INTRODUCTION

Whether it was called Experimental, Avant-Garde or just Artists’ films/videos it represented a body of work that was marginal to the respective institutions of cinema and art and, partly because of that, it was both lively and exciting, if financially unrewarding, generating debate and column inches in film and art journals and the occasional foray into national cinemas and galleries.¹

Felicity Sparrow (2003)

This thesis sets out to demonstrate the diversity in 1970s British experimental filmmaking and act 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.² One of the reasons for the lack of adequate recognition for these forms of filmmaking is that several accounts have asserted that a return to more personal, expressionistic forms of filmmaking occurred at the end of the 1970s. This was frequently referred to as the ‘return to image’, since the these films contained more representational content in contrast to the more formal, minimal films dominating the histories.

In one example, Michael O’Pray identified that ‘since 1980 video art and experimental film have developed away from the largely conceptual aesthetics towards a pluralist practice in which the return of an imagistic and less formalist mode is central’.³ O’Pray identified that Gray Watson had ‘noted a re-orientation of recent art (including film and video) towards an “eclecticism” and “cultural cross fertilization” which marked it off from the preceding years of high formalism of whatever kind – conceptualism, minimalism and, in the case of film, structuralism’.⁴ In a further account, Nina Danino recognised that ‘the late 70s structural film as the dominant avant-garde film practice’ had come under significant pressure at the end of the 1970s, resulting in ‘an explosion of different positions and aesthetics which displaced the signifier which structural film privileged as a modernist art for a greater emphasis on the signified’.⁵ Danino identified diverse filmmaking practices, including women’s films and works related to cultural and race issues, as well as ‘the reaction against structural film’s interdictions and the formalism of video art [leading] to a counter position and an excess of image’.⁶ Accounts such as these, mistakenly
arguing that a ‘return to image’ occurred at the end of the 1970s, have informed the dominant reading of 1970s experimental film history. The ‘return to image’ thesis will therefore be challenged to argue that there was no return at the end of the decade but that personal, more representational, forms of filmmaking existed throughout the decade.

While filmmakers such as Ian Breakwell, Jeff Keen, Derek Jarman, David Larcher, Anne Rees-Mogg, Margaret Tait and Peter Whitehead have received some recognition in 1970s histories, their collectively extensive (image-rich and representational) body of work has been overshadowed by film experimentation with structure and material. The films of Jane Arden and B. S Johnson also require situating within this 1970s film history, as their films are sufficiently innovative and relevant to warrant inclusion. These personal, poetic, visionary, diaristic or expressive forms of filmmaking should stand alongside the formal, structural or material film experimentation, as they all form part of 1970s British experimental film history.

The openness to experimentation – often across disciplines – from the 1960s onwards is especially important when drawing historical trajectories and contextualising contemporary moving image practices. Many of the issues raised by experimental filmmakers in the 1970s are as pertinent today with the rise of accessible digital moving image technologies as they were during the decade:

The common perception that the video installation is an invention of the 1990s – born miraculously free of any evolutionary history – is understandable, if wholly wrong ... the modern form of the installation in all its diversity was the product of a long period of experiment shared by the post-Caro generation conceptualists with their commercial gallery shows, and by members of the Co-op and future LVA groups, exhibiting mostly in artist-run and public-sector spaces. 

This important 1970s experimental film history needs to be understood in all its complexity if it is to provide historical contextualisation for contemporary moving image practices. Vicente Todolí identified that ‘[t]he art of the 1960s and 1970s continues, even some forty years later, to fascinate and provoke ... One thing is certain – the innovations of then are regarded as the foundations of art now’. While some of these also have longer histories, dating back to the early days of cinema or 1920s or 1930s film experimentation in the arts, the 1970s was notable for the growth in the number of filmmakers, the teaching of experimental filmmaking in art colleges and the rich diversity where a veritable ‘explosion’ in experimental filmmaking took place. This thesis is therefore justified as a revision of 1970s experimental film
history, providing a necessary history and a platform for future research seeking historical contextualisation of contemporary moving image practices. Many of the 1970s forms of experimentation, such as the use of multiple screens, personal or diaristic films, performative film events and experimentation with film structure and material are evident in the work of contemporary moving image practitioners.

These films are differentiated from the dominant, narrative cinema and independent film production by their small (sometimes non-existent) budgets and their personal engagement with discourses in the arts, poetry or personal, diaristic investigations with the film medium. They are also mostly single-authored works, with filmmakers working on many aspects of production, including initiating ideas, filming, acting, processing, printing, editing, distributing and screening films. The LFMC production facilities were therefore especially important in facilitating diverse forms of experimentation which would not have been as extensive possible through the use of film processing laboratories.

Most of the filmmakers discussed in this thesis took an anti-Hollywood stance to filmmaking, identified by the very nature of working with small (or no) budgets, with 16mm or Super-8 formats and contextualisation within visual art practices such as painting, sculpture and early artists’ film experimentation, rather than dominant, commercial cinema. Innovation and experimentation were key to the production of work, with the re-use of footage as in Lis Rhodes’ *Light Reading* (1979); the use of found footage as in Le Grice’s *Berlin Horse* (1970) and the use of single shots instead of hours of film footage, as in Chris Welsby/William Raban’s *River Yar* (1971/2) and Derek Jarman’s *Studio Bankside* (1971). The re-use of footage or constrained use of film stock often resulted in unique forms of experimentation, often also significantly determined by access to equipment and choice of film format. Jarman, for example, discussed his (economically-informed) approach with Super-8 resulting in his distinctive filmmaking style:

Here was a way of recording an awful lot with very little film, it had an economic basis. You can take a three minute cassette and spin it out to twenty minutes. It’s a cheap way of documenting things. It also has a slightly hypnotic effect.

Economics and the availability of resources were therefore important aspects informing filmmaking. Vanda Carter also identified some important issues determining personal filmmaking practices:
The reasons why people adopt particular filmmaking techniques are often overlooked in critical appraisal of work. The relationship between filmmaker and equipment, and with film itself, is one of the foundations on which individual style is developed. It is frequently assumed that purely aesthetic decisions govern filming and editing choices at every stage, whereas all filmmaking practice is performed by the amount of money available, what equipment one has access to and by the practical situation and social context in which one works. “Aesthetic” decisions are made within these boundaries, struggling constantly to push resources to the very limits, but never escaping these basic constraints. Films were therefore made by improvising where necessary and, as Carter noted, by pushing the resources to the limit. The choice of film format was, however, also an important determining factor which resulted in the lack of adequate recognition for a number of some 1970s filmmakers. Jarman and Keen, for example, collectively produced over seventy Super-8 films in the 1970s, but Super-8 film was generally viewed as an amateur medium, having ‘a rather ill-defined status’. It therefore does not feature much in the dominant accounts of 1970s history.

Duncan Reekie recognised the important history of amateur forms of filmmaking in *Subversion: the Definitive History of Underground Cinema* (2007). He also identified the extensive activity preceding the formation of the LFMC (1966), making important links to approaches taken by filmmakers using the ‘amateur’ Super-8 medium. Although Reekie’s is a longer history, dating back to the early days of underground cinema, it similarly seeks to reclaim recognition for filmmakers and forms of filmmaking which have not received sufficient recognition. In his harsh critique of the dominant 1970s (structural and material) experimental film history, he related its productivity and dominance to intensive institutionalisation, stressing the relationship between individuals, funding bodies, educational institutions, publications and the distribution and exhibition of films. These, he argued all helped shape the dominance of 1970s structural/material filmmaking and perpetuated its place as *the* history of the decade. Reekie’s argument is important for this thesis as it similarly seeks to reclaim recognition for filmmakers side-lined in dominant accounts of 1970s history.

Although not all filmmakers engaged explicitly with theoretical or socio-political discourses for their filmmaking, these were certainly significant influences informing the wider framework of the 1970s, and were important for contextualising certain filmmaking practices. Some of these were informed by Marxism, politics of perception and viewer engagement (LFMC), feminism, psychoanalysis or other
oppositional approaches to the dominant commercial cinema. For the more extreme protagonists, such as Peter Gidal, this meant the prohibition of representation, narrative and personal/autobiographical filmmaking. It should, however, be understood that experimentation was not necessarily a solemn enterprise inveigled only by austerity, theory, politics and serious intent, but that it also included the joyous exploration of film.

**Terminology**

The different terms for discussing filmmaking require some elucidation to distinguish where experimental filmmaking was situated within the wider field, and because terminology could prove to be notoriously problematic in defining filmmaking.

The dominant, narrative cinema – sometimes referred to in the catch-all term ‘Hollywood’ – is an industrial form of production, justified by its commercial rationale. Although this is in itself a very extensive and complex field, a rather simplistic generalisation can define it as a form of story-telling, with a large part of its history in literature and theatre.

‘Independent’ film broadly refers to films identified from the larger commercial studio systems due to smaller budgets and cultural or socio-political – rather than commercial – motives and value. The British Film Institute Production Board (BFIPB) was one of the main funders of independent films in the 1970s. Different types of independent filmmaking included ‘experimental film’, ‘art house’ or ‘counter cinema’, with the latter two often defined by the distinctive individual visual styles of the directors. ‘Counter cinema’ was described by Peter Wollen as having a ‘militant hostility to commercial, narrative cinema as well as a commitment to radical politics and formal experimentation’.

1970s independent filmmaking also included work produced by diverse socio-political workshops, collectives and co-operatives. The terms ‘avant-garde’ and ‘independent’ were sometimes use interchangeably by theorists or activists in the 1970s. Some forms of independent filmmaking took more conventional approaches to documentary or narrative filmmaking, while others, such as experimental or ‘counter cinema’ filmmaking, took oppositional approaches to attack the illusionism and seamless narrative structures of commercial, dominant cinema.

Felicity Sparrow used the terms ‘experimental’, ‘avant-garde’ or ‘artists film’ in the epigraph, but these films have also been referred to as ‘underground’ or sometimes ‘alternative’ or ‘oppositional’ (signalling their ‘anti-Hollywood’ stance).
The term ‘underground film’ was closely related to the 1960s American and British countercultural movement, with J. Hoberman defining precise moments of usage:

The Underground announced itself on the evening of November 11, 1959 when Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie’s 28-minute *Pull My Daisy* ... at Amos Vogel’s pioneering New York film society, Cinema 16. The Underground ceased to be underground on December 1, 1966 when, after a series of extended runs at the Film-Maker’s Cinematheque, as well as feature write-ups in *The New York World Journal Tribune* and *Newsweek*, *The Chelsea Girls* opened at a first-run midtown venue where it grossed over $12,000 in one week.20

While no such exacting moments are noted in British underground filmmaking, Stephen Dwoskin identified the British context:

The term became, at least by 1960, a much-used label, at first with films but later spreading to a number of other creative and experimental activities, such as small theatre, ‘happenings’, light-shows; the concept even evolved into an underground press syndicate, including *International Times* (IT) and *Oz* (both in Britain).21

Dwoskin defined underground films as having ‘no fixed scope, no fixed budget, no fixed audience, no fixed style and often no fixed script’.22 These were personal films, with the ‘[t]he painters and poets hav[ing] become film-makers’.23 In his autobiographical publication, *Bomb Culture* (1969), Jeff Nuttall also described the underground context as defined by hand reproduced magazines and home movies, identifying that these ‘were so totally divorced from the established communicating channels, and because they were intensely concerned with the use of the obsession for sex and religion as a weapon against the spiritual bankruptcy which begat the bomb’.24

‘Avant-garde’ was a term historically related to military and political terminology, identifying the principal force in combat or political revolution. Its use in the arts and filmmaking dates from the 1920s, but the early 1970s substitution of the term ‘underground’ for ‘avant-garde’ resituated filmmaking within more academic, intellectual (rather than oppositional, countercultural) spheres. A. L. Rees identified that it also positively asserted innovation as the main goal of this area of film and video practice.25 While it could imply continuous artistic historical developments, he admitted that avant-gardes ‘appear, decline and are re-born in different national and historical contexts’.26

The uneasy placement of this type of filmmaking between the fields of art and cinema became an important concern for funding bodies in the 1970s. This resulted in
the Attenborough Enquiry (discussed in Chapter two), helping to distinguish different types of filmmaking for funding bodies. According to David Curtis, ‘artists’ film’ has been in official use since 1972, when it was used to identify a particular Arts Council sub-committee funding artists’ films, as opposed to other forms of visual arts production.27

According to Margaret Dickinson, the term ‘experimental film’ was popular in the 1950s and 1960s when film funding was supported by the British Film Institute’s Experimental Film Fund.28 Duncan Reekie referred to the term’s more open-ended connotations, covering the broadest range of filmmaking:

It refers to both process and product, adapts easily as a noun and an adjective, and it has been accepted by a significant number of divergent film movements and theorists as a transcendent historical term. Experimental in this context would not be limited to formal experimentation but would include experiments in narrative, acting technique, sound, mise-en-scène, technology, working practices, distribution, exhibition.29 (Reekie’s emphasis)

The term ‘experimental’ will be used in this thesis as it accommodates, as Reekie asserts, the broadest forms of experimentation and innovation in filmmaking. Its use in this thesis should, however, be understood to encompass all other cited terms of usage. The contemporary term, ‘moving image’ will occasionally be used and is an umbrella term encompassing film, video and digital technologies.

Countercultural and Theoretical Contexts for Experimental Filmmaking

A brief consideration of the broader countercultural and theoretical contexts for 1970s experimental filmmaking will assist in historically situating the work and understanding 1970s influences on production. The counterculture emerged in America in response to increased 1950s capitalist growth, Cold War anti-communist McCarthyism, the Korean and Vietnam Wars and campaigns for racial and gender equality. In Britain the countercultural movement, took a firm Marxist and socialist stance against American imperialism, and was intensified by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and the impact of decolonisation which had resulted in a crisis in British identity. Nuttall identified the atom bomb, and specifically the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as defining moments in the turn against the seemingly ‘progressive’ Western developments related to modernity.30
A number of seminal countercultural events took place in London in the 1960s. These included the ‘International Poetry Incarnation’ (June 1965), presided over by American Beat poet, Allen Ginsberg, at the Victoria and Albert Hall and documented in Peter Whitehead’s experimental film, *Wholly Communion* (1965). Other events included the all-night launch of the countercultural magazine *International Times (I.T.*, 1966), with films screened by the newly-formed LFMC. The second issue of *I.T.* included an ‘Underground Film Festival Supplement’ with Ray Durgnat’s article celebrating the formation of the LFMC (and launch of its film magazine CINIM), stating that ‘[a]vant-garde low budget non-commercial films are being made in London in greater numbers than most people realise’. He continued by saying that LFMC would ‘be of value if it brings these film-makers together and enables their films to be seen by audiences in this country and by like-minded audiences abroad’. The early countercultural ethos informing the establishment of the LFMC would, however, change in subsequent years, taking a more theoretical and academic turn.

Although the media concept of the ‘Swinging Sixties’ was presented as a harmonised idea of hip and cool bohemia, Whitehead maintained that it was invented by *Time* magazine, obscuring the burgeoning counter-revolutionary activity and true sentiments of the decade. In his film, *Tonite Let’s All Make Love in London* (1967), Whitehead presented ‘a dark version of a city at war with itself’ and a more politicised account of events:

With *Tonite* I was trying to examine the mythology that everybody in London was having fun. Ginsberg’s poem, which is very much about the theft of British culture by American cultural and capitalist imperialism, is actually, very dark. For me the 1960s was the Aldermaston march, the war in Vietnam and the Dialectics of Liberation. The only miracle about those years is that it was a moment of extreme change that managed to get through without savage violence.

Whitehead’s hostile interpretation of 1960s London was not unique, as attempts were taken to avert American imperialism through more hard-line socio-political Marxist ideologies. A radical rethinking of socialism by the New Left, challenging American imperialism, resulted in socialist and Marxist theories informing many aspects of social and cultural investigation, wielding a significant influence in some independent filmmaking circles.

The critic D. N. Rodowick, writing in 1982 and referring to the previous ten years, noted that ‘[n]ot since the 1920s, in Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia, has there been a time in which the inter-relationship between theoretical work, political activity,
and avant-garde artistic practices been so thoroughly argued'. Broader theoretical contexts informing filmmaking in the 1970s included Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis, structuralism and semiotics. Theories related to modernism and the privileging of ‘form over content’ in the visual arts was particularly important in informing specific theoretical approaches related to 1970s independent filmmaking. Marxist collectivist ideologies also had a considerable influence in shaping the film workshop movement (discussed in Chapter Two), forming an important part of 1970s independent film practice. Margaret Dickinson’s Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain, 1945-90 (1999) gives an in-depth account of the diverse range of film collectives and co-operatives taking socio-political approaches to non-commercial independent filmmaking.

**Identifying the History through Diverse Sources**

As this thesis seeks to resituate personal, representational forms of filmmaking within the dominant 1970s historical account, it will be useful to identify a number of sources to determine how the prevailing histories were established. This should also reveal why the history problematically does not fully recognise these more personal forms of filmmaking. The central production centre for a large proportion of 1970s experimental filmmaking was the London Filmmakers’ Co-op (LFMC). This was inspired by the New York Co-op (1962) distribution model and was set-up by filmmakers and activists in 1966, becoming the main production, distribution and exhibition centre for experimental filmmaking in London. Two histories, by early LFMC members, Experimental Cinema: A Fifty Year Evolution (1971) by historian/activist, David Curtis and Film Is…The International Free Cinema (1975) by filmmaker, Stephen Dwoskin, provide international historical contexts for British filmmaking. Curtis’ history incorporates early European and Russian experimentation, American filmmaking from the 1920s to the 1960s (including notes on Hollywood cinematic innovations) and a focus on poetic, visionary and structural/formal filmmaking. The final chapter, centred on the international co-operative movement and more formal experimentation, are also informed by Curtis’ early involvement with the LFMC. Dwoskin’s equally wide-ranging international account also provides useful insights into countercultural activity taking place in London in the late 1960s. Although both publications provide eclectic contexts for British production, a more
specific theoretical agenda would shape itself around structural and material experimentation in the 1970s.

Filmmaker/theorists, Malcolm Le Grice and Peter Gidal, became the LFMC’s most assertive and authoritative theoretical voices and influential practitioners, with their theoretical positions significantly shaping 1970s structural and material experimentation (and dominating accounts of the decade’s history). They were both prompted to respond to American critic, P. Adams Sitney’s ‘Structural Film’ (1969) article, who had identified new formal approaches in American experimental filmmaking (differing from the more poetic, visionary and personal films of the 1940s and 1950s). Le Grice presented his revised version of Sitney’s (in his opinion) limited classifications in his article ‘Thoughts on Recent “Underground” Film’ (1972), and Gidal responded to Sitney’s text by defining his position in ‘Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film’ (1975). Gidal’s manifesto was published in a special issue of the journal Studio International, focusing on ‘Avant-Garde Film in England and Europe’. The issue also included David Curtis’ ‘English Avant-Garde Film: An Early Chronology’ (1975) and Peter Wollen’s ‘The Two Avant-Gardes’ (1975), identifying two different histories related to British experimental filmmaking. These three texts became staple references for 1970s experimental filmmaking, continuing to be referred to in later decades, with Duncan Reekie noting that ‘[t]his trinity of texts provided the 1970s avant-garde movement with, respectively, a history [Curtis], a theory of practice [Gidal] and a historical agenda [Wollen]’.

Through the publication of a number of texts and exhibition catalogues a historical trajectory was created to further support the 1970s structural and material position outlined by Le Grice and Gidal. In 1976 Gidal presented ‘The Structural Film Retrospective’ (1976) at the British Film Institute, providing a body of films (a history) to support his theoretical position. The retrospective was complemented by the publication of Structural Film Anthology (1976), which included his 1975 manifesto, Le Grice’s essay, ‘Abstract Film and Beyond’ (1976), and twenty essays on (and by) formal filmmakers. In Abstract Film and Beyond (1977) Le Grice documented a history of formal filmmaking, dating back to the early days of film experimentation and encompassing international filmmakers such as Hans Richter, Man Ray, Oscar Fischinger, Stan Brakhage, Kurt Kren, American structural filmmakers and a number of LFMC filmmakers. Le Grice identified the international
formal film movement, as being ‘characterized by the idea of a “personal” cinema’, although he focused specifically on abstract and formal forms of filmmaking in his publication.\textsuperscript{44}

Two exhibition catalogues revealing the diversity in British filmmaking practices contrasted with Le Grice and Gidal’s more focused viewpoints. An extensive exhibition of Arts Council-funded experimental films, (and international historical films providing contextualisation), included a loose-leaf catalogue \textit{Perspectives on British Avant-garde Film} (1977) with a wide range of artists’ statements and essays by filmmakers or critics.\textsuperscript{45} The smaller Arts Council/British Council-funded touring exhibition included a catalogue, \textit{A Perspective on English Avant-garde Film} (1978), with a number of essays and artists’ statements. Although the eclectic selection of films in both exhibitions included work by David Larcher, Jeff Keen and Stuart Brisley, the essays in the 1978 catalogue were overwhelmingly focused on formal experimentation with film. These included Curtis’ 1975 chronology, as well as an extract from Le Grice’s ‘Thoughts on Recent “Underground” Film’ (1972). Other essays were ‘Film as Film’ by Peter Gidal, ‘Ontology’ and ‘Materialism’ by Peter Wollen and ‘The Ascetic Task’ and ‘St George in the Forest’ by Deke Dusinberre and Annabel Nicolson’s ‘Artist as Film-Maker’.\textsuperscript{46}

Deke Dusinberre’s unpublished MPhil thesis, \textit{English Avant-garde Cinema: 1966-1974} (1977) focused on ‘the first consistently successful modernist film work in England’.\textsuperscript{47} Dusinberre was closely involved as a LFMC member and his thesis forms a significant, oft-referenced, resource documenting the early years of the LFMC. The \textit{Film as Film: Formal Experiment in Film 1910-1975} (1979) catalogue is similarly oft-cited in historical accounts. The extensive, international historical Hayward Gallery exhibition, on formal filmmaking, was contextualised in over ten essays and provided detailed information about filmmakers.\textsuperscript{48} Although the exhibition took place at the same time as the more eclectic ‘Film London: 3rd Avant-garde International Festival’ (1979) at the National Film Theatre (NFT), the former is more firmly entrenched in historical accounts as no substantial catalogue exists for the NFT event.

Diverse 1970s journals and magazines provided opportunities for the development of discourses on experimental filmmaking. Earlier countercultural magazines included \textit{International Times} and \textit{Oz} related to 1960s counter-cultural activity. Gidal secured space in \textit{Time Out} (1972-75) to present weekly LFMC updates (with John Du Cane) and Le Grice wrote reviews in \textit{Studio International} (1972-1977).\textsuperscript{49} Written
documentation was exceptionally important in disseminating information about experimental filmmaking, as screenings were sometimes one-off events attracting small audiences, and therefore serve as important retrospective source materials.\textsuperscript{50} A number of (often) short-lived, self-published magazines included \textit{Cinim} (1966-68) and \textit{Cinemantics} (1970, 3 issues).\textsuperscript{51} Annabel Nicolson’s \textit{Readings} (1977, 3 issues) provided a useful understanding of wider practices including ‘work that only exists within its own structural duration. Performance, dance, music and film or anything that came into that definition’.\textsuperscript{52} William Raban’s \textit{Filmmakers Europe} (1977-81, 22 issues) provided an international exchange of ideas for film activity. The more long-lived journal, \textit{Afterimage} (1970-1985), produced by Simon Field and Peter Sainsbury (securing Arts Council funding in later years), focused on counter-cinema and experimental filmmaking.\textsuperscript{53} Other relevant publications also included \textit{Cinema} (1968-71) and \textit{Framework} (1974-1992).\textsuperscript{54} Visual art journals also included occasional articles, with two special issues of \textit{Art and Artists} (1972) and \textit{Studio International} (1975), dedicated to experimental filmmaking, providing a more serious profile within the broader visual arts context. The film journal \textit{Screen}, focused mostly on continental theories in relation to the commercial, narrative cinema and independent filmmaking, although increasing opportunities for overlapping discourses occurred as the decade progressed.\textsuperscript{55}

The consolidation of discourses on structural and material experimentation was made in a number of secondary sources, continuing, re-engaging, refining or sometimes challenging some of the earlier discourses. The LFMC’s journal \textit{Undercut} (1980-1990) continued to provide a platform for ongoing discourses in experimental filmmaking, with a continued focus on structural and material influences, as well a broader political agenda related to identity politics in the 1980s. The authors (filmmakers and critics) sought a critical position between \textit{Screen}’s film theory and the theoretical positions related to 1970s structural and material investigations. The publication of a wide range of articles in \textit{The Undercut Reader: Critical Writings on Artists’ Film and Video} (2003) covered diverse issues related to experimental film and video such as theory, animation and identity politics.\textsuperscript{56} The introductory essays provided useful retrospective consideration of LFMC production and shifting ideological contexts from the end of the 1970s onwards.

In \textit{The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory} (1988) Rodowick outlined the close relationship existing between
ideology and film in the 1970s, or as he referred to it: ‘the era of political modernism’. Although Rodowick’s account focused on broader aspects of film theory affiliated mostly to the journal Screen, he also discussed 1970s experimental filmmaking, with a chapter dedicated to critiquing Gidal’s work.

In *Materialist Film* (1989) Gidal took the opportunity to retrospectively revise and consolidate his position on structural/materialist filmmaking. He acknowledged the importance of the LFMC, without which ‘no British experimental film since 1966 would have been possible’. Le Grice, like Gidal, also retrospectively consolidated his theoretical position with the publication of *Experimental Cinema in the Digital Age* (2001). The text included a significant proportion of essays – thirteen out of twenty-five – from the 1970s, with some later essays also re-engaging with Le Grice’s 1970s theoretical preoccupations.

O’Pray’s *The British Avant-Garde Film: 1926-1995: An Anthology of Writings* (1996) also endorsed the dominance of the 1970s structural and material position by including a significant number of related essays in the collection. The *Studio International* ‘trinity’ by Curtis, Wollen and Gidal were included, as well as Stephen Heath’s ‘Repetition Time: Notes Around “Structuralist/Materialist Film”’ and Nicky Hamlyn’s ‘Structural Traces’. In the same year the *Arts Council’s Directory of British Film and Video Artists* (1996) was published (edited by Curtis), which included artist/filmmakers funded between 1973 and 1995. Reekie disparagingly noted that it was ‘in effect the published avant-garde pantheon’, residing ‘in practically every British art school, university and college where experimental film and video is studied’. Reekie observed that this could problematically be read as the full extent of experimental filmmaking produced over the twenty-year period, particularly if it was unsupported by other texts providing alternative histories of self-funded (or other forms of funded) filmmaking.

A. L. Rees’ *A History of Experimental Film and Video* (1999) provides a broad survey of international film and video experimentation, dating back to the early days of pre-cinema in the 1780s to the late 1990s. Although the breadth of enquiry and hundred-year history means that detailed analyses could not be included, the comprehensive bibliography and footnotes offer useful pointers for further research. While 1970s filmmakers such as William Burroughs, Peter Greenaway and Derek Jarman are mentioned, the 1970s is focused on the LFMC’s formal experimentation.
A number of retrospective exhibitions also helped in consolidating the dominance of structural and material experimentation. These included Mark Webber’s ‘Shoot Shoot Shoot: the First Decade of the London Filmmaker’s Co-operative and British Avant-garde film 1966-1976’ (2002) programme of films. The broadsheet publication provided a useful supplement to the screening programmes, as it included essays by critics and filmmakers from the decade, and an in depth ten-year account of the LFMC. Jackie Hatfield’s ‘Experiments in Moving Image: a Retrospective of Experimental Work from the Late 1960s to Date’ (2004) at the University of Westminster included two 1970s film programmes. These were focused mostly on formal experimentation and with a large number of films by Gidal. This was, however, due to the open submission devised by Hatfield, rather than the result of her curatorial role.

Nicky Hamlyn began filmmaking in the late 1970s, influenced by the LFMC’s structural and material position. His Film Art Phenomena (2003) explored specific properties affiliated to experimental film and video. Preoccupations with medium specificity, which were important in the 1970s, were revisited and re-contextualised and close textual analyses of films – a significant proportion from the 1970s – were presented in the three parts, ‘Media’, ‘The Apparatus’ and ‘Aesthetics’.

Jackie Hatfield’s Experimental Film and Video: an Anthology (2006) is an edited collection of essays by film and video makers, providing a contemporary reassessment of key debates from 1970s philosophical and critical texts on experimental film and video. In the ‘Foreword’ Rees’ identified the three sections intending ‘to draw out the strands of argument, as well as to reflect different opinions and insights’ and Sean Cubitt importantly identified that ‘the [British] film and media avant-gardes of the 1960s, 70s and 80s set the groundwork for the emergent digital arts’. Although a diverse range of films, videos and discourses are discussed, David Larcher is the only 1970s filmmaker discussed in detail who took personal, more expressionistic approaches to filmmaking. Hatfield admitted that the Anthology is not meant as a definitive collection of artists, but a snapshot and précis, but the limited focus on diverse forms of 1970s filmmaking problematically serves mostly to reinforce the dominance of the structural/material position in the decade.

Curtis’ A History of Artists’ Film and Video in Britain (2007) presents a broad and eclectic range of films over a hundred year period. This was informed by his extensive ‘A Century of Artists’ Film and Video’ (2003/4) at the Tate Gallery.
Although Curtis’ histories acknowledge the diversity in 1970s filmmaking – he mentions personal filmmakers such as Margaret Tait, David Larcher, Jarman and Keen – formal experimentation (and the LFMC) tends to dominant the 1970s accounts.


From the diverse sources considered above it is evident that formal filmmaking and the structural/material theoretical position has dominated written accounts of the decade. This is not surprising as LFMC filmmakers, writers and theorists went to great lengths to ensure that discourses on filmmaking were disseminated. This was an increasingly important aspect of consolidating practical developments, opening up discussions on filmmaking and cohering filmmaking practices to secure institutional support. The focus on certain aspects of the decade’s production – notably structural and material filmmaking – is also not in itself surprising as this was a significant part of 1970s production, involving a large number of filmmakers, writers and activists; who also continued to influence and inform future generations of filmmakers, curators and historians. However, not all filmmakers working at the LFMC in the 1970s, concerned themselves with firm theoretical discourses, and numerous films were produced without engaging with theory.

If the 1970s structural and material theoretical position had also been equally balanced by extensive writings about the personal, representational, less theoretically-informed filmmaking, the history would not read as unevenly as it currently does. Unfortunately this is not the case, but it will be useful to consider what has been published to understand the absence of documentation about this aspect of 1970s experimental film history. A number of monographs and DVD’s of some of the personal, more representational filmmakers have recently been published and issued. The film-poet, Margaret Tait has received recognition for her oeuvre of over thirty films (1950s – 1990s) with Peter Todd and Benjamin Cook’s edited collection, *Subjects and Sequences: A Margaret Tait Reader*.

Sebastian Coe’s biography, *Like
a Fiery Elephant: The Story of B. S. Johnson provides a comprehensive account of the troubled life of the avant-garde writer, who also made five experimental films between 1967 and 1973. Derek Jarman has numerous monographs and exhibition catalogues about his filmmaking and painting, with Rowland Wymer’s Derek Jarman providing detailed chapters on each of his feature films, and the second chapter focusing on his experimental films. More recently Jeff Keen has been recognised for his extensive works with the publication of GAZWRX: The Films of Jeff Keen (this includes a 4-disc DVD). Jane Arden (and Jack Bond) have also received belated recognition with the issue of three films on DVD in 2009, with the DVD-booklets including informative contemporary essays, as well as source material related to their 1960s and 1970s films. While the individual publications go some way to making amends by providing recognition (and some of the filmmakers have also been included in histories such as Rees and Curtis’) these filmmakers have yet to be adequately recognised as a central part of 1970s experimental film history, alongside the established formal experimentation. This thesis therefore challenges the established 1970s accounts to provide the necessary recognition for these personal, image-rich forms of filmmaking, in order to provide a more comprehensive account of the decade.

A number of other sources, besides the publications already mentioned, have been used in order to uncover the complex and diverse 1970s experimental history. Electronic resources such as websites, e-journals and e-books have provided valuable resources, including biographies, filmographies, articles, essays and film clips of experimental filmmakers. The accessibility of 1970s or contextual experimental films (albeit understandably limited from the 1970s) on sites such as ‘Ubuweb’ and ‘youtube’ have proved useful resources, although of course the on-line or digital versions of films can in no way replace actual screenings of film.

More ephemeral sources held mostly at the BAFVSC have included informative programme notes for screenings held at the LFMC and other venues such as the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), the annual Edinburgh Film Festival and small galleries and artists run spaces. These miscellaneous resources are extensive in number (the LFMC generally held two screenings per week) and provide details on initiatives that were often one-off events. A number of audio and video interviews with filmmakers and critics affiliated to the LFMC also provide a lively record of the 1970s. Derek Jarman’s journals, held in the BFI Special Collections library, are a
useful resource, revealing the intellectual processes underpinning approaches to experimental filmmaking. For this research study original interviews conducted with a number of 1970s filmmakers provided interesting and revealing information about the decade. An interview with the director of LUX, Ben Cook, was particularly illuminating in revealing the importance of historical contextualisation for contemporary moving image practices.

Theoretical Positions and Personal, Representational Filmmaking

A number of reasons accounting for the lack of recognition for personal, more expressive forms of filmmaking are worth reflecting on here, as they provide further insights into the dominant discourses prevailing in the decade. Unlike commercial, narrative (Hollywood) cinema, 1970s experimental filmmaking generally included no linear narrative, plot or professional actors. The dominant theoretical position in independent filmmaking circles opposed the visual pleasure elicited from the passive viewing experience of commercial, narrative cinema. Reekie noted that ‘[n]arrative pleasure is produced by engaging the audience in the pursuit of an enigma and invoking the desire for its resolution, which may be endlessly deferred’. This pleasure in passive viewing was extensively theorised and contested in filmmaking practices, with Rees identifying that filmmakers:

have all used the term illusionism to refer to the tendency of codically constructed narrative cinema to posit a single, unproblematic spectator who becomes psychoanalytically implicated (and trapped) in a diegetic world which is unquestionable in viewing and whose source of control is beyond the possibility of intervention by the spectator.

Rees recognised that ‘[i]llusionism attempts to integrate, rather than to productively exploit, the “space of tension” between the signifying and codifying elements of cinema and image’. This engendered a passive viewing experience, lacking viewer reflexivity and a cognitive conscious response to the film text. Experimental and independent filmmakers therefore sought to counter illusionism by interrogating the codes of the dominant cinema. Features of the dominant cinema such as the time/space manipulation, narrative structure and the meaning of representation were investigated, as well as the physical medium of film and the projection event.

The hostility to commercial narrative cinema was not only investigated by experimental filmmakers, but also informed wider discourses on film theory.
Besides the focus on anti-illusionism in the independent filmmaking milieu, there was also a common focus on the ‘politics of representation’. The combination of ideology and film – outlined in Rodowick’s ‘political modernism’ thesis – became an important focus for many 1970s filmmakers:

[Pol]itical modernism insisted firstly on a “politics of representation” in the assumption that foregrounding the process of signification would draw the spectator’s attention to the materiality of the image through the disruption of the unity and transparency of film form.

By foregrounding film form over film content the passive viewing experience (believed to be integrally related to capitalist, bourgeois consumption) would apparently be countered, engendering an actively engaged conscious viewer. Le Grice and Gidal’s theoretical positions in these respects, as already identified, would instrumentally inform and influence a large proportion of 1970s filmmaking. While Le Grice would renege somewhat on his earlier formalist position, by making a trilogy of more narrative, representational films (1977, 1978 and 1981), Gidal maintained his firm position on anti-illusionistic, anti-narrative and anti-representational filmmaking. It is also important to recognise that filmmakers like Derek Jarman, Jeff Keen, Margaret Tait, David Larcher, Jane Arden and B. S. Johnson were not concerned with these form of film theorisation related to the ‘politics of representation’.

Gidal became the most extreme opponent against representation – the depiction of images and their symbolic or metaphorical meaning – theorising his ideas and attempting to make films which did not represent anything. His charge against representation was that ‘the minute you can identify and the minute you can recognise representation you already know and you’re into the imaginary space in which narrative takes place and in which you become an imaginary participant.’

The concept of anti-representation through the visual medium of film was, however, problematic, particularly as Gidal used film to shoot ‘images’, unlike some of the conceptual 1970s ‘film’ works, such as Anthony McCall’s Long Film for Ambient Light (1975) which includes no film, projector or screen. Gidal’s theoretical texts therefore fit somewhat awkwardly with his films, as Hamlyn identified:

Taken as a whole, Gidal’s ‘negative project’ could be seen as paradoxical. He is against representation/reproduction and yet the large body of films constitutes a vigorous, even enthusiastic way of exploring and developing the range of possible ways of not-representing, or, more accurately, withholding full or firm representations. On the negative view, one can see the myriad ways in which
narration and illusionism can return and corrupt the project. They are always present, just ‘outside’, pushing on the door against which Gidal is leaning.\textsuperscript{80}

Although Gidal’s anti-representational stance was criticised in the 1970s, and in later decades, it continued to be an important influence.

While Gidal’s influential position continued to inform aspects of experimental filmmaking in future decades, the general position against representation in 1970s filmmaking also continued to be upheld by filmmakers and theorists as being representative of the decade’s production. While this was an important aspect of film production in experimental or other independent forms of filmmaking, it has problematically over-determined the historical accounts, resulting in a lack of proper recognition for more personal, expressionistic forms of filmmaking. Experimentation with structure and material at the LFMC is often mistakenly understood to be the history of 1970s experimental filmmaking. This is particularly important for the arguments presented in this thesis, arguing that 1970s filmmaking was more diverse than it has previously been recognised for and that there was no ‘return to image’ at the end of the 1970s.

**Subjectivity, Framing and Economics**

The broad range of 1970s experimental films discussed in this thesis were informed by filmmaker’s interests in theory, technology, literature, poetry or in the individual recording of life events. Attempts were made (particularly by Gidal) to argue against personal subjectivity in the theorisation and practice of formal filmmaking, as this generally contradicted his Marxist ideological position. Experimental films, standing in opposition to the industrial, corporate and commercially produced dominant cinema, were, however, mostly single-authored films, indicating that there is no escaping the fact that these were also individual, subjectively-informed films, as Sam Rohdie identified: ‘[t]he film in “the final analysis”, was the expression of the author and the author’s world ... Behind the film, waiting to be recognized, waiting to tear the mask of the film and to appear, was the filmmaker.’\textsuperscript{81}

In Constance Penley’s critique of Le Grice’s and Gidal’s structural/material theoretical project in film, she identified their decision to move away from the earlier American avant-garde filmmakers’ romantic, expressive idealism to instead present
more detached ‘cool’ experiments and exercises on human perception. She noted, however, that some ‘striking similarities remained’ in the differing approaches:

The subject constituted by the early avant-gardists and the structural/materialists is essentially the same, even if one constructs its subject in the name of romantic idealism and the other in the name of science and “materialism.” Both play on an infantile wish to shape the real to the measure of the subject’s own boundless desire.\(^2\)

Rohdie and Penley recognised and also pointed out the impossibility of denying that these were personal, individually produced films. Penley also, importantly, identified that the different discourses framing films played a key part in how they were understood.

The issue of how films were framed within specific discourses was also identified in discussions with LUX director, Ben Cook:

It was all about the frame. It was about the whole social, cultural framing of works. I’ve always strongly believed that it is a lot more accessible and has a lot to offer people, but the problem is once it gets framed in a particular way – with semantics really – it has the potential to kind of shut it down for people.\(^3\)

The critical importance of the discourses framing 1970s films, such as the material/structural theoretical position, was therefore instrumental in shaping the 1970s experimental film history. Although Marxist ideologies informed the decade’s theorisation and production considerably, it is also important to consider how much these ideologies potentially militated against personal, individualistic expression in experimental filmmaking. This important issue also relates to the lack of proper recognition given to 1970s experimental filmmakers taking more personal, expressionistic approaches to their work.

**Methodological Approaches and Thesis Structure**

At the outset it was important to consider the 1970s films as the key primary sources, demonstrating the diversity in the decade’s production. Although the wider socio-political, theoretical and cultural frameworks had to be carefully considered to understand how this work came about (and where it was situated in the broader contexts of cinema and the visual arts) the films have been returned to time and again, serving as important reminders of 1970s filmmakers’ extensively eclectic approach to experimental filmmaking. Textual analysis has required considerations of film
content, production context and screening conditions. For the latter a reading of a film could differ significantly if it was screened within a specific programme of films, as an installation piece or as a live Expanded Cinema event. Film content needed to be assessed by considering what was presented within the film frame, as well as considering how this was technically achieved. Technicalities such as camera work, lighting, framing, aperture and composition were important; as well as recognising the manner in which films were produced. These processes of production were important for understanding the film texts, for example, where direct film processes were used in films such as Lis Rhodes’ Dresden Dynamo (1974) or where film materiality was exposed, as in Annabel Nicolson’s Slides (1971). Procedural approaches to films, revealed in artists’ statements or drawings, revealed how the inception of a concept on paper could be translated into film form, as in William Raban’s Angles of Incidence (1973). Derek Jarman’s specific filming technique (to a large extent driven by economics) of filming at 3-6 frames per second and projecting at 3-6 frames per second resulted in a particular painterly aesthetic appearance. Different film stocks were also used to achieve specific results or draw attention to the film medium, as in Le Grice’s four-screen After Manet (1975), where colour, black-and-white, negative and positive film stocks were used. In some films multiple frames were included within the single frame, as in David Crosswaite’s Film No. 1 (1971) and Jane Arden’s Anti-Clock (1979). All of these aspects needed to be carefully considered when making textual analyses in order to appreciate the technical, artisanal, theoretical or impromptu approaches taken, resulting in the diversity in experimentation in the decade.

It is apparent from the diverse and extensive resources informing this thesis that no simple methodological process could reveal the complexity of experimental filmmaking in the decade. There were not a set number of films and production companies, governed by commercial directives, shaping the decade’s production. Instead these personal films – situated uncomfortably between the fields of art and cinema – were often made in improvised spaces, with limited resources, friends for actors where necessary, and often nothing more than an inspired moment to capture the world around them. As the (often short) films were usually screened alongside other films, an understanding of the curatorial role and discourses surrounding the films formed an important part in contextualisation. Although LFMC production was mostly contextualised through the structural and material theoretical positions of
Gidal and Le Grice, experimentation in the workshops took a far more experimental approach with temperamental machinery and errors often adding to further opportunities for experimentation.

This thesis could have been presented as a chronological, linear history as if it unfolded seamlessly from the beginning of the decade until the end. However, the filmmaking did not evolve synchronously in a measured and sustained manner across the decade. Instead there were diverse types of activity – occurring simultaneously or at separate times – fuelled by individual or collective interests, accessibility to production facilities, funding and socio-political or theoretical concerns. For this reason a strictly chronological account of the decade is not deemed the most appropriate method for this thesis. A thematic approach, focused on the contexts of production and the film texts, provides a more useful way to examine this history. This enables closer investigation into specific institutional and organisational contexts and discourses surrounding filmmaking, and importantly also accommodates where overlaps may occur between contexts and film texts.

The configuration of this thesis approximates a two-part structure. The first half – chapters one to three – considers the wider institutional and organisational contexts for filmmaking. The second half of the thesis – chapters four to seven – closely considers the different discourses surrounding filmmaking and approaches taken to make films; with close attendance paid to a range of film texts. There are two related central arguments to this thesis. The one intends to reveal the diversity in 1970s British experimental filmmaking, and the other challenges the problematic ‘return to image’ thesis, asserting that personal, representational, more expressionistic forms of filmmaking returned at the end of the decade. I argue that they existed throughout the decade.

In Chapter One historiography and historical construction is considered in some depth, considering the role of the curator and institutions, such as the Arts Council and the Tate Gallery, in shaping historical accounts. Specific examples, such as the ‘Film as Film: Formal Experiment in Film 1910-1975’ (1979) also inform these discussions. This chapter also focuses on the central argument related to the problematic ‘return to image’ thesis, providing numerous written examples identifying – and challenging – this position.

Chapter Two examines the organisational strategies and institutional frameworks (funding and education) in order to understand broader contexts enabling (or
sometimes disabling) film production, distribution and exhibition. Chapter Three focuses specifically on the dissemination of films in screenings, exhibitions and film festivals. This was also largely supported through funding opportunities and institutional developments in the decade. The complex nature of film exhibition, related to installation and expanded cinema, is also discussed.

Chapter Four considers the close relationships between experimental filmmaking and other visual arts practices. A number of examples are used to illustrate relationships to painting, photography, sculpture and features such as landscape and still life genres. In Chapter Five personal films which have not received adequate recognition within established 1970s British histories are presented. A range of films taking personal approaches, informed by countercultural contexts, poetry, psychoanalysis or the occult, are considered, as well as a number of British diary films. Chapter Six investigates experimentation with film structure and material, revealing the diverse types of experimentation undertaken in the decade. Reasons for the dominance of structural and material filmmaking are also investigated, to reveal why this has overshadowed the diverse forms of personal, more individual forms of filmmaking. Chapter Seven examines the impact of feminism and the discourses surrounding women’s filmmaking in the decade. Diverse forms of film experimentation are explored and considered in relation to concepts such as the feminine aesthetic in filmmaking and the gendered presence behind the camera. In the Conclusion a summation of the thesis and suggestions for further research are deliberated.

This complex decade in filmmaking included influential theoretical and practical innovations in experimental filmmaking. This revised history will provide the necessary recognition for personal filmmakers, whose work has been overshadowed by structural and material film experimentation, revealing the rich, complexity of the decade’s filmmaking.
CHAPTER ONE: QUESTIONS OF HISTORY

The view through the lens may be blurred or defined – focused or unfocused – depending on what you think you know; what you imagine you see; what you learn to look for; what you are told is visible.  

Lis Rhodes

This chapter focuses on historiography and the construction of 1970s experimental film history through exhibitions and national collections. A consideration of how canons can problematically be formed through written accounts and curated exhibitions will underpin discussions. Firstly, historiography will more generally be considered before focusing on specific accounts related to 1970s filmmaking, where essays by Malcolm Le Grice (‘The History We Need’), Lis Rhodes (‘Whose History?’) and David Curtis (‘Which History?’) will be referenced. The second discussion draws on a range of written accounts of 1970s experimental filmmaking, upholding the claim that a ‘return to image’ and more representational forms of filmmaking occurred at the end of the 1970s. I will argue that this has problematically privileged certain types of filmmaking over others and therefore does not adequately represent the diversity in 1970s filmmaking. Inconsistencies within some written examples and evidence to dispel this claim will be provided in order to argue that image-rich, representational forms of filmmaking existed throughout the decade.

In an introductory essay for the ‘ICA Biennale of Independent Film and Video’ (1990) critic and filmmaker, Peter Wollen opened with a succinct and cursory analysis of British film and video history:

The history of alternative film and video in Britain is not very long and not very complex. It could be sketched out rapidly in a few sentences. After the scattered work of a few pioneers, often associated paradoxically with the documentary movement (Len Lye, Norman McLaren), alternative film-making resurfaced in the 60s and its contemporary history began with the consolidation of the Film-makers Co-op two decades ago.

The Biennale (inspired by the success of the earlier ‘The Elusive Sign: British Avant-Garde Film and Video 1977-87’) included a range of films identified by Wollen as retaining ‘definite traces’ from the 1970s in ‘the work of Gidal and Larcher from the Co-op period, and Maybury and Wyn Evans from the ‘New Romantics’’ in the 1980s. Wollen’s dismissive comment on the brevity of experimental film and video history implied that few works had been made since experimentation began in the
early days of cinema. If taken as an authoritative view one could be hard-pressed to believe that experimentation in British filmmaking barely existed. Wollen’s analysis could certainly have benefited from a more generous appraisal than the ‘few sentences’ he apportions the history.\textsuperscript{88}

The history of 1970s experimental film and video has been – and still is – a contested domain, as this is a recent history with practitioners, historians and theorists continuing to work in the field. While certain aspects of these histories have been revealed, and continue to be researched, the recent nature of the history means that new material or uncovered claims may be disputed by individuals actively involved the decade. Certainly this should not dissuade the shaping of new positions, but it does set particular challenges, as new evidence emerges and retrospective distance offers a greater awareness of the field.

An important aspect of 1970s experimentation was the separation between film and video practices. Although these two fields operated in knowledge of each other, their differing foci related to medium specificity differed significantly. Many filmmakers were affiliated with the LFMC, while video-makers were mostly associated with the London Video Arts (LVA).\textsuperscript{89} A few practitioners also worked with both media, with Lis Rhodes, for example, revealing that both film and video were used in \emph{Light Music} (1975), although the work is shown as a 16mm installation and generally considered as a film.\textsuperscript{90} Film and video were generally considered separately in the decade, particularly in historical, critical and theoretical accounts, although this changed to some extent in the 1980s, with medium specificity being less of a focus for critics (although arguably still a focus for filmmakers). Wollen identified that ‘the potentially hostile aesthetics of film and video have begun to mesh together, rather than separating and growing apart’.\textsuperscript{91}

A ‘Writing Histories’(2007) symposium, focusing on four decades of experimental film and video practice, revealed some of the complexities related to experimental film and video histories.\textsuperscript{92} The symposium – related to the launch of Curtis’ \emph{A History of Artists’ Film and Video in Britain} (2007) – included contributors, Catherine Elwes, David Curtis and Duncan Reekie, representing the histories related respectively to video, experimental film and ‘underground’ filmmaking.\textsuperscript{93}

In the discussions, differences and commonalities between film and video were deliberated, asking whether medium specificity was still a relevant issue for practitioners today. Issues around accessibility, academic rigour and how
institutionalisation had marginalised more experimental, underground practices were raised. The inaccessibility of these histories to practitioners new to the discipline, in spite of the marked increase in film and video work since the 1990s, was a cause for concern and it was agreed that this needed addressing through educational initiatives. The symposium was inconclusive, failing to provide clarity concerning these histories, but pertinent points were raised related to the role of institutions and the dominance of key players in the field. The brevity of the event was a significant factor in its inconclusiveness, as the histories relating to each of the areas under discussion were substantially complex, as indicated in an introductory text to the event:94

Ripped-off, forgotten, marginalised, undocumented. How would we know who made waves experimenting with film and video if the stories remained untold? Yet the histories now emerging are passionately contested.95

The complex histories of film, video and underground filmmaking were acknowledged in the event, with Reekie bringing to the fore the under-appreciated history of the amateur film movement and underground cinema.96 His admonition that ‘it is institutions which authorise history’, and that ‘[i]nstitutionally the amateur movement did not register’ formed a tacit reminder to approach these complex fields with an understanding of how histories can be created and maintained.97 Earlier histories are also especially important when considered in relation to contemporary film and digital media moving image practices, as Michael Newman identified when discussing contemporary filmmakers, Tacita Dean and Matthew Buckingham, who both work with the 16mm film format: ‘[i]t is striking how much of the best recent moving image work draws on models that were established in the 1960s and 1970s’.98 All of the histories represented by Curtis, Elwes and Reekie are therefore critically important in understanding historical trajectories for contemporary moving image practices.

**Historiography and History Through Curation**

A consideration of historiography will be useful in illuminating some of the problems related to historical construction. While the study of history is a long established discipline, more recent approaches raised in the late 1960s by historical theorists such as E. H. Carr, Hayden White and Keith Jenkins provide useful considerations about the positioned nature of the historian. These approaches have informed an understanding of the vagaries of historical analysis in determining the impossibility of
truly objective accounts of history. Jenkins’ asserted that a single, ‘true’ history is unfeasible:

The past and history float free of each other, they are ages and miles apart. For the same object of enquiry can be read differently by different discursive practices (a landscape can be read/interpreted differently by geographers, sociologists, historians, artists, economists, etc.) whilst, internal to each, there are different interpretive readings over time and space; as far as history is concerned historiography shows this.99

His delineation of the complexity of historical analysis identified how interpretations of the same period were dependent on choices of critical framework, subjective interpretations and/or differing methodological approaches.

Jenkins proposed that the writing of a history could never be an impartial task – an unpositioned history – and that no matter how objectively a historian intended the analysis to be, it would always be inscribed as a personal rendition of events. Despite arguments for the reliability of sources as evidence, Jenkins asserted that:

It is historians who articulate whatever the ‘sources say’, for do not many historians all going (honestly and scrupulously in their own ways) to the same sources, still come away with different accounts; do not historians all have their own many narratives to tell?100

Although historians had narratives they wished to impart, approaches were also informed by institutional or ideological reasoning, as Reekie had argued above.

Michael O’Pray also acknowledged how narratives were constructed and choices were sometimes made to accommodate certain claims or historical accounts; and that these would potentially omit works sitting less comfortably within the arguments presented:

To this extent, the history of the avant-garde is always elusive. Art is continually re-writing its own history in order to provide an alibi for its contemporary ideas, strategies and tastes. Inevitably and necessarily, in such critical re-writings, aspects of the past are elided, and the present floods the future with its projects, ambitions and prejudices.101

It is therefore astute to be reminded of the positioned nature of the historian, and the specific discourses contextualising a period’s production. Reappraisals are equally conditioned by the discourses contextualising the time of writing and the historian’s positioned intentions.

Rhodes’ epigraph offers further insightful considerations on the vagaries of historical analyses. In my correspondence with Rhodes she confirmed that ‘the
focused’ or ‘unfocused’ could be applied equally – ‘without prejudice or hierarchy’ – to both filmmaker and historian.102 The account of events constructed upon ‘what you think you know; what you imagine you see’ is suggestive of the selectively positioned historical investigation.103 The concluding two elements of Rhodes’ quotation, ‘what you learn to look for; what you are told is visible’ identify how educational and cultural institutions educate or inform individuals on what is deemed important.104 Jenkins, O’Pray and Rhodes acknowledged the complexity of historical construction, recognising that it was not only determined by the availability of sources and the discourses surrounding them, but also by what seemed most fitting to support the intended account of events.

Walter Grasskamp questioned the production of art history in an essay identifying how theoretical, institutional or ideological approaches informed historical accounts. Grasskamp discussed the wider contexts shaping the acceptance of artworks into the historical paradigm and the selectivity inherent within any historical assessment:

Of course, historiography, including art historiography, is only possible if a few events are selected from the chaos and peddled. Historiography pretends to go by the worth of events, as contemporaries supposedly saw it, but uses its own evaluation. Just as general historiography prefers capitals over provinces, times of war over peace, technical improvements over the culture of the skilled trades, so art history has priorities that help to reduce the picture, a product of artistic processes and events, into an art historical extract. Artists participate in the emergence of priorities and in their propagation, just as much as dealers do; their agents include collectors, exhibition managers, and the curators of estates. These priorities are extracted from the raw material of casual discussions, recommendations, ambitiously staged exhibitions, rumours, expert judgements, catalogues, auctions, juries, and commissions, and then upgraded.105

Grasskamp revealed how historical analyses were shaped by an array of complex discourses, decisions and intentions. He provided the example of the curator, Wulf Herzogenrath’s restaging of a 1949 exhibition in 1978, whereby he hoped to offer new perspectives on art history.106 It was anticipated that the thirty year distance would provide a more representative history, rather than the limited exhibits presented in the earlier exhibition. However, acquiring some of the work by ‘artists who had fallen through the sieves of art history’ became problematic for the reconstruction.107 In this respect the issue of an unrepresentative history was important, as it was not only determined by a historian or curator’s intentions:

How many forgotten paintings and sculptures are there for each painting that makes a career for itself in the colour reproductions of the standard works of art history? When do these decisions (which art historians take in order, they think, to
separate the chaff from the wheat) start to be taken for granted? How often do these works remain unchallenged merely because the other works have simply been overlooked, forgotten or even frittered away by the heirs?\textsuperscript{108}

Certainly the issue of forgotten or lost works was important, as accounts were also dependent on the availability of primary sources for historical construction, therefore justifying the need for continued re-assessments. The recent recovery of films, such as Jane Arden’s *Vibration* (1974) and B. S. Johnson’s *Fat Man on a Beach* (1974), therefore present important additions for reconsideration for this 1970s history.

The creation of historical canons is, however, more complex than solely involving the positioned historian/curator or the loss of representative works. It also includes the involvement of wider institutional frameworks such as education and funding.

Reekie was particularly disdainful about the role funding played in identifying a select group of filmmakers, suggesting that ‘the award of funding would mark and confirm the entry of the filmmaker into the legitimate institution of art.’\textsuperscript{109} In discussions on the Arts Council retrospective of funded films, ‘Perspectives on British Avant-garde Film’ (1977), Reekie identified the institutionalised acceptance of this group:

From this assertion it is possible to draw the conclusion that since the Arts Council funded most of the filmmakers working in the area; by extension this inference became a self-validating formula which negated the work of all filmmakers rejected by the committee.\textsuperscript{110}

Thus, according to Reekie, filmmakers became accepted, not only into ‘the institution of art’ but also into an acknowledged historical canon, often upheld and perpetuated as definitive until challenged.\textsuperscript{111}

Histriography and historical construction should, therefore, be understood as resulting from a complex network of concerns. These are related to the historian/curator’s positioned approaches, the availability of sources and the influence of institutions in shaping histories. More insidiously these need to be recognised in the creation of canons and in the roles played by custodians of history. More positively, however, these should also recognise the necessity for continued reappraisals of historical periods.
Whose History Do We Need?

Having raised some issues around the complexity of historiography and historical construction, the three afore-mentioned essays will now be considered in greater detail. Firstly, Le Grice and Rhodes’ polemics about history will be discussed in order to focus on historical reconstructions for exhibition purposes. Secondly, Curtis’ paper will focus on the problematic absence of experimental films and videos held in public collections. All three accounts are specifically related to 1970s experimental filmmaking, identifying how positioned choices have impeded an understanding of the complexity and diversity in filmmaking.

The introductory text for the ‘Film as Film: Formal Experiment in Film 1910-1975’ (1979) retrospective exhibition identified that it presented a particular historical development in experimental filmmaking – focusing on formal experimentation with film – rather than a definitive history of experimental filmmaking. The initiative was born out of the German exhibition, ‘Film als Film’ (1977), co-curated by Birgit Hein and Wulf Herzogenrath. ‘Film als Film’ focused on the relationship between experimental film and related artefacts such as drawings, paintings and archival documentation, setting up a polemic within an international historical context. This provided a critical context for considerations of experimental filmmaking within the broader contexts of cinema and German art. The Hayward Gallery exhibition similarly documented a particular history of film, but its approach to addressing this history differed. The curators’ intention was not in ‘simply reproducing the excellence of the German model’ but rather to expand on concepts and present new perspectives, particularly in relation to film aesthetics and historical developments. The exhibition focused more closely on aspects of experimental filmmaking related to the formal investigation of film, in particular experimentation with the structure and material of film, cinematography, editing and the projection event.

The British curatorial team of filmmakers and writers included Phillip Drummond, Deke Dusinberre, Simon Field, Peter Gidal, Malcolm Le Grice, Annabel Nicolson, A. L. Rees and Lis Rhodes, with Birgit Hein advising the project committee. The intention was to re-examine the history from a new position, taking into account more recent British experimentation and including previously omitted material, as Drummond affirmed in his introductory essay:

In following the German model, but re-interpreting it within a slightly later, British context, we have therefore understood our task as that of extending the range of
issues – not only aesthetic or historical, but theoretical and political – which is implied in the very notion of the avant-garde, or of avant-gardes, at large.115

The polemical engagement, offering broader contexts underpinning the historical complexity, aimed to contextualise developments related to 1970s British practices. The intention was to include European and Soviet films from the 1920s and 1930s and the previously hidden history of women’s involvement in experimental filmmaking.

Le Grice’s ‘The History We Need’ outlined the importance of experimental film histories for filmmakers:

‘The History We Need’ implies a recognition that a neutral and inclusive history is broadly impossible and that the historical enterprise should be aimed at aiding the development of contemporary practice.116

He confirmed the importance of this history in assisting contemporary practitioners, rather than the ‘nebulous general public’, for whom, he said, numerous choices were made.117 At stake for ‘Film as Film’ was the presentation of a history most clearly aligned to formal, material and structural experimentation with film, with Le Grice positing a decisive rejection of films with a symbolist or narrative basis. In his opinion, for example, some of Man Ray’s films were ‘in’ – Retour à la Raison (1923) and Emak Bakia (1926) qualified as sufficiently formal for inclusion – whereas his later films did not fit the remit.118 Mythopoetic, surrealist and symbolist films, (such as those by Jack Smith, Gregory Markopoulos, Ron Rice and Kenneth Anger from the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s American underground), were not relevant for inclusion. Neither were Germaine Dulac’s Le Coquille et le Clergyman (1927), nor the Dali/Bunuel films Un Chien Andalou (1928) and L’Age d’Or (1930). Le Grice asserted that, while these films rejected mainstream/Hollywood cinema’s conventions, they still adhered firmly to the narrative structures of the dominant cinema. In his estimation, non-narrative, non-symbolist films were defined as follows:

What is designated form or structure in film is primarily related to the pattern of its temporal construction. Each work is a particular instance of temporal pattern, having likenesses to, and differences from, other instances of form. It, like the image, is subject to the mechanisms of association and, by its instances of difference, signifies. Rejection of symbolist/surrealist practice does not eliminate the issues of signification from ‘formal’ cinema but may encourage a false assumption in the practice that it does.119
While reasons for the inclusion or exclusion of filmmakers were justified, problems emerged for the women involved in the curation of the exhibition, as they saw the history as unrepresentative.

Rhodes was initially the only woman on the ‘Film as Film’ exhibition committee, although Felicity Sparrow, Annabel Nicolson, Jane Clarke, Jeanette Iljon, Mary Pat Leece, Pat Murphy and Susan Stein joined to assist with research and decision-making processes. The group’s research uncovered a number of women involved in filmmaking prior to 1975. Despite the fact that ‘Film as Film’ dealt with specific practices in filmmaking – related to film form, material and structure – it was felt that the inclusion of this historically marginalised group would importantly broaden the context of the exhibition and offer a more representative history. Agreements on how to include the research could, however, not be reached, leading to the women’s withdrawal from the exhibition. The women’s research was, however, included in the exhibition catalogue. The empty exhibition space included the women’s withdrawal statement, also identifying the misrepresentation of the women’s films included in the exhibition:

Maya Deren and Germaine Dulac are both included in the ‘Film as Film’ historical survey but seen only in relation to the articulation of abstract/formal film. We were concerned that these women would be inaccurately ‘defined’ by the concepts that they had been chosen to illustrate and we felt it necessary to re-locate their work within the context of their own concerns, giving it a complexity and fullness that the ‘Film as Film’ exhibition denied.\[120\]

The statement listed the diverse misrepresentations, compromising the complexity of the Dulac’s and Deren’s historical involvement as writers, filmmakers and campaigners. The omission of Alice Guy’s contribution to early filmmaking was also criticised. The empty exhibition walls made a firm statement about the women’s position, reiterated by Rhodes in a 1984 documentary on women’s experimental filmmaking: ‘there’s nothing like absence to silence opposition’.\[121\]

The exclusion raised significant questions on the patriarchal position defining this history. Importantly, the exhibition catalogue included the women’s research as well as the withdrawal statement. Rhode’s polemical essay, ‘Whose History?’ raised some particularly pertinent questions about historical construction:

Women appear, but on whose terms? Within whose definitions? Apparently historical accuracy is based upon acceptable ‘facts’, that is those facts that are the concern of men. Unacceptable ‘facts’ are forgotten and rearranged. If they are remembered they are contained within the existing fabric. Alice Guy made some
200 films between 1896 and 1907. Why has she been forgotten? Her films attributed to Jasset and Feuillard?\textsuperscript{122}

Rhodes identified some of the contentious issues surrounding the positioned nature of history with her question ‘who makes history for whom?’\textsuperscript{123} (Rhodes’ emphasis) This reiterated Grasskamp and O’Pray’s points, expressed above, on how judgements were made to suit particular positioned accounts of history.

The decision to portray a history defined by specific parameters and fitting within a select jurisdiction of formal, materialist film experimentation in ‘Film as Film’ was especially problematic for the women involved:

As a method of reconstructing film history the thesis of ‘Film as Film’ is useful only in so far as it satisfies an apparent need to classify, organise and contain. This imposition of a fixed point of view on film history is dubious and contradicts the idea that films can be evaluated on their own presuppositions and not manipulated to fit those of the historian.\textsuperscript{124}

The difference, however, between presenting a history of formal experimentation and an inclusive history of women’s filmmaking could finally not be reconciled, as the exhibition committee believed that accommodating work on the basis of gender would compromise the exhibition. The lack of resolution related to these complex issues, resulting in the women’s decision to assert their views through their withdrawal, was also a seminal moment, leading to the formation of the women’s distribution collective, Circles (1979). The reclamation of women’s lost histories became a major concern for women in the 1970s and 1980s, shaped by significant developments in the second wave of feminism. This is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Seven.

Before moving on to consider Curtis’ account, it will be useful to briefly reflect on how the construction of a specific history, such as ‘Film as Film’ presented, also played a key part in establishing a certain accepted history related to structural and material film experimentation. Reekie critiqued Le Grice’s firm assertions on the inclusions and omissions related to formal filmmaking:

This [Le Grice’s ‘The History we Need’ essay for ‘Film as Film’] is perhaps the clearest acknowledgement of the purpose and trajectory of avant-garde historification from a leading avant-garde activist. As the avant-garde institutionalised itself so it gained control of the means to make its own legitimate history. By careful selection and exclusion it developed a historical canon and a pantheon of makers.\textsuperscript{125}
This is an important point, related to the central arguments of this thesis, as it also leads to the problematic lack of adequate recognition of 1970s filmmakers taking more expressionistic, representational approaches to filmmaking. This will be returned to again throughout the thesis.

**Experimental Filmmaking: ‘Which History?’**

In ‘Which History?’ Curtis focused on experimental films and videos held in national collections. He challenged public institutions such as the Tate Gallery, the Arts Council and the British Council on their lack of representative film and video histories. In his opening paragraph he noted that Le Grice, questioning the historical lineage of experimental filmmaking (and the importance of this history in contextualising contemporary film and video practices), had asked: ‘where does this art come from? What is its past?’ Curtis identified that – twenty years later – this was still a pertinent and largely unanswered question.

Curtis discussed works made for the gallery (including commercial- and public sector-commissioned works) and single-screen works made for a cinema-type setting or for monitor/television. He believed these experimental film and video histories should be reflected in national collections. Problematically, however, these detailed a sparse and unrepresentative history, with collections suddenly burgeoning in the 1990s as if these artists’ media had been ‘immaculately conceived at some point in the mid-1990s’.

Curtis noted that the Tate collection started with the acquisition of three 1970s films by Gilbert and George. This swiftly shifted to the mid-1980s with Susan Hiller’s *Belshazzar’s Feast: the Writing on Your Wall* (1983/4) and two films by Mona Hatoum including her seminal, *Measures of Distance* (1982). From the mid-1990s a relatively substantial collection was acquired with films such as Steve McQueen’s *Deadpan* (1990) and Douglas Gordon’s (*24-Hour Psycho* 1993). In Curtis’ estimation the Arts Council collection was equally unrepresentative with only a few more 1970s conceptual films. These included Darcy Lange’s *Six Working Lives* (1975/4), Liliane Lijn’s *What is the Sound of One Hand Clapping* (1973), David Dye’s *Mirror Film* (1971), *Two Cameras* (1971) and *Away From/Towards the Arts Council* (1971), David Lamelas’ *To Pour Milk into a Glass* (1972) and Gilbert’s and George’s *Gordon’s Makes us Drunk* (1972), *Portrait of the Artists* (1972) and *In the Bush* (1972). A single work from the 1980s was represented in Rose Finn-Kelcey’s *Glory*
As with the Tate collection, there was a noticeable expansion in the Arts Council collection in the mid-1990s as the work became more collectible:

If you were to characterise the work already in these collections, it’s a history of moving images conceived for the gallery rather than any other kind of space but it is also very much a history of the commercial galleries and their interest in the moving image. It reflects the fact that there was (briefly) a market for the moving-image in the early 1970s (or at least a belief that there might be one), and that there certainly wasn’t a market in the 1980s and early 1990s, but that one finally took off in the mid 1990s.\textsuperscript{128} (Curtis’ emphasis)

In his analysis Curtis also identified the history of gallery-based works, including films commissioned or exhibited during the productive period from the early 1970s to the 1990s. These were shown in both publicly-funded galleries such as the Ikon (Birmingham), Museum of Modern Art (Oxford), Serpentine and the ICA (London) and the Arnolfini (Bristol), and in artist-run spaces such as 2B Butlers Wharf and ACME Gallery (London). Curtis noted that despite the significant output during these years, this rich history was also almost non-existent in state collections:

These were the key players in the late 1970s [and] early ‘80s. It was in these galleries that the film and video installation as we now know it – single-screen, multi-image or mixed media – was born. And yet despite the fact that the work produced in these venues during these decades was designed for the gallery space, it is almost wholly absent from our national collections.\textsuperscript{129}

Clearly this misrepresentation did little to accommodate the quantity and diversity of work produced prior to the mid-1990s, offering a rather unbalanced view of experimental film and video history.

Curtis also discussed site-specific and live-cinema film works shown in public-sector galleries. These included Malcolm Le Grice’s live performance piece \textit{Horror Film I} (1971) and the four-screen \textit{After Manet} (1975), David Hall’s \textit{Progressive Recession} (1974), Anthony McCall’s \textit{Four Projected Movements} (1975) the artists’ group Housewatch’s, \textit{Wounded Knee} (1985), Judith Godard’s \textit{Television Circle/Electron} (1987), Simon Bigg’s \textit{Shadows} (1993), Susan Collis’ \textit{Pedestrian Gestures} (1994) and John Wood and Paul Harrison’s \textit{Obstacle Course} (1999). The Super-8 films in \textit{Wounded Knee} were projected in the windows of a house in East London; \textit{Shadows}, shown at the Truman Brewery in London, was programmed to interact with spectators as they moved within the space and \textit{Pedestrian Gestures} – filmed footage of a hand waving projected onto the floor – was specific to its location in Hull railway station. Godard’s \textit{Television Circle/Electron} was presented in a
Dartmoor forest as a multi-monitor work. Curtis noted that no record of these works existed in national collections. While he admitted that there were inherent difficulties in the presentation of such works – due to their site-specific, multi-screen or performative nature – he firmly believed that at least some documentation of their existence should be presented. He raised some pertinent questions on how this could be done:

The technology used by David Hall’s Progressive Recession is now completely obsolete. Do you fake it with modern equivalents? Malcolm Le Grice may not be with us forever to perform in Horror Film, and a site-specific work such as Judith Goddard’s Television Circle misses its point when removed from the forest location for which it was conceived. Yet it is important that this work is not lost to history. My own view is that you re-stage it when you can (and record your re-staging); fake the technology if you must, and start collecting documentation, such as the McCall drawings, for showing in glass cabinets, if that’s all that’s now possible.\(^{30}\)

The important issue of the preservation and exhibition of historical works using outdated technologies was also discussed by A. L. Rees:

Only a few works are likely to survive in their original state, permanently installed in museums, and they may not be those that shout loudest today. This will be determined not just by the creative merit of the work, but by the survival factor of the different and often transitional media in which it is materialised. The mass-produced neon tubes used by Dan Flavin forty years ago are no longer made, and museums have to have them manufactured by hand to preserve the work. How many artists will get that kind of treatment when the factories run out of 8mm film, VHS recorders and CD-Roms?\(^{31}\)

While Curtis and Rees acknowledged the challenges and complexity involved in acquiring such works, they identified this was not a call for complacency, and that ideally compromises should be sought where actual works could not be displayed.

The final body of works discussed by Curtis consisted of single-screen film, video and experimental moving-image works commissioned for television. Admittedly these different types of experimental work had their own histories, with work produced from the 1960s onwards generally affiliated to the LFMC, LVA, London Electronic Arts (LEA) and television broadcasting. While medium specificity presented challenges for exhibition, Curtis was convinced of the importance of showing historical within the museum context. Historical works discussed included Alexander Premio’s Liverpool Docks (1897), Oswell Blakeson and Francis Bruguiere’s Light Rhythms (1930), Kenneth MacPherson’s Borderline (1930), Lis Rhodes’ Light Music (1975), Guy Sherwin’s Bicycle from Short Film Series (1980),
Jayne Parker’s *Crystal Aquarium* (1989), Mark Wallinger’s *Angel* (1997) and Chris Newby’s *Stromboli* (1990-1997). Curtis agreed that the occasional screening of these films in public platforms such as galleries, the National Film Theatre, the LUX and in other cinemas or on television was important and well-deserved, but he was also insistent on the need for this work to be represented in national museums and art collections through written and visual documentation.

A brief reflection on the Tate Gallery and their attempts to identify the importance of collecting these works demonstrates that this is not a recent concern. In the Tate Gallery’s mission statement, identified by the 1992 Museums and Galleries Act, it outlined its intentions as being to ‘increase the public’s knowledge, understanding and appreciation of art. Particular attention is paid to developing a comprehensive representation of developments in British art’. In spite of the Tate’s claim to be developing a comprehensive history, it was evident from Curtis’ account that experimental film and video histories, preceding the mid-1990s, had been seriously neglected.

Le Grice had already identified these problems in a 1973 *Studio International* article, whereby he urged the Tate Gallery to collect experimental film. His reasons for identifying the Tate as an ideal institution were reproduced in Curtis’ recent publication, but require citing here as they were a timely appeal – thirty years ago – that has still not been adequately addressed:

There are three important areas for which the Tate could be the ideal screening context: (1) an historical repertory of avant-garde film, regularly presented as an aspect of the Tate’s permanent art exhibition; (2) a regular series of showings by individual film-makers, introduced by them, beginning with a complete review of home-grown production; (3) occasional special presentations of installation and cinema in the round, work prepared for the gallery situation.

Le Grice further explained his reasoning:

In Britain, because the BFI deals with the collection of classics of the commercial cinema, and because there is no equivalent to the Anthology Archive [New York] here, the Tate has a unique opportunity to build a collection of avant-garde cinema.

Le Grice’s recommendations were largely disregarded at the time and the Tate’s continued reluctance to collect such work was made evident in a recent interview between Le Grice and Michael Mazière:

MLG: I was also very strongly a critic of the Tate, the Tate had a responsibility to build up a collection of artists film and video.
MM: I went to the Tate numerous times and asked them why weren’t they collecting the work. And from the late 80’s they kept saying, ‘We are not a museum of modern art. We are a museum of British art so it’s not in our remit. And also our trustees don’t want to collect reproducible media’.\textsuperscript{135}

If the Tate wished to offer a ‘comprehensive representation of developments in British art’, as they intended to do, then surely some resolution would need to be found about the collection of works which may not be original collectible artworks but form a significant history of artistic practice.\textsuperscript{136}

Some of the complex reasons for the Tate’s and Arts Council’s reluctance to collect these works in the 1970s and 1980s were summed up by Curtis:

[F]ilm remained the responsibility of the education department, with only rare excursions into the territory by the exhibitions and collections staff over the next two decades. One apparent obstacle was the Tate Trustees’ decision only to collect works published in limited editions. To many artists, the idea of a limited edition of films was anathema; film’s infinite reproducibility was one of its attractions, offering an escape from the trap of the unique, therefore materially valuable art-object, also making film a conceptually purer and (arguably) more democratic medium. (Though artists would soon admit this democracy of access was more virtual than actual; many works never got beyond one or two copies.) The Arts Council, which saw purchasing works for its Collection as a primary means of supporting living artists, similarly failed to include film and video till the mid-1990s. It had the excuse that from the 1970s it was already supporting film-making artists with grants of production and exhibition funds. None the less, the absence of film and video works from the 1970s and 1980s in the Arts Council Collection of contemporary British art – which in size exceeds that of the Tate – was, and is, anomalous.\textsuperscript{137}

Clearly there were problems related to longevity and the exhibition of experimental film and video works, but the lack of representative histories in these national institutions was – and still is – a serious omission, providing a flawed account and failing to recognise the rich diversity in experimental film and video history. Artists, Conrad Atkinson identified that ‘[t]he British art of the 70s made the British art of the 90s possible. The 80s were a reaction to the 70s, but the 90s built on the lessons of the 70s’.\textsuperscript{138} Surely these histories, demonstrating the diversity in production and providing an essential framework for contemporary moving image practices, should be more visible.
Accessibility to Films

Before turning to the written accounts related to an unchallenged aspect of 1970s experimental film history, it will be useful to briefly consider the availability and accessibility of experimental films. This is important as it informs accounts of the history, potentially compromising the recognition of the diversity in filmmaking.

Many of the experimental films discussed in this thesis were not screened regularly and written accounts were often wrought through a single screening event. This meant that written reviews and critical essays came to hold a great deal of significance, for it was often through written accounts that historians, critics and filmmakers gained further access to the films, beyond the limited screenings available. Certainly archives and collections provided opportunities for researchers, but these were also not always easily accessible as they were held in specific locations, requiring time and travel to view the films. Contemporary reviewers, critics and researchers may have the luxury of multiple viewings, either in galleries as looped presentations (contemporary or historic), on DVD copies or in on-line archives, but access to a broad range of work is still to a great extent limited.

The significance of technological developments and accessibility to films were demonstrated in two examples. D. N. Rodowick mentioned a discovery (in 1989) that Pasolini’s whole oeuvre was available on video in his local video store. He commented that ‘five years earlier, I might have prioritised my life around a trip to New York to fill in the one or two Pasolini films I hadn’t seen, or to review en bloc a group of his films’.  

Curtis had made a similar remark on viewing Andy Warhol’s films in the 1960s, ‘I knew about Warhol, and was even prepared to go to New York to try and see what he was on about’.  These significant developments in the way in which author’s access films are important to keep in mind when considering the availability of these texts for historical purposes and the weight that written texts about experimental film have held and continue to hold.

The availability of films on DVD or on-line is useful but, by and large, this does not account for the majority of production. Due to film’s transient duration the whole film must also be viewed in order to grasp the work, and this differs significantly to the viewing of a drawing, painting or photograph. LUX director, Ben Cook, articulated these issues in a recent interview:

It is easier to see a painting than it is to see a film for the basic reason a film has no secondary representation like a painting does. You could theoretically study
painting from pictures and books and obviously that [is not ideal] but you could, to a degree, know these works. Now without seeing a film from beginning to end, you couldn’t know it, could you? And there is a whole complex system of how works are circulated. How value is imbued in works that also affects them.141

Cook identified the durational aspect as being particularly important when taking in the complete work. There are therefore significant differences in the review of a film, assessed from a single viewing with analysis based on the memory of the film, and the viewing of a static artwork. Additionally the screening of experimental films is also often problematic for teachers and students. Maeve Connolly observed that ‘review copies are not always available and, in many instances, classroom presentations of these copies are explicitly prohibited’.142 These all add to the complexities related to film accessibility and to the significance written texts on film hold.

One of the key issues in understanding these film histories is that accounts of work can become prejudiced by difficulties such as accessibility to sources and reliance on accepted written texts which inadvertently become representative of a given period, problematically serving as canonical texts as Cook outlined:

There is a problem in discourse that lacks quite far behind in the practice in this particular area because of this particular phenomenological issue with these kinds of work and their inaccessibility. So the problem is because there is such a lack of writing and scholarship in this area. I mean in relation to other kinds of art history generally. What happens is that the books and the work that was made, maybe not meaning to, establishes a kind of canon or key texts become by default key texts.143

These issues can seriously impede an understanding of a period, as reliance on key texts or accepted sources may perpetuate certain historical positions, and may not dully account for the complexity or diversity in filmmaking in a given period.

The Problem of the ‘Return to Image’ Thesis

In the preceding discussion the complexity of historical construction through retrospective exhibition, national collections and the accessibility of sources was considered. Recognising that the positioned nature of the historian (or curator) and the reluctance of public collections in acquiring works could fail to offer a representative history raised some important issues for consideration. The predominance of 1970s and retrospective written accounts, upholding a certain historical position, poses some equally important concerns which will be focused on here.
The prevailing claim that a ‘return to image’ occurred at the end of the 1970s will be examined through a range of written sources, demonstrating the perpetuation of this problematic argument. A case will be made that this is a flawed argument, failing to adequately account for the diversity in experimental filmmaking in the decade. The ‘return to image’ thesis presents a partial account of the history, undermining the diversity in 1970s filmmaking, as it serves to uphold the notion that structural and material experimentation was of utmost importance throughout the decade. The intention is not to dismiss the importance of structural and material experimentation, but to clarify its position within the wider framework of experimentation.

The terms used in written accounts, relating to more representational, image-rich, personal or expressive forms of filmmaking (and claiming the ‘return to image’) varied, with words such as ‘celebratory cinema’, ‘visionary cinema’, ‘cinema of excess’, ‘personal filmmaking’, ‘narrative’, ‘autobiographical’, ‘poetic’ filmmaking used. Terms such as ‘personal’ and ‘autobiographical’ are self-explanatory and refer to filmmakers taking more expressive, individualistic approaches to their work.

In existing written accounts a ‘return to image’ allegedly indicated a return to more representational forms of filmmaking of visual excess. These ‘returning’ films potentially included a multiplicity of representational imagery, including multiple exposures, the use of popular culture imagery, the prevalence of the human figure or an excessive use of colour. The use of terms such as ‘celebratory cinema’ or ‘visual pleasure’ should be considered in relation to discourses surrounding the ‘visual pleasure’ and viewer identification in commercial, narrative (‘Hollywood’) cinema, where pleasure was allegedly gained from viewing films without requiring an intellectual engagement with the film text. Intentions to ensure greater viewer reflexivity – by challenging seamless, narrative structure and taking an anti-illusionist approach to filmmaking – formed an important part of theoretical discourses expounded by theorist/filmmakers such as Peter Gidal, Malcolm Le Grice, Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen.

These terms could also be seen in opposition to the anti-representation and denial of image arbitrated most firmly by Gidal and Le Grice’s theoretical positions (Gidal was ardently anti-representation and Le Grice ‘condoned representation only if it was critical’). Arguably, however, film is always about image, whether the image reveals the grain of the film or denies viewer identification or recognition. Therefore the phrase, ‘return to image’ is notoriously complex and problematic, but in the
context of its ‘return’ it relates to the representational, potentially symbolic or metaphorical use of image, possibly also serving a narrative purpose. A number of written sources indicated that a ‘return’ to different more representational forms of filmmaking – apparently following on from the rigorous structural, material and formal experimentation – occurred at the end of the 1970s, perpetuating the ‘return to image’ thesis.

The following historical accounts, advocating that a ‘return to image’ occurred at the end of the 1970s, will be identified in order to understand how and why this ‘return to image’ thesis became the established approach to 1970s filmmaking. In ‘Underground 3: Re-viewing the Avant-Garde’ (1983) Rees described some of the changes occurring in experimental filmmaking at the end of the 1970s:

Some of the bêtes noires of avant-garde theory in previous years – including narrative and autobiography – have been reworked in a number of excellent films made in a less ‘formalist’ mode than those of the earlier 70s ... There has also been a crop of Neo-Romantic work, promoted by the energetic B2 group (Wapping and the Regent’s Park Diorama). Its exponents include John Maybury, Cerith Wyn Evans and Julia Hotspur Percy, working on cheap and occasionally nasty low-gauge tape and film. The whole enterprise suggests a folk memory of Jack Smith and might prove the success of excess – or just as quickly disappear into an ever-growing market for style, glitter and pose.\(^{147}\) (Rees’ emphasis)

Although Rees’ criticism for some of the work emerging in the 1980s did not preclude its existence during the 1970s, he indicated that a renewed change of direction occurred at the end of the 1970s. In his review of Will Milne’s Same (1981), in the same publication, he indicated this change:

Following a period of minimalist paring down of the image by experimental filmmakers, Same is evidence of a revival of interest in the codes of editing and composition, of a need to extend and re-think film language.\(^{148}\)

Questions need to be asked whether all experimental filmmakers went through a period of ‘minimalist paring down of the image’?\(^{149}\) This appears not to accommodate the 1970s experimental filmmakers who included the ‘bête noires of avant-garde theory … narrative and autobiography’ in films such as David Larcher’s Monkey’s Birthday (1975), Anne Rees-Mogg’s Real-Time (1971-74), Margaret Tait’s Place of Work (1976) and B. S. Johnson’s Fat Man on the Beach (1973):\(^{150}\) These filmmakers took autobiographical approaches to their work which was not minimalist or pared down.
O’Pray similarly identified this alleged shifting focus at the end of the 1970s, with filmmakers ‘returning’ to different types of production (as if in defiance of their elders) to embrace the world of myth, dream, symbolism, sexuality or the subconscious:

More broadly, it may be argued that there was a shift from asceticism to aestheticism. In an Oedipal reaction, the young film-makers embraced what had been anathema to their elders – subject matter. The 1980s in Britain can be seen as a rejection of modernism in its more rationalist formalist forms, and a return to the repressed tradition of modernism – one which embraced the oneiric (Ron Rice, Cocteau), the symbolist (Deren) and the documentary (Vertov, Jennings) ... Decadence, with its emphasis on the body, opened up a sexual politics evaded by rationalistic machine-based early modernism. The New Romantics can be seen as a later example of this trait. Among the various strands of the 1980s there was a common return to subject matter outside film’s own material and ontological concerns.\(^{151}\) (my emphasis)

Interestingly, O’Pray made these claims at a time when it was evident that New Romantic filmmakers such as John Maybury and Cerith Wyn Evans had been influenced by Derek Jarman’s extensive output of 1970s films, which were without doubt not informed by formal, structural or theoretical filmmaking. Jarman was shortlisted for the Turner Prize in 1986 ‘in recognition of the outstanding visual quality of his films’.\(^{152}\) By the time O’Pray wrote his critique, a collection of Jarman’s 1970s and 1980s Super-8 films had been edited into the 60-minute compilation \textit{Glitterbug} (BBC, 1994).\(^{153}\) \textit{Glitterbug} includes footage from \textit{Studio Bankside} (1972), \textit{Sloane Square} (1974-76) and \textit{Ulla’s Fete} (1976), with the compilation indicating that austerity and asceticism were certainly not the only order of the day. The original video cover described the films as ‘a stimulating, joyous and evocative self portrait of Jarman the artist and his milieu, showing times of fun and pleasure with friends, together with moments of high camp in the early 70s and frivolity on the sets of his films.’\(^{154}\)

Although O’Pray was a firm supporter of Jarman’s work, acknowledging (in his earlier edited collection) that he ‘had been making Super-8 films throughout the 1970s in a style which was visually rich and sensuous and often used constructed and highly theatrical tableaux’, his later statement signalling a shift to aestheticism, at the end of the decade, does not appear to adequately take this into account.\(^{155}\) O’Pray went on to champion the work of Jarman and the New Romantics, Wyn Evans and Maybury in the 1980s, curating exhibitions such as ‘The Synchronisation of the Senses: The New Romantics’ (1985) at the ICA.
More to the point O’Pray identified the alleged return, at the end of the decade, to a filmmaking of representational visual excess as being complemented by a renewed interest in earlier literary and film texts:

Literature replaced theory – especially Lautréamont, Burroughs with Bataille. For its influences and inspiration the film-makers leapfrogged a generation – back to the 1950s and 1960s of Andy Warhol, Jean Cocteau, Kenneth Anger, Jack Smith, Ron Rice, Jean-Luc Godard, Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Japanese cinema. In its aesthetic it celebrated artifice and images pillaged from both high art and popular culture. It emphasized the body, performance and sexuality, notably gay. This meant a shift from the materialist-realism of the Le Gricean formalists, to montage and collaging techniques in which the assembling of images took precedence over the shot of reality.156

This interest in more expressionistic and subversive literature and film from earlier decades thereby also purportedly signalled a marked rejection of the theoretically and politically informed Marxist position prevailing at the LFMC throughout the 1970s. While this may have been the case for certain LFMC filmmakers, an air of caution should be taken when recounting this as the definitive history of the decade. Not all experimental filmmakers were involved with the LFMC, and all those that were did not necessarily follow the hard-line theoretical position affiliated to experimentation with film form, structure and material.

Filmmakers outside of the LFMC, such as Jarman, had maintained a continued interest in romanticism, (‘I think William Morris is wonderful and I like Blake’), poetry (citing Rimbaud and Shakespeare an inspiration), and in the archetypical psychology of Carl Jung.157 These would be continuous influences on his work. Margaret Tait called her works ‘film-poems’, saying ‘I think that film is essentially a poetic medium’ and was also inspired by the poet, Frederico Lorca’s approach to ‘stalking the image’.158 These were consistent interests throughout her life, although she also took a sociological interest to record her surroundings with film. David Larcher, who worked at the LFMC during the 1970s, had never taken the extreme formal, theoretical line in filmmaking and had an interest in mysticism and psychoanalysis (he cited the mystic, Gurdjieff, in Monkey’s Birthday (1975)). Clearly formal, theoretical filmmaking was not the only type of filmmaking taking place during the 1970s.

If a ‘return to image’ did occur anywhere, this was perhaps evident in the work of younger filmmakers influenced by Gidal and Le Grice’s structural and materialist position. These included filmmakers such as Lucy Panteli (Across the Field of Vision,
1982), Michael Mazière (Untitled, 1980), Rob Gawtrop (Distancing, 1979), Will Milne (Fattendre, 1978) and Nicky Hamlyn (Guesswork, 1979). Gidal’s dominant and influential position was also outlined in Curtis’ A History of Artists’ Film and Video in Britain under ‘Gidal’s Legacy’, and in articles such as Nicky Hamlyn’s ‘From Structuralism to Imagism: Peter Gidal and his Influence in the 1980s’ (1999).\textsuperscript{159}

Other LFMC filmmakers, such as Le Grice had turned to more narrative forms of filmmaking in his trilogy, Blackbird Descending: Tense Alignment (1977), Emily Third Party Speculation (1979), and Finnegans Chin (1981), and identified that his own film crisis was influenced by feminist theory and French film theory (Mulvey, Metz, psychoanalysis, etc).\textsuperscript{160} The films of William Raban and Chris Welsby were cinematographically-informed, often taking procedural or structural approaches to filmmaking, and though these films were not implemented in the romantic, pastoral tradition of early landscape painting, they were still image-rich with representations of the landscape clearly depicted.

Wollen also rather problematically summed up 1970s and 1980s filmmaking, reinforcing the notion of a ‘return to image’ occurring at the end of the 1970s:

The dominance of ‘structural’ film, lasted until the early 80s, when it was disturbed by the ‘New Romantic’ film and video-makers, who broke with the rigorous formalism and asceticism of ‘structural film’, revelling instead in flamboyance and excess, reviving the suppressed aesthetic of Cocteau and camp. Thus the 70s were marked by the influence of the fine arts, at the moment when they turned away from painting and the galleries, whilst the 80s were influenced by music, fashion and style.\textsuperscript{161}

This simplistic approach neither accounts for the diversity in filmmaking in the 1970s, but also problematically apportions out the history as if only specific forms of filmmaking were evident in the decades.

O’Pray similarly assisted in consolidating the problematic ‘return to image’ argument, when he took a retrospective view of the past ten years of film and video (1987), identifying the ‘return to image as an avant-garde component’ in his unambiguously titled ‘From Asceticism to Aestheticism’ essay:

That the past decade has seen a return to such kinds of cinema – surrealist, documentarist, poetic, and experimental narrative – should not be surprising, it is precisely the recovery of traits in avant-garde film history that have been allowed to slip out of sight for some time, and that have not been the root of influence.\textsuperscript{162}
Although O’Pray acknowledged David Larcher’s ‘classic “underground” films’ as unequalled in their rich visionary quality in this account, he only mentioned *Mare’s Tail* (1969) and not *Monkey’s Birthday* (1975). He mentioned Jarman’s ‘Super 8 “home movies” which he had been working on since 1970’. He also described the ‘avant-garde’s two oldest practitioners’, Jeff Keen as ‘a surrealist’, and Margaret Tait as ‘a poetic documentarist’. Despite the fact that all these filmmakers collectively produced a significant amount of films throughout the 1970s, he is still insistent that a ‘return to image’ occurred at the end of the 1970s. O’Pray, however, made an interesting comment in his essay, when he identified that ‘perhaps the return to the image as an avant-garde component had never been that far away’.

In discussing the work of Larcher, Keen and Tait he clearly demonstrated recognition of this work, but he still continued with the fallback position, claiming that a ‘return’ occurred at the end of the decade.

The main problem with the ‘return to image’ thesis is that it has come to be accepted as an established part of experimental filmmaking history, with the problematic ‘return’ perpetuated in more recent analyses. In a recent on-line essay about the New Romantics, filmmaker and researcher, Lucy Reynolds identified the following:

If that decade [1970s] was concerned primarily with problematising notions of representation, illusion and pleasure, then the beginning of the 80s saw the New Romantics taking what some would inevitably see as a reactionary about-turn by exploring the “myriad permutations of how beautiful one could make [an] image”. (Reynolds’ emphasis)

In a further reference to the two main New Romantic filmmakers, Maybury and Wyn Evans and the ‘A Certain Sensibility’ exhibition (1979) at the ICA, further claims about the shifting directions in filmmaking were made:

The filmmakers associated with the ‘A Certain Sensibility’ exhibition marked a radical turn within British avant-garde film: by embracing aspects of popular culture they helped to reunite two spheres that had been effectively severed during what Maybury has described as the “intellectual death” of the 70s.

The two severed spheres referred to are those of high and popular culture. Yet, how can this severance be accounted for when Keen, one of the most prolific experimental filmmakers working in the decade, produced numerous films engaging with aspects of popular culture such as comic strips, Hollywood stars and advertising slogans? Keen’s filmography by 1980 ran to almost thirty films. These had been screened at the LFMC and in expanded cinema festivals. Perhaps Maybury’s ‘intellectual death’ and the
'severance’ should be recognised as applying to certain filmmakers – at the LFMC working within the structural and material tradition – who were preoccupied with political and theoretical filmmaking. An air of caution should, therefore, be taken to recognise that this was not the complete history of experimental filmmaking in the decade, but only a part of it.

In a 2002 paper, ‘No Psychodrama Please, We’re British’, Rees described the experimental films emerging from the underground counterculture and film schools in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s:

Aesthetics is a kind of ethics. All explored the medium as material. Artisanal work came, not through drama, but only film as process, something not fixed and always in a state of deferral.

While Rees acknowledged the influence of some American structural filmmakers, psychodrama or mythopoeia were apparently not widespread, as British filmmakers were against the spectacle of cinema. American influence came through Andy Warhol – a few illegal dubs had made their way to the LFMC – whose portraits were ‘cool, objective, rejecting the interiority of the psychodrama which was seen as phoney and pretentious.’ Yet not all 1970s filmmakers explored film materiality and took formal, theoretically-informed approaches to their practice, as evidenced by the films already mentioned and discussed throughout this thesis.

In a further recent account, Julia Knight identified the way experimental filmmaking history was presented with continued references to the dominant 1970s structuralist position in the Undercut journal (1980-1990). Although, she admitted, this was not particularly remarkable, as the publication came out of the LFMC and focused on its own history, Knight indicated that ‘it is also taken as an important reference point – a starting point even – and subsequent developments are repeatedly mapped out in relation to it.’ Knight presented the ‘neat linear history of British avant-garde film’ as follows:

- The British structuralist movement grew out of the 1960s US structural film, but developed a distinctive identity to counter the US hegemony.
- Peter Gidal coins the term structural-materialism for the direction taken by British filmmakers during the 1960s and early 1970s.
- The strict ‘formalism’ of structuralist filmmaking is not totally abandoned but a ‘representational’ element is reintegrated, as exemplified by the ‘landscape films’ of the 1970s. In contrast to Gidal’s assertion that ‘the real content is the form’, according to Deke Dusinberre, ‘not only does shape determine content, but content determines shape’.
• The early 1980s sees a return to narrative, representation and visual pleasure as a reaction to the strict formalism of earlier practices.175

Knight identified the problems with the perpetuation of this specific account of experimental filmmaking history, supporting her account with recollections from filmmaker, Barbara Meter. These require citing in full as they provide some particularly interesting points related to the alleged influence of structural and formal filmmaking and the apparent ‘return to image’ at the end of the 1970s. Writing in 1990, Meter recollected as follows:

Looking again at the British avant-garde after 15 years is as if I have plunged into an orgy of romantic images, graining [sic] colours, decadent and dark moods and personal evocations. What a reaction against the asceticism of the formal and structural film which reigned at the time I was around. A predictable reaction of course – and one which is highly indebted to just that formal movement. I think that all of British experimental film pays a tribute to the structural movement (even when being vehemently the opposite, like the work of Cerith Wyn Evans, Derek Jarman, Anna Thew, etc).176 (Knight’s emphasis)

As Knight also highlighted, it was rather a large claim, on Meter’s part, to state that all British work was informed by structural filmmaking. Jarman, for one, noted that he found ‘all English filmmaking with the exception of social documentaries and David Larcher excruciating’, and could hardly be considered highly indebted to the formal or structural movement by paying tribute to it in his filmmaking.177

While Knight recognised the importance of the British structuralist work, she felt that it occupied ‘a very privileged position in the history of moving-image work’.178 In her opinion this history was rather one-sided and did not adequately take into account video work, particularly as ‘artists’ engagement with video started to happen at around the same time’.179 I would also argue that the history prioritised the importance of structural and formal experimentation – perpetuating the notion of an alleged ‘return to image’ at the end of the decade – at the expense of presenting other forms of filmmaking, such as more personal, representational or autobiographical forms of filmmaking. This compromised an understanding of the diversity in experimentation, which forms a unique and important aspect of this history.

The above has outlined how 1970s experimental filmmaking histories have perpetuated the ‘return to image’ thesis. A few further examples present some rather problematic accounts as they, on the one hand, re-enforce the established history but, on the other, recognise that other forms of filmmaking (some relegated as part of the
'return to image’) did occur. Rees valuably identified some of the strained links between different forms of filmmaking in the decade:

[F]ilm-makers like Jeff Keen, David Larcher and Dwoskin himself - who kept up the anarchic underground tradition - were for a time marginalised by the Co-op structuralists. It was a clash of spirit as much as of substance, signalled in the switch of name from the liberatory ‘underground’ to the more theoretical ‘avant-garde’. For some the Co-op’s turn away from the films of Dwoskin, Larcher and Keen was a sign of new scholasticism. But celebratory cinema was not much in evidence during the post-euphoric 1970s, when the major choices for young filmmakers lay between the purist avant-garde and the agit-prop collectives like Cinema Action, Politkino, the London Women’s Film Group and the Berwick Street Collective. For much of the decade the visionary film-makers of the first Co-op continued to add to their extensive bodies of work regardless, often ironically enough using the techniques and tropes of structural film, although these efforts were more often appreciated in France, Germany and Holland than at home. 

Useful insights were provided by Rees’ account, recognising that other forms of filmmaking – apart from structural or formal experimentation – continued throughout the decade. However, maintaining that the ‘anarchic underground tradition’ persisted with ‘the visionary film-makers’ adding ‘to their extensive bodies of work regardless’, yet suggesting that ‘celebratory cinema was not much in evidence during the post-euphoric 1970s’ sets up some problematic negations. In a further account similar relegations were made:

Broadly the structural tendency won out in those younger film-makers who showed their first films around 1977. It was their immediate legacy and context, although each distanced themselves from it. The underground visionary tradition (in Larcher and Dwoskin, partly in Jeff Keen and later in Derek Jarman) went further underground, and was only picked up again in the 1980s by new groups who definitively rejected structural film. 

How could filmmakers go further ‘underground’? All these filmmakers continued to make films throughout the 1970s. Although Larcher only made one film in the decade, Monkey’s Birthday (1975), it is an epic film lasting six hours. Dwoskin made over ten films between 1970 and 1980. Jarman and Keen made over fifty experimental films in the 1970s. Which ‘underground’ were they a part of, and why are their films not considered as part of 1970s experimental film history? Additionally, what about filmmakers, such as Margaret Tait, Peter Whitehead and Jane Arden who also made experimental films in the decade? With such explicit accounts of inclusion and exclusion presented, clearly the question of positioned histories and historical canons needs to be addressed.
Wollen similarly made a passing reference to the continued persistence in forms of filmmaking relegated to the alleged ‘return to image’ at the end of the decade:

The Co-op film-makers developed a distinctively British variant of American avant-garde film, in which the ‘structural’ tendency, influenced by minimal and conceptual art, became dominant, rather than the tradition of ‘personal’ or ‘visionary’ film-making, although this did persist.\textsuperscript{183} (my emphasis)

The persistence of these forms of filmmaking clearly indicates that they need to be recognised as part of 1970s experimental filmmaking history and more fully explored, instead of being relegated to the sidelines in order to fulfil positioned accounts or uphold canons of filmmakers/films to suit the argument for the dominance of the formal, structural/ material position in the decade. This thesis sets out to trace the films that have been overshadowed by dominant accounts of 1970s experimental filmmaking history to demonstrate the rich diversity in experimentation.

The conclusions drawn from these written texts is that overwhelming evidence, supporting the claim that this alleged return to image, narrative and autobiography occurred at the end of the 1970s. Yet there were numerous films produced throughout the decade to counter this claim. Some of these films have been mentioned here and further detailed evidence is provided throughout the thesis, with a focus on personal, poetic and diary films in Chapter Five. As was mooted in the introduction to this chapter, the reasons for the construction of histories and why they remain unchallenged is complex. What is necessary is the pulling back of the lens to afford a retrospective view in order to reassess and question, ‘what you think you know; what you imagine you see; what you learn to look for; what you are told is visible’.\textsuperscript{184}
CHAPTER TWO: INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIES

Like most artists, the serious personal film-maker commits his time, his energies, his emotions and his money to producing a film. But films need to be projected, even to friends; this is one of their distinctive properties. A FINISHED FILM IS A PROJECTED FILM: that is its function. To make a film that is personal, experimental, avant-garde – call it what you will – in other words, to make a film that is not produced primarily for commercial gain, and to get it projected for others to see, can put the film-maker into a world foreign to his own, the world of bureaucracy, politics, organization, economics. ¹⁸⁵

Stephen Dwoskin (1975)

Experimental filmmaking in the mid-1960s was a fragile cultural development, yet by the end of the 1970s it was a thriving practice. This was due to a complex network of institutional frameworks and organisational strategies enabling developments. Institutional structures, such as funding and education, and organisational initiatives, such as workshops and associations, involved in the production and distribution of experimental filmmaking will be discussed in this chapter. Exhibition is mentioned here where contextualisation is necessary, and is discussed in detail in the following chapter. As experimental filmmaking gained recognition during the decade it was necessary, particularly for funding bodies, to appreciate this film form as a personal statement made with a camera – ‘a world of individual inquiry’ – rather than the ‘formal world of Hollywood, with its production crews of hundreds’. ¹⁸⁶

Organisational strategies will include a discussion of film workshops (in existence from the mid-1960s onwards) and initiatives such as the Independent Film-makers Association (IFA). The former were central to the production, distribution and exhibition of experimental films, and the latter in providing a kind of unifying platform for the heterogeneous kinds of independent filmmaking practices in Britain. While the London Filmmakers Co-operative (LFMC) was the main workshop for the kind of experimental filmmaking discussed in this thesis, it is useful to understand its place within the wider framework of other oppositional practices, particularly as these all struggled for recognition from government funding bodies.

The complex issues related to who was responsible for the funding of experimental film – the Arts Council Great Britain (ACGB) or the British Film Institute (BFI) – and what the definitions and criteria for funding were, will also be considered here. One of the reasons for this complexity was that no precedents existed for funding film work
awkwardly situated between the cinema and the fine arts. This discrepancy would culminate in the important Attenborough Report in 1973, helping to resolve some of the distinctions between different types of filmmaking.\footnote{187}

Funding would remain a complex issue throughout the decade, with the overall proportion spent on experimental film being minuscule, in comparison to independent and mainstream, commercial production. As an example: grants for experimental artists’ films usually ranged between £1,000-£4,000; Stephen Dwoskin received £10,000 for *Central Bazaar* (1972) and the independent film, *Winstanley* (1973), had a budget of £24,000. By comparison the British feature film, *Shout at the Devil* (1975) had a £3,000 000 budget.\footnote{188} Funding proposals would prove challenging for institutional bodies more accustomed to scripted filmmaking intentions, and therefore required some further explication. Arts Council film officers, such as David Curtis and Rodney Wilson, were actively insistent on the need to fund more open-ended experimentation, as this was essentially what experimental filmmaking was. Further clarification of the term ‘independent film’ was, however, also required as this appeared to imply financial independence, but if anything ‘independent’ filmmakers were very much in need of – and dependent upon – financial support in the form of public funding.

The diverse concerns related to experimental filmmaking were aptly termed a ‘web of support’ by filmmaker and researcher, Michael Mazière:

> The level of production is part of a complex web of support which includes education, social context, artists’ organisation, access to technology and the possibility of proper exhibition. Individual grants therefore clearly do not represent the total measure of support for artists’ film and video as much institutional support exists in the education sector and workshops. The question of individual funding is one which is also linked to technology, social and political context and cultural practice.\footnote{189}

His extensive research paper on institutional support for experimental filmmaking also identified that in some instances – such as at the LFMC in the early 1970s – more work was produced without funding than in later years when funding was acquired. Mazière’s paper is a useful resource, providing details of other alternative sources such as group-funding. Dupin’s PhD thesis on the British Film Institute’s support for non-mainstream film (early 1950-late 1970) is also a valuable source and both should be referred to for more detailed accounts, related to institutional support.\footnote{190}
Although funding was vital to the support of filmmaking, education also formed a critical part in developments. It played an important role in both the training of future experimental filmmakers and in the establishment of a critical and cultural framework necessary for the understanding of this type of filmmaking. This was needed in order to encourage audience engagement and to enlighten funding bodies. Encouraging audience engagement should not be misunderstood as an affront upon audiences’ lack of intelligence, but rather as recognition that elucidation could assist in critical appreciation. Therefore, the practice of filmmakers presenting their work became more established in the 1970s. This differed significantly to the dominant, commercial cinema which served primarily to entertain audiences for the cost of a ticket.

Archie Tait’s account of the diversity in independent filmmaking practices (operating in opposition to the dominant industry) provided some idea of the breadth of the terrain:

Independent film-making is not a unified practice, but an umbrella term encompassing activities as diverse as those of Ken Trodd and Dennis Potter, Donovan Winter, Cinema Action and Peter Gidal. Accordingly, independent exhibition is not a unified practice, since the principle factor in differentiating independent film activity from the activity of the majors is the insistence on the sympathetic presentation of the work in an explanatory context. This insistence finds its point of operation in the organisation of the relationship of the spectator to the film.  

Tait’s ‘explanatory context’ was important for an understanding of the exhibition context, viewer engagement and for explaining filmmaking where institutional support was sought. This was particularly significant for experimental filmmaking as its cultural and historical roots were in the visual arts, rather than in cinema history, although filmmakers were to some extent informed by both (either in an oppositional manner or by drawing on early film practices). Le Grice identified the fragile nature of the experimental filmmaking in a 1977 account:

There is no reason at all why the experimental film movement here should not have disappeared without trace. In 1966 it did not fit into the cinema nor did it have a place in the art gallery. I have become so used to thinking of this cultural development as fragile, and the Co-op as a kind of Noah’s Ark, that it is hard to check the habit and see that in the last few years some things have changed. In the art world, film is beyond the stage (if only just) of having ‘a foot in the door’.  

The concerted attempts of individuals and institutions to advance a critical and cultural framework, as well as more substantial organisational and institutional infrastructures, were crucial to ensure the continued development of this work. While
this was important for the expansion of the experimental filmmaking field, the reliance of filmmaking – born out of underground and oppositional practices – on institutional, government support did raise some issues for consideration. The question, whether experimental filmmaking became substantially more institutionalised as the decade progressed, should be kept in mind as it will be returned to at the end of this chapter.

**Film Workshops**

In Britain workshops, collectives or co-operatives where (mostly) 16mm films could be produced, distributed and screened were set up from the mid-1960s onwards. These were important for developing new forms of filmmaking and stimulating debates through socially-grounded practices:

Much of the momentum behind the politicisation of film culture was provided by proto-workshops – small enterprises concerned simultaneously with production, distribution and exhibition of films. Typically, they began with a few like-minded people getting together round shared objectives, and between 1966 and 1970 at least half a dozen such groups began functioning. The vocabulary associated with them – “workshops” and “integrated practice” – only gradually acquired currency with the need to describe what they were doing.¹⁹³

Many of these workshops had a political focus, in the form of agit-prop, socio-political cinema, while others, such as the LFMC, took more modernist approaches to experimenting with film form, structure and material. Collectively, these independent film practices ensured that debate in opposition to the dominant, commercial cinema took place. To some extent this was formalised in 1974 with the establishment of the Independent Film-makers Association (IFA), creating links between the different oppositional practices.

A digression is necessary here, in order to understand the history behind the workshop movement as it did not suddenly emerge in the 1960s/70s without precedent. This is also important for appreciating the diverse forms of 1970s experimental film practices discussed in this thesis. These included Super-8 (more commonly considered an amateur format) as used by Derek Jarman (amongst others) and more personal, autobiographical forms of filmmaking by Jeff Keen and Margaret Tait (also having roots in amateur home-movie filmmaking).¹⁹⁴

An amateur film movement developed in Britain in the 1930s and after the Second World War, particularly as post-war 16mm newsreel equipment became more readily
available. Clubs and societies, for production and exhibition, supported the flourishing – although small scale in relation to the broader population – network of filmmakers; some working collectively and others autonomously. While these amateur groups did not share the same political motivations of the 1970s workshops, they offered substantial alternatives to the dominant industry. Networked organisations such as the Institute of Amateur Cinematographers (IAC), the British Amateur Cinematographers’ Central Council and the Federation of Cinematograph Societies (FCS) supported amateur activity. Awareness of this history identified important links between earlier oppositional or amateur filmmaking practices:

From the amateur perspective, although there was a controversial borderland between the professional and the amateur, and the amateur aspired to “professionalism” and “professional quality”, amateur cine was essentially self-selecting. Despite long-running and constant encouragements and admonitions from activists most amateur filmmakers resisted schemes to centralise, aestheticise or industrialise the culture. This resistance was at heart a resistance to professionalisation; most amateurs wanted to be amateur, they worked at other professions and trades; amateur cine was not work, it was freedom from work.

Films were produced at a grass-roots level, acquiring equipment where possible and improvising where necessary, differing significantly from the film industry where individuals trained for years and were paid for work produced. This hands-on form of filmmaking, driven by enthusiasm and mostly voluntary commitment, was not that different to approaches taken by the later workshops. 1970s workshops, however, had a political dimension and some, like the LFMC, sought recognition as an art medium.

Both early amateurs and later experimental filmmakers were driven by economic constraints and liberation from the production of commercially successful films, therefore experimentation was an open-ended enterprise:

Throughout the post-war decades the amateur movement had both a current of experimental practice and an awareness of the experimental tradition as a crucial element of amateur film culture. The pages of the cine magazines were full of experiments, scripts and ideas for films, DIY equipment projects, advice on how to achieve cinematographic effects and letters from filmmakers detailing their own discoveries.

Reekie noted that screenings of experimental films were regularly publicised in *Amateur Cine World*, ‘a coordinating centre and clearing house for shared information, debate and collective decision-making’. He identified that the experimental amateur ciné-club, the Grasshopper Group, (operating from the mid-1950s), distributed and screened American work by filmmakers such as Maya Deren,
Films from the Grasshopper Group were also distributed in America by Amos Vogel’s Cinema 16. The LFMC would similarly follow suit when they acquired a range of New American Cinema (NAC) films in 1968 through American filmmaker and LFMC employee, Carla Liss. Reekie’s historical account on ‘Underground Cinema’ was critical of the lack of recognition given to the amateur movement in experimental film histories and is, therefore, important for our understanding of the longer history of the workshop movement and historical contexts for aspects of 1970s experimental filmmaking.

The workshops were instrumental in determining a substantial proportion of the decade’s production, particularly the LFMC where workshop facilities for printing and processing enabled a great deal of experimentation. Although some filmmakers also worked independently, seeking other means to make and fund their filmmaking. For more extensive information on the workshop movement and oppositional film practices in Britain, Margaret Dickinson’s *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain, 1945-90* should be consulted. ‘The Cinema Workshops: New Models of Cinema’ (1981) is also a useful reference, providing information about workshop configurations and objectives.

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**Film Workshops: Production, Distribution and Exhibition**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Focus/Specialism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>LFMC (London)</td>
<td>Experimentation with film structure and material</td>
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<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Arts Lab (London)</td>
<td>Arts experimentation with theatre, gallery, cinema and coffee shop</td>
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<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Amber Films (Newcastle)</td>
<td>Community work and campaign films</td>
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<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Cinema Action (London)</td>
<td>Screening of political films in factories and pubs with mobile cinema and film production</td>
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<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Birmingham Arts Lab</td>
<td>Arts and performance space for research into experimental art forms</td>
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<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>IRAT (Research into Art and Technology) (former Arts Lab)</td>
<td>Umbrella organisation to administrate LFMC, TVX, theatre, music, gallery and production workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Berwick Street Collective (London)</td>
<td>Socio-political and campaign films</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>TVX (London)</td>
<td>Video/video art. Community video and open access facilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Liberation Films</td>
<td>Socio-political. Modelled on American Newsreel</td>
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<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>London Women’s Film</td>
<td>Informed by women’s movement and...</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Organisation/Individuals</td>
<td>Focus/Specialism</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>The Other Cinema (Peter Sainsbury and Nick Hart-Williams)</td>
<td>Distribution Independent, European Art House, South American BFI-supported cinema (1976-1977)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Artificial Eye</td>
<td>Distribution: Independent Films</td>
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<td>1977</td>
<td>Cow</td>
<td>Distribution: Women’s films and campaign issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Circles Distribution</td>
<td>Women’s group with feminist focus: Women’s film and video; historical women’s films</td>
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**London Filmmaker’s Co-operative (LFMC)**

The LFMC was the main workshop affiliated with the types of experimental filmmaking discussed in this thesis, although not all experimental filmmakers working in the 1970s had affiliations with it. While other workshops, such as the Berwick Street Collective and Amber Films had some equipment, none had printing and processing facilities similar to the LFMC or explored formal, material and structural aspects of filmmaking in the same way. Films produced at the other workshops were generally less aesthetically or formally experimental as they focused more on socio-political issues.

The LFMC was initiated by a group filmmakers and activists at Better Books in 1966. The initiative came from Jonas Mekas, who had set up the New York Co-op (1962), and was eager to see similar ventures in Britain. The LFMC was officially launched in October 1966 and moved to the Drury Lane Arts Lab in September.
By 1968, with the addition of new members such as Malcolm Le Grice and Peter Gidal, it had begun to establish itself as a production, distribution and screening centre for experimental filmmaking. From 1969-1970 the LFMC was housed at the Institute for Research in Art & Technology (IRAT). Thereafter it had a peripatetic existence (discussed in Chapter Six) for the next few years, before securing relocation funding from the Greater London Council and the Gulbenkian Foundation (in 1976) for a longer term home in Gloucester Avenue. The longevity of the LFMC was essentially attributed to ‘its extremely dedicated membership and staff’, despite insufficient funds, an often uncertain future and the lack of permanent location for many years.

Film funding was always an issue but, paradoxically, production at the LFMC was at its height before an increase in funding occurred in the mid-1970s. This was due in part to the co-operative ideology but also directly attributed to production facilities available to filmmakers. Mazière noted that ‘work was being made prolifically before funding and was then sustained and developed with funding’, pointing out that 1973 signalled a high-point in film production during the decade:

The prolific output by individuals that year is reflected in this selection: 16 films were made by John Du Cane, 5 by David Parsons, 7 by Malcolm Le Grice and 8 by Annabel Nicolson. This partly explains the high number of individual productions with hardly any funding available.

The LFMC’s co-operative model, however, posed some problems for potential funders. Members could only stay in a position for two years, for example, as workshop technician or cinema operator. While this was important for the democratic ethos, ensuring that no hierarchy developed and members could become proficient in all aspects of the organisation, this meant that funding bodies were rather reluctant to support an organisation that was—perhaps in their minds—so unconventionally inconsistent.

Julia Knight provided a useful retrospective reminder of the impetus surrounding its formation:

Indeed, speaking at the Tate Modern event [2002] both [A. L.] Rees and [Peter] Gidal were at pains to point out that the structuralist film work and its attention to materials took place within a political context. Rees contextualised it within the libertarian optimism of the era, and the co-operative and anti-Vietnam war movements of the time, while Gidal spoke passionately about the political nature of the everyday co-operative working methods of the Co-op filmmakers.
The shift in ethos from the LFMC’s early underground days in Better Books store to more hard-edged political/theoretical line was in keeping with other developments in intellectual fields. The Co-op’s close ties with educational institutions, such as the Royal College of Art (RCA) and St Martins College of Art, where members like Gidal and Le Grice taught, would also significantly influence the theoretical directions taken in the decade.

Despite instability, increasing numbers of filmmakers coming out of art schools and the perpetual financial and personal struggles, the LFMC was one of the longest serving workshops of its kind, surviving for almost forty years, where similar British or European initiatives folded within months or years. More detail about the production facilities, venues and the working ethos of the LFMC are discussed in Chapter Six.

**Independent Film-Maker’s Association (IFA)**

While the workshops supported diverse and oppositional filmmaking practices, the formation of the IFA in 1974 was important for maintaining links between organisations. After misrepresentations of contemporary independent, British films were shown on Melvyn Bragg’s BBC programme (1974), it was felt that ‘a major task’ would be to ‘pressure the tv [sic] companies for a much greater presentation of independent film’. The first meeting took place at the RCA in November 1974.

Initial action would eventually provide some leverage for the understanding of the broader framework of independent filmmaking and support for oppositional workshop productions, as Sylvia Harvey identified:

> One of the most insistently recurrent ideas to emerge from the debates within the IFA has been the notion of the need to create an *oppositional space* within which the particular social practice of the cinema advocated by the IFA can develop. (Harvey’s emphasis)

Screenings of films were held by the different groups belonging to the IFA, enabling common ground to be found where possible but more importantly facilitating an appreciation of different film practices and generating further discussions on independent filmmaking.

The ‘First Festival of Independent British Cinema’ (1975) in Bristol was a particularly important IFA initiative, opening up debates between different forms of oppositional filmmaking and situating the diversity of filmmaking within a broader
critical context. In an introductory paper for an IFA conference, held a year later, the organising committee laid out their intentions for independent film in Britain:

Our work together forms an aesthetic and political struggle in the field of cinema – the production of films which made a much more fundamental and far-reaching contribution to the lives of audiences. The ambitiousness of our goals means that these audiences have to be built up more slowly, although we expect this pace to accelerate as the crisis deepens. We have to remain independent of the need to make profits in order to have real artistic independence. Whilst constantly fighting for access to more funds and equipment for its members, the IFA must also defend and develop this political independence and aesthetic independence. For it is in this respect that the work of the IFA members is particularly important, and it is in this respect that we try to use the term independent meaningfully.

By 1976 the IFA were able to elect two IFA representatives onto the British Film Institute Production Board (BFIPB), thanks to Le Grice’s campaigning. Anne Ambrose and Stephen Dwoskin also joined the BFIPB in 1977. Although some members of the BFIPB felt that a conflict of interests existed, impeding clear decision-making about the funding of IFA film proposals, the inclusion of IFA members on the Board was generally deemed positive. In 1978 Peter Gidal and Gael Dohany (who had both previously received BFIPB grants) were also invited onto the Board. Gidal served a further term the following year with Margaret Dickinson, (another recipient of BFIPB funding). Although it provided a welcome platform for debate, the breadth and diversity of interests in these alternative forms of filmmaking also proved rather tenuous, as Rees identified:

The IFA was a more fragile and temporary union, strung together by partisans for a “free cinema” from many different and contradictory if overlapping directions: Cinema Action, the Co-op, disaffected media workers, parts of Screen, film students, documentarists and artists in loose alliance. Astonishingly its impact lingers on. Many of its members were to spread out into the wider mainstream, transmitting its key values into documentary television: John Ellis, Anne Cottringer, Simon Hartog, Keith Griffiths, Rod Stoneman.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s many of the members were instrumental in the formation of the new ‘cultural’ Channel 4 broadcasting station, providing a platform for the dissemination of innovative and experimental filmmaking. Essentially the IFA’s intention to promote a wider understanding of independent filmmaking was achieved with some success, but ‘a final effect of the IFA period was on the intellectual climate in which film was understood, disseminated and discussed’.
Funding

The two main funding bodies supporting experimental filmmaking in the 1970s were the Arts Council Great Britain (ACGB) and the British Film Institute (BFI), who were respectively established in 1946 and 1933.\(^{218}\) Despite being separate institutions with differing funding remits – ACGB for the arts in general and the BFI for independent film – there were points of overlap where co-funding took place or the same types of films were funded. Although the BFI was the first to fund experimental films, the Arts Council would become instrumental in supporting this kind of work as the decade progressed. Greater London Arts also provided some workshop funding in the decade.\(^{219}\)

These institutions were central to the production and dissemination of experimental films, but it is useful to recognise that their roles were also contingent upon changes in government and legislation, influencing decisions on funding criteria and impacting on the amount of funds available. John Wyver, for example, identified some of the changing government positions affecting Arts Council funding in the 1970s:

Early in the decade the Arts Council’s consensual relationship with the government was disrupted by the unsympathetic Conservative Arts Minister Lord Eccles, and by 1976 expansion in funding activities had been curbed by grant increases below the rate of inflation. The first effective moves were made towards a greater proportion of monies going to the regions, and the Regional Arts Associations were strengthened. Devolutionary policies were also boosted by the conclusions of a report funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in 1976, ‘Support for the Arts in England and Wales’. Produced by Lord Redcliff-Maud, this contained the startling assertion that “large areas of Britain constitute a Third World of under-development and deprivation in all areas of the arts and crafts”. Yet despite the wider economic difficulties, the small corner of the Arts Council’s operations responsible for art films enjoyed a productive period in the mid-1970s.\(^{220}\)

Despite the mid-decade support identified by Wyver, funding for experimental films was only a small proportion of the wider Arts Council or BFI budgets. John Wyver noted that the ‘1969-70 [Arts Council] production expenditure totalled £17,898, which represented just 0.2 per cent of the Council’s total budget of £8.2 million’.\(^{221}\)

Although financial support continued to increase in the decade, one of the more pressing concerns lay in defining experimental filmmaking, in order to clarify how to set funding criteria and identify who should fund the films. This involved a more complex understanding of socio-political and theoretical contexts informing
independent production, distribution and exhibition, as this differed from the commercial concerns of the dominant cinema:

As with the Arts Council, BFI funding was moving into the new aesthetic built on film theory and theorised practice. In these ways, throughout the 1970s, a changing film sector pushed towards new patterns of funding to achieve its core ideas. Increased funding led to increased productivity, generating a constituency of “independent film-makers” to whom Channel 4 would turn in its mission to encourage “innovation and experiment”.222

It would be some time, however, before experimental filmmakers would benefit from Channel 4 commissions in the early 1980s. In the 1970s, therefore, the theoretical underpinning of film practices – related to modernism in the arts (form over content), Marxism, psychoanalysis, semiotics, structuralism and feminism – would also form an important part of explanatory models for funding applications. The necessary formalising of ideas for funding applications would to some extent also contribute to the institutionalisation of experimental filmmaking, although attempts were made by Arts Council film officers to encourage open-ended experimentation where possible.

The Arts Council

The Arts Council had historically been responsible for the funding and exhibition of the arts and had funded very few experimental films by the late 1960s.223 Initial intentions included the support of art production and exhibition and the dissemination of information about art necessary for audience engagement. Arts Council funding for film was initially established through the funding of documentaries about the arts, thus fulfilling the purposes of informing and educating the wider public. The Art Council’s art panel (there were also music and drama panels) developed a scheme in 1951 with the BFI, whereby documentaries were shown in conjunction with the exhibition of original artworks (16mm film prints could be hired from the BFI, together with projectors and operators).224 By 1950 the BFI had a Film Appreciation Unit, headed by Denis Foreman, providing lectures, summer schools and publications on film.225 By 1953 a joint BFI/Arts Council catalogue was produced, featuring documentaries on art such as Painter and Poet (1951).226

Early film tours were continued throughout the 1960s and 1970s and were instrumental in informing the Film-makers On Tour (FMOT) (1976-1989) scheme, discussed in more detail below. The film tours would importantly come to fuel an ongoing understanding about the arts and an enthusiasm for films about the arts.
Although Arts Council films were initially about artists, as opposed to by experimental filmmakers, a few experimental films, such as David Hall’s *Vertical* (1969) and Derek Boshier’s *Link* (1970) – related to sculpture and painting respectively – had been funded by 1970.

Fine art graduate, Rodney Wilson became the first Arts Council film officer in 1970. He had been motivated to apply for the position after viewing James Scott’s ‘documentary’ *Richard Hamilton* (1969), and was filled with enthusiasm as the film ‘seemed to be using the language coming out of the European art cinema and underground film’. However, when taking up his position at the Council he realised that most of the funded films were conventional lectures on art and work would need to be done to encourage more experimental forms of filmmaking. In his first paper as film officer, Wilson urged the committee and executives to support ‘new forms of production practice, increasingly working with cheaper, more flexible 16mm cameras and encouraging more assertive ideas of documentary authorship’. These kinds of initiatives were instrumental in shaping Arts Council funding and, together with David Curtis, Wilson advocated for a specialist Artists’ Film Subcommittee.

The Subcommittee was formed in 1972 to assist and assess funding criteria for this new medium. The first specialised team included Alan Bowness, Richard Cork, Douglas Lownes, George Melly, Sam Rhodie and Colin Young. Curtis, who had campaigned for the funding of experimental film from the 1960s onwards, joined the committee in 1973, alongside Tony Rayns and Simon Field. Members and peer-reviewers in the 1970s included filmmakers, critics and academics such as Deke Dusinberre, Tina Keane, Malcolm Le Grice, Mary Pat Leece, Michael O’Pray, A. L. Rees, Anne Rees-Mogg, Lis Rhodes, Guy Sherwin and Felicity Sparrow. Curtis retired from the committee to become an Arts Council officer in 1977 and was instrumental in decision-making until the cessation of the committee in 1999. He was unwavering in his support for filmmakers throughout his long tenure:

David Curtis made an early (1967) case for cultural subsidy, lambasting the then recalcitrant BFI in the pages of the underground magazine *The International Times*. A decade later, as Film Officer at the Arts Council, he was able to set these principles in motion. Along with Rodney Wilson, who revitalised the British art documentary and turned it into an innovative broadcast genre, he made the Arts Council into the lead funding agency for artists’ film and video production and exhibition for over twenty-five years.

Arts Council funding for film included a range of bursaries and awards for production and exhibition, with film funding rising ‘from £12,000 in 1974 to around
Individual applications were considered annually or bi-annually by peer review with a number of other opportunities also materialising. In 1974 the Royal College of Art (RCA) was the first ‘equipment-rich’ art school to offer jointly-funded funded Arts Council production bursaries. Other schools and polytechnics followed, such as Maidstone (1978) and Newcastle, Brighton, Reading and Exeter also benefitting in due time. By 1977 three fixed-amount bursaries of £300, £750 and £1,250 were available for diverse aspects of production: ‘for work in progress, to complete or modify films already started, to continue experimenting with certain techniques’. These were granted according to experience, with the smallest bursaries for the less experienced filmmaker. Production Awards for more specific projects that included a detailed budget were also available, with the amount being determined as required for the individual project. An Annual Bursary had also been set up with the RCA, although this was for video production only. Support for film exhibition included funding for individual or group screenings and focused on Expanded Cinema, Festivals and the FMOT scheme. Examples of the Subcommittee’s meagre annual filmmaking budgets included £6,080 in 1972/73; £14,050 in 1974/75 and £8,078 in 1974/75. By 1980 the Arts Council had funded 253 experimental filmmakers through bursaries and other schemes. Arts Council films funded in the 1970s included, David Hall’s Vertical (1969), Annabel Nicolson’s Slides (1971), Malcolm Le Grice’s Threshold (1972) and Stuart Brisley’s Arbeit Macht Frei (1972), three films by David Hall and Tony Sinden in 1973: Actor, Between and Edge. Further funded films were Film Print (1974) by Peter Gidal, Logical Propositions (1974) by Mike Dunford, The Journey (1975) by Ian Breakwell, Bridge (1976) by John Blake, Streamline (1976) by Chris Welsby and Light Reading (1978) by Lis Rhodes.

**British Film Institute Production Board (BFIPB)**

The BFI was initially set up in 1933 to provide information about all aspects of cinema to the public and educators, with a National Film Library (now National Film Archive) added two years later. From 1952 - 1965 an Experimental Film Fund came into existence, which had no set policies on films funded but intended to ‘explore proposals to give the creative artist, such as the painter or composer, much closer control over the design and production stages of a film’. Limited BFI finances came from the rental or sale of funded films and from the government’s Eady Tax and the
Gulbenkian Foundation. In 1966 the Experimental Film Fund became the Production Board (BFIPB), intending, according to John Ellis, to support ‘films of an experimental nature outside a directly commercial context’. It also ‘established a policy of supporting “first films” and “calling-card” shorts by future television, commercials and feature-film directors’. Despite good intentions, not many experimental films were funded, as Curtis identified in a 1969 article, mentioning Anthony Stern’s San Francisco (1968) and Don Levy’s Five Short Film Poems (1967) as the only possible contenders. By 1970, however, experimental films such as Jeff Keen’s White Lite (1968), Meatdaze (1968) and Marvo Movie (1968), and Tony Sinden’s Size M (1970) and Arcade (1970) had received BFI funding.

The influential head of the BFIPB from 1975, Peter Sainsbury, also supported initiatives such as the purchase of low cost film and video equipment to support practitioners. Other schemes included:

> [T]he regular use of a pool of film technicians who not only largely embraced the political and aesthetic commitments of the independent sector, but also proved to be extremely gifted and adaptable to the various areas of filmmaking supported by the Board. Their great knowledge and creative use of 16mm filmmaking proved vital to the continuation of an independent sector highly dependent on this gauge.

Although this was less relevant for many of the experimental filmmakers, using LFMC facilities or working independently, Mulvey identified the importance of an infrastructure, including technical support alongside financial backing, noting that ‘[t]here was a sense that 16mm was an aesthetic of its own, that it had its own specificity’. Mulvey and Peter Wollen benefitted from BFIPB funding for Riddles of the Sphinx (1977). This type of support was important as only two out of thirty independent films were shot on 35mm between 1976 and 1979, (these included the BFIPB-funded Chris Petit’s Radio On (1979) and Richard Wooley’s Brothers and Sisters (1980)). BFIPB funding was less specifically directed towards experimental filmmaking, with increasingly more well-developed scripts being funded. Some comparisons between these two funding bodies can be drawn through data from Mazière’s research paper. In 1972/73, for instance, twelve filmmakers received funding from the ACGB and three from the BFI, in 1975/76 the numbers rose to thirty-three funded by ACGB and three by the BFI, and by 1979/80 sixty filmmakers had received ACGB funding and only two BFI support. In total the BFIPB funded 43 films between 1970 and

**Alternatives to State Funding**

Although funding was essential for many filmmakers, other alternatives also existed. Some filmmakers such as Margaret Tait and Derek Jarman funded many of their own films. Of Tait’s thirty-two films, produced at her ‘Ancona Films’ studio, only three had received funding. Despite being one of the more prolific filmmakers in the 1960s, Tait applied for funding to the BFI Experimental Film Fund but was turned down. ²⁴⁷

Although funding was essential in developing diverse forms of experimental filmmaking practices it also, according to Curtis, presented a double-edged reality:

> State involvement in the arts can be a mixed blessing. It can be slow to act and vulnerable to policy changes – and like any intervention designed to influence a natural ecology, almost invariably stimulates the mediocre alongside the good. ²⁴⁸

Besides time spent writing applications and waiting to hear if funding had been secured, work could also inadvertently shape itself around funding criteria, despite the best efforts of Arts Council film officers, such as Curtis and Wilson, in supporting the need for open-ended experimentation.

Some filmmakers funded the cost of filmmaking themselves in order to forego the frustration of having to fix ideas on paper, wait for funding, and be restricted by funding requisites. Jarman, for example, worked with the cheaper Super-8 format:

> We shared a dislike of subsidized avant-garde cinema. There was a strong official line, Super-8 allowed us to ignore that. The resources were small enough, so if independence is a form of purity, I had my hands on the philosopher’s stone. ²⁴⁹
Although Jarman received funding for feature films, such as *Sebastiane* (1976), *Jubilee* (1978) and *The Tempest* (1979), he remained ambivalent about it, returning to Super-8 for later productions such as *The Garden* (1990), after a frustrating seven-year struggle to complete his feature film, *Caravaggio* (1986). His oeuvre of short Super-8 films numbers over sixty, including *Miss Gaby* (1972), *Stolen Apples for Karen Blixen* (1973) and *Ulla’s Fete* (1976).²⁵⁰

Apart from British state funding, a few filmmakers also found support on the continent. The novelist B. S. Johnson had received BFIPB funding for *You’re Human Like the Rest of Them* (1967). Yet, when refused further funding for *Paradigm* (1969), he secured £1,400 from Belgian-Polish producer Bronka Ricquier from her Brussels-based company.²⁵¹ His later *Fat Man on the Beach* (1974) was produced by Welsh television. Some of Stephen Dwoskin’s short films were self-funded although he received BFIPB funding for films such as *Central Bazaar* (1976) and support from German funders and television for *Kleiner Vogel* (1976) and *Silent Cry* (1977).²⁵² Both David Larcher’s films *Mare’s Tail* (1969) and *Monkey’s Birthday* (1975) were privately funded by art collector, Alan Power, with the latter costing £3,500. ‘Self-funded’ filmmaking through teaching was also central to sustaining production in the decade and is discussed in more detail below.

Using recycled found footage, disposed of by film laboratories, was also a cheap way of making films. Anthony Scott’s *The Longest Most Meaningless Film in the World* (1968), for example, consisted of 48-hours of found footage film, collected from laboratory bins. The film included a random selection of test strips, academy leader, newsreel and commercial footage, with the costs of making the film almost nil – bar the slicing tape – as no actual footage was shot. Le Grice’s *Castle 1* (1966), *Little Dog for Roger* (1967) and *Berlin Horse* (1970) were also made using found footage (or old home-movies), and Guy Sherwin’s *At the Academy* (1974) consists entirely of academy leader, reprinted several times using both positive and negative exposures and a soundtrack created by printing onto the optical soundtrack. Although the initial footage for these films was found material, production facilities and fresh film stock were essential to produce the final prints. While some filmmakers chose to work in this way, most of the films produced in the decade required at least the purchase of a few rolls of films, processing and printing costs, if one was fortunate enough to have access to a camera, tripod and other necessary equipment.
A brief discussion of the Super-8 medium is necessary as it accounts for a considerable amount of 1970s filmmaking. Although Super-8 was a choice often made for economic reasons, it also brought a particular visual aesthetic and immediacy to the filmmaking. The ease of operation, not as readily possible with larger formats requiring complex camera handling (focus, light meters, aperture, etc), enabled filmmakers to shoot more freely, without as much technical preparation as 16mm or 35mm formats demanded. They could therefore produce a significant amount of work, as Curtis observed:

The only way in which an artist might make a substantial body of work without funding was to use the amateur gauge of Super 8, as David Dye and Derek Jarman notably did for part or all of their careers.\(^{253}\)

As Super-8 lent itself to more informal approaches to filmmaking, where the camera could spontaneously be taken up to shoot a scene, filmmaking often revealed this immediacy whereby filmmakers documented their personal surroundings, using the camera as a kind of visual diary to record observations or events, which could later be edited into a film. The medium also enabled filmmakers to work independently without the need for production facilities as ‘amateur’ processing, editing and splicing equipment was more readily available (and affordable) to purchase.

Super-8 filmmaking is not readily acknowledged in 1970s histories and is instead identified as being more prevalent in 1980s filmmaking, with the alleged ‘return to image’ by New Romantic filmmakers. There was however Super-8 activity in the 1970s, as Gray Watson also revealed in the programme notes for the second screening of the ‘London Super-8 Film Group’ (1975) at the ICA:

The use of Super-8 film by innovatory artists as opposed to essentially imitative amateurs is of course a very new phenomenon, at least outside the United States, but because Super-8 is so practicable and because in many ways it is the natural successor to painting, but with the added dimension of time, more and more people are turning to it as a means of creative expression.\(^ {254}\)

Filmmakers included Tim Cawkwell, Laurie Rae Chamberlain, Bruno Demattio, Fred Drummond, Horatio Goni, Joss Graham, Derek Jarman, Peter Logan and Paul Martin.

Drummond (an early LFMC member) had produced 16mm films, such as Showerproof (1968), before taking up Super-8 filmmaking in 1973.\(^ {255}\) At a 1977 LFMC screening of his Super-8 films, including an homage to structural filmmaking in Kurt Kren Portrait (1976), Tim Bruce described Drummond’s films as, ‘often beautiful; a celebration of his environment, the countryside.’\(^ {256}\) Sarah Child also
observed that a considered, yet unregimented, approach prevailed in Drummond’s
Super-8 films:

Though he denies any structured selection his films struck me because they were
so precise. Something about them was very clear and lucid yet their structure was
not discernable. If I must label his work I will call the films I saw a form of poetry
wherein structure lies at a level deeper than form, that of feeling.257

Little is written in the dominant histories about the Super-8 group and it would be
important to research this area of practice further, as it was clearly more prevalent
than has been accounted for.

Jarman also influenced younger filmmakers, John Maybury and Cerith Wyn
Evans, to take up Super-8 filmmaking, and with the inspiration of earlier filmmakers
such as Kenneth Anger and Jean Cocteau, they produced ‘films of lush colour and
music and languorous pace, celebrating the (male) body (contra-Gidal), decor, and
visual excess’.258 These included films such as Maybury’s Sunbathing for Idols
(1978) and Wyn Evans’ Still Life with Phrenology Head (1980). In historical accounts
Super-8 was said to have returned with the ‘New Romantic’ filmmakers such as
Maybury and Wyn Evans, but there is clearly evidence of its continued use
throughout the decade, particularly if Jarman and Keen’s extensive contributions are
considered with the filmmakers mentioned here. Super-8 was also a way of
maintaining independence, without the need to be reliant on funding bodies to provide
the means to continue working.

Clarifying Funding Terms
Despite filmmakers finding independent means to support their practice, funding was
essential for developing experimental filmmaking practices. One of the main
difficulties associated with funding proposals, however, was the ‘nebulous’ nature of
the product. As identified earlier, experimental film was positioned somewhat
uncomfortably between the dominant cinema and the visual arts. In the dominant
cinema, scripted ideas formed a key part of funding proposals, whereas proposals for
experimental films often required more open-ended investigation. These could entail
experimentation with colour, light, film stocks or processing procedures; all requiring
time and equipment without expectations of a fixed outcome. As in the other visual
arts, ideas were not necessarily explored through predetermined methods, scripts or
formulae. Judged by commercial or independent narrative feature-film criteria,
funding proposals for experimental filmmaking could appear too vague or
unformulated to warrant funding, and could therefore pose some difficulties, as Mazière identified:

In the arts, the direct funding of production is like trying to second guess the future. Unlike other models of funding such as commissioning, purchasing works or subsidising distribution, touring and exhibition, it is a form of high risk funding which statistically makes an uneven contribution in output. Funding at the point of creation can also have a distorting effect on the creative process if it is too prescriptive such as in funding works for television. But if the funding support is non specific (without a specific production or exhibition in sight) then the danger is that the work will not necessarily be widely exhibited.259

Funding bodies needed to learn to trust filmmakers’ intentions enough to be willing to fund them, and it proved to be a steep learning curve.

The support of individuals such as Curtis and Wilson in the 1970s (and Anne Rees-Mogg in the 1980s) at the Arts Council was vital, as they advocated tirelessly for funding without enforcing clear scripted intentions. Curtis pointed out that ‘periodically the committee [Arts Council] agonised about the folly of expecting artists to be able to fix their ideas on paper before lifting the camera.’260 Yet, admittedly this was public money being requested and there needed to be some idea of its intended use. This was a dilemma for filmmakers, as they needed the (financial) freedom to explore their ideas in order to produce new work, and yet there was a risk that they may fail to produce ‘good’ or ‘decent’ film/s. Certainly, this could be a subjective decision from the viewpoint of the critic, but ideally there needed to be an outcome if funding was provided. Le Grice, one of the first filmmakers to receive funding from the new Artists’ Film Subcommittee, recognised this predicament:

I think I was one of the first people from the Co-op to make an application to the Arts Council new film and video committee as a film artist. I made Threshold and curiously, I looked and thought, “I’m not sure about this film.” And I’d also made Whitchurch Down and thought it was a more interesting film, so I gave them both because I felt a terrible responsibility as the first person. I felt like a test case and thought, I really don’t [want] them to feel this is some kind of failure. I don’t think it affected how I made the films, but I did feel a terrible weight of having to come up with something which they were going to be able to kind of feel they got their money’s worth.261

Le Grice may have had these reservations because he was closely involved with the LFMC and had tirelessly campaigned for financial support, but this aspect of experimental film funding was complex for practitioners more used to working in an exploratory, unscripted manner.
The lack of a clear cut distinction between the arts and cinema, where experimental filmmaking was concerned, would prove to be particularly problematic for funding bodies, when attempting to try to identify who should fund which types of films and how to set funding criteria. At the start of the 1970s, when the Arts Council had funded documentaries about artists, films such as James Scott’s Richard Hamilton (1969) and The Great Ice-Cream Robbery (1971) posed some particular problems. Both films were made for Pop Art exhibitions organised by the Arts Council for, respectively, ‘Pop Art Redefined’ at the Hayward Gallery and a Claes Oldenberg retrospective at the Tate Gallery, but neither of the films were straight documentaries about the artists concerned.

Richard Hamilton begins with the artist declaring ‘I don’t like art films…’ and moves to images of newsreel footage and film leader. The film includes clips from films, newsreel, advertisements and images from magazines interspersed with shots of Hamilton’s work. The soundtrack is made up of both synched-sound and ‘found’ sound, lending a disruptive sense to the narrative. No linear narrative about Hamilton’s life or work is evident, although the film appears to be a collaboration between artist and filmmaker; identifying Hamilton’s interests in mainstream media and his designation as ‘Pop Artist’:

From this dense, disorientating and often very funny patchwork emerges something that is both an evocation on film of Hamilton’s paintings and a perceptual analysis that avoids conventional explanation yet which reveals (some of) the ideas that shaped his art.262

The Great Ice-Cream Robbery – also an unconventional portrait – followed Oldenberg on his visit to London for his Tate retrospective; the camera trailing him as he lectured, filmed on his Super-8 camera, unpacked his soft sculptures and spoke to people. The sub-plot of the title involved an ice-cream van, parked illegally outside the Tate, and moved on by the police, eventually overturning.

Neither films were the conventional art documentaries usually funded by the Arts Council and they also had the BFI ‘alarmed by the extent to which the Arts Council was stretching the definition of “arts documentary.”’263 Disputes between the BFI and Arts Council eventually led to government intervention in order to clarify the terms:

With little or no money available, there were inevitable arguments about where the borderline fell between artists’ works (clearly an Arts Council responsibility) and innovative or experimental film and video works (arguably still the responsibility of the BFI). These boundary disputes may be thought of little interest in any other context, but from time to time they managed to engage even government
departments, as the Arts Council and the BFI (and later the Film Council) fought over responsibility for this tiny area.\textsuperscript{264}

These disputes would lead to the Attenborough Enquiry, attempting to clarify issues of funding for all concerned.

**The Attenborough Report**

Government involvement in 1971 took the form of the Attenborough Enquiry, investigating who should be responsible for experimental filmmaking funding and considering how this fitted into BFIPB and Arts Council funding remits. One of the central questions, ‘Should the Arts Council be making films?’ focused the Enquiry Committee, chaired by film director, Richard Attenborough.\textsuperscript{265} In July 1973 the report was finally completed, drawing the following conclusions:

As far as the committee could see, the experimental and non-narrative artists’ films, which explored “the manipulation and use of film as a fine art medium”, were not supported by the BFI’s Production Board, and this in itself was one important reason why the Council should “embrace and encourage film-making as a fine art activity”. An initial sum of £25,000 was proposed to support such work. The Council should also purchase video equipment to use for documenting artists’ work and with which artists could experiment.\textsuperscript{266}

Dupin also identified the BFIPB’s ‘terms of reference’ as being ‘interpreted as focusing on the more traditional view of cinema as an industrially-produced dramatic art’.\textsuperscript{267} One of the anticipated outcomes of the report was the establishment of a closer working relationship between the two funding bodies, although this did not manifest itself in the decade. Dupin noted ‘the first real sign of a possible collaboration between the two bodies was the publication by Peter Sainsbury [BFIPB] and Rodney Wilson [Arts Council], in 1978, of a joint statement “to consider areas of future collaboration”, for instance by sharing equipment and information on applicants’, but this was never fully realised.\textsuperscript{268}

The Attenborough Report clarified matters to some extent and although the Arts Council would become the principle funder of experimental films (with a dedicated Art Film Division), the BFIPB also continued to provide some funding in the 1970s, with experimental films such as Peter Greenaway’s *Windows* (1974) and *The Falls* (1980), Tony Sinden’s *Can Can* (1975), Ken McMullen’s *Resistance* (1976), Stuart Pound’s *Film Without* (1976), Mike Dunford’s *Still Image* (1976), Vera Neubauer’s
Animation for Live Action (1978), Carola Klein’s Mirror Phase (1978) and Anna Ambrose’s Phoelix (1979), amongst those benefitting from support.

**Group Funding**

Although the film workshops, discussed above, were instrumental in facilitating independent film developments in the decade, they also required financial support. In 1969 Le Grice had persuaded an American financier to donate £3,000 to purchase equipment for the LFMC. In 1972 Le Grice had joined the BFIPB, and was motivated by the positive outcome of the 1973 Attenborough Report. He argued for the support of the ‘new phenomenon of culturally-committed film and video groups’ as these were not ‘receiving public assistance.’ Campaigning on behalf of the independent workshops, he received a small amount of BFIPB funding to visit around twenty workshops and filmmaking organisations across Britain to compile a report of needs. Although his application was refused, the BFIPB conceded by providing £3,000 towards the Group Support Fund and in 1974 twelve groups were awarded between £400 and £1,000 for equipment grants.

The LFMC benefited from its first major grant of £16,020 from the BFIPB in 1975, lending some security to the organisation. In 1976 it received charitable status, becoming a public limited company, and began to employ staff. The group funding also importantly meant that filmmakers were not constrained by fixing their ideas on paper and limiting experimentation; as these had been Le Grice’s hoped for intentions:

> Right from the start, I had had a policy, which said, that it was better to fund the workshop facility than it was to fund work, to fund scripts. I started with the view that the best funding system was to fund the production resource which would itself lead to experimental work, so they didn’t have to pass opinion on ideas and proposals. And the BFI wasn’t used to anything that wasn’t a conventional script.

Although the workshop producing most of the experimental films in the decade was the LFMC, the other workshops would also contribute to production, with the Attenborough Enquiry and changes to group funding also ensuring wider support outside of London:

There was, for example, an unwritten agreement that made the funding of film and video workshops – which benefited the whole spectrum of independent makers – a responsibility shared by the BFI and the Arts Council-funded Regional Arts Associations, often in partnership with local authorities such as the Labour-
controlled Greater London Council (GLC), and, after 1982, Channel 4 Television.\textsuperscript{275}

Funding secured for the workshops encouraged further filmmaking developments in the 1970s, and would eventually fall on Regional Departments and Arts Associations in the later decades.

**Pressure on the BFIPB to Fund Features**

Although positive events generated by the IFA, such as ‘First Festival of British Independent Cinema’ (1975), celebrated the multiplicity of independent film production, differences of opinion also became more pronounced. Sainsbury, as head of the BFIPB, lamented the lack of attention to aesthetics emerging from the workshops, while Le Grice criticised some of the socio-politically orientated workshops for their conservative approaches to filmmaking. There were also consistent problems – for both filmmakers and funding bodies – with funding films which were to a large extent directed at specialist audiences. While attempts were made to broaden the audience framework, there were also difficulties with the widely different milieus from which many of the independent films emerged. Although the Attenborough Report had clarified some issues, there was still pressure on funding bodies such as the Artists’ Film Subcommittee and the BFIPB to justify their motivations to the broader funding providers (Arts Council and BFI). Ian Christie articulated some of these concerns:

> [I]t seemed very important to get clear how you would define the different spheres – and again there was a kind of common sense-ish [sic] definition to begin with, which was that people who came out of a visual arts background and functioned in a visual arts-ish [sic] sort of way would naturally be aligned to the Arts Council, but that all started to get complicated when you got these distinctly cross-over figures. I mean the most famous, or notable, of the crossover figures were Greenaway, Jarman and Sally Potter.\textsuperscript{276}

Distinguishing the different types of independent filmmaking, however, was not the only pressure. Christie credited Peter Sainsbury, influential head of the BFIPB, for forging links between the different fields of independent filmmaking, yet there were also broader issues: \textsuperscript{277}

> It wasn’t that Peter Sainsbury thought that features were the only thing that mattered – not at all. But the Production Board was under the threat constantly of being closed down – within the BFI were constant attempts to erode it. And one of
the ways he saw that it could make itself more visible and more indispensable was by achieving this kind of feature level performance.  

This led to the production of a number of feature-length BFIPB-funded films at the end of the decade, such as Sue Clayton and Jonathan Curling’s *The Song of the Shirt* (1979). This signalled a ‘shift, in a general way, which the Production Board was part of, towards the possibility of a “British Arts Cinema”’ that was inspired by European Art Cinema. The British films, however, failed to impress and are memorable more for their exclusion in later BFIPB catalogues.

**Distribution**

By the end of the 1960s there was clearly an interest in alternative (to commercial) forms of filmmaking. Intentions to provide a central booking agency for independent 16mm films by establishing fifty ‘electric’ cinemas came about early in 1968, when over a hundred people met for the “Parallel Cinema” meeting at the ICA. This was never fully realised but an information office was set up at the ICA and independent distributors, such as The Other Cinema, Politkino and Artificial Eye, actively promoted more experimental independent films, making international art-house films and oppositional Third Cinema (mostly South American) films available. Some distributors, such as Cow or Circles, grew out of increased 1970s feminist activity, resurrecting forgotten women’s histories and making women’s films available for hire. The BFI also opened a number of outlets for the screening of independent films in London in 1976. These included the Essential Cinema club in Soho, the ICA cinema club and The Other Cinema.

Financial instability was often an issue, but the involvement of the same members in different organisations also helped in consolidating resources. The Other Cinema, for example, established itself more firmly as the trust’s management or employees included members active in independent filmmaking, such as Stephen Dwoskin, Marc Karlin, Tony Kirkhope, Laura Mulvey and Peter Sainsbury. Artificial Eye, founded in 1976 by Andi and Pamela Engel, had close links with The Other Cinema, distributing foreign language and independent films. Engel’s sporadically published film journal, *Enthusiam*, provided a voice for independent activity:

This magazine is not much interested in industry-produced films, B-pictures, genre, melodramas or whatever all these fashionable little boxes are called. We
will promote those who work today without compromise, and who push forward the development of filmmaking.'\textsuperscript{284}

Engel attempted to ‘cut a swathe through the commercial, corporate and cultural bullshit that accompanied the actual practice of making films’.\textsuperscript{285} To a large extent these were the sentiments of many filmmakers, activists and individuals working in the field in the decade, seeking compromises between making oppositional work and getting it seen. While these distributors promoted a diverse range of non-commercial films, there was less opportunity for the screening of (mostly) short experimental films, therefore many of these works were disseminated through exhibitions, film festivals and regular screenings, such as those held at the LFMC.

By handling their own distribution, film workshops bypassed some of the bureaucracy and ensured that films were screened, adding a necessary (while often small) income to filmmakers and organisations. Distribution at the LFMC was at the outset a key part of the organisation’s formation. The American, Carla Liss (as the first paid employee in 1968) had brought a wide selection of American and historical experimental films for distribution (many from the New American Cinema programmes screened in Britain in 1968). The LFMC therefore became the sole distributor for these films in Britain and Europe. An initiative by Gidal ensured that an equal ratio of British work had to be complemented by the American/historical films hired.\textsuperscript{286} The LFMC’s democratic distribution policy, however, refused to promote one film over another. For some filmmakers, like Stephen Dwoskin, this proved problematic as he sought more proactive promotion of his work and he therefore left the LFMC in 1969, placing his films with The Other Cinema.

Reekie noted an interesting link between the earlier amateur movement (discussed above) and the LFMC. In the 30 June 1966 \textit{Amateur Cine World} an article on American Underground Cinema, ‘What are Underground Movies?’ was featured. The magazine advised anyone with interests in hiring the American films to contact the LFMC in their July issue. Curiously, this was three months before its official launch date, of October 1966, and two years before it apparently had the films in distribution.\textsuperscript{287}

The LFMC also produced their own distribution catalogues, with the increase in the numbers of films giving some indication of the growth of the organisation. In September 1967, for example, 41 films were listed in the distribution library, although these were mostly foreign films. By November 1967, the list of 60 included a number
of ‘home-grown’ works. In 1968 Curtis and Liss produced the first distribution catalogue, including over 100 films, and by 1971 the second catalogue included around 400 films by 160 filmmakers. A 1972 supplement to the latter included an additional 150 British films. The updated 1974 catalogue included over 500 films, with a separate listing for Expanded Cinema works. In 1976 Deke Dusinberre’s BFI application for a new catalogue was refused and a new one was only produced in 1978.288

Although distribution formed an integral part of most workshops’ operations, the Arts Council and the BFIPB were also active in promoting the wider dissemination of funded films, producing catalogues or publications providing information about funded films. Most Arts Council funded exhibitions or screening events included programmes notes although these were sometimes smaller publications, rather than the more substantial ones affiliated to large exhibitions such as ‘Perspectives on British Avant-Garde Film’ (1977) or ‘Film as Film: Formal Experiment in Film 1910-1975’ (1979).289 The Directory of British Film and Video Artists (1996) is an index of (mostly) Arts Council funded experimental films from 1973-1995. It was edited by Curtis and includes 118 filmmakers, creating a quick-reference resource for the diverse and shifting changes in experimental film and video.

In 1977, 1978 and 1981 BFIPB catalogues were published, intending to provide listings of films available for hire as well as a broader understanding of independent and experimental filmmaking practices. Critical or theoretical essays on film, filmmakers or contemporary political issues, preceded each section, providing contexts for the listed films and the index of films and rental information (including 50% of the fee for filmmakers). The catalogues also provided listings of other distributors, such as Liberation Films, LFMC or Cinema Action. The first of the catalogues, covering films funded since 1951 by the earlier Experimental Film Fund and the BFIPB, included experimental films under the sections, ‘Work on Narrative’ and ‘Modernism’ and included films by Stephen Dwoskin, Jeff Keen, Tony Sinden, Stuart Pound, Mike Dunford, William Raban, Peter Gidal, Chris Welsby and David Hall.290

The following two catalogues, focusing on more recent productions, had additional room for critical and theoretical discussions. The 1978 issue included essays on documentary film, funding and feminism, with the section on ‘Technology and Technique’ including Peter Gidal’s Silent Partner and Carola Klein’s Mirror Phase.
Peter Greenaway’s *A Walk Through H* and Bill Douglas’ *My Way Home* were included under ‘Realism and Narrativity’. Increased politicisation resulted in the editors of the 1981 issue, Hilary Thompson and Rod Stoneman, taking ‘an explicit editorial stance’ and subtitling the catalogue, *The New Social Function in Cinema.* Discourses on the cinema’s cultural role can be discerned from essay titles, such as ‘Independent Cinema and Cultural Democracy’, ‘Questions of Democracy and Control in Film Culture’ and some focus on women’s filmmaking. The editors hoped that the social practices of independent cinema could be distinguished from the dominant cinema, in effect also a ‘social practice’, and suggested that it differed significantly due to the ‘conscious and analytical nature of its social intervention, its production and use is conceived within criteria of social and cultural values rather than commercial profit’.

The Arts Council and BFIPB catalogues, demonstrating the range of independent and experimental filmmaking during the decade, are informative resources, but must also be understood as presenting a proportion of work produced. It should not be deduced that funded films or those in distribution were the only works produced. As discussed, filmmakers funded their own work and workshops, such as the LFMC, produced more works than those individually funded by the Arts Council and the BFIPB. Problematically the politics and bureaucracy of determining which films were deemed acceptable for funding or distribution (or even within an established ‘canon’) resulted in films being overlooked and discounted. In a filmography of Derek Jarman’s films, O’Pray made an important observation, stating that ‘[m]any Super 8 films have a rather ill-defined status, and have not been included if they are not in some form of distribution, even if they have been shown in the past.’ This is a significant point as it clearly indicates why certain films have been purposefully overlooked, and not included in 1970s histories. Conclusions drawn clearly indicate that funding for production, distribution and exhibition of films was clearly a complex issue for experimental filmmakers, ensuring that they often had to enter the disparate ‘world of bureaucracy, politics, organization, economics’ that Dwoskin cautioned about in the epigraph.

**Education**

Education played an integral part in the growth of experimental filmmaking in the decade. This also added to the consolidation of film practices affiliated with structural
and material experimentation, as many of the LFMC practitioners taught in educational institutions. Mazière noted that the 1970s progressed with a continued output of filmmakers, as the ‘[t]his “family tree” grew – students would become tutors and spawn new students themselves becoming tutors’. In a 2008 discussion with Le Grice he confirmed this burgeoning film activity emerging from art schools:

In 1974 I knew every filmmaker working in the UK. By 1975 – there was an explosion of filmmakers. By the end of the 70s, there was a lot of film and video being taught in art colleges.

The LFMC’S open access policy ensured that the steady stream of students emerging from art programmes, during the 1970s, also had access to filmmaking facilities.

Education included both formal education in institutions such as art schools, polytechnics and universities and more informal programmes such as workshops, screening events and discussion forums. The latter provided critical or theoretical frameworks, through introductory talks (often presented by filmmakers), and sought to engage audiences unfamiliar with experimental filmmaking. Diverse publications and journals (mentioned in the Introduction) were also instrumental in informing audiences about experimental and independent forms of filmmaking, with the journals *Screen* and *Screen Education* being disseminated by the Society for Education in Film and Television (SEFT).

**Experimental Film and Educational Institutions**

Schools, such as the London School of Film Technique (1954) and the National Film School (1971) at Beaconsfield, offered professional and technical training for filmmakers. While these were important as a support for specialist, technical training for the British film industry, a significant proportion of the experimental filmmakers discussed in this thesis learnt about filmmaking through courses in art schools.

Thorold Dickinson became the director of the first dedicated film unit in an art school, the Slade School Film Unit (1960), initiating the now common practice of screening film clips as part of lectures (although this was done on an editing table, rather than the video or digitised formats now commonly used). Whilst living in New York in the mid-1950s Dickinson frequented Amos Vogel’s Cinema 16, becoming familiar with the work of American experimental filmmakers such as Kenneth Anger, Maya Deren and Stan Brakhage. Although the Slade film unit did
not include film production a number of students emerged who would become influential in 1970s experimental filmmaking circles. These included the historians, critics and writers, David Curtis, Deke Dusinberre, Ray Durgnat, Simon Field and Annette Kuhn and filmmakers, Derek Jarman, Don Levy, Malcolm Le Grice and Peter Whitehead.  

From the mid-1960s onwards film was incorporated into taught art courses, with practical experimentation taking the form of fine art investigation, rather than commercial narrative cinema production. In years prior to its inclusion in dedicated units, it was taught within painting, printmaking or sculpture courses:

By the mid-1960s the young painter Malcolm Le Grice and the young sculptor Barry Flanagan had joined John Latham on the staff at Saint Martins School of Art, and independently they began making films alongside their work in other media. With their very different approaches to the medium – one hands-on, the other more detached – Le Grice, Latham and Flanagan’s teaching at Saint Martin’s helped shape some of the most important films by artists of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In his 1968 chronology Curtis mentioned Le Grice’s students working with film. In February he noted that ‘Le Grice takes me to see works by his students at the Young Contemporaries (which had included film for the first time)’ and in October that:

the beautifully Heath Robinson developing and printing equipment, designed and largely built by Le Grice, was moved from the Arts Lab to his home in Harrow, where the stalwarts who continued to use it increasingly tended to be his own students from Goldsmith’s and St Martin’s.

The Fine Art Film course (begun in 1972) at St Martins School of Art was the first specialist unit dedicated to experimental film and video. The RCA also included film in their post-graduate programmes, with the Environmental Media Department (1974-1986) offering interdisciplinary approaches which included film and video production. Although RCA courses were industry-focused, filmmakers such as Peter Gidal, Stephen Dwoskin and Noel Burch influenced more experimental approaches to film.

The first generation of experimental filmmaker/teachers included Gidal at the RCA and Le Grice at St Martins School of Art and Goldsmiths. Amongst Le Grice’s first group of students, who became key LFMC members were Mike Dunford, Fred Drummond, Gill Eatherley, Annabel Nicolson and William Raban. Gidal’s RCA students (who mostly became involved with the LFMC) included Anna Ambrose, Tim Bruce, Nina Danino, Steve Farrer and later Penny Webb, Michael Mazière, Lucy
Panteli and Cerith Eyn Evans. Anne Rees-Mogg started a film practice at Chelsea School of Art with Guy Sherwin, Chris Welsby and David Pearce as students. Drummond later taught at North East London Polytechnic (NELP) with students such as Steve Farrer, Ian Kerr, Lis Rhodes, Tim Bruce and John Smith. Rhodes taught at numerous institutions including the RCA, Reading University, the Slade, Falmouth, Winchester and Glasgow Schools of Art. Mike Leggett taught at Exeter and Somerset Colleges of Art and John Smith at North East London Polytechnic (NELP) and Guy Sherwin at Wolverhampton Polytechnic, Wimbledon College of Art and Middlesex Polytechnic. Many of these filmmakers became actively involved at the LFMC, with their names regularly cropping up in 1970s screening programmes and funding applications. Mazière astutely referred to it as ‘The Education Nexus – The Engine of Production’ as it was instrumental in developing critical discourses and disseminating specific theoretical positions on filmmaking related to modernism in the arts.

Education also became a form of institutional support for filmmaker/tutors, providing ‘initial and later complementary support to a sector which had very few commercial outputs and few other career opportunities’. Le Grice further reinforced these views:

The Education system provided an undercurrent, proper debate and a certain degree of protection against the uncertainties of the funding systems outside. As well as facilities, resources, a little bit of production funding ... The art schools contributed in a number of ways: one they stimulated new, young students. Two, the staff could continue to do work as the bread and butter was coming from the art school cheque and thirdly they became a major part of the circuit. It wasn’t just education for the work, it became a context for the work.

In this respect, education as a form of institutional support for filmmaker/tutors was not dissimilar to other visual arts practices, where painters, sculptors or photographers supplemented their income and supported their practice through teaching. It is also necessary to recognise how important education was in assisting the consolidation of the LFMC’s structural and material position, with filmmaker/theorists such as Gidal and Le Grice and younger followers, helping to shape its dominance in the decade.

**Non-formal Education and Audience Engagement**

Non-formal education – workshops, short courses and screenings in London and regional areas – contributed to a wider critical and cultural appreciation of experimental filmmaking in the 1970s. Complex political, theoretical and critical
frameworks influencing independent filmmaking could, however, sometimes prove alienating to the uninitiated viewer. Critic Kobena Mercer, outlined some of the oppositional approaches taken by independent filmmakers working in the decade:

Informed by the Brechtian critique of realism and the Althusserian analysis of ideology, film criticism and theory formed in the moment of the new left after 1968 encouraged avant-garde practices that sought to disturb or dislocate the viewer, inscribing an ‘alienation-effect’ or modernist ‘shock’ to effect a critical, reflexive attitude towards the cinematic apparatus, where it was argued that the very technology of the camera (based on Renaissance linear perspective) was ‘contaminated’ with the ideological effects of bourgeois hegemony, ‘structural-materialist’ film-makers, for example, outlawed the representational image. It was as if the films wanted to ‘teach’ their audience a thing or two about cinema and in this way to decontaminate hegemonised subjects out of their ideological illusions, as in Plato’s cave. As an aesthetic strategy this appropriated Althusser’s epistemological opposition of science and ideology, seeking ‘scientific’ guarantees at the level of theory for practices that ruled pleasure out of the question.

With the complex array of influences on independent filmmaking, it was important to consider what the uninitiated viewer would make of the films. The ‘structuralist-materialist’ Mercer referred to, who ‘outlawed the representational image’, was doubtless Gidal, whose theoretical writings alongside his films possibly offered some illumination into his filmmaking practices. Introductory talks, however, or some form of contextualisation would prove useful in building up an understanding of experimental film practices and opening up debates on filmmaking.

The integral relationship between audience and film has a longer history dating back to Soviet cinema practices, recognising film as a useful political tool in assisting the post-1917 revolutionary struggle. From 1918 onwards state subsidised ‘agit-trains’ (mobile propaganda cinemas) travelled across parts of Russia screening political propaganda films. State-subsidised production units, providing support for directors, included Sovkino (Sergei Eisenstein), VUFKU (Alexander Dovzhenko), Mezhrabpom-Russ (Vsevolod Podovkin). Although seminal films, such as Eisenstein’s formalist Battleship Potemkim (1925) and Dziga Vertov’s experimental Man With a Movie Camera (1928) were produced in these studios, formal experimentation was ruled out by the regime in 1928, in favour of films ‘which can be understood by millions’ such as social-realist propaganda films.

In later decades socialist, oppositional approaches to filmmaking, preoccupying Latin American activists in the 1960s, would also inform some of the political approaches to 1970s film British filmmaking. The first issue of Afterimage (April
1970) included an interview with Third Cinema filmmaker and revolutionary, Glauber Rocha, his seminal ‘The Aesthetics of Violence’ essay and an article on Vertov’s ‘Kino-eye’ and ‘Kinopravda’ ideas on revolutionary cinema.311 ‘Towards a Third Cinema’ (1969) by Argentine oppositional filmmaker/activists, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, identified Third World struggles in post-colonial Latin America, Arabia and Africa and the need to reclaim indigenous ownership and identity.312 They promoted an anti-Hollywood approach to filmmaking with attitudes to audiences taking a military stance to engage and politicise:

Each showing for militants, middle-level cadres, activists, workers, and university students became – without our having set ourselves this aim beforehand – a kind of enlarged cell meeting of which the films were part but not the most important factor. We thus discovered a new facet of cinema: the participation of people who, until then, were considered spectators.313 (Solanas and Getino’s emphasis)

Their political context differed to 1970s Britain, and was concerned with hard-line political action against oppressive regimes, with attitudes towards filmmaking encouraged ‘with the camera in one hand and a rock in the other’.314 The anti-Hollywood stance of some experimental filmmakers in 1970s Britain, however, was not dissimilar.315 Socio-political workshops, protesting against the class or gender repressions used film as a key medium to support their arguments, with films such as the Berwick Street Collective’s Nightcleaners (1975). Socially orientated collectives such as Cinema Action also took great lengths to engage the public by taking a van (with films and projection equipment) out to working class communities in urban and regional areas, with films also screened and discussed in pubs or factories.316 Other collectives found measures to politically engage and inform audiences:317

The Angry Arts Group, which had been sponsoring shows of the American Newsreel since 1967, deliberately shifted its tactics in 1969 to stress the importance of presenting a film in a way which challenges the existing ideology in addition to simply screening films with the appropriate political content. It did this by involving itself in the distribution and exhibition of films to the extent of coordinating small-group discussions after each screening to encourage spectators to consider what they had just seen and its significance to their lives. Angry Arts became Liberation Films in 1970 when the group began to produce its own films in this new production/distribution/exhibition context.318

The more participatory and engaged format thus became part of the web of audience education unfolding during the decade, enabling a wider dissemination of independent and experimental films.
Informal workshops or discussion forums formed an integral part of the workshops operations. The LFMC, for example, collaborated with SEFT to offer a ‘day second school, focusing on the area of ‘structural’ or ‘materialist’ film’ in May 1978. This was just one of many regular events intended to broaden experimental filmmaking audiences. A few examples of regional film screenings can provide some idea of how wider dissemination of oppositional and experimental film practices took place. Most events took place in the latter part of the 1970s and were instrumental in laying the groundwork for the increase in regionally-based workshops, proliferating in the 1980s.

‘The Expanding Cinema’ (1977) was a full-day event at Loughborough University with screenings of American and British experimental films, introductory lectures by filmmaker, Philip Drummond and East Midland Arts film officer, Alan Fountain and a discussion forum with filmmakers. In 1977/78 four Film Study Weekends were also offered at Loughborough University. These included screenings, panel discussions and presentations by filmmakers, theorists and critics. Each weekend had a specific focus, for example ‘Approaches to Film Narrative and British Independent Film: the Politics of Opposition’ with speakers A. L. Rees, Malcolm Le Grice and Claire Johnstone. The application form for the weekend outlined the intentions:

East Midlands Arts, through its Film Officer and Film Panel has been involved over the past three years in the complex and exciting task of assisting the development of film culture for the region of the East Midlands. This involves the Association in a broad and integrated vision of film-cultural activity, taking concrete form in practical intervention to assist regional film-makers (through grant-aid and the building-up of our workshop facilities at the Midland Group in Nottingham), film-exhibitors (such as film societies and Regional Film Theatres) and teachers and lecturers in film and television studies.

A residential workshop at Falmouth School of Art in 1978 intended to ‘raise some of the issues of representation and questions involved in diverse modes of representation in the avant-garde, political questions which relate to sexuality and feminism and to see how these areas inter-relate’. Laura Mulvey and Rod Stoneman co-ordinated events, with screenings including films by Kenneth Anger, Andy Warhol, Paul Sharits, Yvonne Rainer and Steve Dwoskin.

One of the most successful initiatives to take experimental films to a wider audience (and help support filmmakers) was the Arts Council-funded ‘Film-makers on Tour’ (FMOT) (1975-1989) scheme. Filmmakers were encouraged to provide
introductory talks, with a fee and travel costs subsidised by the scheme, as Curtis outlined in the catalogue:

Informing the scheme is the belief that an introduction by the artists helps to make the work accessible and opens up a dialogue between the artist and audience. This is particularly important with Artists’ Films where the range of ideas and the ways in which they are presented vary considerably and are often unfamiliar. The artist’s presence will, it is hoped, contribute to the audience’s understanding of the work. 323

Due to the generously small hiring fee of £10 the initiative benefitted small cinemas, galleries and regional theatres who may not have easily afforded the expense of hiring individual films and paying filmmakers. 324 Art colleges also benefited from the scheme by complementing their fine art programmes and more broadly consolidated the ‘growing network of screening spaces in artist-run galleries and film workshops’. 325 It also importantly offered opportunities for opening up further debates on filmmaking:

In few art forms was there such a strong and interrogative exchange between artist, audience and work. Over 160 artists took part in the scheme from 1975-1989, and personal presentation remains a norm among artist filmmakers today. 326

There was a steady increase of filmmakers supported, with eight participants in 1976 and around fifty in 1980, presenting a diverse range of works. In 1976 Expanded Cinema pieces such as Hands, Knees and Boompsta Daisy (1974) by Marilyn Halford and the two-screen Overlap (1973) by David Dye were presented; as well as a programme of nine Super-8 films by Derek Jarman and Jeff Keen’s ‘Continuous Cinema’ events which included 16mm, Super-8 and slide projectors. Tony Hill used both the Super-8 and 16mm format for his screenings of the Expanded Cinema Show. 327 Single-screen films included Le Grice’s Berlin Horse (1970) and After Lumière, L’Arroseuer Arrosé (1974) and William Raban’s film event, Take Measure (1973). The 1980 tour included Tony Hill’s Floor Film (1975); Super-8 and 16mm films by John Woodman such as Pear Tree (1977) and Pebbles (1979) and David Parson’s double-screen Subway (1973) and Interior (1974). Rachel Finkelstein presented feminist films such as (penis envy?), (stop pushing me) and (towards a new female) sexuality). 328 The 1980s tour also included a number of Standard and Super-8 films by Iain Faulkner, Renny Croft, Jeff Keen, Roger Wilson, David Critchley, Tim Cawkwell and Frank Abbott. 329 The tours were remarkable for the diverse range of works presented and the manner of exhibition, which included single-screen, multi-
screen, performance pieces, Expanded Cinema works and small (single and Super-8) and larger (16mm) formats.

While there were positive benefits, with filmmakers generally receiving larger remuneration than was usual, the scheme presented a distinctive disadvantage for distributors who found their hiring fees greatly undercut. Peter Thomas identified the extent of the problem for the LFMC:

While the intention was to increase exposure and find new audiences, the most obvious effect was the simultaneous growth and migration of the Art College market from LFMC to FMOT [Filmmakers on Tour]. LFMC distribution had been routinely organising small shows and college gigs for its members, charging between £25 and £60 and taking 10%. Thus, a hirer group developed and serviced by the LFMC shifted to a subsidised Arts Council scheme for price advantage, but was still able to access many of the same filmmakers and prints, the latter still in the LFMC distribution collection. This was obvious even in the pilot stage 1977, and by 1979 the AFSC [Artists’ Film Subcommittee] were prepared to lose £5,000 depressing the prices. LFMC distribution only grossed £7,000 in 1978/9 and £5,000 went to filmmakers.330

Despite disadvantaging smaller distributors reliant on this income, the scheme positively increased national dissemination, and was instrumental in building up a network of venues for exhibition which included diverse exhibition spaces and art schools, adding to the wider critical and cultural framework for experimental filmmaking.

**Conclusion**

From evidence presented here it is clear that institutional support was instrumental in facilitating the proliferation of filmmaking in the decade. This, however, also meant that the subversive milieu, motivating 1960s underground/experimental filmmaking, became progressively more institutionalised as filmmaking was co-opted into academia and became more reliant on state funding, as Mazière outlined:

From 1973 onwards institutional support played a major and more direct role in the support and definition of artists’ film and video. A more stable environment was developed and the underground nature of artists’ film and video was eroded.331

Director of LUX, Ben Cook, however, also identified that ‘there was a kind of a mythology around these organisations [such as the LFMC] and this area of practice, at that time, about a collective scene growing up in response to a kind of perceived exclusion from the institute, or certain institutional structures.’332 Clearly the
institutional context (funding and education) was central to supporting 1970s experimental filmmaking developments, but perhaps by continuing to perceive themselves outside of the institutions made the experimental film practices appear more radical and oppositional.\textsuperscript{333}

Undoubtedly, as funding and teaching opportunities proliferated (as experimental filmmaking took hold in educational institutions) during the decade, the ability to exist outside of the institutional frameworks, if filmmakers were reliant on institutional resources, became increasingly difficult. Yet some filmmakers did maintain a certain amount of independence by working with different film formats, supporting themselves through other forms of work or seeking funding from abroad. Filmmakers working independently did, however, also benefit from opportunities made available (often through institutional support) to screen their films in diverse screening programmes in exhibitions and film festivals; and these are discussed in detail in the following chapter.

The lack of a collective voice (such as the LFMC had) however, for filmmakers working independently in more personal, expressive and representational ways or using the ‘amateur’ 8mm formats, and existing (to some extent) outside of the institutional frameworks, has meant that a considerable proportion of 1970s experimental history has not been recognised. The fact that some of the personal films also fitted uncomfortably within the dominant socialist and Marxist ideologies, due to their expressive or image-rich representational content, clearly also presented some problems for writers and critics championing the cause of theoretically-engaged work. Many of the personal filmmakers such as Tait, Jarman and Keen did not attempt to justify their films through theoretical frameworks, such as the modernist discourses prevailing at the LFMC or the \textit{Screen}-theory abounding in other independent circles.

The issue of historical recognition and inclusion/exclusion is a complex domain (as discussed in the previous chapter) particularly as an understanding of the institutional contexts surrounding filmmaking also reveals why certain works may go unrecognised. As Mazière indicated earlier, there was a complex web of support facilitating 1970s experimental film production, distribution and exhibition. This matrix also included the wider theoretical and political frameworks, shaping and forming a \textit{certain} historical understanding of the decade that fitted within the accepted discourses, but problematically also excluded works deemed unfit for inclusion. The purpose of this thesis is to bring filmmakers, side-lined in accounts of the decade, to
share the central stage *alongside* the recognised works. Closer inspection of films supported through institutional frameworks in the form of screenings and exhibition also reveals the wide diversity of practices, and this will be made even more evident the following chapter.
CHAPTER THREE: EXHIBITIONS, FESTIVALS AND SCREENINGS

Film is still a decidedly illusive medium. Film artists have to put up with the fact that it’s almost impossible for the general public to see works under discussion. When a film is screened, if it’s advertised (and that’s a big if), the venue is seldom familiar, and few films are likely to have more than one showing in a year even in London. So arrive 5 minutes late and you may have missed that masterpiece for ever.\textsuperscript{334}

David Curtis (1977)

In the previous chapter the organisational strategies and institutional frameworks underpinning 1970s developments in experimental filmmaking were discussed. This focused largely on funding (individual and group) and education, revealing the growth in the field and providing some indication how critical and cultural frameworks began to shape themselves around experimental filmmaking. This chapter will focus on the screening of films in the 1970s and in retrospective events in later decades. Screenings took place in exhibitions, festivals, workshop cinemas (such as the LFMC) and in more informal screening spaces such as artists’ studios.\textsuperscript{335} The transient duration of film and irregular or inaccessible screenings, as Curtis identified in the epigraph, meant that these films and live events could easily be missed or overlooked. Yet evidence from written accounts and the wide range of 1970s films produced reveal the rich diversity in experimentation during the decade.

The curatorial role – particularly in historical retrospectives – needs to be carefully considered as it would be wrong to assume that representations in the larger retrospectives are definitive accounts of a given period. Decisions on the inclusion of films informing the final outcome of an exhibition are made for a number of reasons, such as personal choice, availability and thematic or aesthetic purposes. Nina Danino identified some of the curatorial issues related to the Tate Gallery’s retrospective, ‘A Century of Artists’ Film in Britain’ (2003-4):

A concern is that the show’s suggestion of a definitive account of the 20th century (rather than an individual curator’s preference) should not but may, foreclose the view of other future shows covering works and artists operating in the same time frame and [sic] other individual artists.\textsuperscript{336}

These complexities were deliberated in Chapter One, in relation to ‘Film as Film’ and British national collections of experimental film, but are equally pertinent to the predicaments facing the screening and exhibition of films.
While a large proportion of works were screened as single-screen films in a darkened space, an opposition to the conventions of the dominant, commercial cinema – and an interest in extending the boundaries of the screening space – also led to filmmakers presenting films as installations or as live-action performative pieces. The term ‘expanded cinema’ will be used here to identify diverse expanded forms of film screening, taking place before, during and after the 1970s. Malcolm Le Grice identified some of the expanded cinema preoccupations:

There are two conflicting definitions of Expanded cinema, one which derives from Gene Youngblood (Expanded cinema, [1970]) and one which had currency in Europe from 1967 through to 1980 ... The European interpretation (which is being used here) was largely characterised by a concern to bring the cinematic experience consciously into the space of the spectator through performed action and installation. Expanded cinema opened up particularly lively debates about space, duration and the experiential and is discussed below with a brief history providing wider contextualisation.

Diversity in Experimentation and Approaches to Exhibition

It will be useful to first consider a few examples that are indicative of the diversity and level of film experimentation in the decade. Single-screen films, accounting for a large proportion of filmmaking, presented less of a challenge for exhibitors. These included Margaret Taint’s oeuvre of over thirty ‘film-poems’, including hand-painted films such as Painted Eightsome (1970), films focusing on nature like Aerial (1974) or records of her hometown in five Aspects of Kirkwall. In films emerging from the LFMC evidence of the accessibility to printing and processing facilities is revealed in films such as Annabel Nicolson’s Slides (1971) or Sherwin’s At the Academy (1974). Camera-less, direct-contact films such as Lis Rhodes’ Dresden Dynamo (1974) and Steve Farrer’s Silk Screen Films (1974) were produced by working directly on the film strip and using the film printer to bring in other details such as colour or superimposition. Peter Gidal’s films were informed by cinematographic structuring devices theories on anti-representation, such as Clouds (1969), a hand-held view of the sky, where little happens except the occasional passing of an aeroplane across the screen. Other films explored in-camera structuring devices such as zoom, light and focus as in John Du Cane’s Zoomlapse (1975) and Michael Mazière’s later Untitled (1980). Conceptual films such as Yoko Ono’s Apotheosis (1970) recorded the snowy
landscape from a camera released into the air. A wide range of single-screen films were shown and while these generally did not present difficulties for single screening events, the longer term exhibition of works did pose some problems which are discussed below.

Some works were more complex, requiring specific screening conditions, such as Derek Jarman’s Super-8 films, often screened at a slow projection speed (necessitating the use of special projectors) and with sound added through a separate audio system. David Larcher’s *Monkey’s Birthday* (1975) was either screened as a single or dual-screen projection, with Larcher often providing a running commentary.

The performative nature of expanded cinema works (single or multi-screen), demanded other challenges, with filmmakers sometimes screening films themselves and moving the projector/s around in the space, as in David Dye’s *Film onto Film* (1972), and Le Grice’s *Matrix* (1973). In Jeff Keen’s *RayDayFilm* (1973), Nicolson’s *Reel Time* (1973) and Le Grice’s *Horror Film* (1971) the filmmakers performed as part of the work. Keen’s *Final Appearance* (1976), Derek Jarman’s *The Art of Mirrors* (1976) and Ian Breakwell’s *Growth* (1976) – all shown as part of the ICA’s ‘Festival of Expanded cinema’ (1976) – were multi-media events, including between them Super-8 and 16mm films, 35mm slide projections and tape recordings for sound. Multi-screen works with a site specific focus – incorporating the architecture of the space into the works – included Nicolson’s *Sky for the Bird of the Roof of my Mind* (1975) (shown in her Dairy studio), where a ‘bird’ in the glass roof became part of the work. For Tony Sinden’s film and video works for *Another Aspect, Another Time – The Exhibition* (1979) (shown at the ‘Hayward Annual’ exhibition (1979)) he insisted that all projectors, film loops, plinths and the architecture of the exhibition space be integrally connected. He also used mirrors or projections to incorporate his own presence into the exhibition space, creating ‘a sense of illusion extending itself to the exhibition space’, or where the viewers might see themselves reflected within the work, also creating an illusionary ‘displacement of the physical self’. The experiential engagement with expanded cinema works was an important part in opening up new experiences for film viewing, leading to diverse forms of experimentation in the decade, alongside the single-screen works where experimentation with cinematography, film stocks, printing and processing also added to the diversity in 1970s experimentation.
An awareness of some of the problems related to the extended exhibition of works in galleries is useful for consideration, as it reveals some of the challenges related to experimental film screening. While the live-action works were usually one-off performances, the exhibition of works in galleries was intended for multiple viewings. Unlike the exhibition of static art objects, films (being dematerialised works) required the mechanism of projection to bring them into existence. Nicolson identified how the need for the constant availability of an attendant projectionist could pose difficulties:

Timing problems tend to arise since the films are only projected when a reasonable number of people are present or at unadvertised times. The diagrams and lucid texts providing concise, conceptual accounts can be adequate indications of the artistic premise but do not succeed as substitutes for the spectator experience. Filmmakers therefore had to take these issues into consideration when screening films in galleries over the duration of an exhibition. Although films could be shown as installation loops on 16mm projectors, the fragile nature of the medium and the mechanisms of display meant that knowledgeable technicians had to be available to repair films and projectors if required.

**Anti-commodification**

The commodification of art was a significant ideological concern for many 1970s artists and filmmakers. For some practitioners, taking Marxist or socialist perspectives, the sale of work – purely for monetary gain – was seen as devaluing; stripping work of its political or ideological value. The rationale for the anti-commodification of the art object was also informed by some artists’ pejorative views on the commercial gallery system, viewing galleries as purely interested in turning a profit:

There were various views about what radical artists should do but three options recurred: One was to avoid galleries altogether – the artist Peter Dunn baldly stated: “A socialist cultural practice cannot be gallery-orientated” – and to seek new audiences by employing different means of communication and patronage. A second was to make use of existing galleries but to reform or subvert them; a third was for artists to establish and operate their own “alternative” spaces.

Therefore, artist-run spaces and improvised venues such as the film workshops and 2B Butler’s Wharf ensured an active setting existed – beyond the gallery or cinema – for the screening and exhibition of works.

A range of galleries, including Gallery House (London), the Arts Council’s Hayward Gallery (London) and Walker Art Gallery (Liverpool), supported the
exhibition of experimental film and art. Some of these were larger multi-disciplinary exhibitions that included film as part of the broader display of other visual art, such as the London exhibitions, ‘Art Spectrum’ (1971) at Alexandra Palace and ‘A Survey of the Avant-Garde in Britain’ (1972) at Gallery House. While the inclusion of experimental film in exhibitions was welcome, the uneasy position experimental filmmaking held – neither wholly engaged in the field of the arts or the cinema – posed some problems, as Curtis outlined:

Though historically important as announcements of the arrival of a “new art”, these big mixed-media shows rarely provided a sympathetic physical environment for the showing of film, and the most significant developments in the installation in the 1970s took place in the more familiar contexts of the Co-op’s black box and the controllable environment of the gallerist’s white cube.344

In the Arts Council-funded ‘Art Spectrum’ exhibition, for example, films by Mike Leggett, Ian Breakwell, Bruce Lacey, Mark Boyle and Conrad Atkinson were relegated to a side-aisle in a venue usually used for trade fairs.345

Problems concerning the exhibition of work were compounded by the belief that experimental film was not an easily saleable commodity, due its reproducibility and problems of display. Le Grice acknowledged the fairly high level 1970s art exhibitions many of the filmmakers showed, and lamented the fact that they failed to sell work:

While a dealer might come to another artist in the exhibition and show interest, it would not function like this for the film area. It was seen as a kind of lively entertainment within the exhibition, but it always stayed outside the art market.346

He did, however, admit that the fault also lay with filmmakers and their resistance to the commodification of their work:

I came to the conclusion that some of this is our own fault because we were radically against the commodity world of art as well as we were radically against the world of commercial cinema. We wanted to be in the philosophical context of art, we wanted to show in art spaces, because we were doing multi-projections and installations and what we now call expanded cinema. But actually the work we did was anti-commodity. And so in some senses we made it impossible for the reincorporation into the art world.347

Although this resistance was problematic for the sale of work it added to the diversity in experimentation, as works were less constrained by the need to produce durable objects for commercial acquisition. Some works, such as Nicolson’s seminal Reel Time (1973), were only performed once as the film was completely destroyed as it was fed through a sewing machine during the event.
‘White Cube’ or ‘Black Box’?

Debates around the ‘black box’ (cinema) and the ‘white cube’ (art gallery) proliferated in the decade, stimulated by the exploration of the boundaries between art and cinema by artists and filmmakers. The term ‘black box’ has its history in the early cinema and Edison’s Kinetographic Theater (1893) (a screening theatre and production studio).\textsuperscript{348} By the turn of the century cinemas began to spread across Europe and America, as entertainment venues for the viewing of film, and the standard design of a blackened room with screen, seating and the projection of films (at specific times) became the convention. While there have been some variations in size or décor over the decades, the traditional format of the ‘black box’ has generally remained the same. In due course screening purposes became more varied, with smaller cinemas, for example, catering to specialist audiences with foreign-language or art-house films. As early as the 1920s British film societies screened different types of films to the dominant commercial outlets.\textsuperscript{349} Fundamentally however, these ‘black boxes’ were spaces where films were screened to a, usually, passive and seated audience.

The ‘white cube’ – a colloquial term for the art gallery formalised in Brian O’Doherty’s seminal 1976 essays – was typically identified as a white-walled cuboid or rectangular exhibition space for the presentation of art works.\textsuperscript{350} Although gallery spaces differed significantly in shape, size and (at times) wall/floor colour, the term ‘white cube’ was used to identify ideologies related to institutional or commercial aspects of gallery exhibition, as O’ Doherty elucidated:

The ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is “art”. The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself. This gives the space a presence possessed by other spaces where conventions are preserved through the repetition of a closed system of values. Some of the sanctity of the church, the formality of the courtroom, the mystique of the experimental laboratory joins with chic design to produce a unique chamber of esthetics [sic].\textsuperscript{351}

These particular aspects of the gallery – upholding artworks akin to holy relics – with its specific modes of entry, presentation and heightened status, were problematic for some of the more ideologically-orientated artists and filmmakers working in the decade. The gallery space, on the other hand, offered some real benefits for the screening of film as the space differed significantly from the cinema; not only in the
way films were screened, but also in the way audiences interacted with them. Although galleries often conformed to a certain spatial format – square or rectangular room/s – they offered more fluid viewing spaces than the conventional cinema auditorium. The particular viewing experience enabled audiences to move around the gallery space, taking in the work at their own pace and volition. This was important for single-screen films, where the display of the projection mechanism formed part of the work, as in Anthony McCall’s *Line Describing a Cine* (1973). It was also particularly important where wider explorations with multiple screens, film installations and performative film works was concerned:

Once films were taken out of the cinema – with its darkened room, fixed seating and single screen – numerous possibilities were opened up. Films could have live soundtracks of great complexity, the projectionist could be visible to the audience, and utilise more than one screen – in short, they could become performances, or events, rather than mere screenings.352

These multi-screen expanded cinema works would account for a significant amount of exploration in the decade, with works such as Lis Rhodes *Light Music* (1975), Steve Farrer’s *The Machine* (1978-88), Gill Eatherley’s *Light Occupations - Aperture Sweep* (1973) and David Dye’s *Unsigning for 8 Projectors* (1972) representing just a few examples.

**Expanded Cinema: Experiential Film**

As part of the opposition to dominant cinema, the audience experience of the live event also became a central preoccupation for certain filmmaker/theorists in the decade. Measures taken to activate and engage audiences in experimental film were discussed in Chapter Two in relation to earlier Russian and Third Cinema approaches, and initiatives such as the Arts Council’s ‘Filmmakers on Tour’. Le Grice addressed these issues early in the decade when he ‘considered the situation of the audience politically and ethically’, focusing on the projection event as an affirmation of the central reality353:

> The Real TIME/SPACE event at projection, which is the current, tangible point of access for the audience, is to be considered as the experiential base through which any retrospective record, reference or process is to be dealt with by the audience.354 (Le Grice’s upper case emphasis)

Therefore audience interaction/experience became a central focus for some filmmakers, with works challenging the engagement of film experienced in traditional
cinema settings. Installation works such as Chris Welsby’s *Shore Line II* (1979), for example, consisted of six identical film loops of waves breaking on the shoreline and was projected in portrait format (with projectors laying on their sides).

In some of the workshop cinemas and ad-hoc venues, such as 2B Butlers Wharf, screening spaces were set up to accommodate more experimental initiatives. When Nicolson was responsible for film programming at the LFMC (1976–77), she encouraged the exhibition of more spatially experimental film installations and performance-based works. Her interests in the live event, and how incidental occurrences informed the final outcome of works, were expressed in a seminal *Art and Artists* (1972) article, considering the way different experimental filmmakers (conceptual artists and LFMC filmmakers) worked:

“Chance has no relevance for film used as concept but for those exploring the nature of film as film it can be a positive, contributing factor. Legrice [sic] would respond to stray light on the screen and Hollis Frampton confessed himself more interested in the image reflected on the wall behind the projector when he showed *Zorn’s Lemma* at the London Film Co-op this year. Since every projection is inevitably influenced by the immediate context and is essentially the moment when film exists as a fact in time, it is surprising how few artists respond to this basic premise of film.”

This emphasis on the event itself and on the final outcome of the work also informed her unique body of work, discussed further in Chapters Four and Seven.

Filmmakers found ways to screen work best suiting their intentions, and for some the single-screen format was more in accordance with their filmmaking objectives, yet for others the live event was significant enough to become a key part of their practice. Undoubtedly the screening of films in larger galleries or exhibitions enabled wider dissemination, but the informal spaces provided opportunities for many improvised, innovative screenings in the decade. Regular weekly screenings took place at the LFMC throughout the decade, contributing to the extensive range of work screened. Other more short-lived venues also extended opportunities for experimentation. In the three year life span of 2B Butlers Wharf (set up in 1975) more than eighty live events, including thirty film screenings, performances and video installations, took place.

**Expanded Cinema: A Brief History**

Although expanded cinema was explored fairly extensively, it was not a new innovation in the 1970s and a longer history can be traced back to the 1920s, providing some useful historical context. Kinetic sculptors, such as Alexander Calder
and László Moholy-Nagy, used light and reflective surfaces to create abstract images on the surrounding environment. Moholy-Nagy discussed the effect of kinetic art on the spectator in a 1922 manifesto and in a number of 1930s essays on sculpture, architecture and light.\textsuperscript{356} The discussions on viewer experience closely related to some of the 1970s preoccupations, as Cyrill Barrett identified:

Before a work of Kinetic Art the spectator is no longer a passive or receptive observer: he becomes an active partner “with forces which develop of their own accord”. In Kinetic Art the composition is not given all at once. The spectator has, as it were, to assemble and construct it for himself. But Moholy-Nagy regarded his works as merely experimental and demonstrative devices. He foresaw a time when the spectator would participate in the formation of the work itself. In this too Moholy-Nagy anticipated some of the more recent developments – spectator participation.\textsuperscript{357}

Moholy-Nagy built his \textit{Light-Space Modulator} (1930) from pieces of metal, light bulbs and a mechanism enabling rotation, and exhibited it in a contained space, large enough for spectators to move around in and observe the reflective metal pieces projecting ‘images’ onto the walls in the space.\textsuperscript{358} A film of the reflected, abstract images, \textit{Light Display: Black and White and Gray} (1930) was made in the same year.\textsuperscript{359}

Another early example relating to 1970s expanded cinema was outlined in, artist and theorist, Theo van Doesburg’s essay, ‘Film as Pure Form’ (1925). Van Doesburg advocated for an expanded form of film presentation with an architectural – as opposed to theatrical – setting, with the spectator central to his concerns:

From this it follows that the spectator space will become part of the film space. The separation of “projection surface” is abolished. The spectator will no longer observe the film, like a theatrical presentation, but will participate in it optically and acoustically. For the film of the future is not a constant and mute form like painting, but a new expressive possibility, simultaneously optical and phonetic.\textsuperscript{360} He proposed that this immersive space would enable a more active engagement in the screening event. This did not mean that film viewing had to involve physically moving within the space, but that the viewer of these expanded cinema works would be compelled to take the space and their presence in it into consideration.

In a final example relating to 1970s history, American artist, Stan VanDerBeek proposed an environment ‘where it might be possible to re-order the structure of motion pictures as we know them’.\textsuperscript{361} In ‘“Culture: Intercom” and Expanded Cinema: A Proposal and Manifesto’ (1966) VanDerBeek charted his visions for creating this immersive environment:
The ‘Movie-Drome’ would operate as follows: in a spherical dome, simultaneous images of all sorts would be projected on the entire dome-screen. The audience lies down at the outer edge of the dome, feet towards the centre; thus almost the complete field of view is taken up by the dome-screen. Thousands of images would be projected on to this screen ... The audience takes what it can or wants from the presentation and makes its own conclusions.362

VanDerBeek began making films for his project from the late 1950s onwards and built his Movie-Drome in 1963 at Stony Point, New York. His intentions included the provision of an educational and social tool for expansive audio-visual communication, rather than an environment purely for entertainment. The audience was encouraged to lie down and interact with the space and the films and images were projected on the inside curved walls of the hemispherical dome.363 His experimental and immersive film environment challenged conventional forms of viewing film and slide projections, significantly changing the viewing experience.

These are just a few examples, demonstrating the historical lineage of 1970s British expanded cinema and the continued preoccupation artists and theorists had with concepts related to perception and viewer engagement. This far-reaching history of contemporary moving image gallery installation, dating back to the 1920s, was also noted by Rees:

Digital video installation goes back to the light-play experiments of the Futurists and the Bauhaus, [where Moholy-Nagy also worked] including Oscar Fischinger’s five-screen films (two over-lapping the other three) with live percussion, in 1927.364

Expanded forms of filmmaking were explored again in the 1960s and 1970s, as they ‘were propelled by a drive away from traditional modes of making, thinking, viewing and presenting art’.365 Early experimentation lay as groundwork for the extensive and diverse forms of experimentation taking place in the 1970s – across all aspects of film – and these also informed later decades of film and digital installation.366 Contemporary filmmakers, where clear historical links can be made to 1970s works, include Tacita Dean, Runa Islam, Karen Mirza and Brad Butler, Rosa Barba and Rodney Graham, who have all worked with the 16mm format and in some instances included the projection mechanisms within the exhibition space.367 The uneasy placement of experimental film between the fields of art and cinema was apparent in the 1970s, with Rees noting that Curtis already observed (in 1975) that it ‘shifted away from the arts scene which did not embrace it with enthusiasm, and closer to the
fringe of cinema’. This set the pretexts for the dual histories informing contemporary practice today – often too little acknowledged – but evident in the work of contemporary filmmakers.

1970s Expanded Cinema

Viewer engagement and explorations into film space (in-frame and out-of-frame) were taken up again with enthusiasm in 1970s Britain, as part of wider experimentation in the arts. Historian, Jonathan Walley identified some of the filmmaker’s interests:

Tentatively, we can identify three aspects of cinematic space in the discourses of avant-garde film. First is the space of the theatre and the activity of viewers within that space. Second is the space of what has been called the “apparatus” or “film machine”, which extends beyond the screen to the projector and film reel normally behind the audience. Third, and somewhat more abstractly, are the institutional spaces that define avant-garde film and their ramifications for spectatorship. These are not necessarily distinct categories, but different points of emphasis among filmmakers exploring film’s spatiality.

Although other filmmakers such as Keen, Dye and Jarman also experimented with multi-screen performative film screenings, expanded cinema at the LFMC was explored more explicitly by a group of filmmakers referred to as Filmaktion. Filmaktion did not operate as a fixed group, as Le Grice explained: ‘we must have done eight or ten screenings together, Filmaktion never was a formal group. There was a considerable sharing of ideas and thoughts and inter-influence. [sic]’

Common interests in the live projection event led Gill Eatherley, William Raban, Malcolm Le Grice, Annabel Nicolson and Mike Dunford (and on occasion other filmmakers) to perform together. 1973 signalled a high point, with exhibitions including extensive and diverse programmes of films.

The term Filmaktion first appeared in a 1973 article by Doreen Tanner, discussing the altered space and works shown in the Walker Art Gallery exhibition, ‘Filmaktion: New Directions in Film Art’.

The Walker Art Gallery’s lecture room is a cinema at present, but the programme now showing bears little resemblance to anything happening at the Odeon or ABC. This is film for film’s sake, film without the smooth illusion, with its technology laid bare, its techniques used as an end in themselves. They do have a common wish to get away from the pretences and story-telling methods of the conventional cinema. Showing how things are done is part of this. So their fascination with the actual process of film-making and the ideas that arise from it: as, for example, the fact that anything put on film immediately belongs to time past.
Problems facing these live events included reliance on projection mechanisms and
the use of the fragile film medium, sometimes requiring repair mid-way through a
performance or needing careful manual operation from the performer. These live
works, however, often exploited these features, with a balance between planned
structure and live extemporization proving to be a dynamic experience for both
filmmakers and audiences. In Nicolson’s Precarious Vision (1973), for example,
progress was reliant on the projector manipulation by Nicolson – either slowing down
or speeding up the film – to synchronise with the other performers reading a script.

Raban’s programme notes for ‘Part 2: Live-Action Show’ for the ‘Camden Festival
1973’ provide useful insights, shedding light on the intended audience experience:

Perception of oneself in relation to the world is inevitably influenced by immediate
situations. In varying degrees this determines one’s response to the work in hand
and the eventual form of the work itself. The same piece of work reaches different
people in different contexts and the artists’ experience is necessarily different from
the spectators. Since projection is the moment in the film process accessible to
audiences, its potential obviously lies far beyond simply relaying earlier
observations or constructions. Within such a sensual [sic] as projected light the
basic premise of immediately available experience has broadened into concern
with implications of real and projected time spaces, how we orientate ourselves in
response to the transient and the whole dialectic of perceptual structures and
responses.\(^\text{373}\)

Raban identified the immersive environment and the experiential – for both artist and
spectator – as integral to conceptualising and perceiving these works, as Moholy-
Nagy, Van Doesberg and VanDerBeek had articulated earlier. Clearly it was not just
the mechanistic and materialistic exploration of film that was important but also the
more subjective experience with the film medium in its expanded capacity.

The diversity in approaches to expanded cinema extended from exploration with
more material aspects of film and its apparatus, as in Lis Rhodes’ Light Music (1975),
where projectors were placed within the screening space, Nicolson’s minimal
Matches (1975), where film was referenced through the inclusion of a screen in the
space, or the formal exploration of film ‘recording as a retrospective process’ in
Raban’s 2’45” (1972).\(^\text{374}\) The latter included filming, processing and projecting a film
of the audience entering the space over consecutive days.\(^\text{375}\)

Conceptual artists such as David Dye and Anthony McCall also explored the
spatial properties of the film environment in relation to the sculptural. In Dye’s dual-
screen Two Cameras (1971) ‘two cameras document the activity of each other as they
are lifted over each other around a prescribed circle’, thus recording their movement
in space without a specific focus on content, except as a record of the activity.\footnote{376} In McCall’s 24-hour installation, \textit{Long Film for Ambient Light} (1975), neither film nor projector are included in the work, and instead it focuses on the physical space, the changing light and duration through the passage of ‘natural’ (not film) time.

Other artists exploring expanded forms of filmmaking were less concerned with formal or conceptual aspects. Jeff Keen’s interests lay in getting ‘beyond the frame’ to ‘explore the full graphic potential of the medium in the direction of non-linear movement and synthetic vision’.\footnote{377} He staged multi-projection, performative events that included slides, 8mm and 16mm film; reflecting his interests ‘in the art of assemblage and its counter movement destruct-art (collage/de-collage), and in visual poetry’.\footnote{378} For Derek Jarman, who screened his \textit{Art of Mirrors} (1973) at the ICA ‘Expanded Cinema Festival’ (1976), poetic, personal filmmaking was more important than formal investigation. In a letter to ICA committee member, Ron Haseldon, he questioned whether his film would fit ‘within the definition of expanded ’, explaining that his use of Super-8 was seen more as ‘a contraction to the point: the twentieth century hieroglyphic monad and has nothing at its best to do with expansion, more to do with personal perception than any other gauge’.\footnote{379} With another approach to expanded cinema for the same festival, Ian Breakwell presented three works which included \textit{The Artist’s Dream} (1976), involving ‘a performance inspired by traditional stage illusions, using 16mm and 8mm film, projection, and 35mm slide projection, lighting effects, taped sounds, and live action by performers. Plus props and costumes.’\footnote{380}

The eclectic range of expanded cinema events was also revealed in Raban’s account of the 1976 ICA event, providing an idea of the extensive range of experimentation:

\begin{quote}
Expanded Cinema means many things. For the ‘Festival of Expanded Cinema’ at the ICA in January the selection panel hazarded some categories: the elaboration of screen space, multi-projection as inter-related image, environmental documentation, environmental diaristic, participation/events, installation, performance and other works which were a mixture of some or all of these. Having listed some categories used to date, it is important to say that expanded cinema is a dynamic, evolving art form.\footnote{381}
\end{quote}

The 1976 event included a broad range of artists and filmmakers (from the LFMC and outside of it) such as Keen, Jarman, Breakwell, Nicky Hamlyn, Ron Haseldon, Guy Sherwin, Nicolson, Sinden, Steve Farrer, Marilyn Halford, Rhodes, Ian Kerr, Le Grice, Tony Hill, Dye and Raban.\footnote{382}
Deke Dusinberre’s catalogue introduction (for the 1976 event) identified that while specific critical criteria informed the selection of work, an eclectic approach was taken to accommodate a wide range of work:

[E]xpanded cinema is pre-eminently a discursive and exploratory mode of filmmaking. And the very qualities which we hope to emphasize through critical selection mitigated against a “tight” show of such categories, and counselled an openness to unexpected developments, a receptiveness to improvisation, a sympathy to the informality which characterizes much of the work.\textsuperscript{383}

Dusinberre’s account confirms the diversity in 1970s experimentation, with attempts made to accommodate different forms of filmmaking and exhibition. This is important to recognise as many accounts of the decade have not adequately emphasised this heterogeneity, with structural and material experimentation by LFMC members and the Filmaktion works given precedence over other non-LFMC filmmakers, taking more personally expressive approaches, such as Jarman’s, Keen’s and Breakwell’s.

Festivals, Exhibitions and Screenings

A number of screenings took place at festivals, exhibitions, galleries, workshop cinemas and in temporary viewing spaces in the 1960s, laying the groundwork for the extensive range of 1970s screenings. The 1966 ‘Spontaneous Festival of Underground Film’ was, according to Curtis, ‘an astonishingly catholic interpretation of “underground”’ and included a diverse range of international (American and European) filmmakers and animators.\textsuperscript{384} Many smaller screenings took place at The Arts Lab and LFMC throughout the second half of the 1960s.\textsuperscript{385}

The ‘Edinburgh Film Festival’ (started in 1947) provided a valuable platform for screening and debate throughout the 1970s. The 1969 Festival included two weeks of LFMC films, showing predominantly Sitney’s New American Cinema films, but also including British filmmakers, David Larcher, Fred Drummond, Peter Gidal and Malcolm Le Grice. The ‘Knokke Experimental Film Festival’ (held intermittently at Knokke-Le-Zout, Belgium from 1949) was important for building international networks. The 1967 event included five British entries with a number of British-based delegates attending. P. Adams Sitney’s 1968 New American Cinema (NAC) tour was another important inspirational source for future British filmmakers, artists and critics. For the NAC tour experimental films, produced in America since the 1940s, were screened at the National Film Theatre and then toured to twelve universities across Britain, establishing important networks for future LFMC distribution.\textsuperscript{386}
1970s Screenings

The first of three experimental film festivals, ‘The First International Underground Film Festival’ (1970s), taking place at the NFT, was organised by David Curtis, Simon Field and Albie Thoms and consisted of a broad programme of over 300 experimental films, compiled by independent film distributors, the Roberts Street Arts Lab and the LFMC. British filmmakers were represented alongside a wide range of international (Europe, Australia and America) filmmakers, giving the encouraging impression that an international and alternative film movement was gaining momentum. The event was important for the eclectic range of films screened and discussion and debate stimulated by international filmmaking. Films included formal experimentation with structure and material from the LFMC, Super-8 filmmakers, expanded cinema events and films inspired by pop culture.³⁸⁷ The challenging nature of some of the films and events at the festival included the decapitation of a live chicken in Austrian artist, Otto Muehl’s ‘action’ event and his explicit film, Sodoma (1969). The festival setting in the BFI’s NFT was largely down to the open-mindedness of NFT director, Ken Wlashchin, who recognised the importance of presenting significant and challenging work.

‘The New Art’ (1972) was a review of minimalist and conceptualist contemporary sculpture, painting, film and video at the Hayward Gallery and one of the earliest Arts Council-funded exhibitions to programme films. It included David Dye’s Unsigning for 8 Projectors (1972) which, according to Curtis, was ‘possibly the first continuous film installation seen by a large public in Britain, and was made possible by the artist’s decision to use loops and cheap and reliable Super 8 film’.³⁸⁸

In the same year curators, Siggi Krauss and Rosetta Brooks, presented ‘A Survey of the Avant-Garde in Britain’ (1972). This extensive three-part exhibition at Gallery House (London) included film, performance, video, sculpture and a series of lectures. The event uniquely presented experimental films alongside other art works, enabling a survey of the parameters of diverse art practices.³⁸⁹ Films screened included Mike Leggett’s Shepherds Bush (1971), Carolee Schneemann’s Plumbline (1972), Anthony McCall’s Landscape for Fire (1972) and Stephen Dwoskin’s Dirty (1965), alongside performative events such as Stuart Brisley’s And for Today....Nothing (1972), a performance where the artist lay in a bathtub full of entrails. Documentation of the
performance was later edited to produce the Arts Council funded, *Arbeit Macht Frei* (1973).\textsuperscript{390}

The second NFT ‘Festival of Independent Avant-garde Film’ (1973) included a two-week programme of films and over a hundred filmmakers. The event was organised by David Curtis and Simon Field, with a larger proportion of European (including British) films than the previous festival. £2,350 was provided in funding: £1,100 from the Arts Council; £650 from the NFT and £600 from the BFI.\textsuperscript{391} Discussion forums formed a key part events, with Le Grice anticipating that the festival ‘should stimulate some new thinking about the more general issues, like the aesthetic aspects of film, and the relationship of this new culture to its social situation’.\textsuperscript{392} All films had their British premiere with most filmmakers present to discuss their films. The LFMC featured in a number of programmes, and international retrospective programmes of Ken Jacobs and Oscar Fischinger also provided historical contextualisation. ‘Official’ recognition was also received in the form of a long *Sight and Sound* review by Tony Rayns.\textsuperscript{393}

Four reviews by Jonas Mekas in New York’s *The Village Voice* alerted American audiences of the level of activity in London.\textsuperscript{394} In his first review, Mekas commented on the title of the 1973 festival, signalling the changing perspectives on experimental filmmaking:

The first time [a] similar festival was held here, in 1970, it was called the Festival of Underground Films. Times have changed, and the term underground has lost its precision. The organisers of this year’s festival needed a double-edged term to at least approximately indicate the kind of film they took upon themselves to gather in one place.\textsuperscript{395}

Mekas’ observations indicated the growing diversity in experimentation, with his four detailed reviews discussing the event and engaging with individual films. He focused mostly on LFMC filmmakers (since close links existed between the LFMC and the New York Co-op), providing some useful summations of film activity taking place in London:

The London School is deep into structural researches into process art, and formal explorations of space relationships. I’d say that seeing the work done in London, in the expanded cinema area, and meeting the people involved (Malcolm Le Grice, Paul Botham, Gill Eatherley, David Crosswaite, Annabel Nicolson, Carla Liss, William Raban) left an impression on me of great seriousness with which they approach their work in the area.\textsuperscript{396}
As an adjunct to the NFT festival, a programme of ‘Expanded Cinema’ work from the LFMC was shown at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) nearby. Tony Rayns was full of praise in his review of the ICA works, saying that ‘despite the handicap of poor conditions, this section of the festival offered a higher proportion of the most stimulating work than the “normal” NFT screenings’. The opportunity for an international exchange of ideas, that the festival facilitated, was of great importance to filmmakers, critics and theorists, and by the 1973 event British work had gained wider recognition on a par – or surpassing some would argue – American activity.

Other events and exhibitions regularly taking place included weekly LFMC screenings. Outside London, the Walker Art Gallery (Liverpool) supported experimental filmmaking with events such as ‘An Evening of Artists’ Film and Video’ (1973) and ‘Filmaktion: New Directions in Film Art’ (1973) which were included in a week of expanded cinema screenings. The Belgian Knokke-Le-Zout ‘Festival of Experimental Film’ also continued to wield some influence with British filmmakers David Hall, Anthony McCall, Marilyn Halford and William Raban presenting in the 1974/75 programme. Two multi-media exhibitions of structural and conceptual work in 1975, ‘Structures and Codes’ (RCA) and ‘Structure and Function in Time’ (Sunderland Arts Centre), included films by John Blake, David Dye, David Lamelas and Peter Gidal.

Increased levels of experimentation with the video medium resulted in a range of exhibitions in the 1970s. ‘The Video Show: First Festival of Independent Video’ (1975) took place at the Arts Council’s Serpentine Gallery and consisted of single-screen tapes, lectures, installations and performances. British artists included David Critchley, David Hall, Susan Hiller, Tamara Krikorian and Tony Sinden, with international works by Dan Graham, the Vasulkas and William Wegman. A second but smaller ‘The Video Show’ took place at Tate Britain in 1976 and London’s Acme and Air galleries also presented diverse screenings during the decade. Other national exhibitions were shown at The Third Eye Centre, Glasgow (1976) and the Herbert Art Gallery, Coventry (1978).

In February 1975 the important and ambitious ‘First Festival of Independent British Cinema’, discussed in Chapter Two, took place in Bristol. The event demonstrated the breadth and diversity in British independent filmmaking activity, with screenings ranging from art installations by Ron Haselden, Berwick Street Collective’s Nightcleaners (1975), experimental films from LFMC members, films by
Derek Jarman and Rob Gawthrop and neo-realist dramas such as *Tunde’s Film* (1973). This IFA initiative intended to show the breadth of alternatives to dominant commercial cinema in Britain:

The festival has a polemical function. Its main characteristic is the combination of different combinations of independent film – the avant-garde on the one side, the overtly political film on the other, plus a lot in the middle. The combination we have made is not only an attempt to be comprehensive but is based on the belief that the development of independent cinema depends on cross fertilisation between different forms and intentions. The festival represents, we think, not only what is now the current position of independent film work but also what that position might generate.

Despite differences in political and theoretical approaches to filmmaking the festival provided a timely opportunity for a broader analysis which was particularly important for future developments, such as the formation of Channel 4 (1982).

Questions were raised, however, about the extreme diversity in filmmaking. These were elucidated by Le Grice in his review:

Apart from the general advance in awareness in the minds of the public, critics and official bodies, that an alternative cinema culture exists – which the festival achieved to some extent – what do the film-makers gain from the juxtapositions in this show? Can there be a productive dialogue between the two main axes, the political and the experimental? I don’t think the Bristol show answered this clearly, but there were sufficient points of contact between some of those working within the political grouping and the experimental film-makers to convince me that the process should continue. The experimental film-makers should continue to be exposed to the problem of “accessibility”, counteracting the tendency to become simply incorporated into the “art-world” where the formally sophisticated audience is most readily found. At the same time, the political film-makers should be made aware of the poverty of sensibility and the reactionary conventionality of much of the film form.

Le Grice pointed out that the positive aspects of the event demonstrated that British independent cinema was ‘beyond the embryo stage, and in an advanced stage of development’. He also expressed his delight in Margaret Tait’s films, considering her ‘the only genuinely independent, experimental mind in film to precede the current movement which began here in about ‘66’.

The Edinburgh Film Festival also provided further opportunities for experimental film screenings, with the LFMC presenting regular programmes throughout the decade. Although the festival continued to screen commercial, narrative and independent films, the focus shifted mid-decade towards a *Screen*-theory ethos, rather than the auteurist focus from previous years. Influenced by Peter Wollen’s *Signs*
and Meanings in the Cinema (1967), the theoretical shift recognised ‘film as an ideological practice rather than as a predetermined and self-sufficient object of study’. New festival director, Lynda Miles, consolidated the focus of subsequent events through an increased focus on film theory, with Margaret Dickinson noting that ‘while Bristol [1975] had celebrated diversity, the annual Edinburgh gatherings were more about advancing a unifying ideology’. Changes were evident in Edinburgh’s ‘30th International Film Festival’ (1976) where debates centred on Peter Wollen’s ‘The Two Avant-gardes’ (1975) and the divergent histories of film experimentation he had identified.

In contrast to the eclecticism of the Bristol event – and with more of a concerted ideological focus than Edinburgh’s new approach – Peter Gidal’s ‘Structural Film Retrospective’ (1976) at the NFT presented a historical review of structural filmmaking. The extensive eighteen-programme retrospective coincided with the publication of Gidal’s Structural Film Anthology, containing theoretical and critical essays and personal statements to complement the nearly one hundred British, European and American films screened. Only filmmakers producing ‘relevant work before 1971’ were included, with the retrospective intending to contextualise works and ‘recognise alliances and misalliances between films’. Gidal’s own films and theoretical position, firmly aligned with the modernist movement in other visual arts, interrogated properties intrinsic to the film medium, creating a dialectic ‘established in that space of tension between material flatness, grain, light, movement (two dimensionality) and the supposed real reality that is represented (three dimensionality; figurativeness)’. His ardent stance against narrative and representation, identified by Rees as proposing ‘film as a contemporary art which politically needs to share nothing with the cinema’, confirmed his extreme anti-Hollywood position. The screenings importantly brought a notable amount of work to British audiences, providing the intended contextualisation to consolidate Gidal’s unfailingly uncompromising position on the importance of this type of experimentation. His influence on younger filmmakers and the continued dominance of his position in accounts of the decade’s history – particularly his anti-representational stance – have problematically side-lined other forms of filmmaking, such as the visionary, poetic and autobiographical forms of filmmaking. His retrospective had, however, presented a wide range of films, opening up opportunities for debate which were important for 1970s developments.
‘Avant-garde British Landscape Films’ (1975), curated by Deke Dusinberre, included films by William Raban, Chris Welsby, Jane Clark, Renny Croft and Mike Duckworth. Dusinberre’s Tate programme notes identified that the films ‘assert the illusionism of cinema through the sensuality of landscape imagery, and simultaneously assert the material nature of the representational process which sustains the illusionism’. In Curtis’ analysis he noted that the films combined ‘a modernist determination to make visible all the processes involved in the filmmaking’ yet he also identified that the ‘striking feature of this work was the way it combined a passionate attachment to imagery of mountains, clouds, seascapes, parks and rural pastures’ not dissimilar to earlier British Romantic painters. Although pains were taken (in historical accounts) to assert that a ‘return to image’ and more representational forms of filmmaking occurred at the end of the 1970s, as argued in Chapter One, clearly these sensuous landscape films were image-rich, despite the focus on cinematographic recording devices.

A broad range of Arts Council-funded experimental films were shown at the Hayward Gallery’s ‘Perspectives on British Avant-garde Film’ (1977). Arts Council-funded expanded cinema events by Tony Hill, Le Grice, William and Marilyn Halford, Derek Jarman, Jeff Keen, Anthony McCall and Annabel Nicolson, Ron Haseldon and David were also included in the programmes, as well as a range of films offering critical context. International (not Arts Council–funded) single-screen films also provided critical and historical context for filmmaking:

The survey is not intended to be comprehensive either in terms of films financed by the committee or the historical and critical programmes. Rather, the groups of films and the programme notes about them are intended to demonstrate the changing nature of the films funded by the committee, to show some of the central historical developments and to indicate some of the major aesthetic and ideological concerns that underlie current avant-garde film-making in Britain and abroad.

The diversity in the British funded films was evident in the eclectic range of programmes. These included ‘Artists’ Documentaries’, ‘Conceptual Documentaries’ and various programmes of film experimentation with structure and material, such as ‘Printer/Processor’, ‘Printer/Processing’, ‘Structural Asceticism’ and ‘Structural Film’. ‘Performance into Film’ (‘1’ and ‘2’) included Stuart Brisley’s Arbeit Macht Frei (1973), Bruce Lacey’s The Lacey Rituals (documentation of family life) and Ian Breakwells’ The Journey (1975). David Larcher’s Monkey’s Birthday (1975) and Mike Leggett’s Sheepman and the Sheared (1976) differ significantly from one other,
but both are forms of travelogue including landscape and nature. Jeff Keen’s *White Dust* (1972) was screened alongside Kenneth Anger’s *Lucifer Rising* (1972-77) and Jean-Marie Straub’s *The Bridegroom, Comedienne and the Pimp* (1968). Jarman’s ‘Expanded Cinema’ event included *Diary Reel 3: Fragments 1971-74*, two reels of Super-8 ‘offcuts’ and *The Kingdom of Outremer* (1972-74).

The success of the 1977 Hayward Gallery exhibition and an earlier British Council sponsored survey of British art in Italy, ‘Arte Inglessi Oggi’(1976), were the inspiration for ‘A Perspective on English Avant-garde Film’ (1978). The 1978 exhibition, selected by David Curtis and Deke Dusinberre, toured in thirty countries and including twenty-four filmmakers and thirty-nine British films in the nine programmes. The abbreviated version of the 1977 event was supported by the Arts Council and The British Council and included programmes conceptually organised to ‘present a series of aesthetic ideas and issues in a coherent fashion’. Although it was a smaller programme the diversity was still evident in the range of films presented. These included landscape, still life, performance, structural and material experimentation and travelogues.

The continued presence of the LFMC was evident in the 1977 ‘Edinburgh Film Festival’ which included a range of experimental films. The 1978 event included twenty programmes of ‘U.K. Avant-Garde’ filmmaking, with Nicolson’s introductory essay mentioning the advantages of the LFMC workshop grant (£16,020 from BFIPB in 1976). She identified that the grant opened up further opportunities for experimentation as it also provided technical assistance of a paid workshop member, enabling ‘individuals with less clearly defined aspirations’ to ‘avail themselves more readily’. The 1978 event included contemporary experimental film programmes presented alongside a historic Max Ophuls programme and a range of international independent films. BFIPB-funded films screened included Peter Greenaway’s *A Walk Through H* (1978), ‘a symbolic journey through an imaginary country’, and *36 to 77*, the Berwick Street Collective’s sequel to *Nightcleaners* (1972). As in previous years, open discussion forums formed a key part of events, generating debates and offering opportunities for international exchanges.

Events taking place in London in the final year of the decade are notable in demonstrating the diversity of experimental filmmaking activity. A number of large events took place concurrently in June 1979. The Arts Council-funded, ‘Film as Film: Formal Experiment in Film 1910-1975’ (1979), discussed in Chapter One, presented
an exhibition focused on formal experimentation. Other events included the ‘Film London: 3rd Avant-garde International Festival’ at the NFT, expanded cinema events at the ICA and open screenings at the LFMC. ‘Film London: 3rd Avant-garde International Festival’ (1979) was initiated by David Curtis and Simon Field, with administration handed over to filmmakers Tim Bruce, Bob Fears, Jenny Okun, David Parsons and Penny Webb. The collective statement, issued by the organisers in the accompanying publication identified some important concerns:

British avant-garde film is being produced in various contexts – in film workshops, art schools, and State funding to artists and filmmakers. Outlined below are some of the developments which have influenced the production of avant-garde film in Britain in the 1970s, the major influence being its institutionalisation within art education. The period has seen a proliferation of journals devoted to film criticism and film theory. The attention paid to narrative construction by film theorists has been reflected in the body of work produced from within the avant-gardes.425

The NFT festival’ included thirty-nine programmes of films, with Dusinberre noting that ‘a more political (if unpublicised) decision by the committee means that fully 50% of the British films at the NFT will be by women.’426 Amongst British films screened were Will Milne’s Christ of Feathers (1976), Le Grice’s Emily – Third Party Speculation (1978) and Lis Rhodes’ Light Reading (1978).

Researcher, Peter Mudie, made an interesting point about the differences in the events taking place simultaneously across London, when he identified that the NFT ‘Film London’ programmes were widely inclusive and the Hayward’s ‘Film as Film’ historical exhibition had a very specific focus:

[T]he disparity between the multinational pluralism of ‘Film London’ festival at the NFT and the determinist meta-historical presentation of ‘Film as Film’ at the Hayward [Gallery] would accentuate a visible division in the purposes of the English avant-garde enterprise in 1979.427

Mudie, however, mistakenly identified a division, whereas the organiser’s intentions were deliberately seeking to present the rich diversity (and historical context where possible) of 1970s (and historical) experimental filmmaking. The involvement of the BFI, NFT and the Arts Council’s Hayward Gallery also demonstrated the collaborative willingness to present a diverse range of work simultaneously.428

Attempts were made to ensure that programmes at different venues did not coincide, providing ample opportunity for viewers to see work. Dusinberre outlined the miscellaneous range of work on offer in his (p)review:
[Events] parallel to the festival do afford a certain depth and historical perspective to complement the contemporary overview it offers. On Thursday June 7, Stan Brakhage makes his first British appearance when he presents several parts of his recent work, titled ‘Sincerity’, at the ICA. Paul Sharits will also introduce new work at the ICA on Tuesday June 19, followed by a retrospective at the Co-op on June 20. Other film-makers will no doubt arrive with extra prints under their arms; keep alert for the ad-hoc screenings in London and elsewhere. In addition the ‘Film as Film’ exhibition continues at the Hayward Gallery (only 30 paces from the NFT) until June 17.429

These events were important for providing opportunities for the screening of films, but also for opening up further discussions for artists, filmmakers, critics and audiences on an international level. These related 1979 events also revealed the exponential increase in British experimental filmmaking. Since the NFT programme notes drew attention to the 1970s institutionalisation of experimental filmmaking, it is will be useful to reflect further on this. The progressive institutionalisation was evident if one considered experimental film’s initial ‘underground’ and subversive position, at the beginning of the 1970s, and its highly theorised status and incorporation into academia by the end of the decade. Alongside this progressive institutionalisation was the increased reliance of experimental filmmaking on state funding. It is important to be aware of this predicament of institutionalisation, while remembering that without any institutional support the range of film experimentation and exhibition would surely not have been so extensive during this productive period. Institutional support, such as the Arts Council’s ‘Film-maker’s On Tour’ scheme, also attempted to engage new audiences and support a wide range of experimentation, and not all filmmakers succumbed to institutionalisation. Individuals such as Derek Jarman, David Larcher, Margaret Tait, Peter Whitehead and Jane Arden, took less interest in theoretical forms of filmmaking and found alternative means of funding some of their work, as outlined previously.

Retrospective Screenings
As discussed previously, dominant accounts of 1970s filmmaking have problematically marginalised certain aspects of the decade’s production and thereby failed to also recognise the diversity in filmmaking. The investigation conducted for this thesis addressed the disparity between the diversity in film experimentation and its historicisation, and the intentions are, therefore, to make amendments and recognise the diversity in 1970s filmmaking. This is, firstly, important to provide the
required recognition for 1970s filmmakers marginalised in the histories and secondly, because it provides a clearer understanding of the historical trajectories for contemporary moving image work. A brief discussion will assist in appreciating the importance of historical reviews, such as this 1970s thesis, in providing the necessary historical context for contemporary moving image work.

By the turn of the millennium the proliferation of moving image work in degree shows, galleries and exhibitions was notable, although critical reviews often intimated that this ‘new’ artists’ medium had emerged in the mid-1990s without an attendant history. This ‘new’ moving image medium undoubtedly proliferated due to technological developments and the availability of more affordable digital equipment. It was also institutionally supported through exhibitions in galleries, acquisitions by state collections (the Tate Gallery, Arts Council) and its endorsement by competitions such as the Turner Prize. A large proportion of work was produced using video or digital technologies, although some artists continued to work with the 35mm, 16mm or Super-8 formats. While the diverse histories of contemporary moving image work has (to some extent) been retrospectively recognised through exhibitions, Rees also pointed out that there was still work to be done in critically contextualising these histories, as he identified that ‘the critical reception of installation digital video also lacks anchorage in a critical history’.

The lack of historical contextualisation for a significant amount of experimentation was problematic for many filmmakers, critics, curators and historians, many of whom had worked in the 1960s and 1970s and had paved the way for contemporary practices. This was further compounded by critical reviews lauding this ‘new’ medium with acclaim, yet without adequately acknowledging the historical context, as Rees identified:

Critics and curators who still maintain (as most seem to do) that film in the gallery began in the 1990s are necessarily on wobbly ground as they skate over the long history of multi-screen and expanded cinema in the artists’ domain. Surveying the Turner prize, art critic Jonathan Jones says that “the most radical new idea has been the video and film installation as a genre in itself, independent of cinema while seeming to fill the absence of an alternative culture of the moving image”. The independence is moot, though the alternative culture is not absent but ignored.

Contemporary moving image work clearly required more astute contextualisation; one that recognised its history in the commercial (Hollywood) cinema (as it did to some extent), but more importantly recognised the rich experimental film history of the
1960s and 1970s. In one example, Felicity Sparrow observed Tacita Dean’s 16mm installation, *Disappearance at Sea* (1996) as being ‘full of resonances’ of earlier experimentation, with “[t]he film strip, which one can see going through the projector gate at 24 frames per second’ and the projectors having ‘an aural presence and the recorded film sound vies with the whirr of the motor’. While Sparrow noted that the use of film in the digital age was an anachronism, she recognised that it was clearly a deliberate choice on Dean’s part, as it ‘echo[ed] the subject matter of the lighthouse in the film.

Rees also noted Guardian art critic, Jonathan Jones’, ahistorical assessment of contemporary moving image practice when writing about the 2003 Turner Prize. According to Rees, Jones discussed the ‘imaginative British art film-making’ mentioning filmmakers such as Ken Russell, Michael Powell, Nicolas Roeg and Derek Jarman (in relation to *Caravaggio* (1977) and not his experimental films), and ‘a garbled account of commercial cinema in the 1960s to the New Wave of the 1990s’. Recent contemporary filmmakers were also mentioned by Jones, such as Douglas Gordon, Isaac Julien and Tacita Dean, whose lighthouse film, *Disappearance at Sea*, he compared with Powell’s *Edge of the World* [1937], and as Rees noted, wrongly described as a ‘documentary’. The notable problem Rees identified was the lack of recognition of the extensive history of experimental film and video art. In recent years (since Jones’ review was written) some amendments have been made to recognise the history, with retrospective screenings and exhibitions demonstrating the diversity and complexity of experimental filmmaking history.

Retrospective exhibitions and programmes – including artists’ talks, lectures, discussion forums and affiliated symposia or conferences – served the purpose of re-evaluation and were important for new generations of artists working with the moving image. For many 1970s filmmakers it was also welcome appraisal for work produced and struggles endured. Le Grice observed that perceiving contemporary moving image work as groundbreaking, when it in fact failed to recognise important historical precedents, was problematic:

I saw a triple projection piece by McQueen at the ICA, but a triple projection that could easily have been done in the 1970s. One has to ask oneself the question: why is this contemporary film practice taken up and given some celebrity when the work of people who had created a sort of long term language or practice is still marginalised. I know that my work has been placed with modernist developments; at the same time, philosophically, as you might have picked up from my recent book. I don’t think that the arguments around the kind of Greenbergian concept of
modernism are sustainable in the framework of either digital technology or the present hybridization of technology and culture. I don’t think that the modernist position is sustainable. But I still have difficulty with the gestural eclecticism that seems to be fundamental in postmodern work.437

The problematic lack of recognition for film and video practitioners working in earlier decades was also identified in Sean Cubitt’s preface to Le Grice’s 2001 publication, acknowledging that ‘[t]he media in which he has worked for thirty-five years now have been marginalised for all but the last ten, at which point the previous twenty-five were maddeningly – for those of us of the older generation – erased’.438 Clearly, recognition is essential – for LFMC-related works and importantly also for the more representational, personal forms of filmmaking this thesis espouses – and connections need to be made to provide historical contextualisation for contemporary work where possible. Some attempts were made (and continue to be) to address these neglected histories. This is evident in the retrospective screenings of 1970s filmmaking.

While some large-scale screening events have taken place in Britain (and Europe), providing a useful re-examination of 1970s experimental filmmaking, there have also been a number of smaller screening events, exhibitions and discussion forums. Historians, curators and filmmakers such as David Curtis, Jackie Hatfield, William Fowler, A. L. Rees and Mark Webber, and organisations such as the no.w.here lab and LUX have acknowledged the need for historical recognition, either by screening films or enabling filmmakers to continue working with film in an artisanal manner (as no.w.here lab does).439 In his review of Curtis’ extensive historical Tate exhibition of British films (2003), Gidal outlined the measure of recent screening activity:

The extraordinary resurgence of interest in such works has seen many screenings, mostly in 16mm, in Britain and abroad attended with seriousness and excitement in equal measure. The ‘Shoot Shoot Shoot’ programme which started its ‘world tour’ at Tate Modern last year is just one such important element here, among dozens of others curated independently from Hackney to Kitayushu in Japan. Sometimes these are major events accompanied by catalogues and critiques; or they may be one-nighters given only email publicity, but each show is packed out by more than 100 viewers – and 100 people for such work in one place at one time is a lot, since viewing is very different from consuming.440

Despite the increased and welcome activity, the problematic issue of retrospective recognition is also alluded to in Gidal’s review title, ‘Time Regained (Sort Of)’, indicating that while some form of acknowledgment of historical work is now taking place, perhaps this is not quite sufficient.
The afore-mentioned ‘A Perspective on English Avant-Garde Film’ (1978) inspired a number of the Arts Council and British Council co-funded ventures. Two exhibitions demonstrating new developments in film and video were shown in the mid-1980s, ‘The New Pluralism: British Film and Video 1980-1985’ (1985) and ‘The Elusive Sign: Avant-garde Film 1977-1987’ (1987). The latter offered a retrospective glance over a ten-year period, with eighteen films and fifteen videos screened, although it was limited to single screen/monitor works due to its touring schedule. Filmmaker and critic, Michael Mazière, presented a harsh critique of the 1987 exhibition, in his ‘The Eluded Decade. 1977-1987. R.I.P.’ review, as he identified the exclusiveness of the works presented: ‘what is striking about the selection of the five film programmes is the work that has been omitted’; and the lack of critical discussion in the catalogue ‘practically completely written by Mike O’Pray; not only has he written the introduction, but also 21 of the 33 entries in the film/video descriptions.’ Mazière’s review is particularly pertinent for the discussions related to the central arguments of this thesis, on historical constructions of history and inclusions/omissions. He commented on the exhibition and the ‘whitewash of the film practice, theoretical debates and actual developments of the past ten years’, critiquing O’Pray’s catalogue statement and asking a pertinent question:

We are left on a philosophical note “Art is continually rewriting its own history in order to provide an alibi for its contemporary ideas, strategies and tastes”. Art unfortunately has never “written its own history”; could it be that critics and academics need “alibis” to justify their “ideas, strategies and tastes”? Mazière’s observations are important to keep in mind as the other retrospective programmes are discussed, offering astute reminders on the issues of curation and positioned historical accounts discussed in Chapter One.

Four further Arts/British Council-funded exhibitions, presenting contemporary film and video, were shown at the ‘ICA Biennals’ (1990, 1992, 1995, 1997), and an impressive event held at the LFMC, ‘The Seventh Art’ (1993), attempted to provide more opportunities for historical contextualisation. The ambitious ‘The Seventh Art’ event – screening 160-180 films in eighteen programmes – could be seen as a precursor to Curtis’ later Tate (2003) programmes and the intentions were outlined by Nicolson in the programme notes:

This season offers audiences a chance to become familiar with some of the main developments in the history of experimental cinema. It explores how artists working in widely different cultural contexts have found themselves tackling
similar questions and how certain concerns have emerged and re-emerged in
different political and economic climates. The event included a diverse range of programmes; 1970s films were notably featured in ‘Expanded Cinema’, ‘Light Relief’ and ‘Emerging Perspectives’ programmes. The latter focused on women’s filmmaking and included G (1979) by Susan Stein, Light Reading (1978) by Lis Rhodes, From the Exterior (1974) by Barbara Meter, Mantra (1976) by Jeanette Iljon and Trapline (1977) by Ellie Trip. Although ‘The Seventh Art’ provided a welcome historical overview, particularly for newcomers to experimental film, its location at the LFMC cinema did limit its reach to a wider audience. Later historical events (discussed below) in more conspicuous institutions, such as the Tate galleries or the BFI, would potentially bring in broader audiences.

A number of exhibitions and screenings, providing some historical context but taking more focused approaches to contextualise aspects of 1970s experimental filmmaking, took place in recent years. ‘Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain 1965-75’ (2000) at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, presented conceptual work in painting, drawing, film, performance, installation and sculpture. Curators, Clive Phillpot and Andrea Tarsia, explained that the retrospective context intended to re-evaluate the ten-year period in order ‘to clarify the points of origin of a formative generation in British art’. They noted that ‘[one] of the key characteristics of artistic practices in the 60s and 70s was the degree to which artists not only worked in a variety of media, but also worked closely with practitioners in other art forms’. Nearly half of the included artists worked with film (although their films were not necessarily exhibited), with the exhibition revealing the diverse forms of experimentation across disciplines.

Mark Webber’s ‘Shoot Shoot Shoot: The First Decade of the London Film-maker’s Co-operative and British Avant-garde Film 1966-1976’ (2002) was shown at the Tate Modern before it toured internationally. This in-depth survey included eight film programmes, focusing largely on film experimentation with structure and material at the LFMC, although films by Jeff Keen and David Larcher were also included. A Tate seminar and additional related events, such as a unique screening of 8mm films, a multi-media performance by Keen, and screenings of Ron Haseldon’s MFV Maureen (1975) and Chris Welsby’s installation Shoreline (1977), were also held at The Photographers’ Gallery.
'X-Screen: Film Installation and Actions of the 60s and 70s’ (2004) presented a broad range of inter-disciplinary works focused on expanded cinema, installation and performance documentation. The Viennese exhibition provided opportunities for an examination of the international exchanges in ideas and included a number of British works, such as Anthony McCall’s *Line Describing a Cone* (1973), works by le Grice and documentation of Nicolson’s *Reel Time* (1973). The related symposium offered a chance for further discussions and historical contextualisation, and the catalogue also included invaluable essays and interviews with British filmmakers. These retrospective exhibitions and related events (symposia and conferences) were particularly important as they offered opportunities for historical reflection and reconsiderations of the contemporary significance of historical works. In this respect the conference, ‘Expanded Cinema: Activating the Space of Reception’ (2009), at Tate Modern also offered important opportunities for re-engagement and (re)contextualisation. Although this was primarily a three-day conference about expanded cinema, film screenings and seminal works such as Lis Rhodes’ *Light Music* (1972), Steve Farrer’s *The Machine* (1978-88) and Tony Hill’s performance *Point Source* (1973) were also shown.

David Curtis’ extensive and thematic ‘A Century of Artists’ Film in Britain’ (2003) included 170 films by 130 artists, (both film and video), offering an historical overview of a hundred years of filmmaking. Its exhibition at Tate Britain assured a wider audience than the LFMC’s earlier ‘The Seventh Art’, with Nina Danino noting that the exhibition gained ‘for these practices the legitimising recognition of an art institution of national prestige and it brings together these two estranged environments [art and cinema]’. There was some trepidation about the decision to screen works digitally as looped presentations in a ‘walk-through’ gallery, particularly as medium specificity had been an important concern for film and video artists in the 1970s. However, the digital format also presented some real advantages, as Rees pointed out: ‘among its stunning successes are the 4-screen ‘After Manet’ [1975] by Le Grice in programme 2, which would be impossible to set up for daily film performances over three months (as would many other films in the series)’. As each screening programme ran for three months, visitors could return to view the works repeatedly – differing significantly to the usual one-off screenings of 1970s works. Further benefits included the availability ‘on a daily basis a selection of British work largely ignored by the state and private galleries. It opens up the work to audiences
who have never heard of it and who would otherwise never encounter it’. Curtis’ intention to avoid the specialist status which this type of work had long held, were made clear when he said that ‘the potential gain was the possibility that artists’ film might – at last – escape its pilgrimage status, and at least some of this history might be seen by many thousands of people who visit the gallery each week’.

Filmmaker and historian, Jackie Hatfield, curated ‘Experiments in Moving Image: a Retrospective of Experimental Work from the Late 1960s to Date’ (2004). This survey of experimental film and video, presented at the University of Westminster, was a chronological 40-year programme of films, shown over a 7-day period. Works were presented in their original format (as opposed to being digitised), providing useful opportunities for cross-referencing between film and video. 1970s films were screened in two programmes: ‘Cinematic Exploration – Expanding Screens 1960-1975’ and ‘Light, Space, Frame, Image 1974-1985’ with contextualisation provided by video works shown in ‘Monitor Works 1970-1979.’ The 1970s films appear to be unrepresentative of the decade’s production, (of the 25 films in the two 1970s programmes only 12 filmmakers were represented). This, however, was not an oversight on behalf of the curator, but the result of Hatfield’s unique approach of inviting film and video makers to submit work to the historical programmes, meaning that, ‘there are gaps for those artists who did not submit work in to the event’. An awareness of curatorial intentions is therefore important when considering 1970s and retrospective accounts, as selections could be mistakenly be read as representative accounts of a period, as Danino cautioned above.

It finally needs to be added that problematic consequences, such as the creation of inadvertent canons or ‘definitive histories’, resulting from exhibition curation (related to classifying and historicising works) is ultimately inevitable. This observation does not simply disavow unrepresentative selections, but recognises that inclusivity is also rather more complex than being merely about curatorial decisions, as Walter Grasskamp also identified in Chapter one. Some works become unavailable, filmmakers remove their works from distribution or certain films, for one reason or another become unavailable, or as Mazière, quoting O’Pray, noted (above) that histories are constructed to provide alibis for contemporary ideas, strategies and tastes. An acute awareness of these predicaments therefore recognises the need for continued re-visions and critical reviews, so that works can be re-positioned and included where possible.
Television

Finally, a brief mention of television programmes of 1970s experimental filmmaking is necessary, as this provides some understanding of the continued efforts made by individuals to recognise this historical work and enable new audiences – including practitioners, critics and curators – to engage with it. The IFA (discussed in some detail in the previous chapter) was instrumental in the shaping of the new Channel 4 television network in 1982. New experimental film and video work, specifically for television, and a few programmes presenting historical work from the 1970s or earlier decades was commissioned in the 1980s and 1990s. The four-part Profiles, commissioned by Rod Stoneman in 1983, took a documentary format similar to earlier Arts Council-funded television documentaries. These four programmes were directed by Margaret Williams and edited by David Curtis, with three focusing on a single filmmaker – Margaret Tait, Jeff Keen and Malcolm Le Grice – and one on the women’s film distribution group, Circles. Each programme included interviews with the filmmakers or activists as well as a selection of film clips. For The Eleventh Hour series Stoneman commissioned experimental/artists’ films for television. While these were not specific to 1970s experimental filmmaking, they offered a useful trajectory in 1980s experimentation and included works by Catherine Elwes, Ian Breakwell and George Barber.

In 1993 the six-part historical Channel 4 series on experimental film, Midnight Underground, was presented by Benjamin Woolley. These included both more well-known experimental works such as Robert Frank’s Pull My Daisy (1959) and Ken Jacobs’ Little Stabs at Happiness (1963) as well as lesser known short films by directors such as Martin Scorsese (The Big Shave, 1969). A second series of six films took a different angle in commissioning contemporary British film and video-makers. Midnight Underground was instrumental in introducing new audiences to experimental film, including curator, Mark Webber, who curated the ‘Shoot Shoot Shoot: The First Decade of the London Film-maker’s Co-operative and British Avant-garde Film 1966-1976’ programmes.
Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the dissemination of films through 1970s and retrospective exhibitions and screenings. These events demonstrated the broad range of activity, the progressive increase in filmmaking in the decade and the continued attempts made to screen the work. Some of the challenges involved in screening work were identified; for example the need for multiple projectors, sound equipment and space to accommodate performative works, such as the expanded cinema pieces. The important role of curators and programmers – presenting 1970s and retrospective events – was recognised in this chapter, particularly where these could influence the perception of a period’s production. It was imperative to recognise the role of curatorial decisions in the formation of film canons and to remain constantly vigilant by recognising that decisions were informed by positioned approaches as well as the availability of films for screening. This applied to more focused exhibitions such as Gidal’s ‘Structural Film Retrospective’ (1976) or Webber’s ‘Shoot Shoot Shoot’ (2002) programmes, as well as more extensive historical accounts such as Curtis’ ‘A Century of Artists’ Film in Britain’ (2003-4). Therefore, discussion forums, symposia and conferences have importantly offered opportunities to deliberate these predicaments – related to inclusions and exclusions – and have assisted in shaping revisions of historical work where necessary. While it has been essential to situate experimental film screenings within broader historical contexts (1970s and retrospective) in order to gauge the importance of this particularly fertile decade of experimentation, it is also important to understand experimental filmmaking’s placement within the wider field of art. The following chapter explores this relationship more closely, as the visual arts formed an integral part of experimentation and development.
CHAPTER FOUR: EXPERIMENTAL FILM AND VISUAL ART PRACTICES

For the artist even more than for ‘professional’ film-makers, film meant fluidity, movement, space juxtaposed, illusion, parody, reality, fantasy, twenty-four paintings a second, subtlety, exaggeration, boredom and repetition; it was drawing, photographic scrutiny, scratching, colour, tone, mathematical relationships and patterns. It was all, part or one of these things for each of the individual artists who stepped into film.  

Stephen Dwoskin (1975)

A close relationship between experimental filmmaking and other visual art practices was evident in the way film was used for personal expression, to experiment with film material and structure or to investigate concepts. In the previous two chapters the institutional and organisational factors surrounding experimental film production and exhibition were discussed. This chapter focuses more specifically on relationships between experimental film and visual art practices such as painting, sculpture, photography and drawing. This will provide a clearer understanding of the correlation between the two fields and will demonstrate the extent of the diversity of filmmaking in the decade. The relationship to painting, for example, can be seen in works where the filmstrip was literally painted on as in Margaret Tait’s *Painted Eightsome* (1970) or in the record of the process of painting in Jenny Okun’s *Still Life* (1976). The sculptural was referenced in-frame by taking a cubist approach to the recording of space in William Raban’s *Angles of Incidence* (1973) and in the sculptural ‘physicality’ of the light beam in Anthony McCall’s *Line Describing a Cone* (1973). Relationships to the visual arts were also made evident through the exhibition context; with the relationship to photography evident in John Blake’s *Arrest* (1970), in the display of a print of the film frames within the exhibition space. Relationships were self-evident in Steve Farrer’s *Ten Drawings* (1976), where the film strip was used as a surface to ‘draw’ on. A number of LFMC filmmakers engaged in structural or material experimentation, and conceptual artists explored ideas with the film medium. In Ian Breakwell’s more humorous approach for *Nine Jokes* (1971) he mocked the serious theoretical engagements with film. Films discussed in this chapter reveal the rich diversity in experimentation in a new experimental art form, unconstrained by the precedents of historical convention that other disciplines, such as painting and sculpture, were confined by.
In this chapter discourses in the broader visual arts will first be outlined to identify particular theoretical, political or aesthetic preoccupations informing artists and experimental filmmakers. Thereafter more detailed analyses of films will be made by considering relationships to artistic disciplines. This categorisation of films in relation to specific practices or conceptual concerns is however not to be read as an attempt to fix a taxonomy on the films, but rather to inform the reader where relationships can be drawn between diverse practices. One important issue needs to be identified at the outset: while many experimental filmmakers were informed by the visual arts, there were also prevailing interests in cinematographic recording devices and practical or aesthetic considerations related more specifically to film content and film screening.

**Broader Contexts for Filmmaking**

Many 1970s art practices were informed by theoretical or socio-political discourses; and the rationale for creative production included a complex range of objectives, such as using art to raise awareness of social and class inequalities or recognising the oppressive institutional contexts surrounding the arts and culture. The wider objectives, according to John A. Walker, were fuelled by a ‘repoliticization and feminization, [and] its attempt to reconnect to society at large’.\(^{464}\) One clear radical position in the arts was, however, not evident, but to a large extent the politicisation was motivated by the global, political events, such as American involvement in Vietnam, the civil rights and feminist movements and post-colonial conditions in the Third World (as discussed in the Introduction). Theoretical and philosophical developments across subject areas also informed the politicisation, and while the complex attitudes surrounding the visual arts in the 1970s informed a greater diversity of practice, cohesive developments were not forthcoming, as Walker identified:

What occurred was an often acrimonious struggle between various groups: traditionalists and formalists versus left-wingers and feminists, abstractionists versus figurative artists, blacks versus whites, practitioners versus theorists and critics. These groups argued about the character, social function and future direction of art and its institutions.\(^ {465}\)

These attitudes were by and large informed by left-wing politics and influenced by Marxist and socialist ideologies. However, within this left-wing political activity varied disputes also emerged between the diverse ideological positions related to Maoists, Marxist-Leninists, anarchists and Trotskyists. The different ideological groups held varying expectations of the role aesthetic practices should take, as well as
the engagement necessary from both artists and viewers. For Marxist-Leninists, for example, the role was not only to present economic and social conditions truthfully (social realism), but attempt were expected to better social conditions through raising awareness of living conditions. Maoist aesthetics, on the other hand, did not impose a specific style, but encouraged a range of approaches sought through free discussion and socially-engaged creative practices. Similarly for Trotskyists, recognition of the role that the arts played in contributing to society meant that production and its dissemination was encouraged without imposing strict regulations on style or content. This was exemplified in Leon Trotsky’s manifesto, ‘Towards a Free Revolutionary Art’ (1938), as a reaction against the Soviet Union’s mandate to regulate creative production. For anarchists, an imposition on style or content in art would inevitably go against their core beliefs. However, if art was necessary, it should serve some radical purpose to further their cause against state domination. Although the ideological positions differed in varying degrees, essentially aesthetic practices in the 1970s were expected to serve a purpose beyond decorative or commercial function.

The visual arts in the 1970s were dominated by theoretical discourses informed by socio-political concerns, ideology and 1960s counter-culture; and with a similar perspective to D. N. Rodowick’s recognition of the 1970s as the decade of political modernism, Stuart Sillars identified the decade as being, ‘the years when visual art almost deconstructed itself into theories, ideologies and concepts’. From the 1910s onwards, art had moved away from traditional modes of production, questioning the very nature of art, its artefacts and what purpose these served within the broader societal context. Dadaists and Surrealists (in the 1910s and 1920s), for example, had addressed issues in an anarchic manner, seeking to expose the bourgeois elitism of the arts. New forms of interrogation also emerged in the 1960s, as artists raised further questions about modes of production and the institutions affiliated to education, commerce and exhibition. This was further extended as experimentation across traditional fields of art exposed the permeable boundaries between disciplines. Fixed roles, normally designated to artists, writers or curators, also became more fluid, as Clive Phillpot and Andrea Tarsia identified:

This formal “miscegenation” found its echo in the structures of the art world. Lucy Lippard felt able to see her role as that of “writer-collaborator” with artists, while Charles Harrison abandoned the pages of Studio International and organising exhibitions to join forces with Art & Language. Artists meanwhile often reviewed each other’s shows, curated exhibitions, published magazines and books, and set up a number of organisations and spaces that operated outside of institutions.
This complete openness to experimentation was essential for interrogating art’s political, theoretical and social purpose, moving beyond its historically rarified status as decorative artefact. The fluid parameters between disciplines was also important for 1970s experimental filmmakers, as they programmed events, wrote about their own and each other’s work and theorised about filmmaking, thereby ensuring that work was produced, shown, debated and recorded for posterity. This was especially the case at the LFMC, although filmmakers such as Margaret Tait and B. S. Johnson also published their writing (poetry and novels respectively) which can be read as useful adjuncts to their films.

The ideological intentions of artists and experimental filmmakers in the 1970s therefore often extended beyond the actual production of work, to include considerations of the exhibition context and ethical concerns about the commercial production of artworks. The intention was to challenge established practices and the means of display in order to – ideally – activate the viewer and have some form of societal impact. Therefore, the venue and manner of exhibition – as discussed in Chapter Three in relation to screening events – also became a central concern, alongside the actual work produced. A consequence of these politicised positions was evident in the extension of the more traditional art practices and the development of experimental practices such as performance art, happenings and experimental filmmaking, emerging or being taken up in earnest in the 1960s. This resulted in a diversity of aesthetic practices, with some being focused within their own discipline and others clearly demonstrating evidence of the permeable boundaries between disciplines. The Fluxus movement, for example, revived the Dadaists attitude by taking an interdisciplinary, iconoclastic approach to question the art object and art’s cultural status. These frequently took the form of ‘happenings’, with artists such as George Maciunas, Allen Kaprow, Dick Higgins, Yoko Ono and composer, John Cage being actively involved. Fluxus films, ‘typically tongue-in-cheek explorations of extreme close-up’, often took minimalist and provocative approaches to question the meaning of image. These included Ono’s No. 4 (‘bottoms’ film) (1964) and Nam June Paik’s Zen for Film/No. 1 (1962/64). Walker observed artists’ ideological intentions in the 1970s as having ‘three objectives: first to change art, second, to use that new art to change society, and third, to challenge and transform their relations of production and artworld institutions’. These challenges meant a reconsideration of
the role of art at all levels and proved to be successful in some respects (raised levels of socially conscious awareness), but rather naively ambitious in others (to change society).

**Discourses in Art**

While socio-political theories informed artistic interrogations and questioned the purpose of art in society, more specific discourses in the arts also informed aspects of experimental film production in the 1970s. The advent of cubism in the early 1900s was important for opening up new forms of creative production, particularly with regard to perception. This is discussed in greater detail below in relation to specific films, but it is important to recognise that cubist experimentation, instrumentally informed future developments in the arts. Rees identified the different stages of developments:

A period of *innovation* (1907-25) is followed by *assimilation and consolidation* (1925-35) and then by a new critical or negative *reaction* (in cubism this begins early, with the surrealist revolt from around 1925 onwards although crucially heralded by the long-sighted Duchamp, questioning and probing from within the cubist epoch almost as soon as it began).\(^{475}\) (Rees’ emphasis)

Marcel Duchamp’s conceptual interrogation of the art object was initiated with the submission of his ‘readymade’ urinal, *Fountain* (1917), for the Society of Independent Artists’ New York annual exhibition.\(^{474}\) In Duchamp’s opinion the aesthetic object existed because it had been chosen by the artist, and he asserted that it should be considered within the context of its viewing situation and not purely for its aesthetic qualities. Louise Norton’s analysis further polemicised Duchamp’s submission, offering a sardonic account of events:

> Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not, has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new thought for that article.\(^{475}\) (Norton’s emphasis)

It was specifically the work as ‘thought’ (or concept), and a consideration of the artwork and its viewing context, that proved fundamental in determining future developments related to conceptual art.

It was some years after Duchamp’s urinal was first submitted for exhibition, that the ‘thought’ element, affiliated to artistic production, was returned to with renewed vigour. From the 1960s onwards an intense scrutiny of the purpose of art took place,
with diverse questions raised about the nature of art and its socio-political contexts. Questions included asking how art should be defined, what relationship the concepts behind a work bore to the aesthetic object, what the exhibition contexts were, how audience interaction occurred and whether it was possible for art to be political or politically-engaged. In many of the surveys about the meaning of art in the 1960s, some general conclusions emerged, identifying that there was:

[a]n explicit emphasis on the “thought” component of art and its perception. In the course of the 1960s, normative definitions of art began to crumble, and thus younger artists, often with an excellent academic education started to reinterpret the essence of art in extended analyses. Thus, not only art itself, but also its institutional context, became the centre of attention, subjected to comprehensive criticism in artistic practice. Many artists expressed their worries about traditional forms of marketing art, and so ways were sought of getting away from the idea of artworks as decorative objects for well-heeled buyers.476

This crumbling of the ‘normative definitions’ of art played an important part in opening up more experimental art-forms such as filmmaking, happenings and performance, thereby extending the boundaries of all areas of practice.477 This was discussed in the previous chapter in relation to exhibition and expanded cinema works, and will be covered in more detail below in relation to more conceptual forms of filmmaking such as land art, and experimental ‘film’ works that did not include the film medium. Although not all the experimental films produced in the 1970s would be of a conceptual nature, the disintegration of the firm boundaries between disciplines in the arts would account for varied approaches taken by filmmakers and for the diversity in filmmaking.

The term ‘Concept Art’ was first used in Henry Flynt’s 1961 essay of the same title, with the artist Sol LeWitt following this up two years later with his ‘Conceptual Art’ essay, in which he outlined some essential maxims:

Conceptual art is made to engage with the mind of the viewer rather than his eye or emotions. This kind of art, then, should be stated with the most economy of means. Conceptual art is only good when the idea is good.478

Conceptual art informed the British artists’ group Art & Language, whose artworks took the form of theoretical texts on linguistics. They published the first of their Art-Language publications subtitled The Journal of Conceptual Art, in 1969. In the same year the artist Joseph Kosuth, commenting on Duchamp’s Fountain, announced that:

With the unassisted Readymade, art changed its focus from the form of the language to what was being said. Which means that it changed the nature of art from a question of morphology to a question of function. This change – one from
“appearance” to “conception” – was the beginning of “modern” art and the beginning of “conceptual” art. All art (after Duchamp) is conceptual (in nature) because art only exists conceptually.\(^{479}\)

Kosuth went further to state that, ‘a work of art is a kind of proposition presented within the context of art as a comment on art’, therefore calling on the viewer to respond or engage with the work as a question on art, and its institutional and socio-political contexts.\(^{480}\) (Kosuth’s emphasis)

**Conceptualism, Modernism and Approaches to Filmmaking**

The questioning of art’s purpose, viewer engagement and conceptual investigations of the film medium were explored in a number of ways by filmmakers in the 1970s. Conceptual artists, such as David Dye, David Lamelas and Anthony McCall, used the medium of film to explore concepts, rather than expose the materiality or structural qualities of the medium (as many of the LFMC filmmakers did) or use film for personal, autobiographical expression. Annabel Nicolson identified some of the different approaches to experimental filmmaking used by conceptual artist/filmmakers and LFMC filmmakers in her informative ‘Artist as Filmmaker’ (1972) article:

The self referential nature of much conceptual art provides an interesting philosophical parallel with the materially analytic, self-referential treatment of film evidenced by many independent filmmakers such as the Heins in Germany, Landow and Sharits in the States, Legrice [sic], Gidal, Drummond etc., in England. What may appear didactic concern with the chemistry of the medium is an essential landmark in an overdue, radical re-examination of the nature of film.\(^{481}\)

In a recent interview, with David Curtis, she reflected on the article and the different approaches (particularly to Expanded Cinema):

There were a few people from St Martins, mainly from the sculpture department whose work was quite conceptual, who tended to show work more in galleries like David Dye. And I think they were doing something different. It wasn’t the same as expanded cinema that had grown up with the Co-op. I remember writing about it and trying to identify what the differences were [Art and Artists, 1972]. To simplify it: some of them were using film as a vehicle to convey an idea or a concept and so film was quite attractive to them to make these kinds of statements. But this was deeply different to the Co-op where there was a love of the material for its own sake and exploring and seeing where it led and it was a very fluid process. I think those of us who were involved with the Co-op: we were just in love with film. I mean: the light, the radiance, the projection, exploring what the structure meant. Our ideas followed from that.\(^{482}\)
Although Nicolson identified approaches taken by conceptual artists as different from the LFMC filmmakers (to a large extent also determined by workshop facilities) there were also instances where LFMC filmmakers took more conceptual approaches to explore an idea, as is seen in the films inspired by cubism below.

Artists taking modernist approaches to practice, within a particular discipline, explored the specificities of their medium. In painting, for example, painters such as Frank Stella or Jasper Johns investigated attributes inherent to painting such as two-dimensionality, the materiality of paint or the surface of the canvas. These extended the terms of disciplines with a sense of self-referentiality, as Dusinberre outlined:

The modernist project in the arts might briefly be described as the interrogation of the fundamental representational properties of any medium, and an analysis of the modes of perception offered by that medium.\textsuperscript{483}

In analogous modernist investigations qualities inherent to the medium of film such as material (acetate) or structure (cinematographic and screening event) were explored by LFMC filmmakers and conceptual artists. Film experimentation focused on the interrogation of qualities intrinsic to the medium such as light, structure, surface, grain, materiality and processes of production, often resulting in a self-referential autonomy.

Representation and perception were also investigated to further question the meaning of image in film and how film was perceived by the viewer, as Sylvia Harvey identified:

The refusal to represent the world from a central and single point of view, and then to hand that over to the audience “on a plate”, is at a general level part of the massive crisis in twentieth-century art around the problem of representation. It asks the question – “How do you begin to go about depicting or representing the world?” This area is a concern of writers like Mallarmé and Joyce, but develops as a particular problem for the visual arts. It’s a crisis that the cubists tried to deal with in painting at the beginning of this century, by representing the world from a multiplicity of view-points, not the single-point perspective of all western [sic] post-renaissance painting. It is in general an aspect of the crisis in representation which has come to be labelled “modernism” – that is, a crisis around the recognition of the fact of a medium of communication as something which comes between or mediates between us and our world.\textsuperscript{484} (Harvey’s emphasis)

The mediation Harvey referred to was also useful when considering the way experimental films could mediate the viewer’s perception of familiar subjects or genres in art by imposing certain viewing positions or identifying modes of perception. For example, William Raban’s and Chris Welsby’s River Yar (1971-2) – a
tidal estuary viewed through various times of day, night and seasons – does not operate as a traditionally romantic representation of landscape. The viewer's perception of the landscape is instead mediated by the dual-screen projection, with fixed camera positions depicting the passing of time in spring and autumn equinoxes in real-time and in time-lapse sequences. Therefore the viewer’s attention, explicitly drawn to the cinematographic devices, is compelled to take this into consideration and view the landscape in a particular way.

This focus on viewer activation, forming an important part of 1970s experimentation for certain filmmakers, was outlined by Rees when he recognised that ‘the perceiver, rather than the artist, is made responsible for the production of meaning, a specifically modernist tendency’. This shift of emphasis on meaning-making from the filmmaker to the viewer was also elaborated further by Dusinberre:

Clearly, this formal emphasis is intimately related to the modernist discourse in the other arts, particularly painting and sculpture. So that the quality of literalness which surrounds English avant-garde films is not to be confused with a representational literalness, but to be associated with the presentational literalness of contemporary art. That is, it asserts the primacy of cognition over meaningfulness.

This further extended the critique of commercial cinema, seeking to engage the viewer as an active – rather than passive – consumer of film and became an important preoccupation for certain filmmakers in the decade, particularly those affiliated to the LFMC.

Although conceptualism and a modernist focus on formalism directed certain aspects of filmmaking in the decade, it must be emphasized that experimentation was, on the whole, extremely eclectic and unconstrained by rigid concepts or systematic directives. In Breakwell’s *Nine Jokes*, mocking the seriousness of conceptual art, he presented nine short film sketches, with titles playing a significant role, such as ‘The Art World Erupts’, showing a close up of Breakwell squeezing spots on his nose.

Even at the LFMC, where a great deal of experimentation with structure and material took place, approaches were not dictated by ruling decrees, despite some of the more vehement theoretical practitioner’s positions, such as Gidal’s. One need only refer to Annabel Nicolson’s recorded collection of memories from ‘The Early Years of the Film Co-op’ (assembled for the twenty year celebration) to understand that openness to experimentation abounded. Other filmmakers, who were also most certainly aware of developments in the arts, such as Derek Jarman, Jeff Keen, David
Larcher, Margaret Tait, and Peter Whitehead, generally took no interest in making films engaged explicitly with conceptualism or modernism in the arts.

**Film Experimentation**

In this section the relationship between experimental filmmaking and visual art practices will be explored in greater detail. It needs to be understood that these relationships are not drawn in order to fix set genres onto experimental filmmaking. The intention is rather to expose commonalities, see conceptual relationships and provide an understanding of the links between different forms of practice. While the works discussed may be related to diverse genres in art, filmmaking also often explicitly interrogated the conventions of the discipline informing it. Where earlier movements in painting informed filmmaking, such as cubism, filmmakers sought to push the boundaries of cubist ideas further, as this was made possible through the use of the film medium. Where landscape was investigated, for example, films extended the boundaries of the meaning of landscape painting or land art, often mediating the viewer’s experiences of landscape, as discussed above. In some direct-surface films, such as by Lis Rhodes, Margaret Tait, or Steve Farrer, the acetate was used as a ‘canvas’ or ‘paper’ to literally paint or draw on in order to see the physical marks transformed in projection. The influence of painting on filmmakers, such as Derek Jarman and Peter Greenaway (who both also painted), would also significantly inform approaches to film experimentation.

**Cubism, Painting and Film**

Painting was not necessarily explored explicitly as a moving image platform for the animation of still painted images, but aspects of painting and related theoretical discourses were investigated in order to examine either commonalities, differences or distinctive modes of visual exploration. Both disciplines concerned themselves with composition, the frame, colour (or monochrome), depth, perception, image construction and space.

In the first few films to be discussed a clear affiliation to the cubist phase in painting is evident, with perception and point of view informing interrogations. Parallels between cubism and film were not new in the 1970s and were preceded by earlier films investigating perception, vision and multiple viewpoints. In *The Cubist Cinema* (1975) Standish D. Lawder asked: ‘Are there Cubist films? To what extent
did the Cubists use the medium to release the implied movement of their paintings into an actual passage through space and time? He cited two unrealised film ideas by cubist painters, Pablo Picasso and Léopold Survage, for which written records existed. The relationship between cubism and film was revealed through early experimental filmmakers such as Walter Ruttmans, Viking Eggeling, Hans Richter, Germaine Dulac and Fernand Léger.

For Lawder, Fernand Léger’s *Ballet Méchanique* (1924) exemplified the relationship between cubism and filmmaking. He provided detailed analyses under seven title headings, for example, ‘Prismatic Fracturing’ and ‘Exercises in Rhythm’. Although cubist cinema was in existence prior to 1970s experimentation, some filmmakers used historical knowledge of this movement to explicitly explore cubist theories of perception and multiple viewpoints. While these bore a firm relationship to cubism in painting, investigations were focused on cinematographic recording devices and filmic processes, thereby extending the parameters of painting through the moving image. These formed part of structural and material experimentation with film, discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six, and preoccupying many LFMC filmmakers during the decade.

In Le Grice’s *Academic Still Life* (1976), specific reference is made to the still life paintings of Paul Cézanne, particularly his *Basket of Apples* (1890), where two different viewpoints are evident, disrupting the conventional perspective found in paintings of this genre and from that era. Le Grice’s *Still Life* has the same objects – apples, plate, wine bottle – as Cézanne’s earlier painting, but the fact that it is a moving image, rather than a still life, brings an interesting dynamic to the concept ‘still life’. In Le Grice’s film, perception was explored through the use of multiple points of view taken when looking at and moving around an object/s. The use of time-lapse photography and timed exposures, with a hand-held camera, are presented as dynamic fast-moving multiple viewpoints, operating to activate the viewer, who is forced to become conscious of the act of looking, of perception, and film content. This ensures viewer reflexivity, unlike the dominant, commercial cinema where seamless editing does not disrupt the viewer’s engagement with the narrative. In this way *Still Life* operates as an investigation into the act of looking.

William Raban portrayed minor changes in viewpoint in *Angles of Incidence* (1973) by focusing on the central pane of a window. In order to explore the ‘Axis of Camera Rotation’ and the shifting viewpoints, Raban tied a rope between the camera
Window and camera were separated by a few metres, and the camera was moved in an arc, with shooting taking place at particular ‘broad angles of incidence’, and with a repetition of the patterns of movement occurring at regular intervals. The film was shot following written and sketched plans and took thirty hours to complete, allowing for the occurrence of incidental events such as changes in light. It therefore operated as a record of the same image, with small incremental changes in viewpoint and content. In Raban’s statement about the film he articulated his working processes as follows:

Incorporating the composition into the shooting period allows for a greater degree of flexibility: chance occurrences may be more easily incorporated, and it is less mechanistic than copying from a prescribed score or model.

In a review of the film, Le Grice identified that what was most important in Raban’s film was ‘the way in which the spatial construct of the film is a product of the relationship of the space of the camera to the space which it observes’. Angles of Incidence is usually shown as a dual-screen projection, with one of the films flipped, and with the two films progressively moving out of sync, expanding the notion of multiple viewpoints. Angles of Incidence was also part of the 1980 Arts Council-funded Film-Makers on Tour (FMOT) programme. In my correspondence with Raban, when asked if cubism had informed his film, Raban replied: ‘Absolutely “yes”. Angles of Incidence was made to see if I could transliterate a cubist approach to film’.

Ron Haseldon’s Tracking Cycles (1975), reveals a similar interest in documenting a living room, resulting in a ‘densely coloured, almost cubist representation’ of space. He achieved this by following a rigorous filming procedure, using a tracking device for the camera and recording two cycles of camera movement. Films such as John Du Cane’s Zoomlapse (1975) and Roger Hammond’s Window Box (1972) equally reveal preoccupations with perception, film space and camera operations. In Zoomlapse a view out a window, onto the buildings opposite, is presented through camera shifts utilising the zoom, focus and lighting mechanism. Through the representation of fast-paced fragmented views Du Cane wanted the viewer to be conscious of the way film and space are manufactured. With Window Box Hammond attempted to address focus in an epistemological manner and additionally made the viewer aware of the film medium.
Not all films, bearing a relationship to painting, followed cubist investigations into perception or viewpoint. In Jenny Okun’s *Still Life* (1976) a still life, consisting of fruits and vegetables, is portrayed in negative colour film stock. The 6-minute film records the process of painting, revealing a progressive change in palette, as Okun:

attempts to reinstate some sort of representation of reality by painting the fruit in front of the camera its negative colours: but the burnt-out shadows and black highlights consistently prevent any illusionistic interpretation of the space within the frame while also asserting the processes involved.\(^{497}\)

Okun’s hands are frequently visible as the painting process takes place, creating an idiosyncratic rendering of these edible objects. Not only does the film make direct references to the still life painting genre and the act of painting, but it also comments on the material aspects of the film medium, as Okun screened the film with a negative print, rather than the more conventional positive film print.\(^{498}\) Le Grice’s *Academic Still Life* and Okun’s *Still Life* films both provide critiques of, and investigations into, the still life painting genre, yet they represent a kind of oxymoron, in that they are, in effect, moving ‘still life’ tableaux. Other experimental films of the ‘still life’ tableau include Mike Dunford’s *Still Life With Pear* (1974) and a number of films from Guy Sherwin’s *Short Film Series* (1975-1998) such as *Vermeer Still Life, Metronome and Candle and Clock*.

References to colour field painters such Mark Rothko and Clyfford Still are evident in Le Grice’s *Matrix* (1973). *Matrix* consists of six looped films, with each film consisting of optically-printed solid blocks of colour. Each frame consists of two blocks of colour and this is divided horizontally by a black line. The films are projected with six projectors lying on their sides. The ‘quiet stillness’ of a colour field painting is subverted in this six-screen expanded cinema piece, presenting a dynamic exploration of fields of colour. The performance of *Matrix* lasts about 18 minutes – with projectors moved around by Le Grice – ensuring an active space of projection (for filmmaker and viewer) and the formation of ‘new’ colours through superimposition:

The superimposition of the colour loops yields complex compositions of colour as well as of rhythm, and the screen space is not accepted as given but is exploited as needed. There is a strong sense of shifting lines of horizontality and verticality as the screen shape shifts. In this way, Le Grice effectively activates what is normally passive screen space.\(^{499}\)
No two presentations of the film are the same, due to the live-action projection situation, rendering the colour fields into active explorations of colour, space, light and film apparatus, ensuring that each event is a singular, unrepeatable work.

Although films such as *Academic Still Life, Angles of Incidence* and *Matrix* may have been informed by theoretical interests in film, colour and perception, there were also films less explicitly informed by theoretical interests. A number of 1970s filmmakers took a literal approach to painting on the filmstrip, following on from earlier experimentation exemplified in films from the 1930s by Norman McLaren and Len Lye, who both painted and scratched on the film acetate to create imagery. In Margaret Tait’s *Painted Eightsome* (1970) diverse, abstract and figurative shapes were painted directly onto the film strip to accompany the soundtrack, consisting of an Orkadian eightsome reel. Her *Colour Poems* (1974) also included – amongst the filmed footage – abstract and figurative imagery painted onto the filmstrip. David Larcher also worked on the filmstrip in *Mare’s Tail* (1969) and *Monkey’s Birthday* (1975) (these are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven), with parts of the processed footage ‘painted’ on with chemicals or heated to transform the imagery.

**Painting, Romanticism and ‘Sensuous’ Film**

The relationship between painting and film is evident in the painterly quality of many of Jarman’s Super-8 films such as *Garden of Luxor* (1972), *The Art of Mirrors* (1973) and *Jordan’s Dance* (1977). These were informed by his interest in the mystical and symbolic use of colour, as well as his diverse practices as painter, set designer, film director and writer, with O’Pray providing insight into Jarman’s cross-disciplinary practice:

> Unlike many of his contemporaries, Jarman made films rather as one makes paintings. To recognize this is to understand films like *In the Shadow of the Sun* (1974-80), *The Angelic Conversation* (1985) and *The last of England* (1987) whose raw power, fragmentary style, textured images, sprawling narrative and bricolage-like forms suggest a painterly approach to film.501

Jarman’s choice of Super-8 was for economic independence (as discussed in Chapter Two concerning funding) and technical ease, with most Super -8 cameras having a built in light-meter and easily loadable film cartridge. This simplified the process of filmmaking, as Jarman identified:
I was phased by numbers, I never got a Maths ‘O’ level, and [was] hopeless with machines. When I received my first film back and it was in focus it seemed like magic, an instrument to bring dreams to life and that was good enough.\(^{502}\)

The technical ease that the Super-8 medium facilitated was instrumental in furthering experimentation for Jarman, and although he is dismissive of his technical abilities in the above citation, the way he experimented by re-filming from the screen, using time-lapse photography and experimenting with shooting speeds, resulted in a particularly distinctive body of work. Chrissie Iles eloquently described the way that ‘Jarman folds painting and film inside each other, blurring the lines between cinematographic and painterly composition’, acknowledging the unique, painterly aesthetic of his films.\(^{503}\) His particular working processes, leading to his inimitable filmic sensibility, were described by O’Pray as follows:

Any interest in the films lies in Jarman’s ability to compose the shot, but more importantly, in a technique he discovered for himself in the early 1970s and made his own, of shooting at between three to six frames per second, and refilming it projected at the same speeds. The refilming and original shooting speed allowed Jarman a control over the imagery which produced a strong painterly texture and pulsating rhythm. The grainy streaked colour effect is like a strong broad brush-stroke, and assisted by the degeneration effect of re-filming the colours are often softened and suffused. The rhythm is one which Jarman describes, aptly, as like a ‘heart-beat’ – sensual, dream-like and erotic.\(^{504}\)

The painterly quality in many of Jarman’s Super-8 films, acquired through his unique technical approach was, however, not devoid of theoretical or philosophical interests. In his personal notebooks and published writings he referred to texts on diverse topics such as alchemy, mysticism and the writings of Carl Jung. Peter Wollen noted that Jarman’s ‘own work is full of references to magic, alchemy and occult lore’, and Gray Watson identified the influence of these texts on Jarman’s filmmaking:\(^{505}\)

Jarman read widely in the areas of psychology, magic and the occult ... In addition to Jung, he read James Hillman, notably such books as Dream and the Underworld and Pan and the Nightmare, and he was deeply influenced by Frances Yate’s writings on the hermetic tradition in the Renaissance: Giordano Bruno and, still more, John Dee were important reference points for him, as was Henry Cornelius Agrippa’s Three Books of Occult Philosophy.\(^{506}\)

These mystical and psychological texts informed Jarman’s broader creative practices, and opened up avenues for his explorations with film unconstrained by conceptual or modernist theories.

In his elegy for Jarman, Peter Wollen discussed Jarman’s final film Blue (1993), and the extensive thought that had gone into this work over many years; from
Jarman’s early admiration of the artist Yves Klein in the 1960s, to an engagement with theories of colour and perception by artists, philosophers and theorists such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Ludwig Wittgenstein and William Blake, and his observations of blue in his personal life, such as the flowers at his Prospect Cottage. Therefore, while his Super-8 films were possibly born out of intuitive experimentation rather than a clear, scripted sense of filmmaking or engagement with theory, they cannot be separated from his extensive read knowledge, his political engagement with gay rights, his work as a painter, film director and designer; all infusing his unique way of working with film. For Wollen therefore, *Blue* (1993) became a ‘magical act of resurrection through love’, with the film reaching ‘far beyond minimalism or colour, into the realms of poetry, symbolic discourse and yes, politics’. In this way the painterly, symbolic and mystical was carried through from these earlier Super-8 films to his final work, *Blue*.

**Optical Effects**

In further examples demonstrating the diversity of experimentation affiliated with the painting medium, a particularly interesting connection can be made between the optical paintings of Bridget Riley, such as her black-and-white *Movement in Squares* (1961) and films from Guy Sherwin’s *Optical Sound Films* (1971-2007). Both operate on a similar level, with regard to optics and visual perception, due to the retinal after-effects apparent when viewing the works. Riley’s style of painting, termed optical art, was prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s and was concerned primarily with optics, retinal resonance and perception. Painters like Riley explored the illusory effects of vision, perception and the picture plane, with paintings often appearing to have a restlessly moving surface.

Sherwin’s series of films (a long-term project begun in 1971) explored the production of sound by working directly on the optical soundtrack of the film strip. When these films are projected the projector ‘reads’ the soundtrack, producing an abstract rhythmic score, created by the use of repetitive ‘composition’. In Sherwin’s optical films the soundtrack was complemented by optical effects produced by images in the films, eliciting similar retinal effects to Riley’s optical paintings.

In *Cycles* (1972/77) Sherwin produced sound and image by working directly onto film leader. Paper dots were either stuck on or holes were punched into the filmstrip, with the dots creating both soundtrack and image through their placement on the
filmstrip. In *Cycles* Sherwin was interested in exploring the equivalence between sound and the ‘persistence of vision’, as he pointed out that the difference between units of time in film (24 frames per second) and sound (72 beats per second) created an interesting dialogue between visual and aural perception. During projection, as the dots increase on the filmstrip, they eventually become ‘a pulsating ball of light’; and together with the sound ‘the film highlights the different sensitivities in our visual and aural senses’. While Riley’s paintings do not create the same aural effects, the visual resonances create similar pulsating ‘moving’ paintings, acting on the viewer’s perception. Le Grice discussed the relationship between optical art and film, observing that ‘as with the more serious areas of Op Art, film work in this area exposes rather than exploits perceptual phenomena’. In this way both the paintings and films work on the act of seeing and perceptual modes of reception.

**Landscape in Film**

The landscape tradition has a long history in painting and drawing, and a more recent history in disciplines such as photography, film, performance and land art. Landscape is evident in a range of 1970s experimental films, forming either a central focus or a more peripheral part of the wider text. In some films, cinematographic recording devices directed experimentation and in others the landscape provided an environment in which to explore concepts related to space. In other films, landscape was explored with a firmer personal resonance, bearing some relationship to the Romantic landscape tradition of painters such as J. M. W Turner, or John Constable. Rees, describing urban and rural landscape filmmaking, taken up in LFMC films such as Le Grice’s *Whitchurch Down (Duration)* (1972) and Halford’s and Raban’s *Time Stepping* (1974), saw it linking:

> back to the story of British art and to its fusion of the empirical gaze with the new scientific meteorology in the nineteenth century. Just as in that earlier meeting of Constable’s eye with scientific topography, so in the 1970s a painterly understanding of light and form met up with the mechanical apparatus of camera and printer. The romantic vein in this tradition continues with Larcher’s epic scale films, which celebrate the same interaction of the eye and the machine to expand sight.

While some filmmakers took more procedural approaches, related to cinematographic recording devices, other more romantic affiliations to landscape were explored by non-LFMC filmmakers in works such as Tait’s *Aerial* (1974), Yoko Ono’s *Apotheosis*
(1970), Jarman’s *A Journey to Avebury* (1971) and in David Larcher’s *Mare’s Tail* (1969) and *Monkey’s Birthday* (1975). Landscape featured regularly in Jarman’s films and paintings, without seeking to impose a certain ‘view of the countryside but rather encapsulate and explore the nature and experience of a particular place’. His 1960s paintings often revealed ‘a dreamlike, surreal aspect, which is also explored in many of the films (for example, in *The Art of Mirrors* [1973], *Sebastiane* [1976], *The Garden* [1990] and *Blue* [1993]) – not a familiar geographical landscape but an eternal celestial one’. B. S. Johnson’s landscape (Port Ceiriad bay in north Wales) in *Fat Man on the Beach* (1974) also held particular personal and spiritual significance; ‘a place charged with memories for Johnson, memories of a strange, emotionally unsettled, superstitious phase of his life.’

In contrast to these romantically-infused or personally-held landscapes, were the more structured and cinematographically-focused approaches to landscape evident in the work of LFMC filmmakers, such as Chris Welsby and William Raban. Other filmmakers, not affiliated to the LFMC, also explored landscape, evident in films such as David Hall’s *Vertical* (1969) and Peter Greenaway’s *Water Wrackets* (1975). It will be useful to take a more in-depth look at some of these films in order to understand how landscape informed the work and how cinematographic recording procedures determined the final outcome. The relationship between the natural (landscape) and the scientific or mechanical (film) in Raban and Welsby’s films is explored in a particularly interesting manner. Approaches to films often combined a structured approach, which was also open to incidental occurrences shaping the final works.

Raban and Welsby’s 1971-72 collaborative work, *River Yar*, operates as a dialogue between landscape and photographic/cinematographic recording devices. Raban and Welsby spent three weeks during the spring and autumn equinoxes recording a tidal estuary on the Isle of Wight and in a conversation between Raban and art critic, John du Cane, Raban outlined the role experimentation and chance played in the filming of *River Yar*:

> When we arrived at this mill, it was getting dark and we were due to start filming at sunrise next morning. We bolted the camera to this windowsill without seeing the landscape. We decided to point the camera south because we wanted all the shadows to be apparent, and there was a decision to include some sky in the frame, but otherwise we made no aesthetic/romantic decisions in terms of composition.
While *River Yar* references the landscape tradition in art by the nature of its subject matter, the focus on cinematographic recording devices offered insights into aspects of duration, light and time within the depictions of the changing landscape. Welsby acknowledged the influence of Systems painters such as Malcolm Hughes and Peter Lowe on his work, yet stated that while he appreciated the influence of this systematic approach to working, it ‘was always tempered by his desire to oppose “what is structured, measured, systematic and predictable, [with] what in nature is quite the opposite,’”; a recognition of the important role the incidental played in his work.\(^{518}\)

The film is shown as a two-screen work consisting of real-time footage of sunrise and sunset and time-compression sequences where the swift rush of time is evident in the changing patterns of light, nature, day and night.

In Welsby’s Arts Council-funded, *Windmill II* (1973) and *Seven Days* (1974) the content of the films was determined by either wind or sun. In *Windmill II* Welsby attached eight blades, covered in reflective, mirrored fabric, onto the front of the camera. The 8-minute film, shot on a windy day, consists of varying views of a park landscape, which alternately reveal the landscape ahead or a reflection of the camera and the landscape behind it. These alternating views were dependent upon the direction and speed of the wind.

The 20-minute *Seven Days* (made with Jenny Okun), in a similar manner to *Windmill II*, depended on the elements for content. Filming took place in the Welsh countryside, with the camera placed on an equatorial mount (commonly used in astronomy). A frame was shot every ten seconds for a week, recording the sun’s arc across the sky. The shot direction was governed by the swivelling camera mount, recording either sky (when the sun was behind a cloud) or landscape (when the sun was out). With the natural elements directly determining the final outcome of these films, an interesting dialogue occurred whereby:

The techniques developed by Welsby made it possible for there to be a direct registration of natural phenomena on film. Natural processes were no longer simply recorded from the outside, as objects of observation; they could be made to participate in the scheme of observation itself.\(^{519}\)

This formed a kind of collaborative work between the natural and the technological.\(^{520}\) It is important to stress that while Welsby and Raban’s films were inspired and informed by the landscape, the more specific engagement with cinematographic recording devices, such as light, time and duration were the dominant foci of these works.
A number of filmmakers also used conceptually- and cinematographically-informed approaches to landscape to explore the relationship between the recording process and the figure within the landscape (natural or urban). In John Hilliard’s *From and To* (1971), two cameramen simultaneously record each other’s movements in an outdoor environment which included both nature and buildings. While one filmmaker turns on the spot, recording the scene in front of him at eye level, the other filmmaker moves in a circle around him, recording the first cameraman’s actions. The film is shown as a dual screen projection of the different recorded points of view, and (ideally) with the two cameramen providing ‘verbal accounts of their actions’ as part of the screening.\(^{521}\)

In a similar vein to *From and To*, Mike Duckworth recorded the landscape in *Body Arcs* (1973), with a camera used to record from a fixed, but rotating, position. Duckworth recorded ‘four self-filmed movements’ as he spun around on the spot.\(^{522}\) In contrast to this Martin Hearn recorded a small, remotely-positioned immobile figure in *Central Figure* (1976) and *Figure Spiral* (1978) as the camera moved around the landscape.\(^{523}\)

A number of screenings were presented for the Tate Gallery’s ‘Avant-garde British Landscape Films’ (1975) with curator, Deke Dusinberre, presenting films by William Raban, Chris Welsby, Mike Duckworth, Jane Clark, David Pearce and Renny Croft. In the programme notes Dusinberre identified the films as asserting ‘the illusionism of cinema through the sensuality of landscape imagery, and simultaneously assert[ing] the material nature of the representational process which sustains that illusionism’.\(^{524}\) Films by Welsby and Raban dominated the exhibition, with further connections to landscape in other art forms also identified:

In his notes for the exhibition Dusinberre commented on the link between the kind of measured progress through the landscape found in many landscape films (Renny Croft’s *Attermire* [1976] is a good example) and the photographs of the English artists Richard Long, Hamish Fulton and John Hilliard; and here perhaps some cross-fertilization did take place.\(^{525}\)

Rees also observed the connections between the three land artists, noting that they ‘had indeed emerged from the same art college and concept art background as the LFMC’.\(^{526}\) Interestingly, despite Dusinberre’s selected films focusing on conceptual and procedural approaches to filming the landscape, Curtis also described the way this was combined with ‘a passionate attachment to imagery of mountains, clouds, seascapes, parks and rural pastures’, suggestive of more romantic, pastoral traditions.
Furthermore, he remarked that ‘perhaps its greatest relevance in this context is the reminder it represented that alternatives existed to the materialist (anti-illusionistic) school’. This goes some way to recognising other forms of mid-1970s filmmaking, despite numerous accounts citing ‘alternatives to the materialist (anti-illusionistic)’ as returning at the end of the decade.

Long and Fulton were land artists who documented their walks across diverse terrain using photography, drawings, maps and notes as evidence of their ventures. Walking as art formed part of the conceptually-informed land art movement emerging in the 1960s. This newer experimental art form (taking a stance against the commodification of artworks as discussed in Chapter Three) literally transported art out of the gallery by focusing on the experience of landscape, and was exemplified by Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (1969). Long’s *Walking a Straight 10 Mile Line Forward and Back Shooting Every Half Mile (Dartmoor, England, January, 1969)* (1969) is one of the few films recording one of his walks, with the 6-minute film literally doing what the title suggests, and offering a condensed account of observations at various points on Long’s walk across Dartmoor.

**Further Engagements with Landscape**

While Fulton’s and Long’s walks share the common feature of landscape with the other films discussed here, the work of Annabel Nicolson provides an interesting case for discussion due to the diversity of her practice. Nicolson has been recognised for her short films and her seminal expanded cinema piece, *Reel Time* (1973), yet other works falling within the land art tradition description have received scant recognition. In *Redefining the Contours of Britain: Survey of Rural Circumstance* (1974) Nicolson carried out a walking tour around parts of southern England and the Midlands. Documentation of this project included local newspaper reports, discussing Nicolson’s intentions:

> It could be that she preferred to trace the coastline since much of her work takes the form of contour redefinition. Her survey on rural England, with particular reference to the circumstantial, is expected to be published early next year.

Documentation was later published in her artists’ book *escaping notice*. Parts of the book were exhibited in 1978 and 1994, although a concerted focus to exhibit *Redefining the Contours of Britain: Survey of Rural Circumstance* as land art (in the manner of Long or Fulton) was not made.
In Nicolson’s performance piece, *Sweeping the Sea* (1975), she literally swept the sea at the edge of the shoreline. While these walking works did not involve the use of film, the actions through space, and the durational nature of the events bear some relation to Nicolson’s other expanded cinema works, discussed below; with the immersive aspect of the work in *Sweeping the Sea* described as follows:

Her sweeping was slow and careful. Her movement was with the brush, towards rather than against it. From time to time she would inspect the tideline, take a few steps in another direction and then resume sweeping. After a while one realised that she was less distinct, though not actually further away. Perhaps it was deliberate this trick of making herself part of the background of being just slightly out of focus.\(^{534}\)

The sensitive nature of her engagement with the land was also documented in two photographic pieces, *Combing the Fields* (1976) and *Sleeping Like a Log* (1976), further demonstrating the diversity of Nicolson’s practice. *Combing the Fields* is a photographic record of the artist, in a field at Sandford Orcas in Dorset, ‘combing’ knee-high plants with an oversize comb. In correspondence with Nicolson she stated that it was early morning and the fields were full of frost, and that this private performance was about caring for the land.\(^{535}\) In a similar vein *Sleeping Like a Log* consists of six photographs depicting Nicolson either lying in a field, with the semblance of a log of wood, or lying on a tree trunk horizontally placed on the ground. As in the above-mentioned works, the entering into the landscape as an elemental being deeply connected to the land, was a significant factor. The works resonate with the performance and photographic works of Cuban artist, Ana Mendieta, although her relationship to the land was one of loss and trauma through personal displacement, whereas Nicolson’s works instead display a kinship with the land.

Two further film examples, relating specifically to land art and demonstrating a similar diversity of approach and interrelationship of practices as Nicolson’s, are Anthony McCall’s *Landscape for White Squares* (1972) and *Landscape for Fire* (1972). These films both records of large-scale performances taking place in rural landscapes (fields). The former is a short film documenting the event and consisting of a number of individuals moving across a frozen field and out of a dense fog, holding large, white, square sheets. The event was performed specifically for the camera, with the original intention being to distribute the ‘filmed, photographed, or audiotaped records’.\(^{536}\) The film *Landscape for Fire* (1972) differs in that it is not a
direct documentation of the event, but was filmed and edited to foreground the filmmaking process. These reveal the material and structural elements of the film and cinematographic processes, and include performers involved in the event within the film. The performance consisted of thirty-six fires, laid out in a grid formation, that were intermittently lit by performers according to McCall’s directions.\textsuperscript{537} Although McCall’s conceptual interest in serial structures and mathematical formation initially informed the editing process (his first attempt at editing) he became frustrated with the attempt to reconfigure the event on film. He therefore used the soundtrack (of foghorns, inaudible at first, then gradually moving closer and louder) to provide continuity. In this way he was liberated to follow a multiplicity of approaches and arrangements in the editing:

[H]e spliced in bits of film upside down, backward, and both upside down and backward (indeed in all of the ways that he described as evidently “wrong”) ... In \textit{Landscape for Fire}, each of these “incorrect” orientations serves to produce a visual analogue between film record and recorded event. McCall’s editing notes, for instance, relate the performance’s second “movement” (lit fires in horizontal lines) to sequences where film clips are run forward and then reversed, the form of the third movement, where the fires are treated singly, to “brief shots”, “chop cutting”, “confus[ing] directions”, and flipping the orientation of individual frames ... Completing his decision to feature the means of documentation prominently, McCall’s editing emphasized the filmstrip’s materiality, continuing his questioning of the disembodied transparency of the facilely consumable commercial reproduction.\textsuperscript{538}

The film therefore operated as documentation but also revealed film materiality. This was almost certainly informed by McCall’s involvement at the LFMC, where this kind of experimentation was prevalent during the decade, but also demonstrated clear links with the land art works explored by Fulton, Long and Nicolson. While landscape formed a common denominator in the films and art works discussed here, the approaches to filmmaking and engagements with the landscape – whether procedural, systematic, conceptual or romantic –produced a wide range of films, corresponding to the openness of approach taken in film and art experimentation in the decade.

\textbf{Film and Photography}

The relationship between photography and film is an obvious one since both are lens-based with common features related to camera-based image-making, such as light, frame, composition, film stock, processing and printing. Parallels are evident when looking at the physical filmstrip, where one can observe the thousands of still frames
making up the film sequence, which become animated through the mechanics of projection. Closer consideration of some films can more explicitly reveal the inter-relationship between the two.

Anne Rees-Mogg’s *Muybridge Film* (1973) was inspired by the work of Eadweard Muybridge, the early pioneer in photography, who recorded animal and human locomotion through sequential photographs shot with multiple cameras. In her 5-minute, silent, black-and-white film, Rees-Mogg captured the filmmaker Renny Croft performing a cartwheel. This is first shown as an accelerated action and is gradually slowed down as the film progresses, with production shots included within the body of the main film text. Rees-Mogg ‘took a simple action, took it apart, shuffled its order, and then reprojected it as a mime of its ancestor. But there is no magic about the trick in the sense that she spells out every step’.539 An earlier engagement with Muybridge’s work is also evident in Fred Drummond’s *Photo Film* (1967), consisting of sequential Muybridge photographs and still shots of a live model, which are animated.540

Further examples between photography and film are evident in Sherwin’s *Short Film Series* (1975-1998).541 As also discussed above, films such as *Metronome*, *Vermeer Still Life* or *Tree Reflection* are resonant of the still life or landscape genres found in painting. Many of the films in Sherwin’s series also bear a strong relationship to the photographic, as Sherwin explored the cinematographic processes of recording and image-making using the camera’s focusing and aperture mechanisms to explore tonal range, focus, time and light. Although the relationship with photography may seem self-evident, this is further emphasised in Sherwin’s focus on a single scene. *Tree Reflection, Bicycle, Eye and Bowl*, show the single image of the title like a beautifully composed photograph, with the slightest changes in light or movement visible as the films progress. The relationship to early cinema is also evident, as Sherwin used a hand-cranked 16mm camera, with the slightest of movements visible in each hand-cranked cycle.

In Sherwin’s explorations with light and time there was a planned structure to the films, although chance occurrences also formed a key part of the working process. In my interview with Sherwin he explained how incidents occurring during the filming of *Metronome*, provided unexpected revelations:

What happens at some point is that you have these two clockwork mechanisms and there are slight variations in that, and I didn’t expect that and the arm starts to kind of struggle. And this sort of reveals something about the mechanism that you use to
record it. Those are the kinds of things which, in a way, keep me interested because they’re not things that are part of the plan.\textsuperscript{542}

Sherwin’s \textit{Short Film Series} represented a continuing exploration into composition, light and the recording device of the camera. The changing light in the films was either determined naturally (changes in sunlight) or artificially through manipulating the aperture or shutter mechanisms. There is no set order for the screening of the films and they have been screened individually or as part of the series.

John Blake took a conceptual approach to the production and exhibition of \textit{Arrest} (1970). \textit{Arrest} (1970) is a 10-minute film, recorded by Peter Gidal, with Blake’s head moving in and out of frame. From a distance the accompanying print-out of the film – presented as a strip of film on the gallery wall – resembled a wave-like formation, although on closer inspection Blake’s head is made apparent. The dialogue between still and moving image was explicitly emphasised through the presentation of the printed filmstrip, a written theoretical statement and the looped film installation in the space. McCall’s \textit{16mm Film in Three Parts from Two Points} (1973) also draws some similarities with Blake’s \textit{Arrest}, as nine printed film frames from \textit{Landscape for Fire} (1973) were exhibited as a separate work within the space, also making direct links between the photographic/cinematographic.

\textbf{Drawing on Film}

Steve Farrer’s \textit{Ten Drawings} (1976) operates in a similar vein to Blake’s \textit{Arrest} (1970), although with firm references to drawing as opposed to photography. The screening of \textit{Ten Drawings} was often accompanied by an exhibition of the actual filmstrips and related drawings or diagrams, literally connecting the different disciplines or aspects of the media. The ten films in Farrer’s series were each created by laying fifty strips of clear, 16mm film leader side by side in rectangular formation. Each rectangle was drawn/painted with paint or ink and the strips were then joined together end-to-end. The projected film operates as a compilation of abstract images offering an equivalence of the whole surface of a drawing, satisfying Farrer’s intention to, ‘deal with a film in one stroke; to say, well – slash – I’ve dealt with beginning, middle and end in one go’.\textsuperscript{543} In exhibiting both film and drawings in the same space the transitory nature of film (the moving ‘drawing’) and the physical drawing are juxtaposed, creating an idiosyncratic dialogue between film physicality and the ephemeral existence of the drawings as they are projected in fragmented form.
Thus exposing the relationships between drawing/film and still/moving image still further, with Dusinberre identifying the film as a:

[R]adical departure from the technology and codes of cinematic representation, its adoption of a visual abstraction related to painting (and related to the abstract, dynamic ‘universal language’ envisaged by the neo-plasticists in the ’20), the transformation of a static drawing apprehended instantaneously into a projected strip apprehended temporally (with the complimentary subversion of ‘beginning, middle, and end’ through the ‘all over’ nature of the original drawings), the congruent/divergent sensory impressions produced by the marks as sound and as image (distribution prints have been adjusted to account for projection sync), the serial order and differentiation which accompanies minimal imagery.544

The soundtrack of Ten Drawings is produced through the ‘drawings’ on the sound strip of the film, resulting in the projector reading this as optical sound, as is the case with some of Sherwin’s Optical Sound Films, and Lis Rhodes’ Dresden Dynamo (1974). Rees compared these films conceptually to Robert Morris’ seminal minimalist work, Box with the Sound of its own Making (1961), consisting of a tape recorder, hidden inside a wooden box, playing the ‘soundtrack’ of its construction.545

Farrer’s Ten Drawings is not a chronologically sequential work and has been shown with the filmstrips in different succession. Dusinberre suggested that the work needed to be read beyond its apparently formalist organisation for its immediacy and spontaneity and ‘the lucid (game-playing) quality of the film’.546 With serial film works, such as Farrer’s Ten Drawings and Sherwin’s Short Film Series, the works in effect become renewed with each screening, lending vitality to their existence, not unlike the live-action expanded cinema works.

Sculpting Space

Relationships between film and sculpture were evident in-frame, where film content documented or referred to space, as in some of the landscape or cubist-inspired films mentioned above. Conceptual artists such as David Dye, John Hilliard and Tony Hill also used film to engage with physical aspects of space, either in-frame or in the projection context. Tony Hill’s Untitled (1971) consisted mostly of footage shot from above, such as a pavement with pedestrians walking on it.547 The film was then projected into a cubicle onto the floor creating a dynamic viewer situation, as Nicolson explained: ‘One is physically confined and in contact with the screen/image, walking on clouds, water, fire. One’s own sense of scale and weight is transformed in this intensely physical situation’.548
In Hill’s *Floor Film* (1975) the audience similarly had to walk on the screen ‘within’ the projected image. In 2nd *Floor Film* (1972), shot on Super-8, the audience was required to crawl through a tunnel and onto a glass floor onto which the film was projected (from below onto tracing paper stretched beneath the glass). The film content consisted of people crawling and clinging on to the lower side of the glass. These works therefore create a very specific viewer situation whereby “[t]he image content dictates the spectator experience as much as the environmental framework, but the nature of the controlled spaces for two and three people at a time keeps the experience particularly immediate.” These works are notable as they directly engage with the architectural space as well, which to an extent determines the shape of the work.

In discussing the diverse forms of 1970s experimentation, Nicolson identified that ‘the use of film as an expedient for demonstrating concepts is diametrically opposite from the structural use of film and still more so from perceptual and psychological exploration identified with personal film makers [sic].’ She expressed her regret that “[t]he lack of cross reference between artists’ and film makers’ [sic] is disheartening since these polarities of conceptual and perceptual emphasis could throw illuminating perspectives on each other.” Although Nicolson distinguished the conceptual artists and LFMC filmmakers as taking particularly distinctive (and separate) approaches to film, there were also in fact overlaps in the way that LFMC filmmakers used underlying concepts to pursue their works (as in Raban’s or Le Grice’s cubist-informed films discussed above) and where a conceptual approach was taken to reveal the materiality of film and the projection mechanism, as in David Dye’s *Film onto Film* (1972).

In Dye’s investigations with film, he sought to reveal the essence of the film ‘by stripping away almost everything: seeing what you’ve got left’, resulting in works creating a dialectic between film content and viewing context. His works ranged from single screen film and installations to more performative expanded cinema, with the architectural space becoming an integral part of the work. In *Screen* (1970), for example, a circle was painted onto the wall, covered up and a film of the circle was projected around the circle, with Dye revealing that the idea of the screen had diverse meanings such as ‘to screen onto something, to reveal something, or, to hide something’, creating an paradox. The engagement with the space, by projecting onto the wall was also integral to the piece, making conceptual connections between
film and space. In Dye’s *Unsigning for 8 Projectors* (1972) eight film loops simultaneously screened the same action – Dye’s hand signing his name in reverse – onto a screen suspended from the ceiling. The signatures were fragmented with letters projected in random, non-linear sequence on the hanging (and moving) screen and onto the surrounding walls. Dye noted that he saw the work ‘very much as a piece of sculpture. Though it involved film it was one of the most sculptural things I’ve done, it was a very static piece in a way, that people walked around it’. Therefore the experiential viewer engagement, with works such as this, also imposed on the viewer the need to consider the film material, space and the sculptural aspects of display.

In, arguably, the seminal sculptural film of the decade, *Line Describing a Cone* (1973), ‘solid light’ appeared to take on a physical, sculptural form. McCall’s 30-minute film began with a white dot, continuing the slow progression of a circular line through space and concluding with a completed circle. As the white line on the black background progressed, the darkened space lightened and the light beam took on an increasingly sculptural form. Emissions from a smoke machine (and a 1970s smoking audience) increased the ‘solidity’ of the light beam, with the audience encouraged to move around and interact with the cone of light, with the experiential therefore forming a key part of the work. In McCall’s reflections on 1970s filmmaking in Britain, he acknowledged his awareness of the anti-Hollywood position taken by many filmmakers and Gidal’s more militant theoretical approaches to filmmaking, but stated that his interests lay fundamentally in process as this ‘was part of the air we were breathing, and I was far more inspired by conceptual originality as far as form was concerned, than by ideological analysis’.

‘No-Film’ Film

In a further example, where the essence of film and its apparatus were investigated, McCall pared the film medium down to its barest essentials in *Long Film For Ambient Light* (1975). The interaction between space and time was explicitly revealed in this minimal work, consisting of a large room with a single light bulb hanging from the ceiling in the middle of the room. Windows were covered with white paper, allowing light to enter during the day and forming a screen at night. The typed text, ‘Notes on Duration’, exhibited within the installation space, formed an integral part in contextualising the work. McCall’s text provided a critique of the ‘conventional
distinction between static and temporal events’, underpinning the principle distinction between art and film. In his ‘Notes on Duration’ he outlined his intentions:

This film sits deliberately as a threshold, between being considered a work of movement and being considered a static condition. Formalist art criticism has continued to maintain a stern, emphatic distinction between these two states, a division that I consider absurd. Everything that occurs, including the (electro-chemical) process of thinking, occurs in time.

As viewers moved within the space, consisting of neither film nor projector, they became aware of the presence of the rudiments of the film medium: light, space and time. The title of McCall’s conceptual critique was a key factor in determining his intentions and directing the viewers’ comprehension of the work. This paradoxical ‘no-film film’ was described by Dusinberre as being, ‘the very emphasis on the material nature of the cinema and of cinematic representation [which] leads to immateriality’.

Jonathan Walley used the term ‘paracinema’ to describe works such as *Long Film For Ambient Light*, tangentially related to film but not following conventional modes of production and screening practice:

Paracinema identifies an array of phenomena that are considered “cinematic” but that are not embodied in the materials of film as traditionally defined. That is, the film works I am addressing recognize cinematic properties outside the standard film apparatus, and therefore reject the medium-specific premise of most essentialist theory and practice that the art form of cinema is defined by the specific medium of film. Instead, paracinema is based on a different version of essentialism, which locates cinema’s essence elsewhere.

Walley referenced essays by André Bazin and Sergei Eisenstein, as they both located film within the imaginary sphere of culture, prior to the invention of the cinema, providing a particular interesting analysis for works referencing the pre-cinematic. Eisenstein suggested that the concept of montage existed ‘everywhere outside film’ including our everyday perception of visual experience. Bazin was interested in the idea of film unconstrained by its physical properties and, like Eisenstein, he considered it a ‘conceptual phenomenon – a dream, a fantasy’ preceding its technological and material invention. They related this to memory and the internal capacity for visual invention within the imagination, with film as a concept manifesting itself temporarily in a particular physical form. Walley’s insights are useful to consider for these forms of experimentation, preoccupying a number of filmmakers in the decade, as they opened up the parameters between practices, particularly where conceptual and minimal art and sculpture were concerned.
In Tony Hill’s *Point Source* (1973) a sense of pre-cinematic shadow-play engaged the viewer as Hill performed with a small, bright light acting as the projector that threw light onto a screen or the walls of the space. Hill held small cage-like objects, such as baskets or sieves between screen/wall and ‘projector’, creating a shadow-play as he moved the objects closer or further away from the screen. The loud soundtrack complimented the shadow-play, forming an unnerving, yet melodious score, and transfixing the audience though these simplest of means. Simon Field described Hill’s expanded cinema works as being ‘unpretentious, justly popular, they captivate and intrigue with a “hall of mirrors” astonishment, engendering the sort of child-like wonder that still surely underlies our enduring fascination with the experience of cinema’. Field’s comment also interestingly relates to Eisenstein’s and Bazin’s concepts related to the pre-cinematic existence of cinema identified in Walley’s article.

In a similar way to *Point Source* the cinematic was referred to (through screen, light and action in space) in Nicolson’s performance piece, *Matches* (1975). Two actors, standing in front of two screens, read identical copies of the same text by light emitted from matches repeatedly struck by the two readers. This resulted in a slow and staggered progress, as the intermittent light determined the progression of the work, highlighting the presence of sound, light and shadow. As in *Point Source* Nicolson dealt with very basic elements, namely light, shadow, time and space, with the duration of the piece referencing film’s progression through time. Walley cited examples by filmmakers Paul Sharits and Anthony McCall in his article, drawing pertinent parallels with Nicolson’s work; identifying that ‘this initial gesture of disintegrating the medium, literally piece by piece, was the first step in a larger process of locating the cinematic outside of film’. In works such as this, firm concepts were combined with more experimental approaches, allowing for incidental occurrences to determine the final outcome of the work. This formed a key aspect of Nicolson’s approach to her practice which she outlined as follows:

Since 1973, I have been working away from film, towards more circumstantial situations. The aspects of projection which interest me have always been the transient, fragile qualities of light beaming through space. The accidental, the inadvertent light sources which crept into projection situations give me a point of departure. These performances change shape depending on who helps perform them.
Nicolson’s works, informed by her openness of approach to practice and interests in the circumstantial and incidental, present particularly useful considerations where the expansion of the film medium is concerned. This is equally relevant for works such as *Long Film For Ambient Light, Point Source* and *Matches*, where film, stripped down to its basic components such as light, shadow, space, sound and duration, reconfigure the meaning of film and the mechanics of projection that bring it into existence.

**Conclusion**

The diverse intersections between experimental filmmaking and the visual arts are evident from the discussions and film examples presented in this chapter. It was notable how other visual art practices such as painting, drawing or sculpture informed filmmaking, but also simultaneously extended the boundaries of the film medium. Andrea Tarsia noted the importance of ‘time’ as a dominating influence on experimental practices where “[t]ime was introduced as a recurring subject; not as an alternative to space, but as a fourth dimension that (materially and conceptually) re-defined the spatial possibilities of art.”

Although the influence of the diverse visual arts such as sculpture, photography, performance, drawing or painting were evident in either film content or in the screening context of the film, essentially the motivation behind the works was in the personal approaches for ‘film thought’ to occur, whether through a poetic inspiration with light, colour or subject matter or through more planned and constructed approaches initiating production. In this way the medium of film offered opportunities for experimentation with ideas (where more conceptual approaches could be taken) or in a more exploratory manner, in using the camera, the filmstrip or the exhibition context as a medium of exploration. In the following chapter explorations with film will be extended further to consider countercultural influences and relationships to poetry, dreams and the unconscious.
CHAPTER FIVE: VISIONARY, POETIC AND DIARY FILMS

But once Lysergic Acid was launched as something other than mere pleasure, as a ready window on the Zen eternal, as a short cut back to the organic life, religion and wonderment, as an open road to Laing’s lost self, it left art and Timothy Leary standing and took protest and pop with it.\footnote{Jeff Nuttall, 1968}

I found this expression about ‘stalking the image’. That’s Lorca in a tercentenary lecture about Don Luis de Gongora. And he also says “for Gongora, an apple is no less intense than the sea, a bee is no less astonishing than a forest.” “He takes all materials in the same scale”, and “the Poet must know this,” Lorca says. The kind of cinema that I care about is on that level, of poetry, and I might say in a way that my life’s work has consisted of making film poems.\footnote{Margaret Tait, 1983}

In this chapter more expressive, representational films, informed by aspects of the countercultural movement, psychoanalysis, mysticism, the occult, popular culture, literature and diaristic approaches to filmmaking, will be discussed. Although relationships to the visual arts, focused on in the previous chapter, are also evident in many of the films, the personal, symbolic or metaphoric use of image was central to many of the films under discussion here. This contrasted with some of the conceptual approaches discussed in Chapter Four, and with the anti-representational stance taken by some of the LFMC films discussed in the following chapter. For some of the filmmakers discussed here it was merely the joy of ‘stalking’ and capturing images (as Tait suggests in the epigraph), thereby offering a record of an individual’s life, surroundings or travels; and connecting to personal biographies and histories. Although cinematographic recording and structuring devices also informed some aspects of filmmaking, these would generally not form the overriding focus for these films. Many filmmakers discussed here trained in art schools, and some were also informed by their work as avant-garde writers (B. S. Johnson) and as poets (Margaret Tait), or by their involvement in theatre and independent cinema (Jane Arden).

The dominant view that personal or visionary forms of experimental filmmaking fell away during the decade, only to make a return at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, has been reinforced by numerous written accounts of 1970s history. This was discussed at length in Chapter One where evidence of this claim was provided in written texts. My central argument – that there was no return and this work existed throughout the decade – is supported by further evidence in the diverse range of films under discussion here. This review takes an alternative position,
developing new forms of categorisation in order to show that dominant accounts of 1970s experimental film history have papered over a diversity of filmmaking approaches, particularly where the image was centrally placed within the texts. This re-examination forms an essential part in understanding the rich diversity in 1970s filmmaking practices.

At the outset of this chapter some key concerns related to the counterculture and diaristic, personal approaches to filmmaking will be discussed, as this will assist in understanding the contexts informing filmmaking. Thereafter, films will be considered in greater detail, referring (where applicable) to Sitney’s taxonomical definitions of ‘psycho-dramatic trance’, ‘lyrical’, ‘mythopoeia’ and ‘diary’ (as outlined in Visionary Film). While Sitney’s definitions act as useful guidelines in this review of 1970s filmmaking, this is not to suggest that the British films should explicitly be read through his analyses.

**Contexts for Filmmaking**

In the Introduction to this thesis the underlying disquiet about the conservatism of post-war Britain and the subsequent counterculture were briefly discussed. According to Peter Whitehead the more frivolous media term, the ‘Swinging Sixties’, belied the underlying societal conflicts, with significant events such as the Vietnam War, the CND movement, decolonisation, campaigns for racial and gender equality all leading to a crisis in Western culture and society. By the end of the 1960s, however, aspects of radical countercultural opposition were taken into more theoretical and academic forms, as Duncan Reekie observed:

> The New Left gathered around the development of the journal New Left Review (1959), the campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and the London New Left Club in Soho ... The central thematic of the New Left was that socialism had to be radically reconceived if it was to challenge the new forms of post-war corporate and consumer capitalism and that this reconception had to be based on the development of a rigorous intellectual investigation into contemporary society.

The theorisation and intellectualisation of oppositional approaches (to the condition of Western society and the increasing American imperialism) undoubtedly informed many aspects of 1970s society and culture. In Chapter Two the increasing institutionalisation (as the decade progressed) of certain aspects of experimental filmmaking was considered, with discussions centring on the increase in new filmmakers emerging from art schools and the increasing reliance on state funding.
The theorisation of filmmaking practices, led by dominant discourses around structural and material experimentation (by filmmaker/theorists, Peter Gidal and Malcolm Le Grice and Screen-theory), also took place alongside the increasing institutionalisation. Alternatives to institutionalisation and theorisation did, however, also exist and seeds sown by 1960s countercultural activity continued to be an important influence on society, culture and experimental filmmaking. It will therefore be useful to briefly consider these countercultural influences to establish how they informed some of the filmmaking discussed in this chapter.

Alongside (and often driving) the urgent 1960s socio-political protests was a trans-Atlantic flow of information related to diverse scientific, theoretical, literary, anthropological and religious/mystical texts. Some of these texts had emerged at the turn of the 20th century, finding a more concerted focus from the 1950s onwards. Many of these investigations were informed by research into non-Western cultures and societies, also seeking to further understand the human mind and Western society.

One of the key countercultural influences came out of scientific research into mental illness and the unconscious mind, dating back as far as the 1880s. Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theories and Carl Jung’s analytical psychology were particularly groundbreaking as they investigated the unconscious, dreams and the human psyche in order to understand neuroses and psychoses.577

Alternative approaches to psychiatric and psychological scientific research were also taken in the early 1900s by philosophers and medical professionals who were investigating individual and cosmic consciousness.578 The writer, Aldous Huxley’s influential countercultural text, The Doors of Perception (1961), was informed by his earlier research into Eastern mysticism, primitive ritual and folklore.579 Huxley researched the unconscious mind and states of psychosis by taking mescaline and documenting his experiences. His findings were considered a fundamental breakthrough in understanding the ‘reservoir of untapped vision and inspiration’ held within the unconscious.580 Huxley’s discoveries and the medical community’s subsequent research into psychotropic drugs and the unconscious also inspired Harvard psychologist Timothy Leary’s research into the effects of psilocybin and lysergic acid (LSD).581 Leary was convinced of the therapeutic effects of LSD in consciousness expansion, becoming an ardent campaigner for its widespread use and (naïvely) hoping for an international transformation of consciousness.582 Leary’s
adage, first delivered at a press conference in 1966 to promote LSD, to ‘tune in, turn on and drop out’ has since become inexorably linked with countercultural attitudes.

The search for expanded consciousness, the opening up of perception or an inner connection to the self or god through drugs, mysticism or the occult became a key part of the counterculture environment. Jeff Nuttall described the 1960s countercultural milieu in London as follows:

The acid culture, chanting its slogans of “Turn on, tune in, drop out” and “Do your own thing”, spread throughout the western [sic] world at a brisk rate. Throughout 1967 the spread was marked by the appearance of scores of psychedelic newspapers, mixed-media pop clubs, big bright unreadable posters and “head shops” dealing in badges, beads, prayer wheels, joss sticks and all the paraphernalia of pop-buddhism. This heady mix of psychoanalysis, drug use, meditation and occult ritual would also inform experimental filmmaking. These influences are evident in films such as Jane Arden (and Jack Bond’s) The Other Side of Underneath (1972) and Anti-Clock (1979). Their Vibration (1975) also includes the practice of Sufi meditation. In The Other Side of the Underneath (1972) and Kenneth Anger’s Invocation to my Demon Brother (1969) the consumption of psychotropic drugs appears to have enhanced the performer’s actions. This also seems to be the case in Stephen Dwoskin’s Central Bazaar (1975). Anthony McCall, whose minimalist films were discussed in the previous chapter, also produced films such as Sigmund Freud’s Dora (1979) clearly demonstrating links to psychoanalysis. Jeff Keen also noted his interest in surrealism, and titled his film Mad Love (1978) after the surrealist, Andre Breton’s novel.

The seminal Albert Hall poetry (1965) event (discussed in the Introduction) had marked a significant point in London’s counterculture movement, offering a sense of hope against the socio-political malaise:

After the Albert Hall I wrote to Klaus Lea crying: “London is in flames. The spirit of William Blake walks on the water of Thames ... Come and drink the dew.” ... After the sick capitulation of CND it did look as though we were once again winning. The Philadelphia Foundation had procured Kingsley Hall for their regenerative madness. Leary had set up and established the Alte House at Millbrook. We were all suddenly in touch with one another, thrown out by the termination of our loneliness.

Nuttall admitted, however, that the renewed optimism in the possibility of a more agreeable, humane society was to a large extent attributed to one factor: ‘It seems fastidious to pretend that the overriding agent which produced this new bizarrity, the
new relaxation and colourful contrast to previous earnest tight-lipped attitudes, was not Lysergic Acid'. The ‘Alte House’ Nuttall referred to was Leary’s ‘therapeutic’ establishment outside New York. Leary also had ties to an important and influential anti-psychiatry movement in London, taking unorthodox approaches to the treatment of mental illness and led by the psychiatrist R. D. Laing, who had taken up residence in Kingsley Hall in 1965.

Preceding and continuing in parallel to Leary’s quest to ‘liberalise humanity’ through the use of LSD, was an important group of literary individuals known as the ‘Beat Generation’, ‘Beatniks’ or ‘Beats’. (The Albert Hall poetry event consisted Beat poets). Beat culture was exemplified in key texts such as Jack Kerouac’s stream-of-consciousness novel *On the Road* (1957), Allen Ginsberg’s poem *Howl* (1956) and William S. Burroughs’ novel *The Naked Lunch* (1959). The Beats were notorious for their association with drug-taking, sexual permissiveness, Eastern mysticism and a rejection of American values as they sought to throw off the conventions of a traditional and conservative American way of life (which they referred to as being ‘square’). Reekie aptly described the historical roots informing the movement and its ethos:

Like European bohemianism, beat developed as a zone of relative transgression in square society. They shunned the nine-to-five corporate existence and lived desperate lives of voluntary poverty. They experimented with drugs, magic, Zen, popular montage, sex and psychoanalysis. Instead of cabaret they had the jazz club, bebop and poetry readings at the coffee shop. Mostly they were middle-class, male and white but there were working class Beats, female Beats, black Beats, and the saints of the movement were queer or bisexual: Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Neal Cassady.

The influence of Beat culture in American experimental filmmaking was evident in films, such as Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie’s *Pull My Daisy* (1959) and films by Jack Smith, John Cassavettes and Ken Jacobs. A number of these formed part of the New American Cinema films, screened in Britain in 1964 and 1968, and would, in part, prove important in shaping some British experimental film developments. Some of the more explicit connections, between American and British countercultural circles, were made through the presence of the American filmmakers, Kenneth Anger (discussed in greater detail below) and writer/filmmaker William Burroughs, in England.

Burroughs lived in England for 6 years from 1966 and collaborated with British film distributor and director, Anthony Balch, and artist, Brion Gysin. Three films
came out of these collaborations; *Towers Open Fire* (1962-3), *Cut-ups* (1966) and *Bill and Tony* (aka: *Who’s Who*) (1972). *Towers Open Fire* was screened at the *International Times* launch (October 1966) and *Cut-ups* opened at the Cinephone Cinema in London’s Oxford Street. *Bill and Tony* features Burroughs and Balch as two talking heads with mismatched voices and a Godardian disjunction between sound and image.\(^{594}\)

While the countercultural milieu and the heady mix of psychoanalysis, drug use, meditation or occult ritual influenced certain aspects of 1970s British experimental filmmaking, discussed in this chapter, the wider framework of personal, representational forms of filmmaking also included poetic renderings of individual observations, reflections or memories. A range of 1970s diaristic experimental films, informed by filmmakers’ personal observations of the world, offered direct insights into the filmmaker’s lives. Margaret Tait’s *Tailpiece* (1975) and *Place of Work* (1975, for example, documented the move from the long-term family home. David Larcher expressed his personal vision of the world in his epic travelogue, *Monkey’s Birthday* (1975), which ‘must be appreciated in the simplicity and beauty of its diary format, in the intensity of its personal quest, and in the ambitiousness of its representation as universal odyssey’.\(^{595}\) B. S. Johnson paid homage to Carl Jung and Robert Graves’ *The White Goddess* in his enigmatic self-parodying, *Fat Man on a Beach* (1973). In Anne Rees-Mogg’s autobiographical trilogy a diaristic approach was taken to document her family history as she explained: ‘I was trying not to be within the conventions of the English avant-garde. I felt much more related to American films like Jonas Mekas, and diary film.’\(^{596}\) Ian Breakwell was one of Britain most tireless diary artists, observing the minutia of daily life – with acute observations of the absurd in the ordinary – in written, drawn, painted and filmed accounts. Collectively these autobiographically informed (often poetic) filmed recordings of the everyday and ordinary (sometimes extraordinary) life form a substantial body of work, adding to the diversity in 1970s experimental filmmaking.

**New Considerations for 1970s British Experimental Films**

A consideration of the descriptions used in Sitney’s *Visionary Film* – ‘psycho-dramatic trance’, ‘lyrical’, ‘mythopoeia’ and ‘diary/diaristic’ – provide some useful tools for examining a range of 1970s British film, displaying some similar tendencies. Many of Sitney’s films were shown in his NAC (1968) British tour and his criteria
provide useful entry to more representational, expressive 1970s British films which are over-shadowed in the majority of 1970s historical accounts.

‘Psycho-dramatic trance’ was used to describe American films that held aspects of psychoanalysis, transcendental states of dream, hallucination or imaginary states-of-being in dramatic tension. Sitney’s examples included films by Maya Deren and Kenneth Anger’s *Fireworks* (1947), where a fast-paced editing style was used to depict the trance state, revealing a disorientated sense of time and geography. The influence of 1920s and 1930s German Expressionist and French Surrealist films was also evident in the dislocated narratives, rapid editing style and depiction of surreal experiences. Sitney outlined ‘psycho-dramatic trance’ filmmaking as follows:

It deals with visionary experience. Its protagonists are somnambulists, priests, initiates of rituals, and the possessed, whose stylized movements the camera, with its slow and fast motions, can re-create so aptly. The protagonist wanders through a potent environment toward a climactic scene of self-realization. The stages of his progress are often marked by what he sees along his path rather than what he does. The landscapes, both natural and architectural, through which he passes are usually chosen with naïve aesthetic considerations, and they often intensify the texture of the film to the point of emphasizing a specific point of symbolism.

The ‘lyrical’ film differed from the ‘psycho-dramatic trance’ film in its approaches to consciousness. Sitney gave the examples of the early, short films of Stan Brakhage ‘in which the filmmaker could compress his thoughts and feelings while recording his direct confrontation with intense experiences of birth, death, sexuality, and the terror of nature’. With their superimpositions, rapid editing, hand-painting and scratching on the filmstrip, these films created a lyrical poetic sense that embodied a personal vision and an ‘uneasy inwardness’.

The term ‘mythopoeia’ was first used to describe Brakhage’s *Dog Star Man* (1964), recognising the film as stationing ‘itself within the rhetoric of Romanticism, describing the birth of consciousness, the cycle of the seasons, man’s struggle with nature, and sexual balance in the visual evocation of a fallen titan bearing the name of the Dog Star Man’. Although Sitney’s description was specific to Brakhage’s film, the general preoccupation of mythopoeic filmmaking identified filmmakers drawing their inspiration from a range of sources firmly bound up within their personal vision of dream, nightmare, religion or symbol, thereby creating a kind of personal mythology. It signalled a type of filmmaking drawing heavily on a self-referential poetic sense of mythology and invention, including classical mythologies (Greek, Roman or Egyptian), earth cults or the supernatural. This differed from the fantastical
worlds (in literature) that had a clear sense of order related to geography, history or anthropology. Instead the mythopoeic filmmaker’s vision created a personal mythology through dreams, visions and symbols.

Although ‘diary’ films also included self-referential approaches to filmmaking, these did not generally include the extent of invention and personal mythology as the mythopoeic films revealed. The relationship between the individual and their place in the world or their surroundings focused many of these films, although they did not necessarily follow a didactic, narrative style. Approaches to 1970s British diary filmmaking varied greatly, but generally films did not reveal a chronological account of events, but were more akin to Sitney’s description:

Unlike the literary diary, the diary film does not follow a day-by-day chronology. Structurally, it corresponds more to a notebook, but in its drive towards a schematic or fragmented expression of the totality of the film-maker’s life, it is more like a diary, perhaps one in which the entry dates have been lost and the pages scrambled.603

Sitney discussed the films of the prolific American film diarist, poet, archivist, writer and filmmaker, Jonas Mekas, who has recorded his life events and reflections for the past fifty years.604 Mekas documented his life as an exile in New York, attempting ‘in a period of desperation’ to ‘grow roots into the new ground, to create memories’.605 British diary filmmakers included Ian Breakwell, whose Arts-Council funded Continuous Diary (1977) prompted the ICA’s ‘A Season of Diary Films’ (1977).606 Three programmes of ‘Diary Films at the Co-op’ (1977) were also concurrently screened at the LFMC and included British diarists, Tim Cawkwell, David Curtis, Phillip Drummond, Jeff Keen, Bruce Lacey, Chris Munger, Annabel Nicolson, Tony Sinden and Alan Spademan.607 These diarists and the ones discussed below form a rich body of work contributing to the diversity in 1970s film experimentation in the decade.

The richness of 1970s British experimentation is revealed in the range of personal, representational films discussed below, adding to the already acknowledged history related to experimentation with structure and material. It may be prescient to be reminded of the question posed earlier in this thesis: asking how much the Marxist ideological position militated against forms of personal expression. Some useful answers can be found in Pam Cook’s essay, ‘The Point of Expression in Avant-Garde Film’ (1978), where she identified some particularly pertinent points, relating to the central arguments of this thesis:
The idea of “self-expression” suggesting as it does the creation of a private language to convey the personal fantasies and obsessions of a single individual, has come under attack from “structural” film-makers in America and Europe with their formalist concerns, and from Marxists for whom it is a concept based on bourgeois individualism which asserts an independence from the dominant system that can only be illusory, thus relegating itself to a politically marginal position from which it can never radically change the dominant ideology. Nevertheless, it is a concept which, with its emphasis on the personal, the intimate, and the domestic, has always been important to the Women’s Movement, and the personal diary form, for instance, has always been a means of self-expression for women to whom other avenues were closed.  

Cook identified some important issues about personal forms of filmmaking, focused on expressing the self (in response to one’s surrounding, life experiences or observations) through the film medium. This was especially anathema to 1970s collectivist Marxist ideals, seeking to dispel any sense of ‘bourgeois’ individualism and personal expression. Although Cook identified that personal expression was particularly important for the women’s movement, it was also an important part of 1970s experimental filmmaking practices which have been overshadowed by structural and material experimentation. The dominant Marxist ideology, holding sway in the 1970s, against personal expression has been largely responsible for the lack of recognition for a substantial proportion of experimental filmmakers. As identified earlier in this thesis accounts of the decade have continued to be perpetuated (the dominance of structural and material film and the problematic ‘return to image’ thesis), undermining these important personally-informed, image-rich and representational works. The due consideration given to these diverse forms of personal filmmaking provided in this chapter (and argued for throughout this thesis) should make some amends to ensure that this colourful, varied and important work is given the recognition it deserves.

**Psychodramatic Trance, Lyrical and Mythopoeia in British Films**

**Invocation to My Demon Brother and Rayday**

In the first detailed considerations – related to the distinctions psychodramatic trance, lyrical and mythopoeia – films by Kenneth Anger, Jeff Keen and Derek Jarman will be discussed.  


Anger’s two films neatly bookend the decade and although Anger is
an American, he lived in (or had links with) Britain throughout the 1970s, and both films have production ties with Britain.\footnote{611} A. L. Rees noted that Anger’s main British supporter was ‘the incisive critic Tony Rayns, [who] had limited time for the earnest structuralists at the Arts Lab and Camden Town’.\footnote{612} Invocation to my Demon Brother was first screened at the Edinburgh Film Festival (1969), shortly after Bobby Beausoleil (briefly appearing in the film as the top-hatted Lucifer) was arrested for murder, reinforcing the unnerving macabre occult ritual in the film.\footnote{613} Despite the eleven year gap in the release dates of the two films, they were closely connected:

The development and footage of the two films is integrated. Invocation as it now stands is based on fragments of a larger-scale unfinished work, a template from which Lucifer Rising was produced. Recycling the footage filmed in California from the original Lucifer Rising project with the new London material, Invocation to my Demon Brother was conceived.\footnote{614}

In Gary Lachman’s recent account, he also elaborated on the relationship between the two films, suggesting that:

Invocation and Lucifer Rising should, I think, be viewed back to back, and not simply because Invocation is all we have of Anger’s original idea for Lucifer. The intensity and jagged texture of Invocation – it’s a film in which, as Tony Rayns remarks, “every cut hurts” – seems to parallel the intensity and uncertainty of the counterculture at the time, and Lucifer, rising more than a decade later, seems to embody the less intense but more “harmonious” sensibility of the New Age consciousness that emerged from 1960s radicalism.\footnote{615}

Both films are influenced by Anger’s continued interests in the occult (particularly the occultist, Aleister Crowley) and mythology.

In Invocation to my Demon Brother and Rayday the soundtrack is instrumental in setting the tone; both are aurally abrasive and heighten the tension with frenzy and chaos prevailing as the films progress. The soundtrack of Invocation to my Demon Brother was scored by Mick Jagger on a Moog synthesizer, and begins with a slow, rhythmic drone as the film’s opening shots cut between a group of young, naked males sprawled on a sofa and an albino male face. In the ensuing opening scenes a small, skull-shaped hashish pipe is passed around a group of performers dressed in opulent costume. The sound gradually quickens, continuing as an abrasive whirr throughout the film.

In the opening scenes of Rayday, the names of performers are announced before a sonorous, rasping soundtrack ensues and a group of costumed and masked actor are seen occupying an outdoor wasteland filled with car wrecks and detritus. Keen’s films are generally – and Rayday is no exception here – characterised by an excess of
images, often in double or triple superimposition, with short jump-cuts often operating as a barrage of montage. Similarly, although not quite as visually cacophonous and with more of a ‘narrative’ (if one can go so far to call this one), Anger’s *Invocation to my Demon Brother* is a stream of images, unfolding in fast-paced montage with some superimpositions and the occasional use of a prismatic lens breaking up the screen.

The filmmakers take the lead in both films as co-ordinators of events, but Anger more resolutely presides over the scene as a Magus initiating and overseeing the occult ritual unfolding on the screen. Keen’s leading role, as executor of events, is less authoritative than Anger’s; he is represented as an inadvertent Mickey Mouse-masked Magus, reeling in the excessive array of tacky plastic toys, junk and consumer goods that are repeatedly burnt, smashed or dismembered. Shots of Keen’s comic book illustrations fuel the disarrayed narrative disorder, and in both films an interesting relationship can be drawn between the ritualistic, frenetic rhythm and the use of fire.

The use of fire in Anger’s occult ritual has close affiliations with the satanic realm, but for Anger, Lucifer as the devil, is also representative of the morning star Venus, meaning literally ‘bringer of light’. During Anger’s ritual he sets a page that he is holding a-light as he ‘gyrates widdershins (counter-clockwise) around the “solar swastika” as “Swirling Spiral Force” to enable the Bringer of Light to break through’. The burning flames then fill the screen and in a later scene they are transposed over writhing bodies. In Keen’s world fire is wrought as a destructive mechanism; burning, melting or dismembering the paraphernalia of trash littering his films. Fires burn in Keen’s outdoor wasteland scene as if part of a ritual; at one point a fire burns in a car and at another a burning chair is placed next to the sea. In both films the transformative element of fire operates to elicit change, as the necessary destruction before resurrection.

Both Keen and Anger drew on images of popular culture and media in their films. Keen used Hollywood icons, such as Marilyn Monroe and Mickey Mouse, comic book drawings and clips of newspapers, which are burnt or effaced in *Rayday*. Anger used documentary footage of the Hyde Park Rolling Stones concert (1969) and newsreel footage of the Vietnam War in *Invocation to my Demon Brother*. Text is used by Keen in many of his films. In *Rayday* two key phrases stand out, one at the beginning: ‘How right Motler was to kill the word!’ is spray-painted onto a wall, and
one near the end shows a few feet of unspooled film dropped into the sea at the water’s edge, followed by the words ‘Above the waves beneath the sea!’ In *Invocation to my Demon Brother*, after a group of masked, costumed actors trail down a spiral flight of stairs, playing musical instruments and holding a goldfish bowl, the words ‘Zap! You’re pregnant! That’s witchcraft!’ appears on the screen. Keen also used ‘Zap!’ in *Rayday* (and in his other films) as this forms part of his oft-used comic book aesthetic. None of the texts in the two films imbue an understanding of what is going on, or solidify the narrative, and only serve to further discombobulate the viewer.

An element of excitement and mayhem prevails in both films, although the sinister or dark side leaks through, in the fractured and frenzied sense of ritual or dance that the filmmakers present, with Anger’s film being slightly more ‘directed’ through the progression of the occult ritual. Images of sexualised, naked or writhing bodies are seen briefly in both films, representing both the liberation of joyous, hedonistic excess and a brooding eroticism. Anger has referred to *Invocation to my Demon Brother* as ‘an attack on the sensorium’ in the way that the film assaults the viewer’s perceptive, sensory (visual and auditory) and interpretive modes of comprehension. 618 This could equally and validly be said about *Rayday*, as both films subject the viewer to a salvo of visual and auditory information-overload, providing entry into two manically deranged worlds.

**Lucifer Rising, In the Shadow of the Sun and The Art of Mirrors**

Jarman considered *The Art of Mirrors* as one of his favourite Super-8 films, comparing it to Anger’s work, in his notebook, as ‘the most extreme dream film ever made, even more extreme than Kenneth Anger’. 619 Anger, Jung and alchemy were, however, not the only influences informing Jarman’s filmmaking; the Beat poets and writers also wielded a significant influence on his young adult life, as he outlined in his memoirs:

In 1962 I moved to London from home. I was twenty, and out on my own. Things changed quickly. At King’s I read my tutor’s copy of *Howl*, and learnt of William Burroughs. [...] In late August [1964,] I left Ron and took the Greyhound bus to San Francisco to visit the City Lights Bookshop. I’d crossed the world to get to that bookshop, to buy Burroughs’ *The Naked Lunch*, banned in England. I bought my copy of it along with Ginsberg’s *Howl*, and Kerouac’s novels. 620
Jarman’s diverse interests infused his unregimented approach to filmmaking, thereby echoing the Beat’s sentiments to break out of systematic or conventional ways of working and living. Burroughs had also agreed with the occultist, Crowley’s judgment that ‘humanity was held back by conditioning and controls, and once free of their shackles could become gods’. Although Jarman was influenced by Anger’s films and shared Anger’s interests in magic, alchemy and mystical texts, he remained wary and was ‘anxious to distinguish this “virtuous” interest in magic from the more sinister “black arts” dabbled in by figures like Aleister Crowley and his disciple Kenneth Anger’.

*Lucifer Rising* and *In the Shadow of the Sun* are both scored with rock music soundtracks, focusing the viewer’s passage through the numinous landscapes in the films. *Lucifer Rising* was scored by Bobby Beausoleil and *In the Shadow of the Sun* was complemented by Throbbing Gristle’s *Hot on the Heels of Love* soundtrack (although the soundtrack was only added in 1980 with James Mackay’s assistance).

In both films a quieter visual and auditory tone, than in *Invocation to my Demon Brother* and *Rayday*, sets the tone for unfolding events. Although there is a less cacophonous barrage of images than in the previous films, one could not go so far as to suggest that a linear narrative exists in either, and they differ significantly from one another. Anger’s *Lucifer Rising* offers a kind of cohesive scenario, focusing on ritual, with an explicit narrative depicting the birth of Isis and Osiris’ son, Horus. Crowley envisaged the dawning of a new age, characterised by Horus and the overthrowing of ‘all restraint (“the word of sin is restriction”, Crowley counselled) and a plunge into the holy delights of what Freud called “polymorphous perversity”’. Jarman’s *In the Shadow of the Sun* submerges the viewer in a world of dream or memory and includes a strange ritual, the purpose of which is rather more diffuse than in Anger’s film.

Both films were informed by mythology and mysticism, with the symbolic use of light and shadow informed by alchemical texts, the Tarot or occult symbolism. However, they differ significantly in their visual style and mythological focus, with *Lucifer Rising* consisting of mostly crisp, single-shot images and *In the Shadow of the Sun* being made up of superimposed, re-filmed or single shots filmed at slow speeds. Anger’s film was inspired by a poem by his revered Crowley, and celebrated Lucifer as the ‘beautiful and rebellious angel of light: Lucifer not the devil, but Venus, the morning star’. Jarman was similarly interested in light, but more specifically on the dual integration of light and dark with the idea of ‘the shadow of the sun’ –
synonymous with the Philosopher’s Stone – enabling a continuous interplay of images. In his personal notebook he described the influences on his film:

In 1974 I bought Jung’s *Alchemical Studies and Seven Sermons to the Dead*, and this provided the key to the imagery that I had created quite unconsciously in the preceding months, and also gave me the confidence to allow these dream images to drift and collide at random.626

Orange and pinks colours tinge the imagery *In the Shadow of the Sun*, with degradation caused by re-filming lending a ‘shimmering mystery/energy like Monet’s “Nymphées” or haystacks in the sunset’.627 Jarman was insistent that viewers should not wrack ‘their brains for a meaning’, as there was no explicit narrative to the film, and should rather just relax ‘into the ambient tapestry of random images’ (Jarman’s emphasis).628 John Wywer, however, was more dubious about this approach, suggesting that:

The lure and promise of a deeper meaning, of something beneath the surface, is always present in his work, demanding a closer level of attention than the invitation to treat the film as wallpaper unfortunately implies.629

While the film may hold deeper meanings, Jarman’s intention to allow for the drifting and collision of dream images, demonstrates his desire for the film not to be interpreted with too much fixity of meaning, presumably in the hope that the viewer could equally enter the dreamscape.

Links can be seen with Anger’s interest in the occult, ritual and mystical transformation, with *In the Shadow of the Sun* divided (in Jarman’s mind) into four sections. These include the standing stones at Avebury (Wiltshire) and two fire mazes in the first part; an invocation which includes a figure turning in a circle in the second; evanescent images with typewritten text and ‘pyramids burn[ing] to a candlelit requiem’ in the third; and the images fading into blank footage and a figure listening to a message on a shell: ‘SLNC IS GLDN’630

Gesturing, as part of an apparent ritual, occurs in both *Lucifer Rising* and *The Art of Mirrors* with the viewer appearing to be momentarily implicated in an arcane ritual. Isis and Osiris raise their wands repeatedly to signal the birth of their son Horus in *Lucifer Rising* and in Jarman’s film the mirror, held by a performer gesturing to the viewer, is used not to reflect an image but to refract the light into the camera, darkening the whole scene as the inbuilt light-meter (set at automatic) reacts to it.631

The multiple landscapes also differ significantly in the two films. In *Lucifer Rising* the
landscapes were filmed in Egypt, Germany and England, with each location having ancient, occult connections with sun-worship, thereby providing a context for the actions. In *The Art of Mirrors* landscape provides less of a precise location, appearing to take place largely in a vast outdoor courtyard area (in all likelihood the 1,000-foot terrace on the Thames where Jarman lived at Butler’s Wharf), with mountainous terrain appearing occasionally in superimposition.632

A few words need to be said about Jarman’s use of the Super-8 medium, enabling the cheap production of films and lending the distinctive aesthetic to his films. In Jarman’s journal he noted the cost of making *In the Shadow of the Sun* (aside from the later funding to convert it to 16mm and add the soundtrack) as being around £120.633 On receiving the footage for *The Art of Mirrors* in the post, he identified it as the most unusual film he had ever seen, noting that ‘[t]his is the first film we’ve made on Super 8 with which there is nothing to compare. The other Super 8’s of the last few months are still too close to 16mm work; whereas this is something which could only be done on a Super 8 camera, with its built-in meters and effects. At last we have something completely new’.634 This would also undoubtedly be the reason why he would return to it for later feature-length production such as *The Garden* (1989).

For Anger and Jarman, therefore, the technical and economic aspects related to making their films (choice of format, superimposition, re-use of older footage) would lead to particularly distinctive styles of personal filmmaking.

*Vibration, Anti-Clock and The Other Side of the Underneath*

Three films by feminist filmmaker, writer and actress, Jane Arden, reveal countercultural influences related to the anti-psychiatry movement, mysticism and meditation.635 Arden collaborated with Jack Bond on *Vibration* (1975), *The Other Side of the Underneath* (1977) and *Anti-Clock* (1979), with the films demonstrating a broad range of stylistic and formal approaches.636 Arden requires inclusion in this 1970s film history as *Vibration* and *Anti-Clock* fit the experimental film criteria (outlined in the Introduction) through their production contexts and aesthetic appearance. Although *The Other Side of the Underneath* is less aesthetically experimental, it draws interesting parallels with Dwoskin’s *Central Bazaar* (discussed below), with both films revealing countercultural influences. The influence of psychoanalysis and the anti-psychiatry movement is evident in Arden’s work and she
was a close friend of R. D. Laing’s. Her and Bond were also interested in Sufi meditation, which forms the central focus of *Vibration* (1975).

Arden’s interests in consciousness, madness, women’s oppression and the anti-psychiatry movement informed all of her work. Her radical feminism (discussed further in Chapter Seven) and search for a mode of existence beyond the ego-driven self led her to explore the irrational and rational mind referring to the latter as RAT and viewing it as an essentially dominant masculine principle. The short film, *Vibration* (1975) operates as a non-linear exploration into altered states of consciousness, reached through Sufi mysticism and meditation, which Arden identified in her film notes as follows:

> A scientific, therapeutic investigation through an audio-video unification. Hypnagogic technique – to release the restricted life pulse from our paralysing rationale. *Vibration* anticipates video as a device for self-actualisation. Man and woman are their own laboratories. During this healing process video-film is a powerful tool for demonstrating both the traps of our own mechanical behaviour – and revealing the pulsating heart within.

*Vibration* was filmed on Super-8 and converted to video, facilitating the special effects and editing which play a key role in the film’s structure. Therefore, content (the search for self-actualisation) and technology (audio, film/video) were integrally related in the search for self-realisation.

Arden’s voice opens the film with the words ‘a Sufi meditation’ and ends it with the word ‘rabbit’ uttered repeatedly in a heightened state of agitation. She presides over events with a recurring, questioning voice, articulating the different states of consciousness of the two main performers, Sebastian Saville (Arden’s son) and Penny Slinger. (Jack Bond also acts in the film.) They are led in their visualisations as she instructs and questions, all the while deconstructing images, words and experiences in an attempt at illumination on states of being, informed by ‘the new gestalt initiated by Jung and Reich and Frederick Perles’. As with Arden’s two other films from the 1970s, *The Other Side of the Underneath* and *Anti-Clock*, the interrogation is always uncompromising. Destruction, perhaps in the hope of illumination, prevails, for example, when Arden’s voiceover states ‘the grave is a neat sentence. Eternal life explodes outside the sentence. Shatter the sentence.’ Arden’s instructions are interspersed by the voice of the Sufi mystic, Cherif Abderahmane Jah, who explains in mystical terms, what occurs during meditation. In other parts of the film the sound forms a kind of abstract score at times jarring, bubbling or crackling.
*Vibration* has no coherent linear narrative and instead diverse film fragments are repeated or shown singly. These include images of Saville, Slinger and Bond, documentary footage of local Moroccan people, cosmic images of planetary movements and calm shots of the sun setting over the sea. These are inter-cut with abstracted images of objects, such as a reel-to-reel tape recorder or buildings, with the latter video-edited in bright, hot colours, not unlike the colours in Le Grice’s *Berlin Horse* (1970). The film culminates in Arden receiving instructions on meditation, with scenes progressing with a frenetic charge as the deep, chanting of the Sufi mystic and Arden’s voice (repeating ‘mindful is mindless’) increases to finally become a kind of barking verbal score, until it abruptly cuts to an image of abstract computer glyphs and Arden’s final ‘rabbit’ resonation.644 The progression of the film between gentle, meditative enquiry and fragmented, unnerving interrogation into the inner workings of the mind make the final repetitive uttering of ‘rabbit’ appear as a call to ‘run rabbit run’.

Bond and Arden’s experience of working with video on *Vibration* informed *Anti-Clock*, as did the subject of altered states of consciousness. *Anti-Clock* follows the experiences of a young man as he undergoes the interrogation of his unconscious mind, prompted by himself and a group of scientists leading the inquiry. Both the main protagonist, Joseph Sapha, and the therapist, Professor J. D. Zanof, are acted by Sebastian Saville. Although there is a thread of narrative in the main protagonist’s attempts at self-illumination – through the self as he is both subject and object of the investigation – the film is essentially a nonlinear exploration of memory and experiences. *Anti-Clock* was shot in black-and-white and colour stock and was edited to resonate with the interior spaces of the mind, revealing the disordered and fragmented way in which memory or dreams operate. This was further achieved by placing frames within the main frames and the fast-paced editing between disconnected shots. The use of mostly monochromatic images – with blue filter – and the ‘reframing’ of Sapha’s memory and recollections are offset by seemingly arbitrary clips of archival footage, such as that of Hitler, a firing squad and documentary footage of baboons. What could have amounted to a highly contrived montage of disparate images was justified through the editing process, using video manipulations such as static disruption, freeze-framing, the abstraction of images and the placing of multiple frames within the main frame.
The experimental nature of this feature-length film was ground-breaking for its time with fifty CCTV, surveillance cameras (provided free by the electronics company, Dixons) installed in the Portman Hotel. Bond had worked in the film industry and for ITV, establishing numerous useful contacts able to provide financial support for Anti-Clock. Cupid Films initially provided development funding and Don Boyd, John Simpson, Michael Samuelson and Cupid Films assisted with financial support or in providing equipment for the production of the film.645

Anti-Clock has resonances with Chris Marker’s La Jetée (1962), with its attempts to cut across time to bring past and future into the present, and where the trip down memory lane is full of uncertainty. Both films deal with memory and precognition, where illumination ultimately only leads to the protagonists future death (La Jetée) or nowhere (Anti-Clock). Chris Darke considered the way that Anti-Clock and Arden’s poetry collection, You Don’t Know What You Want, Do You?, represented a personal belief system, suggesting that the hermetically sealed text was of its time, yet also revealing with its historical influences:

[T]hey could also be said to represent the last gasp of one of the great historical adventures of the counter-culture. From Romanticism and Symbolism, Baudelaire and Rimbaud, and via Surrealism all the way to the Dionysian abandonment of rock and drug culture, the systematic disordering of the senses was part of the programme for the authentic liberation of the self.646

Thus the literary links, identified by Michael O’Pray in Chapter One in relation to the New Romantics, also appear evident here. Anti-Clock was first screened at the NFT’s ‘Film London: 3rd Avant-garde International Festival’ (1979) and released on video before being withdrawn from distribution. Darke drew comparisons with Jean-Luc Godard’s Numero Deaux (1975) and David Cronenberg’s Videodrome (1983) in the innovative use of video, suggesting that the film’s lack of critical recognition was due to the ‘perennially conservative and formally timid British cinema’.647 Yet it could just as likely be due to its uneasy assimilation into the fields of commercial, independent or experimental filmmaking.

Arden’s earlier The Otherside of the Underneath (1972) is not as aesthetically innovative as Vibration and Anti-Clock but draws some interesting parallels with Stephen Dwoskin’s Central Bazaar (1975). The Otherside of the Underneath centres on a group of women living in a semi-derelict Welsh asylum exploring their anguish, anxieties and madness.648 It was ‘underpinned by Laing’s view of madness or “schizophrenia” as a political response to conditions in society and the family’ and
The film cuts between scenes of the women’s frenzied antics in the madhouse (dressed in Victorian nightgowns) and pastoral scenes of the small Welsh mining village, where the asylum is located. The disturbing atmosphere prevailing throughout is heightened by Sally Minford’s cello score and role as attendant cellist to the macabre theatre-play. The film, developing at an uneven pace, vacillates between serious therapy sessions and absurd, surreal scenarios. In one such scene an inmate reclines on a bed with a live sheep lying next to her and a mad, bald clown verbally attacking her. In another scene reminiscent of a bad Hammer-horror film – replete with fake blood – two girls attack a rock band with axes. In contrast a later, more evocative scene shows a woman’s face superimposed with war footage, creating a poetic tension between memory, dream and reality. Reality and theatricality are at odds throughout the film and there are times when it is difficult to tell the two apart, particularly in the therapy sessions which appear realistic and were bolstered by the use of drugs. The actress, Penny Slinger, described how the morning workshops were often followed by ‘a puff of marijuana to help us go deeper’ and in the sessions ‘we were delving into our personal and collective psychoses’. As the therapy advanced ‘a number of us took a prescribed dose of psychedelics ... we wanted to go deeper’.

Although the film makes for an uneven reading, with some badly executed horror scenes and incidents of unselfconscious, flamboyant acting, the ‘real’ encounter sessions, revealing the dismantling of the self, are illuminating, albeit disturbing. The film’s importance as a countercultural, feminist text – revealing Arden’s interests in anti-psychiatry and self-transformation – also makes important historical links with other forms film experimentation, as Amy Simmons identified:

Like the avant-garde, psycho-dramatic works of Anger or Maya Deren – in which the filmmaker seeks revelation – The Other Side of the Underneath has clear affinities with other cultures, their rituals and belief systems, exemplified in the closing sequence where the woman slips into a trance at a pagan ceremony.

Although Arden’s films may sit less comfortably within established 1970s history, the omission of her work is regrettable as her prolific output in film, theatre and literature requires acknowledgment in historical accounts of the decade. More recent posthumous recognition (and availability of films) has to some extent restored the balance of her neglect, although the unavailability of her work, since her suicide in
1982, has left some gaping holes in research archives. Susan Croft Croft regretted that Arden’s ‘films had been wiped’ and that she had been ‘[e]rased from the archive’, once again raising questions on the complexity of historiography as discussed in Chapter One.\textsuperscript{654} This thesis, however, recognises the importance of her films as part of 1970s history, demonstrating countercultural influences and more expressive, personal approaches to experimentation.

\textit{Central Bazaar}

\textit{The Otherside of the Underneath} and \textit{Central Bazaar} focus on unfolding events as participants unselfconsciously express their inner feelings, desires or bewilderment in front of the camera. Both films reveal a visceral sense of exposure, although the former differs with Arden’s therapist presiding over events. Both films also appear to take their inspiration from 1960s ‘encounter groups’, a type of group therapy popularised by Eric Berne and Carl R. Rogers in the 1960s, where individuals explored ‘repressed emotion and improve[d] interpersonal communication’.\textsuperscript{655}

For the filming of \textit{Central Bazaar}, Dwoskin invited a group of people to live in his house for five weeks, as a kind of human experiment of personal interaction. He suggested that the film was a bazaar where manifold things are on offer to purchase:

\begin{quote}
Everything is here, all the items and in all manner of design and display and arrangement. The miscellaneous collection looks splendid and full of expectations. Instead of china and glass, it is us men and women all together, held in our own unrealized promise.
\end{quote}

In his MOMA review, however, Jonas Mekas suggested that \textit{Central Bazaar} was ‘a bazaar for voyeurs’.\textsuperscript{657}

The BFI-funded \textit{Central Bazaar} opens with a man and woman repeatedly setting a table and slowly develops into a progressively bacchanalian situation. In the second scene, a woman recounts the story of The Three Little Pigs to camera, with film critic, William Fowler, suggesting that it sets an unnerving claustrophobic tone, with the question of the ‘wolf at the door’ ever present throughout the film.\textsuperscript{658} After a Labour Party canvasser makes a chance call to the house – and Dwoskin records this for what becomes the companion piece to \textit{Central Bazaar’s} recent DVD release, \textit{Laboured Party} (1974) – the question of the wolf as the outsider, coming in to a hermetically sealed world, is once again raised.\textsuperscript{659} Fowler suggests that it is not the Three Little Pigs fairytale, the Labour canvasser or the filmmaker who constitutes any threat, but that ‘if anything, the wolf represents the threat of context and location – the entire
world outside –hanging in the wings ready to break the spell’. Yet, the wolf also, arguably, represents the ‘dangers’ inherent as a group of individuals subject themselves to a social experiment of sorts, where they are invited ‘to act out their fantasies on and about each other, asking whoever was involved to give their active support’.  

The film evolves as a kind of pornographic B-movie, as the characters progressively latch onto and into one another. The tension is heightened by Gavin Bryar’s musical score, and the various changing states of undress, costume or make up as the film develops. Bryar opens the film with a loud thunder clap, becoming a more abstracted, synthesised score and reaching a crescendo in the middle of the film. At this mid-point, threatened or threatening sounding voices are audible as the frenzied sexualised action takes hold, before returning again to a less intrusive synthesizer score.

While Arden’s film has the added contrast of the inhabitant’s interaction with the Welsh community, representing a ‘normal’ life of sorts, no such contrast exists in Dwoskin’s hermetically-sealed world (although, arguably, Laboured Party, could be viewed as representing the more socially-responsible and respectable ‘normal’ world outside). A kind of structure is articulated through Arden’s therapist and both films follow a narrative of regression through personal expression, with invitations to freely explore the self and others, resulting in the unleashing of emotion, desire, confusion and a series of bad ‘trips’.

As the scenes unfold in Central Bazaar, in progressive states of undress and fancy dress, the sexualised antics are captured in wide to medium-shot and – particularly with the young anorexic child/woman – in close-up. Allegations of Dwoskin’s voyeuristic eye were assuaged by his own, and film critics such as Paul Willemen’s justification that the intention was to implicate the viewer in the feelings of discomfort when watching intensely private moments. Willemen called this the fourth look: ‘the look at the viewer’ as he/she ‘has to confront his/her sadistic voyeurism’, following on from Laura Mulvey’s three looks (camera, viewer and looks between actors) outlined in her seminal 1975 essay.

As important as Dwoskin’s filmmaking (as a whole) may be in opening up questions related to voyeurism and the ‘camera eye’, the only justification being that it imposes on the viewer an uncomfortable sense of the voyeuristic is rather questionable, as this completely vindicates Dwoskin from any part in the interrogative
‘looking’. Surely there is something about reframing a sexualised moment that brings with it an attendant lasciviousness on the part of the cinematographer. This should be recognised without circumventing the issue with theoretical notions related to viewer identification. Perhaps the titles, introducing Dwoskin’s two companion films, are also revealing, *Central Bazaar* is ‘directed by Stephen Dwoskin’ and *Laboured Party* is ‘a film by Stephen Dwoskin’ (my emphasis).

The sense of voyeurism is unavoidable in both Arden and Dwoskin’s films, with the camera observing private moments and the individuals losing themselves (perhaps the longed-for loss of ego) before the viewer. A brief mention of Dwoskin’s physical condition, as a disabled man, is important as it has imbued his filmmaking with a singular vision. Dwoskin had polio as a child, and was familiar with being a visible object of attention. His films were often shot from a low angle and static position and were permeated with concerns about penetrating ‘the wall of looking at a film into looking in a film’.

Rees’ observations about Dwoskin’s *DynAmo* (1972) are, arguably, also relevant for *Central Bazaar*:

By taking private acts and making them public, the film elicits the viewer’s uneasy participation. “To use the camera as a character”, he said in 1978, “to use the camera so as the viewer is within the action”. The voyeurism of cinema is made visible. Absorption becomes theatricality.

While there is no doubt that the camera is the recording device, capturing the action and delivering it to the viewer to indulge in, the hand of the filmmaker in all of this is, of course, also crucial. Dwoskin will be returned in Chapter Seven, where the subjectively involved filmmaker will be discussed further.

**Daddy and Fire in the Water**

Peter Whitehead was briefly discussed in the Introduction as he documented some seminal 1960s British counter-cultural events. He graduated from Cambridge with a degree in physics and crystallography, but at an early age developed an interest in the occult and mysticism: ‘I had always had a deep interest in Ancient Egypt and ancient systems of mysticism’. He later studied at the Slade, attending Thorald Dickenson’s film course (mentioned in Chapter Three), and took up a style of filmmaking personifying ‘the *nouvelle vague* concept of le caméra stylo (camera-pen); camera-on-shoulder’. (Curtis’ emphasis) His last two films, *Daddy* (1973) and *Fire in the Water* (1977) were made before he gave up filmmaking to become a falconer.
Whitehead’s long-term interests in mysticism inform both films, as do psychology, mythology and the inner quest for self-actualisation.

*Daddy* reads as an uncomfortable ‘bedtime story’, taking place on a country estate and chronicling bizarre events occurring between a little girl/woman and her military-clad father. It was initially intended as a semi-documentary film about the artist, Niki de Saint Phalle (who is credited as co-director), but ended up as a surreal, Freudian account of a woman attempting to deal with the memories of a predatory father. It operates as an interesting case for the feminist deployment of poetic practice, engaging with Saint Phalle’s work and biography, and taking a psychoanalytic route to wrest revenge on an evil father-figure.

In the opening scene, Saint Phalle is seen shooting at a painting that starts to drip paint. This is a reference to her *Tirs (Shots)* ‘shooting paintings’ performed around the world in the 1960s as a defiant feminist gesture of subversive aggression. The film is divided into sections; each beginning with an illustrated page of a book, drawn by Saint Phalle, giving the viewers a sense that they are being told a children’s fairytale. Intimations of incest exist throughout the film, as it cuts between scenes of old film footage of a little girl playing in a garden, attempting to escape her father’s advances, and the newer-looking footage of the grown woman facing her aged father. In the final bizarre scenario, the adult daughter seeks revenge by tying her father to a wooden frame, rendering him immobile, and presenting him with a naked young girl as a birthday present. The young girl is painted as one of Saint Phalle’s famous ‘Nana’ sculpture, provoking the old man seductively and placing a phallus-shaped white cake on the table in front of him. He is tied up and forced to eat from a potty and watch the girl masturbate, as he unable to do anything but endure this mad tea party. Freudian undertones shape the film, as it moves between a menacing country-manor idyll and macabre theatre-play, with Whitehead appearing briefly on a balcony releasing birds into the air.

Whitehead’s final film, *Fire in the Water*, functions as a kind of leave-taking from filmmaking as it includes clips from many of his previous films and a repertoire by 1960s and 1970s musicians, such as The Doors, The Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd and Bob Dylan. The 80-minute film is divided into seven parts, with inter-titles such as ‘Requiem for the ‘60s’, ‘The Inner Self’, ‘Assassination: the Other Self’ and ‘The Collective Self’ and the ‘Divided Self’. There are clear references to Carl Jung’s ‘collective unconscious’ in the penultimate title mentioned, as well a reference to

In the opening scene, a young couple in a camper van pass through isolated, mountainous terrain to a cottage in the Scottish Highlands. The film then cuts between footage of the couple watching clips of Whitehead’s films (on a Steenbeck editing table) accompanied by the musical soundtrack; and scenes of the woman walking in the mountains, complemented by natural sounds such as bird calls, brooding thunder, a running river, wind blowing or silence. Popular songs set the mood where the film clips are viewed, reinforcing a nostalgic atmosphere. This contrasts with the scenes depicting the woman’s slight figure in the wilderness, giving the impression of being both at one with nature, yet also engulfed by it. In these latter scenes there is a sense of foreboding, as if predicting some unpleasant event, which is compounded by the progressively ominous soundtrack consisting of rolling thunder, rushing water or strong wind, exacerbating her danger. The film ends in a denouement when she is surrounded by writhing snakes and disappears into the watery depths.

Whitehead has dismissed both *Daddy* and *Fire in the Water* ‘as after-thoughts or non-films in my estimation’, yet they are still in distribution and, arguably, stand as important historical texts, imbued as they are with a counter-cultural patina of introspection, turning to psychology, mysticism or the arcane in the search for self-realisation. The film clips shown on the editing table in *Fire in the Water* also form a unique countercultural narrative, providing significant visual and spoken accounts of historical events. These include an interview with David Hockney, Michael Cane discussing the loss of the British Empire, Allen Ginsberg and Ernst Jandl’s readings from the 1965 Albert Hall event, Peter Brook and Glenda Jackson protesting about the Vietnam War, Martin Luther King’s memorial service (1968), the W. B. Yeats poem, ‘Things Fall Apart’, the Columbia University student rebellion (1968) and Ralph Ortiz’s performance where he ‘dusts’ the audience with a bird and proceeds to smash both bird and piano to pieces, to the strains of The Doors *The End*. It is an important film.

*Daddy, Fire in the Water, Central Bazaar* and Arden’s three films discussed here were very much of their time, revealing counter-cultural influences in their content and in their mode of articulation. They share some common traits, depicted in the unfolding of events and in the unselfconscious questioning of the self in relation to others and the surrounding world. As significant texts, drawing their influences from
the counter-culture, psychoanalysis and the unconscious or dreams they should be acknowledged on a par with the more theoretical and conceptual filmmaking dominating accounts of the decade’s filmmaking.

**Diary and Autobiographical Filmmaking**

Having considered films informed by some of the countercultural influences and broadly fulfilling the criteria identified in the terms psycho-dramatic trance, lyrical and mythopoeia, a number of ‘diary’ films will now be addressed, taking personal approaches to recount life experiences or document the world around them.

**Ian Breakwell**

Ian Breakwell’s work in film, video, painting, drawing and writing was informed by his observations of mundane and ordinary life events. Observations were recorded in notebooks, often focusing on life’s absurdities and attempts to come to terms with them. His work was intensely political, although not in an overt slogan-carrying manner, with Nick Kimberley observing that ‘this is William Burroughs naked lunch [sic], forcing us for the first time to confront what we consume. We don’t like what we see’. Humour lay at the centre of Breakwell’s work:

> For all the grime, for all that this life is no more lastingly substantial than the hunks of meat carted about Smithfield Market, for all that suppressed violence threatens to erupt from almost every page, the diary finds life constantly marvellous. The monstrous and the tragic exist cheek by jowl with the erotic and the laughable. Breakwell’s epiphanies are every bit as enhancing as Joyce’s – and less religious. Here, the marvellous is supremely human.

Although humour was central to most of Breakwell’s work, he also took a more serious interest in the role of institutions and institutional discourses in shaping people’s lives. He was involved with the Artist’s Placement Group which facilitated artists’ residencies in government or industry-based organisations. His internship at the Department of Health and research into mental illness resulted in *The Institution* (1978), made with actor Kevin Coyne.

In Breakwell’s voyeuristic Arts Council-funded, *The Journey* (1975), he drew inspiration from observing train passengers on a placement with British Rail. Earlier observations of commuters, documented in his notebooks, made him conclude that ‘[p]eople do everything to avoid each other’s gaze. They read newspapers on the tube because if everybody stared at the person opposite, it would be intolerable’.
*Journey* takes a prying look at two train passengers in close proximity to one another (with knees almost touching), but who are contained in their own thoughts (probably, as Breakwell discerns, because they daren’t stare at each other). They are lost in their own thoughts and their isolation is echoed in the way the window seals them off from the world outside. Breakwell parodies the travelogue film convention, with the montage of film clips having an erotic and overtone, and concluding in a sexual encounter.

A later diary entry draws some interesting parallels with Breakwell’s voyeuristic observations of the woman in the film:

The face of the woman in the opposite seat has a skin complexion like a sugared almond. She wears a beautifully cut grey tweed jacket and a grey pleated skirt. Her breasts stir under her white silk blouse with the movement of the train. Her eyes are glazed; they keep closing. Sleep overcomes her. Her manicured hands slide off her lap, pulling back her skirt over thighs in white silk stockings. Her face slackens; the little frown disappears. Her lipsticked mouth parts to reveal pearly white teeth on which, for a second, lands a black fly.676

Breakwell’s voyeuristic ‘camera eye’ draws parallels with Dwoskin’s *Central Bazaar*, although in *The Journey* the actors do not perform to camera as they do in Dwoskin’s film, but are observed from a seeming distance. Although Breakwell’s above diary entry reveals rather lascivious observations of the woman, his voyeurism was generally ‘social rather than sexual’.677 His extensive body of work included *The Walking Man Diary* (1978), shown at the Angela Flowers Gallery, London and *Continuous Diary* (1977), initially funded by the Arts Council in 1977 and shown at the Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol and the ICA, London and later commissioned as a Channel 4 series.678

**B. S. Johnson**

B. S. Johnson was an established writer of avant-garde novels when he made his final film, *Fat Man on a Beach* (1973) for Welsh television, just weeks before his suicide. He had written and directed five films, including the BFI-funded, *You’re Human Like the Rest of Them* (1967), the ICA-supported *Up Yours Too, Guillaume Apollinaire* (1968) and *Paradigm* (1969), and two films for ACT, *Unfair* (1970) and *March!* (1971).679 Johnson’s work had received scant recognition since his death, but has recently been brought to public attention through Jonathan Coe’s comprehensive biography.680
Fat Man on a Beach provides further evidence of personally-informed, diaristic types of filmmaking in the decade. The film is essentially about a fat man on beach. Johnson is the ‘fat man’ who discusses a diverse range of topics, including the weather, the Welsh peninsula where filming is taking place, some very bad jokes and a detailed recollection of a car crash where dismembered bodies were cut through ‘like a cheese-cutter’. The soundtrack alternates between Scott Joplin’s upbeat The Entertainer and Johnson talking-to-camera. He also reads poetry and cajoles camera and audience to follow him like a dog, (saying things like ‘sit’ or ‘good boy’), with the direct, self-reflexive address to the viewer adding to Johnson’s peculiar antics and recollections.

James Joyce’s Ulysses (1922) and the writings of Carl Jung had been a source of inspiration for Johnson, although it was Robert Graves’ The White Goddess (1948) that wielded the greatest influence on his life:

[He was] captivated by the more mystical writings of Robert Graves, with their insistence that poetic inspiration comes from the Muse Goddess, a figure bound up with complicated myths of birth and death, the Moon and the all-providing Mother.

In his life Johnson wrestled with the search for integration between the domestic and creative, revealing something of this ongoing search (through mysticism) in his final film.

In a pensive moment near the end of the film, both Johnson and the cameramen are seen reflected in a mirror half-immersed in sand; Johnson says ‘some things can only be said indirectly … one can only reflect the truth of what they were. I’m not sure I know the truth about this particular thing that I want to talk about indirectly.’ Johnson then recounts a story about a spiritual experience, where he finds himself naked on the top of a mountain in Wales at dawn, gesturing wildly to a female deity. Johnson confesses disbelief in such religious gestures, his failure to understand how he came to perform these bizarre actions, admitting that he was not there of his own volition. He continues by saying that there is nowhere on earth where he could do this except here in Wales, an area that has transfixed him and been instrumental in allowing this to happen. He justifies his actions through a discussion of Jung’s archetypes and how these compel us – even as evolved and civilised beings – to attend to this type of ritual. This near-final scene reveals clues to Johnson’s life-long internal search: to find answers to human behaviour and the passage our lives take.
Johnson death, two weeks after filming, provides a poignant suggestion that answers were perhaps not forthcoming. Arguably, the knowledge of Johnson’s imminent death adds a sombre note to the viewing, imbuing it with a patina of loss, particularly in the closing shot as Johnson walks fully clothed into the water; the camera pulls back further and he walks ever deeper into the sea.

Although Johnson regarded himself as an avant-garde or experimental writer and filmmaker, he appeared not to have been aware of underground poetry or film activity taking place at Better Books or the LFMC in the 1960s or 1970s. No mention is made of Johnson attending alternative (to mainstream) film or art events in Jonathan Coe’s biography. In correspondence with Coe (who spent seven years working on the book) I asked whether Johnson was in any way involved in the underground or avant-garde scene in London. His response was as follows:

To the best of my recollection, I found no record in BSJ's archives of his having attended either the LFMC screenings or Bob Cobbing’s Better Books screenings. This is not to say that he never attended them, but he certainly left no trace of it behind. But then he tended to move in a fairly restricted circle, despite his avant-garde leanings.  

Coe’s comment is discerning as it sheds light not only on Johnson’s creative environment, but also on the diverse – and often separate – experimental film circles in which people moved. Interestingly, however, Nuttall did mention ‘Brian Johnson’ and his publication *Albert Angelo* (1964) in *Bomb Culture* (1968).

**Margaret Tait**

The thirty films by Scottish filmmaker and poet, Margaret Tait, (made between 1951 and 1998) form an eclectic collection of work. Tait preferred to describe herself as a film-poet, rather than a documentary or diary filmmaker, yet some of her films, arguably, fall fittingly into the diary form of filmmaking discussed here. Tait was a keen chronicler of everyday life and as a writer her ‘openness of mind, voice, structure, all come from the Beats and Whitman crossed with MacDiarmid, but then cut their own original (and crucially female) path’. She studied film at the ‘Centro Sperimentale di Cinematogafia’ in Rome for two years. The idea of ‘stalking the image: the equivalence of a stealthy, patient hunt’ was held central to her working process. This was inspired by the poet, Federico Garcia Lorca’s lecture about Don Luis de Gongora, as the epigraph to this chapter identified.
The films *Tailpiece* (1976) and *Place of Work* (1976) focus on the emptying of Tait’s family home in the Orkney Islands. They were shot between June and November in Kirkwall, where Tait grew up and lived intermittently as an adult. *Tailpiece* opens with a shot of a garden and continues with the hand-held camera moving, like an observant camera-eye, towards the house. Diverse shots of interior nooks, crannies and windows reveal ordinary spaces which are permeated with memory for Tait. As two men carry furniture out of the house, the empty spaces suggest a sense of loss, heightened by the knowledge that these spaces can never again be occupied in the same way. Tait said that she wanted to capture the secret places one gets to know through living in a house for many years, and the film appears to reveal these unfolding memories. The soundtrack includes a recording of Tait’s young nieces learning a song that she remembered learning in the house as a child. The children’s voices and music resonate, bringing a melancholic atmosphere to the film. Catherine Russell’s observations on Mekas’ diary films could equally be used in relation to Tait’s *Tailpiece*:

> The longing for the past that Mekas expresses constructs memory as a means of splitting oneself across a number of different axes: child and adult, old world and new, pastoral and metropolitan, natural and cultural.

Tait attempts to restore this division between past and present as she captures the house’s ‘lifetime’, describing the film as covering ‘the time of finally emptying a long-time family home, with its personal memories and connection with some of my own work’. *Tailpiece* was described by Jo Comino as, ‘a diary film which logs shifts in time and space so that they seem almost imperceptible’, with sound used ‘in a way which emphasizes scale’ rather than as synced-sound or as a commentary of events. Comino provides the example of bells tolling some time after a church is seen, stating that, ‘the seasonal or elemental changes are recorded as if coincidentally, and the actual presence of the film-maker remains elusive, a shadow, a reflection in the mirror, a disembodied voice.’

Although a sense of loss is elicited in *Tailpiece*, the longer film, *Place of Work*, operates more as a documentary account, without the same distilled poetic reflection prevailing in the shorter film. In this record of the emptying of the house, Tait wished to take the viewer ‘from the work table, out the front door, and round the house in an east, south, west and north circling’. This circle was repeated, focusing on aspects of the garden – flowers, cats and people in it – and the interior and exterior of the
house. Tait’s films cover a wide range of subject matter, portraiture, landscape, abstract drawings/paintings on film, but are united by her poetic vision of ‘stalking’ of the image. Le Grice had written favourably about Tait’s films in his ‘First Festival of Independent British Cinema’ (1975) review (cited in Chapter Three), and Tailpiece and Place of Work were included in a 1977 LFMC screening.

**Anne Rees-Mogg**

Anne Rees-Mogg’s trilogy, *Real Time* (1971-74), *Sentimental Journey* (1977) and *Living Memory* (1980) share some common themes with Tait’s two films as they are autobiographical reminiscences on the childhood home, the surrounding countryside and later events in Rees-Mogg’s life related to filmmaking and the LFMC. Rees-Mogg taught at Chelsea School of Art in the 1960s and 1970s and acted as chair on the LFMC committee in the early 1980s. *Muybridge Film* (1975) was discussed in Chapter Four, but her trilogy of films is particularly relevant to discussions of British diary filmmaking.

*Real Time* records a journey to Rees-Mogg’s home and includes footage of her driving along the motorway, intermittent shots of red poppies along the roadside, footage of family photographs and re-enacted events from Rees-Mogg’s childhood, acted by her niece. Nick Wadley described it as ‘the most densely autobiographical’ of her films, revealing an ‘obsessive delving through the family looking-glass’. A conversation with her mother and an evocative scratched record repeating the same lines accompany the disparate visual recollections, forming a kind of memory-documentary without a linear narrative.

*Sentimental Journey* reads as an instruction manual of sorts, detailing the techniques or processes involved in filmmaking, through sound and image. These include animated drawings, paintings on film, repeated shots, single frames, colour separation, the use of filters, portraits of students and teachers, a picnic in a garden and a group portrait amidst the ruins of a building. They reveal the LFMC’s structural and material influences, but the precarious nature of working with film also has a sense of ironic self-questioning, also evident in the jerky, repeated phrases of instruction or discussions on filmmaking.

In *Living Memory* Rees-Mogg reflects on her childhood home and the surrounding environment. Footage of her flying overhead in a plane and walking across fields with her two nephews are edited with earlier photographs of the boys (manipulated by
Rees-Mogg on the LFMC printer). The soundtrack further supports this dialogue between past and present, articulating problems of time, memory and place through quotations by philosophers and poet. Wadley observed that:

The pervasive strain of memory throughout her work contrives to outwit time through the act of documentation – as if the process of recording and re-enacting of people and places, changing and unchanging, rescues their passing from any sense of loss and regret ... The subject of her films is both filmmaking and autobiography.696

Rees Mogg’s trilogy operates as a personal reflection, not dissimilar to Tait’s two films, collapsing time and space to create a memoir imbued with recollections of events and working processes. Although the influence of the LFMC’s structural and material experimentation is evident in the trilogy, Rees-Mogg was insistent that she was not trying to work ‘within the conventions of an English avant-garde’ but felt ‘much more related to American films like Jonas Mekas, and diary films’.697

David Larcher

David Larcher’s Mare’s Tail (1969) and Monkey’s Birthday (1975) were described by Henrik Hendrikson as being ‘firmly in the visionary strain of avant-garde filmmaking’.698 Monkey’s Birthday was filmed on a journey across Europe and Asia, ‘encountering and recording remarkable landscapes and peoples, and experiencing the romantic artist’s life of poverty and visionary experience’.699 It is imbued with archaeological and psychological observation and enquiry, as experiences are recorded and later edited to form an epic, interior journey.

Larcher studied anthropology and archaeology, completed a post-graduate degree at the RCA and worked as a professional photographer before taking up filmmaking.700 He had also attended early LFMC meetings at Better Books and literally lived at the LFMC for weeks to edit Mare’s Tale. For the editing of Monkey’s Birthday he spent the best part of a year working at the LFMC and living with his family in a truck parked outside.701 Dwoskin’s description provides useful insights into Larcher’s working processes:

Larcher, who is also one of the few subjectively responsive and free photographers, has no theories. If any influences seem evidently exerted it is the ‘I Ching’, hypnagogic imagery and some of John Cage ... The real influence however is still Larcher, who roves and discovers in his own world without the constriction of ours ... It is freedom that is desired by many, feared by most and intellectualised out by others.702
Although he worked at the LFMC intermittently in the 1970s, his work did not follow the more rigorous formalism of experimentation with structure and material. Instead Larcher’s work took a more personal, mythopoeic approach to filmmaking, incorporating poetry and myth into his art of visionary filmmaking. In Monkey’s Birthday:

Almost every frame of this six hours is subjected to a practically alchemical barrage of procedures and treatments which have no reason to be brought to a conclusion: the tinting of frames, the scratching of celluloid, the addition of newly printed repetitions of previously shown takes could go on forever.\(^703\)

The soundtrack mirrors the eclecticism of the imagery, consisting of music, found-sound recordings, recordings of Larcher discussing the filmed image and quoting the mystic, Gurdjieff, (who also informed Arden’s Vibration discussed above). The film has been shown in a shorter version, although more recently Larcher has insisted that the 6-hour film be screened at dawn in his presence, so that he can provide intermittent comments with a microphone during screening.\(^704\) Although it is a long, multi-layered film, Hendrikson suggested that it ‘must be appreciated in the simplicity and beauty of its diary format, in the intensity of its personal quest, and in the ambitiousness of its representation as universal odyssey’.\(^705\)

Larcher’s practice – unharnessed by theoretical or conceptual concerns – was also shared by other filmmakers such as Jarman, Tait and Keen, who found inspiration in poetry, myth or dream. This imbued their filmmaking with a personal vision of the world. Although British diary filmmakers took diverse approaches to filmmaking, what united them was the way that personal experience, memory and poetic, philosophical or mystical inspiration were combined to create subjective experiences of reality on films. Jarman, for example, saw art and film as ‘archaeology of the soul’, revealing that:

My world is in fragments, smashed in pieces so fine I doubt I will ever reassemble them. So I scabble in the rubbish, an archaeologist who stumbles across a buried film. An archaeologist who projects his private world along a beam of light into the arena, till all goes dark at the end of the performance, and we go home’.\(^706\)

Therefore filmmaking was a way to excavate and resurrect memories, infuse filmmaking with poetic or philosophical reflection or simply present fragmentary experiences for consideration. Rees-Mogg suggested that she felt ‘a little bit more at ease with American films on the whole’, compared with the more rigorous formalism
of LFMC experimentation, as ‘[t]here’s an acceptance of the home-movie, the diary, personal experience, as being perfectly valid’.\textsuperscript{707}

Hamid Naficy’s description of Mekas’ working methods as a film diarist provides some useful insights:

Each squeeze of the camera shutter-release button produced one random epistolary film note, one postcard, to be added to the stack of visual notes and cards that would one day become a film. This mode of production wove the fragmented biographical life of the filmmaker into its cinematic representation, exilically accenting the resulting films, which Mekas characterised as “small films, films that do not force anything upon you”. But these little, unpretentious films are expansive, celebrating the ordinary moments of life by paring them down to such essential simplicity that they achieve poetic eloquence.\textsuperscript{708}

Although Naficy explicitly referred to Mekas’ process in relation to his experiences as an exile, the fusion of past and present through film was also evident in these British diary filmmakers, as a way of determining their presence in relation to their surroundings and life experiences. Breakwell’s life-long ‘continuous diaries’ were recorded in written form and permeated his film diaries.\textsuperscript{709} Johnson’s recollections, infused by his mystical experience, brought him back to the beach in Wales to recount a number of absurd events and memories. Tait and Rees-Mogg visually reflected on their childhood homes and landscapes to record a diary of events, and Larcher’s poetic odyssey recounted his global wanderings. Like Jarman, they all took an archaeological approach to mine their life experiences and project their ‘private world along a beam of light into the arena’.\textsuperscript{710}

**Conclusion**

It is clear that the films discussed under the terms psycho-dramatic trance, lyrical, mythopoeia and diary filmmaking covered diverse approaches to filmmaking. While the range of films discussed here may not form a cohesive body of work, driven by a single overarching theoretical, philosophical or aesthetic premise, they are united by the personal, image-rich approaches (informed by literature, scientific or mystical texts) taken. This supports the premise that that there was no return to personal, visionary and more expressive forms of filmmaking at the end of the 1970s – as mooted in diverse histories – but rather that this work existed throughout the decade. These films are image-rich using superimposition, as in Jarman’s and Keen’s films, or are richly textured through physical work on the filmstrip, as in Larcher’s *Monkey’s*
Birthday. Subjects have been ‘stalked’ as in Tait’s films and voyeuristically stared at (by camera and viewer) as in Central Bazaar and The Other Side of the Underneath. Actors have performed bizarre rites and rituals for Anger, Keen and Jarman and have been the subject of psychological investigation in Anti-Clock. Filmmakers have reflected on themselves and their lives in attempts to uncover possible connections between past and present that may shape a hidden narrative, as in Rees-Mogg’s trilogy and Johnson’s Fat Man on the Beach. They have also wandered without restraint, merely looking and recording what is observed in pure wonderment, with no predetermined purpose, as Larcher did in Monkey’s Birthday. These personally-informed films form an important aspect of 1970s experimentation, complementing film experimentation with structure and material filmmaking, and it is essential that they are fully recognised as part of 1970s experimental film history. In the following chapter the more dominant structural and material experimentation will be discussed. Questions will also be raised about its dominance, in established histories, to attempt to understand why more personal forms of filmmaking have been over-shadowed.
CHAPTER SIX: EXPERIMENTS WITH STRUCTURE AND MATERIAL

Structural/Materialist films are at once object and procedure. Some are clearly, blatantly of a whole, others work as obvious fragments, non-beginning-non-end film. Both rely upon an aesthetic that tries to create didactic works (learning not teaching, i.e. operational productions not reproductive representations). At the same time there is attempted avoidance of empiricism, and the mystic romanticism of higher sensibility individualism.\(^{711}\)

Peter Gidal (1976)

Work in this area drawing, and paying attention to the physical base (acetate), emulsion surface, sprockets, joins etc., easily shades over into an awareness of: mechanical and physico-chemical processes. In this case attention is drawn to the photochemical response and its chemical development, the transfer of image through printing, the transformation of image through these processes and the mechanical systems of film transport in camera, printer, or projector.\(^{712}\)

Malcolm Le Grice (1978)

If dominant, commercial cinema was about the compression of the time/space continuum and the illusion of the passage of time through narrative, then the intention of structural and material film experimentation was to raise awareness of duration, film material and process, to encourage viewer-reflexivity and demystify the filmmaking process. A focus on the relationship between film content and film form identified that early structural filmmaking was ‘often theorised as a cinemetic relation – and disjunction – between signifiers and signified.’\(^{713}\) A. L. Rees additionally noted that ‘[d]uration became the hallmark of British structural film, a “road not taken” by the mainstream cinema or by the lyric direction in avant-garde film’.\(^{714}\) This type of film experimentation, as the two epigraphs identified, explored film medium and structure, revealed processes and procedures in filmmaking and took an anti-Hollywood stance to counter symbolic image use and narrative structure. At the outset of this chapter filmmaking criteria and theoretical debates related to experimentation with structure and material will be outlined. The LFMC will be discussed in some detail as this was the dominant workshop where experimentation took place. Thereafter, a range of films will be discussed with a focus on elements such as materiality, structural or procedural approaches, narrative, sound and humour. The intention is to reveal commonalities in filmmaking but also to demonstrate the diverse range and complexity of films that fall under the rubric ‘experimentation with structure and material’.
While experimentation with structure and material also took place internationally in countries such as in Germany, Austria, America and Japan, a distinctively British type of experimentation was firmly established in the 1970s.\footnote{187} This was primarily due to production facilities at the LFMC – enabling diverse approaches to experimentation – and the dominant theoretical positions held by filmmakers/theorists, Peter Gidal and Malcolm Le Grice. The theoretical positions informed and influenced experimentation during the decade, but also problematically subordinated the more personal and visionary forms of filmmaking, discussed in the previous chapter, as these used more representational imagery and did not take rigorous theoretical approaches to filmmaking.

The important question, asking how far the Marxist critique went in terms of undermining the individual authorial voice, needs to be returned to here. Gidal, in the opening epigraph, clearly expresses his distaste for ‘the mystic romanticism of higher sensibility individualism’.\footnote{186} He was also vehemently against all forms of narrative filmmaking, particularly if this was expressed ‘through any form of anthropomorphic, individualist identification with the film-maker’.\footnote{187} His ‘Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film’ (1975) ‘manifesto’ outlined his uncompromising position which, according to Duncan Reekie, considered film ‘as a necessary element of an advanced revolutionary Marxist struggle’\footnote{188}.

Further questions, asking whether the Marxist collectivist spirit and the LFMC cooperative ethos also undermined the recognition of more personal, individualistic forms of filmmaking, need to be considered. These should be kept in mind for the following discussions in this chapter, as experimentation with structure and material has been recognised as the dominant history of 1970s experimental filmmaking and the more personal, visionary forms of filmmaking have not been adequately recognised. In this chapter experimentation with structure and material will be considered in order to understand its importance and complexity, but its dominant position will also be questioned. It needs to be understood that by questioning the dominance of structural and material experimentation in the decade, there is no intention to undermine the important theoretical and film work produced. These investigations were substantially important in opening up discourses on issues such as the medium and apparatus of film, perception and viewer engagement and are still important for contemporary filmmakers engaging with similar debates.\footnote{189}
Le Grice’s theoretical position was less uncompromising than Gidal’s (although it was theoretically rigorous), focusing on diverse aspects such as the role of the spectator, the time/space continuum and film materiality. Both Gidal and Le Grice’s theoretical positions are discussed in greater detail in this chapter. The terms ‘experiments with structure and material’ or ‘structural and material experimentation’ will be used here to avoid alignment with more specific terms such as Gidal’s ‘Structural/Materialist’.

In an essay on the more austere approaches taken by British experimental filmmakers, Deke Dusinberre identified the directions taken to counter ‘pathetic fallacy’ or the Romantically-infused emotionally and consciously-driven filmmaking. Dusinberre described the ‘ascetic task’ taken as having:

[T]wo related pursuits: to relentlessly efface the representational aspect of the cinematic image (thus engaging the discourse of the other arts by interrogating the very qualities of film as a specific medium) and the rigorous elimination of a transcendent goal or shape (to forestall an analogic critique which would lead to the ‘pathetic fallacy’ which undermines the literally reflexive strategies of structural film-making). The positive results of these tactics of negation is to challenge the dominant system of signification and to intensify the spectator’s awareness of her/his own capacities for meaning-making.

The films, therefore, focused on the specifics of the film medium, structure and process, sought to encourage a greater sense of viewer reflexivity without eliciting emotive responses to images which could be symbolically interpreted. Despite Gidal’s uncompromising position and an understanding of LFMC work produced during the decade, under the structural and material experimental remit, questions do need to be asked about how works were also framed after-the-effect to fit in with the structural/material position. This should be taken into account for the discussions here.

**Diverse Forms of Experimentation**

A broad range of approaches were taken to experiment with film form, materiality and structure, as A. L. Rees identified:

[T]he camera’s iconic image, single or double, was not in itself the central concern of the early Co-op which – with Mike Dunford, John Du Cane, Roger Hammond, David Parsons and Annabel Nicolson – took film-making further into live events, the handmade film print, procedural systems and expanded cinema (or ‘making films with projectors’) to question the given definition of film as a representation rather than, as the Co-op saw it, an investigation of its identity as a performance in
which viewers as well as makers were engaged. Such films seek film equivalents for light and motion. They aim to renew perception by using the whole register of film language, underlining its normally invisible aspects – frame, surface, print stock – and its ‘mistakes’ (flare, slippage, double-exposure).  

Some filmmakers, such as Gidal or William Raban, took more structured approaches in the filming stages and others, like Annabel Nicolson and Lis Rhodes, experimented with processing and printing. The diversity in experimentation meant that films ranged from Gidal’s austere *Clouds* (1969) or John Du Cane’s *Relations* (1974) to more image-rich films such as Jeff Keen’s *White Dust* (1972) and Chris Welsby’s *Seven Days* (1974). Films such as Nicolson’s *Shapes* (1970) and *Slides* (1971) focused on film materiality, whereas humour and child-play respectively informed Ian Breakwell’s *Repertory* (1973) and Marilyn Halford’s *Footsteps* (1974). Although most structural and material experimentation emerged from filmmakers working at – or affiliated to – the LFMC, filmmakers like Peter Greenaway also produced structural films, such as *Water Wrackets* (1975) and *Vertical Features Remake* (1978). Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, influenced by European art-house filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard, took more didactic approaches, using pro-filmic structuring devices and feminist discourses, to underpin films such as *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977). The Berwick Street Collective’s *Nightcleaners* (1975) has also been considered a structural film due to the editing of the documentary material.

The issue of American influence on British experimentation was deliberated with some regularity, as the LFMC had been partly-inspired by the New York Film Co-op (1962) and because a large proportion of the early LFMC films consisted of New American Cinema (NAC) works. In Webber’s LFMC chronology he noted that of the sixty titles in distribution by November 1967 ‘few are home-grown’, therefore the early influence could readily be assumed. In his ‘Early Chronology’ Curtis asserted that ‘international’ for the first few years of this chronology was ‘virtually synonymous with “American”’. In gathering further evidence for his own account and in Deke Dusinberre’s research for his (unpublished) thesis on English avant-garde film, however, it became apparent that American influence tended ‘to be greatly overestimated’. Curtis suggested that British developments endured from ‘original and distinctly English impulses’, citing filmmakers such as Keen and Le Grice and possibly also referring to 1930s filmmakers, Len Lye and Norman McLaren.
It is useful, however, to consider some of the international experimentation with form and content to reveal the wider framework and potential cross-cultural influences. Austrian filmmakers, Peter Kubelka and Kurt Kren were important influences on British structural and material experimentation, with Kubelka being present at an ICA event in 1967. Kubelka’s minimalist structural films included *Arnulf Rainer* (1958–60), consisting of black and white frames edited alternately using a diagrammatic score. Two advertising commissions included *Adebar* (1957) and *Schwechater* (1958), with both using minimal imagery and repetition in an abstracted, structural form. Le Grice first visited the LFMC to attend a screening of Kurt Kren’s films in September 1967, with the films making a significant impression on him. Le Grice resisted the temptation to present Kren ‘as some kind of father of European avant-garde film’ but acknowledged that ‘his work is certainly held in very high regard by almost all the film-makers this side of the Atlantic involved in so-called structuralist film’. Le Grice quoted 3/60 – *Baüme im Herbst* (1960), with its time-lapse images of trees in autumn, ‘as the first structural film’. Kren’s influence is evident in films such as Guy Sherwin’s *Tree Reflection* (from *Short Film Series*) and in Fred Drummond’s homage, *Kurt Kren Portrait* (1976).

Although the Fluxus movement took more anarchic approaches to art-making, there was also a modernist focus on form and content informed by conceptualism. In George Maciunas’ ‘Neo Dada in the USA’ (1962) essay, he asserted that ‘Fluxus embraced concretism and art-nihilism, which champion the unity of form and content’. Although the ‘unity’ differed to some extent, with Gidal advocating, for example, that ‘the real content is the form, form becomes content’, some distinct similarities can be seen in a few of the Fluxus and LFMC films.

Some interesting parallels can be drawn between Le Grice’s dual-screen *White Field Duration* (1973) and Nam June Paik’s *Zen for Film* (1964). Paik’s film consists of a thousand feet of clear, 16mm leader which accrues scratches and evidence of non-filmic materiality with repeated screenings. One of the films in *White Field Duration* is also made of a clear leader, with the other film comprising of footage of projected leader, or in effect the ‘refilming of non-photographic traces’. In both these non-representational, minimalist films the medium of film and the projection situation is emphasised. Although Le Grice has filmed the ‘empty’ footage to be screened, Bruce Jenkins assessment of *Zen for Film* is equally applicable for *White Field Duration*; ‘[w]ith one simple gesture, Paik had opted out of the duplicity of the
representational by making an aggressively presentational, imageless and anti-illusionist work”. Correlations between George Maciunas’ Flux Film No 7: Ten Feet (1966) and Guy Sherwin’s At the Academy (1974) are also evident, as both films contain academy film leader. Ten Feet contains numbers, counting down from one to ten at one foot intervals, and At the Academy consists of optically printed, looped and reprinted academy leader, revealing numbers in spectral bas-relief. Flux Film No 7: Ten Feet had been in the LFMC collection since 1969, when it arrived in a Fluxus Anthology donated by Jonas Mekas and Carla Liss, and Curtis had shown Zen for Film at the Roberts Street Arts Lab and at the Piano Factory.

Other early films also relating to British structural and material investigations included Roh Film (1968) by German filmmakers, Birgit and Wilhelm Hein and a number of American films such as George Landow’s Film In Which There Appear Sprocket Holes, Edge Lettering, Dust Particles, etc, (1966), Tony Conrad’s The Flicker (1966), Paul Sharits’ Piece Mandala (1966), Stan Brakhage’s Mothlight (1965) and films by Andy Warhol such as Sleep (1963) and Empire (1964).

An international exchange of ideas related to experimental filmmaking formed an important part of developments. Some of these were discussed in Chapter Two in relation to the NAC films held in the LFMC and in Chapter Three in relation to international film festivals, exhibitions and discussion forums. Links with European film groups had aspired towards the formation of a European Co-op at the end of the 1960s, although this never materialised. Throughout the 1970s, however, the LFMC made extensive efforts to keep international dialogues alive, either by showing work abroad or inviting filmmakers to show films in Britain (these often also included talks, debates or discussion forums). William Raban published the monthly Filmmakers Europe from 1977 onwards (supported by a Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation grant), providing information about screenings, workshops, film courses and generally opening up opportunities for European exchanges. LFMC screenings and talks abroad included Nicolson’s visit to Canada, documented in ‘Canadada Fragments’ (1973), screenings of films by Gidal and Mike Leggett at an ‘Avant-Garde Cinema’ (1976) event in Colorado; and debates between Le Grice and Sitney (1977) and Le Grice and Brakhage (1978) also provide informative insights into cross-Atlantic exchange. These are just a small number of events, but the international exchanges should be seen as an important part of 1970s experimental film developments.
Theoretical Perspectives

P. Adams Sitney, Malcolm Le Grice and Peter Gidal

In 1969 American critic, P. Adams Sitney published his ‘Structural Film’ essay, identifying a new direction in American experimental filmmaking. This differed from the mythopoeic, lyrical or psycho-dramatic films of the 1940s and 1950s, and instead focused on filmmaking informed by minimalism, conceptualism and modernism in the arts. Filmmakers investigated structural and procedural filmmaking devices and aspects of film material or structure. Sitney posited four characteristics defining a ‘structural’ film: an unchanging camera position, a flicker effect, looped printing and re-filming from the screen. Films prioritised form over content and often referenced the medium itself; he asserted that ‘the structural film insists on its shape, and what content it has is minimal and subsidiary to the outline’. This contrasted with approaches taken by earlier filmmakers, such as Stan Brakhage where the personal ‘camera eye’ was of prime importance, or in the films of Maya Deren, where a shot-by-shot consideration marked her tightly choreographed works.

Sitney’s points were addressed specifically in relation to films such as Michael Snow’s *Wavelength* (1967) and Andy Warhol’s *Sleep* (1963) and *Empire* (1964). *Wavelength*, consisting of a 45-minute zoom filmed across the length of a loft room, has a soundtrack of a slowly-increasing sine wave. The camera begins with a wide shot and ends with a close-up of a framed photograph of a wave (a play on the sound and image of the title). It won the Grand Prix at the Knokke Le-Zout Film Festival (1967) (attended by a number of British filmmakers) and was first screened at the Arts Lab, London, in 1968. Later screenings took place at the LFMC and it was taught in experimental film programmes, and still remains one of the seminal films referred to in historical analyses.

Although *Wavelength* was influential, Warhol’s films would prove particularly significant in opening discourses on illusion and the time/space manipulation in dominant, narrative cinema. *Sleep* significantly reversed some the earlier filmmakers’ focus on dreams and the unconscious, by literally showing someone in the act of sleeping. Warhol’s initial intention to produce an 8-hour film was limited by his equipment, with *Sleep* being heavily edited and appearing ‘meditative, beautiful, yet complexly structured, achronological and endlessly repetitious’. Warhol would realise his earlier intentions of shooting an 8-hour ‘real-time’ film a year later with *Empire*, consisting of a stationary shot of the Empire State Building,
filmed in one night. Sitney identified how Warhol discredited the myth of the personal, visionary filmmaker (as well as Hollywood filmmaking):

Warhol made the profanity of footage the central fact of all of his early films, and he advertised his indifference to direction, photography, and lighting. He simply turned the camera on and walked away.

Warhol’s films were first shown in Britain as part of the ‘New American Cinema’ screenings in the late 1960s. His approach (particularly to duration) wielded a significant influence on some British filmmakers, although many had initially been unaware of the disjunction between filming at sound speed (18fps) and projection at silent speed (16fps). Warhol’s confrontation with duration opened up new possibilities by challenging the meaning of temporality and film-time, as Sitney identified:

Warhol broke the most severe theoretical taboo when he made films that challenged the viewer’s ability to endure emptiness or sameness ... The great challenge, then, of the structural film became how to orchestrate duration; how to permit the wandering attention that triggered ontological awareness while watching Warhol films and at the same time guide that awareness to a goal.

Film duration (as Rees identified above) significantly informed and shaped British structural experimentation, with essays such as Le Grice’s ‘Real TIME/SPACE’ (1972) and Gidal’s 1975 manifesto providing theoretical insights related to duration. The ‘real time’ aspects of Warhol’s films, and subsequent influence on British filmmakers, interestingly also revealed experimentation hearkening back to early cinema experiments in the way durational equivalence was, as Stephen Heath observed, ‘itself a turning back in cinema’s history’ to the first films by Lumière.

In Le Grice’s White Field Duration, Paik’s Zen for Film and Warhol’s Empire the viewer experienced real-time as a durational experience through the film projection.

Although Sitney’s ‘Structural Film’ was important in identifying certain tendencies, it also elicited a number of critical responses, whereby the term ‘structural’ film and the limited criteria used to define this type of filmmaking were rigorously taken to task. Fluxus artist, George Maciunas’ one-page comment derided Sitney for his ‘3 Errors: (wrong terminology, wrong examples-chronology and wrong sources for origins).’ His sardonic ‘comment’ presented a table with categories and causes of error with proposed corrections and a list of over forty films for Sitney’s fewer examples.
German filmmaker and theorist, Birgit Hein, and British critic, Annette Kuhn, took more incisive, but measured, issue with Sitney’s essay. Hein determined that as flawed as Sitney’s ‘structural film’ was, it undeniably opened up important avenues for consideration as it highlighted a real tendency:

Until then, there only existed the notion of ‘underground film’, used as a catch-all category for all productions outside the official film-industry, i.e. erotic, poetic, formal, experimental and short films. Sitney was delineating a new direction, quite different from the mainstream of the American underground film which was mytho-poetic in nature.

Hein’s essay was written for the ‘Film as Film’ (1979) exhibition (discussed in Chapter One) and in attempts to identify the historical development of structural film (in order to shed light on 1970s British and European production) Hein observed that ‘[o]fficial film theory concentrates on the rendering of reality: structural film sees this as merely one possibility among many, and this allows for a much broader definition of the medium’. Her definition divided this into three categories; the filmstrip, projection and the projected image, which she elaborated on in her essay.

Kuhn similarly critiqued Sitney’s position to provide context for the ‘Perspectives on British Avant-garde Film’ (1977) exhibition, offering her view on structural film:

Accordingly structural film may inscribe the materiality of film (stock) itself and of the machinery required to render celluloid as film; or it may take as its topic film definable precisely as a semiotic system, a particular articulation of a series of codes which produce a film as more or less meaningful. In the latter instance certainly there is always some reference – implicit or explicit – to dominant forms of film language, and it might well even be argued that the kind of structural film practice which addresses itself solely to the material character of film is, by its refusal of connotative meaning, in fact constituting itself as a radical denial of dominant film language.

Kuhn’s analysis usefully serves as a reminder of the anti-Hollywood stance taken by filmmakers. Both Hein and Kuhn referred to experiments with structure and material, although they use the term ‘structural film’, which was important in defining the diversity of approach taken by British filmmakers in the decade.

Le Grice responded to Sitney’s ‘Structural Film’ with a 1972 essay, taking him to task on his simplistic definition and categorisation. He argued the futility of trying to find simple commonalities in films that differed so completely that ‘a film by Sharits and one by Frampton are different enough to keep a critic busy for a few weeks without including others’. Le Grice identified that, on a more general level, there had been ‘a new formal tendency among filmmakers who have a base in the
“underground”. He provided eight characterisations – instead of Sitney’s four – whereby ‘a range of specific areas of concern’, rather than strict categories, could identify approaches to filmmaking. In brief these included concerns:

1. deriving from camera limitations and extensions, such as lens and frame limits or camera movement and time-lapse
2. occurring through editing processes
3. with the eye mechanism and perception
4. deriving from printing, processing and re-filming procedures
5. focusing on the physical nature of film and its material reality, such as dirt, scratches or sprocket holes
6. relating to film projection and projection apparatus such as lens, shutter or screen
7. with duration as a concrete dimension
8. with meaning construction through ‘language’ systems or the semantics of image

Le Grice believed that these broader and more clearly defined criteria could more suitably accommodate the diversity in filmmaking practices and encourage wider critical debate. Most criticisms of Sitney’s terminology censured the fact that continental theories, related to linguistics and the social sciences in France, had not been acknowledged when Sitney coined the term ‘Structural Film’. However, in a 1977 debate with Le Grice, Sitney admitted that it was not an ideal term, suggesting that ‘the mistake of associating structuralism with structural film was not in the text of mine’.

Gidal outlined his singular position on ‘non-illusionistic’ filmmaking in ‘Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film’ (1975). His manifesto defined his critical position and his approach to filmmaking. The addition of ‘materialist’ – to Sitney’s ‘virtually formalist theory’ – also identified his Marxist position. Gidal defined his firm anti-Hollywood, anti-narrative and anti-representational stance identifying that ‘[i]n Structural/Materialist film, the in/film (not in/frame) and film/viewer material relations, and the relations of the film’s structure, are primary to any representational content’. Title headings within his manifesto included ‘Devices’, ‘Film as Material’, ‘The Viewer’, ‘Dialectic’, ‘Narrative and Deconstruction’, ‘Reading Duration’ and ‘Reflexivenes’, giving some idea of Gidal’s preoccupations. Gidal’s manifesto was described by A. L. Rees as follows:
Gidal’s introductory essay opens mildly enough by claiming that “it attempts to be non-illusionist”, but he unpacks this ambition in strongly didactic terms to successively attack all the major forms of cinema, including classic films, documentaries, dramas, political films and even experimental films in the “visionary” mode of Brakhage. For him film is very clearly a “modernist art”, defined by “flatness, grain, light, movement”, in a state of tension with its representational content and with the viewer.

Gidal’s concept of film as a modernist art needed, therefore, only to reference itself: film as film, with an overriding emphasis of form over content. Although Le Grice and Gidal questioned Sitney’s term ‘structural’, the term ‘material’ or ‘materiality’ would also lead to some confusion. Clarifications needed to be made to ensure that it did not only refer to film material, but that it was also accommodated all the processes of filmmaking and film screening such as camera operations, choice of film stock, processing and printing, exhibition context, etc.

Le Grice and Gidal’s involvement with experimental filmmaking extended beyond merely making films and defining the field in theoretical terms. They both campaigned for greater recognition of experimental filmmaking and sat on numerous boards and committees such as the BFIPB and the IFA. Both were involved with the LFMC in the early stages of development (Le Grice from 1967 and Gidal from 1968) and would maintain a dominant presence there throughout the 1970s. (Le Grice’s campaign for workshop funding was discussed in Chapter Two). Besides their responses to Sitney’s ‘Structural Film’ they also wrote extensively about film, with Gidal securing a weekly column dedicated to LFMC activity in Time Out (1972-75) (to which John du Cane also contributed) and Le Grice providing regular film reviews for ‘Vision’ in Studio International (1972-1977), as well as writing for other publications. They produced influential publications which remain seminal historical sources of reference, including Gidal’s Structural Film Anthology (1976) and Materialist Film (1989) and Le Grice’s Abstract Film and Beyond (1977) and Experimental Cinema in the Digital Age (2001). They also took part in events such as ‘Film as Structure’ (1973) at the Tate Gallery, where each of them screened a programme of their films alongside films by Kubelka, Sharits and Snow. In 1976 Gidal and Le Grice presented papers on theory and practice for a weekend seminar at the LFMC, organised by Deke Dusinberre, focusing on Wollen’s ‘The Two Avant-Gardes’.
Although they were in agreement on certain theoretical issues, they also differed on others, as Le Grice identified:

There is probably a greater justification for this link at the level of theory than there is in any specific aspects of the film work. As a theorist, Gidal offers a far more secure scholarship and breadth of contemporary reference than I have ever pretended, but I find more points of agreement in the concepts than I find in disagreements.  

Le Grice continued by stating that Gidal’s position on ‘structural/materialist’ film was particularly ardent (a position Gidal has continued to uphold), but one which Le Grice was less stringent about. He clarified his position independently from Gidal’s by stating that ‘in using the term “material”, I’ve been very unwilling to put the “ist” on the end and turn it into “materialist”’. Constance Penley identified that Gidal’s and Le Grice’s theorisation of filmmaking ‘are highly complementary, one often citing the work of the other to help support an argument’, but asserted that ‘[t]hey differ, however, in that Le Grice speaks from within a concerned historical reconstruction of the same movement for which Gidal polemically agitates’.

It is useful to briefly consider the theory and practice relation, as Gidal’s and Le Grice’s dual roles as filmmakers/theorists with certainty brought an in-depth understanding of technical and practical issues to their theorisation. This would certainly enable some deeper insights, as Paul Arthur maintained – ‘[a]n important distinction for the thrust (and impact) of Gidal’s work is that it has evolved alongside an active filmmaking practice’ – and which could be equally applicable to Le Grice’s position. Both maintained that theory followed practice, with Rees noting that despite Gidal and Le Grice being ‘associated with “theory-building” throughout the 1970s, Le Grice maintained that LFMC filmmakers applied theory after practice as an analysis of production’. It was, surely however, not quite as simple as working with a mind unadulterated by theory – a possible tabula rasa – and more realistically one can assume that theory and practice were integrally intertwined.

**Questioning Structural and Material Film and the Structuralist Legacy**

In attempting to understand why personal and visionary forms of filmmaking have not received adequate recognition in 1970s histories, alongside structural and material experimentation, it is necessary to take a closer look at the dominance of the structural and material theoretical position.
In the first instance it is worth considering how Gidal and Le Grice contextualised historical film practices to fit with their theoretical positions, as this sheds light on their dominant positions and on the more marginalised parts of the 1970s history this thesis seeks to reinstate. This was discussed to some degree in Chapter One; Le Grice distinguished specific films as fitting for his historical formulation outlined in the ‘History We Need’ (also drawing on his Abstract Film and Beyond (1977)), therefore creating a historical trajectory to support his theoretical position. Gidal similarly did this with Structural Film Anthology (1976) and the BFI’s ‘Structural Film Retrospective’ when he retrospectively positioned certain films and filmmakers to consolidate his theoretical position. Gidal and Le Grice were uncompromising about recognising films that clearly fitted or did not fit within their historical distinctions, with Constance Penley making some useful observations their dominant positions:

[A]s theoretical writings, the work of Le Grice and Gidal offers an already secondarized and rationalized version of their own activity, thus making very apparent their way of thinking about film. Le Grice’s writings, moreover, offer an account of both his and his contemporaries’ film-making practice across a history of the abstract, formal avant-garde, thus opening the way for a discussion of the historical placement of this avant-garde, of its historical imaginary, that is, its own conception of its origins and influences, its relation to the other arts and to the history of art.776 (Penley’s italics)

The historical imaginaries that Gidal and Le Grice created to support their positions were not in themselves unusual, and this is often the way that historians, critics, curators, theorists artists or filmmakers have contextualised or theorised practices. Commonalities, differences, shifts and radical breaks have been identified to reveal theoretical or aesthetic changes, or to establish new theoretical or critical positions. The problem, however, with Gidal and Le Grice’s ‘historical imaginaries’ and the positions they have defined, is that they generally established the dominant 1970s experimental film history (governed largely by structural and material film), which have continued to dominate accounts of 1970s experimental filmmaking histories, without being adequately challenged.777

From the mid-1970s, however, a number of criticisms of formal experimentation and the dominant structural and material theoretical position took place. At the Edinburgh Festival’s ‘International Forum of Avant-Garde Film’ (1976) Anthony McCall announced his doubts about the radical and political nature of structural filmmaking. He published the article, ‘1973-75. Closure’ and delivered a statement
signalling a shift in his artistic direction in the journal, *Wallpaper*, in June 1976.\textsuperscript{778} In his unpublished statement McCall identified that:

[A]vant-garde film, has slipped sideways into a network every bit as limiting, every bit as ideologically bound to a status quo, as the movie industry itself. The Museums of Modern Art have become our Odeons [sic] Leicester Square. Increasingly, the work is identified and practiced more as a visual style, than as a continuing exploration of the problematic of doing film, doing art, in this culture. Whatever political significance this work was beginning to acquire is now being negated by widespread promotion within the official system of art validation – one that occurs as a pervasive abstract imprint on an international scale, without authentic connection to the special social geography of each city, region or country.\textsuperscript{779}

McCall, speaking from the position associated with the ‘conceptual artists’ working with film, criticised the co-option of these avant-garde practices into the gallery system, leading to a commercialism that newer experimental practices in the 1960s had sought to undermine (as discussed in Chapter Three in relation to anti-commodification).

During this period (summer 1976) LFMC filmmaker, Mike Dunford also made a harsh criticism against the LFMC and the dominant theoretical (structural and material) position informing filmmaking. His Marxist/Leninist attack was particularly damning as it came from a fellow structuralist filmmaker, admonishing filmmakers (and theorists) of closely participating in the reproduction of the ideological function they defined themselves as being against, namely the dominant, commercial cinema.\textsuperscript{780} The change from a radical underground position to one under institutionalised state control was summarised by Reekie as follows:

The shift in the LFMC from the counter-culture to the aesthetics of Structuralism was a shift towards professionalised art (handicraft) practice that fetishised the production process: printing, processing, editing, rephotography, projection and so on. This aesthetic fetishisation was theorised/valorised as Materialism. But whilst the LFMC theorised against the bourgeois hegemony of the mainstream they were actually developing the avant-garde as an elite and autonomous institution under the direct control of the bourgeois state.\textsuperscript{781}

Although Reekie’s point is rather extreme, regarding ‘bourgeois state control’, his summary identified some important issues that McCall and Dunford’s critiques raised, about the commercialisation and institutionalisation that many artists (with their Marxist ideologies) had fought against in the late 1960s/early 1970s. The institutionalisation of experimental filmmaking (primarily at the LFMC) had, however, also led to some accomplishments, such the progressive recognition (by
funding bodies and educational institutions) of experimental filmmaking as an art form in its own right. Yet, there were issues with the dominance of the structural and material theoretical positions, particularly Gidal’s uncompromising viewpoint, inviting further criticism.

In the same year as McCall and Dunford’s denunciations, Anne Cottringer critiqued Gidal’s ‘Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film’, identifying ‘the many short-comings and contradictions of Gidal’s definition’ and suggesting that these ‘undermine[d] his arguments’. Furthermore, she argued that his problematic distinction between narrative/non-narrative film and the ‘viewer/viewed relationship inevitably blinkers his approach to a materialist definition’, potentially leading ‘ultimately to fetishisation of material’. This was clearly not the ‘advanced revolutionary Marxist struggle’ that Gidal had hoped to identify.

In Gidal’s defensive response to Cottringer’s criticism, he identified the relationship between theory and practice as presenting particular challenges:

I am admittedly bogged down in my language usage by my unfortunate experiences making films. The memory of one social practice intervenes on the formulation and attempts at theoreticisation of another (which is obviously not entirely separable).

The theory/practice dualism would also come to undermine Gidal’s filmmaking as some of his most ardent arguments, such as his attack on representation, and the disjunction between his theory and practice opened up additional avenues for criticism.

Stephen Heath also questioned Gidal’s uncompromising position as a filmmaker and theorist in ‘Afterword’ (1979), identifying that the dismissal of all forms of filmmaking posed a significant dilemma:

There is for Gidal a radical impossibility: the history of cinema. The fundamental criticism made of everyone from the Berwick Street Collective to Akerman, Oshima to Le Grice (even Le Grice), is that their films are part of that history, return its representation, that they are in that cinema, repeat its implications.

(Heath’s emphasis)

The difficulty with Gidal’s negation – especially against representation – is that the use of the film medium invariably created a contradiction-in-terms. Unless the work was minimised to an extreme degree as in Nam June Paik’s Zen for Film (1964) or Anthony McCall’s Line Describing a Cone (1973), then the film medium – particularly with filmed ‘image’ (as all of Gidal’s films were) – would be notoriously
problematic. Perhaps the better solution for such negations could be found in McCall’s *Long Film for Ambient Light* (1975), where no film was evident and only referred to in the title, or better still in John Stezaker’s ‘idea for a film – concept committed to the page’. Here we have anti-representation at its finest.

A further attack on Gidal’s manifesto was presented in Deke Dusinberre’s ‘Consistent Oxymoron’ (1977) in which he identified – in no uncertain terms – that it ‘reads as a series of more or less disjointed monologues’, suggesting that ‘[i]n short, the overall impression is not one of linear argument, but one of fragmented comment. That comment is further fragmented by an oxymoronic vocabulary and contradictory phrase structure’. Despite these criticisms Gidal continued to maintain a dominant position, teaching at the RCA, and exerting a significant influence on younger filmmakers.

Rees identified a younger generation of LFMC filmmakers, such as Michael Mazière, Nicky Hamlyn and Penny Webb, producing work which continued the arguments with aspects of structural filmmaking, although these were ‘usually representational and ‘imagist’. The formal dominance at the LFMC was, however, also refuted by other filmmakers that joined the LFMC towards the end of the 1970s, such as Cordelia Swann and Anna Thew, whose interests were less concerned with structural and material film investigations. This turn against the dominant LFMC position has problematically consolidated the ‘return to image’ thesis that allegedly occurred in the history of experimental filmmaking at the end of the decade. Le Grice noted that ‘the first wave of reaction against the orthodoxy of the Co-op practice was the New Romantics ... it was at this time that we felt we (Gidal and I) should back off’ (my italics). Although there may have been an ‘orthodoxy’ for certain members, this needs to be seen within the wider framework of experimental film practices, including the films discussed in the previous chapter.

While it is necessary to question the dominance of Gidal and Le Grice’s theoretical and concrete (on filmmaking) positions, this needs to be balanced with a recognition of their achievements. Hamlyn did this in a number of retrospective articles, concluding that:

In retrospect, it can be seen that Gidal’s and Le Grice’s anti-cinema polemics could not by themselves constitute a self-sufficient artistic theory, and this partly explains the decline of Structural film. However, their theories can usefully serve as a set of background beliefs to sustain a filmmaking which reinstates to its programme the investing of perception, exploring the peculiarities of the human
As discussed previously these theories established many valuable insights, which contemporary filmmakers continue to engage with. The dominance of these positions, however, also needs to be questioned, particularly where they stand in the way of accommodating the more personal/representational forms of experimental filmmaking, this thesis seeks to recognise, as an *equally* important part of 1970s history.

In further examples revealing Gidal’s dominance, Curtis identified that ‘[b]y the mid-1970s Gidal’s *stern injunctions* against representation, and particularly any depiction of women, had taken hold among the Co-op group’793 (my emphasis). Curtis identified that Mazière was ‘initially equally committed to the *Gidalian position* ... [h]is *Untitled* (1980), made while he was still at the RCA, was a construction of super-impositions, camera-movements and sound-dislocations that questioned the representation of space in film in the *authentic Gidal manner*’794 (my italics). Gidal was clearly an indomitable presence, and in Anna Thew’s acerbic account of the LFMC she pointed out that ‘Gidal was a name dropped around with varying degrees of force’, further noting that she was ‘sitting close to God’ (Gidal).795 Dusinberre also ended his ‘Consistent Oxymoron’ critique by suggesting that ‘in less disciplined moments we might be tempted to consider Gidal’s formulation of a fragmented artistic subject whose location must be inferred by the aesthetic subject in the tradition of Hebraic theology which describes G-d as that which cannot be named but merely alluded to’.796 The point here is not to undermine Gidal’s position completely, but to consider how significant his dominant presence and influence was in the 1970s and in subsequent decades. Additionally, to further to question how much this was responsible for the lack of recognition for more personal, representational and subjectively-informed filmmaking.

It was, however, in Penley’s critique of both Gidal and Le Grice’s dominant positions that some possible insights could be gleaned on the lack of recognition for the personal, more representational forms of filmmaking this thesis seeks to recognise. Penley criticised both Gidal and Le Grice’s positions on filmmaking, asking ‘what is the place of a modernist practice like the Co-op movement that explicitly and militantly disavows any relation to “illusionism”, the imaginary, identification, even fiction?’797 As discussed above, Penley identified their ‘historical
imaginaries’ as problematically recognising only *certain* forms of filmmaking. Yet, despite the collective criticisms on the structural and material position identified here, it continued to wield a significant influence on filmmakers, critics and historians, informing the dominant account of 1970s experimental film history. This needs to be seriously reconsidered as it presents – as this thesis identifies – an uneven account of the decade. The lack of recognition for the more expressive or personal forms of filmmaking has motivated this research project, ensuring that these filmmakers – misaligned as they are within the current 1970s histories – obtain the recognition that they deserve.

**Narrative, Sound and Purposive Duration**

Although the above section has critically examined the dominant structural and material position, this was also certainly important in opening discourses and informing 1970s film experimentation. This is evident in the established accounts of the decade and the numerous films produced informed by theoretical and practical experimentation. Before moving on to consider the importance of the LFMC workshop and the films in more detail, it will be useful to deliberate on a number of issues. This will include a brief discussion on narrative and the role of sound and image in narrative formation.

Most of the experimental films discussed in this thesis – in opposition to dominate commercial cinema – do not follow a linear narrative structure. Gidal’s insistence that ‘[n]arrative is an illusionistic procedure, manipulatory, mystificatory, repressive’ informed his theoretical and practical approaches to demystify film by exposing the structure and material of the medium. The ‘manipulatory’ aspect (of film on the viewer) is, however, rather complex and it could be argued that it relates to all forms of film (commercial, independent and experimental), as the viewer is compelled to watch from beginning to end. This differs significantly to the viewing of a painting or sculpture, where the viewer is not manipulated in the same durational manner. In this respect escaping the ‘manipulatory’ aspect of narrative (the unfolding of film through time and space) may, arguably, not be at all possible with the film medium. Exceptions, however, do exist in such minimal works as McCall’s *Long Film for Ambient Light* (1975), which only refers to film and does not make the same demands on the viewer’s time. Penley raised the issue of narrative in relation to Le Grice and Gidal’s insistence on its elimination in experimental film:
As for Le Grice and Gidal’s argument that narrative must be eliminated because it constructs and manipulates as unconscious spectator, it is not completely sure that even the least “montaged” avant-garde films escape the fundamental structures of narrative.  

Du Cane similarly recognised how the concept of narrative could pose some problems if the film’s passage through time was considered:

One of the central facts about film is the fact of its transient duration. The relations between external, objective time consciousness as they exist in the further relation of film time and real time are relations that have only recently been given detailed attention.

These considerations are useful to keep in mind as a film – as opposed to a painting – if it is to be fully appreciated, is reliant on the viewer’s engagement with the whole work, demanding (manipulating?) the viewer’s time. Film narrative is also further be complicated by the addition of sound, as will be seen with the examples discussed below. Workshops, such as ‘The Avant-Garde and Narrative - 2’ (1978), were held at the LFMC in collaboration with the Society for Education in Film and Television (SEFT).

Many film experiments with structure and material were silent or had an abstract sound track that did not utilise sound for purposes of narrative formation or story-telling. Although this was often attributed to financial constraints, ‘silent sound’ was also an intentional decision, forcing a closer attendance to the visual aspect of film content or the mechanics of projection. Sound could be seen as surplus to requirements, interfering with the visual content of the film, as Brakhage pointed out in ‘On Silent Sound’ (1957):

The sound sense which visual images always evoke and which become integral with the aesthetic experience of the film under creative control, often makes actual sound superfluous. On this premise alone, one could disqualify almost every sound film from consideration as a work of art. There is no definition of a work of art which will admit superfluity.

In structural and material experimentation, and the foregrounding of form over content, the addition of sound could therefore be seen as unnecessarily superfluous, as Wollen also acknowledged:

Language is still excluded from an enormous number of avant-garde films, which are shown either silent or with electronic or other musical tracks. Again, there are real technical and financial reasons for this, but these practical disincentives coincide with an aesthetic itself founded on concepts of visual form and visual
problems that exclude verbal language from their field, and may be actively hostile to it. 803

Silent films also demand a specific focus on the visual image and the projection situation, encouraging the sought for viewer-reflexivity many (especially LFMC) filmmakers were preoccupied with.

In Chapter Four the use of the optical soundtrack was discussed in relation to Guy Sherwin’s Optical Sound Series, Lis Rhodes’ Dresden Dynamo (1971) and Steve Farrer’s Ten Drawings (1976) as a clear correlation between sound and image existed. Sound, however, also played an important role in shaping narrative, either through the incongruence between sound and image or because the soundtrack offered a narrative structure to the work. The important role of sound in narrative construction is considered below with films by Ian Breakwell, Peter Greenaway, David Hall, John Smith and Chris Welsby.

**LFMC Workshop: Collaboration and/or Individual Production**

Before considering a range of films in greater detail, a closer look at the LFMC will be useful as this was essential in facilitating experimentation with material and structure for many filmmakers. The wider workshop movement and the origins of the LFMC (and funding) were briefly discussed in Chapter Two, but a more detailed account, looking at how production facilities enabled the development of a distinctively British practice in the 1970s, will be considered here. A reminder, by Le Grice, of the contexts and motivations surrounding the set-up of the LFMC is useful in trying to establish the ethos of the working environment:

The concepts for the Co-op drew variously for their formation and sustenance on a range of diverse influences as wide as that of the hippy movement, Marx, Marcuse, and May ’68. It drew heavily on the precedent of the New York Film-makers Co-operative, but, through the merger with the Arts Laboratory group took on a much wider set of objectives. Though it was not fully appreciated at the time, even by those of us most involved, as well as having more ambitious aims, it always had a more strongly developed set of social and political objectives than had motivated the New York Co-op. 804

Social and political objectives included members’ commitment in all aspects of the LFMC operations – from laying bricks, plumbing, mending pavements or fixing floors and making tea to operating equipment. This was a significant factor in the
longevity of the LFMC, with the integrated practice of production, distribution and exhibition also serving as a good working model.

The LFMC’s survival was plagued by a lack of finances (as briefly alluded to in Chapter two) and it had an itinerant existence, in various sites across north London, until securing a long-term home (for twenty years) in Gloucester Avenue (1977). After the closure of the Arts Lab in 1969, the LFMC was homeless for a year, with films kept at Curtis’ home, equipment at Le Grice’s home and screenings held mostly at the Electric Cinema. The LFMC was housed in the New Arts Lab (or Institute for Research in Art & Technology (IRAT)) in 1969, where it remained until the end of 1970.805 A longer term home at the Dairy (Prince of Wales Crescent), from 1971-75, offered some security before relocating to the Piano Factory (44a Fitzroy Road, Camden) for one year. Both the Dairy and the Piano Factory required a substantial amount of work, with Co-op members involved in a co-operative spirit and with the ‘shared labour add[ing] to developing [a] collective ideology’.806 Relocation costs were covered by Greater London Council and the Gulbenkian Foundation for the Gloucester Avenue move in 1977. Rees noted that ‘[e]ach location stamped its shape on the films that were made there, from the meltdown of media in ‘expanded cinema’ of the two Arts Labs, to a more purist climate at Fitzroy Road’.807

LFMC members involved in the 1960s and 1970s, besides Le Grice, Gidal and Curtis, included Nicolson, Tim Bruce, David Crosswaite, Deke Dusinberre, John Du Cane, Mike Dunford, Stephen Dwoskin, Gill Etherley, Steve Farrer, Marilyn Halford, Roger Hammond, Jeff Keen, Ian Kerr, David Larcher, Mary Pat Leece, Carla Liss, Anthony McCall, Lis Rhodes, Barbara Schwarz, Guy Sherwin, William Raban, Anne Rees-Mogg, Carolle Schneemann, John Smith and Chris Welsby.

Gidal outlined the importance of the printing and processing equipment at the LFMC in facilitating production:

[S]pontaneous or not, work with one possible operation through one aspect of one machine at the London Film-makers Co-operative in, say, 1969 could yield a specific kind of work on representation that another system of technology could not. Commercial laboratory processing could not yield this kind of work on/in film, regardless of whether or not theorisation had reached a point of desiring such a work.808

Gidal continued by discussing how the LFMC equipment supported an experimental approach to practice, much as an artist using a studio would do, and where working with the machines was instrumental in determining the final outcome of films.
It is useful to consider how Marxist, collectivist ideologies infused approaches to production at the LFMC and, more importantly for the arguments here, also possibly negated the recognition of more individualistic, personal and visionary filmmaking practices. Curtis identified that ‘Peter Gidal and others saw their work at the Co-op in the 1970s as gaining stature from being part of a collective enterprise, avoiding the individualist path’. Reinforced by Marxist materialist ideologies, Gidal identified that there was ‘[n]o ethic of petit bourgeois handworker. No aesthetic of individual genius’. According to Gidal, the LFMC operated in a particularly collective and supportive manner despite occasional personal differences to filmmaking, and he gives an example of how Le Grice had helped him produce a sequence of his film:

There was zero competitiveness. We worked together, supporting each other, making a film, getting each other’s film shown, even if we had fights and did not get along personally, we would show each other’s work.

Nicolson also commented on the collective and supportive way of working, suggesting that:

It made us very dependent on each other or whoever had the skills, or who was on hand who could show you how to do something. It meant we had a very intimate relationship to each other’s work. We were either looking at each other’s work or helping each other with something.

The specifically collective manner of producing films should not be misinterpreted as being a homogenous approach to filmmaking, but instead produced a diversity of approaches, evident in the films produced. Le Grice and Curtis were prescient in recognising the need for workshop facilities, in the early days of the LFMC’s formation, for facilitating work in an artisanal manner. However, not all filmmakers used the workshops and even Gidal, who was a dominant presence at the Co-op in the early 1970s, sent films to Soho laboratories with detailed instructions for printing in later years. Some filmmakers, like Welsby, did in-camera editing, preferring not to make extensive use of the workshop. Larcher, however, as discussed in Chapter Four, literally lived at the LFMC while working on his two epic films in the workshops. The range of films discussed below demonstrate the diverse concerns preoccupying filmmakers such as materiality, humour, narrative and the relationship between sound and image. Not all filmmakers discussed, however, were LFMC members.
Film Experimentation

A range of films will be focused on in this section, considering diverse aspects of structural and material experimentation. The choice of films is neither definitive of these forms of experimentation, nor do they account for all structural and material experimentation in the decade, and should be seen in conjunction with the already well-established structural and material film histories. They instead disclose some interesting facets of experimentation, related to film materiality; anti-representation and subjectivity; humour, narrative formation and the disjunction between sound and image.

The Material of Film: *Shapes and Slides*

Films such as Le Grice’s *Yes No Maybe Maybe Not* (1967) and Gidal’s *8mm Notes on 16mm Film* (1971) expose the materiality of the medium by the inclusion of sprockets, the edges of the film frame and show the film being pulled through the printer. Le Grice’s identified how the process of revealing film materiality could oppose dominant, commercial cinema construction:

> What Hollywood tried desperately to hide – the material base of the medium – in order to retain an illusion that the spectator was inside the scene of the narrative, I, the Heins, Landow, Conrad and others tried to stress. This attention to the material simultaneously disrupted illusion and established a new basis on which artistic equipment in the medium could be built.

Nicolson’s films *Shapes* (1970) and, the Arts Council-funded, *Slides* (1971) would have been impossible to produce without access to production facilities. They are – as their titles suggest – about shapes on and in film as it is slid through a contact printer. *Shapes* was filmed in Nicolson’s living space, with the camera moving around objects such as paper and transparent gels hanging in the room. Shots, taken from the rooftop of St Martins School of Art, are also included in the 7-minute film, presenting a succession of abstract images, at times grainy and painterly, which David Miller described as being ‘exploratory, subtlety, humble and thoughtful’. These are as much a record of the external objects observed, as a record of the internal filmmaker’s ‘receptive eye’. Nicolson described her working process, explaining that the incidental played an important part in shaping the final outcome of a work:

> The process was very fluid, similar to painting. I got quite interested in the specks of dust and dirt on the film and the re-filming gave me a chance to look at that more closely. When I make a film, I’m not sure what I’m ever going to achieve … it kind of gets clearer to me as I’m doing it.
In this way the lack of pedantic attention, conventionally used in handling film in a laboratory setting, would instrumentally inform the film content. By allowing dust or dirt into the film strip, the film became a physical record of a space, with traces of the minute ephemera held within the space.

*Slides* is a 10-minute film montage, consisting of, mostly, abstract images, including:

35mm slides of a number of Nicolson’s paintings, cut into narrow strips and joined together into lengths. There are also some sections and still frames from an earlier film *Anju* and some pieces of celluloid, sewn with dark coloured thread. The imagery consists of landscape footage, still images, abstract colour bands and brush strokes and a sequence of a face which has been cut out from one film and inserted into the material of another. Sprocket holes appear regularly and frequently swop sides as the original film is flipped or alternated.

Nicolson pulled or hand-threaded 8mm, 16mm and 35mm film fragments through a Debrie contact printer. By this process the finest details were magnified to reveal dust or dirt, as well as the sprocket holes and light leaking through, where the image is smaller than the frame. In discussing Nicolson’s working process with the slow-running Debrie printer, Nicky Hamlyn singled out how instrumental the machinery was in enabling this type of filmmaking:

This makes it a good tool for creative/experimental printing, hence its importance for the London Film-maker’s Co-op at times when film-makers have wanted to explore and control those processes normally undertaken by commercial laboratories.

Fleeting images of a bookshelf, a room, or a figure in a landscape are intermittently visible throughout the film, and through the rich colour and density of the photographed images, the light flares and the exposure of the physicality of the medium a dialogue is formed between film content and film material. In an artist’s statement Nicolson described it as follows:

Slides came about through some fascination with the phenomena of matter, its frailty and transience, the oddness of tiny filmed images from my earlier work lying around. Images were created by movement and handling, literally keeping in touch with the elements.

**Anti-representation and the Subjective ‘Camera-Eye’: Room Film 1973**

Gidal’s *Room Film 1973* (1973) reveals some similarities to Nicolson’s two films, in the way the fleeting images briefly move across the screen without a firm sense of recognition or representation. Curtis had screened Gidal’s earlier *Room Film, Double*
Take (1967) in the Arts Lab, soon after Gidal’s arrival in England. In the later Room Film 1973, the handheld camera moves across a domestic space – his ‘room’ of the title – barely alighting or allowing the eye to identify objects. The film focuses on the act of perception and consists of 100-foot continuous takes, edited into 5-second units, which are repeated once in the same sequence. As the camera moves across the room there are brief moments of repose, giving a sense of recognition to a plant and its shadow, a light socket, a book and papers, before moving on, continuing its restless search across the room. Dusinberre identified Gidal’s intended focus on anti-representation:

> The film is almost relentless in its denial of tangible images (that is, images which are easily identifiable and spatially locatable) ... The feeling of surface is evoked throughout: surface of object, of film, of screen.\(^{820}\)

Ironically, this continued search – and denial – draws parallels with films such as Nicolson’s Shapes as both films reveal a kind of navigation through space made by a personal ‘camera-eye’. Gidal, however, with his firm anti-illusionist and anti-representational stance was entirely opposed to the idea of subjectivity, and in his statement about the film stated ‘the film is not a translation of anything, it is not a representation of anything, not even of consciousness’.\(^{821}\) The moving camera, however, somewhat ironically appears to be firmly tied to the filmmaker’s roving vision.

In Room Film 1973 aspects of the film material and structure, such as grain, flatness, colour, flare-out, and film surface are revealed in green and grey tinged imagery. Despite Gidal’s insistence on an ‘objective’ impersonal reading of the film, the hand-held fleeting images are subjectively inscribed. Gidal’s films have been compared to the films of Stan Brakhage – to whom he sees himself entirely opposed (in filmmaking terms) – whose personal, visionary filmmaking was heavily steeped in the personal ‘camera-eye’ and conscious/subconscious processes in filmmaking. Rees suggested that ‘like the colour flashes and vivid movement of his later films, they recall Brakhage – a comparison Gidal opposes, since he rejects Brakhage as myth maker and image maker’.\(^{822}\) Jonas Mekas also made this comparison when he said that “[b]y the use of early Brakhage techniques, very subtly and very plastically it deals with light, glimpses of light falling in the room, on various objects ... Gidal’s own “Anticipation of the Room” ...”\(^{823}\) Le Grice also noted that despite Gidal wanting it otherwise, or ‘however much he would like it played down critically’, films such as
Room Film 1973 ‘are at one level predicated on the sensual lure and the visual pleasure which he derives from the objects looked at’. Nicky Hamlyn had also identified this connection when he noted that Gidal’s films had been ‘vulnerable to this kind of [subjective] interpretive reading’ that resembled filmmakers like Brakhage, ‘whose work is avowedly poetic and mythopoeic: the expression of personal vision.’ There is clearly no denying the connection.

An interesting correlation can also be seen between Gidal and Brakhage’s films through an observation made by Michael Snow: ‘I liked your Room Film 1973 very much. It is very good ... I felt as if my father had made it, as if it was made by a blind man ... I feel that searching tentative quality a lot, that quality of trying to see’. This is so close to Brakhage’s oft-cited opening line in his seminal ‘Metaphors on Vision’ essay, in which he stated:

Imagine an eye unruled by made-made laws of perspective, an eye unprejudiced by compositional logic, an eye which does not respond to the name of everything but which must know each object encountered in life through an adventure of perception.”

Of course, Brakhage’s essay is written in a visionary or mystical tone of voice, differing significantly to Gidal’s theoretical one. Yet there is certainly something about the fleeting journey through Room Film 1973, which is equally an ‘adventure in perception’ in how attempts are made to make sense of space, and where the eye momentarily alights on an object, only to be denied the full shape and form in detail, and is forced to perceive again and again.

More needs to be said about Brakhage’s films as these have commonly been considered films of personal vision, mythopoeic or lyrical, and he has been considered ‘too uncritically subjective’ by some critics. Yet Rees also identified that structural filmmakers were influenced by the ‘modernist montage’ in Brakhage’s seminal film, Mothlight (1963), which included actual moth’s wings, flowers and leaves collaged between clear 16mm film leader and direct-printed onto fresh film stock. Paul Arthur referred to these as ‘denatured photographic’ images, identifying that Mothlight operated as part of the ‘strategy of modernist anti-illusionism’, not dissimilar to structural and material forms of experimentation.

Brakhage’s earlier films, such as Desistfilm (1954), Wedlock House: An Intercourse (1959) and Window Water Baby Moving (1959), also display structural approaches with their lack of linear narrative, focus on the structuring film process and use of repetitions. In Brakhage’s later film, The Text of Light (1974), consisting
entirely of shots of sunlight refracted through a crystal ashtray filmed with a macro-
lens, the minimalist and spare images capture the materiality of objects as ‘the light
seems to take on the shapes, textures, movements, even the three-dimensionality, of
things’.832

What is fundamentally important – whether in Room Film 1973, Mothlight or The
Text of Light – is the way that these films are framed in critical or theoretical
discourses. This was discussed briefly in the Introduction, but needs to be firmly
emphasised, as it crucially informs the way films are critically received and
historicised. Gidal observed the structural, material or minimal ‘unemotional’ image
(although the critical readings of Gidal’s films may not accord with his intentions),
whereas Brakhage’s films are written about in more mystical language in relation to
‘the physical and metaphysical light invoked by Erigena and Grossteste’. 833

**Anticipation Through Image Construction: Film No 1**

A brief mention needs to be made of David Crosswaite’s *Film No* (1971) as it reveals
some particularly interesting issues on progressive image construction. The 10-minute
film makes use of multiple frames within the main frame (also evident in Raban’s
2’45” (1972) and Arden’s *Anti-Clock* (1979)), with the screen divided into four
sections. Crosswaite achieved this through filming on 8mm film, without splitting the
film in the processing stage, thus enabling projection with four frames within the
16mm frame. Two abstract images dominate the film: one appears to be of barely
recognisable night-time traffic, occurring periodically with flashing lights of passing
cars. The other is a kind of barbed circle, at times ‘stationary’ and at others spinning
and swirling. Both negative and positive image are utilised, with a steady build-up of
image occurring from start to finish. A complex series of loops were built up in the
printing stage, using a system of masks, with colour added to the original black-and-
white footage, creating a dynamic rendition of colourful explosions with the abstract
images. The film begins in black-and-white, with one of the four frames flickering
and flashing periodically, although this soon builds, revealing single or multiple
frames flashing across the screen. It is particularly the way that colour is most
elocuntly added that shapes a kind of visual narrative progression. The
monochromatic images (from the start of the film) are complemented half-way
through, with the select addition of sepia, pale greens, and then gradually more dense
yellows and blues and finally some highly-saturated hot pinks and reds.
In Roger Hammond’s introduction to the ‘Structural/Materialist’ programme of films for *Shoot Shoot Shoot: The First Decade of the London Filmamkers’ Co-operative and British Avant-Garde Film, 1965-1975*, he said that he could not over emphasise the importance of David Crosswaite’s *Film No. 1* (1971), suggesting that it revealed Wittgenstein’s anticipation and intentionality, with the imagery exposing the continual correction of thought and fugitiveness.834 *Film No. 1* has a whirring, rhythmic soundtrack complementing the whirling and spinning spirals, ensuring continued absorption and creating a more lively sense of engagement than some of the more austere structural films, seeking to negate the image, present.

**Humour and Sound/Image Disjunction: Repertory, Girl Chewing Gum and Footsteps**

The important role of sound is revealed in Ian Breakwell’s *Repertory* (1973) and John Smith’s *Girl Chewing Gum* (1976), with the disjunction between sound and image raising questions about visual and auditory representation and film narrative. A crucial factor is the way the two films also make use of humour, as this is little in evidence in most experimentation with structure and material. The Arts Council-funded *Repertory* consists of a continuous tracking shot around the outside of a closed theatre building. In the 9-minute film, Breakwell provides a voiceover detailing a day-by-day account of productions taking place in the building.835 The more colourful, verbal descriptions of events provide a marked contrast to the drab, dishevelled exterior of the building. With each day’s programme, details about the position of the curtains and the footlights (up or down), inveigle the viewer to imagine the possibility of events taking place in the theatre. Breakwell’s ongoing interest in the mundane, using humour, was discussed in the previous chapter; and Mike Sperlinger described how *Repertory* exposed the boring aspects of life in a banal manner.

With its unresolved tension between the image on the screen and the voiceover, *Repertory* remains ambiguous; theatre is presented as at once as a healthy eruption of the absurd into drab daily life, and at the same time an arbitrary confinement of it.836

The soundtrack is instrumental in directing the viewer’s imagination in order to construct images and to ‘see’ these theatre productions, bringing imaginary colour and life to the film, despite the fact that all that can be seen on the screen are dull images of bricks, walls and the boarded-up windows of a building in a state of disrepair.
Therefore a kind of imaginary narrative is formed in the viewer’s mind, also drawing attention to the absurdity of the situation.

In Smith’s *Girl Chewing Gum*, humour similarly operates, forcing the viewer to question what is being addressed in the soundtrack. The voiceover appears to be that of a film director instructing a film crew on camera shots and directing the ‘actors’. Although events initially occur as instructed, the viewer soon realises that the scenes being ‘choreographed’ are far too complex for such evidently easy cohesion. Most of the film consists of a wide shot of a busy street corner with cars, buses and pedestrians moving in and out of frame, and the humour becomes more evident as ‘actors’ in the film seemingly obey the directed orders. Just before the close of *Girl Chewing Gum*, a cut and change of scenery ‘ambiguously locates the commentator in a distant field’, thus disclosing the ‘director’s’ location, although this is still undermined by the dialogue.\(^{837}\) *Girl Chewing Gum* established Smith’s fondness for creating an illusion through a play on word, image, and narrative voice which is also evident in *Associations* (1975) and his later film, *Gargantuan* (1992).\(^{838}\)

Both films question the role of sound in narrative construction in a humorous way, in turn leading the viewer to question what is seen and heard. Sperlinger, discussing Breakwell’s preoccupation in all areas of his diverse art practice questioned the roles played by image and word, asking ‘what can you do in words and what can you do in pictures?’\(^{839}\) The relationship between sound and image was also important in defining the political or provocative nature of image; with concerns raised about the ability of image (without sound) to adequately articulate political concerns. In his review of structural film theories Paul Arthur expressed his surprise that Gidal tended to avoid discussions of the sound/image disjunction. Arthur noted that Gidal suggested that ‘juxtaposition does not ensure a questioning situation and seemed to reject sound as having a major role’.\(^{840}\) The soundtrack, however, played an important role in shaping a film, as these two films demonstrate, and the use of sound would become especially important for women filmmakers, as the following chapter reveals.

Humour was also used in films such as Bruce Lacey’s *How to Have a Bath* (1971), which is part of a rather bizarre series of Arts Council-funded films, documenting human behaviour. The absurd style of the film (albeit not explicitly engaging with the dominant structural and material position) with Bruce and his wife demonstrating the ‘how to’ of the title, parodies Richard Massingham’s instructional wartime film, *The Five Inch Bather* (1943) on saving water and washing all the necessary body parts.
Anna Thew parodied the austerity of 1970s structural filmmaking in *Lost for Words* (1980). Thew, familiar with Mulvey’s and Wollen’s *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977) and Le Grice’s *Time and Motion Study* (1976), determined that ‘there was obviously a great deal of confusion on the British scene between whether to go Godard, or go down another pot hole (double screen of course)’. Lost for Words, set in a post-apocalyptic landscape, opens with a little girl reciting Marx and follows a disjunctive narrative, including a car journey, an accident and the final inhabitant on earth being interviewed on the radio. Thew joined the LFMC at the end of the 1970s and edited the film (partially filmed when Thew was at Chelsea School of Art under the tutelage of Anne Rees-Mogg) on the LFMC pic-synch, receiving Arts Council completion funding for printing.

In Marilyn Halford’s *Hands Knees and Boompsa Daisy* (1973) and *Footsteps* (1974) child play is resorted to as Halford uses the structure of a game and her background in dance to shape the films. In *Hands Knees and Boompsa Daisy* she performs the game of the title with her on-screen filmed image. In *Footsteps* Halford plays the game ‘footsteps’, with the cameraman creeping up on her from behind and capturing her actions. The first half of the film is presented silent and shown in negative, with images of Halford standing, with her back to the viewer, in front of a high brick wall. She periodically turns around quickly, attempting to catch out her ‘playmate’ (the camera), as the camera moves closer to her, capturing her face and upper body in animated action; before the camera swings back across trees and grass to take its position to creep up on Halford again. The second half of the film is shown in positive image, and is a near-repetition of the first half, although it is also complemented by a light-hearted piano score, adding to the playfulness of the game-playing. Catherine Russell identified that ‘[c]hildhood was a privileged theme in the avant-garde of the 1960s as the site of a spontaneity and uncorrupted vision that was sought as an ideal of visionary cinema’. Although this is not much in evidence in some of the more austere LFMC structural and material experimentation, Halford’s combination of child’s play and more serious experimentation with formal aspects of film, are a welcome rejoinder from the more rigorously (and sometimes dull) structural films, where the viewer is forced to endure boredom to recognise the passage of time.
**Sound as Narrative Formation: Streamline, Water Wrackets, Vertical and Vertical Features Remake**

Finally four films by David Hall, Chris Welsby and Peter Greenaway will be discussed. The intention is to demonstrate how two films with similar visual imagery, and aligned with structural forms of filmmaking, can operate on completely different levels due to the content of the soundtrack.

Although Greenaway had no involvement with the LFMC, his films demonstrate the wider influence of experimentation with structure and material. His awareness of dominant experimental filmmaking practices and knowledge of structural filmmaking is revealed in a statement related to his BFI-funded film, *A Walk Through H* (1978):

> It was the time of structuralism. There was a great desire for the very matter of self-conscious filmmaking. There was a lot of concern for organising film strategies based upon number counts, equations, etc. And I was I suppose a sponge for all that activity. I myself wanted to make a contribution.  

Greenaway did not, however, merely engage in this type of filmmaking because he wanted to contribute to its legacy, but instead took a critical position on the seriousness with which this type of work was taken up in the 1970s. Greenaway’s obsession with mathematics, games and structure in his later feature films led Curtis, (somewhat ironically as Greenaway wasn’t part of the dominant group of LFMC filmmakers experimenting with structure and material) to state that ‘in time, the most dedicated structural/formal filmmaker would prove to be Peter Greenaway.’

Welsby’s Arts Council-funded *Streamline* (1976) and Greenaway’s *Water Wrackets* (1975) raise some interesting issues in relation to sound and narrative. *Streamline* consists of a single tracking-shot of a stream bed, filmed from above in ‘real time.’ The 8-minute film covers approximately nine metres of the stream, tracking a straight line through a landscape. Welsby constructed a complicated mechanism to hold the camera and track along the stream, enabling him to visually navigate the stream. Sound was recorded synchronously and the only ‘drama’, as Welsby called it, was when the close shots of the water became faster, as the water burbled over rocks in the stream. In many ways *Streamline* is a simple film, belying the complexity of the necessary filming mechanism and operating as a structured investigation into space and time in a landscape.

In *Water Wrackets* Greenaway’s visual images are comparable to Welsby’s *Streamline*. Although *Water Wrackets* does not consist of a single shot like Welsby’s
film, the multiple, passive images of nature – water, trees, insects, grass, fallen trees – do not reveal much action. These are quiet, meditative scenes of nature. Greenaway’s film is changed from one of still, rural contemplation by the voice of the narrator recounting a bloody family history of the landscape which included discussions of feuds, fallen heroes and villains, acted out on the terrain in view. Intermittent deep, sonorous sounds occur in breaks in the voiceover. As in Breakwell’s *Repertory* – albeit differently regarding subject matter – the viewer of *Water Wrackets* is compelled to imagine the scenes of violence and bloodshed taking place in the peaceful landscape. What clearly distinguishes *Water Wrackets* from *Streamline* is the narrative structure produced by the soundtrack. The narrative is evident despite the fact that the random compilation of quiet scenes of nature do not operate in any chronological visual order. In fact, if anything Welsby’s *Streamline* has more of a chronological visual narrative, as the camera makes its path along the stream, than Greenaway’s *Water Wrackets*.

Further examples, where soundtrack shapes the narrative, can be found in Hall’s Arts Council-funded *Vertical* (1970) and Greenaway’s *Vertical Features Remake* (1978). As with the previous two films, similarities are evident in the visual imagery, yet the films operate on vastly different levels due to the soundtrack. In *Vertical* Hall explored the viewers’ perception of perspective in film. By filming figures in landscapes from diverse camera angles or alongside vertical markers, the viewer is forced to question his/her reading of perspective, as the figures and the vertical markers sit at odds with accepted notions of perspective. Although *Vertical* has a soundtrack consisting of ambient sound this does not shape any narrative aspect in the film.

Greenaway’s *Vertical Features Remake* appears to be a direct reference to Hall’s *Vertical*, although I have not been able to confirm this with the author. In *Vertical Features Remake* a film about a fictional character is being remade, based on instructions and fragments from an original, but lost, film. The film-within-the-film is made four times, each time following rigorous mathematical and structuring devices accompanied by a narrative voiceover recording the sequence of events. While Greenaway (in his above statement) said that he wanted to make a contribution to ‘structuralism’, his comment on the motivation behind the making of *Water Wrackets* clearly demonstrates a critique, as well as an engagement:
At this particular time of making there was a great concern amongst English filmmakers for notions of structuralism. So in a sense, although the manufacture of images of English rustic landscape are serious enough, the way they’ve been arranged and the comments made upon it, has the feelings of being a mocking documentary.\textsuperscript{849}

The visual images in \textit{Vertical Features Remake} bear some resemblance to Hall’s earlier \textit{Vertical}, particularly with the focus on the vertical object. Landscape shots with poles, trees or other vertical objects construct a dialogue between the natural forms and the vertical shape. If \textit{Vertical Features Remake} is watched silently it operates in a similar fashion to some of the more rigorous structural films. In Hall’s \textit{Vertical} the viewer is urged to question what is perceived, and how perception of objects, in relation to one another, occurs in a landscape. In parodying the seriousness of structural filmmaking \textit{Vertical Features Remake} is, according to Greenaway, ‘both a celebration and a critique of structuralist theory, unthinkingly and stupidly dominant in film circles in the Seventies’.\textsuperscript{850} The voiceover in \textit{Vertical Features Remake} is instrumental in structuring the narrative of the film, as the complex story unfolds of how the films (within the film) are to be constructed. This raises some pertinent points about the importance of a verbal soundtrack, not only in creating a linear account but also, in articulating an explicit narrative or account.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The examples presented in this chapter identified a range of approaches to structural and material filmmaking, and recognised how readings of films could differ depending on how films were framed within theoretical discourses. At times the filmmaker’s intention, as in Gidal’s \textit{Room Film 1973}, did not always match up with the viewer’s reading of a film. This framing of a film within specific theoretical discourses could also imbue the viewer’s approach to interpreting the film. It was also established how integral the relationship between the visual film text and the soundtrack were in shaping the narrative construction of a film. These films should be considered alongside the already well-established histories of structural and material experimentation, as well as the less well recognised personal, representational forms of filmmaking.

The theoretical discourses related to structural and material experimentation were important in opening up further possibilities for discussion and practical film
experimentation, as the examples shown here and dominant histories reveal. However, problems with the more austere LFMC experimentation with structure and material – particularly Gidal’s stern call for the expulsion of representation and narrative – led to a formalism that fore-grounded form over content to such an extent that it literally banished any form of narrative, which was crucial in articulating women’s concerns. There was, therefore, by the end of the decade considerable criticism from women filmmakers, critics and theorists, indicating that structural and material filmmaking – with its formal concerns of anti-representation and anti-narrative – could not adequately accommodate feminist discourses. In a lecture given by Laura Mulvey at the ‘Oxford Women’s Studies Committee’ (1978), for example, Mulvey contested Gidal’s asceticism, identifying that ‘women cannot be satisfied with an aesthetics that restricts counter-cinema to work on form alone. Feminism is bound to its politics; its experimentation cannot exclude work on content’.851

In a later retrospective example, in Esther Sonnet’s thesis on feminism and the politics of representation, Sonnet argued that 1970s abstract film could neither engage sufficiently with feminist discourses, nor open up polemical discussions:

From a feminist perspective, abstraction is dependent on a primary exclusion of the social – within the Modernist aesthetic of Abstract Formalism, issues such as the social construction of gender in film simply cannot appear.852 (Sonnet’s emphasis)

Similar reservations were also observed by LFMC filmmaker, Nina Danino, when she retrospectively reflected on the shortcomings of structural and material experimentation for engaging with women’s issues:

There are limits to the extent to which the language of structuralism, with its emphasis on procedure and engagement with the means of production, its objectivising rhetoric of representation, was capable of inscribing gender or any subjectivising stance.853

Therefore, new forms of filmmaking, better accommodating feminist theories and discourses, needed to be found.

Not all women filmmaker’s were working under Gidal’s (and the wider LFMC’s) structural directives, as is made evident through the range of films discussed in this thesis. Yet the question of how to produce political films, without conforming to commercial narrative cinema or documentary-filmmaking conventions, was an important one. A fundamental part of the feminist movement involved reclaiming lost women’s histories and questioning the patriarchal inscription of language, therefore
questions arose about how to accommodate these within experimental films. In many of the women’s films discussed in Chapter Seven, language was crucial in facilitating a confrontation with the patriarchal inscription of language. Therefore more specific feminist content needed to be engaged with in filmmaking, in order to open up feminist dialogues for discussion. These will be elaborated on in the next chapter, where the diverse approaches taken to engage with feminist discourses in experimental filmmaking will be discussed in greater detail.
CHAPTER SEVEN: WOMEN AND EXPERIMENTAL FILMMAKING

There is nothing connected with the staging of a motion picture that a woman cannot do as easily as a man and there is no reason why she cannot completely master every technicality of the art.854

Alice Guy (1914)

I met a happy man
a structuralist filmmaker
– but don’t call me that
it’s something else I do –
he said we are fond of you
you are charming
but don’t ask us
to look at your films
we cannot
there are certain films
we cannot look at
the personal clutter
the persistence of feelings
the hand-touch sensibility
the diaristic indulgence
the painterly mess ...
... he told me he had lived
with a “sculptress” I asked does
that make me a “film-makeress”?
“On no,” he said, “We think of
you as a dancer.”855
Carolee Schneemann (1975)

The previous chapter concluded by recognising that austere, structuralist forms of filmmaking were not suitable for engaging with feminist discourses. In Carolee Schneemann’s epigraph, clues suggest why this may be the case for some women filmmakers. Undoubtedly referring to her own films, it is clear that personal, emotionally and ‘messy’ content did not fit in with rigorously formal, unemotional (and mostly male) structuralist filmmaking.856 This chapter will explore the diversity in 1970s women’s filmmaking and consider how women either engaged explicitly with feminist discourses or followed their own directives to make personal experimental films. In defining their own gendered positions and creating critical frameworks for working in, women were at liberty to experiment without having the same historical legacies or orthodoxies to submit to as their male counterparts. Therefore filmmaking took many different guises, further supporting the claim to diversity in the decade and identifying that a ‘return to image’ did not occur at the end
of the decade. Despite Alice Guy’s 1914 assertion in the epigraph, however, women were still struggling to find recognition as commercial and experimental filmmakers in a predominantly male dominated field in the 1970s.

Some wider political and theoretical frameworks, related to feminism, will first be discussed to contextualise the complex spheres of influence. Women’s experimental films were informed by feminism, developments in the arts, structural and material experimentation and by Screen-led film theories related to Marxism, psychoanalysis, semiotics or structuralism. More conventional documentary approaches were taken in feminist campaign films such as the London Women’s Film Group’s Whose Choice? (1976) or Women of the Ronda (1973). These were primarily used to disseminate information and act as a visual platform to campaign for social change and will not be discussed in depth here, but referred to where necessary.

The existence of a dominant feminine aesthetic was deliberated to some extent in the 1970s. Some of these debates will be considered here as they open up some particularly interesting approaches to women’s filmmaking. Thereafter a range of experimental films, presenting diverse subject areas, such as sexuality, domestic activities, motherhood, women’s historically-inscribed roles, film language and women’s work will be examined. The existence of the gendered film text will also be questioned, as will the roles of history, language and ideology in women’s filmmaking.

**The Second Wave of Feminism as Context for Filmmaking**

While the first wave of feminism in the early 1900s focused on women’s judicial rights, the second wave of feminism, beginning in the mid-1960s, focused on issues such as equal pay, education, job opportunities and free access to abortion and childcare. The increasingly widespread availability of contraception in the 1960s also significantly impacted on women’s sexual liberty. Women’s wider access to higher education was also particularly influential on developments, as universities became hotbeds for radicalisation and left-wing politics.

The publication of influential texts such as Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* (1970), Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (1971) and Juliet Mitchell’s *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974) would all contribute to raising awareness of women’s issues, with the term ‘patriarchy’ identified by Millett as an oppressive force. Jane Arden (whose films were
discussed in Chapter Five) set up the radical feminist theatre group, Holocaust (1967) in London, performing pieces such as *Vagina Rex and the Gas Oven*, at venues including the Arts Lab. Laura Mulvey’s influential *Screen* essay, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ (1975), would open up significant discourses on women’s roles as objects of desire in the dominant, commercial (‘Hollywood’) cinema. Feminist magazines such as *Spare Rib, Red Rag* and *Shrew* would also, importantly, provide a platform for developing feminist discourses.

D. N. Rodowick posited Mulvey’s essay as ‘the watershed article’ in relation to women and film. He identified it as ‘a polemic for an avant-garde feminist practice’ and ‘a key text of political modernism’ despite its focus on commercial, narrative cinema. He argued that Mulvey’s concerns should also be understood within the broader framework of feminist theory:

In this respect Mulvey should be read in the context of the work by Juliet Mitchell, Julia Kristeva, Michèle Montrelay, Luce Irigaray, and other important thinkers, all of whom had published path-breaking texts by the mid-70s. All of these writers, including Mulvey, introduced another important element. The psychoanalytic study of sexual difference was aimed not only at a critique of patriarchal culture; the reigning ideas of film and cultural theory were equally open to critique for how they represented (or forgot to represent) the concerns of feminism.

Seminal events marked the second wave of feminism in Britain, such as the Women’s Liberation Conference (1970) at Ruskin College and, in the same year, a Miss World protest at the Albert Hall. Although the early period of the second phase of feminism was consolidated by a collective spirit, fragmentation intensified in the 1970s as women’s different priorities led to more specific feminist campaigning. Imelda Whelehan, however, noted that:

> [D]espite evidence that the second wave was founded upon active tensions, feminists of the early ‘70s did construct networks of communication, conferences, demonstrations and newsletters, which crossed boundaries and emphasized aspects of feminism’s commonality. There may not have been one dominant definition of feminism, but all strands were rooted in the belief that women suffer injustice because of their sex; and the emergence of women’s liberation as not only a movement but an intellectual tendency too proved attractive to many women.

This intellectual tendency manifested itself in diverse ways with regard to women’s creative production, resulting in a range of approaches to the visual arts and filmmaking. The term ‘the personal is political’ personified the women’s movement, for despite the differing concerns of campaign groups, essentially all feminist politics necessitated the scrutiny of one’s private life.
Women at the LFMC

Although women at the LFMC were aware of and engaged with feminist discourses during the 1970s, it was only at the end of the decade that they consolidated their position more firmly. Their withdrawal from the ‘Film as Film’ exhibition (discussed in Chapter One) and the LFMC (in 1979) resulted in the formation of the women’s film collective, Circles (1979). The dominance of the structural and materialist position informed filmmaking in the first half of the decade, evident in women’s films such as Annabel Nicolson’s Slides (1971), Lis Rhodes’ Light Music (1975), Gill Eatherley’s Hand Grenade (1971) and Jenny Okun’s Still Life (1976). These films did not explicitly engage with feminist discourses. Increased politicisation, however, during the decade brought some changes, as Nicolson identified: ‘our consciousness was changing very rapidly and there was a gap that was opening up’. Nicolson made it clear that the decision (for this group of women) to finally withdraw from the LFMC was not an easy one, as it had generally been a supportive environment for women filmmakers:

I think it was probably very painful for all concerned because we had all worked together and been allies. Certainly for myself I’d had plenty of support from the men in that group: critical support and practical support.

The need to consolidate resources within a women’s group was, however, according to Whelehan not uncommon practice in the 1970s:

Most second wave feminism focused on social constructionist, rather than essentialist, arguments and therefore casting men as the “enemy” was tacitly accepted as a temporary socio-historical subject positioning which would be open to transformation. Although perhaps the majority of feminists did not foresee total separatism as a workable long-term solution, they craved the autonomy to construct a movement for women.

However, some younger women filmmakers working at the LFMC, at the end of the 1970s, did not feel the need to consolidate their position by setting up their own collective, and instead approached filmmaking on their own terms within the LFMC. These included Anna Thew, Cordelia Swann and Jean Matthee.

Considering the Breadth of Feminist Practices

It will be useful to consider how women consolidated their feminist position in the arts as this gives an idea of the heterogeneous nature of experimentation and the plurality of approaches taken. In the exhibition, ‘Women and Work: A Document on
the Division of Labour in Industry 1973-1975’ (South London Gallery, 1976), Mary Kelly, Kay Hunt and Margaret Harrison undertook a detailed study of women’s factory work, including texts, photographs and films.870 ‘Portrait of the Artist as Housewife’ (ICA, 1977) focused on the relationships between ideology, femininity and domesticity, whereas the travelling exhibition, ‘Fenix Arising’ (1978), exhibited works in progress, ‘aimed at both demystifying the role of the artist and at attacking the commodification of art work for the market place’.871 Another travelling exhibition, ‘Mother’s Pride: Mother’s Ruin’ (1977-78), centred on ‘women’s lives as socially constructed and politically resisted’, through exhibiting everyday objects such as clothes, photographs, notebooks and domestic items.872 ‘Womanmagic’ (Ibis Gallery, 1979) celebrated more mythological and spiritual feminine aspects related to goddess worship and historical, cross-cultural, ‘universal aspects of womanhood’.873 While these diverse exhibitions were important in raising awareness about women’s (normally hidden) lives, questions were raised about whether they in fact operated from an essentialist position. In a joint paper presented at the 1979 Socialist Feminist Conference, the speakers asked whether this was only furthering women’s difference and ‘reinforcing oppressive definitions of women’.874 All these issues needed to be taken into account in treading the fine line between creating artworks highlighting women’s issues (thereby strengthening their cause) and in producing works which reinforced women’s marginality.875

Specialised film events became an important platform for the development of feminist film discourses with the ‘First International Women’s Film Festival’ taking place in New York in June 1972, and similar events following suit in London and Edinburgh. Developments continued throughout the decade with the 1973 season of ‘Women’s Cinema’ at the NFT and the Edinburgh Film Festivals in 1976 and 1979 including women’s programmes and discussion forum.876 An Arts Council-funded seminar at the LFMC, ‘Feminism, Fiction and the Avant-garde’ (1978) was presented by three editors from the feminist film theory journal, Camera Obscura, acknowledging the important role of theory and ideology related to feminist discourses and film. In their first issue, the American editors had ‘explicitly acknowledged their debt to the work of British feminist theorists of cinema and stated that they see themselves as following up on this initial research’.877 Significantly women filmmakers and activists also recognised the need to progress beyond the first stage of recovering women’s lost histories and critically assessing sexism to ‘search
for new images’ and new ways of making films. 878 This would be important for women’s future developments in experimental filmmaking, and Mulvey noted that she was struck ‘by the historic conjuncture between feminist film theory, the Camera Obscura presentation, and the Co-op, home of avant-gardist film practice’. 879 It is also a noteworthy reminder that 50% of the British films selected for the ‘Film London: 3rd Avant-garde International Festival’ (1979, discussed in Chapter Three, were women’s films. 880 A two-part exhibition, ‘About Time: Video, Performance and Installation by Women Artists’ (1980) at the ICA and Arnolfini included works selected according to ‘the artist’s awareness of a woman’s individual experience within patriarchy’. 881 The multi-disciplinary exhibition included drawing, print, sculpture, painting, installation, film and video.

**Theoretical Contexts for Filmmaking and Questions of a Feminine Aesthetic**

Now that an understanding of the breadth of activity has been presented it will be useful to further consider some of the theoretical discourses surrounding women’s filmmaking. Besides engaging with feminist discourses, women also felt the need to find more experimental approaches to filmmaking that challenged the codes of the dominant cinema, the austerity of structural and material film, and the conventions of documentary filmmaking.

The question whether a ‘feminine’ or ‘feminist’ aesthetic existed in women’s creative output was deliberated in a number of feminist discourses. Firstly it needs to be clarified that while these terms have sometimes been used interchangeably in writings about women’s artwork, some differences are inherent in their meanings. ‘Feminist’ generally refers to the more political, oppositional side to women’s activities as part of the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM). The historical essentialist position can (admittedly rather simplistically) be explained using the feminine/masculine binary opposition as follows: ‘feminine’ has been described using terms such as gentleness, passivity, sensitivity in contrast to the ‘masculine’ being described with terms such as strength, rigorousness and practicality. 882 Therefore the complexity of determining whether an artwork had a feminine/feminist aesthetic could include all or some of these aspects affiliated to either more explicit feminist discourses or a gendered female sentiment. This was also to some extent complicated by conflicts between beliefs of ‘an essential feminine sensibility’ and the idea that
'femininity is socially and historically constructed'. The term ‘feminine aesthetic’ will be used here, but should be read to include the diverse distinctions and recognised as a complex term.

In a lecture given at the ‘Oxford Women’s Studies Committee’ (1978) Mulvey reflected on women’s involvement with feminism, theory and experimental filmmaking in the past decade:

Up to this point, I have used feminist film criticism around 1972 to mark a particular stage of conscious development and to show a need for a theoretical leap forward. But no leap forward could be conceived without this first spring-board: awareness of sexist exploitation and cultural oppression, and the resurrection of women who had struggled to make movies in the past. 

Through consciousness-raising in the second wave of feminism and the historical reclamation of early women film pioneers such as Dorothy Arzner, Germaine Dulac and Maya Deren, experimental women filmmakers considered how they could engage with feminist discourse, but also challenge the constraints of commercial, narrative filmmaking. 

Mulvey cited Wollen’s ‘The Two Avant-gardes’ and the useful examples that Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov and Jean-Luc Godard provided in demonstrating an integral link between form and content, establishing new possibilities for narrative experimentation. Mulvey asserted that this would be critical for opening up new feminist polemics:

Semiotics foregrounds language and emphasises both the crucial importance of the signifier (for a long time overlooked and subordinated to the signified) and the dual nature of the sign, thus suggesting the aesthetic mileage that can be gained by play on separation between its two aspects. For feminists this split has a triple action: aesthetic fascination with discontinuities; pleasure from disrupting the traditional unity of the sign; and theoretical advance from investigating language and the production of meaning.

This semiotic expansion – rather than the reductionist line Peter Gidal took – would be essential for engaging with feminist discourses. This approach was also outlined in feminist film theorist E. Ann Kaplan’s analysis:

This confrontation entails making completely new use of cinematic form – organization of individual images (the entire mise en scène), the choice of camera angle, distance, lighting, etc., and ultimately even the technical equipment itself. All the audience’s expectations are to be challenged and normal kinds of identification refused.
Both Kaplan’s and Mulvey’s assertion that political films needed to be made politically, (as Godard had posited in his 1970 manifesto), would inform a wide range of women’s filmmaking. This did not, however, entail establishing specific modes of operation or prescriptive filmmaking aesthetics, but rather opened up diverse approaches for women’s filmmaking.

Questions of a Feminine Aesthetic

Early on in the decade questions were raised about the existence of a feminine aesthetic in the arts. In a special women’s issue of Art and Artists magazine, questions such as ‘Why women only?’ and ‘Is there a female sensibility?’ were addressed by Lucy Lippard:

I, for one, am convinced this differentiation exists, but for every time I can be specific about it there are endless times in which it remains just out of reach. Perhaps it is impossible to pin it down or draw any but the most personal conclusions until women’s place in society is indeed equalized and women’s work can be studied outside of the confines of oppressive conditioning.

Lippard’s reservations about pinning down a specific aesthetic would continue to be deliberated throughout the decade.

At an AIR Gallery seminar, ‘Towards a Feminist Perception Women’s Practice in Art’ (1977), the question of a feminine aesthetic was also a central focus, with Linda Mallett asking some pertinent questions:

Is there, in fact, an especially female art practice and if so, how does it relate to the masculine mainstream? Is there an equivalent female aesthetic, either feminist or non-feminist?

The seminar, included presentations from artists and critics such as Mary Kelly, Susan Hiller, Tina Keane and Caroline Tisdall. The essentialist nature of these preoccupations were, however, criticised in Sarah Kent’s review of the event. She expressed her reservations about ‘an activity that seemed filled with indulgent self-pity’, giving personal problems ‘a status more important than they merited’, advocating instead for a need ‘to adopt an optimistic and assertive stance in the world’ and ‘ignore[ing] personal difficulties’. Clearly this was a difficult issue, but Kent positively concluded that many opportunities for further discussion had been covered in the seminar.

Although Mulvey had encouraged new approaches to women’s filmmaking, she also questioned whether ‘the very act of opposing traditional aesthetics and
questioning male-dominated language generates a new language and carries an aesthetic with it." When referring to research undertaken for some of the women's events at film festivals, Mulvey admitted that it was hoped that a historical thread could be drawn to 'reveal a coherent aesthetic' as women's common experience of repression and exploitation in visual media had acted 'as a unifying element for women directors, however different their origins'. It will be useful to deliberate the question of a feminine aesthetic further, before considering some answers to the questions, as this reveals the complexity of the debates.

In her article, 'Is there a Feminine Aesthetic?' (1976), Silvia Bovenschein used early literary examples to question the complexity of reconstructing a women's language firmly embedded within patriarchal language. She asked whether possibilities existed for women to redefine themselves within this:

The analysis of linguistic structures, imagery, the forms and symbols of behaviour and communication, is tough work which has hardly begun. If women are to succeed in freeing themselves from old patterns, in conquering new terrain and — to finally return to the subject at hand — in developing different aesthetic forms, they can do this only on the basis of autonomy.

Autonomy, however, could not mean the invention of a new language, as this was clearly impossible. Bovenschein suggested that a feminine aesthetic was not determined by feminist content but rather that the mode of production could suggest a feminine perspective. She argued that women should not have to explicitly depict political feminist actions in their work as this would merely reduce work to the level of photo-journalism. She outlined her conviction that an open-ended approach to creative practice was essential in allowing women to explore feminist discourses:

I believe that feminine artistic production takes place by means of a complicated process involving conquering and reclaiming, appropriating and formulating, as well as forgetting and subverting. In the works of those female artists who are concerned with the women’s movement, one finds artistic tradition as well as the break with it. It is good — in two respects — that no formal criteria for “feminist art” can be definitively laid down. It enables us to reject categorically the notion of artistic norms, and it prevents renewal of the calcified aesthetics debate, this time under the guise of the feminist “approach”.

Although Bovenschein did not specify that a particular aesthetic approach should be taken, or that this was indeed possible, she argued that feminist discourses should be engaged with in an open-ended manner, allowing for individual engagement.
It will be useful to briefly consider some of the questions and debates, identified so far, related to the search for new ways of working with film and the existence of a feminine aesthetic. Clearly a tabula rasa – the creation of new cinematic language – was impossible. Arguably, however, one advantage that women had, in not having been included in many of the established historical, theoretical or critical discourses, was the liberty to experiment more freely without building on established fields. This opened up possibilities for experimentation, yet there were also some ideas proposed on what may be indicative of a feminine aesthetic.

Teresa de Lauretis began a 1985 article, continuing to question the existence of a feminine aesthetic, by citing the twofold conclusion drawn in Bovenschein’s earlier article:

Is there a feminine aesthetic? ... Certainly there is, if one is talking about *aesthetic awareness* and *modes of sensory perception*. Certainly not, if one is talking about an unusual variant of artistic production or about a painstakingly constructed theory of art. *(Bovenschein’s italics)*

De Lauretis noted that the twofold answer reflected some of the contradictions inherent in the previous fifteen years of the women’s movement, acknowledging that, on the one hand, an intrinsic condemnation of historical patriarchal, bourgeois dominance had been necessary to forge a radical analysis, yet, on the other hand, a positive, political approach to women’s social issues had also been essential to forward debates. She further identified that this was also indicative of the evident dichotomy in 1970s women’s filmmaking, whereby either documentary-style approaches or more formal approaches engaging with form and content were taken to address women’s issues.

De Lauretis was critical of the continued need ‘to ask whether there is a feminine or female aesthetic, or a specific language of women’s cinema’, suggesting that this represented continuing being ‘caught in the master’s house’. *(In other words, if women’s cinema continued to be positioned in opposition to men’s cinema, this could lead to an unproductive, essentialist position, further serving to alienate women from the central debates. De Lauretis did not call for an indiscriminate rejection of the ‘rigorous analysis and experimentation on the formal processes of meaning production’, but instead advocated for the ‘redefinition of aesthetic and formal knowledge’ through feminist theory.*

She argued that this should include attention to specific *details*, providing a feminine sense of identification for the spectator,
therefore enabling an engagement with film from a specifically feminine perspective. This was to be understood as ‘saying that a film whose visual and symbolic space is organised in this manner addresses the spectator as a woman, regardless of the gender of the viewers’ (De Lauretis’ emphasis). Clearly these are complex issues, but they are worth considering as they open up further debates on whether a feminine aesthetic can be revealed through women’s filmmaking; and if so, what these may be.

De Lauretis provided the example of Chantal Akerman’s *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce – 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), arguing that ‘the pre-aesthetic is already fully aesthetic’ in the film. She argued that this was not due to the beautiful or well-composed images, or the use of specific camera angles and particular narrative directives, but the pre-aesthetic was created by the specific attention paid to ordinary, mundane actions, such as peeling potatoes or making coffee. While this did not hold the viewer in a state of suspense through narrative expectation, she argued that it formed a dialogue between temporality and insignificant actions:

What the film constructs – formally and artfully, to be sure – is a picture of female experience, of duration, perception, events, relationships and silences, which feels immediately and unquestioningly true. And in this sense the “pre-aesthetic” is aesthetic rather than aestheticised. (de Lauretis’ emphasis)

Akerman also supported de Lauretis’ idea on the pre-aesthetic as she believed that few women had the confidence to follow through with their feelings in film, for instance by showing gestures for no other reason than wanting to do so. Akerman suggested that the difficulty lay in the means of expression, rather than in the content which was ‘the most simple and obvious thing’. She also asserted that women dealt with content, forgetting ‘to look for formal ways to express what they are and what they want, their own rhythms, their own way of looking at things’. Akerman believed that not having contempt for her own feelings was ‘the reason why I think it’s a feminist film – not just what it says but what is shown and how it’s shown’ (de Lauretis’ emphasis). Although de Lauretis argued that a feminine aesthetic could be revealed in the way that a film was made by focusing on specific details and addressing the metaphorical female spectator, this is debatable. Clearly this is complex theoretical territory, but it does provide further avenues for the analysis of 1970s women’s experimental films, which is particularly useful when considering the diverse range approaches to filmmaking and the attention to detail and the means of expression.
Certainly, deliberating whether a feminine aesthetic existed in women’s filmmaking during the decade was a complex task, resisting unproblematic conclusions. Further questions were asked and some assumptions were made. At a women’s filmmaking event at the Edinburgh Film Festival (1979) Lesley Stern questioned whether ‘formal experimentation can inherently be more political’ or whether this only served to further alienate a broader audience, conflicting with the consciousness-raising feminists sought (Stern’s italics). 905

Mulvey also conceded that it appeared ‘increasingly doubtful whether a unified tradition could be traced, except on the superficial level of women as content’. 906 Feminist film critic, Patricia Erens, also identified with this view, suggesting that ‘for most viewers, films with strong [female] central characters and didactic messages have come to represent the feminist aesthetic, primarily because of their relationship with the women’s movement’. 907 While Erens and Mulvey’s analyses were perhaps useful in identifying the broader landscape of women’s filmmaking, women’s experimental films did not always explicitly centre on female characters. Nicolson revealed how women’s approaches to filmmaking at the LFMC also differed significantly to other formal or documentary-informed approaches:

We were thinking about what the films were saying, because we were in quite an odd position to, say, the feminist network. We weren’t making films with a social, documentary content about women’s experience. We were very sympathetic to it, but we weren’t actually doing that. We were working in a more abstract way and exploring forms, but there wasn’t a recognisable female content. So we were in this odd relationship to the rest of the feminist network, who couldn’t see what we were doing, and our natural allies were the men at the Co-op, who we had grown up with, so to speak, artistically. 908

This reveals the complexity of the domain, indicating the diverse approaches taken to investigate feminist issues.

Mulvey closed her Oxford lecture by concluding that a common single, cohesive approach or aesthetic language was not evident in women’s filmmaking practices, and that this made it easier to ‘exemplify tendencies and movements’, rather than claiming that an overriding aesthetic existed. 909 It will be useful to keep all the complex issues deliberated here in mind when considering the range of films discussed below, to see if any there are tendencies or specific feminine traits revealed in the diverse range of films. It will also be made clear (through the films discussed below) that a ‘return to image’ did not occur at the end of the decade in women’s filmmaking, supporting the main claims of the arguments in this thesis.
Diversity in Women’s Filmmaking

The Domestic: Often During the Day

It is interesting to consider both de Lauretis and Akerman’s comments in relation to films by British filmmakers focusing on the domestic. In Joanna Davis’ *Often During the Day* (1979) close attention is given to domestic detail, revealing a kind of meditation on the pleasures and frustrations of domestic work, as Davis identified:

I made the film because I had to stop ignoring the small daily tasks which seemed to occupy a large proportion of time. Like washing up, cooking, caring for a space, jobs done in order that I could get on with my real work. For most women “jobs done” in order that someone else can get on with the “real work”. In order that someone else can enter “real life” and cope with “real issues”.910

Davis’ black-and-white film utilises both still and moving images. The opening shots consist of various hand-tinted still-photographs of the kitchen, with detailed close-ups of mundane objects, such as a tea-strainer or bread on the morning breakfast table. These are given the importance and attendance to detail that one would normally bestow on something more significant. In this respect Akerman’s comment about *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce – 1080 Bruxelles* could be equally valid for Davis’ *Often During the Day*: ‘I give space to things which were never, almost never, shown in that way … If you choose to show a woman’s gestures so precisely, it’s because you love them.’911 This is evident in Davis’ film where the mundane or dull domestic objects are lovingly considered, as she explains:

I describe a kitchen both physically and through the activities that take place within it. I want to take notice of the small and regular activities that occupy a big proportion of my time. I expect a recognition from other people. I made a film in the odd hours over the past two years and the activity of making it was quite close to the activities it describes. No account is taken of the importance of housework to women, either in terms of the simple amount of time women spend on domestic-care activities or in terms of the personal meaning of housework to women.912

The soundtrack also serves to contextualise the events and politics of the time, with radio broadcasts announcing a bombing in County Armagh (N. Ireland), extracts from the song, ‘Dancing in the City’ and a male voice reading extracts from Annie Oakley’s *Sociology of Housework*.913 Davis’ voice also describes the activities taking place in her kitchen, with painstaking attendance to detail, related to both the topography of the kitchen and the minor events taking place within it. In its contemplation of the ordinary and domestic, Davis’ film satisfies Bovenschein’s criteria for a feminine aesthetic in its ‘aesthetic awareness’ and in its utilisation of
‘modes of sensory perception’.\textsuperscript{914} In relation to ‘aesthetic awareness’, attention to
detail was given to the formal aspects related to filming and editing such as the use of
close-up, hand-tinted photographs, the pace and rhythm of the visual and audio
‘narrative’ and the relationship between sound and image. The ‘modes of sensory
perception’ are located in the details of what is perceived in the space (kitchen), and
how Davis acts on this using the camera and claiming the intimate and homely space
as her own. This is Davis’ ‘camera-eye’, framing, fixing and paying attention to
mundane objects, such as the cat’s food bowl, or to activities like cutting bread. As
Davis says, these are often ignored yet they ‘occupy a big proportion of time’.\textsuperscript{915}

In Felicity Sparrow and Lis Rhodes’ introductory essay to the Arts Council-
funded, LFMC screening programme, ‘Her Image Fades as Her Voice Rises’ (1983),
they raised some questions on the tension in Davis’ film, between lovingly caring for
a domestic space, yet also feeling oppressed by it:

This conflict – can pleasure be pleasing if that pleasure is seen as oppressive? – is
expressed by the film-maker through images showing the continual violation of her
feelings for the space.\textsuperscript{916}

An interesting comment about Davis’ film made during my interview with Lis Rhodes
may also shed some light on Sparrow and Rhodes’ observations. She suggested that
the film represented a struggle akin to colonialism:

I mean it’s completely about the male domination of space. And whether that
happens to be like where we’re sitting at a table or … I think that runs through it,
doesn’t it? I can’t see how it doesn’t, and indeed I think that is the case. And I
suspect that one could say very much the same thing with Jeanne Dielman which I
think is a very interesting film equally. In a sense to do with space, but also to do
with economy. How to live and fortunately resistance to that.\textsuperscript{917}

This notion of colonisation was also expressed by feminist historian Sheila
Rowbotham in her influential feminist text, \textit{Woman’s Consciousness, Man’s World}
(1973) to, as Pollock explained, ‘underline women’s sense of being occupied,
dominated and visible’ to themselves ‘only through images constructed of and by the
oppressor, the dominator, the coloniser – of mind and body’.\textsuperscript{918} In this way, the close
examination of domestic space, that Akerman and Davis’ films reveal, exposes the
inherent anxieties about the male ‘colonisation’ of spaces, thereby setting up an
emotionally ambivalent relationship to the domestic space, which is apprehended by
the ‘loving’ and close attention to detailed care given, yet is also permeated by
feelings of entrapment.
The idea of personal perception can also be further elucidated through considering Margaret Tait’s approach to filmmaking. Tait’s films Tailpiece (1976) and Place of Work (1976), where she observed the emptying of her family home, were discussed in Chapter Five. The close attention to domestic detail is also reminiscent of Tait’s broader film practice and is exemplified in earlier films such as the portrait of her mother, Portrait of Ga (1952). Akerman’s suggestion that women need to find their own way of looking at things is therefore apt in relation to these women’s approaches to filmmaking. In Akerman’s discussion of Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce – 1080 Bruxelles she further elaborates on this concept, which is also relevant to Davis and Tait’s films:

I give space to things which were never, almost never, shown in that way, like the daily gestures of a woman. They are the lowest in the hierarchy of film images … But more than the content, it’s because of the style. If you chose to show a woman’s gestures so precisely, it’s because you love them. In some way you recognize those gestures that have always been denied and ignored.\textsuperscript{919}

This loving attention to detail is epitomised in Tait’s Portrait of Ga by the focus on her mother unwrapping a sticky sweet or stirring sugar into a cup of tea. The sensitive attention to detail is also evident in Tait’s other films, such as Ariel (1974), where small details in nature, such as a bird alighting on a branch, an earthworm in the soil or leaves blowing in the wind shed poetic light on the ordinary in nature.\textsuperscript{920}

Tait’s approach to filmmaking is also relevant in relation to Boveschein’s concept of personal ‘modes of sensory perception’, and is described by Sarah Neely as follows:

Tait, who described her technique of “breathing” with the camera and liked to use Lorca’s phrase “stalking the image” in reference to her own practices, allows the camera time to explore … she is preoccupied with catching the “momentary”, and “subtle” gestures. Like the barely perceptible opening of the clover, Tait’s breathing with the camera, or stalking the image, aims to give pause to the image, allowing for – as is the case with both of these portrait films [the portraits of Tait’s mother and of Hugh MacDiamid]– a glimpse of the real person.\textsuperscript{921}

Perhaps it is this giving ‘pause to the image’, cherishing the understated, small gestures, as Davis does in Often During the Day, and as Akerman and Tait see as being central to their filmmaking practices, that exemplifies Bovenschien’s mode of sensory perception – the way that filmmaking is approached, rather than only focusing on what is recorded or the mechanics of production.
A few others films, focusing on the domestic, further reveal the diverse approaches taken to filmmaking and subject matter. While there is not the same detailed focus on domestic actions, more light-hearted and satirical approaches to domestic activities are taken. In Helen Chadwick’s Super-8 trilogy, *Domestic Sanitation, Bargain Bedroom Bonanza* and *Latex Glamour Rodeo* (1976), the performances of Chadwick and three friends are documented as they are dressed in latex suits and enact domestic activities, such as vacuuming and dusting. The surreal scenario and bizarre charades included ‘undergoing gynaecological probing in a dungeon-like living-room as Donny Osmond and an American voice promoting beauty products crackled from a nearby radio,’ creating a feminist polemic on the media’s and society’s fixation with female beauty.922 In Jayne Parker’s *Free Show* (1979) and *RX Recipe* (1980) equally facetious domestic actions are taken by Clare Winter. In *Free Show* she performs three acts: ‘Act I – Cutting liver. Act II – Ironing. Act III – Plucking Eyebrows’.923 The play of danger and violence in these mundane domestic acts is further exaggerated with the preceding 8mm clips of circus acts before each filmed action. *RX Recipe* shows a woman lovingly cleaning and stuffing an eel. She then performs the same action on her legs before the film suggestively ends, insinuating that she will perform the same ‘stuffing’ action on herself.924 In many ways the humour in these films emboldens the points about women’s oppression or ‘enslavement’ to the domestic, rather than the quieter observed actions in Davis’ film.

The domestic act of sweeping is evident in both Gill Eatherley’s expanded cinema work, *Light Occupations: Aperture Sweep* (1973) and Annabel Nicolson’s performance, *Sweeping the Sea* (1975) (the latter discussed in Chapter Four). *Light Occupations: Aperture Sweep* skilfully references both filmmaking – camera aperture and light – and domestic action: ‘Light occupations in both senses of the word, light meaning lightweight or menial occupations, like sweeping, or light meaning the light from the sky, or light from a projector, artificial light.’925 Eatherley sweeps the screen with a microphone attached to the broom, recording the sound of sweeping, while a single or dual-screen film of her sweeping, shadowed figure is screened. The domestic act of sweeping in Nicolson’s *Sweeping the Sea* (1975), also resonates with *Light Occupations: Aperture Sweep*. Eatherley’s work also takes an assertive approach to a mundane and ordinary domestic action, by the way in which the action is enlarged on the screen and with Eatherley’s enigmatic live engagement the filmed image.
An interesting contrast can be drawn with the domestic action performed by male filmmaker, Malcolm Le Grice, in *Time and Motion Study* (1976). The 12-minute film, shown in both positive and negative colour film stock, and recorded on two cameras, documents Le Grice washing the dishes: one in medium-shot and one with a wider view of the domestic space and Le Grice’s actions in it. In my interview with Le Grice he discussed the influence of feminism on his practice:

My own film crisis was influenced by feminist theory and French film theory (Mulvey, Metz, psychoanalysis, etc). Feminism was a big influence in terms of a major discussion. I was teaching at Central St Martins. It was a specific time when I made *[Sketches for a] Sensual Philosophy* [1986-9] and *Finnegan’s Chin [Temporal Economy] (1981)*. Male students didn’t know what to do due to the subject issues with the women. There was a sense of guilt with the males and they wanted to make feminist films. My trilogy related the issue to where women are placed in film: women’s roles etc. *Time and Motion Study* of me washing the dishes was influenced by men’s/women’s roles.

Despite the film revealing Le Grice’s preoccupation with film structure, process and materiality, the domestic task is given a rather more desperate connotation. It appears as if he has to provide evidence that he too takes part in such mundane domestic duties, historically ascribed to women. There is less of the attention to detail, as in the films of Davis, Tait and Akerman, but rather a double-insistence (two cameras) to record evidence of his actions, which interestingly relate to his comment on feelings of guilt as a male who needs to somehow demonstrate an engagement with feminist discourses.

**The Gendered Film Text: Antepartum, Breathing, Fuses and Moment**

Although the domestic space opened up some useful issues for consideration, further enquiries, ascertaining whether the filmmaker’s gender could be gleaned from the final film, will be deliberated here. In de Lauretis’ article she asked ‘what formal, stylistic or thematic markers point to a female presence behind the camera?’ This question will be considered in relation to Mary Kelly’s *Antepartum* (1973), Guy Sherwin’s *Breathing* (1978), Carolee Schneemann’s *Fuses* (1964-67) and Stephen Dwoskin’s *Moment* (1970).

*Antepartum* and *Breathing*, are short, silent and single-shot, black-and-white films of the same subject matter: a tightly-framed, heavily pregnant belly. The inherent simplicity in these films makes them appropriate examples for addressing de Lauretis’ question. In both films the camera plays an important role in capturing subtle
movements, as the common ‘action’ is the slight rise and fall of breath as the abdomen moves. In Kelly’s film further action in the form of hands stroking the abdomen takes place.

The body in Antepartum is Kelly’s own, filmed from a fixed camera position below the pubic area, looking up at her pregnant belly. The extremely tight framing creates an abstract image, strongly lit from above right:

In Antepartum the camera is positioned in close proximity to the woman’s body. The body remains immobile except for the regular, rhythmic, rising and falling of her breath, and some possible (though hardly detectable) intrauterine movements. Like the camera, the body’s position is more or less fixed; there is only slight movement, barely noticeable on the first viewing. Thus, there is a reciprocal mimetic relationship between the body and the camera; each remains more or less fixed and immobile except for some slight movement. 

Sherwin’s Breathing (part of Short Film Series (1975-2004)) is a tightly-framed focus on his partner’s pregnant abdomen. It differs from Kelly’s film by being a side view of a prone body and a window in the background, with Deke Dusinberre describing Breathing as follows:

The camera aperture is opened up and closed down in time with the natural breathing cycle. Subsequent changes in the light exposure and depth of field emphasise different aspects of the image, from skin surface (with subtle disruptions as the infant kicks) to the inversely symmetrical curve of a clothes line seen through the far window.

While the content of both Antepartum and Breathing relate to the feminine (as they are intimate portraits of female experience) there are few observations revealing de Lauretis’ gendered ‘presence behind the camera’ in the films. It is clear that the strikingly similar films do not offer up revelations of the gendered filmmaker, nor do they provide fixed views related to discourses on femininity, masculinity or the body. They are instead abstract views of a pregnant body, or small observed vignettes of experience.

The reading of the film could, however, be significantly changed through the screening context. A Marxist reading of the film was possible through Antepartum’s original screening, when it was shown as part of a Super-8 dual-projection, with Kelly’s second film consisting of a close-up of a female factory worker’s arm operating machinery. The concept of women’s labour – both biological and within the work force – was therefore juxtaposed in Kelly’s Marxist, feminist analysis. As Sherwin’s Breathing forms part of his Short Film Series, the focus is more on
cinematographic observation, using lighting and changes in aperture to synchronise with the breathing belly.

Schneeman’s *Fuses* (1964-67) and Dwoskin’s *Moment* (1970) may offer some more distinctive considerations, than *Antepartum* and *Breathing*, in relation to the gendered film text. Some background information on Schnemann will provide useful additional contexts for discussion. Schneemann (an American) lived in London from 1969 to 1973 and had close affiliations to the LFMC. Her interdisciplinary practice included performance, installation, film and video, with *Interior Scroll* (1975, 1977) considered as a seminal feminist piece. The epigraph is an extract from ‘Scroll 2’ and is included in her Super-8 film, *Kitch’s Last Meal* (1975).

The Super-8 film, *Fuses*, consists of explicit images of Schneeman and her partner having sexual intercourse, and was first screened at the LFMC in 1968. Schneemann worked on the film print by painting, scratching, dipping it in acid, baking, burning and leaving the film outside in the elements, and finally editing it. In this way, the explicit images were partially obscured, rendering what could have been a conventional pornographic film, into a painterly and sensuous montage. The film is a highly personal contemplation of sexual congress, revealed through the explicit nature of the imagery and the way the film material has been worked on. Although the fact that the film was made by a woman is not recognisable in the film text alone, it should be considered in the reading of the film, as this relates to wider discourses around women’s self-portraiture. Women’s self-portraiture also acts as a form of reclamation, as the female (often) nude was historically presented in painting usually for the delight (and voyeuristic scrutiny) of the male viewer. Schneemann said that *Fuses* was a response to Stan Brakhage’s *Window Water Baby Moving* (1959) (a film of Brakhage’s wife giving birth), as she felt that, ‘the male persona or the male eye was absorbing or repossessing an essential, unique female process’ to the extent that the film ‘became the birth giver’. In her 1971 notes on *Fuses*, Schneemann identified the importance of her role as filmmaker and camerawoman:

I did the filming even while I was participant in the action ... Perhaps because it was made of her own life by a woman, *Fuses* is both a sensuous and equitable interchange; neither lover is “subject” or “object”.

In her interview with Duncan White she amusingly observed that while the sexual action may appear to be continuous, she was, in fact, having to wind out the Bolex camera every thirty seconds, saying ‘Honey I’m back! Where were we?’ She also,
more seriously, offers further insights into her reasons for being both performer and camerawoman in *Fuses*:

Partly I would never want to ask anyone else to do what I think I should do. I don’t want to be in the hierarchical position of the director who had that separation between instruction, expectation and demand. That was a folly that I experienced every time I was in a man friend’s film and thought this would be a wonderful collaboration and I would find something between us, I was deformed. Every time. They had that power to completely make me experience the self that was depicted in those films as a deformation. So it was just an experiment: what happens if I use myself – because this is coming out of my lived experience and those sensations of it. 

Thus *Fuses* enabled (and empowered) Schneemann to present herself exactly as she wanted to be seen. It also, arguably, identifies the importance of recognising the gender of the filmmaker and the filmmaker’s intentions when making a reading of a film. *Fuses*, therefore draws some pertinent contrasts with Dwoskin’s *Moment*, discussed below.

Schneemann raised an interesting point in relation to film history in her 1977 interview with Kate Haug, who was researching sexually explicit women’s experimental films. Haug, posed a question in reference to Mulvey’s seminal ‘Visual Pleasures’ essay, asked why an important film such as *Fuses* had not really been addressed by feminists or film critics. While acknowledging that Mulvey was referring more specifically to ‘Hollywood’ cinema, Haug believed that ‘*Fuses* really exemplified so many of the different tenets in her particular argument’. Schneemann’s response to Haug was insightful:

*Fuses* was being shown in London, in 1968, 1969, and through the early seventies when I lived there – as Mulvey began writing her film essays. She talked to me about the rupture *Fuses* made in pornography – how important *Fuses* was as an erotic vision. It was going to change the whole argument and discussion of filmic representation of sexuality and … then she couldn’t touch it! Mulvey has never mentioned my films. We were there at the same time, at the same moment, in parallel. I showed *Fuses* first at the Roundhouse for the “Dialectics of Liberation” conference in London in 1968 and at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA). I was pulled out of the film booth by the conference coordinator who told me that in case of immorality charges, he would not defend me. I was on my own. He would have defended Stokely Carmichael, R. D. Laing, etc., if their political transgressions had been prosecuted. I felt incredibly alone, female, desired, and despised. I ended up living in London for four years. One of the only ways I could get any income at all was due to the curiosity around *Fuses*. Derrick Hill, a courageous independent distributor, kept getting me little showings for it. It was written about a lot; it was seen all over London. I was on important censorship and pornography panels with editors, publishers, politicians.
Schneemann provides some particularly interesting points, not only about *Fuses*, but about the wider socio-political climate in London in the early 1970s. Although *Fuses* did raise important questions about viewer identification and issues of pornography, Mulvey’s reasons for failing to address the film were rather different. These were articulated in my recent correspondence with Mulvey, when I asked her about Schneemann’s view on her lack of engagement with *Fuses*; and is necessary to quote at length:

I don’t think I could have seen *Fuses* in the late 60s – I just didn’t go to avant-garde films until after 72. Those conversations with Carolee were more likely to have been around 1975 and it’s very likely that I would have made the remarks the gist of which she quotes. They ring true – and she’s quite right that I never managed to turn them into concrete theory/criticism. I moved rather towards the more austere aesthetic which influenced my own films (made with Peter Wollen in the mid to late 70s) and became much more interested in the kind of theoretical cinema of, say, Yvonne Rainer or Chantal Akerman – both more compatible with the structural/minimalist aesthetic that was so significant at the time. The point when, I realise looking back, I could/should have engaged with *Fuses* would have been in my article ‘Film, Feminism and the Avant-garde’. It would certainly have been appropriate in that context – but I clearly didn’t develop my thoughts on the question of the representation of sexuality from a feminist perspective. I probably didn’t have a satisfactory critical/theoretical approach to the film. In that sense, she’s right that I didn’t know how to handle it – and that would have been the time/place to do so. I can’t remember now whether I avoided the question of *Fuses* and Carolee’s work in general in that article – more likely I was by then, (as I said above) following a different line of thought, influenced by minimalism and the need to work through a counter cinema before any “positive” approach to women’s sexuality could be addressed.\(^{942}\)

Mulvey’s clarification is insightful, as it addresses the issue related to *Fuses* but also identifies the ongoing developments related to feminist discourses and women’s filmmaking. It also demonstrates the diversity in women’s activity, clearly illustrating that different groups of women were preoccupied with different concerns. The special women’s events, such as those at the Edinburgh Film Festival and the LFMC, were therefore opportune moments where the wider diversity in women’s filmmaking could be deliberated.

In considering the gendered presence behind the camera and the recording of intimate or private moments on film, Stephen Dwoskin’s *Moment* offers an interesting counterpoint to Schneemann’s *Fuses*. A large proportion of Dwoskin’s film practice is centred on voyeurism in film, with *Central Bazaar* and Paul Willeman’s ‘fourth look’ discussed in Chapter Five.\(^{943}\) It is particularly pertinent that many of the women in Dwoskin’s short films are mute, with his scrutinising ‘camera eye’ ever observant. In
his earlier film, *Alone* (1963), however, the woman’s inner thoughts and quandaries are revealed through her voice-over; and this differs significantly from his other films as she is given a voice (an identity) and is ‘allowed’ to speak.

*Moment* consists of a continuous, fixed, close-up shot of a woman’s head lying on a red pillow. She is allegedly masturbating and comes to orgasm; with only the subtleties of her facial expressions revealed and her hand periodically coming into frame (as she smokes a cigarette). Comparisons can be made with Andy Warhol’s *Blow Job* (1964), where all the suggested action is centred on the close-up of a male face. As the viewer becomes implicated in the act of voyeurism, an uncomfortable self-reflective engagement occurs, differing to the viewing of the dominant cinema whereby ‘the viewer of Hollywood cinema is allowed to imagine himself/herself as “invisible.”’ Here the viewer, through pleasure or discomfort, recognises his/her own viewing position. Curtis, however, also suggested that ‘like all [Dwoskin’s] work [it] says as much about the maker and the current viewer, as about its ostensible subject’. This was discussed in Chapter Five, where I argued that the filmmaker also needed to acknowledge his role in the voyeuristic act of filming, as this could not simply be circumvented through theories on viewer identification, implicating the viewer in the act of voyeurism.

The aesthetic ‘look’ of both *Fuses* and *Moment* differs significantly. *Fuses* is painted over and worked on to slightly obscure or veil the explicit film images and *Moment*, despite a slightly grainy quality to the image, is explicit in what is not revealed of the woman’s body but what the viewer ‘sees’ in her expressions. The different viewing experiences are also attributable to the editing and structuring of the film. While the continuous fixed shot of *Moment* allows the viewer to stare and enter into the voyeuristic act alongside the filmmaker, the fragmented and disrupted way of viewing *Fuses* means that the viewer is constantly denied a detailed view of the action.

These observations do not propose that the viewing of the four films discussed here reveals an *absolute* gendered film text, but ‘formal, stylistic or thematic markers’ can disclose something about the ‘presence behind the camera?’ Arguably, knowledge of the gendered presence of the filmmaker also changes the reading of the film. Would we, for example, read *Moment* differently if it was made by a woman? Arguably, yes. Just as *Fuses* is understood in the terms under which it was made, and which Schneemann believes is important: a film made by a woman on her terms. A
film’s production and screening contexts also raise some interesting issues around modes of interpretation, the example with *Antepartum* revealed. All these observations further added to the detailed analyses possible in interpreting these women’s films, revealing the complexity in approaches to filmmaking.

**History, Language and Ideology: Thriller, The Song of the Shirt and Light Reading**

Although the four films discussed above are silent or have a minimal soundtrack, three films will be considered here where the soundtrack is as important as the visual film text in opening up discourses on feminist polemics. History, language or ideology are central to these films by Sally Potter, Lis Rhodes and Susan Clayton and Jonathan Curling. History is called into question in the films in different ways as women’s socially-inscribed, historical positions are deliberated; or in the way that the central character/s considers their changing roles in society.

In Potter’s *Thriller* (1979) the death of the heroine in Puccini’s opera, *La Boheme*, is contested as it serves primarily to satisfy the role of the grieving lover. In *The Song of the Shirt* (1979), by Clayton and Curling, the title is taken from Thomas Hood’s 1843 poem, the plight of the 18th and 19th century needlewoman is questioned through reference to (male) historical texts and women’s contemporary problems (in the 1970s) with regard to social status, work and low-pay. In *Light Reading* (1978) Rhodes takes a more dialectical approach, engaging with formal aspects of film structure and materiality, to question female subjectivity and women’s historically oppressed position. Language and ideology are used in all three films to polemically open up discussions about women’s traditionally, submissive roles and the patriarchal inscription of language.

*Thriller* was filmed in the attic above Potter’s flat in Holborn, London, and funded with a £1000 Arts Council grant. It was informed by Mulvey’s ‘Visual Pleasure’ (1975) essay, Claire Johnson’s writing and other feminist texts and, according to Patricia Mellencamp, ‘begins where *Meshes* and *La Boheme* end’. In the opening scene the central character, Mimi, sits on a chair, holding a book and laughing hysterially. The mocking, frenzied laughter is repeated in a later scene as Mimi closes a journal (*Tel Quel*) she has been reading, containing the writings of Marx, Freud and Mallarmé, and faces the camera. Potter said that she was commenting on the dominant role of (male) theory in this scene:
Near the end of thriller, an anonymous hand passes a book into the frame and Mimi reads from the introduction to the book, which is a structuralist text. That image is asking, “What function does theoretical and analytical work have in understanding my life? Mimi’s life? Cinema? What is the correct relationship between the complexities of theory and complexities of the image? And the answer in my film is laughter.949

Potter further questions ideology and theory as she offers an alternative narrative, to the original defenceless Mimi in Puccini’s opera, through Mimi’s firm, confident, alter-ego Musetta in Thriller. She defies her historically-inscribed position, contesting her murder and her submissive position. Sue Harper identified how Potter used these binary positions to further polemicise the heroine’s role:

The film splits the heroine into good (Mimi) and bad (Musetta), into young (Mimi) and old (the seamstress in the photograph), and most radically into white (Mimi) and black (Colette Laffont). The latter is the one to escape patriarchy, by laughter.950

On Mimi’s disavowal – through laughter – of Freud’s and Marx’s theories, Harper also identified the ‘icons of male theoretical culture’ as being as ‘complicit as its works of art’.951 Harper’s analysis also, importantly, alludes to the progressive fragmentation occurring within feminism in the 1970s, and where women filmmaker’s in the 1980s would more explicitly focus on issues related to race, class, and sexual orientation.

The film, Focii (1974), of the LFMC filmmaker Jeanette Iljon, draws some particularly interesting parallels with Thriller, in the way that dance/movement, the mirror and the dual-self were used to question identity. Although Focii is silent, the ‘sparse composition of one, then two dancers, conveying isolation, fear and curiosity’, are conveyed through the dynamic movements in the dance.952 As in Thriller the mirror is central to the female’s performer’s actions, as she returns to her reflection to question and recognise, but in Focii she struggles to recognise her ‘self’ as she ‘mimics the other figure, attempting to catch her out with rapid, erratic movements’, creating an sense of unease.953

In the BFIPB-funded The Song of the Shirt, language and ideology are questioned through the quotation of a range of historical (male) sources. These include the writings of Richard Cobden, the Earl of Shaftsbury, Mayhew and the Chartist, Harney.954 According to Judith Mayne, the undermining of authority in male, historical texts is also evident in The Song of the Shirt, and in her interview with
Clayton, referring to Boveschein’s above-mentioned ‘Is There a Feminine Aesthetic?’ article, Mayne identified that:

Boveschein describes the element of female resistance, however passive, that contributes to the work of art. In a sense much feminist work has been an attempt to exploit that resistance, to tease out its implications. The voice of Thriller is precisely that: it looks back at the text, takes whatever cracks there may be in the representation, and then attempts to take them to some kind of “logical” feminist extreme. That voice is also present in The Song of the Shirt – not the authoritative voice you [Sue Clayton] just described, but the voices of the two women who read the text and laugh about it. 955

Laughter therefore appears as a firm, defiant antidote to contest the injustices in history, as it challenges rather than victimises.

While an important objective in the second wave of feminism was the reinscription of women into history, Clayton believed that this was only proportionately possible. History, she said, could not materially be rewritten, ‘you can try to explain why women are absent, but I don’t think you can actually construct a female voice in a specific historical instance that has the power to explain its absence’. 956 Although, arguably, this is what women were attempting to do – including with The Song of the Shirt – in the 1970s. Clearly, some historical facts could not be changed, but amendments could certainly be made in order to reintegrate women into histories and thereby offer more representative viewpoints, accommodating the complex positions of all involved.

Clayton was critical of Potter’s ‘ahistorical voice because it produces such a critique of the situation out of which it came.’ 957 In referring to Mimi’s question – “Do they have to suffer to produce the way I suffered to produce?” – Clayton asked where this historically disconnected voice had come from? 958 Arguably, however, this was where the strength in Thriller lay; in Mimi’s uncompromising defiance to insert herself into history and challenge it. Clayton (who studied under Peter Gidal at the RCA) admitted that perhaps they would be ‘criticized a bit for not taking the kinds of imaginative leaps that other filmmakers have taken’ with their film. 959 Although Mayne reassured Clayton (in the above quotation) that The Song of the Shirt also offered resistance through the women’s laughter at the male, historical texts, its more self-conscious intervention did appear less certain of its challenge. David Curtis identified The Song of the Shirt, alongside a number of other BFIPB-funded films, as being ‘dubbed by sceptics at the time “post-Straubian Costume Dramas”’ as they ‘more self-consciously attempted to intervene in the mainstream with a political
engagement equivalent to that of Godard and Straub/Huillet. Interestingly, Potter’s ‘imaginative leap’ has meant that Thriller has been consistently referred to and written about, while The Song of the Shirt – although receiving significant attention at the time – has enjoyed less sustained attention.

In Lis Rhodes’ Arts Council-funded Light Reading language and ideology were used to question women’s historically-inscribed status. A significant focus on the relationship between sound and image also explicitly draws the viewer’s attention to consider cinematic structuring devices, the interrelation between sound and image and how these inform the film’s construction and narrative. The twenty-minute film is made up of three parts; with the first two-and-a-half minutes consisting of a black screen and Rhodes’ voiceover. The second ten-minute sequence comprises diverse shots viewed in silence and the final eight-minutes utilises both sound and image. Rhodes’ asserted that her interest in structural aspects of filmmaking were ‘an intervention against illusion, rather than to do with fixed patterning or something’.

Rhodes’ filmmaking was clearly influenced by her involvement at the LFMC, where structural and material experimentation was a dominant influence in the 1970s. The sound/image dislocation in Light Reading imposes a greater sense of viewer reflexivity – unlike commercial cinema’s narrative linearity – whereby the viewer is compelled to observe the diverse auditory and visual stimuli in attempting to piece the fragmented parts together. In here analysis of the film, Nancy Woods elucidated on the sound/image hierarchy:

One consequence of this formal manoeuvre is the radical undermining of sight as the essential condition of the film’s immediate intelligibility. This tactic precipitates a temporary shift of emphasis in the sensory registers by which film spectatorship is usually experienced, forcing the spectator to reconsider her/his habitual subjugation of sound to image.

Thus, the undermining of sight points to the very essence of cinema, which is the visual image. In Rhodes’ negation of image in the first part (featuring the black screen) she prioritises the woman’s voice and therefore, arguably, also comments on women’s historical objectivity in art, whereby women’s presence as object of desire existed to satisfy the male viewer. The titling of the LFMC programme, which featured Light Reading, ‘Her Image Fades as Her Voice Rises’ (1983), is therefore intentionally apt.

In the second part of Thriller, the content of the voice-over also opens up questions about patriarchal language structure. A direct correlation appears to exist between a
few sentences in Rhodes’ voiceover (occurring three quarters of the way through the film) and John Berger’s discussion of female objectivity in his seminal publication, ‘Ways of Seeing’ (1972). In Rhodes’ voiceover she states:

She watched herself being looked at. She looked at herself being watched but she could not perceive herself as the subject of the sentence as it was written. As it was read. The context to find her is the object of the explanation.963

And in Berger’s text he similarly deliberates:

Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of women in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.964

In my interview with Rhodes I asked if she was directly referencing Berger’s text. She was, however, ambivalent about directly accrediting him, suggesting that ‘one has things in ones ears you know, my feeling is: not necessarily ... And if one is talking about how one [works] as an artist, you use everything that is sort of around’.965 She however, confirmed Gertrude Stein as a key literary source in Light Reading. ‘I think that what I was reading at that time was some Gertrude Stein, so if, as I remember, the reference was very much her writing’.966 Stein’s poem, ‘Sonatina Followed by Another’ is quoted in Light Reading and Rhodes’ interest in Stein’s writing was ‘in a sense something she pronounced, that in a way grammar is the problem, as much as anything else, in the sense of constructing meaning’.967 Rhodes’ use of language in Light Reading is not fixed, as she speaks in both first and third person, and refers to ‘she’ in the singular and plural. Her monologue forms a circular score, complementing the rhythms and repetitions of the visual images. The tone changes throughout the monologue, from indecision – asking advice on what to do – to decisiveness in providing concise directions for the printing of the film, without pause and offering no sense of a fixed narrative. Lis Rhode’s and Felicity Sparrow’s essay confirms the reasons for her indecision: ‘[t]he clues suggest it is language that has trapped her, meanings that have excluded her and a past that has been constructed to control her’.968

Still photographs are used in all three films discussed here. In The Song of the Shirt and Thriller they provide evidence of women’s historical, oppressed position in society as working-class seamstresses. Archival photographs from an earlier theatre production of La Bohème and of needlewomen feature in Thriller. In The Song of the
Shirt still photographs illustrate a voice-over reading of a novel about a distressed needlewoman (the focus in a broad range of Victorian literature and social research). E. Ann Kaplan made some pertinent observations about Potter’s use of archival photographs as contributing to Mimi’s inscribed mute role in the classical opera. These comments may be equally valid for the other two films discussed here:

The space is deliberately “frozen” in two senses; first, in that the shots are photographs of photographs of a stage performance (“signifiers of signifiers” as Jane Weinstock puts it), which sets them one stage further from the signified than a cinematic shot would normally be; secondly, in the literal sense that the figures do not move – occasionally the camera moves in for a close-up of some detail, e.g. Mimi 2’s face, or a seamstresses’ hand, but this only accentuates the silent, passive aspect of the figures. Kaplan’s observations are noteworthy in that they also relate to Sparrow and Rhode’s earlier discussions on raising women’s mute voices from history.

Light Reading is more formally innovative of the three films, as Rhodes exposed the structural procedures of the film’s production. She used the ‘direct’ techniques featured in her earlier films such as Dresden Dynamo (1971), where Letratone and Letraset forms were placed directly onto the clear film leader and optical soundtrack. In Amenuensis (1973) fresh film stock and a used typewriter ribbon were hand-wound and contact-printed with a light bulb. Parts of this film, with traces of typewritten letters and words scrolling through the screen, form the final part of Light Reading. Rhodes used the optical printer to re-film segments of film, creating repetitions for the cyclic score. The rostrum camera was also used to film photographs of an unmade, blood-stained bed, the bottom half of a male figure walking on a pavement and torn fragments of photographs. While these all provide indexical evidence, they offer no certainty but only clues to the possible narrative events. Rhodes is also glimpsed in photographic self-portraits, reflected in a small hand mirror and in a Polaroid photograph, problematising – as self-portraiture does – the duality of being both subject and object. This also relates to the discussions on Schneemann’s Fuses, and women seeking to represent themselves, as opposed to being represented by others (particularly men).

The images and voice-over in Light Reading offer only a lack of clarity or disclosure, as the tentative narrative unfolds. Thus the film reads as a fragmented puzzle, offering little narrative certainty, yet raising questions about cinematic and verbal language. Annette Kuhn read this reticent elucidation as follows:
The repeated denial of meaning ... is effectively an assertion of meaninglessness, a project of radical asceticized deconstruction ... The repetitions, the radical refusal of semioticity, the unfixed nature of the space articulated by the film, all serve to operate against the kind of closure associated with a defined and homogenous filmic space.970

Providing a comprehensible narrative was never Rhodes’ intention as she explicitly exposed the mechanisms of the camera operations, revealing the film materiality and processes of production. The camera, like a scanning ‘eye’, films the photographs in either fast-paced sequences or with slower, roving camera movements in close-up, moving either from left to right, right to left or from top to bottom. Images of rulers, scissors and hand-written numbers also reference the editorial, decision-making processes in filmmaking, as the voice-over provides instructions for printing.

By contesting patriarchally-inscribed grammatic form, Rhodes was able to find her own voice, and although Light Reading did not offer a ‘single solution ... there is a beginning. Of that she is positive’.971 This also relates to the attempted forms of historical amendment, discussed above, where the reinsertion of the women’s voices into historical accounts offered some form of redress. Like Clayton, however, Sparrow and Rhodes questioned how much could in effect be changed:

Where do we begin? There is the past, always, which we can re-read, re-frame, just as we can try and re-place Alice Guy and Germaine Dulac. But it’s not just a question of balancing out the injustices: “There is nothing connected with the staging of a motion picture that a woman cannot do as easily as a man,” it goes deeper than these crimes of exclusion and unequal opportunities.972

Yet, while no clear answer was offered for what could be done to make amends for women’s exclusion, the important issue of challenging histories by asking questions and reinserting women’s accounts was clearly important. Sylvia Harvey also similarly questioned how, in The Song of the Shirt, a ‘multiplicity of accounts’ lacking answers about women’s history could be useful.973 While there was no explicit answer to the question, ‘yes, but why did these things happen?’, she identified that ‘very positively, though, what the film tries to do is ask who gets to write history and how do they do it?’974 This importantly reiterates Rhodes’ refrain in ‘Whose History?’ (discussed in Chapter One), where she asked, ‘who makes history for whom?’ (Rhodes’ emphasis).975 This is a question that Thriller, The Song of the Shirt and Light Reading all pose, as they address women’s absence and prescribed roles, asking how it may be possible to make amendments or redress the balance.
A Feminine Aesthetic of Ephemerality: Shadow Woman, Sky for the Bird on the Roof of my Mind and Jaded Vision

In this final section on women’s filmmaking, a feminine aesthetic will be considered in relation to Tina Keane’s Shadow Woman (1977) and Annabel Nicolson’s Sky for the Bird on the Roof of my Mind (1973) and Jaded Vision (1973). These ephemeral works included performance, pre-cinematic shadow-play and film screenings.

In Shadow Woman Keane reflected on the mother-daughter relationship through game-playing. In the first half of the work, Keane’s shadow repeatedly fell across her young daughter playing hopscotch in a garden, as Keane placed mirrors on the hopscotch numbers. The second half focused on ‘the passivity of waiting from the time of one’s birth as a baby girl till the day of one’s death as an old woman’ and included a reading of Faith Wilding’s poem, Waiting. After performing Shadow Woman for the first time, Keane reflected on her performance, recognising that it ended on a rather sombre note, appearing to suggest the weight of women’s inherited oppression. A third part was added to the piece, significantly changing the work. Keane read extracts from Virginia Woolf’s The Waves while a film of the sun’s reflections on water was screened. It exuded ‘an optimism, it had the universe and it had energy, constant energy’. The Super-8 footage was later used in Keane’s film, Shadow of a Journey (1980), with the soundtrack providing a political voice for traditional forms of story-telling, (women were ‘keening (melancholy wordless wails)’ as they retold traumatic historical accounts of Highland clearances).

Performance was particularly important for Keane as it lent itself to an open-ended, experimental exploration of ideas within a prescribed structure:

I’ve tried to combine the two – to mix the intellect with the intuitive part so that one has a structure within which one can be fairly spontaneous. The importance of not having a total script is actually trying to respond to the audience – see who is there. Different places you go, you might slightly change that.

Some significant parallels, around questions of control, the predetermined and the incidental, were evident with Nicolson’s 1970s performance practice. Nicolson reflected on these performances in a recent expanded cinema event:

The importance of consideration, that there was an awareness of what would happen but it wasn’t all predetermined. Within the performance space, the projection space, there was an openness. So whoever was doing the performance brings something else to it ... I think the answer lies somewhere in my understanding of what performance is. It is the moment when things happen. It is
the same with film in the sense that projecting is the moment when it all becomes real. 981

Like Keane, Nicolson recognised that separation between audience and the performative event was minimised in such experiential works; they were more reliant on subtle gestures to the audience’s response:

Since 1973 I have been working away from film, towards more circumstantial situations. The aspects of projection which interest me have always been the transient, fragile qualities of light beaming through space. The accidental, the inadvertent light sources which crept into projection situations give me a point of departure ... These performances change shape depending on who helps perform them. This inevitably creates a risk around the work. At the moment I am thinking about the difficulty of retaining a balance between formal work and improvised risk. 982

In Sky for the Bird on the Roof of my Mind (1973) film loops were projected onto the roof and walls of Nicolson’s studio. A film of an apparent bird was projected onto a dusty mirror with ‘bird’ written on it, and another loop was passed through a slide projector, casting vertical images of film frames from roof to ceiling. These images were then, in turn, projected onto the ‘original precarious bird’ on the roof, illuminating it with light. An added element was created by random flashes of reflected light as film loops caught the light beams. Nicolson commented on the recurring image of the apparent bird and how intuition and the working space formed an integral part of her process:

Someone said the other day that everything was contained in that image, the projected image of the tiny bird. In fact it wasn’t a bird, it was a crack in a glass roof. It’s from years ago and recurs and recurs. It’s mainly to do with listening to signs and seeing them manifest. 983

In a similar way Jaded Vision (1973) also utilised the space as a key part of the work, relying on the spontaneous actions of audience and equipment. It was presented either as a 2 or 3 screen film performance lasting 10 minutes. Jaded Vision included floor to ceiling film loops and the shadow of a paper bird. A microphone was swung around creating strange bird-like sounds through the feedback.

Although there were also male filmmakers who performed as part of the work, such as in Le Grice’s Horror Film 1 (1971) and William Raban’s 2’45”, Keane was insistent that the transient nature of such works was an especially female sensibility as she identified:
You see, the whole idea of male art is very much tied to the idea of making art that will last for ever. So, in a sense they become monuments. I think that the art that comes from women is organic and not particularly lasting. I don’t think women are thinking of trying to make themselves great artists with works that will last after their death, that will put them on a pedestal. It’s to do with the whole NOW and LIVING. 

Whether the ephemeral nature of these works singles them out as ostensibly feminine was debatable. The lack of documentation, however, was an issue and relates to Keane’s statement about working organically and not being too concerned with making lasting works. Very little documentation exists of Nicolson’s extensive performance works from this period, as she reveals:

We were passionately interested in the projection situation, the live situation. Getting away from the content of the images or the story and making what was real in that live situation with the audience. So it wouldn’t have occurred to us to document it. That was everything that we were shying away from. I also think it depends why you’re performing and I think if you’re trying to create a space for people to come into. In my case I was working in near darkness or very dim and working with quiet sounds. My dialogue was with the audience and not with the camera and I wouldn’t have been able to work with someone recording.

Nicolson does however regret that there isn’t a record of her work, as the ephemeral nature of these works means that ‘there’s very little trace and transient work doesn’t leave much in its wake’.

Conclusion

Although extensive research was done to retrieve women’s forgotten histories and many films had addressed issues related to feminism in the 1970s, the likelihood of recognising a common aesthetic was rather small. Researchers had initially been optimistic that ‘a coherent aesthetic’ could be revealed, but admitted that this was increasingly doubtful. In Stern’s review of the special women’s event at the 1979 Edinburgh Film Festival (1979) she identified the importance of the diversity in women’s experimentation:

For what emerged with startling clarity is that films do not speak for themselves: there is not such thing as an essentially feminist film, there is no singular feminist position or critique. There is only difference. And differences are articulated in differing languages. This is integral to the dilemma of ‘attempting to build a new language of film’.
As the decade progressed, with further histories emerging through research by different groups of women, women also became more insistent about articulating their concerns outside of patriarchal structures. There is no doubt that this increased awareness resulted in the irresolvable difficulties emerging at the end of the decade in the Hayward Gallery’s 1979 ‘Film as Film’ exhibition (discussed in Chapter One), leading to the women’s split from the LFMC and the formation of the women’s distribution centre and collective, Circles, in 1979. The Channel Four documentary, *Seeing for Ourselves: Women Working with Film* (1983), focused on the Circles group and the women involved explained how it provided a welcome, supportive network for women filmmakers, historians and theorists.989

A substantial amount of groundwork was done in the 1970s, coming to more concerted fruition in the 1980s, but increased fragmentation meant that more essentialist, political issues such as race and sexuality would become key concerns that further divided the women’s movement. What is revealed, through the complex discourses engaging women in resurrecting film histories and establishing their own positions in the 1970, is the diversity of approach taken to explore experimental filmmaking. Furthermore, this reveals that there was no ‘return to image’ at the end of the 1970s, as this was central to many women’s diverse and image-rich film practices.
CONCLUSION

The past is valid only in relation to whether the present recognises it.\footnote{Nadine Gordimer}

This thesis has identified 1970s British experimental filmmaking as a rich and complex period in recent history. This revision of the decade and the act of historical reclamation made is important, as it provides the more neglected filmmakers with the recognition that they deserve and also brings a numbers of filmmakers, often unrecognised, into the field. One of my central arguments has contested the ‘return to image’ thesis which maintained that more personal, representational (image-rich) or expressionistic forms of filmmaking only returned at the end of the decade. This claim has problematically marginalised an eclectic body of work that has needed repositioning alongside – and in equal measure – to the recognised and established LFMC history of structural and material experimentation. My intention has not been to undermine the work produced at the LFMC, but to re-evaluate it in conjunction with other more personally-engaged forms of film practice, thereby providing a more comprehensive account of the period.

Approaches and Perspectives to Research

Research for this thesis was undertaken through a number of approaches. A wide range of published and unpublished written texts were examined including books, journals, essays, exhibition catalogues, artists’ statements, programme notes and more ephemeral sources held at the BAFVSC and the BFI. An awareness of the dominance that some written texts have held in accounts of the decade has been essential in recognising that certain histories and authors have achieved a canonical status. With this in mind, it has been necessary to ask how valid these positions still are and how these may be read anew in revisions – such as this one – of the decade.

Archival research (mostly conducted at the BAFVSC) has uncovered other aspects of this history, such as the extensive and diverse screenings included in multi-disciplinary art exhibitions or presented at the LFMC (in the extensive screening programme documentation). Annabel Nicolson’s collected reminiscences of the LFMC, ‘The Early Years of the Film Co-op’, provides an insightful account of the improvisatory and experimental nature related to filmmaking and screening.\footnote{Annabel Nicolson’s collected reminiscences of the LFMC, ‘The Early Years of the Film Co-op’, provides an insightful account of the improvisatory and experimental nature related to filmmaking and screening.} These archives also revealed some invaluable insights – in funding applications, artists’
statements or other aspects of filmmaker’s working processes – that are not extensively revealed in existing accounts and require uncovering further. One of the highlights of my archival research at the BAFVSC was in finding an extensive folder on Nicolson’s practice. This revealed a wonderfully diverse and extensive artistic practice, including artist’s books, ephemeral performances (with and without film) and a sensitively personal approach to practice. Although a few films – fitting in with the 1970s structural and material hegemony – have been included in accounts of the decade, the breadth of her cross-disciplinary practice (in the 1970s and in later decades) has yet to be fully recognised. This thesis has included her film-related and written texts where possible, but the broader contexts of her practices as writer, activist and practitioner should be realised.

In Subversion: The Definitive History of Underground Cinema (2007), Duncan Reekie has set an important precedent in recognising the history of amateur and underground forms of filmmaking which have problematically been precluded from more established histories. Although, at times, he objects too harshly against the role of institutions in supporting filmmaking and shaping histories (if there is no institutional support at all then this seriously impedes production, education and exhibition), he does raise some very important issues. These include the recognition of film formats considered ‘amateur’, such as the Super-8 format. This is critically important to this thesis, as a significant proportion of the films requiring appropriate recognition within the history include the numerous Super-8 films made by Derek Jarman and Jeff Keen. This is not even to mention the Super-8 Film group that was affiliated to the ICA from the mid-1970s onwards, and the diverse other filmmakers who worked with the smaller format, and whose films require researching further to further incorporate within the history. The misnomer that Super-8 filmmaking was more accepted as part of art/film practices in the 1980s, with the films of New Romantic filmmakers such as John Maybury and Cerith Wyn Evans, is therefore misleading and also forms part of the problematic ‘return to image’ thesis that has been challenged in this thesis.

As part of the research for this thesis, interviews were conducted with filmmakers and other individuals involved in the field. These have proved insightful, offering personal accounts, recollections and some details that more censored written accounts would not have revealed. The film texts themselves, however, have been central to the research undertaken for this thesis. It was at the outset important to watch as many
films as possible to establish the extent of 1970s film practices. (The BAVSC has in this respect been an excellent resource, providing access to films which are otherwise largely unavailable). Returning to these film texts time and again has played a significant part in establishing the diversity and variety of approaches to filmmaking, as these are not adequately revealed in the dominant written histories. The close textual analyses and relationships drawn between diverse texts also form an important part of the contribution to knowledge this thesis presents.

It was important to consider the broader framework of international filmmaking as this formed an important part in cross-cultural exchange. The influence of earlier American experimental filmmaking needed to be considered, particularly in relation to the LFMC, as it was inspired by the New York model and held a large number of New American Cinema films in its distribution collection. It was especially important for the LFMC filmmakers and theorists to distinguish themselves from their American counterparts, by producing work firmly engaged with modernist discourses in the arts as informed by the Marxist ideological position. The LFMC’s turn against the expressive, romantic idealism in some forms of American experimental filmmaking, such as the mythopoetic films of Stan Brakhage, was also important for identifying distinctions between British and American filmmaking. A continuous dialogue was, however, maintained between British and American filmmakers and theorists throughout the decade. Connections with European filmmakers also formed an important part of filmmaking practice, with dialogues continuing throughout the decade.

A New Version of the Dominant History

For an increased appreciation of experimental filmmaking in the decade, it was essential to consider the wider contexts of filmmaking at the outset in the first three chapters. Chapter One focused on historiography and historical construction, with a particular emphasis on the curatorial role related to film exhibition and the way in which this was instrumental in establishing particular perceptions of history. The numerous written accounts related to the ‘return to image’ thesis were also identified in the chapter, as these accounts of 1970s history have problematically dominated readings of the decade’s history.

Chapter Two considered institutional contexts, such as funding and education, as well as the organisational strategies involved in establishing recognition for this form
of filmmaking. The complex nature of the field was revealed through understanding how marginalised experimental filmmaking was, in relation to the dominant, commercial cinema and other forms of independent filmmaking. It also revealed that without the consistent hard work and persistence of individuals campaigning for recognition, this work may never have established itself so fully in the decade.

In Chapter Three institutional contexts, related to funding and education, also played an important part in the dissemination of films. The diverse screenings, revealing the extent of film exhibition and the innovative way filmmakers exhibited works, is the focus of this chapter. These ranged from more improvisatory screenings, such as the weekly events taking place at the LFMC or other informal venues such as artists’ studios, to more conventional single-screen film festival screenings. In this respect discussions related to the ‘white cube’ (gallery space) and the ‘black box’ (conventional cinema) opened up some useful points for consideration. Innovation was particularly pertinent with the expanded cinema works, pushing the boundaries of conventional film screening and viewing by creating immersive and experiential viewing spaces.

Chapters Four to Seven focused more closely on specific types of filmmaking and the discourses or inspirations informing them. The more detailed analysis enabled further examinations and insights to be revealed about possible commonalities in films and how discourses or other literature informed filmmaking. These analyses revealed the extensive diversity in approaches to experimental film production and exhibition, which need to be fully recognised.

In Chapter Four it was valuable to consider films in relation to other visual art practices and the discourses surrounding them, as experimental filmmaking essentially emerged from the fine arts, rather than the cinema. (It has, however, also been important to be aware of commercial, narrative cinema practices, as independent filmmakers took oppositional, theoretical and concrete (films) approaches to this). Relationships between diverse fine art practices, such as painting, drawing or sculpture, yielded up some insightful connections between different forms of creative production.

Chapter Five centred on filmmakers taking more personal, expressive or representational approaches to their work. It was important to consider the influence of the 1960s countercultural contexts, related to Beat poetry and literature, psychoanalysis, the occult, psychedelic drugs and self-actualisation, as this influential
aspect of 1970s filmmaking has largely been repressed in dominant accounts of the
decade. Some filmmakers were inspired by poetry, dreams and myth; and most of
these filmmakers took decidedly individual approaches to express themselves through
the film medium, as opposed to the more theoretical, conceptual approaches taken by
other filmmakers. These personal filmmakers have been centrally placed in the thesis,
although dominant accounts of 1970s history have tended to focus on structural and
material experimentation. The pivotal positioning in the fifth chapter underpins the
need for these filmmakers to be more centrally recognised within the history.

In Chapter Six it was important to closely consider the dominant accounts
of experimentation with structure and material. This more familiar history also required
focusing on, as the importance of the LFMC and particularly the workshop facilities
enabled such diverse forms of experimentation. The LFMC also needed to be
identified as an important centre of filmmaking activity, around which a diverse range
of practitioners, writers and theorists gathered. It has been necessary to recognise the
extent of Peter Gidal and Malcolm Le Grice’s theoretical influence
on critical discourses and filmmaking practices in the period. Their collective investigations into
anti-illusionism, film materiality, process, procedure and the viewer experience
significantly informed LFMC filmmaking and theoretical discourses on film. These
have been considered in some depth, with investigations also made to uncover why
these theoretical positions came to dominate histories of the 1970s, and have
continued to be so influential. There has been no intention to undermine the important
work of LFMC theorists and filmmakers, but the hegemony of its theoretical position
needed to be investigated in order to understand how and why it may have contributed
to the lack of recognition for more personal forms of filmmaking, which has been the
main purpose of this thesis.

The final chapter on women’s experimental filmmaking, Chapter Seven, has taken
an in-depth look at a range of film texts and the discourses surrounding them.
Different feminist discourses informing filmmaking revealed extremely diverse forms
of experimentation, ranging from more didactic films seeking to divulge a specific
message on women’s issues and others using performative events to reveal a sense of
ephemerality. It was important to situate women’s filmmaking at the end of the thesis,
as the end of the 1970s was a particularly significant period with the women’s
withdrawal from the ‘Film as Film’ exhibition and the formation of the women’s film
collective, Circles in 1979. The 1980s therefore became an important decade for the
consolidation of women’s experimental filmmaking activity, and drew on the important feminist developments in the 1970s.

The prevailing ideological climate in 1970s intellectual circles was overwhelmingly Marxist and this provided a clue to the lack of recognition received for more personal, individualistic approaches to filmmaking. The LFMC’s theoretical position, dominated by Gidal and Le Grice, was informed by Marxism, as was the broader Screen-led film theory. The concept of the individual artist expressing him/herself to fulfil his/her own desires stood firmly in contrast to the collective Marxist ideological position. This in all likelihood also contributed to the perpetuation of the claim that there was only a return to more personal, expressive forms of filmmaking at the end of the decade, with the waning of more extreme Marxist opinion in intellectual and academic circles. The increase in post-modern discourses in the 1970s also resulted in misgivings about dominant theoretical and ideological discourses such as Marxism.

**Alternative Approaches to this History and Ideas for Future Research**

Other approaches to the decade could have been taken for this research study. It is useful to consider these as they also raise the possibility for further research that could be undertaken. Since the LFMC was central to the decade’s production and dissemination, this would seem an obvious choice. This is, however, already a well-researched area, with several larger studies already undertaken, and another thesis focused on the LFMC could possibly serve to uphold the hegemony of its position, instead of recognising the diversity of filmmaking in the decade and arguing for the recognition of more marginalised personally-directed forms of filmmaking. Alternately, there is also extensive archival material available in the BAFVSC collection related to LFMC screening programmes and filmmakers’ practices which have yet to be uncovered, and if approached without the dominant explanatory models in mind would almost certainly reveal a broader diversity of practices. The firm links established between the LFMC and other European filmmakers and groups in the 1970s would also form a particularly interesting focus for research. European 1970s historical research on experimental filmmaking could be linked up with the British histories (including this one) to establish significant overlaps and influences. There are some publications available, but William Raban’s *Filmmakers Europe* (1977-1981) would provide a useful starting point.
A single theoretical discourse could have been used to investigate filmmaking in the decade. A focused study on semiotics, for example, could have provided a useful analytical tool for investigations of representation in experimental filmmaking, as the meaning of image was extensively deliberated in both the LFMC and Screen-led theoretical circles. Feminist discourses could also have provided a useful means of enquiry, particularly as these were wide-ranging and prevalent at the start of the decade. Investigating the diverse forms of women’s filmmaking and how feminism impacted on the resulting crisis of identity for male filmmakers could have uncovered some interesting perspectives on the decade. Although it would be useful to interrogate the decade’s filmmaking through a single approach, as this could offer up some detailed and focused studies, it would not have exposed the extensive diversity in practices that I was seeking to reveal in my account of the decade. I have, therefore, hoped to show the positive methodological effects of an eclectic and catholic approach.

Each chapter of this thesis could also have provided a focused study for 1970s experimental filmmaking, as there is substantial material to provide a comprehensive area of research in each one: the construction of history; institutional and organisation frameworks; film exhibition; the relationship between experimental film and the visual arts; personal, expressive forms of filmmaking; structural and material film; and women’s filmmaking. This would not, however, have brought the personal filmmakers the recognition that they deserve and would not have adequately revealed the diversity in 1970s experimental filmmaking. It could also have possibly imposed a new dominance for one type of filmmaking, speaking for the whole decade.

This thesis has presented a revised version of 1970s experimental film history, providing an important contribution to knowledge in the field. Understanding the rich diversity of filmmaking taking place in the decade, and the positioning of more personal, representational filmmakers centre-stage, alongside the already established LFMC filmmakers has been important, and is the central argument of this thesis. There is, however, certainly room for additional research and it is hoped that my work has opened up the field for further consideration.

Numerous references have been made throughout this thesis to the lack of recognition for earlier histories of contemporary moving image work. Rees has argued that curators and critics who suggest the locating of film in galleries began in the 1990s were ‘necessarily on wobbly ground’, as the long multi-screen and expanded
cinema history has been skated over. He also noted that the improvised atmosphere of the earlier Arts Lab and LFMC had been recreated in recent diverse artist-led screenings by Brad Butler and Karen Mirza (of no.w.here lab), and by Lucy Reynolds and Peter Todd at venues such as the Gas Works and the 291. In another account, 1970s filmmaker Chris Welsby recognised the importance of 1970s experimentation and the problematic lack of recognition for this history, as a number of approaches or techniques were being claimed as innovative ‘firsts’ by curators and critics, when they had in fact already taken place in the 1960s or 1970s. Welsby expressed his disbelief at such ignorance.

Therefore important work is to be done in connecting up these diverse histories (including this one) in order to provide a substantial understanding and framework for contemporary moving image practices. The 20-year video history, produced by the extensive REWIND project at the University of Westminster, and the imminent publication from the AHRC-supported ‘Narrative Exploration in Expanded Cinema’ project led by David Curtis and Duncan White of the BAFVSC, should also provide important additional research to supplement this history. Alongside other published and unpublished documentation a focused study which made explicit links between historical and contemporary practices, would provide a welcome support for contextualising contemporary moving image practices. Understandably this would an ambitious project, as the influence of the dominant, cinema history would also need to be taken into consideration, especially as there are contemporary artists such as Sam Taylor-Wood, Steve McQueen and Douglas Gordon who have made feature films. Established directors, like Peter Greenaway and David Lynch, also exhibit their paintings or installations and these form an important part of their filmmaking practices. There are many connections to be made and histories to be drawn, and a recognition of the diverse experimental film and video histories would importantly offer a more robust platform for critical engagements than is currently possible.

Building on from Chapter Four, a focused study on relationships between diverse 1970s visual art practices and experimental filmmaking could additionally provide incisive insights into cross-correlations and interdisciplinary practices. Although the separate fine art disciplines, such as painting, sculpture and printmaking, are only more recently being taught within cross-disciplinary art programmes, there is much to be gleaned from understanding how parameters between these disciplines became more fluid in the 1960s and 1970s. Artist/filmmakers like Annabel Nicolson and Jeff
Keen would provide some useful insights into these cross-disciplinary approaches to practice, where drawing, artists’ books, performance and filmmaking have formed part of their wider practices. A study of Derek Jarman’s eclectic approach to painting, experimental and feature-filmmaking would also reveal unique relationships between diverse practices. Cross-disciplinary approaches of course have a longer history, with the Bauhaus and important 1930s figures such as artist/filmmaker/pedagogue, Lázsló Moholy-Nagy providing useful examples. Approaches to understanding the wider historical transmutations between practices – and the role of experimental film practices within it – would be revealing and offer useful materials for contemporary research and practice.

There are diverse areas for further research which this thesis hopes to stimulate. By recognising the diversity within filmmaking practices in the decade, and in importantly bringing to the fore the work of filmmakers side-lined in established accounts of the history, it is hoped that this thesis will be a valuable contribution to 1970s experimental film history. Questions of personal creativity have been brought centre-stage in this thesis to reveal both the singular and diverse filmmaking practices taking place. Light, space, image, time, the experiential. These fleeting impressions which pass too quickly for us to pin down, do require pinning down, so that they receive the recognition they deserve.
Introduction

2 The terms ‘structural and material film experimentation’ or ‘experimentation with structure and material’ will be used in this thesis to differentiate it from terms such as ‘structuralist/materialist’, aligned with Peter Gidal’s specific theoretical position.
6 Ibid, p. 5.
9 In the early days of cinema, screenings sometimes took the form of film performances, as in the work of Georges Méliès or in vaudeville theatre and silent film performances. 1920s or 1930s films included more formal experimentation by Viking Eggeling, Oscar Fishinger, Hans Richter and Man Ray, as well as the Soviet innovators Dziga Vertov and Sergei Eisenstein. Dada or Surrealist films from the same period included works by Man Ray, Salvador Dalí, Louis Buñuel Hans Richter, Germaine Dulac and Jean Cocteau. In Britain Len Lye and Norman McLaren produced films through filming, using found footage or by painting and drawing on the actual film strip.
10 Many filmmakers continue to work with film as opposed to digital moving image, or with both. Filmmakers such as Nicky Hamlyn, Brad Butler and Karen Mirza work with 16mm film and explore some of the cinematographic, political or socio-political aspects of filmmaking which 1970s filmmakers were preoccupied with. Mirza and Butler’s no.w.here lab is both production centre for 8mm, 16mm filmmaking (and digital), as well a centre where discussions/discourses around historical and contemporary filmmaking take place. 2008 Turner-prize finalist Runa Islam works with both 16mm and 35mm and has explored structural approaches within her filmmaking. In the work of filmmaker Ben Rivers a poetic or diaristic type of filmmaking is evident – drawing a link with the work of Margaret Tait, for example.
11 A few examples of contemporary practitioners (working with film and digital moving image) engaging with earlier 1970s film practices such as the use of multiple screens, personal or diaristic films, performative film events and experimentation with film structure and material include Sam Taylor-Wood, Ben Rivers, Tracey Emin, Luke Fowler, Ian Helliwell, Brad Butler, Karen Mirza, Runa Islam, Jane and Louise Wilson and Emily Wardill. Guy Sherwin and Malcolm Le Grice, who were working in the 1970s, also continue to produce new works.
12 It is necessary to draw attention to the issue of film dates, as there are times where there is some inconsistency and films have been identified in different years. David Hall’s Vertical has, for example, been identified as 1969 and 1970, and the dates for some film series has also been extended as filmmakers continue to work on these. This is not generally an extensive problem but something that it is necessary to be aware of. Some filmmakers also use earlier films (or parts thereof) within later works, as is the case with Kenneth Anger’s Lucifer Rising (1970-1981).
13 Simon Filed and Michael O’Pray, ‘Imagining October, Dr. Dee and Other Matters’, Afterimage, 12, pp. 40-58; p. 55.
16 Independent national cinema movements have included the British Free Cinema movement of the 1950s or the French nouvelle vague. The French nouvelle vague or New Wave includes directors such as Jean-Luc Godard, Alain Resnais and Francois Truffaut.
17 British ‘art-house’ directors include the 1970s feature films of Derek Jarman, Peter Greenaway and Ken Russell. Other international art-house directors include Michaelangelo Antonioni, Ingmar Bergman, Federico Fellini, Fritz Lang, Pier Paulo Pasolini and Wim Wenders. Jim Jarmusch and David Lynch can, arguably, also be included as art-house directors. Peter Wollen coined the term ‘counter cinema’ in a 1972 essay on Jean-Luc Godard’s V’ent d’est (1970). ‘Counter cinema’ filmmakers/theorists, Laura Mulvey and Wollen took an oppositional stance to the commercial,
narrative cinema and both produced seminal essays – Wollen’s ‘The Two Avant-gardes (1975) and Mulvey’s ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ (1975) – which are still frequently referred to.


40 J. Hoberman, ‘Introduction’ in *Underground Film: A Critical History*, (New York: Da Capo, 1995), pp. v-xv; p. vi. *Underground Film: A Critical History* was first published in 1969. Hoberman continues by stating that this ‘promoted the *Times’s* [sic] chief critic to declare that Andy Warhol and “his underground friends” were “pushing a reckless thing too far”.

41 Stephen Dwoskin, *Film Is... The International Free Cinema*, (London: Peter Owen, 1975), p. 23. Dwoskin noted that American underground publication included *East Village Other* (EVO), *Other Scenes* and *RAT* (New York), *Chicago Seed*, *The Argus* (Atlanta), LA *Free Press* (Los Angeles), Berkeley Barb (California), *Win, Liberation, The Rag* (Detroit) and the *San Francisco Express*.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.


46 Ibid.

47 David Curtis, *A History of Artists’ Film & Video in Britain*, op. cit., p.3. The ‘Artists’ Film Sub-Committee’ was formed in 1972 and was part of the Arts Council of Great Britain.

48 Margaret Dickinson, ‘Introduction’ in Margaret Dickinson (ed.), *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain, 1945-90*, (London: BFI, 1999), p. 4. The British Film Institute Experimental Film Fund was formed in 1952 and was replaced by the British Film Institute Production Board in 1966. Despite being called the Experimental Film Fund hardly any films by artists were funded and the Fund was generally used to support (often short) films by independent or commercial directors.


51 *Wholly Communion* is a 33 minute, 16mm, black-and-white film. The ‘International Poetry Incarnation’ at the Albert Hall in June 1965, drew an audience of 7000 with another 2000 allegedly turned away, included readings by British and American Beat poets such as Lawrence Ferlingetti, Michael Horowitz, Alexander Trocchi, Gregory Corso and William Burroughs.

52 *International Times* was edited by Jim Haynes and Barry Miles of the Indica shop/gallery on Southampton Row. The launch took place in October 1966 at the Roundhouse, London. LFMC films by Stephen Dwoskin, Jeff Keen, John Latham and William Burroughs/Anthony Balch were screened and the bands Pink Floyd and Soft Machine played at the event. All-night events also took place at clubs such the UFO and the Middle Earth Club in London.


54 Ibid.


56 Ibid., p. 23. Whitehead is cited in Cronin’s article.


58 P. Adams Sitney’s ‘Structural Film’ article was first published in *Film Culture*, 47, Summer 1969. Sitney’s article was later published in *Visionary Film: The American Avant-garde 1943-1978* (1974).

59 ‘Thoughts on Recent “Underground” Film’ was first published in *Afterimage* 4, Autumn 1972.

60 ‘Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film’ (1975) was published in *Studio International*, November/December 1975, although an earlier version had also been published in the same journal in 1974.


62 Curtis’ chronology documented his early interest and involvement with experimental filmmaking from the mid-1960s onwards, providing details related to the set up of the LFMC. Wollen traced two
parallel histories in the ‘Two Avant-Gardes’, with one related to LFMC formal experimentation and including historical precursors such as 1920s abstract film experiments by artist/filmmakers such as Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov. The other history outlined a trajectory for European directors such as Jean-Luc Godard and Straub/Huillet drawing on the formal experimentation of 1920/30s Russian directors such as Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov.

43 ‘The Structural Film Retrospective’ (1976) included an 18-programme retrospective of over a hundred films.
45 ‘Perspectives on British Avant-garde Film’ (1977) was curated by David Curtis and Deke Dusinberre and held at the Hayward Gallery.
49 Time Out was begun in 1969 as a collective venture with a focus on alternative politics and culture.
50 Other critics, historians and reviewers contributing to experimental film discussions also included, John Du Cane, Stuart Marshall, Stephen Heath, Simon Field, Annabel Nicolson and A. L. Rees.
51 Three issues of Cimino were produced by Ray Durgnat and Simon Hartog.
52 Transcript of interview between David Curtis and Annabel Nicolson from video tape of rushes for planned documentary for ‘Shoot Shoot Shoot: The First Decade of the London Film-makers’ Co-operative and British Avant-garde Film 1966-76’, I/V1, 2001), held at BAFVSC.
53 Afterimage included issues with a special focus such as ‘Avant-Garde Film’ (1970), ‘Aesthetics, Ideology/Cinema’ (1974).
54 David Curtis, A History of Artists’ Film & Video in Britain, op. cit., p.50, reference 55.
55 Continental theories related to Marxism, psychoanalysis, feminism; semiotics and structuralism in linguistics.
56 Nina Danino and Michael Mazière, (eds.), The Undercut Reader: Critical Writings on Artists’ Film and Video, op. cit.
60 The films for ‘Shoot Shoot Shoot’ were screened at Tate Modern before beginning an extensive international touring programme.
64 Ibid., p. xii.
70 GAZWRX: The Films of Jeff Keen, (London: BFI, 2009). The book includes essays by Jack Sargeant, a reprinted Tony Rayns article from 1976, a reprinted Raymond Durgnat’s article from 1965 and Keen’s artists’ statement from the Perspectives on British Avant-Garde Film catalogue (Hayward Gallery). It also includes numerous images of Keen’s work and notes for films. The 4 DVD’s include Keen’s films made between 1960-2002.
The three films by Jane Arden and Jack Bond, released in 2009, include Separation (1967), The Other Side of the Underneath (1972) and Anti-Clock (1979). The short Super-8 film, Vibration (1975), is included with Anti-Clock. All were produced by the BFI.

The ‘studycollection’ (BAFVSC) has an on-line record of their exemplary paper and video/DVD collection held at Central St Martins School of Art and Design. This also includes information about recent research projects, papers and screenings. The REWIND site is related to an extensive research project into the first 20 years of artists’ video at the University of Westminster. Academic and university websites have also been useful as these often include conference papers or lectures. A number of 1970s filmmakers also have their own websites, providing further information.

These include Deke Dusinberre’s 1970s audio interviews for his MPhil thesis and recent videos of interviews for an intended documentary related to Mark Webber’s Shoot Shoot Shoot: The First Decade of the London Filmmaker’s Co-operative and British Avant-garde Film 1966-76 (2002).


Ibid., p. 47.


Interview with Peter Gidal, June 2007. p. 14


Chapter One: Questions of History


The Elusive Sign: British Avant-Garde Film and Video 1977-87’ was held at the Tate Gallery in 1987, it was funded by the Arts Council of Great Britain and the British Council. Filmmakers included Peter Gidal, David Larcher, John Maybury and Cerith Wyn. The ‘New Romantics’ are discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.


The LFMC (London Filmmakers’ Co-op), formed in 1966, was one of the main centres for experimental filmmaking, while the LVA (London Video Arts), formed in 1976 focused on video.

Interview with Lis Rhodes, London, November 2008:

LR: I suppose the fact that I made Light Music and it was half on video, but it is always shown on film…

PG-H: So was it made half on video?

LR: Not exactly on video I suppose. It was, actually I used a synthesizer but yes, it was. Yes, there was a section that was. I had done several performance pieces with Ian Kerr. They were mixed up [and] we transposed it back and forth. So I suppose, in my experience the divisions were not quite as [marked] although I tend to be known more for the filmmaking and for the fact that one was sort of dodging about with early video.

‘Writing Histories’ Symposium at British Film Institute, London May 2007 contributors: David Curtis, Catherine Elwes, Duncan Reekie & Gareth Evans

The chair was writer and filmmaker Gareth Evans.

‘Writing Histories’ was a short event, lasting between two to three hours.

British Artists Film and Video Study Collection, http://www.studycollection.co.uk/hiddenhistorybfi.html, accessed on 31 August 2009. In email correspondence with David Curtis I asked him who had written the text for the website. His reply was as follows: ‘I suspect Rhidian Davis at the BFI made it up, working from ideas submitted by the speakers (Duncan Reekie, Cate Elwes and me). It wasn’t me directly, I’m sure (‘I don’t think I’d say ripped off’!)’. Email correspondence 8 December 2008.


Michael Newman, ‘Moving Image in the Gallery Since the 1990s’ in Stuart Comer (ed.), Film and Video Art, (London: Tate, 2009), pp. 86-121; p. 95.


Email correspondence with Lis Rhodes, 16 August 2010.

Ibid., p. 152.

Walter Grasskamp, ‘For Example, Documenta, or, How is Art History Produced?’ in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (eds.), Thinking about Exhibitions, (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 67-78; p. 68.

The 1949 exhibition titled ‘Deutsche Malerei und Plastik der Gegenwart’ (‘Contemporary German Painting and Sculpture’) was reconstructed in 1978 at the Kölnisher Kunstverein (Cologne Art Association) by Wulf Herzogenrath.

Walter Grasskamp, ‘For Example, Documenta, or, How is Art History Produced?’, op. Cit., p. 68.

Ibid., p. 68.


Ibid., p. 173. ‘Perspectives on British Avant-garde Film’ (1977) was shown at the Hayward Gallery.

Ibid., p. 172.

‘Film als Film: 1910 Bis Heute Vom Animationsfilm Zum Filmenvironment Der Siebziger Jahre’, co-curated by Birgit and Wilhelm Hein, Wulf Herzogenrath, Germany, 1977.

Phillip Drummond, ‘Introduction’ in Film as Film, Formal Experiment in Film: 1910-1975, op. cit., pp. 5-6; p. 5.

Peter Gidal, Annabel Nicolson and Lis Rhodes were on the original committee, but resigned and withdrew their research before the exhibition opened.

Phillip Drummond, ‘Introduction’ in Film as Film: Formal Experiment in Film: 1910-1975, op. cit., pp. 5-6; p. 5.

Malcolm Le Grice, ‘The History We Need’ in Film as Film: Formal Experiment in Film: 1910-1975, op. cit., pp. 113-117; p. 113.

Ibid.

Emak Bakia (1927), directed by Man Ray. Retour à la Raison (1923), directed by Man Ray.

Malcolm Le Grice, ‘The History We Need’ in Film as Film: Formal Experiment in Film: 1910-1975, op. cit., p. 114.

Annabel Nicolson, Felicity Sparrow, Jane Clarke, Jeanette Iljon, Lis Rhodes, Mary Pat Leece, Pat Murphy, Susan Stein, ‘Woman and the Formal Film’ in Film as Film: Formal Experiment in Film: 1910-1975, op. cit., p. 118.

Seeing for Ourselves: Women Working with Film (1983) is a 56-minute documentary from the 4-part, Channel Four series, Profiles. The other documentaries are: Jeff Keen Films, Margaret Tait: Film Maker [sic] and Normal Vision: Malcolm Le Grice (all 1983). All were commissioned by Channel Four’s Independent Film and Video editor, Alan Fountain, funded by Arts Council England, directed by Margaret Williams and produced by Arbor International. Founder members Jo Davis, Tina Keane, Annabel Nicolson, Lis Rhodes and Felicity Sparrow elucidate on motives behind the organisation, providing details of events involving screenings, discussions and performances related to contemporary and historical women’s filmmaking.
Chivers, Filmmakers included Cerith Wyn Evans, John Maybury, Holly Warburton, Cordelia Swann, Steve p.107. O’ Pray identified the New Romantic Movement as taking place from about 1979 286; p. 286. Series
Hamlyn, reviewed in the same issue included
in the same issue are  
October 1983, pp. 288; p. 288. ‘The excellent films made in a less “formalist” mode’ reviewed by Rees ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ (1975), first published in
York: Oxford University Press,
of poetry to fiction. P. Adams Sitney, he said that the relationship of the ‘film poem’ to the commercial narrative cinema was similar to that  
International
Garde Film
Rodowick’s italics.
1965
www.tate.org.uk/co
2010,
Support
David Curtis,
David Curtis, A History of Artists’ Film & Video in Britain, op. cit., p.60.
Rees referred to ‘celebratory’ and ‘visionary’ cinema in A. L. Rees, A History of Experimental Film and Video, op. cit., p. 78. P. Adams Sitney described the ‘film poem’ as being made by filmmakers, who ‘like poets, produce their work without financial reward, often making great sacrifices to do so.’ he said that the relationship of the ‘film poem’ to the commercial narrative cinema was similar to that of poetry to fiction. P. Adams Sitney, Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943-2000, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. xii.
A. L. Rees, A History of Experimental Film and Video, op. cit., p. 96.
Ibid.
David Curtis, A History of Artists’ Film and Video in Britain, op. cit., p. 289.
“Glitterbug was first screened on BBC 2’s Arena. It was produced by James Mackay, with music by Brian Eno. (London: A Basilisk Communications Ltd./BBC Co-production, 1994).

with music by Brian Eno was produced by James Mackay, (London: A Basilisk Communications Ltd./BBC Co-production, 1994).

Cover of Glitterbug video, produced by James Mackay, op. cit.


Michael O’Pray, Avant-garde Film: Forms, Themes and Passions, op. cit., p.110.

Simon Filed and Michael O’Pray, ‘Imagining October, Dr. Dee and Other Matters’, Afterimage, 12, pp. 40-58; p. 50.


Ibid., p. 8.

Ibid., p. 8.

Ibid., p. 10.


Ibid.

Ibid.

A. L. Rees, ‘No Psychodrama Please, We’re British’, notes from audio recordings of ‘Shoot Shoot Shoot: The First Decade of the London Film-makers’ Co-operative and British Avant-garde Film 1966-76’ symposium at Tate Gallery, May 2002. Audio recordings held in the Tate Library and Archive Collections: Hyman Kreitman Reading Rooms, Tate Britain. Rees’ paper was given as part of the symposium related to Mark Webber’s touring exhibition, ‘Shoot Shoot Shoot’.

‘psychodramatic trance’ or ‘mythopoeia’ were terms used by P. Adams Sitney, in Visionary Film: American Avant-Garde Film (1974) to describe American films of the 1940s and 1950s by filmmakers such as Kenneth Anger, Maya Deren and Stan Brakhage.

A. L. Rees, ‘No Psychodrama Please, We’re British’, op. cit.


Ibid., p. 19.

Ibid., p. 19.

A. L. Rees, A History of Experimental Film and Video, op. cit., p. 78.

While some of Dwoskin’s productions were longer feature-length films with more of a narrative structure such as Behindert (Hindered) (1974), and others such as Tod und Teufel (Death and Devil) (1973) were drawn from literary sources, Dwoskin continued to probe the voyeuristic ‘eye’ of the camera (and filmmaker) with films such as Dyn Amo (1972), Girl (1975), Central Bazaar (1976) and Silent Cry (1977) throughout the decade. Dyn Amo was funded by Michael Armitage and Maggie Pinhorn, Central Bazaar was funded by the BFI and Silent Cry was funded by the German television station, ZDF.
Chapter Two: Institutional Frameworks and Organisational Strategies

Stephen Dwoskin, Film Is: The International Free Cinema, op. cit., p. 52. Dwoskin’s upper case emphasis.


The full title is: Report of the Arts Council Film Committee of Enquiry, ACGB. Referred to as the Attenborough Report, Richard Attenborough, C. B. E. acted as Chairman.


Margaret Tait studied film at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome, Italy, but also took more experimental approaches to recording her home and environment in Scotland.


Ibid., p. 110. Chapter Seven of Reekie’s Subversion, ‘Amateur Cine Culture: The Hidden Continuity From 1930s Experimental Film to 1960s Underground Cinema’, provides a particularly useful reference on these historical contexts.

Ibid., p. 113.

Ibid. Screenings advertised included silent Soviet and pre-war experimental films, German expressionistic films, French avant-garde films and work of British experimental filmmakers, Len Lye and Norman McLaren. A July 1958 issue of Amateur Cine World included a review of the Brussels Experimental Film Festival, discussing filmmakers such as Stan Brakhage, Shirley Clarke and Len Lye.

The Grasshopper Group was set up by John Daborn and included filmmakers such as Derek Hill, Bob Godfrey and Stuart Wyn Jones. Hill also set up the film distribution, Short Film Service, in the late 1950s, supplying films commercially to cinemas and to film clubs and societies. He also wrote regularly for Amateur Cine World. Refer to Duncan Reekie’s Subversion for more information on Hill, p. 113-114.

Carla Liss was a friend of Jonas Mekas (New York Co-op) and met David Curtis in the summer of 1968.


Accounts are included from the LFMC, New Cinema, Nottingham and Four Corners.

The Arts Lab had been set up a few months earlier by Jim Haynes and Jack Moore, with David Curtis joining them to run the cinema. In September 1967 a split occurred between ex-Better Books and LFMC members who couldn’t agree on the future development of the organisation, with some wanting a distribution-only base and others pushing for a production base as well.


Ibid., 17.


In November 1968 David Curtis and Stephen Dwoskin travelled to Munich for “Europ”, a 6-day meeting with other film groups. The intention was to form a European Co-operative, but this was never realised. Mark Webber, ‘Chronology of Events and Developments 1996-76’ in Shoot Shoot: The First Decade of the London Film-makers’ Co-operative and British Avant-garde Film 1966-76, op. cit., p. 6.

In 1975 the Independent Video Association (IVA) was formed and was incorporated into the IFA in 1983, thus becoming the IFVA.


Organising committee members included Stephen Dwoskin, Peter Gidal, Simon Hartog, Nick Hart-Williams, Marc Karlin, Malcolm Le Grice, Laura Mulvey and James Scott.


The festival is referred to in Margaret Dickinson’s Rogue Reels under the above title and is referred to as the ‘First National Festival of Independent Film’ in David Curtis, A History of Artists’ Film and Video in Britain, op. cit., p. 19.


Le Grice was a member of the BFIPB from September 1972 - January 1976.


Ibid.


Filmmaker Keith Griffiths was film officer at GLA. The Film Work and Group Four Corners received office and workshop funding from GLA in 1974. David Curtis, A History of Artists’ Film & Video in Britain, op. cit., p.75.


Ibid., p. 103.


At the outset the 1946 Royal Charter decreed that the intentions lay in ‘developing a greater knowledge, understanding and practice of the fine arts exclusively, and in particular to increase the accessibility of the fine arts to the public throughout Our Realm’. John Wyver, Vision On: Film, Television and the Arts in Britain, op. cit., p. 92.

The scheme came out of funding for filmmaking for the 1951 Festival of Britain which included a Telekineina (cinema) on the South Bank, where more than twenty films were screened. These included experimental films by Norman McLaren. Funding for documentary and experimental film production was provided in the regions of £120 000, and would also come to shape the first BFI Experimental Film Fund in 1952. Early funded films, touring the country, resulted in the ACGB Annual Report in 1951-52 stating that, ‘the screenings in 110 locations have stimulated an appetite which is going to be difficult to satisfy and cultivate.’ 1951-52 ACGB Annual Reports (in co-operation with the BFI) is quoted in John Wyver, Vision On: Film, Television and the Arts in Britain, op. cit., p. 94.


The Painter and Poet series was made for the Telecine at the 1951 Festival of Britain and included the illustration of poems by contemporary artists. The ACGB Annual Report in 1954-55 reported that, ‘viewers were becoming more demanding or at least “increasingly alive to the technical quality of art films”’, thereby recognising the impact that exposure to these films was making. 1954-55
ACBG Annual Reports (in co-operation with the BFI) is quoted in John Wyver, Vision On: Film, Television and the Arts in Britain, op. cit., p. 96.

227 Ibid., p. 105.

228 Ibid., p. 105. Wilson’s paper was titled ‘Concerning a Policy for Art Films’.

229 In 1976 this would become the Artists’ Film and Video Subcommittee.

230 David Curtis’ A History of Artists’ Film & Video in Britain, op. cit., p.82, reference 32.

A. L. Rees, A History of Experimental Film and Video, op. cit., p. 92.


233 David Curtis’ A History of Artists’ Film & Video in Britain, op. cit., p.68.

234 Ibid.

235 Perspectives on British Avant-garde Film, op. cit., loose leaf exhibition catalogue. Notes are provided about Arts Council awards and bursaries.


237 Ibid.


239 A Gulbenkian Foundation grant of £10,000 was provided in 1961 and two sums of Eady tax funding £7,000 and £5,500 1953 in 1956 respectively. Sourced from David Curtis, A History of Artists’ Film & Video in Britain, op. cit., p.62 and 82.


241 David Curtis, A History of Artists’ Film & Video in Britain, op. cit., p.62 and 63. Directors such as Tony and Ridley Scott, Stephen Frears and Kevin Brownlow received funding.


243 Ibid.

244 Christophe Dupin, The British Film Institute as a sponsor and producer of non-commercial film: a contextualised analysis of the origins, administration, policy and achievements of the BFI Experimental Film Fund (1952-1965) and Production Board (1966-1979), op. cit., p. 263.

245 Ibid., p. 264.


247 David Curtis, A History of Artists’ Film and Video in Britain, op. cit., p. 62.

248 Ibid., p. 291.

249 Derek Jarman, p. 15 of big black square notebook dated 30 March 1983, Box 23 at BFI Special Collections Library.

250 In John Wyver’s Derek Jarman (2005), Wyver identified cataloguing problems related to the Super-8 films. While the films made between 1972 and 1983 are numbered at sixty-two, twelve volumes of additional footage also exist which have been edited together at random and titled ‘It Happened by Chance’, p. 27.

251 Jonathan Coe, Like a Fiery Elephant: The Story of B. S. Johnson, op. cit., p. 262. Ricquier’s company was called Elisabeth Films.

252 Kleiner Vogel was supported by a grant from the Berliner Kunstler Program and Silent Cry by German television programmer ZDF.

253 David Curtis, A History of Artists’ Film and Video in Britain, op. cit., p. 28.

254 Gray Watson, programme notes for ‘London Super-8 Film Group’, screenings at the ICA on 1 and 2 October 1975. 1975 file at BAFVSC. Two filmmakers, Peter Logan and Paul Martin, had both come to film by way of kinetic sculpture and had exhibited in the Kinetic Art Exhibition at the Hayward Gallery.

255 Drummond took up Super-8 when he moved to Leicester in 1973 and wanted to continue working with film without being dependent on London films labs or the LFMC.

256 Tim Bruce, ‘Fred Drummond Come in from the Cold Film Co-op Feb 16th’, Annabel Nicolson, Readings, No. 2, March 1977, p. 5.


258 David Curtis, A History of Artists’ Film & Video in Britain, op. cit., p. 263.


260 David Curtis, A History of Artists’ Film & Video in Britain, op. cit., p. 68.
Hunger (1965) and Fernando Furnaces' imperialism (neo-filmmakers were generally from Latin American, taking a militant stance against North American imperialism). Films included Octavio Solanas' La Hora de los Hornos (Hour of the Furnaces) (1969). Seminal essays related to Third Cinema include Glauber Rocha's 'Aesthetics of Hunger' (1965) and Fernando Getino and Octavio Solanas' ‘Towards a Third Cinema’ (1969).

288 All figures about distribution from Mark Webber’s ‘Chronology of Events and Developments 1966-76’, op. cit., p. 6 and 7.

289 ‘Perspectives on British Avant-Garde Film’ (1977) and ‘Film as Film: Formal Experiment in Film 1910-1975’ (1979) took place at the Arts Council’s Hayward Gallery.


293 Ibid.


298 The London School of Film Technique changed its name to the London International Film School in 2003 and was largely privately-run, offering no grants or bursaries. The National Film School opened in 1971 in Beaconsfield, offering three year professional training programmes. It was funded partly through the Eady Levy and graduates (about fifty per year) were given a union ticket to enable work in the film industry.

299 Dickinson worked in the British film industry as a director and editor from the 1930s onwards. Films directed included Gaslight (1940), Queen of Spades (1948), Secret People (1951) and Overture (1958). In the Slade School Film Unit lectures were complemented by a film screenings.

300 Dickinson was also aware of Jonas Mekas’ alternative Film Culture magazine, contributing ‘This Documentary Business’ to a 1957 issue: Thorold Dickinson, ‘This Documentary Business’, Film Culture, October 1957.


302 Ibid., p. 25.


282 Christophe Dupin, The British Film Institute as a sponsor and producer of non-commercial film: a contextualised analysis of the origins, administration, policy and achievements of the BFI Experimental Film Fund (1952-1965) and Production Board (1966-1979), op. cit., p. 258. The Other Cinema exhibition space in Charlotte Street was funded by the BFI for eighteen months (1976-1977).

283 The Other Cinema was established by Peter Sainsbury and Nick Hart-Williams in 1970 and represented Godard, Hertzog, Straub, Dwoskin and many political and third world cinemas. The Other Cinema managed a productive, but often financially unstable existence until 2005, when excessive cost increases forced closure.


286 Co-op filmmakers would get some financial return for screenings, with differing accounts listing the proportions as being between 60%-70% of the rental cost given to the filmmaker. In Annabel Nicolson’s LFMC statement, for the 1978 Edinburgh Festival, she identified that ‘the film maker who receives 70% of all hire fees, the other 30% being used to run the distribution service’.


288 All figures about distribution from Mark Webber’s ‘Chronology of Events and Developments 1966-76’, op. cit., p. 6 and 7.

289 ‘Perspectives on British Avant-Garde Film’ (1977) and ‘Film as Film: Formal Experiment in Film 1910-1975’ (1979) took place at the Arts Council’s Hayward Gallery.


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302 Ibid., p. 25.

Grice’s visit to the ‘Young Contemporaries 1968’ is given in Mark Webber, ‘Chronology of Events and Developments’, op. cit., pp. 6.

This gives some idea of the extent of experimental filmmaking being taught, but Mazière’s research paper should be consulted for more extensive details: Michael Mazière, Institutional Support for Artists’ Film and Video in England 1966-2003, op. cit., p. 14.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 15.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid., p. 198.


Afterimage, edited by Peter Sainsbury and Simon Field, would go on to publish critical essays on diverse forms of experimental and independent filmmaking in future issues, for example Malcolm Le Grice’s ‘Thoughts on Recent “Underground” Film’ (Afterimage, no. 4, Autumn 1972).


Ibid., p. 53.

Ibid., p. 49.


Organising Committee for IFA Conference, ‘Independent Film-Making in the 70s’ in Margaret Dickinson (ed.), Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain, 1945-90, op. cit., p. 133.

The Angry Arts Group formed out of anti-Vietnam support group VSC (Vietnam Solidarity Campaign) and became Liberation Films in 1970.

Margaret Dickinson, Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain, 1945-90, op. cit., p. 132.


East Midlands Arts, flyer for ‘Film Study Weekend’ at Loughborough University, November 1979. Sourced from 1979 file at BAFVSC.

South West Arts, flyer for ‘Independent Film and Sexual Politics’ at Falmouth School of Art, Set/Oct 1978. Sourced from 1978 file at BAFVSC.


The cost of hiring a programme of films, together with the filmmaker providing an introductory or post-screening talk, was £10. Arts Council funded filmmakers were paid £30 plus travel. Peter Thomas, The Struggle for Funding: Sponsorship, Competition and Pacification, Screen 47(4) 2006, pp. 461-467, p. 465.

David Curtis, A History of Artists’ Film and Video in Britain, op. cit., p. 68.


Tony Hill’s Expanded Cinema Show included the films Doors, Heads, Heartburn, Expanded Movie, Four Shorties, Ceiling Film, To See, Living Room, Point Source and Toeknee Chestnut. (no dates given)

No date given for Rachel Finkelstein’s films.

Some of the Single and Super-8 films included in the 1980 programme: Iain Faulkner’s Pylon (1976-77), Hollingworth Waits (1977), The Full Reflexive Artifice (1977) and A Passage From the Cone (1978-79); Renny Croft’s Five Super 8 twin projections (1973/5), Jeff Keen’s Rayday Readings
and 8mm Evidence (no dates given for Keen’s films), Roger Wilson’s First American abstract (no date), David Critchley’s Right between the eyes 4,800 times; Breathe and Movie for the men of... (no dates give for Critchley’s films), Tim Cawkwell’s First Appearance (1970) and Frank Abbott’s Moving Traffic (no date). Film titles have been written as in the catalogue, with unsystematic use of upper and lower case.

Chapter Three: Exhibitions, Festivals and Screenings

355 Annabel Nicolson, ‘The Early Years of the Film Co-op’ in Jackie Hatfield and Stephen Littman (eds.), Experiments in Moving Image, (London: EpiGraph, 2004), pp. 12-19. First published in ‘Light Years: A Twenty Year Celebration’ of the LFMC, (1986). Nicolson’s account of screenings at the LFMC cinema very usefully reveals the improvisatory nature of these events and the nature of the spaces, enabling diverse forms of experimentation. Sometimes projectors broke and required repair mid-screening and at the Dairy the improvised cinema space had mattresses on the floor. This all added to the atmosphere of experimentation.

360 Ibid., Tony Sinden is cited by Curtis, from an interview by William Furlong, Hayward Annual, Hayward Gallery, 1979.
363 2B Butler’s Wharf was set up in 1975 by a group of art graduates and friends in a warehouse along the Thames. The annual rent of £800 (divided between the eight members) paid for a 3000ft space to show work which involved time-based media. Original members included: John Kippin, Belinda Williams, Martin Hearne, David Critchley, Alison Winckle, Kevin Atherton, Steve James and Mick Duckworth.
364 David Curtis, A History of Artists’ Film and Video in Britain, op. cit., p. 39.
365 Ibid., p. 39 and 50 (reference 60). ‘Art Spectrum’ exhibitions also took place simultaneously in Scotland, North Wales, Central England, Ulster and in the non-London South, celebrating the formation of the new Regional Arts Associations. London was the only venue showing ‘new art’.
367 Ibid.
368 Thomas Edison’s Kinetographic Theater or Black Maria was the first production studio and screening theatre in New Jersey, USA.
372 Gareth Buckell, ‘Shoot Shoot Shoot: The LFMC and the Film Culture of Sixties Britain’ Filmwaves, 3, 2006, pp. 36-40; p. 38.
374 Ibid.


The alternate name, *Light Prop for Electric Stage* has also been used for this work.

*Light Display: Black and White and Gray* is a 6-minute black-and-white film of reflected light. Moholy-Nagy’s film synopsis: ‘Light Display: Black and White and Gray’ (1928-30) was published in *Art in America*, May/June 1967. The original German title is *Lichtspiel, Schwarz, Weiss, Grau*. In 2002 the Tate gallery commissioned a copy of the sculpture, which has been exhibited, with the film screened in an adjacent space.

Theo von Doesburg and Standish Lawder, ‘Film as Pure Form’ in *Form*, Summer 1966.


Ibid., p. 73.

While VanDerBeek was concerned with the audience experience and alternate presentations of films and slide projections, his interests extended to the function of the brain and consciousness and in how technology played a role in expanding communication between these. His visions for the Movie Drome project included the building of similar spaces across the world, acting as centres for communication, although this was never realised.


Contemporary artists working with multiple-screen projections and installation include Douglas Gordon, Sam Taylor-Wood, Runa Islam, Rosa Barba and Jane and Louise Wilson.

*Light Display: Black and White and Gray* has also been used for this work.


Maxa Zoller, ‘Interview: Maxa Zoller with Malcolm Le Grice’ in *X-Screen: Film Installation and Actions of the ’60s and ’70s*, (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2003), pp. 136-147, 146.


Raban set up the camera on a tripod and filmed the screening of the film. He is seen entering the frame announcing the day and date. This is recorded as part of the film with subsequent films including the projection of earlier films within the frame.


Ibid.

Ibid.


Some of Sitney’s ‘New American Cinema’ films were first screened in Britain in 1964. David Curtis was instrumental in arranging for Sitney to bring his ‘New American Cinema’ programme of films to Britain in 1968.


The level of enquiry was also indicative in


Jonas Mekas is an American artist/filmmaker, with an extensive filmography dating from the 1950s to the present day. He was the founder of the New York Film Co-op in 1962 and of Anthology Film Archives, a distributor of artists’ films. Mekas’ reviews of the 1973 Festival were published in the New York newspaper The Village Voice on 27 September, 4 October, 11 October (pp. 77, 86 and 89), 18 October 1973 and 25 October (pp. 87.).

Jonas Mekas, Movie Journal’, The Village Voice, 4 October 1973. Sourced from BAFVSC: the scanned documents have been tightly cropped and do not include page numbers.

Jonas Mekas, Movie Journal’, The Village Voice, 27 September 1973. Sourced from BAFVSC: the scanned documents have been tightly cropped and do not include page numbers.


‘Structures and Codes’ was shown at the Royal College of Art and ‘Structure and Function in Time’ at Sunderland Arts Centre. Both exhibitions were organised by Rosetta Brooks and included films by John Blake, David Dye, David Lamelas and Peter Gidal.

The Serpentine show was organised by Sue Grayson and committee advisors included David Hall, William Fever, Stuart Hood and Clive Scollay.

The festival was organised by Independent Cinema West (ICW) and took place at the Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol from 11 – 18 February.
Tunde’s Film (1973) directed by Maggie Pinhorn and Tunde Ikoli. The Berwick Street Collective’s Night Cleaners (1972) was initially conceived as a documentary about office workers working the night shift. The film was rendered more experimental through the editing process with the film structure being made more explicit.


Ibid., p. 224.

Ibid., p. 225.

The Society for Education in Film and Television (SEFT) produced the education-focused journal, Screen Education and the film journal, Screen. Screen-theory was informed by continental theories related to Marxism, psychoanalysis, semiotics and structuralism. It was also drew inspiration from the French journal, Tel Quel.


Margaret Dickinson (ed.), Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film In Britain, 1945-90, op. cit., p. 50.

Wollen identified two histories relating to, on the one hand, more minimal formal film experimentation by 1920s and 1930s artist/filmmakers such as Man Ray and Oscar Fischinger and linking with the LFMC; and the formal experimentation of Russian filmmakers, such as Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov linking with European filmmakers, such as Jean-Luc Godard.

British filmmakers included David Crosswaite, Fred Drummond, John Du Cane, Mike Dunford, Jill Eatherley, Peter Gidal, Mike Leggett, Malcolm Le Grice, William Raban.


A. L. Rees, A History of Experimental Film and Video, op. cit., p. 83.

David Curtis, A History of Artists’ Film and Video in Britain, op. cit., p. 96.

Curtis refers here to ‘Cozens, Joseph Wright of Derby, Constable et al’. David Curtis, A History of Artists’ Film and Video in Britain, op. cit., p. 95.

These expanded cinema events included two filmmakers in one programme: William and Marilyn Halford; Anthony McCall and Annabel Nicolson. It is unclear whether the films offering critical context were Arts Council funded. In discussions with David Curtis (May 2011) he identified that some were, although this is not indicated in the exhibition catalogue.

‘Introduction’ to ‘Perspectives on British Avant-garde Film’ (1977) loose-leaf catalogue.

The duration for David Larcher’s Monkey’s Birthday (1975) was given as 2 hours 45 minutes, although it has also been screened as a 6 hour film. Duration for Mike Leggett’s Sheepman and the Sheared (1976) is 2 hours 15 minutes.

Derek Jarman, ‘Expanded Cinema – Derek Jarman’ in Perspectives on British Avant-garde Film, (London: Arts Council/Hayward, 1977). Loose leaf exhibition catalogue. Jarman states that he will show The Kingdom of Outremer ‘if there is time’, therefore it is not clear whether it was shown or not.

‘Arte Inglessi Oggi’, a British Council funded exhibition, included experimental films alongside paintings, sculpture and performance art. David Curtis and Richard Cork had selected a range of experimental films for the survey of British art shown in Milan, Italy.


‘Film London – Third International Avant-Garde Festival’ 20 August to 2 September 1978 programme notes.


Peter Mudie, unpublished MPhil/PhD, op. cit., p. 417.

The NFT was renamed the BFI Southbank in 2007. The Arts Council’s Hayward Gallery opened in 1968.

Deke Dusinberre, ‘Making the Avant-Grade [sic], op. cit., p. 14.

The Turner Prize included the work of the following film or video artists in their shortlist: 1986: Derek Jarman, nominated for his contribution in painting and film; 1995: Mona Hatoum, 1996: Douglas Gordon (winner); 1997: Gillian Wearing (winner); 1998: Tacita Dean and Sam Taylor-Wood; 1999: Steve McQueen (winner).


Ibid., p. 5.


Ibid.


Ibid.


LUX is a distributor of artists’ moving image work and was formed in 2002, taking on the LFMC and LEA (London Electronic Arts, formerly LVA) collections. They support promotion, screening and dissemination of knowledge about all forms of artists’ moving image work, ‘no.w.here lab’ was set up in 2004 by filmmakers, Karen Mirza and Brad Butler. Some of the LFMC equipment was rescued from storage, in order to set up a workshop where artists can work with 16mm, Super 8 and film processing and printing. Digital facilities are also available for telecine transfer. They have also been instrumental in arranging screenings, talks and lecture series related to artist’ filmmaking. Mark Webber is a film curator who has consistently supported the screening of artists’ film work and has programmed the artists’ film, experimental and avant-garde programmes at the annual BFI Film Festival since 2001. He is also responsible for ‘secret cinema’ email listings which announces film screenings.


‘The New Pluralism: British Film and Video 1980-1985’ (1985) was shown at the Tate Gallery. Works were selected by critic, Michael O’ Pray and video-artist, Tina Keane. ‘The Elusive Sign: Avant-garde Film 1977-1987’ (1987, RCA) was organised by David Curtis with selectors Catherine Lacey, Tamara Krikorian and Michael O’Pray.

Films included were Nicky Hamlyn’s Guesswork (1979), Tina Keane’s Shadow of a Journey (1980), Jeff Keen’s Victory Thru Film Power (1979-84), Le Grice’s Emily (1979), Will Milne’s Same (1980), Sally Potter’s Thriller (1979), Lis Rhodes’ Light Reading (1979).


Ibid.

Ibid.

 Selectors for the ‘ICA Biennals’ included Peter Wollen, B. Ruby Rich, John Wyver and actress, Tilda Swinton. ‘The Seventh Art’ programme notes indicate that ‘The LFMC receives financial assistance from the British Film Institute and the Arts Council of Great Britain’.

It is not possible to calculate the exact amount of films from looking at the programme notes, as a few of them list a group of films, for example for ‘Fluxus Anthology’ or ‘A series of short films Edison made between 1893-1901’ an exact list is not given. Programme notes were sourced from The British Artists’ Film and Video Study Collection at Saint Martins School of Art.
458 Annabel Nicolson, ‘The Seventh Art’, Programme notes were sourced BAFVSC, Annabel Nicolson file.
451 Ibid.
452 Artist/filmmakers included Conrad Atkinson, Derek Boshier, Ian Breakwell, Stuart Brisley, David Dye, Gill Eatherley, Steven Farrer, Peter Gidal, Marilyn Halford, David Hall, Tony Hill, John Hilliard, David Lamelas, Malcolm Le Grice, Annabel Nicolson, Yoko Ono, William Raban, Lis Rhodes, Guy Sherwin, Tony Sinden, John Smith and Chris Welsby.
453 Mark Webber’s ‘Shoot Shoot Shoot: The First Decade of the London Film-maker’s Co-operative and British Avant-garde Film 1966-1976’ (2002) was supported by The British Council, the Arts Council, the BFI and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. Seminar at Tate Modern on 4 May 2002 included David Curtis (AHRB Centre for British Film and Television Studies), A. L. Rees (RCA Senior Research Fellow), Ian Christie (Birkbeck, Professor of Film and Media History), filmmakers Lis Rhodes, Peter Gidal, Chris Welsby and Anthony McCall.
454 ‘X-Screen’ was installed over four floors at the Museum of Modern Art, Vienna.
455 ‘Expanded Cinema: Activating the Space of Reception’ was curated by Duncan White and David Curtis, forming part of the AHRC-funded Expanded Cinema research project, led by White and Curtis. Publication of the research is due in June 2011.
456 In ‘A Century of Artists’ Film in Britain’ (2003) four separate programmes of works were shown for a three-month period over the course of a year.
459 Ibid., p. 12.
460 David Curtis, ‘Curating a Century of Artists’ Film in Britain’ Filmwaves, 22, 2003; pp. 54 – 55; p. 55.

Chapter Four: Experimental Film and Visual Art Practices

466 André Breton and Diego Rivera were co-signatures of Trotsky’s manifesto, Towards a Free Revolutionary Art (1938).
469 Art ‘happenings’ first took place in America, with Stephen Dwoskin describing them as follows: ‘In 1957 Alan Kaprow created the first ‘happening’. The ‘happening’ was time and space, an environment in itself. The room or the area was filled with objects; with materials; with sounds and smells; with lights; and most important, with people. What happened depended on the people present, who were no longer viewers, but were part of the piece’. Stephen Dwoskin, Film Is: The International Free Cinema, op. cit., p. 48.
470 A. L. Rees, A History of Experimental Film and Video, op. cit., p. 66.
471 Yoko Ono’s film No. 4 was made in London and included close-ups of a number of bottoms. Zen for Film consisted of clear, film leader. The Fluxus movement took place in the 1960s predominantly in America and Germany.
Raban’s ‘Diagram for the Shooting of the Film’

published in Guillaume Apollinaire’s 

rhythm 

identifying ‘an art in itself’ establishing ‘the analogy between soun 

Indépendants’ (1912), had produced drawings and notes for his ‘Les Rythme coloré’ project,

idea of using film for the representation of movement’ in 1912, citing Picasso’s discussions w

were images of small circular w 

projector beam and the circles on the screen’; ‘Some people were gathered in a dark room. High above

handed round jars of bubbles and asked people to blow them. You could see the bubbles rising to the

‘Barbara Schwarz did an event in the cinema with bubbles. She showed severa

Early Years of the Film

published in

(eds.),

Theory

pp. 43

pp. pp. 44

Arts Council, 1978); pp. 485

pp. 20

December 1969, pp. 134


pp. 44-48; p. 46.

pp. 21 and 22. Lawder noted that Picasso had been an ‘avid movie-goer’ and ‘toyed with the

idea of using film for the representation of movement’ in 1912, citing Picasso’s discussions with

Daniel-Henry Kahnweiller. Léopold Survage, who exhibited with the cubists in the ‘Salon des

the fulfilment [sic] of which I advocate by cinematographic means’. Survage’s ideas for the

pp. 46; p. 49.

Nine Jokes included the following sketches: ‘Container’ is a shot of a briefcase in centre screen and

where nothing happens; ‘Gulp’ is a close up of a man’s neck swallowing; ‘Yes/No’ shows Breakwell’s

mouth opening with a small board in it saying ‘yes’ then cuts to a woman’s nose with ‘n’ and ‘o’ i

each nostril; ‘Sleep’ is a shot of a group of ceramic bulbs/bottles lying down to ‘sleep’ as the light dims

to darkness and then lightens again. Once fully light bulbs/bottles are smashed; ‘The Greatest Story

Ever Told’ shows a cat licking a bible; ‘Pastoral’ is a shot of a landscape with trees and grass and two

people in a bull suit moving through the landscape; ‘Feel’ is a shot of a torso with knitted jumper and

hands feeling underneath it.

Anyone could enter a piece of work if they paid the fee of six dollars, Fountain was signed by

Duchamp as ‘R. Mutt’ but was rejected by the jury and the urinal was not displayed in the exhibition, despite it being a non-selective open submission.


Ibid.


Ibid.


Interview between Annabel Nicolson and David Curtis, from ‘Shoot Shoot Shoot’ rushes I/V1 2001. Viewed at BAFVSC.


Deke Dusinberre, ‘St George in the Forest’ in A Perspective in English Avant-garde Film, (London: Arts Council, 1978); pp. 43-48; p. 46.

Nine Jokes included the following sketches: ‘Container’ is a shot of a briefcase in centre screen and

where nothing happens; ‘Gulp’ is a close up of a man’s neck swallowing; ‘Yes/No’ shows Breakwell’s

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hands feeling underneath it.

Annabel Nicolson, ‘The Early Years of the Film Co-op’ in Jackie Hatfield and Stephen Littman (eds.), Experiments in Moving Image, (Luton: EpiGraph, 2004), pp. 12-19. Exhibition catalogue. First published in Light Years, Film-makers Co-op Anniversary Programme, 1986. A few extracts from ‘The Early Years of the Film Co-op’ include: ‘It was the first film I’d ever made. I’d painted on it and

scratched on it and stuck pieces together with sellotape because I didn’t know anything about splicing’;

‘Barbara Schwarz did an event in the cinema with bubbles. She showed several of her films and then

handed round jars of bubbles and asked people to blow them. You could see the bubbles rising to the

projector beam and the circles on the screen’; ‘Some people were gathered in a dark room. High above

were images of small circular windows with doves flying round against the light. After a while she

gave out some hand wound film viewers for people to look through privately and pass round’. (No
details such as dates or names are provided in the accounts).


Ibid., p. 21 and 22. Lawder noted that Picasso had been an ‘avid movie-goer’ and ‘toyed with the

idea of using film for the representation of movement’ in 1912, citing Picasso’s discussions with

Daniel-Henry Kahnweiller. Léopold Survage, who exhibited with the cubists in the ‘Salon des

Indépendents’ (1912), had produced drawings and notes for his ‘Les Rythme coloré’ project,

identifying ‘an art in itself’ establishing ‘the analogy between sound rhythm in music, and colored

rhythm - the fulfilment [sic] of which I advocate by cinematographic means’. Survage’s ideas for the

project were published in Guillaume Apollinaire’s Les Soirées de Paris, nos. 26-27, July-August, 1914.


Raban’s ‘Diagram for the Shooting of the Film’.

William Raban, Angles of Incidence, Luxonline.

Malcolm Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, op. cit., p. 129.

Email correspondence with William Raban, 23 June 2009.

Ron Haseldon, *Tracking Cycles* (1975), cited from cover of video held in BAFVSC.


**Still Life** was also part of the 1980 Arts Council-funded (FMOT) programme.


Norman McLaren was of Scottish origin and later settled in Canada. He made films such as *Seven Till Five* (1933) where he painted directly into the film strip. Len Lye originated from New Zealand and lived in England during the 1930s. In films such as *A Colour Box* (1935, commissioned for the GPO) and *Kaleidoscope* (1935, commissioned by Churchman’s cigarettes) he painted directly onto the film strip. Both worked under John Grierson in London for the General Post Office (GPO) Film Unit.


Entry from Jarman’s notebook, 30 March 1983, Phoenix House, Box 23, BFI Special Collections, p. 15.

Jarman used a Nizo Professional camera which had an in-built light meter.


Peter Wollen, ‘Blue’, op. cit., p. 133.

Also known as Op-Art.

‘Persistence of vision’ is the term used in explaining the theory of how the eye sees a succession of still images as apparent moving images.


Aerial* (1974) included shots of nature such as birds, trees, an earthworm and grass. *Apotheosis* (1970) shows the receding landscape as the camera moves upward, revealing pristine snowy landscapes. The term, meaning ‘a release from earthly life’ could be read as the human passage from physicality to spirit (death). Meaning cited from David Curtis, *A History of Artists’ Film and Video in Britain*, op. cit., p. 220. *A Journey to Avebury* (1971) was filmed on a trip to Avebury with shots of the countryside and details of tress and grass infused with a warm, golden luminosity.


Ibid.


*Seven Days* was included in the 1980 Arts Council-funded FMOT programme.


Ibid., p. 99.

Ibid., p. 99.


David Curtis, *A History of Artists Film and Video in Britain*, op. cit., 95.

Land art has also been termed earth art or earthworks, with the most well-known example being Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (1969) at the edge of the Great Salt Lake, Utah. This work was a spiral made of stones, mud and rocks and measured over 400 metres in length and 4.5 metres in width.

The film was made for Gerry Schum’s ‘Television Gallery’ programme, screened on German television.


In Nicolson’s ‘Artist as Filmmaker’ (1972) the film is titled *Untitled* (1971) and in the ‘Live in Your Head: Concept as Experiment in Britain’ (2000) catalogue, the filmography presents the 1971 film as *1st Floor Film*. *Floor Film* was included in the FMOT (1976) catalogue.


*Photo Film* is a 10 minute (projected at 16fps), silent, 16mm black-and-white film.

*Short Film Series* consists of 3-minute films, which can be shown in any order.


Chapter Five: Visionary, Poetic and Diary Films


Margaret Tait, ‘On “stalking the image” in Peter Todd and Benjamin Cook (eds.), *Subjects and Sequences: A Margaret Tait Reader*, op. cit., p. 89. Tait’s citation forms part of a David Curtis’ selection of her writing, “In Her Own Words”. The “stalking the image” citation is taken from research undertaken for a Channel Four programme on Tait’s work (from the series *Profiles*, which was also partly funded by the Arts Council). The programme was transmitted in April 1983. Tait was interviewed by Tamara Krikorian and Margaret Williams for the programme, with interviews and research also taking place before the transmission date (1983).


Among the manifold early texts about dreams and the unconscious are Sigmund Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dream*, (1899), Boris Sidis’ *The Psychology of Suggestion: A Research into the Subconscious Nature of Man and Society* (1898) Carl Jung’s *Psychology of the Unconscious* (1912). Both Freud’s *Collected Works* (dating from 1895) and Jung’s *Collected Works* (dating from 1902) include detailed discussions of the unconscious.


Psilocybin is the psychoactive ingredient found in magic mushrooms and lysergic acid is a synthetically produced compound, more commonly known as LSD. In *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream*, op. cit., p. 18, Jay Stevens noted that by 1967 extensive research had been conducted into the effects of d-lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), saying that ‘[f]ew drugs had been studied so extensively’ but that there was ‘a complete absence of formal conclusions’.

This took it out of the controlled medical or scientific research contexts in which it was originally undertaken. Without the necessary support systems in place this resulted in incidents of overdosing and psychosis. LSD was first made illegal in some US states in 1966 and Leary’s lack of scientific rigour and adherence to protocol also led to his dismissal from Harvard University in 1963.


Anger had allegedly instructed an audience to drop LSD at a screening of *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* in 1967 in New York. He also stated that: ‘I wouldn’t say LSD influenced my filmmaking, but there was a cosmic quality that came from it. I miss those first trips, when the wallpaper used to dance, when shapes did the hula’. In Alice L. Hutchison, *Kenneth Anger: A Demonic Visionary*, (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004), p. 168. Drug use was also prevalent in the filming of *The Other Side of the Underneath* (1972), as actress Penny Slinger admitted in Penny Slinger, *The
Other Side of the Underneath’, in The Other Side of the Underneath (London, BFI, 2009), pp.4-10; p. 5 and 8. DVD booklet. Actress, Natasha Morgan, also discussed the recreational drug use during therapy sessions and filming in The Other Side of the Underneath – discussed in the DVD interview for The Other Side of the Underneath.

Anthony McCall’s Sigmund Freud’s Dora (1979) was made with Deedee Halleck, Babette Mangold, Claire Pajaczkowska, Andrew Tyndall, Ivan Ward and Jane Weinstock and has been described as a feminist film.

Duncan White, interview with Jeff Keen and Jackie Foulds, Brighton 2008, p. 11. Accessed on 6 April 2011. http://www.rewind.ac.uk/expanded/Narrative/Interviews_files/JeffKeenTS.pdf. In the interview Keen said that ‘It was a surrealist film in the sense that, before I made the film I had the music for it, which is interesting’. Keen had found a 78 record of Latin American music, saying it was ‘Surrealist music. The only music they loved. The only music [known] to Breton that I could understand’.

Jeff Nuttall, Bomb Culture, op. cit., p. 183.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 198. R. D. Laing corresponded with Timothy Leary at Alte House and visited him in 1964: discussed in Nuttall, p. 187. The anti-psychiatry movement was led by R. D. Laing in Britain and by Thomas S. Szasz in America. Both contested the stigmatization of mental illness, with Laing claiming that mental illness was a normal response to pressures from family and society. Laing advocated that psychosis should be assisted without the use of drugs and in a supportive environment, where patients could work through their mental distress. The use of psychotropic drugs, however, also allegedly and controversially formed part of ‘therapeutic’ practices to access the hidden depths of the unconscious in the search for dysfunction. Laing ran The Philadelphia Foundation at Kingsley Hall (in East London) from 1969-75. He wrote a number of influential books including The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness (1960), The Politics of Experience and The Painted Bird of Happiness (1967).

Ginsberg’s Howl and Other Poems was published in 1956 in America and was briefly banned on charges of obscenity (although these were soon dropped). William S. Burroughs’ book has been published both as Naked Lunch and The Naked Lunch.


In Stephen Dwoskin, Film Is: The International Free Cinema, op. cit., p. 61: Dwoskin identified that there were two main stimuli for the development of independent and experimental filmmaking in the 1960s. He noted that these included the International Experimental Film Festivals held in Belgium (1949, 1958, 1963 and 1967) and the tour of New American Cinema Films. The latter were brought to London by Jonas Mekas in 1964/5, followed by an extensive sixty-hour programme (also touring to twelve British universities) brought by P. Adams Sitney. ‘In almost all the countries that Sitney visited a film co-operative or some form of consolidated independent activity soon appeared’. This included the formation of the LFMC in 1966.

Duncan Reekie, Subversion: The Definitive History of Underground Cinema, op. cit., p.140: ‘Burroughs’ influence on both the Underground and popular, culture is inestimable, his prose style became a characteristic voice of the Underground press, he influenced a new generation of science fiction writers, he inspired countless rock lyrics and band names and his work inspired and consolidated the development of the Underground Cinema movement’.

Rees identified it as ‘being coincident with early structural cinema, and shares its ethos even as it exceeds its technical limits (Balch was a shoestring ‘independent’ of a different ilk from the Co-op artisans)’: A. L. Rees, A History of Experimental Film and Video, (London: BFI, 1999), p. 80.

Burroughs wrote the script and Balch did the cinematography, with the film ideally screened as a live performative event with the projected image screened alternately onto the faces of the Burroughs and Balch, creating a kind of ‘merged personae’: David Curtis, A History of Artists’ Film and Video in Britain, (London: BFI, 2007), p. 178.

Henrik Hendriksson, ‘Monkey’s Birthday’ in Perspectives on British Avant-garde Film, op. cit., Loose leaf exhibition catalogue.


Films by Maya Deren: Meshes of the Afternoon (1943), At Land (1944) and Ritual in Transfigured Time (1946).


Ibid. p.150.

Ibid. p.164. Sitney also discusses the lyrical films of Bruce Baillie in his chapter ‘The Lyrical Film’ in his 1974 book, in relation to Stan Brakhage’s work.

Ibid. p.173.
Mythopoeia was a term used in literary criticism in the 1930s, invented by author and scholar, J. R. R. Tolkien, who published his narrative trilogy, *Lord of the Rings* (1955). The spelling of ‘mythopoeic’ is as Sitney utilises it in *Visionary Film*.


Mekas’ epic *Lost Lost Lost* (1976) was shown as part of the Hayward Gallery’s ‘Perspectives on British Avant-garde Film’ (1977) and the ICA’s ‘A Season of Diary Films’ (1977). Jonas and Adolfa Mekas were Lithuanian refugees, arriving in New York in 1949, after spending five years in forced labour camps in Germany.


Programme notes state: ‘Ian Breakwell’s exhibition, ‘Continuous Diary’, which has prompted this season of Diary Films, is currently on show in the ICA galleries’. Programme notes from 1977 file at BAFVSC.

‘Diary Films at the Co-op’ were screened at the LFMC on 16, 17 and 23 March 1977. British films included *Summer Reels* by Tim Cawkwell, *Diary Films* by David Curtis, *Days in Lives* by Phillip Drummond, multi-projection event *From One Moment to the Next* by Jeff Keen, *Cold Mountain* by Chris Munger, *To the Dairy* by Annabel Nicolson, *Diary Films* by Alan Spademan. Roger Arguire, Dirk Larson, Bruce Lacey, Rose McCluskey and Tony Sinden were included in the programme ‘Pre-War Home Movies’ and Taylor Mead, David Brooks, Carolee Scheemann, Andrew Noren and Gerard Malanga were included in the ‘American Diary Film’ programme.


Jeff Keen’s *White Dust* (1972) and Kenneth Anger’s *Lucifer Rising* (1972-77) were screened in the ‘Deconstructed Narrative’ programme in ‘Perspectives on British Avant-Garde Film’ (1977) at the Hayward Gallery. The date for *Lucifer Rising*, 1972-77, is cited in the Hayward programme; more recent dates are given as 1981 (*Magick Lantern Cycle DVD*) and 1970-1981 (Alice L. Hutchison, *Kenneth Anger: A Demonic Visionary*, op. cit.)

Duration of *The Art of Mirrors* (1973) is recorded as 16 minutes and *In the Shadow of the Sun* (1974-81) is recorded as 40 minutes in the 1976 FMO catalogue.

Alice L. Hutchison, *Kenneth Anger: A Demonic Visionary*, op. cit., p. 164. In September 1967, after 1600 feet of Anger’s unfinished *Lucifer Rising* film was allegedly stolen from the trunk of his car in San Francisco, Anger placed an obituary in *The New York’s Village Voice* stating: “In memoriam Kenneth Anger Filmmaker (1947-1967)”, and then headed for London. Through the Robert Fraser Gallery, London he met with a range of musicians, artists and influential individuals who turned out to be important collaborators, friends and supporters of his films. These included, amongst others, Mick Jagger (who produced the soundtrack for *Invocation for my Demon Brother*), Marianne Faithful (who acts in *Lucifer Rising*), Anita Pallenburg (who produced *Lucifer Rising*). Donald Cammel, who co-directed and acted as Osiris in *Lucifer Rising*, and who also wrote the script for the 1970s feature film, *Performance*. When Fraser was away in India, Anger allegedly rented his London apartment and filmed the indoor scenes for *Lucifer Rising* in it. Anger had spent time in London in the 1960s, screening his films at Better Books and at The Arts Lab (1968) and was to spend intermittent periods of time in London during the 1970s.


Alice L. Hutchison, *Kenneth Anger: A Demonic Visionary*, op. cit., p. 169. Bobby Beausoleil was part of cult leader, Charles Manson’s entourage and was convicted for the murder of Gary Hinman in July 1969.

Ibid., p. 165.


Anger was interested in the occult or black magic, and was greatly influenced by the writings and life of the occultist, Aleister Crowley. This would significantly inform his work, with occult symbols related to Satanism or the supernatural found in many of his films.
Vibration’ in conversation on 28 April 2011. The Underneath wrote the script and music for Underneath collaborators for ten years the London Film Festival 1960s and her two films, You? was co New York and the Gas Oven Curtains for Harry candles £4.50, notebook £1, taxis £5’.

sequences, the fiery mazes for instance, had a budget: costumes £5, sawdust £4, paraffin £2, roses £10, light. Nizo Super camera adjusted to the light. This was what Jarman particularly liked about working with a hand crocodile to conceive Horus. The temporarily blackened screen occurred as the light meter in the box 23 in Derek Jarman collection at BFI Special Collections Library.

matriarchal influence. child’, representative of a new era without restraints on personal liberty determined by patriarchal or the patriarchal age and Isis the matriarchal, therefore he envisaged Horus, ‘the crowned and conqueri Horus, and Osiris was brought back to life, assisting in Horus’ birth. For Crowley Osirus represented reconstructed her beloved Osiris. Through a magic ritual she was able to become impregnated with Horus, and Osiris was brought back to life, assisting in Horus’ birth. For Crowley Osirus represented the patriarchal age and Isis the matriarchal, therefore he envisaged Horus, ‘the crowned and conquering child’, representative of a new era without restraints on personal liberty determined by patriarchal or matriarchal influence.


From page 15 of Derek Jarman’s personal notebook, entry dated “30th March 1983 Phoenix House”. Box 23 in Derek Jarman collection at BFI Special Collections Library.

Derek Jarman, Dancing Ledge, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 121.

Ibid.


Derek Jarman, Dancing Ledge, op. cit., p. 122.

A shot of a baby crocodile hatching out of its egg references Horus’ birth, after Isis mated with a crocodile to conceive Horus. The temporarily blackened screen occurred as the light meter in the camera adjusted to the light. This was what Jarman particularly liked about working with a hand-held Nizo Super-8 camera: it was technically simpler, and the built-in light-meter enabled such shifts in light.

Derek Jarman, Dancing Ledge, op. cit., p. 118.

Ibid. ‘[m]ost of the sections were filmed for the price of the stock, usually about £20 - some lavish sequences, the fiery mazes for instance, had a budget: costumes £5, sawdust £4, paraffin £2, roses £10, candles £4.50, notebook £1, taxis £5’.

Ibid., p. 116.


Ardens co-directed, acted and conceived the soundtrack for Vibration (1975). She co-directed and wrote the script and music for Anti-Clock (1979). She wrote the script and directed The Other Side of the Underneath (1972).

Sebastian Saville (Ardens son) confirmed that she was a close friend of R. D. Laing’s. Phone conversation on 28 April 2011.

They were introduced to Sufi meditation by British writer and mystic, Ian Dallas. Penny Slinger, ‘Vibration’ in Anti-Clock, (London: BFI, 2009), pp. 18-22; p. 18.
York, on 28 March 1977.


Penny Slinger also acted in some of Peter Whitehead’s films and was his partner for some years. She worked for Vaughan Rogasin Films, who distributed the films of Kenneth Anger and also exhibited at the Angela Flowers Gallery, with whom Anger had connections. Penny Slinger, ‘The Other Side of the Underneath’ in The Other Side of the Underneath, (London: BFI, 2009), pp. 4-10; p. 4, DVD booklet.

Jane Arden, ‘Notes on Vibration’, op. cit., DVD booklet. Arden is referring to Carl Jung’s writings. Carl Jung was a psychologist and William Reich and Frederick Perls were both psychiatrists and psychoanalysts.

The voiceover is spoken in French by the Sufi mystic, Cherif Abderahmane Jah, who is credited in the opening scene as the ‘Giver of Light and Sweetness’.

Penny Slinger noted that ‘The Sufi chanting is digitally manipulated and visual effects created what seems like calligraphy coming to life and vibrating with the sound frequencies. We experience Cherif leading Jane in dynamic chanting (Zikir/Dhikr – literally, remembering, recollecting, calling the Divine name) with the associated breathing techniques and movements designed to attune the state of being.’ Refer to Penny Slinger, ‘Vibration’ in Anti-Clock, (London: BFI, 2009), pp. 18-22; p. 20.

Michael Pearson of Cupid Films put up development money, Don Boyd (Kendon Films) provided financial backing, John Simpson who was then directer at Kay Film Laboratories (Soho) provided ‘full-blown financial backing form the laboratory for as long as this took’. Cameras and all necessary filming (and editing) equipment was provided by Michael Samuelson of Samuels Equipment Hire. DVD booklet: Jack Bond, ‘Anti-Clock: A Journey Through Inner Space’ in Anti-Clock, (London: BFI, 2009), p. 4.


Ibid., p. 3.

The Other Side of the Underneath was adapted from Arden’s play A New Communion for Freaks, Prophets and Witches (1971). Most of the cast and production crew lived collectively for the filming. Refer to Penny Slinger’s account in ‘The Other Side of the Underneath’ essay in DVD booklet.


‘Hammer-horror’ films are generally associated with British production company, Hammer Film Productions.

Penny Slinger, ‘The Other Side of the Underneath’, op. cit., pp.4-10; p. 5 and 8. DVD booklet. Actress, Natasha Morgan, also discussed the recreational drug use during therapy sessions and filming in her interview on the DVD.

Ibid.

Amy Simmons, ‘The Other Side of the Underneath’, in The Other Side of the Underneath, op. cit., pp.1-2; p. 1. DVD booklet.

Susan Croft, ‘Chasing Jane’ in The Other Side of the Underneath, 20-22; p. 22. Croft noted on p. 21 that records of Arden’s later work ‘is absent from the archives. There is no file in the V&A Theatre Collections for Vagina Rex and the Gas Oven, [or in the Drury Arts Lab archive], two cuttings only in Arden’s Personal file, no obituaries. Arden’s proposed new version of Vagina Rex and the Gas Oven, as The Illusionist, to star Peter Sellers, is missing from the Roundhouse archive. Mentions of A New Communion for Freaks, Prophets and Witches, the theatrical source of The Other Side of the Underneath, are absent from the Open Space archives’.

William Fowler, ‘Encounters with Central Bazaar’, in Central Bazaar, (London: BFI, 2009), pp. 2-6; p.3. DVD booklet. Arden would have been familiar with this through her friendship with R. D. Laing and interests in the anti-psychiatry movement who also held group therapy sessions.


Labour Party (1974) 20-minutes, was released as a companion piece to Central Bazaar on the 2009 BFI DVD release.


Ibid.
Old Lady Decently

Johnson’s novels include *Christie Malry’s Own Double Entry* (1973) and *Christie Malry’s Own Double Entry* (1975). Originally printed in Issue 3 of *Filmwaves*, February 1998.


Saint Phalle was allegedly abused by her father at eleven and subsequently suffered from a behavioural disorder, having to change schools regularly and suffering a nervous breakdown in her twenties. In 1960 she met the sculptor Yves Tinguely who became a long-term partner and collaborator.

Saint Phalle ‘performed’ her *Shooting Paintings* in the early 1960s. A canvas covered in plaster and containing paint pots would be shot at with a rifle, and paint would spill out of the paintings.

Niki de St Phalle’s ‘Nana’ sculptures, produced in the 1960s, were white plaster caste female figures which were painted with bright colours. An enormous recumbent ‘Nana’, “hon-ek-katedral” (she-ascathedral) was exhibited in Sweden in 1966, causing controversy because the viewers had to enter the sculpture, like a building, through the vagina.

The actress is Natalie Delon.

Peter Whitehead interview in which Whitehead dismissed both *Daddy* and *Fire in the Water* “as after-thoughts or non-films in my estimation.” http://s120937152.websitehome.co.uk/pw/html/interviewentropy.html, accessed on 3 October 2009.


Artist’s Placement Group was a social experiment set up in the 1960s up by Ian Breakwell, John Latham, Roger Coward, Barbara, Steveni and others, whereby artists’ marginalised positions were brought to light through placement in government or industry organisations. They did research, took part in decision-making and were paid for their work.


‘1.4.1978 London: Central Line tube station from Chancery Lane to White City, 2.10pm’.


The *Walking Man Diary* (1975-78) is a vast photographic and verbal commentary on a scruffily-dressed man who Breakwell observed walking continuously around Smithfield Market. Breakwell lived opposite Smithfield Market for over twenty years, with his wondow over the market informing many of his diary observations. *Continuous Diary* (1977) was initially released by Audio Arts and was commissioned by Channel Four in 1984. *Repertory, The Journey and The Institution* were included in the Arts Council-funded FMOT scheme.

*You’re Human Like the Rest of Them* was funded by the BFI Experimental Film Fund. *Paradigm* (1969) was funded by Elisabeth Films.


Dialogue from the film *Fat Man on the Beach*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCyyHjkvjio&NR=1, sourced from ‘youtube’ on 2 August 2009.


Johnson monologue in *Fat Man on the Beach*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCyyHjkvjio&NR=1, sourced from ‘youtube’ on 2 August 2009.

Email correspondence with Jonathan Coe, dated 16 October 2007.

Jeff Nuttall, Bomb Culture, op. cit., p. 150.
Of the over thirty films Tait made only two were funded: *Colour Poems* was financed through the Scottish Arts Council’s ‘Filmmaker as artist’ competition in 1974; and *The Drift Back* (1956) was financed by The Orkney Education Committee. Her other films were funded by her work as a GP. Information sourced from Sarah Neely, ‘Stalking the Image: Margaret Tait and Intimate Filmmaking Practices’, *Screen*, 49: 2, pp. 216-221; p. 218.


*Tailpiece* (1976), black-and-white and duration is 10 minutes. *Place of Work* (1976), colour and duration is 31 minutes. Tait had lived in the house since she was seven and it remained her permanent address during her travels and was her permanent place of work for seven years.


Margaret Tait, ‘Tailpiece’ in Peter Todd and Benjamin Cook (eds.), *Subjects and Sequences: A Margaret Tait Reader*, op. cit., p.165.


The influence of material and structural experimentation is evident in Rees-Mogg’s film. The trilogy of films was included in the Arts Council-funded 1980s FMOT scheme.


In his interview with Jackie Hatfield, Larcher discussed photographs he took at the Albert Hall event, ‘The International Poetry Incarnation’, in June 1965. Larcher stated that, ‘I did a book with Peter Whitehead called Wholly Communion. He made a movie and we used my pictures to do the book’.


Larcher provides a wonderful account of the arrival of the midwife to assist in the birth of his child, who was born in the truck outside the LFMC, in his REWIND interview with Jackie Hatfield. op. cit., p. 9. Accessed on 7 December 2010.


David Larcher on REWIND, op. cit.

With thanks to Ben Cook, director of Lux, for providing this information. Telephone conversation on 24 July 09. The film is not in distribution, except for a forty minute reel held at the distributor, Lux. Larcher has the only full 6-hour copy. *Mare’s Tail* and *Monkey’s Birthday* were included in the 1980 Arts Council funded FMOT scheme, with Larcher providing 3 options for the screening of *Monkey’s Birthday*: either as a dual-screen 2 ½ hour version, as a shortened 2 hour version ‘especially adapted for critics’ or as a 6-hour single-screen film.

Henrik Hendrikson, ‘Monkey’s Birthday’ in *Perspectives on British Avant-garde Film*, op. cit. Loose leaf exhibition catalogue.


The reference here is to Breakwell’s *Continuous Diary* (1977) work. Later presented on Channel Four in 1984.

Chapter Six: Experimentation with Structure and Material


714 Ibid., p. 77.

715 A few examples include: Germany: Birgit and Wilhelm Hein’s Roh Film, (1968), America: George Landow’s Film in which There Appear Sprocket Holes, Edge Lettering, Dust Particles, etc, (1966) and Richard Serra’s Hand Catching Lead (1968), Austria: Kurt Kren’s 3/60 – Bäume im Herbst (1960) and Peter Kubelka’s Adebar (1957) and Japan: Takahiko Iimura’s Ai (Love) (1962).

716 Peter Gidal, Structural Film Anthology, op. cit., p. 14.


719 Contemporary filmmakers such as Luke Fowler, Emily Wardill, Brad Butler, Karen Mirza and Runa Islam have all engaged with these seminal discourses in their film work.

720 ‘Pathetic fallacy’ was a term used by John Ruskin. His ‘Of Pathetic Fallacy’ essay was first published in Modern Painters in 1856. ‘Pathetic fallacy’ in poetry or literature occurred when inanimate objects were given human attributes or qualities such as emotions or sensations. Ruskin provided the example of the crocus, described in a poem as follows: ‘The spendthrift crocus, bursting through the mould, naked and shivering, with his cup of gold’.


723 Nightcleaners is a campaign film about women office cleaners, which was initially filmed as more conventional documentary footage. This was rendered more formally innovative in the editing process.


726 Ibid.

727 Ibid.


729 Ibid.


731 Ibid., p. 64.

732 Kren’s 3/60 – Bäume im Herbst and particularly Sherwin’s Tree Reflection also appear to pay homage to William Fox Talbot’s calotype, An oak tree in winter (1842/43).


734 Peter Gidal, Structural Film Anthology, op. cit., p. 2.

735 Nam June Paik’s Zen for Film (1964) is about thirty minutes in length, depending on projection speed.


738 Film leader was attached at the beginning (head leader) and end (tail leader) of all commercial films to assist with projection set up-up (focusing, colour, light and sound levels, etc) or for telecine operations. The head leader includes a countdown of numbers at about one foot intervals.


740 This was confirmed in email correspondence with David Curtis, 13 April 2011.


742 Clyde Steiner also worked with William Raban on Filmmakers Europe until 1981, producing 22 issues.


Ibid., p. 370.

Ibid., p. 369.

Maya Deren’s An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film should be consulted for further information about her film practice. First published by the Alicat Bookshop Press, New York in 1964, but also available in Bill Nicols (ed.), Maya Deren and the American Avant-Garde, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001), pp. 267-322.

Examples include Brakhage’s Dog Star Man (1964), where the film focuses on the unconscious, dreams, inner thought and vision. Maya Deren’s and Alexander Hamid’s Mesches of the Afternoon (1943) moves between a surreal sense of reality and dream/imagination following the actions of the main female protagonist (acted by Deren).


Empire was filmed from the Rockefeller Foundation offices (41st floor) in the building opposite the Empire State Building, the Time-Life building.


A. L. Rees, A History of Experimental Film and Video, op. cit., p. 77. Warhol always screened his films at the slower, silent speed.

P. Adams Sitney, Structural Film, op. cit., p. 374. Warhol also insisted that silent films, shot at 24 frames per second, were shown at 16 frames per second, slightly slowing down the motion in the films.


George Maciunas, ‘Some Comments of Structural Film by P. Adams Sitney (Film Culture No. 47, 1969)’ in Tanya Leighton, Art and the Moving Image: A Critical Reader, (London, Tate Publishing, 2007), p. 54. Maciunas’ response was first issued on 5 December 1969. Maciunas comments included: ‘category, error, cause of error’ and a ‘proposed correction of error’ including seven categories, whereby he took Sitney to task on ‘terminology’, and six categories of filmmaking including, ‘single staccato’, ‘linear progress’, ‘arithmetic or algebraic progression’, ‘wave motion’, ‘readymades & found film’ and ‘origins and precursors’. Maciunas accused Sitney of plagiarism for films such as Warhol’s Sleep (1963-64) and Empire (1964), which in his opinion derived respectively from Jackson Mac Low’s Tree Movie (1961) and Nam June Paik’s Empire State Building (1964).

Although Birgit Hein was working in Germany, she had close affiliations with the LFMC, particularly through her working relationship with Malcolm Le Grice. She was also involved in the 1979 ‘Film as Film’ exhibition, which was discussed at length in Chapter One. Hein’s 1979 essay for the ‘Film as Film’ exhibition catalogue provides a useful retrospective analysis on work which took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s in Britain.


Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.


Found in 1977 file a programme notes image its ‘hot’, seductive imagery. Gidal’s TAKES works in white photography is emphasized [in S (1967 LFMC’s ‘Cinema of Personal Vision’ at the LFMC on 30 November (no year stated)].

Interview with Peter Gidal, June 2007. In my interview with Gidal I asked if he had ever been tempted to reassess his position in order to allow for ‘representation’, and his reply was the following: ‘That these two things about representation, recognition and identification aren’t seen as the most important is still to me shocking. But I haven’t changed my position. It’s just that I was extreme then’.


A. L. Rees, A History of Experimental Film and Video, op. cit., p. 82.


Ibid.

Branden W. Joseph, ‘Sparring with the Spectacle: Parts 1-5’ in Christopher Eamon (ed.), Anthony McCall: The Solid Light Films and Related Works, op. cit., pp. 36-77; p. 39. Exhibition catalogue. ‘1973-75. Closure’ was published in Wallpaper in June 1976. McCall was one of the editors of the journal. McCall presented ‘Film as a Connective Catalyst’ to filmmakers and critics, including Tony Conrad, Hollis Frampton, Peter Gidal, Stephen Heath and Annette Michelson. He ‘announced a radical shift in his artistic direction. Trenchantly critiquing his solid light films, along with the aesthetic associated with the London Co-op in general, for having devolved into an effective formalism, he declared that contemporary avant-garde filmmakers had succeeded in doing little more than changing venues from the art house to the actual museum’.

Ibid. McCall is cited in Branden W. Joseph.


Ibid.

At the mid-point in the decade experimental filmmaking was gaining some recognition, as some clarification around funding issues were resolved after the Attenborough Enquiry, it was being taught in art schools in dedicated courses. Admittedly, there was still some way to go for it to receive further critical recognition and economic support.

Anne Cottringer, ‘On Peter Gidal’s Theory and Definition of Structural/Materlist Film’, Afterimage, No. 6, Summer 1976, pp. 86-95; p. 87.

Ibid., p. 94.


David Curtis, A History of Artists’ Film and Video, op. cit., p. 213. Despite Gidal’s firm stance against representation and the subjective filmmaker, his early film, Takes (1970) appeared in the LFMC’s ‘Cinema of Personal Vision’ (1977) screening. Films screened were Stephen Dwoskin’s Dirty (1967-71), Peter Gidal’s Takes (1970), Roger Hammond’s High Stepping and Roland Lethem’s La Fee Sanguinaire (1968). Dusinberre wrote in the programme notes: ‘[T]he grainy quality of the black and white photography is emphasized [in Dirty] ... in short, the film privileges a more distanced reaction to its ‘hot’, seductive imagery. Gidal’s TAKES works in similar fashion, in that a simple provocative image – a woman taking off her bra – is mediated through the formal strategy’. Deke Dusinberre, programme notes for ‘Cinema of Personal Vision’ at the LFMC on 30 November (no year stated). Found in 1977 file at BAFVSC.

Deke Dusinberre, ‘Consistent Oxymoron’, Screen, Vol. 18, No. 2, Summer 1977, pp. 79-89; p. 82.

Ibid., p. 238.
Anna Thew, ‘Small Talk Between the Lines’ in Light Years: A Twenty Year Celebration, October 1998, pp. 35-38; p. 35. Exhibition catalogue for ‘Light Years’, A Festival of Experimental Film, Video, Performance, Installation and Music at the LFMC and other venues across London.
Deke Dusinberre, ‘Consistent Oxyronor’, op. cit., p. 87.
Constance Penley, Future of an Illusion: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis, op. cit., p. 4.
Peter Gidal, ‘Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film’ in Peter Gidal (ed.), Structural Film Anthology, op. cit., p. 4.
John Du Cane, ‘Film and Video: The Third Part of Gallery House’s Survey of the Avant-Garde in Britain’, Time Out, 13-19 October 1972. Du Cane cites Raban’s Broadwalk (1972) and Colours of This Time (1972) as representing ‘fine contributions in this area’.
A number of films were shown at The Avant-Garde and Narrative - 2’, including Zorns Lemma (Holli Frampton, 1970), Reversal Rotation (Tony Sinden, 1974), Whitchurch Down (Malcolm Le Grice, 1973) and Condition of Illusion (Peter Gidal, 1976). Talks were given and screenings were also followed by discussions. This event took place at the LFMC on 20 May 1978 in collaboration with the Society for Education in Film and Television (SEFT).
IRAT (Institute for Research in Art & Technology) was an arts centre that included LFMC, John Hopkins and Sue Hall’s video workshop TVX, a theatre, music venue, a gallery, printing, electronics and metal workshops.
Interview with Peter Gidal. P. 7.
BAFVSC.
Ibid.
Annabel Nicolson, ‘Shapes’ in Mark Webber (ed.), Shoot Shoot Shoot broadsheet, ibid., p. 5.
‘Shoot Shoot Shoot’ consisted of a season of films and a symposium which took place at Tate Modern in May 2002.
Ibid.
Annabel Nicolson, ‘Artists’ Statement’ in Deke Dusinberre and David Curtis (eds.), A Perspective on English Avant-garde Film, op. cit., pp. 73-74, p. 73.
Chapter Four


Ibid.

A. L. Rees, A History of Experimental Film and Video, op. cit., p. 69.

Ibid.


Ibid., p. 101.

‘Structural/Materialist’ programme from Shoot Shoot Shoot: The First Decade of the London Filmmakers’ Co-operative and British Avant-garde Film 1966-76 (Tate Gallery, 2002). Video tape of rushes with Roger Hammond’s introduction to the film programme. Tape held in BAFVSC.

Ian Breakwell, The Artist’s Dream: Stories and Pictures by Ian Breakwell, (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1988), p. 28. A written version of Repertory included daily events happening in the theatre over 17 days. One ‘Wednesday’ for example stated: ‘The curtain is up. The footlights are on, the houselights dimmed. In front of each chair in the orchestra pit is a music stand; on each music stand is an open score. Large moths settle on the sheets of music’.


A. L. Rees, A History of Experimental Film and Video, op. cit., p. 117.


Email correspondence with Anna Thew, 18 December 2008.

In Roger Hammond’s interview with Mark Webber, he mentions Le Grice’s rarely seen Love Story 3, where the performer similarly (although rather more obscenely) engages with the projected image. www.lux.org.uk/featured/hammond.html, accessed on 1 May 2007.


Email contact was established with Greenaway in July 2009, but when I enquired about the possible relationship between the two films, Greenaway did not respond. Email correspondence with Peter Greenaway from 3 July 2009.

Peter Greenaway DVD Introduction to Early Films No 1, op. cit. Greenaway’s introduction to the film on the DVD.

Chapter Seven: Women and Film

Alice Guy, ‘Woman’s Place in Photoplay Production’ in The Moving Picture World, 1914. Guy’s citation is used in Seeing For Ourselves: Women in Film, part of Channel Four ‘Profiles’ series 1983.

Carolee Schneemann, Imaging Her Erotics: Essays, Interviews, Projects, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003), p. 159. This forms part of the text used in the second of Schneemann’s Interior Scroll performances at Telluride Film Festival, Colorado on 4 September 1977.

The citation is an extract from the text for Schneemann’s performance Interior Scroll (1977). Schneemann drew a scroll, resembling a film strip, out of her vagina and read out the statement written on the scroll. Scheneman’s bold statement, was made in response to a program of women’s films, which she selected with Stan Brakhage for the Telluride Film Festival (1977). The film programme had been titled ‘The Erotic Woman’ by the festival organisers and the festival brochure also included a drawing of a naked flasher on the cover. Scheemann took offence to the way the programme title and brochure framed the films and performed her ‘action’, Interior Scroll, in protest. ‘The Erotic Woman’ film programme included her film, Fuses.

Films were made by the London Women’s Film Group between 1972 and 1977. Christine Gledhill explained that ‘[t]he group functions as a collective in which the skills of those who work professionally in the media are passed on and shared with those who don’t’. (Christine Gledhill, ‘Whose Choice? – Teaching Films about Abortion’, Screen Education, 24, A77, 1977, pp. 35-46; p. 35). Whose Choice? (1976) is about the choices available to a young, working-class girl seeking abortion. In Women of the Rondra (1973) women from a South Wales mining community discuss their experiences of the 1930s General Strike. Both were made by the London Women’s Film Group with BFIPB funding.

The term ‘second wave’ was first coined by Marsha Lear.


D. N. Rodowick, The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Criticism, op. cit., p. xxi.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Circles was initially funded by 11 women who each contributed £20: Jane Clark, Joanna Davis, Rachel Finkelstein, Jeannete Iljon, Tina Keane, Mary Pat Leece, Pat Murphy, Annabel Nicolson, Lis Rhodes, Felicity Sparrow and Susan Stein. £100 Arts Council funding was received for a 16mm splicer, with no further initial funding received by choice. It was one of the first organisations breaking down the boundaries between film, video, performance and installation. Historical women’s film work was brought back into distribution and represented within a feminist context. Circles information cited here from: Michael Mazière, Institutional Support for Artists’ Film and Video in England 1966-2003, pp.1-41; p. 8. http://www.studycollection.co.uk/maziere/paper.html


Ibid.

Imelda Whelehan, Modern Feminist Thought: From the Second Wave to ‘Post-Feminism’, op.cit., p. 177.

Anna Thew’s Super-8 film, From Face to Face (1979/90), has close ups of male faces and as Thew says: these are ‘objets of desire, pedagogue, young lover, old flame ... the hairstyles lend the film an arcane, ‘deux ou trois choses que je sais de lui’, quality’. luxonline, accessed on 28 July 2009. www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/anna_thew.face_to_face.html. In Cordelia Swann’s Ten Commandments
of Love (1979) the same image (a still of two lovers from the 1950s film of the title) was printed and edited in the LFMC workshop to the popular love song of the title. In Jean Matthee’s later Descent of the Seductress (1987), she explored the iconic image of Marilyn Monroe.

This study was conducted by artists Mary Kelly, Kay Hunt and Margaret Harrison in a metal box factory in Bermondsey and coincided with the Equal Pay Act (EPA) of 1970. The exhibition took place at the South London Art Gallery and included written and typed texts and documents, ephemera such as punch cards, black-and-white photographs and films. The work and eventual exhibition evolved through the artists’ involvement in the Women’s Workshop of the Artist’s Union (founded in 1972 to end sexual and racial discrimination in the arts).


Ibid., p. 27 and 28.


Works produced ranged from explicit portrayals of women’s experience evident in pieces such as Monica Sjöö’s infamous painting of parturition, God Giving Birth (1969) or Catherine Elwes’ 3-day performance piece, Menstruation II (1979), to more minimalist approaches to personal experience, such as Susan Hiller’s photographic documentation of her pregnancy in 10 Months (1977-79). Experimental films were also included in exhibitions such as ‘Three Friends’ (Susan Hiller, Carla Liss and Barbara Schwartz) at Gallery House in 1973. Liss screened Dowecote (1973), transporting viewers into a stone tower replete with the sounds of beating wings and cooing birds with her four-walled projection environment. Schwarz’s Homemovie included a personal exploration of different film techniques, and images that caught her eye.

Women’s Cinema’ at the NFT was organised by Claire Johnstone and included films by Maya Deren, Dorothy Arzner and Germaine Dulac.


In his Time Out review Deke Dusinberre identified that, ‘a more political (if unpublicised) decision by the committee means that fully 50% of the British films at the NFT will be by women.’ Deke Dusinberre, ‘Making the Avant-Grade’ [sic], Time Out, 1-7 June 1979, pp. 14-15; p. 14.


These are problematic definitions but are referred to here as they were used historically to describe different characteristics related to gender in literature or social sciences.

Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, ‘Introduction’ in Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (eds.), Framing Feminism: Art and the Women’s Movement 1970-1985, op. cit., pp. 3-78; p. 29. Gender construction has been deliberated taking either the biological (nature) or sociological/cultural (nurture) routes; as well as combinations of the two.

Laura Mulvey, ‘Film, Feminism and the Avant-Garde’ in Michael O’Pray (ed.), The British Avant-garde Film: 1926-1995: An Anthology of Writings, op. cit., p. 207. The year 1972 also coincided with...
the publication of the first American feminist film journal in America, *Women and Film* (1972-75), providing a voice for specific concerns.

Part of feminist historical reclamation included recovering ‘lost’ histories and reinserting them into traditional histories or rewriting these from a feminist position. Important publications included Sheila Rowbotham’s *Hidden from History* (London: Pluto Press, 1974).

Laura Mulvey, ‘Film, Feminism and the Avant-Garde’, op. cit., pp. 199-216; p. 211.


Jean-Luc Godard, ‘What is to be done?’, *Afterimage*, No 1, April 1970. No page numbers. This is set out as a manifesto for political filmmaking with 39 points. All subsequent points refer to ‘1. We must make political films’ and ‘2. We must make films politically’, suggesting for example that, ‘36. To carry out 2 is to use images and sounds as teeth and lips to bite with’ or ‘39. To carry out 2 is to be militant’.


Ibid.


Silvia Bovenschein, ‘Is There a Feminine Aesthetic?’ in *New German Critique*, 10, Winter 1977, pp. 11-137; p. 124. Early literary examples such as Sappho and George Sand were discussed.

Ibid., p. 134.


Ibid., p. 158. De Lauretis refers to Audre Lorde’s cautionary metaphor, ‘The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 161.

Ibid., p. 159.

Ibid.

Ibid. Akerman is cited by de Lauretis.

Ibid. Akerman is cited by de Lauretis.

Ibid., p.160. Akerman is cited by de Lauretis.

Lesley Stern, ‘Feminism and Cinema-Exchanges’, *Screen*, 20, Winter 1979/80, pp. 89-105; p. 95. The women’s filmmaking event was held at the Edinburgh Film Festival (1979).


Laura Mulvey, ‘Film, Feminism and the Avant-Garde’, op. cit., pp. 199-216; p. 213.

Joanna Davis is cited discussing *Often During the Day* in the Arts Council-funded *Seeing for Ourselves: Women Working in Film* (1983) documentary, forming part of the Channel Four ‘Profiles’ series. My own transcription of her discussion was used. The documentary focused on women filmmakers and founding members of the women’s distribution group, Circles, Joanna Davis, Tina Keane, Annabel Nicolson, Lis Rhodes and Felicity Sparrow. 56 minutes, colour. Video held in BAFVSC.


Joanna Davis, statement on the video cover of *Often During the Day*. Video held in BAFVSC.


915 Joanna Davis, statement on the video cover of Often During the Day. Video held in BAFVSC.
917 Interview with Lis Rhodes at British Library, London, December 2008, p. 43.
920 Akerman is cited in de Lauretis’ article.
921 Ariel (1974) is a 4-minute 16mm film in colour and black-and-white.
924 Free Show (1979) is a 15-minute black-and-white film and RX Recipe (1980) is a 12-minute film with actress, Clare Winter.
928 Mary Kelly, Antepartum (1973), 8mm, 1 minute and 30 seconds, and Guy Sherwin, Breathing (1975), 16mm, 3 minutes.
929 Kelly’s and Sherwin’s films present the same abstracted subject matter as Susan Hiller’s later photographic record, 10 Months (1977-9). Hiller’s photographs, of ten lunar months documenting her pregnancy, bear a close resemblance to both films.
931 Deke, Dusinbere, ‘Short Film Series’, Art and Artists, 50, October 1983, pp. 286-287; p. 287.
933 The first screening took place at Portsmouth Polytechnic (1974). According to Kelly, both projectors were running simultaneously as looped installations. Although no evidence exists of the screening event, Kelly verified that it took place in Siona Wilson’s 2008 article.
934 Interior Scroll was performed in 1975 for the ‘Women Here and Now’ exhibition, East Hampton, New York. The 1977 performance was a protest ‘action’ at the titling of a film programme at the 4th Telluride Film Festival, Colorado. Schneemann’s films, Fuses and Plumb Line, were part of the ‘The Erotic Woman’ programme which Schneemann had been asked to introduce. Carolee Schneemann, Imaging Her Erotics: Essays, Interviews, Projects, op. cit., p. 153.
935 John Berger’s seminal Ways of Seeing (London: Penguin, 1972) should be referred to for further reading on the historically observed female nude in art history. Female photographers such as Claude Cahun, Francesca Woodman and Bernie Searle are a few examples where self-portraiture has been used as a form of reclamation.
937 Ibid.
939 Ibid.
941 Ibid.
942 Email correspondence with Laura Mulvey, 8 August 2010.
944 Ibid., p. 41.
945 David Curtis, A History of Artists’ Film and Video in Britain, op. cit., p. 249.
Harris, in August at Drill Hall in December 1977. It was also performed at the ‘Women’s Festival’.

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Broadsheet programme notes for screening. 'Image Fades as Her Voice Rises', (London, Arts Council Great Britain, 1983), no page quoted in Peter Burton. Ed Bennett, Film Work Group (Stuart Mackinnon, Clive Myer and Nigel Parks), these 1970s BFIPB

George Julian was a social researcher, Henry Mayhew (1812-87), advocated reform to assist the poor; and Chartist leader, George Julian Harney (1817-97), had working relationships with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.


Interview with Lis Rhodes, British Library, London, November 2008, p. 47.


From film: Light Reading by Lis Rhodes, Afterimage DVD compilation of Lis Rhodes films.


Interview with Lis Rhodes, British Library, London, November 2008, p. 46. ibid.


Lis Rhodes and Felicity Sparrow, ‘Imprisoned in Dependency or the Violence of Meaning’, op. cit.

Ibid.


Lis Rhodes, ‘Whose History?’ in Film as Film: Formal Experiment in Film: 1910-1975, op. cit., pp. 119-120; p. 120.

Shadow Woman was performed at the Acme Gallery, London, with the first half taking place in a constructed garden in the upstairs part of the gallery. It was also performed at the ‘Women’s Festival’ at Drill Hall in December 1977.


Ibid. The Super 8 footage was filmed on a boat trip, travelling in the Scottish islands from Skye to Harris, in August 1976.

David Curtis, A History of Artists’ Film and Video in Britain, op. cit., p. 259.
Conclusion


Annabel Nicolson, ‘The Early Years of the Film Co-op’ in *Experiments in Moving Image*, op. cit., pp. 12-19. The account was compiled from recordings of LFMC members or visitors made by Nicolson, and first published in *Light Years, Filmmakers Co-op Anniversary Programme*, 1986.

