

Historiographic Returns: Reviewing British Avant-Garde Film of the 1970s

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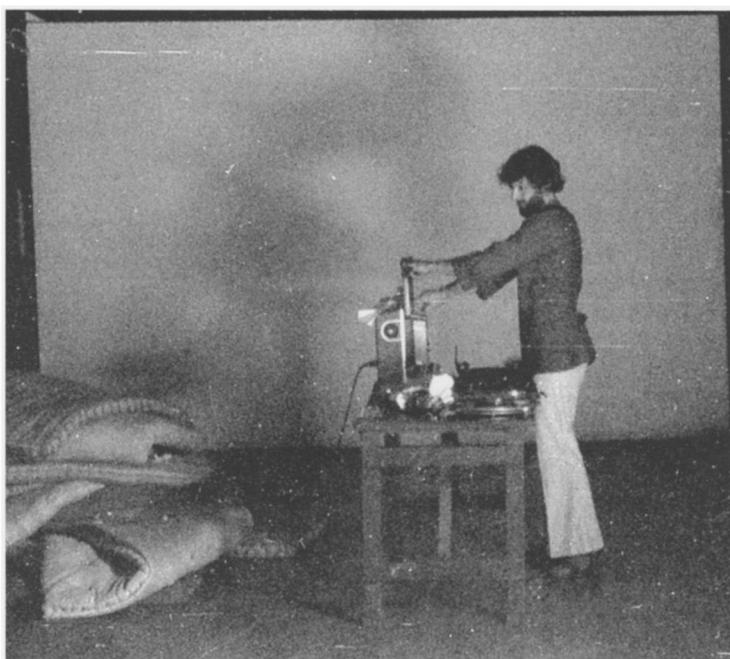
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Malcom Le Grice
in the Co-op.
Courtesy of LUX,
London.



Historiographic Returns: Reviewing British Avant- Garde Film of the 1970s

FEDERICO WINDHAUSEN

I said to Sitney, at dinner in July: I have found your Structuralists, P. Adams, and they are in England. Complete to the diacritical mark, influence of Warhol, the whole number.

—Hollis Frampton to Peter Gidal, 1972¹

I should, and eventually will, know the new European avant-garde better than I do. I only wish I could admire it more.

—P. Adams Sitney to Malcolm Le Grice, 1977²

If the London Film-Makers' Co-operative (LFMC) was still “one of the great unrecognised success stories of British film culture” when Michael O’Pray characterized it as such in 2002, five years later it appears to be enjoying the benefits of a recent spike in curatorial and scholarly interest.³ Those who witnessed the development of the LFMC firsthand might be surprised or amused by the rhetoric of historiographic recovery employed within some of these institutional and academic projects, given that the Co-op seems to have always been narrating its own history. Before turning to two particularly important contributions—namely, the LUX/Re:Voir DVD compilation entitled *Shoot Shoot Shoot: British Avant-Garde Film of the 1960s and 1970s* and David Curtis’s new survey book *A History of Artists’ Film and Video in Britain*—a review of a few key issues and debates can give us a clearer sense of why the contemporary projects matter.⁴

At the outset, we might as well begin with a purported point of origination, one that introduces the theme of transatlantic communication. The following is an excerpt from a telegram dated October 1966 and allegedly sent to Jonas Mekas and the New York-based Filmmakers’ Cooperative:

LONDON FILM-MAKERS COOP ABOUT TO BE LEGALLY
ESTABLISHED STOP PURPOSE TO SHOOT SHOOT
SHOOT SHOOT SHOOT STOP NEVER STOP NO BREAD
NO PLACE TO LAY OUR HEADS NO MATTER JUST
MIND IF YOU WANT TO MAKE MONEY STOP IF YOU
LIKE BRIAN [*sic*] FORBES STOP IF YOU READ SIGHT
AND SOUND STOP IF YOU WANT TO MAKE FILMS I
MEAN FILMS COME ALL YOU NEEDS IS EYES IN THE
BEGINNING STOP⁵

The text certainly conveys the countercultural spirit of the writers, artists, and filmmakers who populated the Co-op when it was linked to Better Books, a central London paperback bookshop that doubled as performance/screening space. The text also suggests a desire to participate not just in the experimental film cooperative movement, which was showing signs of growth across Europe, but more specifically with the well-publicized New York scene.⁶

In an Anglo-American experimental film culture that is full of embellished anecdotes and unsubstantiated reports, offered up by sympathizers and antagonists alike, origin stories are exceedingly susceptible to correction and alteration. The telegram's best-known appearance was probably the reproduction (or simulation) found in filmmaker Stephen Dwoskin's 1975 *Film Is*, a book published in the same year as an article on the LFMC written by Curtis, a personalized retrospective account that also mentioned the telegram.⁷ Twenty years on, a slightly updated version of Curtis's piece included a new footnote that announced, "Published, but never sent!"⁸ More recently, Mark Webber has suggested that the telegram "may have been mocked-up by Simon Hartog [a founding LFMC member] for reproduction in [the Co-op's magazine] *Cinim* and elsewhere."⁹ Thus, the telegram stands now as an uncommonly effective propaganda piece.

The telegram is also an artifact suggestive of missed connections, specifically between London and New York. Despite their expressions of international solidarity, the British Co-op members clearly sought to develop their group (focused, in the initial stages, on exhibition and distribution) without the intervention of New York's most prominent experimental cinema advocates: in October 1967, they rejected Mekas's suggestion that he and his camp (Sitney, Ken Kelman, and Stan Brakhage) select experimental films from the U.S. for European distribution.¹⁰ By the time Sitney arrived in April 1968 with an extensive touring program of North American experimental film (including all of the major "underground" filmmakers but only *Eat* (1964) and *Outer and Inner Space* (1965) by Warhol and nothing from Michael Snow or Paul Sharits), the "spirit of Better Books was decidedly dead," according to Curtis.¹¹ Sitney's curated program of underground films was screened at London's National Film Theatre, not in the alternative spaces of the counterculture, and he later recalled that his subsequent "university tour of England was considerably less successful than I had imagined."¹² Thus, if the accounts are to be believed, the Americans appear to have missed their "underground" moment in England; for some participants, 1968 is better remembered as the year that soon-to-be-labeled "structural" (or structural/materialist) filmmakers such as Malcolm Le Grice began their public careers. Le Grice later claimed that, given "the already established tendency towards formal experiment in the European film," American experimental film screened overseas "was read more for its formal concerns than it warranted

(particularly the interpretation of Brakhage filtered out much of his retrogressive expressionist symbolism and overstressed the formal grasp of his work)."¹³ Presumably, the British response to the September 1968 visit of Michael Snow and Joyce Wieland was considerably different—throughout the first half of the 1970s, Snow remained one of the few North American filmmakers approvingly discussed by British filmmakers and critics.

The appearance of a shift from underground to structural film is seemingly corroborated by observations such as A.L. Rees's claim that "celebratory cinema was not much in evidence during the post-euphoric 1970s" in England and by the writings of Le Grice and Gidal, the two most prominent publishing filmmakers of the period.¹⁴ Yet alternative views have also been advanced, in fairly unostentatious ways, by filmmakers such as John Smith:

I think maybe the impression on this side of the Atlantic, not surprisingly, is of the British Avant-Garde as being much more severe, linear and single-minded than it actually was. In fact, there was a lot of diversity at that time. There were manifestoes, but as you know, some people write manifestoes and other people keep quiet, and the people who keep quiet don't necessarily agree with what's said in its entirety.¹⁵

Smith refers directly to David Larcher, whose "incredibly rich and imagistic" films "really want to give pleasure." In his new book, Curtis compares Larcher's "autobiographical, introspective . . . heroic" film *Mare's Tail* (1969) to Brakhage's *The Art of Vision* (1965), pointing out that Sitney had screened the earlier American film in his London series.¹⁶ Moreover, Larcher continued to work on films throughout the early to mid-1970s, seemingly undaunted by the anti-illusionist rhetoric of the newer Co-op group. Previously concerned with broad narratives of development, scholars of British experimental film have barely begun to chronicle the diversity of output and the obvious or tacit lines of continuity within and across filmic practices during the 1970s. Curtis's book makes suggestive contributions to this area, but because it remains within the limits of the introductory overview genre, it presents little new research.¹⁷



Older filmmakers now argue for the need to reconsider the diverse ways in which the Co-op contributed to traditions and tendencies within avant-garde film, but many of them once enjoyed the freedoms attendant upon those who are unburdened by an awareness of historical tradition. One reads again and again throughout accounts of the period that the young, art-school-trained practitioners of the late 1960s and early 1970s knew little about past practices in American or even European experimental film.¹⁸ Yet few, if any, seem to have been disinter-

ested in possible links to film history.¹⁹ As Rees puts it, the films by Le Grice, William Raban, Mike Leggett, and Chris Welsby that lack “fictional narrative content . . . seem to leap over the history of film, and back to the experiments of Demeny, Muybridge and Lumiere. Here a line of descent is traced from the earliest cinema, with narrative as a grand detour.” He goes on to note that this “primitive or artisanal mode also led to ‘expanded cinema,’”²⁰ and, indeed, by the early 1970s, London-based critics and filmmakers were calling attention, in direct and indirect critiques of Gene Youngblood’s “undying technological utopianism,”²¹ to the European emphasis on “the old technology, expanding the *possibilities* and *exigencies* of cinema technology as it has existed for eighty years.”²² For some filmmakers, their contemporary interventions gained urgency and relevance precisely at the moment when they could be removed from the contexts of experimental film history (or high-tech image culture) and reconnected to early (or pre-) cinema.²³ This attitude allowed filmmakers to develop their own versions of what Hollis Frampton labeled “metahistory,” a revisionist refashioning of artistic lineage and tradition designed to generate new work in film.

Notwithstanding the ambiguous or ambivalent nature of its awareness of experimental film history, the LFMC found chroniclers of its own development by the early 1970s (in early 1972, for example, *Time Out* published a feature that reviewed the Co-op’s emergence). But Le Grice and Gidal, the filmmakers who quickly came to define the public image (“severe, linear and single-minded”) of Co-op practice in the 1970s, rarely discussed contemporary practices in detail, presumably leaving the writing of accounts of unique production practices, institutional politics, and activist filmmaking communities to the historians. What Le Grice and Gidal presented instead were attempts to justify and explain, in the theoretical jargon of the era, the seemingly idiosyncratic combination of formalist experimentation and political goals in their own work (while also interpreting fellow Co-op filmmakers along similar lines).²⁴ The generalizations offered by these filmmaker-theorists have tended to dominate discourse on the period, just as the main alternative to their views is said to be found in the landscape film subgenre whose best-known practitioners are Raban and Welsby.

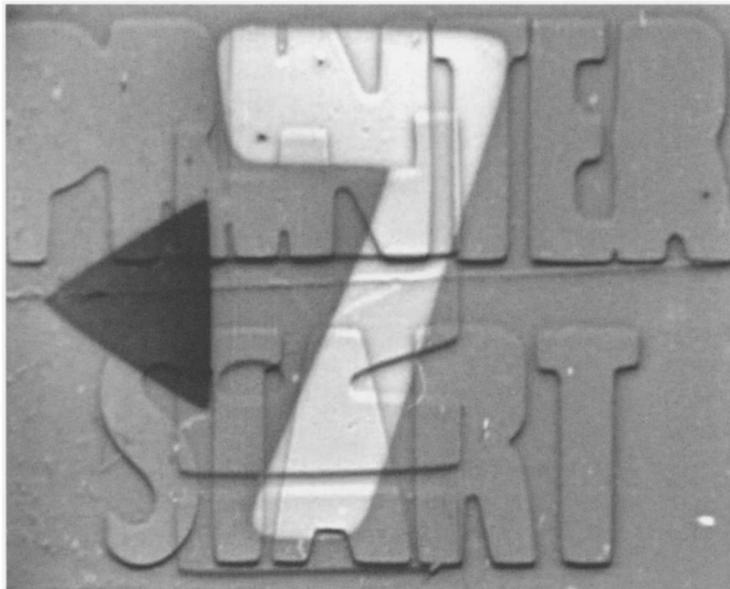
Objections were voiced and offshoot filmmaker collectives formed, as Curtis and others have noted. By 1978, when Curtis and critic and programmer Deke Dusinberre curated the touring, ten-year retrospective series “A Perspective on English Avant-Garde Film,” from which expanded cinema works and individual auteur shows were excluded, Dusinberre noted that the final selection, divided into nine short screenings, was met with

some dissatisfaction on the part of many English filmmakers—those included in the final selection as well as those excluded. It was felt that the rigour of selection and programming violated the spirit of openness—openness

on the level of participation by film-makers and on the level of an open context and meaning for the work itself—which has characterised the first decade of film-making here. It was felt, too, that the strictly categorized programming was hopelessly academic.²⁵

The *Shoot Shoot Shoot* DVD looks, at first glance, like an abridged version of Curtis's and Dusinberre's allegedly "academic" and restricted retrospective because it includes all of the filmmakers and seven of the films in the earlier series. So it is perhaps an irony of history that, nearly thirty years later, Mark Webber's compilation serves as an introduction to the diversity of the 1966–1976 period.

The DVD (and, indeed, Curtis's book) might be alternatively subtitled "Subjects for Further Research" because it offers a valuable sampler of significant bodies of work in British exper-



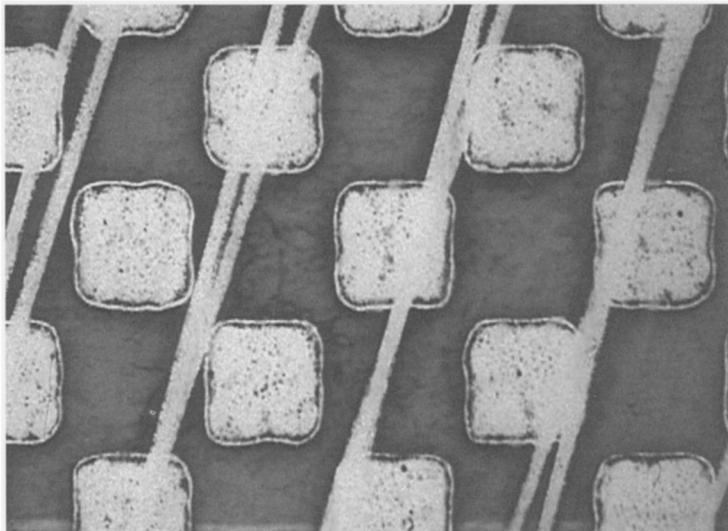
imental film. Moreover, just as Curtis makes good use of the survey historian's method of connecting the work of a particular moment to both past and future practices, Webber presents films that can be placed in productive dialogues, with each other and with experimental film traditions commonly associated with the American context. Both the book and the DVD help us look beyond the filmmakers' claims of a "break" with rival practices and traditions and search for more complex networks of interrelations and resistances. Many issues and questions could emerge from possible comparisons, but I will raise only a few.

The first film is Guy Sherwin's superimposition-laden contribution to the film-leader-countdown genre, *At the Academy* (1974), a hand-processed work that Curtis has interpreted as "essentially . . . graphic," in the manner of former Sherwin student Lis Rhodes's early work.²⁶ The viewer of the DVD can proceed to the next film, Le Grice's 1967 *Little Dog for Roger*, which also

Guy Sherwin.
At the Academy,
1974. Frame
enlargement.
Courtesy of LUX,
London.

displays effects created by artisanal printing techniques, or skip ahead to Rhodes's *Dresden Dynamo* (1971), a cameraless film also taken to be primarily "graphic."²⁷ In the case of Rhodes's film, the term was used by Sherwin and his student Steve Farrer to suggest that *Dresden Dynamo* draws attention to its illusions and optical effects but not to process, to the act of producing the work. Notably, Le Grice described *Little Dog for Roger* as "clarifying the direction" taken by Man Ray and Len Lye, but he never mentioned Rhodes's film (which utilizes offscreen space in a manner reminiscent of Lye's work) in this context.²⁸ Do Sherwin and Rhodes "belong," then, to the "materialist" tradition, or do these films point to another set of connections to the "graphic" modernist avant-garde that Le Grice does not discuss?

Sherwin has mentioned that his film plays a "game . . . with the audience's expectations" in a manner probably related to its use of the academy-leader countdown.²⁹ Whether Sherwin had



any interest in the American films that Sitney placed in the subcategory of the "participatory film" (in which viewers were expected to make decisions using logic and inference) is an open question; notably, Le Grice suggested that another film included on the DVD, Gidal's *Hall* (1968–1969) could generate something akin to "the kind of puzzle-game used in Frampton's *Zorns Lemma*."³⁰ Do these and other works constitute a British version of (or response to) the participatory film?

Le Grice's *Little Dog for Roger* "proved to be the beginning of a whole genre of English filmmaking," according to Curtis,³¹ and Webber's detailed notes (shaped in part by extensive interviews with the filmmakers) list the film's deliberate "imperfections": "dirt and scratches, under- and over-exposure, geometrically correct, or horizontally or vertically inverted, positive or negative, in and out of focus, freeze frames or steady or interrupted motion, single or double-exposure, sound or no sound, full frame or cropped."³² Stephen Dwoskin describes *Little Dog for Roger* as "a film romance" because the movements of the

Above: Lis Rhodes.
Dresden Dynamo, 1971.
Frame enlargement.
Courtesy of LUX,
London.

Opposite: Peter Gidal.
Hall, 1968–1969. Frame
enlargement. Courtesy
of LUX, London.

rephotographed filmstrip “are not passive and controlled, but fluid, rhythmic, diversified.”³³ This diversified quality of movement can also be found in another, more lush filmstrip-film, Annabel Nicolson’s *Slides* (1970). To what extent do such films complicate the historical narrative of “image saturation triumph[ing] over the interdicted image” that supposedly dominated the 1970s?³⁴

The inclusion of Jeff Keen’s *Marvo Movie* (1967) and Dwoskin’s *Dirty* (1965–1967) provides a new opportunity to spotlight British filmmakers with strong ties to the American underground film tradition.³⁵ Especially relevant reference points include, in Keen’s case, Pop art and Jack Smith; and for Dwoskin, Warhol’s cinema and the erotic dimension of 1960s experimental film. Keen’s work has been particularly difficult to see. Dwoskin’s might reach a wider audience with the release of a five-DVD set of his films.³⁶ Can these films be productively integrated into a history of the cross-cultural reception of underground cinema?

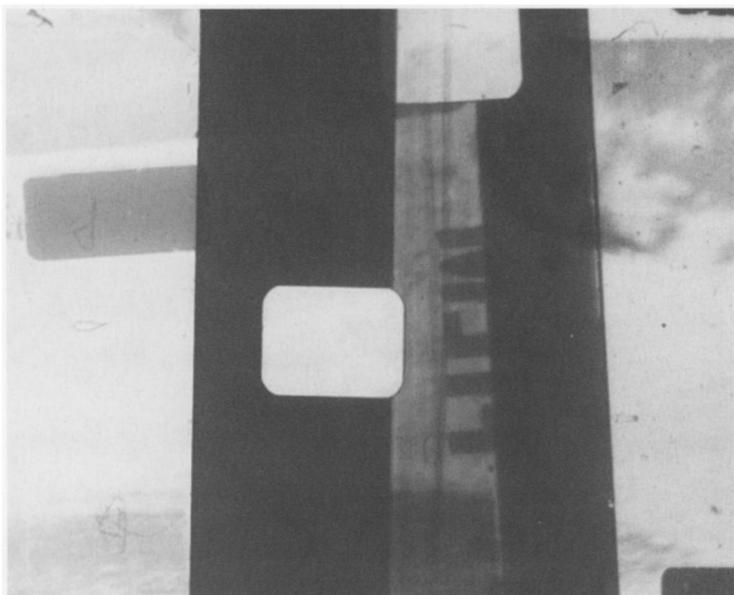


Raban’s *Broadwalk* (1972) and Welsby’s *Fforest Bay II* (1973) play with the tension between intricate, sometimes systematic (or even mathematical) approaches to process and the potentially chaotic, sometimes unpredictable interventions of the phenomenal world. This often-noted tension is found throughout the work of the landscape filmmakers (and is apparent in the BFI’s career-survey DVD collections for each filmmaker). The considerable impact of their work is suggested by Webber’s choice of an atypical film by John Smith, *Leading Light* (1975), a time-lapse “room film” that resembles an American lyrical film. In Smith’s view, it displays the influence of Raban’s and Welsby’s films inasmuch as it uses “a natural cycle—in this case the sunlight travelling around a room” to generate “a framework in which to work,” which it then interacts with, during the production process.³⁷ Did Smith’s film initiate or contribute to a second-generation appropriation of the landscape filmmakers’ ideas and practices?

Mike Leggett’s remarkable loop-printed *Shepherd’s Bush*

(1971), a film of subtle and extreme tonal shifts that has been quite successfully transferred to the digital format, introduces the work of a filmmaker engaged in the exploration of “iterative and generative systems using analogue-based motion picture film” in a manner distinct from the use of systems by the landscape filmmakers.³⁸ As his most recent writing indicates, Leggett would like his seemingly medium-specific filmic work to contribute to new media discourse, with *Shepherd’s Bush* acting as a starting point for this stage of this work. Is it a representative instance of a photochemical film practice aspiring to connect itself to new media structures in the early 1970s?

These questions show that much work remains to be done in a variety of areas. Webber’s efforts as a programmer have been exceptional, and they are ongoing. He is currently seeking funding and institutional support for an “expanded cinema study collection” (or archive) that would collect secondary



materials: “documentation of screenings/performances and contextual information related to Expanded Cinema work.”³⁹ This effort would be ideally complemented by a tandem approach that sets out to restore a large number of decaying British experimental films *and* establish a consistent DVD conversion and distribution system for restored or new prints.⁴⁰ Notably, the BFI’s DVDs on Raban and Welsby seek to contextualize the films and introduce the expanded cinema work through informative written texts and filmmaker-narrated documentaries, features that should also be utilized in future DVDs (a Sherwin retrospective, for one, seems long overdue). Filmmakers’ oral accounts,⁴¹ scholarly research into institutional development, studies of individual and collaborative production practices, and reception histories have all been initiated, to varying degrees, but what exists remains highly incomplete and patchwork.⁴² And while introductory survey books and DVD compilations constitute significant contribu-

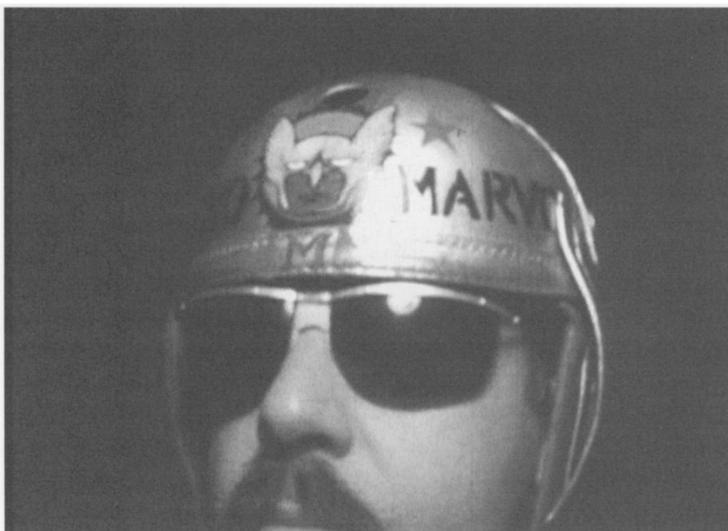
Above: Malcolm Le Grice. *Little Dog for Roger*, 1967. Frame enlargement. Courtesy of LUX, London.

Opposite: Jeff Keen. *Marvo Movie*, 1967. Frame enlargement. Courtesy of LUX, London.

tions to the field of experimental film history, they cannot meet the urgent need for more sustained (and better funded) reconstruction projects.

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One more missed connection involves Peter Greenaway, a British filmmaker who was part of neither the Co-op nor the American scene and who represents instead a case of relatively single-minded development. By the end of the 1970s, Greenaway had completed *The Falls* (1980), an ingenious film that was said to occupy a “hybrid space” between American structural filmmaking and the European art-house cinema of the sixties.⁴³ The film, which uses an alphabetical structure to order the stories of characters whose lives were transformed by a “Violent Unknown Event” somehow involving birds, was inspired by Hollis Frampton’s work in a number of ways, but most specifi-



cally by a passage about the language of birds in the essay “A Pentagram for Conjuring the Narrative.”⁴⁴

Sitney has recounted that “When Frampton died of cancer in March, 1984, Greenaway was actually heading for Buffalo to meet him.”⁴⁵ Since that mid-1980s period, Greenaway’s work has moved increasingly further away from the influence of the avant-garde of the 1970s—and from any sense of productive interchange with filmmaking communities. In the view of some critics, his artistic isolation has impeded his increasingly diffuse and unfocused work from functioning as a “continual influence” on fellow filmmakers.⁴⁶ The possible routes that Greenaway might have taken, had his sense of aesthetic affinities with one branch of the American avant-garde film been preserved throughout his career, now lie purely in the realm of speculation.

Positioned at a historical remove that separates us from the polemics of the 1970s, and facing a scene of increasing interest in the period’s filmic output, we might be embarking upon a

moment of intensified inquiry. My secondhand anecdote about Greenaway is meant to suggest the relevance not only of failed transatlantic connections but also of belatedness, redirected or reversed trajectories, and hybrid cases for our contemporary understanding of experimental film, British, American, or otherwise. At its most promising, a return to the era's dense web of practice and discourse contains the possibility of restoring to our film culture a sense of continuity perpetually being denied or lost.



Stephen Dwoskin.
Dirty, 1965–1967.
Frame enlargement.
Courtesy of LUX,
London.

Notes

1. Hollis Frampton, "Letter from Hollis Frampton to Peter Gidal on *Zorns Lemma*" (25 August 1972), in *Structural Film Anthology*, ed. Peter Gidal (London: BFI, 1976), 77.

2. Malcolm Le Grice and P. Adams Sitney, "Narrative Illusion vs. Structural Realism" (1977), in *Experimental Cinema in the Digital Age* (London: BFI Publishing, 2001), 139. Ten years after his move from New York to England, Deke Dusinberre recalled a comment from the summer of 1973: "Was it Jonas Mekas or P. Adams Sitney (probably the latter) who said something to the effect of, 'London? There *aren't* any avant-garde filmmakers. Go to Germany instead.?" Deke Dusinberre, "On British Avant-Garde Landscape Films," *Undercut 7/8* (1983): 49.

3. Michael O'Pray, "No bread. No bed. No matter: The London Film-makers' Co-op used Hoovers, rubber bands and passion to make avant-garde classics," *The Guardian*, 4 May 2002, 5. The label "success story" might seem ill-chosen to those who recall that filmmakers such as David Crosswaite, Gill Eatherley, Roger Hammond, John Du Cane, and Mike Dunford ceased making films, either permanently or for long periods of time, after the Co-op's first decade.

4. Motivated by a commendable impulse toward inclusiveness, Curtis discusses both experimental film and the artist's film, but the title of his book suggests the collapse of the former into the latter term, in favor of a broader use of *artist*. (This preference might originate in Curtis's work with the Arts Council of Great Britain, which employed the artist category in order to distinguish between commercial and independent productions.) Yet he consistently relies upon *both* terms, not always interchangeably, throughout the rest of the book. This suggests that the distinction remains difficult to maintain, despite the Arts Council's promotion of one umbrella term. See David Curtis, *A History of Artists' Film and Video in Britain* (London: BFI Publishing, 2007), 1–2.

5. Stephen Dwoskin, *Film Is: The International Free Cinema* (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 1975), 63. Bryan Forbes is a British screenwriter and director, prominent in the 1960s and often identified with a particularly heavy-handed version of the "new British realism." The derision suggested in the telegram is also probably a response to his attempt at crossing over into Hollywood (with *King Rat* in 1965).

6. "Aural History," an informative online "audio documentary" of the Co-op's early years, was curated by Maxa Zoller in 2006. See Maxa Zoller, "Aural History" (2006), <http://www.studycollection.co.uk/auralhistory/index.htm>. For a brief account of the European cooperatives that emerged in the 1967–1968 period, see Klaus Schönherr, "Europe," *Filmmakers Newsletter* 1, no. 12 (October 1968): 10.

7. David Curtis, "English Avant-Garde Film: An Early Chronology," in *A Perspective on English Avant-Garde Film* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain / The British Council, 1978), 9–18.

8. David Curtis, "English Avant-Garde Film: An Early Chronology," in *The British Avant-Garde Film 1926 to 1995: An Anthology of Writings*, ed. Michael O'Pray (Luton, UK: The Arts Council of England/John Libbey Media/University of Luton, 1996), 119.

9. Mark Webber, "LFMC Chronology 1966," *Shoot Shoot Shoot* broadsheet (London: LUX, 2006), n.p., available online at <http://www.lfmc.org/chronpages/CHRON%201966.htm>.

10. Mark Webber, "LFMC Chronology 1967," *Shoot Shoot Shoot* broadsheet, (London: LUX, 2006), n.p., available online at <http://www.lfmc.org/chronpages/CHRON%201967.htm>. Webber points out that the selections would have been made by the figures who later formed Anthology Film Archives' "Essential Cinema" committee.

11. Curtis, "English Avant-Garde Film," in *The British Avant-Garde Film 1926 to 1995*, 105.

12. Curtis, "English Avant-Garde Film," in *The British Avant-Garde Film 1926 to 1995*, 106. It later became clear that Sitney would not be receptive to the work of the Gidal/Le Grice faction at the LFMC, with a major point of contention being the persistence of Romanticism's legacy in film. At a public debate with Le Grice, held in New York in 1977, Sitney explicitly rejected the notion that modern art and film represented a decisive break from "our artistic and philosophical heritage," because he saw Romanticism as ongoing into the present. For Sitney, the British films were merely the latest version of a familiar Romantic dialectic between the subjectivity of the artist and the material existence of the cultural artifact. Employing foregrounding strategies that directed spectatorial attention to the material properties of the filmstrip, the Co-op filmmakers sought to suppress signs of individual authorship, but according to Sitney's interpretation such tactics could offer only a metaphorical, "illusionistically illustrated" version of materiality. See Le Grice and Sitney, "Narrative Illusion vs. Structural Realism," 142.

13. Le Grice, "Letters from Gidal and Le Grice" (1978), in *Experimental Cinema in the Digital Age*, 133.

14. A.L. Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video* (London: BFI Publishing, 1999), 78.

15. Brian Frye, "Interview with John Smith," *Millennium Film Journal* 39/40 (Winter 2003), available online at <http://mfj-online.org/journalPages/MFJ39/JohnSmith.html>.

16. Curtis, *A History of Artists' Film and Video in Britain*, 178.

17. I am primarily referring to Curtis's treatment of the Co-op's history, which takes up considerably less than a third of the text. The book merits a longer and more substantive review than I can provide. It ably covers a large time period, in particular the decades preceding the Co-op's formation, and it is likely to stand as the best overview of British experimental film and video for quite some time; it might also be the most impressively illustrated book on experimental film history ever published.

18. Deke Dusinberre, for example, observed that in 1976, "the firm base for English film-makers is the art school scene, which turns out young film-makers who are, in the main, naïve to the American tradition." Deke Dusinberre, "St. George in the Forest: The English Avant-Garde," *Afterimage* 6 (1976): 15–16.

19. Contemporary accounts of the early 1970s Co-op often stress that its emphasis on practice and collective dialogue brought it closer to the tradition to Dziga Vertov's laboratory model. See, for example, the citation of a recent talk by William Raban in Curtis, *A History of Artists' Film and Video in Britain*, 30. No scholar has endeavored to cite writings or interviews from the period that might demonstrate an active, conscious effort to engage with this aspect of Soviet culture, however (even Le Grice discussed only Vertov's films as valuable progenitors, never mentioning the lab model). This leaves unanswered the question of whether this particular Vertov connection is being asserted only now, in retrospect.

20. Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video*, 81.

21. Peter Gidal, "Expanded Cinema by Gene Youngblood" (book review), *Art and Artists* 7, no. 9 (December 1972): 53.

22. Deke Dusinberre, "On Expanding Cinema," *Studio International* 190, no. 978 (November/December 1975): 220; emphasis in the original.

23. Curtis's book traces possible points of connection between early cinema and 1970s film. Curtis, *A History of Artists' Film and Video in Britain*, 87–89, 94, 108.

24. Le Grice was the more historically minded of the two, with Gidal rarely looking further back than Warhol's films. In Le Grice's view, the LFMC was improving upon the work of the modernist filmmakers (Man Ray, for example): through their foregrounding of filmic materials and their attempts to generate temporal experiences liberated from the principles of narrative structure, the filmmakers valued by Le Grice and Gidal could be presented as

politically minded formalists who were setting distancing effects in the service of spectatorial demystification and enlightenment. A description of the political context that impacted some of this work is offered by Le Grice in Maxa Zoller with Malcolm Le Grice, "Interview," in *X-Screen: Film Installations and Actions in the 1960s and 1970s*, ed. Matthias Michalka and Museum Moderner Kunst (Austria) (Cologne: Walther König, 2004), 140–141.

25. Deke Dusinberre, "A Perspective on English Avant-Garde Film," in *A Perspective on English Avant-Garde Film*, 7.

26. Curtis, "The Artist's Film/Avant-Garde Film," in *A Perspective on English Avant-Garde Film*, 40.

27. Dusinberre, "See Real Images!" *Afterimage* 8/9 (Spring 1981): 103.

28. Malcolm Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond* (London: Studio Vista, 1977), 118.

29. Guy Sherwin, untitled film notes, in *A Perspective on English Avant-Garde Film*, 79.

30. Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, 130.

31. Curtis, "English Avant-Garde Film," in *The British Avant-Garde Film 1926 to 1995*, 112.

32. Mark Webber, *Shoot Shoot Shoot: British Avant-Garde Film of the 1960s and 1970s*, DVD notes (London: LUX; Paris: Re:Voir, 2006), n.p.

33. Dwoskin, *Film Is*, 179.

34. Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video*, 96.

35. Curtis provides useful introductions to the work of both filmmakers in *A History of Artists' Film and Video in Britain*.

36. The Dwoskin DVDs are being distributed by the Swiss nonprofit organization Les Films du Renard. This set of discs is supposedly the first of three.

37. Frye, "Interview with John Smith," n.p.

38. Mike Leggett, "Generative Systems and the Cinematic Spaces of Film and Installation Art," *Leonardo* 40, no. 2 (June 2007): 123.

39. Mark Webber, "Expanded Cinema Study Collection Proposal" (2006), n.p. Copies are available from Webber by email request: webstar@blueyonder.co.uk.

40. Surprisingly few filmmakers have taken up the skeptical critique of digital video on ontological grounds that one finds in Nicky Hamlyn, *Film Art Phenomena* (London: BFI Publishing, 2003), 9–14. The digital conversion of film comes with losses and gains, and there is something singularly odd about viewing such heavily processed, photochemical films in a format that can offer only "virtual" film grain, for example. Also, art institutions need to take film restoration as seriously as the film archives and distributors do (relying on digital copies as an easy substitute, in lieu of searching for print rental or restoration funds, is inexcusable). But I side with the scholars and archivists who argue that rejecting digital conversion altogether does more harm than good.

41. Gidal, of all people, has provided a sampling of the oral history approach (couched within his usual polemics) in a recent text. See his informative account of the making of his *Upside Down Feature* (1972) in Peter Gidal, "Matter's Time Time for Material" (2004), in *Experimental Film and Video*, ed. Jackie Hatfield (Eastleigh, UK: John Libbey Publishing, 2006), 20–21. Despite its brevity, Gidal's account is far more precise in its discussion of collaborative work and in-house feedback than most texts on the LFMC, which have long been dominated by rhetorical and overly general references to the Co-op's collaborative ethos and its free exchange of ideas.

42. The British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection, a research project led by Curtis at Central St. Martins College of Art and Design, has developed an important online resource, available at <http://www.studycollection.co.uk/>.

43. Paul Della Penna and Jim Shedden, "The Falls," *CineAction!* 9 (Summer 1987): 21. Sitney interprets *The Falls* not as a late or quasi-structural film but as a "cinematic version of the Menippean satire" in his review

article. P. Adams Sitney, "The Falls," *Persistence of Vision* 8 (1990): 45.

44. Hollis Frampton, "A Pentagram for Conjuring the Narrative," in *Circles of Confusion: Film-Photography-Video: Texts 1968-1990* (Rochester, NY: Visual Studies Workshop Press), 66.

45. Sitney, "The Falls," 46. A similar version of this story was also told to me by Annette Michelson in conversation. Michelson claims to have met with Greenaway during that 1984 visit.

46. Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video*, 101. Somewhat polemically, but no less insightfully, Rees parses the differences between the Co-op's model of filmmaking and the Greenaway/Derek Jarman model in this section of his book.