

# PRAXIS

**Praxis Film Development Workshop**  
Praxis is designed to enable Canadian screenwriters, directors and producers to develop their dramatic feature films with the direct assistance of internationally-recognized industry professionals. Our commitment is to innovative low-budget feature films. Projects may enter comprehensive screenwriting workshops in fall or spring sessions, or may apply any time for specific pre-production support — story editing, workshop facilities, consultation with creative advisors, production planning, etc. PRAXIS neither charges fees nor invests in projects; our involvement is arms-length. Applicants must submit a completed first or later draft of their screenplay. **Deadline for the Fall Session is July 14, 1989.** For further information and an application form, call Cath Moody at: PRAXIS, (604) 682-3100 or write:



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Praxis is a program of the Centre for the Arts at Simon Fraser University.

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## On (Experimental) Film

BARBARA STERNBERG

In the November 88 (#157) issue I outlined some issues within feminist film theory and asked what relationship it has to avant-garde film. The next two columns, written by guest columnists Leila Sujir and Catherine Russell, were responses to this question.

Leila answered from a sense of urgency, as she stated in a covering letter to me: 'It seems to me that feminist theory is currently a battleground, disputing, among other notions, postfeminism, and until that ground is sufficiently cleared (a space cleared etc.) the films themselves are not really part of the discussion; and from her column: ... the space created for both feminism and the avant-garde continually needs to be reasserted. With this as her imperative, she made connections between feminist theory and experimental film as being spaces for difference, spaces for questioning, and, citing Kaja Silverman, as the possibility of a resistant and oppositional agency to mainstream (patriarchal) culture'.

Catherine Russell seems, in her response, to have equated experimental/counter-culture with inexpensive or low-budget, with small and/or difficult and with ghettoized or of interest to small audiences. She suggests the possibility of larger budgets and broader audiences for films that nonetheless maintain themselves as 'alternative'. She warns of the danger, however, of slipping into its (minor cinema's) own marginal hegemony, threatened by the ever-present temptation of enacting new definitions of unity and coherence. Thus she calls for less concern with defining and maintaining rigid categories and suggests that there is room in this country for lots of different kinds of films.

Neither response really answered my question. If feminist theory was only calling for non-narrative or disrupted narrative in opposition to mainstream, then wasn't that already happening in avant-garde film? Why is avant-garde film not included within feminist film discussions, not even feminist/female experimental filmmakers? Why has the a-g been called 'male'? How does avant-garde film relate to issues of pleasure, gaze, pre-Oedipal readings, chora etc? Can't I for example, be both? Why are we not greater allies? a call to which I read, in some way, in Catherine Russell's article.

I cannot really agree with the characterizations she made, but her conclusions, particularly formulated in her question: 'Why is the 'experimental' in the title of this column in brackets?', brought me back to the first column I wrote in which I discussed the problems of this nomenclature. I suggested other possibilities: 'innovative', 'advanced' or '( )' film, only to be queried by a friend: 'Why any name? Why not just film? Why not B's films and leave it at that?' Yet Leila, Catherine and I all attested to the usefulness educators, critics, curators and distributors make of definitions and categories — and to the dangers of limits, hegemony, canon exclusivity that these same distinctions bring. I seem to be back where I started from, still asking questions — a good place to end.

**Doina Popescu** of the Goethe Institute, Toronto, has, for the second year, made the pre-selection for the prestigious Oberhausen Short Film Festival. Included amongst those she has submitted are: **Richard Kerr's** *The Last Days of Contrition*, **Chuck Clarke's** *8 Frames/Second*, **Barb Sternberg's** *Tending Towards the Horizontal*, **Lisa Miles' Hiroki**, **Stephen Butson's Isis**, **Tim River's Frame of Mine**, **Roy Cross' Thru the Looking** and **Andrea Sadler's The Red Shoes** from Montreal.

*Moving Images*, TVO's half-hour program originated and directed by **Richard Johnson** which shows experimental film, video and computer generated work, is on the air for its second year. Up to 20 from the original 10-part series, it can be seen Tuesdays at 10:30 pm and Sundays at 4:00 pm. That's the good news. The bad is that TVO doesn't seem to put much stock in the program if one judges from how infrequently (never?) they advertise it on their network and from rumours that it may not be produced for a third season. So — write to TVO — let them know you're out there watching — you want more — and why the hell are they keeping this wonderful program a secret?!? The letters do make a difference.

### Experimental Film everywhere this spring

Three shows in Halifax organized by **David Miller**; three exhibitions in Calgary organized by **Marcella Bienvenue**, two series of three screenings at AKA and Neutral Ground in Regina organized by **Richard Kerr**; an exhibition: 'Documentary in Ruins' at Island Media Arts and NSCAD; in the USA, shows at Berks Filmmakers, Philadelphia and Millennium, New York. Hurray and good work, **Mike Hoolboom!**

Big Experimental Film Doings scheduled for May 28 — June 4 in Toronto. The International Experimental Film Congress focuses attention on experimental film from Britain, Europe, USA, Canada, Latin America and the Philippines in a series of curated screenings and on panels. The Congress centers its discussions on the burning issue of the first panel: Cinema's Phoenix: Death or Resurrection of Experimental Film? Certainly there is work being made — lots of it, to which 10 programs of recent work will attest. So does this question become: Is it avant-garde and what can this mean today? Will a new name be found? What is in a name? Is there an experimental film movement and is it continuing? In what directions? Will this Congress be the place for Catherine Russell's response/call/undefinitions (or should I say a-definitions) to find acceptance? Whatever it may or may not see accomplished, the International Experimental Film Congress will be an occasion for filmmakers and film enthusiasts to congregate and for this filmwork to see light. Plan to attend! For registration and information contact **Jim Shedden**, co-ordinator, c/o Innis College, 2 Sussex Avenue, Toronto, Ontario.

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