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John Berger's Revolutionary Narratives

This paper addresses how the intellectual, aesthetic and technical innovations of the 1960s permeated film culture of Britain in the 1970s by examining connections between John Berger's art criticism, fiction and filmmaking. Berger's work from this period is also oppositional in aesthetic and political terms.

Berger's Booker Prize-winning, experimental novel *G.* (1972) is fundamentally concerned with Berger's interpretations of Cubism (1965 and 1969) and it can be defined as a Literary Cubist novel. But, unlike most art historians, Berger ascribes stylistic and political significance to the revolutionary nature of Cubism, which he calls 'the only example of dialectical materialism in painting'. His novel is as much an attempt to formulate a Marxist modernist narrative in Britain, as it is an example of Literary Cubism. *G.* explores the liberating, subversive power of sexuality, and this revolutionary transformation in the sexual realm is metaphorically related to freedom from oppression in other areas, which evokes the 1967 Dialectics of Liberation conference. Revolutionary themes and dialectical structures are likewise present in the films that Berger made with Alain Tanner: *The Salamander* (1971), *The Middle of the World* (1974), *Jonah, who will be 25 in the Year 2000* (1976). Tanner's involvement in Free Cinema in Britain during the 1950s and Berger's participation in Franco-Swiss culture in the 1960s are evident in their concern with the relationship between British film culture and European political-aesthetic debates.