
The Jarman Award: James Mackay on Derek Jarman

James Mackay worked closely as producer and collaborator with Derek Jarman throughout the 1980s. He was Cinema Programmer at the London Filmmaker's Co-op in the 1970s, and programmed for Edinburgh and Berlin film festivals. He continues to work as a film curator, including programmes for Cambridge Film Festival, and recent work as producer includes projects with Hannah Collins and Lynn Hershman-Leeson. <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0533168/bio> Earlier this year he worked with X New York on an installation presentation of Jarman's early Super 8 films <http://x-initiative.org/blog/2009/03/07/derek-jarman-early-films-super-8mm/>

The first I heard about Derek was at an exhibition of Expanded Cinema at the ICA in 1974 <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/researchservices/archive/icaarchive/history/70s.shtm>. They were showing a three screen version of *In the Shadow of the Sun*. I first met Derek much later, at the London Film-makers Coop in the late 70's. I invited him to show some of the many S8m films that he'd made. That night he showed some 20 films, projecting them himself on two small Bolex projectors that he'd brought with him and accompanying them with a selection of music off commercial audio cassettes – like a DJ really – he kept the audience enthralled for almost three hours.

During the prep for the show we had discussed the merits and disadvantages of working in S8mm, especially the problem of fragility. When I met him again it was mainly to talk about preservation of the S8mm films. At the time he was also very excited about the two features that he had in development – *Caravaggio* and *Neutron* – reading aloud each revision each time we met. Using my contacts in Europe, I was able to raise funding to have a 16mm negative made from the S8mm original of *In the Shadow of the Sun* (1974). This was Derek's first opus magnum - the result of four years of filming and creating many layered composites.

As we spent more time together I was slowly drawn into the production process, from script consultant to development producer on *Caravaggio*. However, as *Caravaggio* was proving difficult to get off the ground and Derek would never allow himself to be idle, he continued to work with the more accessible medium of S8mm. *TG Psychic Rally in Heaven* (1981)

<http://blog.sfmoma.org/2008/11/derek-jarman-throbbing-gristle-tg-psychic-rally-in-heaven/> was the first film conceived to be shot on 8mm but completed on a more distributable format. In this case 16mm. This was followed by a series of films mixing 8mm and 16mm. Our first foray into large scale production started during a session at the ICA, where we were preparing a selection of Derek's early 8mm films for a run in the cinema by transferring them to video. We did this by projecting them on a white wall and re-filming them with a video camera. Half way through the second day we started to get a bit bored with the process and began to experiment with a large tarnished mirror and the projectionist, Steve Radnall. Derek projected the image on to Steve and the mirror whilst filming the scene with the video camera. This was an exciting new departure. The material that we filmed that day was the first step in making *The Angelic Conversation*.
<http://seul-le-cinema.blogspot.com/2009/06/films-i-love-34-angelic-conversation.html>

With Agfa selling off its colour stock - £2.50 for a cartridge including processing - it was decided that our new project should be something more ambitious than a short. The combination of low cost of the stock and Derek's preferred shooting speed of 6fps meant that a little went a long way. There were to be two central characters. Derek had met Paul Reynolds at *The Bell*
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9_2jeYb3Vo in King's Cross and I somehow found Phillip Williamson. The idea was to create a free form love poem with these two young men at its centre.

Gradually over that summer, we filmed the sequences for the new work. As our resources were very limited - neither of us had any real income at that time - we could only afford to film for one or two days at a time. Derek chose all the locations. I devised the smoke and flares. Ken Bolton or another friend would drive - we could only go as four with driver, Derek, myself leaving only room for one of the principal actors on each location shoot! The only time they were filmed together was for the bed scene in Derek's Charing Cross Road flat.

Other scenes, with extras, were filmed in the ICA Cinematheque. A video sequence was filmed in Derek's flat. After each shoot the film was sent off for processing. As soon as it came back we would borrow a U-matic recorder from the BFI on the other side of Charing Cross Road and video the films off the wall. It all sounds a bit amateurish but we were deadly serious.

Having completed filming in the late summer of 1984 we began to edit using a simple two deck VHS system. About this time, Derek, being greatly annoyed that Channel 4 (which had just started) were funding Peter Greenaway to make a series of shorts from Dante's Divine Comedy, but had completely ignored him. He was petitioning them with the idea of making a series of shorts based on Shakespeare's sonnets when it dawned on him that it would be an even better idea to combine the sonnets and The Angelic Conversation.

At the same time we had done some tests blowing up to 35mm to see how the images would stand up. The first couple were ropey indeed. Then we met Fred Weinal from Colour Film Services lab and he put the material through the new machine that he'd built and that worked. Manfred Salzgeber invited us to show the film at the Berlin Film Festival the following year.

The Angelic Conversation isn't a home movie that became a feature - rather it's a feature conceived and made using home movie technology. 58mm gave us access to the tools of cinema despite the fact that we were both flat broke.

There was an air of anarchy to London in the early 80's. Thatcher was running rough shod over our culture. We had sentimental drivel such as Chariots of Fire in our cinemas. The gay press was more reactionary than the right wing newspapers. But the music was good.

While waiting for the money to come through to finish Angelic we made Imagining October (1984), a 27 minute meditation on state censorship and repression which recently ran for eight weeks as an installation at Tate Britain.
<http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/lightboxderekjarman/default.shtm> This was made in the same way as Angelic but much faster - we only had six weeks to make it before it was to be shown at the 1984 London Film Festival - but we managed it and got the first print back from the lab on the morning of the screening. Sitting in the Lumiere Cinema on St Martin's Lane we were so apprehensive I could hear both our hearts beat. We were really pleased it worked. It was what we wanted, we'd seized the means of production. Cinema was ours.

There was a wind of change at BFI Production and less tolerance of experiment. They wanted to do a film with Derek, but on their terms. It was still fun, but coming

from an art school background, the kind of costume drama that Caravaggio was becoming didn't really interest me; I wanted something more contemporary, more urgent.

So we made *The Last of England* - just Derek and me and our friends. We paid for the shoot ourselves out of money that we had raised by making music videos for The Smiths and the Pet Shop Boys. Only after we shot and edited it did we look for money to make the 35mm print and pay for the music. We made it under the auspices of someone else's company. That turned into a slightly steep learning curve but fortunately I had a good lawyer! Anyway it's still my favourite film!

After that I set up my own company which produced *The Garden* and *Blue* and enabled Derek and I to have complete control - and ownership. *Blue* was surprisingly hard to finance; although the budget was quite small - around £90k - people had difficulty getting their heads around the idea. A blank screen. Some just laughed. But Derek was right and it worked splendidly.

I guess the most fun we had was in the early days when we made *Angelic Conversation* - four people: Derek, me and the two cast members. And lots of other films and things between 1979 and 1986 when we were on the outside not even remotely interested in being on the inside. Derek was a great man, generous, kind, and a second father to me.

On his death in 1994, Derek bequeathed his entire archive of Super8 films to me. The archive is comprised of all the personal film work that Derek made between 1970 and 1983 and containing over 60 individual titles which were filmed and edited by Jarman.

As I previously explained, Super 8mm film was Derek Jarman's primary medium in the 70's. The archive consists of original 8mm reversal films - where the reel of film that actually passed through the camera is edited and projected. In addition to completed films, the archive also contains a substantial amount of diary footage and edit cuts which Derek compiled into 12 volumes entitled *It Happened by Chance* - Reels I to XII.

Over the past 14 years I have dedicated a considerable amount of time to conserving and promoting this work. Some images can be seen in Isaac Julien's film Derek <http://www.derekthemovie.com/> and the work continues to be seen, with screenings and installations at venues such as the Serpentine, Kunsthalle Zurich, Ballerina Cinema of Dreams, Kunsthalle Wein, X New York and Tate to mention a few.