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A Queer Collaboration: Derek Jarman and Keith Collins

Keith Collins interviewed by Dr Jim Brogden at Brasserie Zédel, London on the 21st November 2013.

ABSTRACT

This verbatim interview transcript recognizes the significant contribution made by Keith Collins (aka "H.B") to the radical queer visual art practice of Derek Jarman, the mercurial English polymath and *enfant terrible* of British cinema. In many ways, Collins was Jarman's artistic 'muse', erudite companion, fellow gardener, and passionate carer during Jarman's final years suffering with AIDS. As the subsequent custodian of Prospect Cottage and garden until his own death from a brain tumor in 2018 (hence the deferred publication) and "torchbearer" for Jarman's artistic legacy and archive, Collins' devotion has been largely overlooked by British art culture, and beyond. To contest this apparent neglect, the interview seeks to resituate and celebrate, a unique example of queer collaboration and friendship between Derek Jarman and Keith Collins, referred to by Bruce Webber as the "greatest love story". To vivify these aims, the following hitherto unpublished transcript reveals unique insights and vivid recollections based on Collins' life with Jarman from 1987 until Jarman's death from AIDS in 1994. Moreover, the Collins interview provides a series of candid historical reflections informed by "lived experience", from which to re-examine the legacy of a particular English queer artistic milieu during a tumultuous period in British socio-cultural life. After much reflection, now seems to be an appropriate time to release this engaging and increasingly poignant reminder of Collins' forgotten contribution to the work of Jarman, his unselfish devotion to another's creative ambition and artistic legacy.

KEYWORDS

Derek Jarman; Keith Collins; Collaboration; Queer; Interview; Gay Art; Film; The Garden; Prospect Cottage

Interviewee: Keith Collins

Interviewer: Jim Brogden

Date of Interview: 21st November 2013

Location of Interview: Brasserie Zédel, London

List of Acronyms: KC=Keith Collins, JB=Interviewer

[Keith Collins and Jim Brogden meet outside Brasserie Zédel for lunch. To “break the ice” Brogden acknowledges his surprise at actually meeting Hinney Beast (“HB”) from the Jarman diaries].

JB: Did you ever keep a diary yourself.¹ Because you are quite a raconteur yourself.

KC: I didn't keep a diary. I did take photographs. But [pauses] I took ridiculous photographs. We went to the Chelsea Hotel - which is a shithole.² Met this guy there – he was playing the piano, some opera [I photographed] a dripping tap with black and white film a grainy dripping tap. I didn't photograph the guy. If only I had photographed the guy.

JB: Was he a jazz pianist?

KC: No, in the late seventies he was going to be the next David Bowie.

JB: Was it Jobriath?³

KC: Yeah, they were saying: Beethoven, Mozart, Jobriath. And he was with Derek Lee - one of Derek's closest friends.⁴ And went to meet the film maker [French photographer] Cartier Bresson. I think I photographed his carpet instead of him [pause]. If only I had photographed the people instead of the details.

JB: The stories are quite poignant.

KC: Yes [pause], I should have photographed the people. It's a mistake.

JB: Have you seen *A Bigger Splash* the movie?⁵

KC: Yeah.

JB: The story of how that film came to be made is hilarious. Jack Hazan asking [David Hockney] for just another five minutes of filming. It's a wonderful document of London in the late 60s.

KC: Yes, dear David, he's embroiled in all that scandal at the moment.⁶

I don't think he'll ever come back to England- very sordid, very nasty, don't think he'll come back.

JB: Pity, thought he [Hockney] looked a lot happier [on returning to Bridlington].

KC: We had a *cameraworks* once, slipped through our hands, five polaroids on the back saying "but for enjoyment not for investment" - we read that, and thought oh.⁷ Yes, the paintings that have slipped through our grasp - quite funny. We had a couple of Gilbert and George at one state.⁸

JB: Gilbert and George, they are very aloof, aren't they? In "real life" are they regular guys?

KC: They're regular guys.

JB: Do they let the façade slip at all?

KC: Never. It's an act. Stop doing the act and it doesn't work anymore.

JB: The Englishness?

KC: Yes, the Englishness, yeah, they were very kind when Derek was quite ill. Dave Robilliard [and] two assistants who worked for them, and who were incredibly kind and generous.⁹ I tried writing very recently about [pause] because there's not much written about the time when everyone was dying, that horrible time, when you just get to know someone and then they die on you, and there was that horrible time when you'd meet people - think: I'm sure there's a bit in the diary where it says just me and the ugly people left, because you'd meet people and think your fantastic, fun, and Derek always lamented that the people who would go out and have casual sex were usually the free-thinkers, and were the artists, and that whole generation of those people were going to be wiped out...¹⁰

JB: It's quite Hardy-esque [in the diaries] his [Jarman's] references to "the Heath"?¹¹

Because I've only got certain insights. I'm heterosexual, but I appreciate male beauty. But these journeys to the Heath [Hampstead Heath, London]?

KC: He [Jarman] loved it there. I only, I went twice there: once with Derek, and once with my friend Gerrard, and we completely took the piss out of it, which for Derek was like we were laughing in church, and we just screamed, we clutched each other, because it was hilarious, it was ridiculous, you'd be walking around a forest in the dark, tripping over roots and things, and then some man's arm would emerge wearing some black leather policeman's hat and uniform, with his cock out! And we would just scream saying "stop! Stop! Stop!" And you'd turn some corner and there'd be people sodimizing each other. There are bars now where you don't need this anymore.

JB: Is it the *en plein air*?

KC: On a summer's night, I used to write this magazine called *Square Peg* and edit it.¹² And we went up there one night during the Aids crisis to say: "look don't be having casual sex again" - with a tea tray we'd go around interrupting people saying: "tea? Coffee? Custard cream?" Just to spoil the moment. And I'd often spoil Derek's moment by putting perfume in his [unknown as recording inaudible] Or Ralgex in his KY.¹³ Very naughty, very mischievous of me. And he [Jarman] said at the time on a summer's night there would be a thousand people up there. More than a night club. To some extent, because he was famous, he couldn't go to a bar and get casual sex, so he'd go up there and have casual sex, which would be safe sex.

JB: Did you find it erotic up there?

KC: No absolutely not! I found it terrifying. You just couldn't see what you were getting, there'd be some penis, and you'd think where's that been five minutes ago? One of my friends went up there, who's in the diaries - he's still alive, and he stripped off. So, he's walking about in his underpants and shoes, He'd piled his clothes under a bush, and when he went back, someone had wiped his arse on his tee shirt. So as the sun is rising, he thought well: what am I gonna do? I can't walk back into town with my tee shirt on. So, he washed it in the pond that's there. Hung it on a tree to dry, went out to have more casual sex, then put it on slightly damp, and walked home. Compared to this sex life, I feel completely boring. I'm strictly 'vanilla', as I used to describe myself, just to completely conflate the two terms.

JB: Did Derek tell you I'm just going to walk the Heath tonight?

KC: Derek would get a taxi [pauses]. I've got a great sex story to tell you, but I'm just going to quickly mention the Heath; apparently now, it's empty. No one goes there at all. Because technology's intervened, there are web sites where you type in your age, what you're looking for, and sadly, and it matches you with exactly what you're looking for.

JB: Is it Grind [*Grindr*]?¹⁴

KC: I don't do such things.

JB: Stephen Fry mentioned it.¹⁵

KC: It's a gay detector. But it takes away all the randomness, and mystique because ... you find out about compatibility, what they like to do in bed, what their penis is like...

JB: It's quite up front?

KC: It's very upfront! It's a horrendously upfront. So that's stopped the Heath. But this is a great sex story from Derek: when he was terribly ill in hospital, I think it was the trip before his final stay in hospital, he said to me once: "do you think people in this ward slip into each other's bedrooms, they have separate bedrooms here, to have sex with each other, at night, when it's quiet?" I thought that was the most disgusting thought I'd ever heard. I've never been so...I can't think of anything more disgusting [then Jarman replies:] "I do."

I was cleaning him [Jarman] in the bath, and I noticed his penis, it was sore, so I phoned the hospital and said: "look, I think [Derek] might have picked up an opportunistic infection, it's a bit sore," [the hospital replied:] "oh, he's got gonorrhoea – didn't you know?" Well, I said: "where the hell *did* he get that?" [the hospital replied:] "Well we thought you'd know?" [KC replies:] "Well he certainly didn't get it here!" And he [Jarman] contracted gonorrhoea on an Aids ward. And in the middle of the night, these people hanging on to life, bits dropping off them, sneaking into each other's rooms and fucking – can you imagine it? ¹⁶

JB: There's a real life-force there?

KC: Oh yeah, what a drive. It'd be winter – November. Derek would be out of hospital, just recovering, from about pneumonia, or TB or something, off down the Heath in the freezing cold – that drive, just one last fuck! Because on that trip, I know I'm going to meet the man with the biggest cock ever, you're not, you know? But that astonishing...[pauses].

JB: A trophy?

KC: There is a bit at the end of *Dancing Ledge* [published 1993] where [Jarman] talks about being in *Heaven* where this man pulls out, quite graphic, the biggest, thickest penis he's ever seen, and one by one, he brings off these men - drop your pants and wait for it.¹⁷ And I spoke to Shaun [Allen] the editor [of *Dancing Ledge*], and Shaun said: at the end of this "we cut it out" of the actual text, it says "and he finally took me [Jarman]". So, Derek was the last conquest. So, Derek [pauses] that was edited out. Well, I thought that's quite interesting. Anyway, I'm sorry. I could talk about Aids forever. It was the grimmest time ever. You did see a lot of fantastic people, with astonishing intellect and ideas, fantastic musicians, would just be, and in those days, you'd fall ill one day, go into hospital on a Tuesday, and a month later you'd be dead. They wouldn't have a drug. They wouldn't do anything. The hell of it is that's coming back – there are multi drug-related strains of HIV. People have unprotected sex because they think it's a curable disease now [inaudible] and transmit strains. I was talking to Dr Mike Newall, Head of Immunology at St Thomas', and he said that it's just like the early days of HIV now. People present, serial converting, and you can't do anything for them. I know an artist, and one of her pupils, twenty-one, died recently. Can't be sexually active that long - can he? If he started at fourteen...no, he said he was a virgin when he came to University. So, nineteen, and two years later he was dead. So, it hasn't stopped. So, just going through the horror of that [pauses] the guy I'm picking up from New York - we've been friends for thirty years. I can't believe that I've known a gay man... and every time I meet him, I say: "we've known each other for over thirty years, and we're still alive! It's a miracle, how did we do it?" And it's a mystery to us how we did it. And God, it's coming back [Aids]. Sorry questions, yes, I've prattled on about HIV. It's dull.

JB: In my original letter to you I did write that I thought that your relationship with Derek, and from someone living in the north of England, I thought that it was a fantastic love story. One of the greatest English love stories.

KC: Someone else called it that - Bruce Weber.¹⁸ Bruce Weber described it as that, and afterwards, if Derek and I had the tiniest disagreement, Derek would shout out: "oh, it's the greatest ever love

story!" Oh yeah, all the time he would trot it out, as a diffusing quote. And because Bruce Weber had said it, that meant something. The greatest love story in English history [both KC and JB laugh]. It was a love story, definitely; I've still got all of Derek's love letters. But oddly, my letters to him are in the BFI archive, I found out about two and half months ago...So questions? ¹⁹

JB: I've got some [opens A4 sheet with questions].

KC: I need to retrieve those love letters. They don't belong in the BFI. It's a mistake really.

JB: These questions now seem quite banal in relation to your previous reflections

KC: It's okay, don't worry.

JB: To provide a context, I see myself as a champion of Derek's work – a northern outpost - a champion of Derek's work for around 25 years, both in Sheffield and Leeds.²⁰ I discuss his work with many photographers and young filmmakers, and I mention the relevance of the cottage and the garden [*Prospect Cottage* situated in Dungeness, on the Kent coast], and they've [the students] never heard of Derek. What's going on? So, I mention Derek's contribution and yours.

KC: Next year's going to be a big year. There's going to be a lot of publicity next year.²¹

JB: Your to-camera-piece on the gardening programme [pauses] and I wanted to find out what Keith looked like...you did really well in the garden documentary. And I know that you're a private person, but I wanted to know your view or perspective on the legacy [Jarman's place in British culture] in which Derek has been subsumed. And his very individual spirit you and Derek achieved in the cottage and your life together. We've lost that kind of passion; and living life like a Walt Whitman poem – really Romantic. And I think that my job is to celebrate that. The cottage has become a site of pilgrimage. How do you view the cottage as your home and this new venerated site?

KC: It's my beautiful millstone. So, it's full of Derek, and it would have been very odd after Derek died to strip it of Derek, because there's a bit of me there as well. And it would have been very difficult to strip all of Derek out of it, because it was full of him. So, it's always had that kind of

[pauses] it's not a mausoleum, but it's also that kind of feel, if you weren't around when Derek was around, you go in and think it's a museum to Derek. But it's full of bits we had just lying around.

JB: And your impact on the space [Prospect Cottage]?

KC: Nil.

JB: But you're a garden designer, you did garden design?

KC: My impact on the interiors [pauses to reflect] that has changed quite a bit: the books behind glass, because we had a terrible problem with theft. So, I built some glass cupboards. It's pretty much as it was.

JB: And that was your decision?

KC: Yeah, what was I going to do? Fill it with Ikea furniture? Carpets and? It pretty much worked as it was. When people come, they can't believe I actually live there. They say: "where's your stuff?" There's a lot of CDs there. And there's about three pairs of trousers and tee shirts. All the stuff you really need. A few books.

JB: Was Derek more a collector of *objets trouvés* than you?

KC: We both were.

JB: When Derek talks about you in the books [especially *Modern Nature* and *Smiling in Slow Motion*], you have these a kind of monastic qualities that you've got, where you are trying to create some order for these objects of delight that he brings, you seem to oh my, here we are [interjection by KC] ²²

KC: I'll file it under that.

JB: Yes, you're doing all the 'spade work' it seems.

KC: Yeah, a lot of gardening is essentially about that. The garden at Dungeness is a lot about organizing things you just find on the beach scattered and concentrating them in one place. It's very much what happens there. I'll send you the piece I wrote for the garden article.²³ I think I touched on it there, but it's a concentration and an up-ending through ninety degrees.

JB: The great precision in the writing when you write the epigraph [epitaph] for Stephen Farthing's book. You use language about the garden which is very precise.²⁴

KC: It looks random [the garden] but when you inspect it close, the plan is very precise. I feel there is a terrible responsibility on me, because people turn up from all over the world. I've had people from New Zealand or Japan. And, if they turn up and there's nothing there, falling to bits, or decrepit, it's a disappointment for them. I was in Shipley's [London bookstore] once, and a woman came round browsing and said: "Derek Jarman's garden, I was down there the other day, and it's completely ruined." But it was January! And Shipley [the bookstore owner] just looked at me, and I looked at him, and we both just smirked. Of course, it's ruined, there's nothing. You can't just go there and expect roses blossoming in January. I struggle and keep it as best as I can.

JB: Did you manage to grow Sea Holly?

KC: Yes, we grow it very well [the garden]. So that for me is a responsibility. I feel I must

JB: In many ways, you are the unofficial custodian. I find it very selfless.

KC: Someone said that I had recently been nominated for an MBE for tourism. Which of course, I'm one of those people who would say: no thanks. I wouldn't accept any honor like a knighthood. I'm very against them. Derek was dead against them. The nominee was anonymous, and I'm not doing it for tourism. I hate tourists.

JB: Would you prefer privacy?

KC: Oh yeah.

JB: Would you like the garden to go back to shingle, to gradually fade?

KC: I think the danger with the garden is you let it become decrepit, to become a sad parody of itself, or you destroy it overnight. I quite like the overnight destruction aspect to it: just put boards around it, a giant van turns up, if you announced you were going to destroy it everyone who reads *The Guardian* [newspaper] would be down the next day salvaging bits to sell on Ebay, which would be really annoying. It already happens. I have already had to buy things from the garden on Ebay.

JB: You get trophy hunters coming down?

KC: Yeah. They take something then they see, oh, Dungeness, 'Derek Jarman's Garden' – thanks, that's mine, I don't have to buy that.

JB: So, the way in which the garden is treated reflects the time in which we live now?

KC: Yeah. There was a time when Derek had his bathtub in the garden, as just a piece of art.

JB: What future do you see for the garden, and in what ways do you preserve the ethos of the garden that you both established?

KC: The future [pauses] I think, I'll send you the thing I wrote for the garden Jim. That will help you a great deal. I think Derek [was] somehow a bower bird [Bird of Paradise preparing a display?] making this thing to attract people to him, [he was] quite showy of the garden. But there was the most tragic bit in the diaries is a line that says the garden has failed - he's been growing all these ancient herbs, and he's trying to treat himself and he falls terribly ill.

JB: It's in *Modern Nature*.²⁵

KC: Yes, it's the saddest thing ever, because he invested all his hope. It may be through these things, and having them flower, having a future to look forward, to protect himself. So, there's that sadness there.

JB: You referred to it [the garden] as an oasis?²⁶

KC: Yeah, the odd thing that's happened. When we moved there [Prospect Cottage, Dungeness] the old lady who lived there said, Derek said; "is it tough to grow?"

I've never seen one of those before...and as the beach has grown – long-shore drift, the plants have moved with them. So, what used to be scrub out the back, sorry, in the garden...so the idea was to have an oasis in the desert. But now I'm continually pulling weeds, trying to have a desert in the middle of a meadow. So, the thing is, when people knock on the door and say: "is that house open?"

JB: It's a public building?

KC: It's a public space. Peering through the windows all the time, trudging around – on midsummer's day they'll be people there at four thirty in the morning waiting for sunrise – a cheap Stonehenge, then people leave the pub at eleven thirty [pm] then have trudge around with a torch, so it's not ideal. People's kids screaming. Dogs yapping. All that stuff. It's hard to concentrate there.

JB: You're very tolerant?

KC: I'm fairly, 95% tolerant. The thing is, if people knock on the door and say: "is it open?" I say no. But if I see someone wandering around and they came a long way, I'll invite them in.

JB: That's very generous.

KC: In a perverse way. If they want to be in, I won't let them in, and if they don't want to be let in, I'll let them in.

JB: The story of the Japanese tourist in particular, and the correlation between the Zen garden and the shingle?

KC: Yeah, they [the Japanese] really get it. And they get his films. There's a word for it in Japanese, which eludes me at the moment, when things are at their most perfect when, just before they're destroyed.²⁷ And that's why they love Cherry blossom. It's just at its most perfect the split second before it falls off the tree. And they love those films where Derek has his beautiful young men in and are perfect just before they die.

JB: You're in quite a few films, aren't you?

KC: Yeah. Sometimes accidentally, sometimes not so.

JB: Do you think for some allegorical reasons Derek would choose to relocate to England's only 'desert'?

KC: No. The only reason he relocated there was we were travelling down to film a bluebell wood, and Derek had been down before filming videos for Bob Geldof.²⁸ So, he knew Dungeness. One of the pop videos had shots of the nuclear power station, with clouds flying over the top, to put as a backdrop to Bob Geldof's.²⁹ I know that sounds weird but...

JB: A green screen thing?

KC: Yeah. Bizarre. But...

JB: No subtext of a nuclear bomb?

KC: No. I'm friends with Bob now, but at the time I was very fraught, and erm, so he knew Dungeness well; and [he] said [Jarman] as we were driving to it: "there's a little house here, black with yellow windows, and if it's ever for sale, I'll have to buy it." Until there's a sign up saying for sale [KC says to Jarman] "Well you're going to have to buy it". And we kind of pushed him to buy it. The other thing was [the] driving distance from London. We could drive there. So, it wasn't like having a place in Scotland, Newcastle. Any way, you could on a whim, get to Dungeness. And it was cheap. Because a house in the South East then was ridiculously expensive. And I think the cottage cost £32,000, which in the 80s was quite a lot. Because a flat in London then was £80,000, which now would be four million of course. So, it was inexpensive. Had a lot of rooms, was in a kind of outsider place: he [Jarman] liked the outsider-ness of it. Liked the notion that he had discovered it - which he hadn't. He thought he'd be the first artist to find it, but he really wasn't the first artist – but he liked that notion that he'd discovered this mysterious place no one else had found.

JB: A bit like the artists' colony in St Ives [Cornwall], or Staithees [North Yorkshire coast]?

KC: It has turned into that. It has turned into an artists' colony. A millionaires' colony it's turned in to now. The artists are leaving, and the millionaires are moving in.

JB: Would you regard the move to the cottage as an extension of the artistic practice? I think the whole move as part of his work in a way. Unlike Hockney going to Los Angeles.

KC: I think when you reach a certain age, and I'm reaching the age when Derek moved to Dungeness, London does pale a bit. You don't really want to be going out to bars, clubs, and everything, you do appreciate a bit of quietude, and I think that appealed to him. He would always turn his life into his work. So, I think it went the other way round, that he didn't think I'm going to have this pastoral work, I think he moved to Dungeness and made the pastoral work subsequent to that.

JB: Do you see his work as a continuation of the work such as [Samuel] Palmer and William Blake? That English tradition of the artist as the outsider, discovering a new kind of Romantic trope?

KC: Yeah...very much so, I think there is a School of British art that's been missing from the art history: that's English pastoralism, late 80s, early 90s. Derek had done all these beautiful little landscapes down there: very thick paint, very bright colours. The cottage is full of them, and their quite exquisite, and really do fit in with this whole school that people seem to have missed. There was a lot of that going on at the time.

JB: Do you know Philip Wilson Steer's work [1860-1942]?

KC: Afraid I don't.

JB: He worked in Southwold and Walberswick [in Suffolk]. And you've got the same elegiac fascination with the atmospheric conditions [in landscapes]. Just a question for your Keith: which aspects of Derek's work now - since twenty-years have elapsed, do you find the most compelling?

KC: Oh lord, [long pause] I think the writing is particularly good in *Dancing Ledge* [1984]- the one I wasn't involved with [both KC and JB laugh]. The writing is really good, and I think will last. The odd thing is there's just been an exhibition of paintings at [Waddington's] [pause] it's on at the moment. And the paintings look very fresh and now. That's the odd thing. I haven't seen them, haven't smelt them in twenty-five years. The flat used to stink of black oil paint, linseed, and laundry products. And laundry products because Derek would paint these paintings in black paint, put glass on them, and smash the glass, hand them on the walls to dry, and overnight these bits of broken glass would flop off. The sheets would be permanently covered in black oil paint. So, we were permanently boiling

these sheets, and people would come round and say it smells crazy like oil paint and Wisk - which is something you would clean the sheets with. So, the paintings I think I would have previously probably said maybe the paintings should just vanish, and people won't appreciate them – be very much of their age, and think of them as a curiosity, but it seems that they are very now, and people, they've been quite a few sales.

JB: The black paintings embedded with objects?

KC: Yeah, they're black paintings.

JB: Derek's obsession with Pasolini – the blackness?³⁰ Richard Salmon [art dealer] prefers the earlier paintings - the quiet paintings, the earlier landscapes.³¹

KC: Yeah.

JB: What, are your future aims? You've got responsibility for this selfless preservation of the cottage and garden, and you being the spokesperson for Derek's memory?

KC: I don't like to the thought of that. I don't like the idea of being some kind of spokesperson for Derek. I'm really glad for Tony's biography.³² He often takes that responsibility from me - and does the chats like that. I do see a lot of people because I think now the - to get a PhD you need access to original material. And so, I see a lot of PhD students, turning up wanting an interview, or access to texts. So, I...

JB: [interjects] So would you relinquish the role of custodian, the archivist, the curator?

KC: The BFI [British Film Institute] do have a lot of the sketchbooks – and very well. I tried to give away all of the remaining works to the British Library, and they wouldn't take them because they don't take photography. It's too hard to curate them. I think they might have changed their policy on that. And I have no firm future plans. Isn't that terrible?

JB: That's great [both KC and JB laugh].

KC: No, it's terrible. Or it's a dereliction of duty, because I should have set up by now some kind of trust that maintains the cottage, and my pension goes into it, in case I'm blown-up by Al-Qaida driving my train [London Underground train].

JB: But it's your home isn't it?

KC: It is my home, but if Al-Qaida blew me up today, it would be a terrible mess.

JB: Stephen Farthing mentioned that you had been in conversation with the National Trust?³³ The audience responded really well to your response, that: "as soon as you remove fox-hunting from your land, I may consider it."

KC: Yeah, Sir John Birt [former Director-General of the BBC, b.1944] turned up – he'd got the John Lennon's birthplace given to the National Trust, and they were interested, but they want a gift. They won't buy your house from you. They expect a present. And it also has to be self-sustaining financially. So, they want to turn your house into a tea-room. Flogging tea towels, and things like that. And my neighbours said: "if you give your house to the National Trust, we will burn it down." Because they were getting a bit sick of all the tourists. And the National Trust would deliberately attract tourists, which I don't publicise the garden. So, there's that aspect. At the time, I was furious with them for allowing foxhunting on their land, and, I said, well, if I'm going to give away a house - I'm going to give it to a fisherman.

JB: That's lovely.

KC: It was a fisherman's house, maybe it should be a fisherman's house again. Fishermen aren't stupid. If I gave it to a fisherman, they'd say: "oh" someone's given me a house. It's worth half a million now - I'll flog it. And I'll flog it to the National Trust [laughs]. So, it's a stupid thing to do, but...

JB: It's a bit of a dilemma?

KC: It's a terrible, it's a disaster because – it's a burden. And, you think, if you write a will you leave things to the people you love – and it's leaving a poison pill to someone. I love you, and here's a burden that I've endured, and now it's yours to endure. That's not a nice thing to do to someone. Derek's original intention wasn't what happened: Derek [pause] Derek wanted, for everything to be put into a trust, then all to be flogged. He wanted everything to be sold, and then I was to receive

the funds. But there was a mistake in drawing-up the will, that I didn't, something really horrible happened. When, shortly after Derek died, very shortly after, the sister [Jarman's sister, Gaye Jarman] was coming to view the body. The next day she said: "you can stay in the flat until the will is read, but after that, I want you out." And I had always said to Derek that I didn't want anything, I was going to move back to Newcastle, and had assumed that Derek had mentioned to his sister. I had no idea what he had written in his will - that he had written his will and left her. She was his nearest kin. He'd left her the cottage and flat. So, went to see the lawyer and said: "look, I've got a problem, his sister said as soon as the will is read, I want you out. I'd just like a fortnight to sort my shit out. Can you delay reading the will out?" He said: "there's no need to do that - Derek has left you everything". And I was, I was in absolute shock. I said why? I was in shock about that. And I think she was in more shock when she found out that was in there. But the lawyer who had written up the will saying everything should have been put into trust, should have been a partner to do that, [he] wasn't a partner, and the will wasn't null and void, but they couldn't move things into [a] trust. So, the lawyer who wrote the will said we can do two things: we can go through a huge legal process to enter things in trust, or you can just have everything. So, I said: for now, I just rather have everything, and decide when I'm going to sell everything, not in some kind of fire-sale. The art [gallery] was really glad because all the paintings entered the market straight away, the price would have just slumped, so he was pleased. I was pleased because I didn't have to find a home in a hurry and pleased that there was a house full of memories to go and sit and grieve. Derek sister is now dead. Think she died of cancer, and she put up a fight [inaudible brief exchange why Derek's sister should have acted in that way towards Keith].

JB: Tell me if I'm prying, but you're the guy who's there for Derek in those dark moments. All that support, and she didn't value your contribution?

KC: She made that assumption. I think it was - she was a different generation. And, shortly before she died, she said: "Keith, the only reason Derek would have bought the cottage was because he came into an inheritance when his dad died." I think it wasn't a lot of money, about £50,000. So, she said: "the only reason Derek could afford the cottage, and I could afford the house in the Isle of Wight, is when Lance [Jarman's father] died- he left us money. And the only reason Lance had money, is when we were kids, he scrimped and saved. When we went out on a day trip, we had a packed lunch instead of going to a restaurant. And we didn't have foreign holidays. So, the only reason Derek could have it is because our lives were impoverished. So, for that reason, I'd like you to write a will and leave everything to my children." So, I sent an express email, saying I haven't yet

written a will, and I'll take your request into consideration when I do, but you must appreciate that I might have someone I love to leave things to, not your children. So, every time she'd call me up, contacted me, between her dying and Derek dying, she was only wanting something. Very strange [pause] relationship. Very sad. Derek saw her very infrequently - about once a year. They weren't estranged, but they weren't on the phone all the time, or seeing each other all the time. Anyway, so what do I want to do with the cottage? I don't have any firm plans, terrible dereliction of duty, and I should sort it out, and I will sort it out.

JB: You shouldn't be so critical when it comes to your duty. You've got your life to lead.

KC: I've got a life to lead, but honestly, if something terrible happened to me, if I had a heart attack under the table, I'd leave a mess.

JB: What about these friends? You have these societies for example: The Friends of Ilkley Moor, Friends of the South Downs?

KC: I'm sure I could set up something like that, but I need to set it up while I'm alive. It's not the sort of thing you can do when I'm dead. If I died now intestate, my parents would inherit all of Derek's things. My eighty-two years old parents would have 8 million worth of fine art, a flat, a house, my pension. They'd probably die soon after. My sister would probably inherit it, and not know what the fuck to do with it.

JB: Houses do cause problems sometimes.

KC: Yeah, it will cause a problem, and I need to have a serious sit-down with some serious lawyers, throw some serious money at them, and seriously think; the danger of putting things into trust is it's very hard to get them out of trust. Who knows what the future's gonna bring? I might need in the future to flog Prospect Cottage.

JB: You might wish to preserve [Prospect Cottage] and hear the sea and live there?

KC: Yes, there's that possibility. But I can't tell what's gonna happen. I don't want to burden some person I love with them. And it would be a burden. And as I say: the condition was very difficult, it's really very, very difficult to impose a condition in a will. In fact, it's impossible. That's one of those,

kind of, Victorian stories: “you only inherit if you have a sex-change!” It’s not going to happen. And I think it’ll be good to say you only inherit if you destroy the garden and just restore the cottage, just as a house on the beach. The only person who would buy it now is either a huge fan of Derek, which would be a kind of horror, because they would be getting some weird masturbatory fantasy about sleeping in Derek’s bed, and having all that kind of stuff going on, or it would be someone who wants to bulldoze it, because that’s what happens at Dungeness now: millionaires buy a fisherman’s shack for £30 million, bulldoze it, and build a grand design there.³⁴

JB: I thought that it was a protected area. One of scientific value?

KC: It’s a planning conservation area, but there’s a way round those rules if you build something of outstanding architectural merit. You get away with it. So, all they do, is get in a fancy architect, and that means it’s of outstanding architectural merit.

JB: I think Alain de Botton.³⁵

KC: Alain de Botton, yes, he started it.

JB: That was really crafty wasn’t it?

KC: He’s crafty. It was the oldest house on the beach, which is a bit of a disappointment for all the locals. But five houses are going this year.

JB: That’s really bad news for the area, because part of its attraction is that idiosyncrasy. Its marginal aspect. Its liminal edge.

KC: Well, now it’s like a showroom for Grand Designs.

JB: He’s got a lot to answer for has Kevin McCloud, he’s a lovely guy...

KC: He’s got no formal education in architecture, but he has a big say in the architecture of this country.

JB: Hugely influential, and aspirational.

KC: Yeah, hugely influential. Yeah, well that's what's happened there. And Prospect Cottage is becoming the black tooth in this perfect American smile. It's going to be a terrible mess there, that they're all going to hate me: "why is that still there?" I'm going to build a giant glass drum around it, to pickle it.

JB: The last remaining English Eden – the 'Last of England' in a way?

KC: Yes, that's Prospect Cottage, it's a mess. I'm sorry. I do need to sort it out. I'll do it. It just seems very odd writing a will.

JB: Well, you are a young guy. You are a Romantic guy, but I've not written a will either.

KC: It's important that we do it. I need to sort it out. And try and work out some system - a way.

JB: The friends of [Derek Jarman]?

KC: Burn - it - down [both KC and JB laugh]. Torch it.

JB: And, as Derek said: "and sold to the Japanese for a million pounds."³⁶

KC: Yeah, and then Derek changed his mind about being cremated and mixed in the paint. There was this rumor that some Japanese person had bought the cottage for millions, and it was going to be carted off to Tokyo. Completely untrue.

JB: What do you think of the Isaac Julien film?³⁷ I thought the documentary was interesting – the pace of it was very respectful.

KC: Didn't like it very much.

JB: But the end - I thought was disappointing, when he [Isaac Julien] was presenting himself as the last man standing [carry the torch for Derek Jarman]. The ending was strange for me. As though he was coming across as the only edgy filmmaker with a Gay/Queer standing left, now Derek's gone. I would have expected more restraint. Don't...

KC: It started off as a very different film. The thing I didn't like about it was Tilda [Tilda Swinton actress], who's from impossible wealth. She's from a place called Swinton, Castle Swinton. Her dad was the Lord Lieutenant - the greatest decorated living military man. Major Sir John, and we got to see him once, and as we were driving up the drive, we'd hired this fantastic Jaguar, driving along [whilst] we were playing some horrible pop music, and Tilda... it was in those cassette days, and she put on this cassette, and said: "I think you'll find this more appropriate", and put in the four seasons [Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* classical music]. She wasn't being ironic at all. I said: "Tilda, you dad's a major, he's also a Lord. Do I call him Major Sir John or Sir John, or John?" She said: "Well if, my father should speak to you, you shall address him as "Major Sir John". And she could turn that on like that [clicks fingers]. A terrible snob. So, there's Tilda in this film, from impossible wealth, and privilege, lecturing people.

JB: The eulogy.³⁸

KC: Lecturing people on how to run their lives, and how to make this small, and I thought: how dare you do that? It started off as a very different film. Isaac wanted to have shots of me driving a tube train, but I said I want to keep some part of my life that isn't Derek.

JB: Exactly. That's right.

KC: [I didn't want] Every single thing that I do be subsumed in the world of Derek. Fortunately, Isaac changed his mind in the end. So slightly odd film. And now, we should go to another venue.³⁹

JB: Real insights.

KC: Do you want to know a very weird story? I went to school with someone, and they work in the same depot as me.⁴⁰

JB: In the tube?

KC: In the tube. All those lines, all those depots, and someone from the same school - works at the same depot as me. And I didn't realize for years. He's two years older than me. He was a prefect, when I was a [pause].

JB: So how did you get talking?

KC: There's a photograph of South Moor in the little newspaper, a pit pony covered in... [pauses]

JB: You're from a village, aren't you?

KC: Yeah, a tiny mining village.

JB: I saw *Sebastiane* when I was eighteen in Bradford, and it was quite an infamous screening at that time.⁴¹

KC: Oh yeah [agrees].

JB: Some women in the audience were booing. I've always been a big [Brian] Eno fan, and I like your description of where the title came from. It reminded me of when I used to go to the Greek Islands in the late 70s. I used to do drawings of people on the Greek ferries - going to Poros, Santorini. Went to Ikaria in 1979, and I was the only guy on the ferry along with the first presenter of *Magpie*.⁴²

KC: Oh yeah, the big curly haired fellow.

Conclusion

At the end of the interview Collins insists on paying the bill. As we leave the table in Brasserie Zedél Collins engages in a short friendly chat with Miriam Margolyes [British actress], who has been sitting in a group on the adjacent table throughout the interview.

Our conversation continues as we walk to Maison Bertaux in Londond's Soho district for tea and cake - the quintessential Jarman 'themed-day' experience! As we wait for our order to arrive seated upstairs, Collins explains why both him and Jarman used to spend so much time in Maison Bertaux (a place reference which litters Jarman's diaries): it was simply to escape from the frequent guests who made unsolicited visits to their London flat, in Pheonix House, on Charing Cross Road.⁴³

After an engaging (unrecorded) conversation in Maison Bertaux we depart, to walk along Oxford Street. Collins has a shift on the London Underground in the late afternoon, but before we say our final farewells Keith shares an interesting anecdote based on where we are standing. He describes

how Brian Eno fell on this exact spot where we are now standing, near to the entrance of Oxford Street tube station. Eno's accidental fall, and the initial shock of hitting the pavement resulted in an 'epiphany' for Eno (and perhaps contemporary music?). For as he lay there still dazed from the accident, Eno recalls hearing music coming out of the nearby Virgin record store, creating an unexpected sound-world mixed with the immediate street sounds of passers-by, and Oxford Street traffic. According to Collins, it was at this moment that Eno experienced an epiphany, his sonic turning-point': his invention of 'Ambient' music.

Notes

8. Hockney's book *DAVID HOCKNEY CAMERAWORKS* published by Thames and Hudson in 1984.
9. Famously eccentric English collaborative artists, Gilbert Prousch b.1943, and George Passmore b.1942.
10. Dave Robilliard, British poet and artist 1952-1988.
11. The Aids crisis. The first UK cases emerged in December 1981. Terry Higgins was one of the first people to die from what is referred to as an Aids-related condition in London in July 1982.
12. Alluding to the novels of Thomas Hardy, especially the landscape of Egdon Heath, in *The Return of the Native*, 1978.
13. *Square Peg* was a queer arts periodical released in 1982 by a collective of seven gay men who attended The Bell nightclub in North London.
14. "KY" brand gell. One of the most commonly used water-based lubricants for gay men.
15. *Grindr* gay dating social networking App launched in March 2009.
16. Stephen Fry's *Out There* BBC documentary series exploring the lives of gay people around the world shown on the 16th October 2013.
17. Derek Jarman received treatment for his HIV-related illness at St. Bartholomew's hospital, initially in the casualty ward, then later in Colston ward, which cares for the HIV-related dying.
18. There's no direct reference to the famous London gay nightclub, Heaven, in relation Jarman's edited version of the incident in *Dancing Ledge* (1984: 246): '[...] then unzips, and produces the biggest, thickest cock I've ever seen – it is hard as rock'.
19. Bruce Webber, American fashion photographer and filmmaker b.1946.
20. British Film Institute.
21. Jim Brogden delivered a series of Jarman lectures to both undergraduate and postgraduate students at the Sheffield College from 1987, and more recently, at the University of Leeds from 2004. Each lecture would emphasize the subversive aesthetic that characterized his work and the importance of Jarman's independent creative vision. Brogden has always been surprised that so many young creative students were unfamiliar with Jarman's contribution to UK culture.

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22. The year 2014 witnessed a series of events to commemorate the twenty years anniversary of Derek Jarman's death in 1994.
 23. Derek Jarman's journals: *Modern Nature: The Journals of Derek Jarman* (1991) and *Smiling in Slow Motion* (2000).
 24. Keith Collins emailed Jim Brogden the garden article text for the *Plant Journal* on the 25th June 2014. The same text was also used for Collins' epitaph for *Derek Jarman's Sketchbooks*, published by Thames and Hudson in 2013). This is a short extract that epitomizes its elegiac quality: 'Eighty-three tides skirred along the seacoast at Dungeness between Derek's arrival and his leaving; each flood scattering the shingle with a gasp filled with exhilaration of dawn's first breath...' He ends the email with an inimitable reference to "the people at Thames and Hudson go all juicy, and they wanted something in the same style (difficult if it's not your authentic voice').
 25. *Derek Jarman's Sketchbooks* (2013) edited by Stephen Farthing and Ed Webb-Ingall, concluding with the Collins epitaph: '...now I sit in his chair, at his desk, in the room he called the Spring Room. This is where he [Jarman] would write, overflowing with love of his garden...' (2013: 251).
 26. Extract from Jarman's journal *Modern Nature*: 'I cried late at night with HB for my films. No-one will ever know the thousand little decisions that make or break my little movies. So late at night. I weep for the garden so lonely in the shingle.' (1991: 281).
 27. Email to Jim Brogden on 25th June 2014 at 16:09 extract: 'The garden is a refutation of Dungeness: an oasis in a desert...' (my emphasis).
 28. In traditional Japanese aesthetics the term *Wabi Sabi* 侘寂 is defined by an acceptance of transience and imperfection, in which the notion of beauty in nature embraces impermanence and the process of decay. Much of Jarman's creative work is characterized by this central theme: the transience of male beauty, love, and of course, the garden at Prospect Cottage.
 29. Lead singer of the Boomtown Rats and joint organizer with Midge Ure of the *Live Aid* multi-venue benefit concert on the 13th July 1985.
 30. The Smiths pop video *The Queen is Dead*, 1986. Directed by Derek Jarman.
 31. Italian filmmaker 1922-1975, who had an enormous influence on the work of Jarman, notably the use of black and allegorical symbolism.
 32. See the interview with Richard Salmon on the BBC Arena documentary *Derek Jarman- A Portrait*, 1991.
 33. Tony Peak's biography of *Derek Jarman* published in 1999.
 34. Jim Brogden has a short conversation with Stephen Farthing, following his Q&A following the *Derek Jarman's Sketchbooks* presentation at the Ilkley Literature Festival, October 2013.
 35. Alluding to the long-running Channel 4 aspirational "self-build" programme, *Grand Designs*, written and presented by Kevin McCloud since 1999.
 36. Philosopher Alain de Botton founded Living Architecture in 2006, and completed *Shingle House*, designed by NORD Architecture, a holiday home on the beach at Dungeness, in 2010.
 37. Jim Brogden paraphrasing Jarman's joke on the BBC Arena documentary *Derek Jarman: A Portrait* 1991, in which he speculates on his cremated dust being used in one of his black tar paintings and sold to the Japanese.
 38. Isaac Julien co-director with Bernard Rose of the film documentary, *Derek*, 2008. Written and narrated by Tilda Swinton.

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39. Jim Brogden refers to *In the Spirit of Derek Jarman*, Tilda Swinton's keynote speech at the Edinburgh International Film Festival on the 17th August 2002.
 40. Maison Bertaux patisserie at 28 Greek Street, London, for tea and cake. The essential Jarman experience.
 41. Keith Collins was a driver on the London Underground Bakerloo Line at the time of the interview.
 42. Jarman's controversial 1976 film (in Latin).
 43. Mick Robertson presenter on the ITV children's television programme from 1968-1980.
 44. "I've many pictures of Derek. I often visited him at this flat in Charing X Rd and slept there a few times! He was a lovely man, very indulgent of the young and he was the centre of the queer art scene and the Soho milieu that surrounded it" David Gwinnutt, www.davidgwinnutt.com (2021).

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