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The Alternative Alternative: Artists Super 8 in the 1970s

The 1970s marked a period of consolidation for experimental film in Britain. The Arts Council funded its first films in 1970, the BFI hosted the International Festival of Underground Film in the same year – the first of many large scale festivals and exhibitions in this country – and the London Filmmakers Coop, founded in 1966, substantially increased its 16mm film production.

There were, however, other things going on in the 1970s including a gradual increase in the use of Super 8 film and with it a quest for a new aesthetic and a different sensibility to that pursued by the LPMC. This paper examines the early use of the gauge by artists, before its high profile in the 1980s. It looks at when Derek Jarman shot Super 8 on the set of Ken Russell's THEDEVILS, when artists such as Anna Thew and Tina Keane took to the format at the end of the decade and when DJ Don Letts made THE PUNK ROCK MOVIE. By tracing the development and attraction of Super 8, this paper seeks not only to tell a lesser known story about experimental film in the 1970s but to consider the distinctions between filmmaking technologies and the relationship between technology and expression.