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By Oliver Dixon

In the 1970s, the South Wales valleys began a long process of deindustrialisation. The service industries and mass unemployment began to dominate the working patterns of life from Neath in the West to Cwmbran in the East. [1] Cinema Action's (CA) documentary *So That You Can Live* is set in these valleys and traces the experience of the working-class Butts family from 1976 into the early 1980s. [2] The film narrativises the shifting conditions of work and life in this period, following various members of the family in and out of work as they migrate across the valleys or escape to England. While the historiography and cultural study of the broader crises of British deindustrialisation, decline in Britain's international economic standing, '80s authoritarianism of the British state, and global accumulation downturn are, by now, familiar, there is a relative paucity of work that considers these crises in the cultural and economic specificity of the Welsh context. [3] *So That You Can Live* offers, I argue, an excellent case to elucidate the aesthetic registration of these crises in Wales.

Crisis principally emerges here as what Raymond Williams terms a structure of feeling. That is, I analyse crisis as an emerging, collective sense of breakdown of the nation and class that is actively formed and forming in response to shifting historical conditions. Unlike any definitive analytic exposition of crisis, structures of feeling "do not have to await definition, classification, or rationalisation before they exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action". [4] 'Structure of feeling' captures the presentness of attempts to articulate a still murky historical moment — it is a striving towards, but not quite achieving, a final, complete analytic perspective. As Williams reminds us, it is emergent

artistic formations, such as the independent film movement to which CA belonged, that frequently register and engender novel structures of feeling, often arising as a "modification or disturbance" of older artistic forms. [5] For Williams, the notion of structure of feeling "can be specifically related to the evidence of forms … which, in art and literature, are often among the very first indications that such a new structure is forming". [6] Paying close attention to the aesthetic constitution of this structure of feeling, in particular the modification or disturbance of Welsh landscape conventions, I aim not to reduce this registration to the general social content of crisis but rather to attend to the articulation of crisis within the formal specificity of *So That You Can Live*'s aesthetic transformations.

Unlike CA's previous work, a slate of agit-prop campaign films made for the trade union movement, which often featured rallying speeches and explosive images of specific struggles, the majority of *So That You Can Live* consists of observational documentary footage that offers an account, at the personal and familial level, of the very difficulties of working-class struggle in the late 1970s. The film's narrative trajectory can be glimpsed at two picket lines that appear at the start and the end of the film. The contrasts between the pickets provide microcosms of the shifting dynamics of working-class life in the valleys. The first, in 1976, features Shirley — the mother of the Butts family, a keen shop-steward and the film's key protagonist — speaking about the imminent victory in the factory women's fight for equal wages with their male counterparts. The second, in 1981, shows us Shirley, after she has lost her job and union position, out in support of a strike. Discussion between picketers now revolves around key terms like unemployment, factory closures, and "dead valleys". Shirley suggests here that the opportunity to fight was missed.

Across the film, a plot slowly develops in various extended observational sequences: discussions with Shirley in her home or on the bus, the birth of a grandchild, the family

farming a newly acquired small holding, or children entering the workforce. Despite a non-linear temporal arrangement across the film, a basic narrative trajectory is held together by such key chronological markers. However, it is through the introduction of various moments of generic divergence from the observational documentary form — what Williams calls a "modification or disturbance" — that the film struggles to articulate not just concrete shifts in the valleys but the very conditions of their historical possibility: the shifting forms of production in Wales, the determining relationships between the 'centre' of Britain and its internal peripheries, [7] the crisis of deindustrialisation and unemployment and the production of history and popular memory in the region.

Such generic divergence, an in-between mode that refutes both pure modernist self-reflexivity and simple realist immediacy, can be glimpsed in the film's creative inversion of political documentary voice tropes. CA combined the 'authentic' voice of the documentary subject with the authoritative, intellectual voice-over by having Shirley's daughter, Diane, read and interpret passages of Raymond Williams' *The Country and The City*. Equally, divergence is offered in the non-linear narrative structuring, with the political documentary's traditionally climactic picket line appearing instead at the beginning of the film. However, in this article, I will consider this working within and against generic and symbolic tropes across one local instance of the film's textual system: its use of landscape imagery. Tracing the film's activation of the symbolic terrain of the southern Welsh landscape, I consider how the breakdown of traditional Welsh landscape tropes within the film articulates a structure of feeling of crisis — a crisis of both the Welsh industrial working-class and the unevenly distributed breakdown of the British economy and state in the 1970s. The film's shifting landscapes are the vehicle through which to capture this structure as a "cultural hypothesis" or "social experiences *in solution*". [8] That is, its landscapes are the symbolic material for variable, incomplete attempts to define and comprehend "a social experience which is still in

process”. [9] I argue that treating the landscape as a contradictory, unstable cypher for a range of emergent ideological attachments enables us to uncover how landscape imagery has historically mediated the relationships between nationhood, class, and changes in Welsh society’s mode of production. To begin, I briefly sketch an economic history of Wales and the valleys, before tracing a genealogy of Welsh landscape imagery, in order to analyse the material and symbolic forces that underscore *So That You Can Live*’s unstable landscapes.

Midway Wales and the Long Decline

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, Wales was a mostly agrarian community with little indigenous aristocracy or bourgeoisie. Tom Nairn suggests that with the onset of modern industry, Wales took up a peculiar place in European economic history. [10] Wales began to share many features of European regions undergoing relative, forced under-development, such as “depopulation, cultural oppression, fragmentary and distorted development” with much of the nation maintaining an impoverished agrarian basis as in Corsica, Britanny, or Galicia. [11] The country simultaneously shared the features of a relatively over-developed small nation, as it was a centre of the Industrial Revolution. This over-/under-developed split made Wales an “ambiguous, midway location”. [12] Unlike economic development imposed upon small provinces, Welsh modernisation hugely altered the conditions of life for most of the population, with the valleys becoming a global industrial centre in the 19th century. Nonetheless, this industrialisation, like economic development directed at peripheral regions, was almost entirely directed from outside and concentrated within the coal and steel industries. Wales did not have a native bourgeoisie (like in Scotland or the Basque Country) but instead gained an English bourgeoisie. Moreover, the nation lacked a recent history of statehood with latent political institutions capable of reactivation by later nationalist

movements, as in Scotland and Catalonia. In Nairn's words, this was an "at once enormous and decentred industrialisation". [13]

As such, Wales became "an integral but peripheral part of a general United Kingdom economy" developing unevenly in relation to England, whose capital organised the Welsh economy. [14] This uneven dependency continued across the 20th century, with external manufacturing mainly "exerted from the rest of Britain, mainly in the South East and West Midlands" or overseas. [15] In particular, the valleys represented a large, low-cost labour market with widespread unemployment forcing workers to accept "occupationally homogenous and low skill employment". [16] With the decline of the coal and steel industries, a situation of dependency deepened. That is, while clearly benefiting and greatly contributing to the violent rise of the British empire, Wales developed "an established and continuing role which is thrust upon the inhabitants of some regions to accept lower living standards to produce the conditions for the realization of profits in other regions or countries". [17] As we shall see, *So That You Can Live* repeatedly grapples with this uneven dependency. Across the image track, the London cityscape is the recurrent counterpart to the valleys' landscapes, and incessant verbal references to 'outside forces' that shape the lives of its protagonists pepper the soundtrack.

These "usual forces of uneven development" that were "tied together unusually closely and graphically" greatly shaped the familiar oppositions of Welsh cultural and political life. [18] Indeed, Welsh nationalist politics in the 19th *century,* which burgeoned within cultural movements like *Eisteddfod* renewal and the University Colleges, developed out of a desire to defend a rural, traditional identity grounded in the Welsh language and in reaction against the Anglicised, industrialised South. Against this nationalism, another Welsh political identity was tied to industry and a broader socialist and trade union struggle itself, premised

upon participation in a broader British Labour movement. [19] Neither formation, it should be noted, was necessarily oppositional to British imperialism, which served as the often unspoken foundation for their very existence. Moreover, as Nairn points out, the Welsh nationalist movement both reacted to and was based upon the capitalist South, where movement to industrial centres salvaged the Welsh language from consignation to the 'backward' countryside. [20] Hence, in the valleys, traditionalism and defence of the rural lived alongside the modernisations of industry and an attendant proletarian identity. This close tying together of different modes of life and temporalities is evident in *So That You Can Live,* where scenes of industrial action exist alongside those of the Butts' family farming small holdings. Indeed, it is in the very landscape of the valleys, where collieries and farmland mark the hills, that the unevenness of Welsh development is so visibly apparent and spatially close.

The other major historical trajectory that *So That You Can Live* engages with is one of the valley's industrial decline and unemployment that can be traced across the post-war era. In the immediate post-war period, nationalised industries like the Coal Board and Steel Corporation employed an irregular number of workers in Wales compared to British averages. By the 1960s, with the continuation of pre-war coal and steel decline, Wales was opened to Foreign Direct Investment, and foreign multinationals from America, Europe, and Japan opened branches in South Wales. [21] An overreliance on coal was replaced by an overreliance on multinational plants. These branches moved elsewhere in Europe when economic circumstances made it favourable to do so. [22] As such, between 1968 and 1983, there was a total collapse of the old basic industries like mining and steel, and by the end of 1982, employment in Wales was the lowest in decades. [23]While other regions of Britain were similarly undergoing deindustrialisation and crises of unemployment in the 1970s, Welsh wages decreased relative to the rest of Britain. [24] The consequences of reliance on

branch and multinational plants "became apparent in the early 1980s when recession proved disastrous, and [South Wales] lost more manufacturing jobs relative to its population than any other area in Britain". [25] Such catastrophic deindustrialisation drives the narrative developed in *So That You Can Live*, with the film following Shirley's attempts to find work and locate alternative means of subsistence and registers in the closed collieries that speckle its landscapes. In what follows, I consider how this history of uneven development, dependency, and deindustrialisation has shaped historic representations of the valleys' landscapes and how the resultant symbolic terrain is activated in *So That You Can Live*.

Landscape and the Valleys

So That You Can Live was a hugely significant film in the British independent film movement. [26] The film was praised for its inversion of tropes of a working-class documentary subject familiar from the visual history of the valleys and CA's previous agit-prop films. [27] However, responses to *So That You Can Live*'s landscapes have varied. In Paul Willemen's reading, the film's landscapes are deployed as a "site where the dynamics of history can be read". [28] More recently, contemporary critic Colin Perry positively frames the film as part of a counter-pastoral cinematic tradition on account of its usage of *The Country and The City*. [29] Yet Sue Aspinall and Mandy Merck denounced its use of landscapes that "produce a sense of melancholy and loss, creating an elegiac mood reminiscent of the Augustan idealisation of the obscure countryman dwelling in rural simplicity". [30]

These conflicting accounts capture the multiple potential pulls of working with pastoral imagery. The landscape here holds such symbolic force as to produce directly antagonistic

readings. Where some spectators find the critical force of its landscapes points to the historical development of capitalist modernity, others find it a simple idealisation of the pastoral. W. J. T. Mitchell's analysis of landscape as a medium elucidates the conditions of possibility for such antinomic readings; he claims that the landscape is not a raw material but "always already a symbolic form in its own right", and that all landscape imagery is "a representation of something that is already a representation in its own right". [31] The film pulls its readers in conflicting directions precisely because the Welsh landscape is a symbolic form in itself, with an ideological weight and pre-history that escapes the film's own usage, separate and yet emerging from any individual representation of it. *So That You Can Live*'s deployment of landscape imagery is always already in excess of the film's wider textual system. Thus, to understand the possibility of such conflicting readings, we must first unpick the various landscape representations that CA works within and against. I argue that the following, necessarily brief, selection of images indicates some of the long tropes that *So That You Can Live* engages.

In Ron Lawrence's 1984 painting of Pontrypridd, housed in the National Library of Wales, concentric circles of terraced houses, trees, and hills enclose a rugby match at the center (Figure 1). Lawrence's painting indexes a dominant image of the valleys as a hermetic enclosed community, organically entwined with the landscape, around a transparent symbol of the national 'soul'. In Bruce Davidson's 1960s photography of the valleys, which, in his own words, attempted to capture the "lyrical beauty" of the community, this organicity takes the shape of harsh contrasts of industry and land. [32] The soil often appears scarred by mineshafts and smoke. The people appear torn from their natural connection with the land, as suggested in miners' darkened faces contrasted against the faded greens and counterposed horizontal and vertical lines (Figure 2).

Perhaps the most famous film about Wales, John Ford's *How Green Was My Valley* (1941), similarly counterposes industry and nature as opposing forces. For example, in its opening sequence, a cross-fade takes us from the colliery and the domineering spoil tip, an image of the 'present' we learn from the voice-over narration and negatively imbued with its minor-scale orchestral accompaniment, to the luscious green rolling hills. The pastoral past is thrust upon us by the film's central nostalgic string motif and gleaming choral doubling. Elsewhere, the forces of industry and nature are counterposed directly, as in a frame where the child is separated on either side by smoke and nature, signified by a tree, in a diagonal horizon that marks their asymmetry between, but not the total dominance of, the unnatural over the community (Figure 3). "For the colliery", our narrator tells us, "had only begun to poke its skinny black fingers through the green." Nature here is the community, its organic innocence, and industry is the disruption of some outside evil.

How Green Was My Valley was a literary adaptation from Richard Llewellyn's novel of the same name. [33] So too in the Welsh industrial novel, we find literary renditions of this fundamental opposition. For Raymond Williams, these traditional contrasts of "darkness and light, of being trapped and of getting clear", the oppositions between the darkness of the pits and the clarity of the open landscape, finds particular purchase on the very ground of the valleys precisely because "the pastoral life, which had been Welsh history, is still another Welsh present, and in its visible presence – not as an ideal contrast but as the slope, the skyline, to be seen immediately from the streets and from the pit-tops". [34] Such contrasts then render a consciousness of both history, alternative modes of production, and Welsh over-/under-development. Yet, this consciousness of historical possibilities is filtered through a distinctly backward-looking, nostalgic melancholy (in the properly Freudian sense of a blockage to the conscious, egotistic working through of loss). The principal object of this melancholic mode is an impossible and imaginary pastoral past (a "lyrical beauty")

abstracted from economic relations of domination within agricultural production, as an aesthetic means of escape from industrial capitalism's own relations of domination.

Other mid-20th-century Welsh cultural production similarly reflects on the 19th-century emergence of industrial manufacturing via the changes in the landscape. Gwyn Thomas' *All Things Betray Thee* (1949) renders the landscape as a medium through which a proto-class consciousness emerges principally in locating the shared dominance of the industrialists over all the towns in the valleys:

"You see no occasional smoky patches behind each line of hills? [...] Under each smudge. There is a town like Moonlea. A centre of new work, in mine, mill or foundry […] Strings of towns, just like Moonlea, separated as yet by short hills, long ignorance and a little fear. If those townships were once to act together, we'd be more than a bubble in the mud. […] And in each Moonlea, a few thousand people whose pattern of feeling and experience, whose impulse of misery, are precisely as ours." [35]

In *Coal Face* (Alberto Cavalcanti, 1935), a Griersonian documentary looking at coal mining across Britain, the valleys appear no longer as hermetic but as part of the unity of Britain, for whom mining is the "basic industry". Rhythmic montages connect images of collieries jutting out of the land across different regions, collapsing the latter into an organic unity within which each individual region labours for the greater national good. The film culminates in a sequence that cuts across different industries, as the narrator lists the yearly coal contributions needed in each, underscoring the necessary interconnectedness that marks the national image sought after. Here, the landscape becomes the industry-scape whose flattened continuity combines to create a greater-than-the-sum-of-its-parts image of the British nation leaping forward into modernity.

Every Valley (Michael Clarke, 1957), a British Transport Film production, repeats these unifying connections at the lower scale of the Welsh nation. The film opens with a landscape pan while the voice-over invokes past modes of production: "the sun rose … on the ruins of Victorian ironworks, on the castellated towers of Edwardian landlords, on the terraced roofs of the miners". After this invocation, landscape images enter as bridging shots, the mere site of developing modern transport links between each unnamed industrial town. Such links supersede the landscape as a site of historical curiosity, becoming "new lifelines of a changing life" and thrusting the valleys into a unified future by enabling the diversification of industry away from mining. *Every Valley* reduces the landscape to the harmonious image of the undifferentiated Welsh community's leap into the future.

From this brief survey, we can delineate two tropes operative across Welsh landscape imagery. On the one hand, we have the organicity of the hermetic community, the innocent and lyrical valleys as ruptured by the outside of industry. On the other hand, we have the non-hermetic image of the valleys as one natural cell in the essential unity of all industrial Great Britain or Wales. These two tropes index a typical split of 20th-century Welsh political identity. The former aligns with the nationalist politics of tradition and pastoralism, which wishes to overturn the entwined anglicisation and modernisation in the valleys — an identification with the rural still visible in the landscape and operative in the Welsh economy. The latter aligns with a productivist, industrial class identity committed to participation in the Labour Party and union movement. *So That You Can Live* works with these containers of meaning, and unexpectedly displaces their familiarity in an attempt to simultaneously register the historical development of modes of production within the valleys, relations of dependency with English capital, and the crises of Welsh working-class identity in the period.

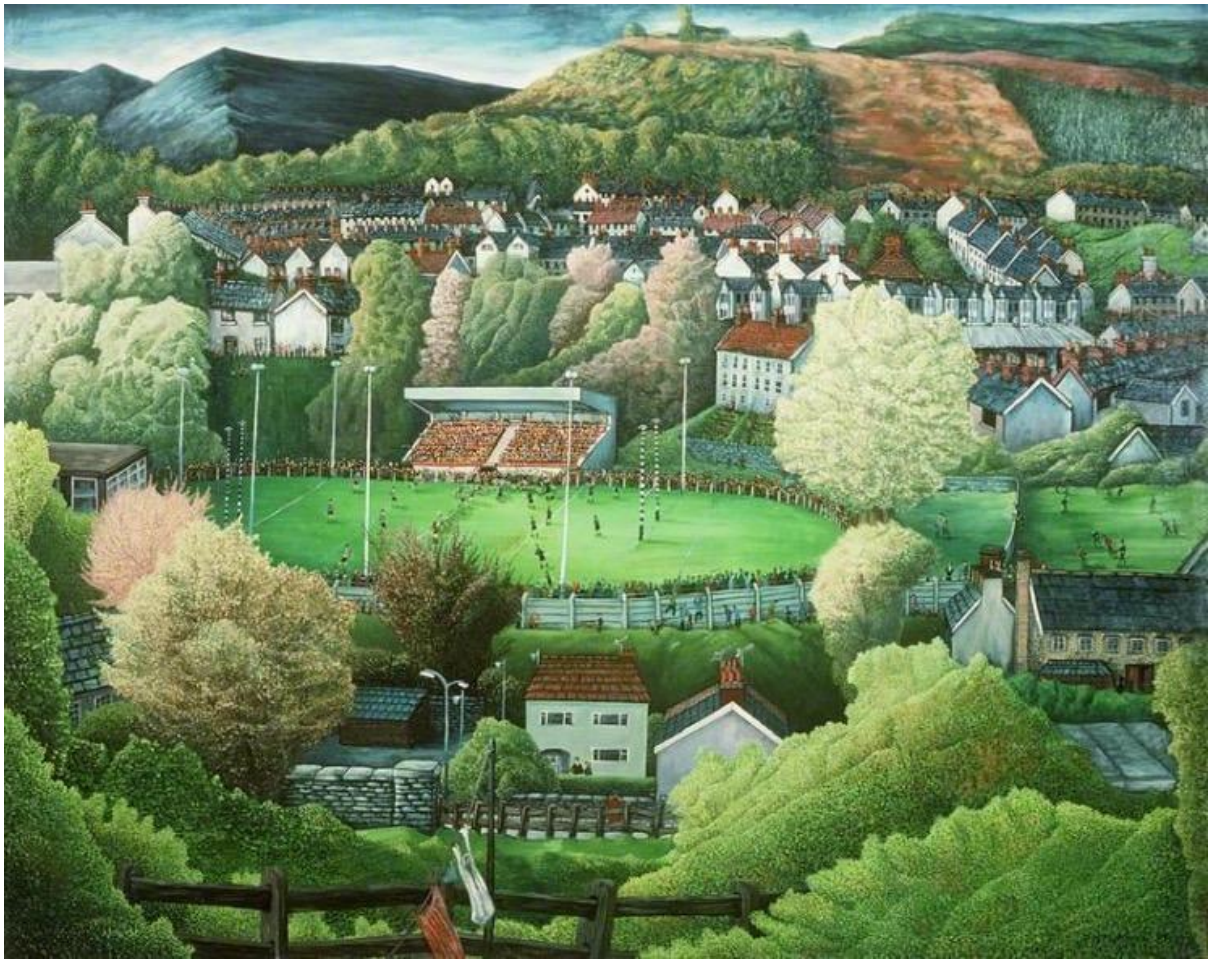

FIGURE 1—*The Rugby Match* [1984]

FIGURE 2—Miners on hillside

FIGURE 3—*How Green Was My Valley* [1941]

***So That You Can Live*'s Unexpected Landscapes**

So That You Can Live is a film about the valleys that begins, rather peculiarly, in London. Diane Butts has moved to London to look for a job "because there's none down in Wales". She has quickly discovered that she lacks the necessary educational level for employment. As she looks across the city, Diane speaks of an article she has read on the asymmetries in the Welsh and English education systems (Figure 4). The montage moves us, quite literally, with the interjecting image of a bus to the Rhymney valley. Atop a slow pan across the hills, an ex-miner sits on the valley slope and imagines if the "hills could speak" of the labour performed on them (Figure 5). The displacement of the typically Welsh filmic space, from the lyrical hills to an outside, registers here both as a unity and as a separation, a unity in separation; the montage entwines the Valleys and London together, unevenly. This unevenness is simultaneously rendered metonymically in the images' differing topography,

narratively in Diane's search for work in London, and through the struggles of the documentary subject to articulate their uneven history, as in Diane's reflections on educational disparity, or memory speculation, as in the speaking hills.

The montage, a cut between the valleys and London, which is repeated throughout the film, constructs a direct spatial contradiction between the impoverished valleys and developed England, gesturing towards a history of external determination and inequality between regions. This visualised spatial juxtaposition recalls Henri Lefebvre's analysis of the Nanterre student revolt. [36] For Lefebvre, the new Parisian university campus located in Nanterre between the metro and the Algerian 'shanty towns' forced middle-class students to traverse the segregated spaces of education and poverty and thus indicated the spatial and temporal unevenness of French urban development. As Kristin Ross puts it, Lefebvre's example shows that "economic inequality … produced not only contrasting landscapes and lived environments but vastly different temporalities". [37] Indeed, the contrast between Diane's search for potential, future work in London and the ex-miner's vision of re-animated dead labour in Rhymney suggests a closeness to past rural life inaccessible within London's modernised terrain.

In this opening montage, we can glimpse a dual activation-inversion of both landscape tropes. Firstly, there is an activation of the hermetic, nostalgic image of organic community in the slow panning of the green hills. Yet this is an attempt to locate a different valence of the trope's pull towards an alternative, past mode of production, instead articulated here as a practice of reading the landscape as a depository of history and dead labour that shapes contemporary life. The insistence on the process of reading here is doubled by over-shoulder compositions highlighting the act of looking and interpreting. Secondly, in the montage of London and Rhymney, there is an activation of the trope of the valleys as but one cell in the

British system. However, by unevenly counterposing the valleys with their outside, the film relates the former as a dependent region, rather than one equal part of the whole.

So That You Can Live contains a preponderance of landscape imagery structured upon a nature/industry dichotomy. Such sequencing works within this framework of historical-aesthetic understanding only to invert it in unexpected ways. Halfway through the film, Diane reads aloud a passage of *The Country and the* City, which talks of the relations between country and city as a driving force of the capitalist mode of production. We then cut to a tracking shot that moves from behind a hill to reveal rows of terraced houses lined by slag heaps. The use of the Williams text complicates the imagistic opposition of hill and heap; the opposition is instead rendered at the level of a 'mode of production'. The nature/industry couplet morphs from an opposition of industry to a pure, natural past emptied of its social relations to a transformation of the industrial within the landscape, a living process of economic relations and reproduction marked into the land. Hence, over the tracking shot, a man's memories of his childhood farm, which his "farmer-cum-miner" father ran, underline this necessity to read the landscape for such transformations. [38] The camera comes to a still, and we suddenly cut to a pan across London, as Diane again reads of "rent and interest, of situation and power, a wider system", and back once more to farmland. This montage invites us to attempt, like Diane's coming-to-consciousness, a reading of the landscape within the uneven relationships between regions; the sequence insists that the valleys, their history, and their people cannot be explained without the domination of British capital and its transformations.

Elsewhere, we cut from a shot of Marx's *Capital*, taken from a miners' institute library, to another panning shot of the slag heaps and hills, to a job centre and listings for 'urgently required steelworkers' in West Germany and the Netherlands. Again, the abstraction of

reading, rendered literally in the image of Marx's book, and the displacement of filmic space, now to the outside of Western Europe, re-articulates the landscape as a cypher and overdetermined site of complex global processes, no longer an image that can be easily read as the isolated signifier of nature, the pastoral, or the organic. This also then repositions the film's narrative and representational content of unemployment within the Butts family and the valleys more generally. This structure of feeling of crisis, of the instability of previous modes of work and life, and decay of isolated communities — with the Butts family shifting in and out of work and farming small holdings to get by — must be related, these montage sequences suggest, within the global decline of British capitalism and the relocation of industrial production to Western Europe.

As Diane puts it, or Raymond Williams through her, speaking yet again over a tracking shot of the townscape: "It is so close this life in the family, in the valley, this effort and struggle at work, it is so close we don't need to be told about it, until forces coming from right outside are putting such pressures on us that we are forced to ask what our lives really are, what this place really is". This passage, from closeness to outside pressures, mirrors the film's movement from the pastoral landscape to the abstractions of political economy. The film offers the image of the valleys as hermetic community, as if to say to the spectator: "See! This familiar place, this close life in the family, these lyrical hills", only to use this very familiarity to unexpectedly denaturalise this no-longer possible pastoralism, to pull the rug out from under its feet, into the abstraction of material processes outside the frame. This movement is what John David Rhodes and Elena Gorfinkel have termed a space-place dialectic: a shift from locality to abstraction, and back again, to read a concrete place as a local instance of the broader spatial processes of capitalist totality. To ask, 'what this place really is' is to treat locality as the "means through which [abstract and generalizing] thought is able to articulate and materialise." [39]

The very dynamism of the film's landscape shots directs our attention to the historical and ideological instability of the landscape itself. Within single shots, we witness a transition from what appears, at first, to be the image of a pastoral past to the site of capitalist modernity proper. The manual process of reading, of tracking one's eyes across a page, is mirrored here in many tracking or panning camera movements across the valley. Such movements demand that we interpret the historical layers and transformation within the various forms of appearance the landscape might take: from agrarian community to industrial heartland, from an over- and under-developed location into the wasteland of both the rural and the modern. Furthermore, the move away from a hypostatised opposition of Nature and Industry to an image of settled simultaneity also suggests the waning dominance of the industrial within the valleys. By returning a sense of historicity to both the agricultural and the industrial, the film displaces the sharp antagonism between these two modes, as ahistorical notions of old and new, and instead locates their contingency. This dispersal of the antagonism, from Davidson's opposing lines in the image or Ford's cuts between two images to the flattening movement of CA's camera, registers the deindustrialisation of the valleys. The heaps, just like the farmland hills before them, become here another symbol of an accumulated past within the landscape. If there is a political force to this dispersal, it is found in the film's giving shape to or recognition of the historical problem of a Welsh working-class that can no longer rely on older models of aesthetic imaginary with which to identify and position themselves. *So That You Can Live* inaugurates a still-deindustrialising image of Wales qua landscape, emptied of the battle between the hermetic community and the industrial invader.

More broadly, this dissolution signals the crisis and collapse of an industrial proletariat proper, who in documentary imagery were often associated with the mining towns of the South Wales valleys, and an end to industrial manufacturing in the period. We might find

similar formal registers of this collapse in the undecidability of documentary voice models in the film: neither the authoritative intellectual voice-over nor the authentic voice of the worker, but a combination of both in Diane's reading of Raymond Williams. This mingling indicates a mismatch between available forms of political documentary and a shifted social reality. The assumed power of a self-conscious and coherent working-class subject grounded in received forms of struggle, offered in earlier CA agit-prop films like *Fighting the Bill* (1970) and *UCS1* (1971), does not find purchase on the precarious life of the Butts family, especially in the new generation, signalled by Diane, which is further detached from oppositional proletarian pedagogy. Equally, the pre-formed, detached vocal explanation found in 1930s realist documentaries is absent precisely because such an analysis was incomplete when paired with the emergent details of the Butts' life. The symbolic efficiency contained in the older proletarian documentary subject is limited in the face of a collapse of the proletarian ways of life on which such a subject was based. As Raymond Williams discussed in his interview on the film, the strike traditionally formed the narrative climax of left documentaries on the working class. [40] Yet the strike in *So That You Can Live* is the point of departure. This narrative trajectory further allegorises this shift in documentary mode, a turning away from the narrative inevitability of working-class organisation towards the very "difficulty of a collective project". [41] Similarly, instead of relying on older models of working-class or nationalist opposition to the stain of "skinny black fingers" on the landscape, *So That You Can Live*'s historicised landscapes offer a "much sadder recognition of what the real shape of the problem is". [42]

FIGURE 4—Diane looking at London

FIGURE 5—An ex-collier looking at the valley

Unstable Landscapes Contra Nationalist Resolutions

In working within and against dominant landscape codes, *So That You Can Live*, at times, gives into the pulls of such tropes without which it is not intelligible. If filmic moments offer certain trajectories of meaning, they do so in friction with both actual spectators and historical codes of interpretation. [43] Indeed, the conflicting interpretations of *So That You Can Live*'s landscapes point to the inability of cinematic devices to fix images' meanings, especially within the abundant, preformed symbolic terrain of the Welsh landscape. The film's pastoral imagery, the invocation of the 'closeness' of life in the valleys, and the elegiac soundtrack, with its solo piano melody repeating incessantly throughout, might pull towards the lyrical image of a community 'fallen' from its organicity. As suggested above, Aspinall and Merck's detraction of the film's "Augustan idealization" can be understood as an identification of one of the film's possible pulls into the symbolic force of the Welsh landscape as medium. [44]

Yet perhaps this very instability, *So That You Can Live*'s landscape's potential to simultaneously recall, veer into, or subvert the history of Welsh landscape imagery constitutes its very political effectivity. The landscape's capacity to lay bare the breadth of ideological investments in the Welsh national image par excellence enables the film to affectively render changes in the working patterns of the valleys. The pastoral pull remains in the film's landscapes precisely because the pastoral remained, as it did for the Butts, a residual mode of life in the late 1970s with the collapse of industry and the absence of alternative means of reproduction. The film's landscapes enable us to recognise the continued force of this idealised pull just as they insist upon its still-forming outmodedness.

Where the film avoids the landscape's unstable imagery, it is at its most politically shortsighted. For example, the film's closing sequences work as limiting devices. In the

penultimate scene, Diane reads an invocation for the Welsh: "We have to look till we find ourselves again, find our country again, and change it for ourselves." This nationalistic framing, tinted here with a progressive-socialist bent, encloses the film's trajectories within a domineering Welshness, one that might undermine the cultural hypothesis of dislocation offered elsewhere. The idealistic gesture of the unproblematised, unified pronoun 'ourselves', a populist notion of Welshness contra the British and multi-national corporate outside, necessarily precludes an encounter with the darker history of Welsh embroilment in colonialism and imperialism. The unevenness between Wales and London, the stand-in for British capital, then becomes a formal flattening to a singular antinomy between inside and outside, itself a quasi-Marxist redoubling of the opposition between Industry/Nature as one of Capital/Welshness. Indeed, this sequence takes flight from the landscape to another inside, the Butts' family home. Diane reads the nationalist passage atop a slow tracking shot that moves from family photographs to household detritus before landing on Diane herself. Here, away from the unstable and contradictory landscape, the house and the family can act as a simple metonym for the nation, with the shot's closing image of youth invoking the Welsh future Diane speaks of.

In this penultimate sequence, the wider contradictions of Welsh life and history, its existence as a central part of a brutal international system of slavery and later imperialism, which in turn rendered it semi-peripheral and useless to the whims of global capital, are ultimately resolved by appeal to the imaginary resolution of the nation, or its rewriting as the progressive political form par excellence. We might venture that this national image is itself an overdetermined symptom of the waning effectivity of the workers' movement to render itself the universal form. In Wales, the 'break-up of Britain', resurgent nationalist movements, total disillusionment with the British state as a vehicle for socialism, and the collapse of Labourism instead reigned supreme. Moreover, though the penultimate sequence

appears to contain the film's most direct political message, one that works to restrain what Welshness might mean, its populist optimism and finality are undercut elsewhere by the film's landscapes.

Just before the penultimate scene, a shot rests on another landscape. The camera pans from a hillside of forestry to a small farmhouse and a line of terraced houses. Diane tells us that investment firms have bought the forestry as protected deposits of capital. The panning motion elongates the vastness of forest land, suggesting the domineering presence of financial capital over the apparent idyll; the seemingly natural world, rather than the smog of industry, enters as another figure of British capital. An ex-mining farmer looks around at the hills, but the very land underneath his feet offers neither stability nor renewal. He discusses the closure of pits and the impossibility of farming for subsistence on his small-holding. We cut to another landscape where distant forestry curves behind a barn in the foreground (Figure 6), and, as the farmer walks through a gate with his sheep dog, he predicts upheaval in the future: "you're bound to get violence, and you're bound to get bitterness".

What initially appears as an image of a romantic, older way of life is not what it seems. Both Diane's voice-over and the farmer's speculation offer different codes with which to read the landscape. These voices insist that both the rural fantasy and industrial community are untenable in the face of outside private ownership of the surrounding land, the absence of a commons, and the flight of manufacturing capital from the region. Here, the slopes and the hills, a typical image of the Welsh nation, offer a simultaneously operative and false pastoral image that reveals the bind of a people stuck between the dying modes of the agrarian and the industrial, with no way out. This image is not the promise of a renewed people or country as in Diane's subsequent nationalist invocation. Rather, the landscape's impossible, tainted Augustean allure becomes the very medium through which the crisis of Wales — its

entrapment in increasingly unsustainable, residual modes of production, its ownership from elsewhere, its long decline, its unemployment, and its deindustrialisation — can be glimpsed.

FIGURE 6—Private Forestry and a Small-Holding

Conclusion

In this article, I have traced how the crisis of Welsh deindustrialisation registers, in *So That You Can Live*, as a formal breakdown of both political documentary and Welsh landscape tropes. As I have argued, landscape across Welsh visual art and literature is a central mediator of the national- and class-constituted structures of feeling across eras; in the South Wales valleys, the landscape has provided an open and visible symbolic terrain with which to affectively register and hypothesise the shifting, uneven character of production and daily working-life. The valleys and *So That You Can Live* offer a unique perspective in the British context. The valleys provide a visible coagulation of the agrarian and the industrial, an

intensified compounding of the residual and becoming-residual of whole ways of life within a single terrain, that CA articulated within an uneven national and global frame by working within-and-against tropes of Welsh landscape imagery.

Yet, CA's deployment of landscape imagery echoes a wider turn towards the landscape in British and European left-filmmaking of the 1970s and 1980s, suggesting the pertinence of my analysis beyond the Welsh context. As Colin Perry notes the landscape is a central image of many counter-pastoral, historical films and tele-plays in 1970s Britain — notably *Penda's Fen* (Alan Clarke, 1974), *Akenfield* (Peter Hall, 1974), *Winstanley* (Kevin Brownlow and Andrew Mollo, 1975) and *In the Forest* (Phil Mulloy, 1978) — that both rejected and historicised the ascendent conservative nationalism of the mainstream British film industry. [45] Elsewhere, the landscape counters chauvinist Irish nationalism, as in the feminist *Maeve* (Pat Murphy, 1981), contains the traces and after-images of political struggle, as in Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's *Fortini/Cani* (1976) or *Too Early/Too Late* (1981), or inscribes the waned historicity of an increasingly globalised economy, as in Michaelangelo Antonioni's *The Passenger* (1975). As various global and national crises compounded, this landscape-turn crystallised a collective sense that by looking outwards at the land, one might grasp the residual ways of life, latent struggles, and emerging historical processes greater than any individualised narrative that, in sum, overdetermined such crises. There was a sustained impulse to look again at the land, or to clear the (aesthetic) ground for new ways of looking at it, for traces of social transformations and histories whose effects would only later become clear.

As my reading of *So That You Can Live* points towards, to interpret such landscape imagery as the site of emergent structures of feeling might reveal a broader history of the ties between cinema, landscape, nationhood, and crises in the capitalist world-system. Such a landscape

focus rebounds within and offers new direction to ongoing film-scholarly attention to cultures of deindustrialisation, [46] the (inter-)national in national cinemas, and the residual persistence of the agrarian within cinematic modernity. [47] *So That You Can Live* reminds us that it is in looking at the slopes and the hills that such historical, political, and conceptual problems might first come to consciousness.

Notes

[1] Gwyn Alf Williams, *When Was Wales?* (London: Penguin 1985).

[2] For a brief history of CA, see: Oliver Dixon, "The chronotopes of radical film: Collective exhibition and the social practice of 'Cinema Action'", *Moving Image Review and Art Journal*, 14, no. 1 (2025).

[3] For example: Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence* (London: Verso 2006); Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back* (London: Routledge 1982); Stuart Hall, et al., *Policing the Crisis* (London: Macmillan Press LTD 1978); Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso 1981); Lester Freidman, ed., *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1993).

[4] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132.

[5] Ibid., 134.

[6] Ibid., 133.

[7] In a special journal issue on Peripheral Europes, Benjamin Kohlmann and Ivana Perica develop the notion of internal peripheries. That is, areas that, while not belonging to the global periphery proper, contain "decelerated development, economic stagnation or worse" relative to their wider unit – Europe in their case, Britain in ours. Kohlmann and Perica, "Introduction: Peripheral Europes," *Critical Quarterly* 65, no. 4 (2023): 6.

[8] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 132-133.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*.

[11] Ibid., 208.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 209.

[14] John Williams, "The Rise and Decline of the Welsh Economy, 1890-1930", in *Class, Community and the Labour Movement: Wales and Canada, 1850-1930* ed. Deian R. Hopkin and Gregory S. Kealey (Cardiff: Llafur/CCLH, 1989), 17. This is not to suggest that Wales constituted an internal colony of England, rather that it was an internal periphery within a regionalised, not cultural, national or ethnic, division of labour.

[15] Philip Cooke, "Dependency, Supply Factors and Uneven Development in Wales and Other Problem Regions," *Regional Studies*, 16, no. 3 (1982): 224.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., 225.

[18] Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1981), 211.

[19] For a discussion of these oppositions, see Robin Mann and Steve Fenton, *Nation, Class and Resentment: The Politics of National Identity in England, Scotland and Wales* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

[20] Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*, 210-11.

[21] Gwyn A. Williams, *When Was Wales?*, (London: Penguin, 1985), 255.

[22] Leon Gooberman and Ben Curtis, "The age of factories: the rise and fall of manufacturing in South Wales, 1945–1985," in *New Perspectives on Welsh Industrial History,* ed. Louise Miskell (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2020).

[23] Gwyn Alf Williams, *When Was Wales?,* 255.

[24] Gavin Cameron, John Muellbauer, and Jonathon Snicker, "A Study in Structural Change: Relative Earnings in Wales Since the 1970s," *Regional Studies* 36, no. 1 (2002).

[25] Gooberman and Curtis, The age of factories, 146.

[26] For a historical overview of the movement, see Margaret Dickinson, ed., *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain, 1945-90* (London: BFI, 1999).

[27] See, for example, Claire Johnston, "So That You Can Live Popular Memory," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, no. 19 (1982).

[28] Paul Willemen, *Looks and Frictions* (London: BFI 1994), 142.

[29] Colin Perry, "History, Landscape, Nation: British Independent Film and Video in the 1970s and 1980s", *Moving Image Review and Art Journal* 6, no. 1-2 (2017); Raymond Williams, *The Country and The City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

[30] Sue Aspinall and Mandy Merck, "So That You Can Live, II", *Screen* 23, no. 3-4 (1982): 159.

[31] J. T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape", in *Landscape and Power* ed. by W. J. T. Mitchell, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2002), 14.

[32] Darren Devine, "US Photographer Bruce Davidson's Iconic Images of South Wales Valleys Life Fetch More Than £5000 at Auction," *Wales Online*, September 30, 2014, accessed May 1, 2025, https://www.walesonline.co.uk/lifestyle/nostalgia/photographer-bruce-davidsons-iconic-images-7860714.

[33] Richard Llewellyn, *How Green Was My Valley?* (Penguin Modern Classics, 2001; first published 1939).

[34] Raymond Williams, "The Welsh Industrial Novel" in *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 2005), 164.

[35] Gwyn Thomas, *All Things Betray Thee* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1986; first published 1949), 99.

[36] Henri Lefebvre, *The Explosion: Marxism and the French Revolution*, trans. Alfred Ehrenfeld (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969).

[37] Kristin Ross, *The Commune Form* (London: Verso, 2024), 19-20.

[38] Willemen notes this demand for landscapes to be "read as palimpsests" (*Looks and Frictions*, 154).

[39] Elena Gorfinkel and John David Rhodes, "Introduction: The Matter of Places," in *Taking Place: Location and the Moving-Image*, ed. Elena Gorfinkel and John David Rhodes, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xv.

[40] Sue Aspinall and Raymond Williams, "This Sadder Recognition – Interview with Raymond Williams," *Screen* 23, no. 3-4 (1982).

[41] Ibid., 147.

[42] Ibid., 152.

[43] Such a claim emerges from Willemen's work on the "mode of address." See Paul Willemen, *Looks and Frictions*. (London: BFI, 1994).

[44] Similarly, Aspinall and Merck critique the film's depiction of the unified family as a form to reflect a class that neglects the contradictions internal to the family. Aspinall and Merck, "So That You Can Live, II," *Screen 23*, no. 3-4 (1982): 159.

[45] Colin Perry, "History, Landscape and Nation: British Independent Film and Video in the 1970s and 1980s".

[46] E.g., Daniel Martin, "The Left Behind: Precarity, Place and Racial Identity in the Contemporary 'Serious Drama'," *Journal of British Cinema and Television 20*, no. 1 (2023).

[47] Benjamin Crais, "Cultivating History: Sergei Eisenstein's The General Line and the Cinema of Agriarian Transition," Discourse 45, no. 1-2 (2023).

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Biography

Oliver Dixon is an AHRC-funded PhD candidate in Film and Screen Studies at the University of Cambridge. His PhD research investigates the history of British independent film and film theory in the long 1970s. Reading the long 1970s as an interregnum period of crisis and transition away from the post-war class compromise into the neoliberal hegemony, he locates the radical practices and theory of the independent film movement as mediations of this transition. His thesis extrapolates the movement's theory of and organisation as 'cinema as social practice', which uniquely enabled it to capture the era's emergent expressions of the class relation and work with/for developing political movements. His article on the exhibition practices of the Cinema Action film collective was published in *Moving Image Review and Art Journal*. He also programmes film screenings for Welsh arts organisations and the London Short Film Festival.