Landscape Photography as Cognitive Mapping: The Temporal and Spatial Politics of Garden Festival Wales and its Territory

By

Simon Ford

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Abstract

This research project, which is theory and practice based, is a response to Fredric Jameson's call for a practice of cognitive mapping. The field of study is the site of Garden Festival Wales, Ebbw Vale, South Wales, that occupies, mainly, the former location of Ebbw Vale Steelworks. In bringing attention to Jameson's concept, it is hoped to reaffirm social landscape photography's political agency.

Garden Festival Wales was the last of the UK National Garden Festival programmes that took place between 1984 and 1992. They were major public events staged in various regions of the UK as the industrial economy was being dismantled in favour of financial services and a capitalism increasingly operating at a global level of value production. Blighted industrial land was remediated prior to the construction of the festivals, thereafter their purpose was to promote the regions in anticipation investment and jobs would follow. However, there was another motive behind them, and it was ideological, the advocation of a new future reconstructed on the values of consuming and ownership.

The research study proposes the ruins and remains of the garden festival are emblematic of this transitional period of UK history. From a society and economy, at the time, established, primarily, on industrialism and the collective to a society based on finance and the service sector, at its core a liberal individual.

The social and aesthetic philosophy of Theodor W. Adorno is central to the theoretical interests of the project, together with Walter Benjamin's history as philosophy organon. Notably, his speculative concept of the dialectical image – a method of schematising history in such a way it questions what seems invulnerable in the present. The research asks how his concept can be made appropriate for a practice of photography that has the former industrial landscape as its main interest.

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Preamble

There is little need to see an old map or an old photograph of the upper Ebbw Valley, around the town of Ebbw Vale in South Wales, to understand something must have happened there, something that altered the landscape in such a staggering way. Far-reaching changes manifest in the landscape even 20 years after the steelworks finally ceased production and over 30 years since the last colliery closed. Vast open expanses of overgrown land characterise many regions of the UK where heavy industry once prospered. Sometimes there is new road infrastructure, although it seems to lead nowhere in particular, often ending abruptly at the edge of waste ground. Occasionally, there are even roundabouts, but they, too, would seem to have little purpose.

There is a walk I take from where I live in Ebbw Vale to the Garden Festival Wales site around two and half miles south of the town. I go down the steep lane, the original pedestrian route from the town to the steelworks for most of its modern existence, to the bottom of the valley. Past the abutments of the old footbridge over the long-ago dismantled railway, that used to bring a miscellany of materials to the steelworks including limestone, coal and iron ore. Before walking over the fallow ground where the cold-rolling mills once stood, just opposite the new houses built in the shallow concavity left by the original 19th century blast-furnaces.

A trench has been excavated in the road, probably utilities for the houses being built just behind the old administration building for the steelworks and the only structure to survive demolition. Early 20th century and neo-baroque in style, it is commanded over by a capstan clock that has carved into all four of its sides the same inscription which reads: 'Time Fleeth Away Without Delay'. Passing by the excavation in the road, I notice some bricks have been unearthed with the name 'Ebbw Vale' imprinted into them and that the trench has been cut through a layer of blast furnace slag and coal waste. I walk past the preserved hot ingot rolling stand; the front gardens of the new houses almost touching its concrete foundation pedestal. I wonder if anyone else has noticed the trickle of oil coming from the gearbox, near the base, just above the words 'BOTTOM DRIVE' cast into the casing. Perhaps a 'bleeding' of oil that makes this mechanical edifice seem alive. In a less reified sense, it seems to re-animate the time when it was a working machine and all those workers who must have attended to it. I imagine the oil levels being checked at the beginning of each shift, being topped-up if necessary, and the cacophony of noise and bustle of activity as the production-line was set in motion.

There are again, today, a couple of people doing something on the empty ground in front of the further education college. This time one of them has a laser theodolite and the other a level staff. I'm guessing they must be doing a survey for what I've heard is a new automotive research and training centre.

As usual, there are a number of dog walkers and joggers on the path, which runs alongside what used to be the railway marshalling yard, serving the northern part of the works, and now a nature reserve, always profuse with teasel and willowherb this time of year. On the ridge above me, had I been walking here twenty years ago would have loomed, for the next mile and half, the steelworks' strip rolling mill and annealing lines. Dense now with young ash, silver birch and sycamore.

Leaving the bottom of the valley I emerge near the former location of the Victoria Colliery. I walk along Festival Road, past the Ebbw Vale Business Enterprise Centre (funded by Tata Steel, the owners of the steelworks at the time of its closure) and where the Victoria blast furnaces were once located, eventually arriving at the Garden Festival Wales site and formally the visitor carpark (and before that, the location of the steelworks' cooling towers). There are cedar trees arranged either side of a now depilated 'boulevard' leading to where the festival's entrance pavilions once stood.

The new village of Victoria has been built on a substantial part of the Garden Festival site, even so there are numerous ruins of the original festival that have survived, dispersed over many acres. Walking through the Japanese Gardens on my way to the southern boundary of the site I can see the tops of the canopies of the Festival Park Retail Outlet, up on the hill, abandoned since late 2021. I found out recently it is to be converted, by the real estate owners, into business units for let. Fortunately, I got the opportunity to photograph the coal-mining tableau outside the entrance just before it closed, as it was dismantled almost immediately afterwards.

I climb the 'Stairway to the Stars' originally linking the lower part of the garden festival site with the attractions higher up on the hillside. Remarkably, the handhold ropes are still intact, as the wooden posts rot away, their original ruby red colour permeate sometimes a mostly green encrusted surface. Reaching the summit, just in front of me are the two hills of steel slag produced by the Victoria blast furnaces, prominent because of their distinctive profile, which were during the garden festival turned into a waterfall feature.

The southern-most border of the festival site is where the steelworks' slag-tip and the coal waste tip of Waunlwyd Colliery come together. Substantial remediation work took place here prior to the start of the festival and before a number of attractions were built, including 'The Countryside Centre' with little sign that it ever existed, except a path that zig-zags up the old tip. Looking over the football pitches, south, to the village of Cwm, the main street, Marine Street, is lined with terraced housing and over a mile long and leads right up to the former entrance of Marine Colliery, the last in the Ebbw Valley to close in 1989.

An unimaginable quantity of surplus-value has been produced in this landscape, over many decades and not only by the work and labour process, but from the nature of the land itself. Now that industry has long departed, there other values and meanings present today besides those equated with the accumulation of wealth. Like those to do with history and nature. There are values and meanings in the process of passing away too, like those to do with community. There is something here, as well, that can enfold all these last into a story about the here and now and where we might be heading in the future, and this is the landscape's *representational value*.

The upper Ebbw Valley is a unique location because of its isolated topography, even by expectations associated with the Valleys of South Wales. Surrounded by mountains and cut off from any adjacent urban centre, it is a landscape that seeks only to amplify the conflict between capital and nature. A unique backdrop that further casts into stark relief the ruins of industry past as antagonistic emblems to progress. We might say it is a landscape that offers a cipher for what Nigel Thrift has termed 'political aesthetic knowledge',[1] and the kind of knowledge procured by 'opening the event to more … action, more imagination'.[2] Art has work to do here, to make other kinds of meaning of a critically useful and universal kind. This entails situating the landscape in representation in such a way it has 'something *real* to say about politics.'[3]

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[1] Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, *Arts of the Political: New Openings for the Left* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 14.

[2] Nigel Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 20.

[3] Amin and Thrift*,* p. 40. My emphasis.

Introduction

> Brecht's stress that what defines the dialectic above all is the
> observation—everywhere and always—of contradictions as such.
> Wherever you find them, you can be said to be thinking
> dialectically; whenever you fail to see them, you can be sure that
> you have stopped doing so.

> – Fredric Jameson.[1]

Fredric Jameson and Cognitive Mapping

Fredric Jameson's concept of cognitive mapping refers to an aesthetic means of orientating local experience in an otherwise incomprehensible and foreclosed production of space associated with multinational capitalism. Where the 'empirical position of the subject' is a less and less tangible one. Under global capital, the production of space seems to be something always orchestrated and mobilised from elsewhere. It is precisely in this kind of situation where cognitive mapping is intended to enable, according to Jameson, 'a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality … [and the] … structure as a whole'[2] Jameson's concept is a response to a complexity identified with capitalism and experience that became evident in the West during the early 1970s and in the following decades, with neo-liberalism as its organising principle, a capitalist form expanding to all limits of the globe, albeit in economically uneven ways.

Jameson sees art practice as the most suitable means to bring to light this absent cause of capitalist activity. At the heart of any understanding, for Jameson, is representability, including the capability to make connections, a function he sees essential in aesthetic practices. The research study proposes photography has a particular 'elective affinity' to this kind of connection making methodology, not least an ability to render the world both empirically and aesthetically.

Cognitive mapping has had a long history in Jameson's thought, appearing then disappearing for extended periods. Often when it reappears it has been modified or renewed

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[1] Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London and New York: Verso, 2009), p. 288.
[2] Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic or Late Capitalism', *New Left Review,* no. 146 (July – August 1984), pp. 38-39.

in some way. In the 1977 essay 'Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: *Dog Day Afternoon* as a Political Film' he first situates the idea of cognitive mapping – not named, as such, at this time – as a condition of class-consciousness emerging allegorically in the film *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975).[3] Jameson returns to a class-based version of cognitive mapping – again, not identified, as such – a number of years later in his book *The Political Unconscious* (1983 [1981])[4] where he understands all cultural texts, artefacts and objects to be allegorically enciphered and potential places of political awakening. The concept is more extensively explored, its central theoretical tenets strengthen and, for the first time, appears as a named concept in the essay 'Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (1984)'. Jameson sets-out in this essay the global context for his method, explaining the 'need for maps' to assuage disorientations associated with late capital. His concept surfaces again in 'Cognitive Mapping (1988)' a transcript of a conference paper calling for an aesthetic delineation of global capitalist space.[5] What makes this paper interesting today, besides the elucidation on his concept, is that Jameson feels it necessary to make a robust case for a materialist aesthetic and theoretical approach, the paper delivered during a period of doubt in any universalising concept, let alone the effectiveness of representation, especially of a realist kind, the post-structural voices in the audience are at their most strained. In his 1991 book *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,*[6] Jameson offers the most developed and sustained version of cognitive mapping, forming the central methodology in his call for a practice of critical postmodernism. In *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (1995)[7] Jameson enhances the aesthetic and interpretative core of his concept, whilst continuing to stress the urgent need for a practice of mapping capital's 'global system'. The essay 'Culture and Finance Capital (1997)'[8] is where Jameson considers that any mapping of capital will need to have an approach that takes account of the immaterial and shrouded operations of the financial markets.[9]

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[3] Fredric Jameson, 'Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: Dog Day Afternoon as a Political Film', *College English,* Vol. 38, No. 8, Mass Culture, Political Consciousness and English Studies (April 1977), pp. 843-859. Sidney Lumet, dir., *Dog Day Afternoon,* Artists Entertainment Complex / Warner Bros (1975).

[4] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London and New York: Routledge, 1983).

[5] Fredric Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping' in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana and Chicago: Illini Books Edition, 1988).

[6] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

[7] Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (London: BFI Publishing, 1995).

[8] Fredric Jameson 'Culture and Finance', *Critical Enquiry*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Autumn, 1997), pp. 246-265.

[9] Ibid., p. 252.

Cognitive mapping has had little take-up, if any, as a *pre-emptive* methodology in photography, let alone landscape photography. There are, however, a number of photographers and artists who pursue an investigative and knowledge-based form of photography. They are often practitioners who construct critical lines of enquiry attempting to show, certainly in social landscape photography, the effect on communities and the environment, either directly or indirectly, of free-market capitalism. In the field of theory, it has been a different story with a steady succession of reviewing, renewing and criticising of Jameson's concept, although they are studies referring, in the main, to cognitive mapping and cinema.[10]

Following Jameson's conceptualisation, what would landscape photography look like if it took cognitive mapping as its methodology of? More explicitly, regarding the specific matter at hand for this research project, what would landscape photography look like if were to visualise the 'totality of capital', in Jameson's terminology, having the post-heavy industry landscape as its subject matter? What is expressly valuable about Jameson's concept it is meant to be a form of visual inquiry relevant to a given art practice and responsive to any field or context of experience. Appreciating this openness, Jameson's concept has been interpreted in this study, so it takes account of the landscape in three ways. First, as a place objectively produced by historical forces; secondly, a place that continues, today, to be produced by the same forces of history and, finally, a place where a dialectic of nature and capital play-out as a legacy of these same forces (of industrial capitalism).

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[10] Jason Berger, 'Tethering the Butterfly: Revisiting Jameson's 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society and the Paradox of Resistance', *The Eugene O'Neill Review,* Vol. 28 (2006), pp. 211-215; Deborah Dixon and Leo Zonn, 'Confronting the Geopolitical Aesthetic: Fredric Jameson, *The Perfumed Nightmare*, and the Perilous Place of Third Cinema', *Geopolitics,* 10 (2005), pp. 290-315; 'Cognitive Cartography in the Neocolonial World: Jameson's '"Third-World Literature" and Ngugi's *Petals of Blood'*, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language,* Vol. 55, No.2 (Summer, 2013), pp. 184-206; Tyson E. Lewis, 'Too Little Too Late: Reflections on Fredric Jameson's Pedagogy of Form', *Rethinking Marxism,* 21:3, pp. 438-452; Tanner Mirrlees, 'Cognitive Mapping or, the Resistant Element in the Work of Fredric Jameson: A Response to Jason Berger', *Cultural Logic: An Electronic Journal of Marxist Theory and Practice*, Vol. 8, (2005), no page numbers. Available at: https://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/clogic/article/view/191865. Last accessed, 05/08/23. There are two explorations of Jameson's concept that deal with a variety of art forms and not only limited to film: Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute* (Alresford: Zero Books, 2015) and is the most sustained of all the studies on cognitive mapping, including a survey of landscape photography practice. The other is Peer Illner, 'The Artist as Whistleblower: Cartography, Capitalism and Cognitive Mapping', *Continent,* Issue 6.2 (2017), pp. 37-47. Available at: https://continentcontinent.cc/content/3-archives/1-issues/4-issue-6-2-2017/6-the-artist-as-whistleblower-cartography-capitalism-and-cognitive-mapping/295_illner-the_artist_as_whistleblower.cartography-capitalism-and-cognitive-mapping.pdf. Last accessed, 23/09/23.

Landscape and Capital

The research project, throughout, is guided by a materialist interpretation of the landscape, which means any definition of the term 'landscape' must reflect this objective as well. Raymond Williams provides an expedient explanation, that any interpretation of the landscape must emanate from historical circuits of production and social relations: 'A working country is hardly ever a landscape. The very idea of landscape implies separation and observation. It is possible and useful to trace the internal histories of landscape painting, landscape writing, landscape gardening and landscape architecture, but in the final analysis we must relate these histories to the common history of a land and its society.'[11] Or, Henri Lefebvre, on space: 'we … have to study not only the history of space, but also the history of representation, along with that of their relationships – with each other, with practice, and with ideology.'[12] The subject of representation is, then, indivisible from the object of society. W.J.T. Mitchell similarly wishes to turn the concept of landscape toward the object, only this time by having an idea of landscape more as an action, or something that is acted upon, in terms of what it does to us and what we do to it: '[A] model [of landscape] would ask not just what landscape "is" or "means" but what it *does*, how it works as a cultural practice. Landscape … doesn't merely signify or symbolize power relations; it is an instrument of cultural power'.[13] Denis E. Cosgrove provides a useful working definition of landscape for this study – a merger of the Mitchell and Williams definition, in many ways –, a concept incorporating that which is empirically concrete and symbolically constructed:

> [L]andscape … refers to the surface of the earth, or part
> thereof, and thus the chosen field of geographical enquiry, it
> incorporates far more than merely the visual and functional
> arrangement of natural and human phenomenon which the
> discipline can identify, clarify, map and analyses …. As a term
> widely employed in painting and imaginative literature as well
> as in environmental design and planning, landscape carries
> multiple layers of meaning…. Landscape is not merely the

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[11] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Vintage, 2016), p. 172.
[12] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space,* trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 42.
[13] W.J.T Mitchell, 'Imperial Landscape' in W.J.T Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power*, (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 1-2.

world we see, it is a construction, a composition of the world.

Landscape is a way of seeing the world.[14]

To view the landscape means to have in mind already circulating ideas about nature and the land, thus it is the vista becomes more easily assimilable to understanding. The symbolic is the means modulating what is otherwise unintelligible in magnitude – threatening, even. Art helps assuage this anxiety and instinctual response, observes Kenneth Clark, so that the landscape appears more temperate, closer to hand, more approachable.[15] So our experience of nature, land, space and place is always a mediated one (by the idea of a particular landscape – a Romantic one, for instance). A rationalising Theodor W. Adorno assigned to myth both in modern-day usage, albeit instrumentally corrupted, and a closer to nature archaic form now lost to us post-enlightenment. Representation, specifically the artwork, for Adorno, provides a surrogate for nature and, similar to Clark's discussion, fundamental to our understanding of it.[16] There is danger though, if the landscape is something which is constructed by the imagination from already existing ideas so it must also be vulnerable to ideological manipulation – for better or worse.

It would be self-evident to say that a history of land is first about possession and activities to do with the accumulation of private wealth. Of course, land that comes into private possession has to be delimited, as such: the enclosing of common land in England from the end of the 15th century, for example, thus ensuring its value producing potential was protected and controlled. As already touched on, the concept landscape implies symbolic production and economic activity are entwined, so much so landscape art can be understood to be as much about concealing as revealing, as Elizabeth K. Helsinger explains:

> As in Holland, the word [landscape] refers both to the design
> imposed in the process of constructing an artistic
> representation as in a painting or poem, and to design worked
> out on the land itself…. Dutch ditches, English enclosed fields
> and landed estates, pictures and poems in both countries

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[14] Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Wisconsin and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), p. 13.

[15] Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art* (London: John Murray, 1991), pp. 4-16. According to Clark, the rational space of the enclosed garden would have served a similar purpose to painting, in this respect.

[16] A line of thinking that runs throughout Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory.* Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Ralph Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London and New York, Continuum, 1997).

– assert, though in order to disavow, an understanding of possession that conveys the right to shape the appearance of the land and control its uses: rights of private ownership … of land as capital … as the basis of national prosperity.[17]

This also re-enforces the concept landscape is not only confined to matters of the artwork, or other representations, the land is also a landscape when it is culturally delineated, generally in accordance with changes to production as a result of technological progress.

The picturesque, in many ways, typifies the rationalised view of the landscape as, essentially, a visual 'system' fashioned from the preconceived; William Gilpin (1724 – 1804) the most prominent personality of the trend. It is worth spending a little time looking at Gilpin and the picturesque more generally, as there are interesting correlations with the garden festival events at Ebbw Vale in particular. Gilpin arranged picturesque tours of the UK the patrons of which were coached in appreciating – in more practical terms: how to frame – the landscape according to the perspective, proportion and content of classical Italian painting, typically the paintings of Claude Lorraine. The convening of nature in agreement with a preconceived logic included, on occasion, attendant technical paraphernalia like the Lorraine Glass, a device for framing the landscape in harmony with the perspective of its name sake. Other apparatus was physically installed into the landscape to enhance – to construct, even – an experience of the picturesque. Like viewing stations strategically placed around a planned circuit often in a private estate. Peregrinations that might have included other kinds of ersatz structures like follies, grottoes and fake ruins that amplified further the picturesque experience.

The picturesque, as already touched on above, was not only an aesthetic scheme for revealing features of the landscape that were otherwise veiled, equally was an advantageous programme of obscuring what really existed. Typically, signs in the land that might indicate co-option into monetary interest: 'the picturesque … mystified the agency of social change so that fate, and not the economic decisions of the landowning classes, seemed responsible. In this respect, the picturesque represented an attempt to wipe out the

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[17] Elizabeth K. Helsinger, 'Land and National Representation' in Michael Rosenthal, Christiana Payne and Scott Wilcox, eds. *Prospects for the Nation: Recent Essays in British landscape 1750 – 1880* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 15-16. Importantly, for Helsinger, any artwork's rendition of property presupposes the landowner, too: 'Landscapes … also point to their observers. They project the possibility of a subject while they refer to a portion of the land. The landscape of property projects an owner.' Ibid., p. 16.

fact of enclosure and to minimize its consequences.'[18] The landscape according to the picturesque meant, as well, having a jurisdiction over the ethical dimension or how social relations happened to be portrayed – or not: 'Picturesque enterprise … with its almost exclusive emphasis on visual appreciation, entailed a suppression of the spectator's moral response to those very subjects which it could least hope to divest of moral significance – the ruin, the hovel and rural poverty.'[19] Corroboration of which can be found in Gilpin's *Observations on the River Wye* (1770),[20] a chronicle he made of one of his tours.

Many of the places Gilpin encountered on his journey along the Wye were witness to proto-industrial activity. Only they were scenes often assimilated into the rhetoric and tone of picturesque language. For example, when Gilpin was approaching the town of Neath in South Wales he had this to say:

> Beyond the river the country arose in hills, which were happily
> adorned, when we saw them in a clear serene evening, with
> one or *two of those distant forges or char-coal pits,* which we
> admired on the banks of the Wye, wreathing a light veil of
> smoke along their summits and blending them with the sky. —
> Through this landscape we entered the town of Neath; which,
> with its old castle, and bridges, excited many picturesque
> ideas.[21]

In other encounters the view so despoiled it was beyond even blandishment to salvage. Like when Gilpin arrived with his party at Tintern Abbey in the Forest of Dean just on the South Wales side of the England / Wales border (just over 20 miles from Ebbw Vale as the crow flies). In the Abbey Gilpin comes across workers from the nearby ironworks who had improvised shelters to live, amongst the ruins of the Abbey, to which he remarked: 'I never saw so loathsome a human dwelling.' And upon leaving the Abbey, he noted: 'Tintern-abbey hath been described as a solitary, tranquil silence; but its immediate environs only are meant. Within half a mile of it are carried on great iron-works, which introduce noise and bustle into these regions of tranquillity.' Marring an otherwise perfect picturesque experience.[22] Interestingly, Tintern Abbey, at the time, was owned by the Duke of Beaufort

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[18] Ibid., p. 75.
[19] Malcolm Andres, *The Search for the Picturesque Landscape, Aesthetics and Tourism*, *1770 – 1800* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1989), p. 59.
[20] William Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye* (London: Pallas Athene, [1770] 2005).
[21] Ibid., p. 78. My emphasis.
[22] Ibid., pp. 40-45.

who also owned the nearby ironworks where the workers Gilpin met at the Abbey were employed. The Duke of Beaufort also leased land, not long after Gilpin's visit, to the developer of Beaufort Ironworks at the head of the Ebbw Valley (the village adopting the Duke's title name sometime later) precipitating the development of the nearby Ebbw Vale Ironworks soon after (see Chapter 1). In fact, with the former Gilpin example mind, it is the kind of aestheticizing of industrial activity which became a sub-genre of the picturesque in its own right. Joseph Wright of Derby's (1734 - 1797) *Arkwright's cotton mill, Cromford* (Fig. 1), for instance. The mystique of industry shown in harmony with nature[23] and an aestheticized affirmation, celebration, even, of new bourgeois wealth.

Fig. 1. Joseph Wright of Derby, *Arkwright's cotton mill, Cromford* (c. 1795–6).
© Derby Museum and Art Gallery.

With the Romantic sublime the depiction of industry became an equivocal viewing experience because it was a treatment of the landscape that could be viewed either with wonder or as an omen of the new industrialism. See for example, Philip James de Loutherbourg (1740 - 1812), *Coalbrookdale by Night* (Fig. 2). Exemplifying if, nothing else, artistic production is always in tension with the multifarious attitudes of an age. Not unheard of today, a similar sublime approach to landscape photography showing the consequences of industry and capital can sometimes be just as ambiguous.

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[23] Bermingham, pp. 80-81.

Fig. 2. Philip James de Loutherbourg, *Coalbrookdale by Night* (1801).
Image credit: Science Museum / Science & Society Picture Library

The picturesque, including the close relatives of the pictorial and pastoral, have probably had the most profound and lasting effect on landscape photography, certainly in Britain. A perspective that has survived not only in amateur practice, but in professional and commercial circles remains the convention to imitate. An aesthetic treatment that can be seen as a form of myth-making, certainly in its idealising of the landscape. An ideological perspective the garden festival events sought to exploit, not only in representation and the general *mise-en-scène* of their staging, but in rhetoric espoused in editorials and advertising. The picturesque is easily digested because, precisely, it is a *pre-digested* form, to use Adorno's phrase. As John Taylor explains, it is in this way that 'photographers … become functions of myth, and so have real political and social consequences. Unsurprisingly, this use of photography to represent a *view,* or a mythic landscape, is still the main issue today. Photographers serve this system as long as they offer us *views.*' [24]

A major challenge to the picturesque approach to landscape photography was not really in evidence until the 1970s, certainly in the UK, then mostly because of the emergence of photography as an independent form of practice no longer constrained by commercial and, or conservative aesthetic inertia. Practices that have had an important transitional effect on landscape photography, as we will see later.

Any materialist interpretation of the concept landscape, as inferred a number of times already, means it is never detached from the process of social relations: the land as a place

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[24] John Taylor 'The Imaginary Landscape', *Ten 8*, Rural Myths, no. 12 (1983), p. 12.

of production (and the economic interest and rational organising principles that inevitably follow). Landscape in the service of power and vested interest is no more pervasively demonstrated than in Western empire and its social form: colonisation and landscape, as a representational practice, was the ideological prime mover in its legitimisation. Landscape art was / is enduringly interconnected with the fortunes of a nation and the wherewithal of empire. Largely, rights to territory that were initially represented in painting and engraving, lithography and other proto-reproducible forms including survey depictions like maps and other schematic documentation. With the invention of photography not only came rapidity of distribution to a considerable number of people cheaply and easily; more importantly, it was photography's indexically that effected an even more convincing message both for settler and capitalist of their natural right to (foreign) land. These were mimetic 'colonial fantasies', the landscape as wilderness, yet a territory full of so far to be discovered riches.[25]

Without meaning, in any way, to dilute the historical brutalities associated with Western empire, this study understands capitalism's ceaseless search for territories of profit – the process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, to use more contemporary parlance – to be no less than an activity of colonisation (with the term 'territory' also to be understood in the broadest sense). A practice of possession and hegemonization that is today more insidious, but no less pitiless, central to the survival of capitalist enterprise. Certainly, one can see, historically, the landscape of Ebbw Vale in both these senses of the term: the subjection and exploitation of local people, nature and the landscape in the pursuit of profit by incoming capitalist interest. Only for this past, during the garden festival programme, to be occupied once again by a dominant force, this time one that reimagined history so as to fabricate a mythological picture of the future. Today, quite simply, is capital's colonising of consciousness. Where the UK garden festival programme can be seen as an example of the emergence of this kind of proselytization so key to neoliberalism's accession.

The Garden Festival Landscape and its Territory

The creation of myth was tantamount to an incipient neo-liberalism in the 1980s and early 1990s, part of an ideological project designed to change consciousness so that new frontiers of accumulation could be realised with as little friction as possible. And it was the 'heritage industry' that took a leading role in aligning attitudes to new forms of value and meaning. Industrial and social history appeared in officially sanctioned form, during this nascent time

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[25] Jarrod Hore, *How Landscape Photography Shaped Settler Colonialism (*Oakland: University of California, 2022)*, p. 6.

of neo-liberalism, in a mostly pacifying way; any radicality the past might once have had, including the recent past, was nullified – indeed was made appropriate for consumption, instead. Devoid of immediate experience, history was open to external interpretation and a dominate view of industrial work and working-class culture that collapsed the past into pre-digested forms of nostalgia.[26] One of the more considerable enterprises of this type of enculturing was the UK National Garden Festival programme.

The UK National Garden Festivals were staged every two years between 1984 and 1992 and had three fundamental aims behind their conception. The first was the reclamation of contaminated and blighted land once occupied by heavy manufacturing making it suitable for future redevelopment. The second, were the garden festivals' capacity to publicise and promote a region with the ambition of attracting significant business investment and the employment opportunities that would then follow. The third rationale was ideological, the Garden Festivals were spectacles design to present an affirmatory view of the future, one that was premised on undivided forms of consumerism and finance capital. Each of the festivals at Liverpool, Stoke-on-Trent, Glasgow, Gateshead and Ebbw Vale ran for around five months. Visitor attractions were built including temporary gardens, water features, retail outlets, heritage trails, country centres, amusement parks and a multitude of promotional 'pavilions' advertising and exhibiting the services and products of various finance, leisure and retail businesses. After the festivals closed, the land was sold for retail, housing, and other kinds of development.

The research focuses on the final garden festival event which took place near the town of Ebbw Vale in the Ebbw Valley, South Wales. Like the other garden festival locations, the site in the upper Ebbw Valley is an entanglement of a long and recent history of capital: new developments reside alongside the ruins of the garden festival which are, themselves, interspersed with ruins of the industrial past.[27]

This study sees the garden festival landscape at Ebbw Vale as emblematic of the transition from a massified form of industrial capital, that had the collective at its centre, to a form based on multinational finance, information, an absolute commodity form and a liberal subject. In this respect, the festival site is being proposed as a culturally and socially rich

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[26] John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: Sage, 2002), pp. 94-123.
[27] The former site of the Glasgow Garden Festival almost completely redeveloped post festival, unlike the other locations, is less inclined to show these kinds of juxtapositions. Nonetheless, it has attracted interest from archaeologists who recently conducted a dig at the site in the hope of recovering some of its buried artefacts 'Glasgow archaeologists dig for lost treasures from 1988 garden festival', *The Guardian*, 28/05/2022.

fragment, in a Walter Benjamin sense of the term 'fragment', symptomatic of a more extensive, spatial and temporal picture of capitalist relations and subjectivity.

Because of the distinct context of the landscape under scrutiny it is history that, in due course, takes precedence and not only in theoretical terms, but also in the direction of the practice. Ex-heavily industrialised regions still provide the possibility of making a concrete juxtaposition between past and present. Even after many years of large-scale clearances there are any number and variety of ruins, remnants, fragments, memorials, buildings and, of course, memories. Although, importantly, and where there is considerable discussion on how it can be successfully achieved, it must be a form of history set-in motion toward the present day so that it gains critical leverage on our present predicament. Therefore, the project proposes a cognitive map is made from the prospect of not only how things look right now, but how they came to look this way in the first place and the possibility of how these same things might look different in the future – in a utopian sense of the possible.[28]

There might be those who think the landscape has little to offer, critically, in an age of so-called cognitive capital and its communication technology means. David Harvey suggests that even though the intangible character of capital is an important anatomy of the production of space to understand it is never without substance:[29] telecommunication infrastructure, for instance. The landscape also registers the effects of the capitalist production of space. For example, indications of the transition from manual forms of labour to those of a cognitive type, this would not only be ruins or redundant buildings, but equally infrastructure once affiliated with one form of labour that has been adapted for new work practices and routines.[30] In a related sense, on an accelerating basis it seems, the changes in and on the landscape as work and labour disappear altogether and leisure becomes the ascendent vista. In a broader sense of the changes to labour practices from manual to cognitive, many ex-industrialised landscapes readily display symptoms of uneven geographic development and those familiar and less familiar signs of economic and social dispossession – not least the predominance of manual labour in ex-industrial regions, over

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[28] To show what things look like right now is the possibility of how these same things might look different in the future. Indicating, as such, the utopian component that is always present, for Jameson at least, in any speculation about capital. Ian Buchanan, *Fredric Jameson: Live Theory* (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), pp. 112-113.

[29] See for example: David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: A Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London and New York: Verso, 2019). As was the case for Allan Sekula, a theme explored in later chapters of this study.

[30] One interesting adaption of old infrastructure is for mobile phone repeater masts, in particular chimney stacks.

that of intellectual labour.[31] Even a speculation on the stock market, or other market activity, can have a reciprocal and empiric indicator in the landscape – which might be something registering in the negative: as a loss or absence of something. A more extreme example of this would be the financial crash of 2008, the consequences of which are still visible in many ex-industrial regions.

This is not to say, it is evidence that can be found in anything other than varying degrees of fragmentation, as Harvey points out: capital leaves in its wake nothing but confusion and is its inherent 'maintenance of heterogeneity.'[32] Although, what may seem initially like fragmented and disparate phenomena can assume a semblance of coherence, if they are read as effects of the totality (of capital), a point Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri draw attention to: 'The sphere of capitalist relations … is composed of an extraordinarily heterogeneous, conflictual and unstable set of elements which act on different scales … registering the heterogeneity of elements *should not prevent us from recognizing the overall design*.'[33] As Harvey iterates, it is still very possible, under the most difficult of obfuscating practices to situate and to name capital.[34]

When considering this, the research believes making available the landscape not only empirically but figuratively assists the process of visualisation (of the obfuscated character of late capital). The landscape procured in this way, for Dianne Harris, it becomes a place for 'understanding the operations of authority, the flow of capital, the manipulation of environmental resources for specific ends, the creation of social hierarchies … and as a conveyor of ideology'.[35] Jameson takes this even further. The emblematic landscape can provide access to adjacent contexts and other spatial and temporal levels of meaning in excess of what seems to be apparent, in fact, to the 'world system', itself:

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[31] The majority of working age people in the upper Ebbw Valley are employed in the manufacturing sector or other jobs of a manual category, including the logistical and care sector. See the Office for National Statistics 2021 Census Data for Blaenau Gwent: https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/customprofiles/build/#W07000084. Last accessed 12/12/2023.

[32] David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism* (London: Profile Books, 2011), p. 214.

[33] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, 'Empire Twenty Years on', *New Left Review,* 120 (Nov. / Dec. 2019), p. 78. My emphasis. Nonetheless, capitalism is in the business of constructing an absolute image not only for others, but also for its own aggrandisement: 'Contrary to the way many postmodernist accounts would have it … the imperial machine, far from eliminating master narratives, actually produces and reproduces them (ideological master narratives in particular) in order to validate and celebrate its own power. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 34.

[34] Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital,* p. 214.

[35] Dianne Harris, 'Self and Landscape' in Rachel Ziady Delue and James Elkins, eds., *Landscape Theory,* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 190. See also Charles Harrison 'The Effects of Landscape' in *Landscape and Power*, p. 220 and p. 231.

> On the global scale, allegory allows the most random, minute, or
> isolated landscapes to function as a figurative machinery in which
> questions about the system and its control over the local
> ceaselessly rise and fall …. On the actanial level, a host of partial
> subjects, fragmentary or schizoid constellations, can often now
> stand in allegorically for trends and forces in the world system.[36]

The landscape in this research study is encountered as complex economic and social vista, including the 'absent cause' of history and a dispassionate first nature. A view of the landscape that has been similarly described by the photographer John Kippin (b. 1950) and the challenge for photography is how it adapts and responds to this kind of objective and constantly shifting panorama:

> The engagement with the landscape as a place in which society
> and culture is reflected and organised is a central one and it
> continues to be important to engage with a visual representation
> of our landscape that explores its links to ownership, capitalism,
> consumption, exploitation and globalisation whilst at the same
> time considering its bio-diversity and ecology and how we might
> consider new imperatives towards sustaining it in the transition to
> a post – post-industrial representation regardless of whatever we
> eventually end up calling it.[37]

Staying with Kippin, now with his long-time collaborator Chris Wainwright (1955 - 2017) and their *Futureland Now* project. Because not only is it a project helpful to illustrate the idea of a hybrid form of landscape photography, it additionally demonstrates how it can be employed as a form of cognitive mapping charting the local to the global. During an interview with Liz Wells they provide a number of enlightening answers to her questions. Explicitly, landscape

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[36] Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic,* p. 5. The social landscape photography of John Davies has been appraised as having a similar emblematic character. In that his photographs often surpass what is being depicted. Gabriel N. Gee, 'The Representation of the Northern City in the Photography of John Davies (1981-2003)', *Visual Culture in Britain,* Volume 11, Issue 3 (2010). Specifically, regarding the latter point, see p. 337.
[37] John Kipping, 'Some Thoughts on Photography, Landscape and the Post-Industrial', *Material Memories* conference, University of Newcastle, 2015. Available at https://johnkippin.com/text/. Last Accessed, 12/09/23. Later published as John Kippin, '*Post*-Post-Industrial: Some Thoughts on *Futureland*, Photography and Landscape' in Gwen Heeney, ed., *The Post-industrial Landscape as Site for Creative Practice* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2017).

photography having the potential to raise consciousness concerning the effects of globalisation on the economy of a region. A photography that not only shows the results of capitalist activity on the landscape in the present, but how it signifies just as effectively in the future as a legacy of the original representation. Because of the scale and complex nature of an ever-moving political-economic phenomenon, there is an understanding, by the artists, it will always be an awareness of a limited and incremental kind photography and aesthetic practice, more generally, can provide, but a contribution to understanding, nevertheless. Their rejoinder is particularly apposite for the Ebbw Valley landscape, garden festival site and certainly the cognitive mapping that this project is undertaking:

> I do think it is vital to get a sense of that global agenda as a kind of baseline that runs through the focus of our work. The conditions in 2012 are not that different to the conditions in the late 1980s. The same issues of class divide, economic divide defined by geography and cultural divides and unemployment trends still exist …. The very thing that we saw happening in 1989 in terms of initiatives to reinvigorate a region, that whole regeneration rhetoric from people like Heseltine is not a lot different to rhetoric you now hear around the Olympics for instance …. Here we are still dealing with the North, looking at places that we looked at 20/30 years ago saying, actually very little is changed in terms of the social and economic orders and political neglect. The landscape might look a bit different but actually we can see through pictures exactly the same kinds of issues. [38]

Landscapes like Ebbw Valley frequently invite the characterisation 'post-industrial' which, as many will know, could not be further from reality. Ebbw Vale (and the Ebbw Valley more generally) is highly dependent on manufacturing and, like other regions, spends considerable time and economic resource attempting to attract other industries to the area. Post heavy industry regions like the upper Ebbw Valley are, though, places that have been, and continue to be, disavowed by metropolitan centres and those who control the political conversation,

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[38] John Kippin and Chris Wainwright interviewed by Liz Wells in *Futureland Now,* p. 116. *Futureland Now* is a response to the landscape after their earlier collaborative project on the North-East of England during the dismantling of industry in the 1980s. John Kippin and Chris Wainwright, *Futureland* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: The Laing Art Gallery, 1989).

unless they happen to suit an often-transient political agenda,[39] where the term 'post-industrial' continues, it seems, to realise its original abstract function. Likewise, the Ebbw Valley has been abandoned symbolically, having little merit any more as a spectacle. Like it at height of the drastic reforms to work, the economy and society in the late 1970s and into the 1990s as Western economies moved away from large-scale industrial production and manufacturing to the service and finance sector.

The Emergence of Social Landscape Photography

The political and societal events described above provided the kind of subject matter for photographers who were important to the emergence of social landscape photography as a genre of practice. Reportage and photojournalism and, later, independent social documentary can be seen as practices where landscape starts to gain political and critical traction. Although, it was a landscape image that served a contextualising purpose in a much broader documentary narrative – the landscape shot variously referred to as the wide-view, context shot or establishing shot. The landscape image is, here, part of a sequence that might also include the 'detail shot' and the 'relationship shot', amongst others. In this wider documentary field of the use of landscape there are some historical precedents: the humanist photography of the 1940s and 50s, for instance, and figures like Bill Brandt (1904 - 1983) and Bert Hardy (1913 - 1995) and publications such as Lilliput and Picture Post. Not forgetting the work of the Mass Observation Project, around the same time, and not only Humphrey Spender's (1910 - 2005) photography, the landscape figured throughout their work which included painting, film, poetry and prose. Later, the use of landscape in investigative reportage of the, then, new Sunday Supplement format from around the mid-1960s. Don McCullin (b. 1935) comes to mind as a central figure – certainly he made use of the landscape image throughout his documentary work in the UK and, for that matter, in his war photography.

As already inferred, by the 1970s in the West social cohesion was starting to break down. A combination of events including globalisation and the automation of production on a now significant scale; rising unemployment; inflation; breakdowns in labour relations; racial tensions; a disenfranchised youth and general urban decline, along with a failing state as the post-war social contract started to unravel. Notwithstanding, a dystopian vision of the landscape stoked by the possibility of all-out nuclear war, along with images of decimation still fresh in the mind after the end of the Vietnam war. All of which contributed to invalidating

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[39] 'Levelling-up' would be the most recent example of such an agenda.

the pictorial and pastoral view. Let alone a Romantic one of nature meant to undermine the rationalist mind-set and the industrial order – a spiritual promise no longer holding sway against such societal tumult. Instead, photographers and artists turned their attention to showing effects in order to question the causes.

The landscape was where this breakdown of society could be most tangibly witnessed, no more so than in the working-class heartlands of the UK. Material for a growing number of independent photographers: Vanley Burke (b. 1951), Tish Murtha (b. 1956), Chris Killip (b. 1946, d. 2020) Pogus Caesar (b. 1953), Graham Smith (b. 1947) and Peter Mitchell (b. 1943). To name only a handful of socially aware photographers where the landscape came to have a central function in many of their accounts. By the mid-1980s social landscape photography had become an established practice and genre in its own right. There was, however, as many commentators acknowledge, a clear formal influence on the development of social landscape photography in Britain during this period, which was the work of the American New Topographics photographers.

The New Topographics were guided by conceptualism and the neo avant-garde of the 1960s and, of course, minimalism. Influences they combined with the most phlegmatic aesthetic of 19th century American survey photography. An eclectic range of influences that were set against a backdrop of a highly mediated contemporary society.[40] Along with a certain self-reflexive approach, common to the avant-garde since the turn of the 20th century, it was a visual and intellectual combination that rejected the picturesque and its often-pastoral subject matter. Including, the Romantic notion of a landscape untouched by human experience epitomised by the photography of Ansel Adams (1902 - 1984). Rather, they 'photographed everything that had previously been cropped out of American landscape photographs: the "spaces in between," such as parking lots, industrial buildings, grain elevators, tract developments, shopping malls, freeway underpasses, and the like.'[41] The sort of 'concrete element that society seeks to disregard in its self-conception.'[42] A formal approach and subject-matter choice that endorses, in Wolfgang Sheppe's analysis, a 'knowledge-based realism' because it possesses a certain kind of objective truth that 'insists on the visibility of the universal and the necessary, giving the prevailing law of profit its

[40] Caroline Blinder and Christopher Lloyd, 'US Topographics: Imaging National Landscapes', *Journal of American Studies*, 54, 3 (12th February 2020), p. 462.
[41] Wendy Cheng, '"New Topographics": Locating Epistemological Concerns in the American Landscape', *American Quarterly,* Vol. 63, No. 1 (March 2011), p. 151.
[42] Wolfgang Sheppe, 'Lewis Baltz and the Garden of False Reality' in Lewis Baltz, *Candlestick Point* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2011), pp. 93 – 94.

inhuman expression'.[43] The New Topographics' desired, unlike the affectual strategies of the anti-rationalists, to affirm the importance of the everyday landscape, not in its mawkishness, or fetishisation, but worth paying attention to as a location for 'intellectual and philosophical inquiry'.[44] The landscape presented in such a way it becomes a method of visual analysis; that it communicates something about a much wider sphere of interest than what it empirically seems to present.[45]

Because of the particular approach taken with the landscape in this research project, it is worthwhile highlighting an aspect of The New Topographics' perspective rarely commented upon. That, it was not only a straightforward attempt to realise an unambiguous kind of objectivity to do with landscape, as some tend to suggest. In fact, there was a subjective constituent in play, too, as Wendy Cheng explains, via Robert Adams (b. 1937):

> Unlike many interpretations that side with the objectivity of
> these depictions Robert Adams denies this was the case
> [instead that] autobiography and metaphor were key elements
> of a good landscape photograph, believing that neither the
> photographer's personal engagement with the place nor the
> responsive chord it might strike in the viewer could (or should)
> be excised.[46]

The New Topographics' approach to landscape influenced, directly or indirectly, a generation of British photographers, certainly in the 1980s and 1990s, a period during which social landscape photography was probably at its most influential in the gallery and publishing world in the UK. Photographers such as Ron McCormick (b.1947), Roger Palmer (b.1946), Paul Seawright (b.1965), Mark Power (b. 1959), Paul Graham (b.1956), Melanie Friend (b. 1957), John Davies (b.1949), John Kippin, Peter Fraser (b.1953), Charlie Meecham (b.1950), Simon Norfolk (b.1963) and Donovan Wylie (b.1971).

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[43] Ibid., p. 98.
[44] Cheng, pp. 160 - 161.
[45] Ibid., p. 161.
[46] Ibid., p. 154.

Fig. 3. Ron McCormick, *Ebbw Vale, looking northwest from Eastville Road, 1984.*
© Ron McCormick.

During this same period, a significant social documentary undertaking was commissioned on the South Wales Valleys, including the Ebbw Valley, by Ffotogallery, The National Centre for Photography in Wales (featuring some of the photographers listed above). Photographers were commissioned to work in various locations all over South Wales just as the coal and steel industries were being, literally, dismantled. *The Valleys Project* (1984 – 1990),[47] was one of the most comprehensive photographic surveys of working-class life and industrialism in the UK during this period. What is particularly interesting for this research study, is that the project involved significant input from photographers using landscape-based resolutions. Ron McCormick was commissioned to make landscape-based work in and around the pit villages of Llanhilleth and Crumlin, in the lower Ebbw Valley, and around the town of Ebbw Vale, including the steelworks. One of his photographs show what was later to become part of Garden Festival Wales 8 years later (Fig. 1). Roger Tiley (b. 1960) covered parts of the lower Ebbw Valley around the town of Newbridge during his commission and a number of years later, in 2002, he independently documented the final months of Ebbw Vale Steelworks before closure in the project *Tinplate Town* (2002).[48]

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[47] The photographers involved in the project were: David Bailey, Mike Berry, Ron McCormick, John Davies, Peter Fraser, Francesca Odell, Paul Reas, Roger Tiley and William Tsui. An archive of *The Valleys Project* along with writing about the project can be found here: https://www.ffotogallery.org/archive. Last accessed 20/01/22. See also Paul Cabuts's comprehensive survey of documentary photography in South Wales during the modern period, including *The Valleys Project*. Paul Cabuts, *Creative Photography and Wales: The Legacy of W. Eugene Smith in the Valleys* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012).

[48] Roger Tiley, *Tin Plate Town: Ebbw Vale, South Wales* (Ystradgynlais: 2Ten Books, 2002).

Looking at *The Valleys Project* today, in its entirety, it would seem remarkably like a cognitive map, as it satisfies many of Jameson's criteria, in that it reveals the societal and economic effects of an incipient neo-liberal global order on the local landscape, working-class life, community and culture.[49]

The Relation of Theory to Practice

As already described, the research project understands the landscape as a construct of society so, it would be obvious to say, the landscape will, in some way, reflect society at large. The research also accepts society, under the capitalist mode of production, is inherently contradictory and so the landscape will, inevitably, mirror these same antagonisms. Certainly, the landscape of the garden festival site and the upper Ebbw Valley, its borders and territory are no more illustrative, an intensification even, of the paradoxical character of society organised under late capital and, as such, would seem reticent to analysis other than afforded by historical materialism and the dialectical method. The Critical Theory associated with the first-generation 'Frankfurt School' is seen as especially significant here, since their theoretical model encountered society first as an antithesis. That their understanding of how society was organised, under the exchange relation – including the ideological machinations that take place there – is incompatible with the real interest of the subject. No more so than the antithesis of capitalist progress and nature, a dialectic central to this period of the Frankfurt School as well, particularly its principal protagonist Theodor W. Adorno.

Adorno's philosophy targets society as one premised on consumerism, mass and commodified forms of culture and technological innovation as the primary motor of progress surplus value production. Adorno not only sees the importance of the cultural form for the profit margin, but also its part in the distribution of ideology. The exchange-principle, including the forces and relations of production that enable it as a social form, are, for Adorno *et al* non-negotiable axioms for an analysis of society; an analysis and interpretation that takes place at the level of a reified and alienated subject. At the same time, however,

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[49] There has been a recent flurry of interest in landscapes once associated with heavy industry, mostly focused on the coal industry and the 1984/85 miners' strike – 2024 marks the 40th anniversary of the start of the dispute. See for instance, Huw Beynon and Ray Hudson, *The Shadow of the Mine: Coal and the End of Industrial Britain* (London and New York, Verso, 2021); Robert Gildea, *Backbone of the Nation: Mining Communities and the Great Strike of 1984-85* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2023); Jeremy Paxman, *Black Gold: The History of How Coal Made Britain* (London: William Collins, 2022) and Derek Price, *Coal Cultures: Picturing Mining Landscapes and Communities* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2021). Derek Price's book analyses former coal mining communities via a number of documentary and landscape photography projects.

Adorno and the Frankfurt School had the immanent view society contained the means for its emancipation and was its latent or 'non-identical' content:

> following the Marxist tradition, Adorno [claims that his theory has]
> practical intent [as a critique] of late capitalism … meant to
> contribute to the implementation of positive change. Specifically,
> the practical intent of critical theory is to provide the theoretical
> basis for surmounting reification by examining its nature and its
> damaging effects on human life while locating the rational
> potential in reified reality that points beyond it.[50]

Gillian Rose takes up this same discussion on theory and praxis, specifically in relation to Adorno's philosophy of negative dialectics, maintaining it is his attempt to redefine 'theory as a social activity'.[51] Any rationality associated with possibility, that society possessed in its culture, Adorno believes, can only find transformative force in language, the concept and representation.[52] If we think of landscape photography (as cognitive mapping) as a praxis reflexive to dialectical theory with an ambition to critique society, it could do worse than be schooled in Adorno's negative dialectical method.[53]

What this means methodologically, is a critically committed photography form. Critical, crucially, in the sense that Adorno envisaged: a world to be apprehended, always, by way of its negative image or at least to gather together evidence to show the world is no more than a sham. Adorno's project was not only to prove this to be the case, but an interpretative method to present evidence of that which is truly meaningful. Although, more often than not, it is a process of presenting evidence in the negative: as a loss or lack of something – the effects of history, in fact. Notwithstanding, there are certain situations where the true and

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[50] Deborah Cook, *Adorno, Habermas and the Search for a Rational* Society (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 143.

[51] Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (London and New York: Verso, 2014), p. 191. Art and philosophy share similar cogency in the thinking of Adorno. They are both able to create the intellectual space necessary for interpreting the veracity of the concept, object or experience. He also opposes the separation of philosophy from sociology and philosophy from aesthetics – the latter relationship at the centre of his negative dialectical method.

[52] Caren Irr, 'One-Dimensional Symptoms: What Marcuse Offers a Critical Theory of Law' in *Rethinking the Frankfurt School: Alternative Legacies of Cultural Critique*, eds., Jeffrey T. Nealon and Caren Irr (New York: SUNY Press, 2002), p. 171. This is why Adorno sees it necessary to sublate culture. Culture, as a corrupted setting, needs to be overcome, but its transformative possibilities preserved. Cook, *Adorno, Habermas and the Search for a Rational* Society, p. 112.

[53] The Frankfurt School's project of Critical Theory is an unmasking of the untruth of society as a first step on the path to truth. Or that negation is, itself, the sanctuary of truth. Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Berkley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1996), p. 66 and p. 263.

meaningful can be experienced concretely as the non-identical, what Adorno encapsulates as the 'unintended', what others term the anthropological, or some aspect of the natural world (that might catch us unaware).

The project proposes photography can be a comparable methodology of critically working through the problem (of society), turning-up similar evidence, including in the negative. The (historical) landscape provides the place where absence, loss and lack can be witnessed most readily and where the spectacle, the present, is most abundant in its empirical rawness.

The study considers knowledge, as much as anything else, to be an aesthetic pursuit. Certainly, after the thinking of Adorno and Benjamin and the Frankfurt School in general – as did Jameson, of course – including those on its periphery (which would number Benjamin, but no less influential on the School, Adorno in particular), Berthold Brecht, for instance. They saw aesthetic practice yielding not only alternative types of knowledge about the world, but rational forms as well – albeit with different views about how this might come about. The thesis, to all intents and purposes, asks how this can be applied in practice often by mediating the different views in question. Complementary to this, we can also see aesthetic devices and mechanisms doing formal work in the production of knowledge and understanding in Adorno's philosophy of negative dialectics. Here, the centrality of the constellation (a device Adorno inherited from Benjamin) and Benjamin's dialectical image, constellations, again, and also the correspondences; figurative devices connecting the experience of the past to the present – as just a few examples. Formal devices that were meant to interpret the problems of society *dynamically* including the presentation of the 'solution' as *Darstellung*. Not as a synthesis or conclusion, like we might expect from scientific analysis or experimentation, but as an open constellation of thinking. A comparable approach has been adopted by the practice methodology – not without certain (stated) caveats, however – mediating the landscape to achieve a similar open-ended result.

So, to the landscape proper and how the cognitive map might address the historical content that can be found there. The study proposes part of the task of the cognitive map is to present this history in a critical manner, something activated for the present, that is to say, it should gain a redemptive quality. This is the basis of Benjamin's dialectical image concept. Benjamin's organon of schematising the experience of the past so that it critically questions all that seems unassailable in the present forms a major part of the discussion, directly or indirectly, that takes place in the thesis. Including, how Benjamin's concept can be made appropriate for a practice of landscape photography, particularly the complex industrial

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history associated with the Ebbw Valley, including the garden festival and the ruins that can now be found there.

Benjamin's dialectical image is a complex concept, multifaceted in construction with many interpretative working parts and is, fundamentally, designed to serve a speculative purpose, albeit curated from empirical and material evidence. With this in mind, and regarding the specific methodological needs of the research, three principal elements of Benjamin's concept have been chosen as especially relevant: the fragment as monad, the re-animation of social relations and the natural history of the object.

Benjamin's dialectical image reconstructs the experience of the past as a concrete image, one that is set in motion toward the present where it erupts throwing into disarray the notion of progress, a revelatory moment key to its function and, more generally, his history as philosophy hermeneutic.[54] The dialectical image is also pivotal to Benjamin's secular notion of auratic experience, where it provides not only socio-historical material, but the formal arrangement for its necessary political dimension. One in conflict with the aura of cultic religiosity or that synthesised variety produced by the commodity spectacle (Benjamin recognising that natural aura was no longer available to us in the modern era, replaced as it was by varying degrees of myth). An imitated version of aura circulated by the spectacle is especially relevant in considering the garden festival programme, whose events were no less than a fabricated sense of auratic experience – certainly in relation to the industrial past. Different if it were a history processed through the critical mechanism of the dialectical image, where it would be revealed as a picture of progress first as catastrophe and then crisis, to paraphrase Benjamin. And that social relations, of a certain variety, are those that are consistent and real. The practice, part of its function is to perform a similar task to Benjamin's dialectical image, so that the past and the present come into revelatory relation. Perhaps, by the way photographs are presented with each other or by their relationship with other media such as text or, simply, something that is operative within the image, itself.

Although, this is not the only task of the practice, it has other dialectical work to do, besides. Like the relationship of the industrial past to nature, for instance, part of a 'natural history' dialectic that runs throughout the practice. Adorno suggests this should be as representation a kind of poeticization, so that we see nature alienated yet recognisable at the same time. In this way capital's unabated instrumentalising of nature comes into focus, but not in an easy

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[54] Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1995), p. 55.

expected sense, instead we get an idea of capital's – history's – ineluctable mediateness with nature.

In a related sense, the research project understands there is a certain pleasurable dimension to making a cognitive map. After all it is, essentially, a playing with form as a process of making connections so that something becomes revealed – knowledge by revelation to use Benjamin's vocabulary. Jameson suggests that 'realism' is the formal place where a pleasure in knowledge can be fulfilled, where appropriate forms come together in such a way the world can be made all over again or at least to indicate what might be otherwise. So, we can say that participating in making formal connections is to have a pleasure in the production of knowledge and, as far as this study is concerned, (political) commitment as well. Although, it is a pleasure in form and knowledge that is difficult to demonstrate in methodological terms. Even so the author, because of his own experience, suggests this is the case.

Turning, now, to a broader view of Adorno's theories of expression. In Adorno's treatment, expression is given force because it cuts through convention, although it is an incumbent subject who does not rearticulate a preconceived expressive form. The expressive in Adorno is a collective act, certainly not devoid of history and, in a typically Adornoian characterisation, every act of expression is an articulation of 'damaged society' as a whole. In this sense, it is always an utterance for others that contains the impossible desire to be reunited with nature, including human nature. Mimetic expression is especially relevant for Adorno, as it is for Benjamin, because it is a mode of recognising the object unfiltered by the concept. Photography is discussed regarding these latter qualifications and how the camera, in practice, can be integrated into a mimetic gesture the photographer makes to the landscape, one that recognises it as an assemblage of experience rather than merely as a sign (for industry, for example).

In summary, the theory is a gathering together of various aesthetic devices from Frankfurt School thinking, mainly Adorno and Benjamin – although complemented by other dialectical and materialist thinkers like Raymond Williams, for instance – useful for a production of knowledge and understanding of society, nature and history, taken-up methodologically by the practice. The study understands photography has a special place in the production of knowledge of this kind / in this way, because of its ability to show the world not only empirically, but also the facility to render the world aesthetically, that is: to figuratively mediate it. This does not mean such a way of dealing with the world by photography practice is not already in existence – it certainly is, with many examples given throughout the thesis.

The task has been to highlight and gather together concepts, forms and categories from Adorno and Benjamin, and others, which social landscape photography, including documentary practice more widely, can identify (and to, perhaps, utilise).

The cognitive map, ideally, would be the theory and practice components combined and read as if they were one body of work. That said, the practice component, presented in this research project as a photobook, has been produced as a freestanding piece of work, functioning independently of the theoretical thesis with its own title and introduction of which some parts have been taken from the theoretical thesis. Included in the photobook introduction is a comprehensive break-down of how the book's organising principle (as a cognitive mapping framework) functions, and guidance on how the audience should approach it as a project. Likewise, the theoretical thesis functions just as well in isolation to the photobook and, in this respect, is its own exegesis (process and practice methodology has, however, been referred to throughout the thesis, including indications how the theory relates to practice). Having said this, to read / view the theory and practice analogously is to satisfy, in the most fulfilled way, the research project's ambition for a practice of cognitive mapping. Afterall, in agreement with Adorno, art requires philosophy to articulate what it is unable to speak[55] and would be to, furthermore, abet art's propensity for breaching epistemological, theoretical, and practical boundaries: 'philosophical thought allows art to have multiple meanings beyond the divisions of labour.'[56]

However, although not unrelated, by the very nature of practice, it is unable to give full regard to wider, often complex, principle(s) behind the original philosophy / theory. Art, when it happens to be collaboration with theoretical thinking, is magpie-like, it picks out form and content that might benefit its practical aims. However, if a meaningful outcome arises in praxis, it transcends any unorthodox appropriation, and this would be the justification. Understanding this is, for some, a provocative thing to say. From the practitioner and production point of view, nevertheless, it is how art tends to resolve theory as practice and a theme that is discussed (via Walter Benjamin) in more detail in the concluding chapter. Related to this, the thesis discusses, on occasions, theoretical perspectives in excess of that which is directly relevant to the practice. But, nonetheless, are seen as useful, more generally, for a practice of landscape photography, including documentary photography, as cognitive mapping.

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[55] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 71, p. 91 and p. 341.
[56] Ibid., p. 350.

The relationship of theory to practice also serves to introduce the other figure central to this study, Allan Sekula (1951 – 2013) and his lifetime work recording as an artist, documentarian and theorist of the capitalist production of space. An interest in Sekula's oeuvre that includes the formal aspects of his working method, particularly his concurrent use of theory, prose and photography, in any one project, throughout his career. A compound method he uses to expose all that is hidden to us by capitalist relations and is an approach to practice he designates the term 'critical realism'.

Returning to the praxis proper, the former Garden Festival Wales location is the spatial and historical axis about which the practice is organised. All the locations visited during the production of the project, including other supplemental material, can be traced, whether directly, figuratively or historically, to the garden festival site at Ebbw Vale. The garden festival location contains many remnants of former buildings and other structures like, for example, flower beds, ornamental gardens, pavilions, sculptures and artworks, transport infrastructure, water features, visitor centres and the remains of miscellaneous facilities and installations. They have been photographed according to their condition today and then combined with captions and written commentary that reunites them with their original function. A map of the layout of the garden festival, at the time of its inauguration, has been used to identify the purpose of buildings and other features, including where they were once located. Although, it would be incorrect to assume this is a project of 're-photography'. There is no reproduction of a building, for example, as it looked during the festival compared to the present day. The intention has been not to reproduce a dichotomous picture, as this would be contrary to the constellation view of past and present the project insists upon and an assertion at the heart of the theoretical component of the research as well. This is not to say such a 'before and after' picture could not contribute to a wider assembled form of cognitive mapping.[57]

In terms of the garden festival's 'territory', numerous regional and national locations have been visited, that have an association with the festival site today, its historical incarnation as Garden Festival Wales or with the industry it replaced. These might be associations related to the political economy, power and logistical circuits once centred on the festival site and the upper Ebbw Valley (forces that are, of course, not absent today either, albeit of a different order). One example of how this works in practice, is the project traces, visually, successive mergers and take-overs from the original Ebbw Vale Iron Steel and Coal Company and the

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[57] Nonetheless, it would be interesting to see Jameson's cognitive mapping method used in a 're-photography' project and a 'before and after' exposition of the capitalist production of space.

owners of Ebbw Vale steelworks[58] – including the many collieries, mines and quarries that supplied it – to the manifestation of that company today.

In terms of the practical and logistical execution of the project; the garden festival, its immediate borders and local territory, including the upper Ebbw Valley, were locations covered over multiple visits during an approximate 6-year time span. With visits made to regional locations in South Wales and national locations in the UK during this same period. Frequent revisits were made including to the regional and national sites, but mostly the garden festival site and hinterland. Research was done prior to many of the visits using a number of archives both physical and online.[59] It was, however, the use of historical maps that turned out to be the most valuable resources to gain an objective historical view about a place in comparison to the present day.[60]

The content of the project is not only derived from, or based on, the archive or other historical research, but also my own experience. Not from the Ebbw Valley, I was born in South Wales, although I did work at Marine Colliery (a colliery originally developed and owned by the Ebbw Vale, Iron Steel and Coal Company) just south of the garden festival location, for a brief period before its closure, and other collieries before that, eventually leaving South Wales in the late 1980s. I decided to move to Ebbw Vale so I could work on the project. This allowed me the maximum degree of exposure to the landscape and history of the Ebbw Valley and its regions during the making of the project. It also allowed me to make the frequent and involved visits I viewed as necessary to fulfil the experiential requirements for a practice of cognitive mapping, as one that starts from the perspective of the local.

The autobiographical is not the only voice in this project, it is one voice amongst many, including those people I have met while living in Ebbw Vale and the stories told to me when I

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[58] A company that was destined to become an industrial empire and one of the world's largest producers of steel by the 1950s.

[59] Physical archives: Ebbw Vale Works Museum, Ebbw Vale; Gwent Archives, Ebbw Vale; Glamorgan Archives, Cardiff; National Museum and Galleries of Wales, Cardiff; Richard Burton Archives, University of Swansea. Online only archives: Cwm and Waunlwyd Community Archive: https://cwm-waunlwyd.gwentheritage.org.uk/. Last accessed 12/09/23; People's Collection Wales: https://www.peoplescollection.wales/. Last accessed 23/08/23; Durham Mining Museum: http://www.dmm.org.uk/. Last accessed 07/08/2023; Industrial Gwent: http://www.industrialgwent.co.uk/. Last accessed, 16/09/2023; Graces Guide: https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Main_Page. Last accessed 01/11/2023; Cadw: https://cadw.gov.wales/. Last accessed, 04/11/2023; Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales: https://rcahmw.gov.uk/. 04/11/2023.

[60] A comprehensive open-source archive of historical maps covering all of the UK, available online, at The National Library of Scotland: https://maps.nls.uk. Last accessed, 02/11/2023.

have been in the landscape taking photographs. It has been invaluable third-party experience to understand the singular topography and lie of the land these megalithic structures of industrialism once occupied, no less produced. When there is an autobiographical voice, it is one that expresses a collective history to do with industrial work and is an utterance on behalf of those who have endeavoured in history and continue to do so in the capriciousness of the here and now. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh refers to the importance of the biographical in Sekula's documentary practice and, like Adorno, one that stands and falls according to objective conditions:

> Sekula's work foregrounds … the biographic dimension of artistic experience, perceived and presented as an actual trace of public and political transformations, the field where these changes can be best analysed and observed. … The biographical becomes transparent as the locus where all the institutional, economical, and ideological interests intersect most prominently to situate the subject.[61]

There is not anything to add to this. Only to say that what follows, in the theoretical thesis and in the practice seeks, in many ways, to fulfil a similar ambition.

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[61] Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'Allan Sekula, or What Is Photography?', *Grey Room,* 55 (2014), p. 126.

Chapter 1

Steel, Coal, Arcadia

Garden Festival Wales is your festival. From the moment you
arrive until the time you leave you are regarded as part of it.
The festival has been designed to put visitors needs first to
give you an experience you will never forget. The abandoned
site of the former Ebbw Vale steel works has been transformed
into a kaleidoscope of colourful fun. Whatever your age,
whatever your tastes, Garden Festival Wales has been built
with you in mind.

– 'Welcome and Introduction', *Garden Festival
Wales,* Souvenir Brochure, 1992.

Paris in the year 2855: … Sèvres, which has become the
regular market … in its midst can still be found the factories of
an earlier age, reconstructed in porcelain *a la reine.*

– Arsene Houssaye.[1]

1:1 Introduction

The UK Garden Festivals' historical context is established in this chapter, including the
economic and political situation precipitating their existence and the ideological part they
played preparing society for a world post-industry. The chapter also identifies issues and
difficulties (including potential resolutions) a cognitive mapping practice is likely to encounter
in a landscape still recovering from many decades of industrialisation. Symptoms which are
subsequently addressed in more detail in later chapters – in this sense there is a diagnostic
side to the chapter.

The garden festivals' publicity, events and exhibitions, certainly at Garden Festival Wales,
had a particular presentational language firmly entrenched in the aspirational and the

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[1] Arsene Houssaye, 'Le Paris of future' in *Paris et les Parisiens au XIX sièle* (1856), quoted in
Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* p. 399.

entrepreneurial. Part of a wider rhetorical strategy, it was meant to usher in a new consciousness; one fully aligned to a new society based on absolute forms of consumption.

'Heritage' had a principal role during the festival programme, ultimately to stage-manage the past using various themes engendered by certain myths often simplifying complex experiential realities to do with industrial work and community. It is proposed was a form of history deployed strategically to assuage – cancel even – any view of the past as dissenting. In parallel with the managed historical view, nature was also enlisted by the festivals. Co-opted into a language of the 'post-industrial' nature was blended with the corporate and, again, particularly discernible at Garden Festival Wales. It is suggested that nature was no more than a pretext aimed at mystifying its continued domination in the name of new forms of value production.

Attention turns to how nature and history can be reclaimed and made critical in representation – landscape photography in particular. In terms of nature, Adorno's dialectical view of 'natural beauty', a cultural construct, he saw its conceptual dimension could be used against itself to invalidate the sentimental view, precisely the one circulated by the garden festivals. In doing this, a more veracious view of nature is likely to emerge.

There remains the problem of history, where it is Jameson's concept of the 'political unconscious' that is seen to be especially gainful for a practice of photography that has the industrial landscape as its interest. Jameson hermeneutic focussed, as it is, on elucidating historical class struggle (and a mode of interpretation precursory to Jameson's cognitive mapping method). How photography can be formally prepared for this task of showing history is established, becoming a core theme for the remainder of the thesis.

The ex-industrial landscape of the upper Ebbw Valley is the principal question in view for the rest of the chapter. A documentary project by Allan Sekula, the focus of which is a similar historical / transitional landscape to the Ebbw Valley is used to illustrate how an always absent controlling economic interest and the always present signs of uneven economic development and precarity can be represented in landscape photography.

1:2 From Slag to Shopping

The upper reach of the Ebbw Valley starts its six-mile course north from the former pit-village of Aberbeeg and the location where the Ebbw Fach and the Ebbw Fawr rivers meet.[2] Not yet endowed with industrial character and densely covered in pine forest, it is a scene likely to contradict many prepossessions some visitors might have about the Valleys of South Wales. Soon, though, rural and urban antagonisms start to play out, amplified by the landscape's topography; sometimes the valley is wide enough for river, road and railway to run side by side, threading through terraced housing, and other times narrow, the railway sculptured into valley hillside. The hills of the valley have long-ago been mostly stripped of trees, covered now with insipid yellow-green grass, stunted by grazing, crossed with ancient packhorse trails and the remains of 19th century tramroads.

At the head of the Ebbw Valley is a village named after the Duke of Beaufort[3] who leased land, in 1779, to the ironmaster Edward Kendall who had a number of ironworks in Cumberland and Scotland and was expanding his business interests in other regions of the UK.[4] The village of Beaufort's location provided, in abundance, the natural resources required for iron production: coal, iron-ore, limestone and water. Beaufort became the location of the Ebbw Valley's first large-scale ironworks and ten years later the nearby Ebbw Vale Ironworks site was developed by Walter Watkins, Charles Cracoft and Jeremiah Homfray, a 'firm of Bristol capitalists.'[5] Precipitating, over the next century and a half, the mass industrialisation of the Ebbw Valley.

Ebbw Vale Works, as it became known, pioneered the Bessemer process of steelmaking, a type of low carbon steel in demand for its tensile strength and insatiably consumed by infrastructure projects, particularly railways, during the second phase of industrialism in the

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[2] There are two Ebbw Rivers. The Ebbw Fawr (translating as The Big Ebbw River), its source near the town of Ebbw Vale at the head of the Ebbw Fawr Valley and The Ebbw Fach (The Small Ebbw River), its source near the town of Abertillery at the head of the Ebbw Fach Valley. The rivers conjoin at Aberbeeg where they form the Ebbw River proper. The Ebbw Fawr is, however, known as the Ebbw River throughout its course from its source near Ebbw Vale to where it joins the river Usk 25 miles south near the City of Newport on the Severn Estuary. The upper Ebbw Valley starts at Aberbeeg and runs north to Ebbw Vale town. The lower Ebbw valley includes the small towns of Llanhilleth, Crumlin, Newbridge and Crosskeys all coming to exist because of the coal, iron and steel industries.

[3] His descendent, the 12th Duke of Beaufort, remains the largest owner of land in and around the upper Ebbw Valley and one of the largest private landowners in South Wales.

[4] Arthur Gray-Jones, *A History of Ebbw Vale* (Second Edition, 1992), p. 27 and p. 45. Interestingly, the Welsh name for Beaufort is Cendl which is the Welsh language form of Kendall.

[5] B. Caswell, J. Gaydon and M. Warrender, eds., *Ebbw Vale: 'The Works'* (Bromyard: Record Printers, 2002), pp. 30-31.

mid-19th century.[6] During the 1930s, the steelworks site was completely redeveloped becoming the only 'integrated' steel plant outside of the USA and by the 1950s it was, reputedly, the largest steelworks in Europe (Figs. 2 and 3).[7] In the 1970s, the industry was rationalised in the UK, as steelmaking was now a worldwide business and not confined, in the main, to Europe and the USA as it once was.[8] Ebbw Vale Works was repurposed and became the UKs largest producer of tinplate for the canning industry and meant the closure of the blast furnaces and the hot ingot rolling mills in 1975.[9]

Fig. 4. *Black and White oblique aerial photograph showing the steelworks at Ebbw Vale*, Aerofilms Collection (Monmouthshire: 1972). Looking south from Ebbw Vale town. At the top of the picture are the blast furnaces and later the location of Garden Festival Wales. © Crown copyright and is reproduced with the permission of the RCAHMW.

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[6] Gray-Jones, (Second Edition, 1992), p. 88-89 and p. 435.
[7] B. Caswell et al, *Ebbw Vale: 'The Works'*, pp. 304-305.
[8] John Elliot and Colin Deneen, 'Iron, Steel and Aluminium' in Chris Williams and Andy Croll, eds., Ralph A. Griffiths, gen. ed., *The Gwent County History, Vol. 5, The Twentieth Century,* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 2013), pp. 68.
[9] Ibid., pp. 332-333 and pp. 335 and 336.

Fig. 5. Photographer unknown, Ebbw Vale Steelworks, Victoria Blast Furnaces, Blaenau Gwent County Council Library Service Collection (1970). Image Source: Cwm and Waunlwyd Community Archive. © Unknown photographer.

Within a decade market demand had slumped and with increased competition margins started falling to unsustainable levels. There followed a number of innovations in both production and products and various rationalisation strategies to save the works. Eventually, in a final blow, the steel union's own rescue plan was rejected by the then owners, Corus, and steel production finally ceased in the upper Ebbw Valley in 2002, just over 200 years after the first blast furnaces had been lit.[10]

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[10] Caswell, *et al, Ebbw Vale: 'The Works',* pp. 351-373.

Fig. 6. Photographer unknown, *Waunlwyd Colliery* (1958), The coal waste tip in the foreground formed the southern extent of Garden Festival Wales and where the 'Country-Side Centre' was built. At the top of the picture, middle, are the slag tips at 'Silent Valley' produced by the steelworks' blast furnaces from the late 1930s up until the1970s. Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum of Wales. © Unknown photographer.

Fig. 7. Anne Marie-Lewis, *View from the Sky Shuttle, Garden Festival Wales* (1992). Looking north across the festival site (to the middle ground is the former location of the steelworks blast furnaces) to Ebbw Vale town. At the top of the picture, part of Ebbw Vale steelworks which was still in production at the time. © Anne Marie-Lewis.

Occupying the southern tract of the former steelworks and the coal tip produced by the operations of Waunlwyd Colliery (Fig. 4), Garden Festival Wales was inaugurated in 1992

(Fig. 5).[11] The UK National Garden Festivals took their inspiration from previous national festivals in the UK, including The Great Exhibition (1851) and The Festival of Britain (1951) and the German *Bundesgartenschauen*. The German Garden Show had had many different manifestations in German culture since the beginning of the 20th century.[12] Michael Heseltine, the then Secretary of State for the Environment, at the beginning of the 1980s, was mostly interested in their use as a primer for the regeneration of bombed-out post-second world war West German cities.[13]

The advent of the festivals was prompted by the riots that took place in the early 1980s in Brixton (London), Toxteth (Liverpool), and St. Pauls (Bristol). Heseltine, after some initial internal political argument, secured central government funding for a programme to regenerate inner-city boroughs and for a wider scheme of revivification of former industrialised regions economically and socially impoverished by the impacts of the cancellation of traditional employment. The UK National Garden Festival initiative was the centre piece of Heseltine's strategy.[14] Aimed at mitigating the after-effects of industry, it first meant reclaiming and remediating blighted land making it suitable for redevelopment. Thereafter, the garden festival events were a way to publicise the suitability of a region for economic investment and the new employment opportunities that would (hopefully) follow.

The Garden Festival programme was initiated at the height of a turbulent time of social upheaval in the UK, including the year-long miners' strike of 1984/85. Making it difficult to counter the other view they were part of a wider ideological campaign designed to mystify the dismantling of the gains made since the establishment of the post-war social settlement. The garden festivals were national events 'showcasing' a future predicated on undivided forms of consumerism, a new 'spirit of entrepreneurialism', the unregulated availability of credit, a fully liberalised subject and the capitalisation of culture and society. The garden festival events at Liverpool (1984), Stoke-on-Trent (1986), Glasgow, (1988), Gateshead (1990) and finally Ebbw Vale, quite simply, had the task of incorporating all of these aims into their programme of attractions, events and exhibitions.[15]

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[11] The festival site covered the location of the Victoria blast furnaces, the hot ingot rolling-mills, the waste tip produced by the blast furnaces, a railway marshalling yard and other ancillary infrastructure associated with the blast-furnace process.

[12] Andrew C. Theokas, *Grounds for Review* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), pp. 28-32.

[13] Michael Heseltine, *Where There's a Will* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), pp. 157-158.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Notwithstanding the ideological function of the garden festivals, a programme of remediation and re-landscaping of blighted and contaminated industrial land, prior to the start of each of the festivals, has had a real and positive effect, certainly for those living in the upper Ebbw Valley.

After the closure of the final festival at Ebbw Vale, part of the site was sold to a housing developer, where the new village of Victoria was built (the original village was built for workers and their families of Victoria Iron Works in the mid 19th century and demolished in the late 1970s). Most of the land, however, was sold to a real estate company who let a large part of it, on a long-term lease, to the local council who subsequently turned it into a public park (Festival Park). A shopping mall, Festival Park Retail Outlet, was constructed on part of the remainder of the site, as well as other commercial leisure facilities, which operated successfully for many years. In February 2021, the festival site was put up for sale and the retail outlet was closed, in November 2020, after a period of decline exacerbated by the Covid pandemic.[16] The site was purchased soon after by another real estate company based in the West Midlands and, at the time of writing, the retail space was still unoccupied, although the council continues to let the park area. The most recent scheme is to convert the former shopping centre into business units for let.[17]

The former steelworks site, that borders the garden festival, includes relatively recently built public buildings: a hospital, further education college, leisure centre and school. They seem vulnerable though, oasis like, surrounded by acres of reclaimed land. A signature of 'post-industrialism' in this part of the world is former industrial land seeded with rye grass, a tough grass able to grow in the most arid conditions, making the landscape seem changeless in appearance. Look down though, and closely, you will see the ground is composed of a pulverised mixture of brick, concrete, coke and blast furnace slag, from about the size of a marble to something like a tennis ball. This is the material left of former industrial buildings and the steelmaking process after passing through a mobile crushing and screening machine. An apparatus designed to speed-up the physical de-industrialisation of the landscape and a dialectical inevitability, it would seem, of the current means of production.

As the last of the UK Garden Festivals, Garden Festival Wales had a much more developed sense of the neo-liberal future as, unlike its predecessors, had been from the planning stage

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[16] Saul Cooke-Black, 'Ebbw Vale's Festival Site Close to Being Sold', *South Wales Argus*, (Feb., 2021), online edition, https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/19105197.ebbw-vales-festival-park-close-sold/. Last accessed 12/11/21.
[17] David Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession (a rephrasing of Marx's 'primitive accumulation') has a resonance here. A number of 'dispossessions' can be demonstrated by the festival landscape, its hinterland and the upper Ebbw Valley more generally. The most identifiable is accumulation by the privatisation of state-owned assets. Less well-known is the marketisation, by the tourist industry, of local culture including its artefacts, history, concepts and forms. Finally, there is the strategic creation of precarious low paid employment conditions, including areas of unemployment, providing a 'reserve army' of adaptable and cheap labour. Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism,* pp. 44-50. Also see Fredric Jameson, *Representing Capital*, (London: Verso, 2014), p. 71.

'market-led'[18] It mirrored, in many ways, the changes taking place in society at large since the inaugural festival of 1984. A new climate of experience reflected in the rhetoric used by the souvenir brochure (Fig. 6), an intonation that further consolidated the cancellation of consensus in favour of individual choice.[19] The souvenir brochure's editorial and advertorial ambit invariably referring to financial opportunities and occasions for consumption.

In a rare, if not the only, critical commentary on the UK Garden Festivals at the time of their inauguration, John Roberts saw ex-industrialised regions, at the time, had become no more than 'enterprises' in competition to attract corporate and financial interest as part of a process realigning the UK economy with burgeoning multinational market forces. Roberts identified the importance of the garden festivals as cultural spectacles, mostly premised on a 'green' agenda, for the national psyche; obscuring the process of capitalism's recapitalising after a period of crisis,[20] his comments remain salutary on this, even today:

> [T]he garden festivals are a perfect illustration of the native forces of late capitalism: the control and displacement of economic crisis through forms of affective cultural identification. By symbolising the transformation … from dark and ugly manufacturing centres into 'truly' green and pleasant landscapes – to quote one of the commercial brochures – the privatised form of this process is given stable and evolutionary character. However, the equitableness of this 'greening' couldn't be further from the truth given the ferociously competitive nature of international capital today.[21]

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[18] Theokas, p. 190.

[19] Stuart Hall identifies a programmatic corralling of language and representation by Margaret Thatcher and her followers in defining and legitimating a 'common-sense' view of the new liberalism and a language style that the Garden Festival brochure can be seen to be exploiting. Stuart Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', *Marxism Today* (January 1979), pp. 14-20. The brochure of the first UK garden festival, at Liverpool, when compared to the Garden Festival Wales brochure, has a tentativeness in the use of liberalist rhetoric. Its language, photography and design ethos are suffused with a kind of patriarchy, not unlike the literature for the 1951 Festival of Britain. In contrast to the self-assured and individualistic free-market rhetoric of the Garden Festival Wales brochure, both in its linguistic and symbolic offering.

[20] The effects of the inflationary, monetary, devaluation and production crises of the 1970s was the economic and societal catalyst neoliberalism needed, it is often cited, for the recapitalisation of capital in the 1980s. See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[21] John Roberts, 'The Greening of Capitalism' in Simon Pugh, ed., *Reading Landscape: Country, City, Capital,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 244. We can also see the spectacle of the public exhibition as an allegory of the transient and fickle nature of capital itself: 'the flimsy structures of world fairs in their praise of technical progress and their built-in demand to be discarded

John Taylor observes how the heritage and tourism industries become part of this same system of reimagining the past, harnessing the symbolic, including photography, to evacuate the reality of social relations from industrial history; replacing them with images of a mythic and nostalgic kind.[22] A type of symbolism, Taylor suggests, that was 'a substitute for the problems of history, a panacea for audiences who receive simple narratives designed to allay anxiety and anchor them in a profoundly stable present.'[23] The reality of the historical landscape, as a complex palimpsest, becomes instead, as Mike Crang puts it, open to selective 'revalorisation' in the name of 'heritage' often in accordance with contemporary interest, particularly that interest aligned with regeneration and renewal.[24] For Raymond Williams, it is precisely historical change powered by dominant interest that determines what is chosen for the historical record and a 'selective tradition' that inexorably means 'a rejection of considerable areas of what was once a living culture', choices invariably governed by 'many kinds of special interest, including class interests.'[25]

As the final event of the garden festival initiative, Garden Festival Wales was in a much more advantageous position to fully socialise, with its marketing and events programme, the concept of heritage. The systematic atomisation of work and the near complete disintegration of collective life, by the early 1990s, meant industrial history could be co-opted and re-enacted as an *image* qualified by an idealised notion of 'tradition'. A version of history that was returned to the subject, as docile spectator, in the dioramas installed around the festival site, in advertising and in memorabilia (Fig. 6).[26] History became no more than an array of visual pleasure, what John Urry terms the 'artefactual' presentation of history rather than as an experience of real events and of real people.[27] A 'visitor experience' that had a negative imprint in a new world of insecure, low-skilled and low paid work.

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after a short while like empty food cans.' Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cummings (London: Verso, 1997), p. 120.

[22] Raymond Williams makes it clear there are certain archetypical images which persist as overdetermined symbols of permeance and are false in the sense they do not reflect the actuality of history. Instead, they are conventions of a nostalgic kind and mostly active during times of upheaval. Williams, *The Country and the City*, pp. 415-416.

[23] John Taylor, *A Dream of England: Landscape, Photography and the Tourists Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 247.

[24] Mike Crang, 'Envisioning urban histories: Bristol as palimpsest, postcards, and snapshots', *Environment and Planning A* (1996), p. 437.

[25] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution,* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1965), p. 68.

[26] Urry, *The Tourist Gaze,* pp., 124-132.

[27] John Urry, *Consuming Places* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 161.

Fig. 8. Front cover, *Garden Festival Wales Souvenir Brochure* (1992). Photographs © unknown. Brochure material © Garden Festival Wales Limited and the authors.

Fig. 9. Page from the 'Festival Features and Themes' section of *Garden Festival Wales Souvenir Brochure* (London: Harington Kilbride PLC, 1992). Photographs © unknown. Brochure material © Garden Festival Wales Limited and the authors.

The garden festivals can be interpreted as transitional mirages and illusions made easier, in Walter Benjamin's assessment, by a subject already assuaged by mass entertainment so

ripe for insertion into consumerist circuits.[28] A fundamental quality of a reconstructed consumerist subject is that it is unfettered by the past, thus ensuring its full alignment to the new future. This new future, according to the festival's brochure, displays and events, was to be established on leisure, the pastoral and a fecund and obliging commodity. Using a variety of visual tropes inclined toward the aspirational and entrepreneurial, South Wales is shown at the beginning of a renaissance. A constructed view that was meant to diminish any correspondence the visitor might have had to a notion of class history; particularly that sort of class-politic that inevitably flows from collective forms of industrial work. For Benjamin, World Exhibitions, since their emergence in the late 19th century, were training grounds for the working-class in their changing relationship, as both producer and consumer, with the commodity form.[29] Phantasmagorical environments, the festivals constructed an illusion of a way of life where practicality and use-value were finally consigned to the edges of society as an anachronism.[30] We can say, regarding all of this last, that the garden festivals were designed to confound any preconceptions the subject might have had of themselves as a worker, let alone the subject of history.

For Taylor heritage sites do, however, incorporate a corrective to their own orchestrated artifice: 'what is socially peripheral is symbolically central. The disregarded spaces of wasteland, or perimeter fences, or the scrub land which runs along their edges, are never empty of meaning.' An especially pertinent observation when considering the garden festival location at Ebbw Vale as a blend, today, of the abandon and the officially sanctioned. A liminality akin to Benjamin's concept of the fragment as something disclaimed by presiding forces yet, still, imbued vague traces of its original value, whether as something of use or of exchange and an antagonistic location for the interrogation of meaning. The incompleteness of the peripheral and fragmentary becomes a corrective to the affirmative character of the commodity form, certainly its status as a signifier of progress and, as far as Benjamin is concerned, a location from which to critique a much wider truth about the present (as conditioned by the object, capital). Industrial ruins, the abandoned and the repudiated embody a practical experience of the past that has gained some urgency for critical reanimation, just as the experience of heavy industry fades from memory to remembrance and the autonomous machine era beckons.[31]

[28] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 7.
[29] Ibid. p. 804 and Walter Benjamin, 'Paris–The Capital of the Nineteenth Century', in Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: NLB, 1973), p. 165.
[30] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 7.
[31] As Jonathan Crary explains: 'only through a reactivation of the memory of a circumstantial past can the official chronicles of history be opposed and thus new possibilities for the future imagined.'

As well as history, nature, too, was subsumed into the festival's mystification gambit. For Adorno, the cultural landscape of the mid 19th century is defined by a rift between first and second nature, a reification of the natural environment as a direct result of the rise of industrialism.[32] With this came the growth of 'technique' in art instigating a 'mediateness' with first nature, where nature, subsequently, becomes no more than a 'caricature of itself … overlaid with images of being a commodity'. First nature re-emerges in this distorted view as 'natural beauty', a conceptualisation appropriate for the bourgeoise imaginary,[33] no more evidently manifest, for Adorno, than in the 'tourist industry'. Where nature is turned into 'nature reserve' and an alibi that distracts from the reality of a dominated nature.[34] A similar pretext, it would seem, used by the garden festivals to cloak their true intention and to ingratiate public favour.

In Adorno's account, we are unable to candidly inhabit nature as we are all implicated in its subjugation. Having little choice other than to accept its culturised immediacy, that we so often mistake for first nature; a reified experience that does little more than appease a false relation of history to nature.[35] On the other hand, is a 'second nature' that if its sentimentalised exterior is penetrated the historical dimension is exposed and is an action that further holds to account all those who, in Adorno's words, possess 'an ahistorical aesthetic consciousness that sweeps aside the dimension of the past as rubbish …. Without historical remembrance there would be no beauty.'[36]

Suggesting there is a dialectic that binds art, itself, to the concept of 'natural beauty' and to think otherwise is to hold a (post) romantic notion that art is something 'other' – something set apart from the rational: 'art is not nature, a belief that idealism hoped to inculcate, but art does want to keep nature's promise. It is capable of this only by breaking that promise.'[37] Art can only do justice to nature if it shows the wounds that have been inflicted by an instrumental society: 'Art holds true to … nature only where it makes landscape present in

Jonathan Crary, 'Vera Lutter: Spectres of Negation' in Brian Dillon, ed., *Ruins* (London and Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2011), p. 179.

[32] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 66.

[33] Ibid., p. 67.

[34] Ibid., p. 68. We can say this idea of 'natural history', manifest as 'nature reserve', still applies today in the considerable number of ex-industrial locations, especially former collieries, that have, in fact, become nature reserves.

[35] Ibid., p. 66.

[36] Ibid., p. 65. Adorno continues: 'the past and cultural landscape, would be accorded guiltlessly to a liberated humanity, free especially of nationalism.' Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

the expression of its own negativity'.[38]

An important dialectic to have in mind when considering, for example, the public artworks that are now so common in many in ex-industrialised regions, including the Ebbw Valley. The most recent and officially sanctioned response to the past – a symptom, itself, of the cognitive distance between the present and the industrial past – are artworks that employ a 'nature will always find a way' trope – the 'Ur-phenomena' of which, to use Benjamin's term, were in evidence at Garden Festival Wales. Usually, realised as large-scale painted murals on public buildings or, increasingly, old industrial buildings themselves, they seem only to occasion, at least in the back of one's mind, the thought that the more idyllic and benevolent scenes of nature they seem to paint, the less idyllic and benevolent nature there seems to be. Of course, the kind of idealised portrayal teeming with flora and fauna that ensure the historico-political dimension remains foreclosed, otherwise it is a determined curiosity that brings the landscape's repressed (social-historical) material to understanding.[39] All around the upper Ebbw Valley, including the festival site, it is possible to pick-out this antagonistic material if the landscape is apprehended *spatially and temporally.* Adorno draws attention to this kind of social relational material locked-up in the landscape, including the desire of those who aim to release it: 'The most profound force of resistance stored in the cultural landscape is the expression of history that is compelling, aesthetically, because it is etched by the real suffering of the past. The figure of the constrained gives happiness because the force of constraint must not be forgotten; its images are memento.'[40]

Fredric Jameson suggests in the absence of a stable and interconnected 'cosmology' of meaning, it is the historical artefact that provides a surrogate for the lost totality of political significance, where 'history stands in place of master narratives as allegory'.[41] A perspective that means accepting the world of objects so 'there is nothing that is not social and historical – indeed, that everything is "in the last analysis" political'[42] and the locus of Jameson's 'political unconscious' interpretative method. Jameson proposes society's contradictions and

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[38] Ibid. pp. 67-68. Or if a transcendent moment does arise then it will be just that, a fleeting and transient experience. Ibid. p. 68.

[39] Without exception, this would be to open a Pandora's box of capitalist relations, as described by Lefebvre: 'Unlike psychoanalysis, bringing the (social) unconscious to light reintroduces not only the relations of production, but those of reproduction (domination and power), as well as representations (of a particular social class or stratum for itself, for other classes, for society as a whole).' Henri Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life, One Volume Edition, Vol. 3*, trans. Gregory Elliot (London and New York: Verso, 2014), p. 701.

[40] Adorno, p. 64.

[41] Buchanan, *Fredric Jameson: Live Theory,* p. 57. This is always a Marxist allegory of history, for Jameson. Ibid.

[42] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious,* p. ix.

struggles are latent in the creative outputs of artists and writers; the great upheavals of history existing there in obscure and ambiguous ways. Jameson insists, it is only a dialectical materialist understanding of history that can perform the task of decipherment: 'Only Marxism can give us an adequate account of the essential *mystery* of the cultural past … returned to life and warmth and once more allowed to speak, and deliver its long forgotten message'.[43]

Marxist philosophy's fundamental interest in the object of history (and of nature) is its facility as a 'meta-commentary' and the 'one code which decodes all the other codes'[44] and an interpretative method, in Jameson's view, that awakens, emblematically, the political unconscious by bringing to light evidence of historical class-struggle. Where all artefacts have, not only texts, the potential for 'socially symbolic acts'.[45] For Jameson, it is only the object that can truly possess an equitable knowledge of history, as the subject is already contaminated by reified society. Moreover, is an object, artefact or text that will, by far, outlive us continuing to muster history's antagonisms.[46] Desire, struggle and suffering sedimented in the object that remains mute until given the emblematic means to speak.[47]

The garden festival site, its borders and territory, are landscapes that can be seen to have concealed within them material intelligence from the past, that in a figurative and sometimes negative movement can be turned to political meaning about the present. Or, put another way, and relevant to photography as a mode of cognitive mapping and the agency that is

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[43] Ibid. p. 3.

[44] Buchanan, *Fredric Jameson: Live Theory*, p. 58. Jameson's meta-commentary or transcoding method is a figurative capability to jump from one mode, or method, of understanding to another. See Roland Boer, 'A Level Playing Field? Metacommentary and Marxism' in Ian Buchanan, *On Jameson: Conversations on Cultural Marxism* (Durham, NC and London, Duke University Press, 2007)*,* p. 53. and Steven Helmling, *The Success and Failure of Fredric Jameson: Writing the Sublime, and the Dialectic of Critique (SUNY Press, 2014),* pp. 29-30.

[45] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious,* p. 5.

[46] The object, for Jameson, is indelibly infused with the means of production.

[47] Ibid., pp. 4-14. Here, practically illustrated by W.J.T. Mitchell, using a photograph by Allan Sekula: 'objects seized from the world to constitute the world from below…. [T]he smallest detail stand[s] in for the totality, even a rusty tool can be a revelation of fossilised detritus of capital – a critical historical materialism.' W.J.T Mitchell, 'Planetary madness: Globalizing the Ship of Fools' in Alexander Streitberger and Hilde Van Gelder, eds., "*Dissembled" Images: Allan Sekula and Contemporary Art* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2019) p. 34. Mitchell has in mind the photograph of a rusty spanner displaced on a ground of dust in Sekula's *Fish Story* documentary. For Sekula use of allegory in his documentary work see Anthony Abiragi, 'Reading Against the Grain: Allan Sekula and the Rhetoric of Exemplarity' in ibid., pp. 230-238. Simon Faulkner puts the acquisition of the history object in photographic terms, where the emphasis is on the photographer, or artist, to take an active and pre-emptive role ensuring the past is cast in such a way it has a figurative relevance to our own political problems. Simon Faulkner, 'Late photography, military landscapes and the politics of memory', Open Arts Journal, Issue 3, (Summer 2014), p. 126. Available at: https://openartsjournal.files.wordpress.com/2014/09/faulkner_v3_p121-136.pdf. Last accessed 04/09/23.

meant to flow from such an intervention, is to mobilise the landscape from an 'activist's perspective'.[48] A conceptualisation that adeptly encapsulates the role of the photographer in relation to the landscape as an operative one, prerequisite to any photography of disclosure.

To accept Jameson's model is to agree with the existence of a totality of class-relations; the political unconscious a schematisation whereby the subject gains an idea of their place in these relations and how false-consciousness is most likely to be overcome.[49] The crucial part here, for Jameson, is the *figurability* of this relationship, signalling his commitment to the aesthetic as the best possible solution for making legible class-politics. Jameson highlights the often failure of positivist forms of knowledge, sociology and economics, for example, to bring these kinds of relations into tangible form. The figurative, in contrast, decouples class-relations from abstract (scientific) understanding making them accessible to the imagination as 'vivid … experiential … characters in their own right'.[50]

1:3 Landscape, Class, Figurability

A class-based perspective is, without question, always at the forefront of the documentary work of Allan Sekula and his project *Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes* (1997 [1987])[51] is a particularly cogent example. Like the upper Ebbw Valley, the landscape in Sekula's project has been altered by mining and other heavy industry. Also, like the upper Ebbw Valley, it is a landscape in transition, albeit in Sekula's documentary at an earlier stage of this process. Sekula's documentary takes place at various centres of influence and power in Canada and the USA, although the critical focus of his project is its material source: the wealth generated by mining and metal processing around the City of Sudbury.

Sudbury is a place on the cusp of losing its nickel industry (nickel mined and processed in Sudbury was used in the manufacture of Canadian and American coins) and anticipating the economic vacuum once production finally ceases. So that he gains a comprehensive picture of the objective nature of the economic and social issues facing Sudbury, Sekula turns his

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[48] Conohar Scott, *The Photographer as Environmental Activist: Politics, Ethics & Beauty in the Struggle for Environmental Remediation* (Loughborough University, Unpublished PhD, 2014), p. 114, *passim*. Available at: https://repository.lboro.ac.uk/articles/thesis/The_photographer_as_environmental_activist_politics_ethics_and_beauty_in_the_struggle_for_environmental_remediation/9333125, pp. 114-117. Last accessed, 20/09/22.

[49] Fredric Jameson, 'Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: *Dog Day Afternoon* as a Political Film', p. 845. This is a method that, essentially, becomes cognitive mapping in Jameson's later thinking.

[50] Ibid. Also see Jameson, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,* p. 358.

[51] Allan Sekula, *Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997).

attention to the administrative centres of the region like Ottawa, where the Bank of Canada is located, and other places of economic and political influence far beyond the boundaries of Sudbury.[52] Sekula constructs his documentary in such a way economic and social inequity is brought to light, like issues to do with the uneven distribution of economic prosperity.[53] In essence, Sekula's project is a making visible of the objectivity of money, as an assemblage of human labour and natural materials, at the same time revealing the ideological, corporate and political structures behind the distribution of money and finance. We are all familiar with money as an abstraction, but few, even since Sekula, have chosen to follow a path to its substantive source, let alone infiltrate the ideology and mythology constantly orbiting and concealing the reality of money-power.[54] What Sekula's documentary shows, albeit tacitly, by following the circuits of capital and power, that even when arriving at what appears to be an origin, another complex network of human and economic relations become apparent. Nevertheless, after Adorno, it is the narrative, the 'condition' and the 'process' of finding something out is just as crucial to the truth as the claim itself.[55]

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[52] Sekula's explanation is more direct concerning his approach: 'How better to help question the metropolitan ambitions of the Canadian bourgeoisie than by approaching the Bank of Canada from its "own" peripheries, from Sudbury, a place secretly regarded by many respectable and even ecologically sensitive North Americans as the arsehole of Canada?' Sekula, *Geography Lesson,* p. 59. Interestingly, Ebbw Vale has suffered a similar 'othered' outside view throughout much of its history. A place remarked, certainly in my own experience during the 1980s, as having suffered more than other communities of South Wales. Defined most markedly by the sheer presence of industry and its scars on the landscape, including the amount of detritus dumped there, even compared to other valleys of South Wales. An objective character of the landscape, subsequently, subjectivised.

[53] The substantive of this is the presence or absence of work and labour, including the divisions of labour. Sekula is often cited as a documentary maker interested in the representation of work and labour, which is accurate in one sense. But he is also attentive to the precarity of labour, the complexities of the divisions of labour and the absence of labour (as all issues dealt with in his *Geography Lesson* project). Sekula is critical of documentary photography showing work and labour in the affirmative, as it would seem to be 'ignorant of any notion of labor's contingency…. [T]he nightmare of unemployment on one side and by the utopian dream of genuine freedom from work on the other. … So, I've always tried to approach labor from this "negative" or dialectical perspective: work shadowed by non-work.' Allan Sekula, 'Conversation between Allan Sekula and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh in Alan *Sekula: Performance Under Working Conditions*, ed. Sabine Breitwieser (Generali Foundation, 2003), p. 48.

[54] We can also see Sekula's documentary as an allegory of (the impossibility of) making visible the totality of capital and the cul-de-sac of its heterogenous operations.

[55] Theodor W. Adorno, *An Introduction to Dialectics*, ed. Christoph Ziermann and trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 2018), p. 27.

Fig. 10. Allan Sekula, *Bank of Canada* from *Geography
Lesson: Canadian Notes,* 1985 – 1997. © Allan Sekula Studio.

Sekula's documentary begins with photographs of the Bank of Canada's exterior (Fig. 8) and interior architecture. The emblems, icons and general *mise-en-scene* on display are unmistakably indicative of corporate authority. A rhetoric the Bank looks to legitimise in the dioramas of its Museum of Currency. Sekula's documentary continues with photographs of various social interactions taking place behind the ideological posturing in and around the Bank's headquarter building. A photograph of a newly married couple posing in the alcove of the Bank's Garden Court, for instance, and images of cleaners and maintenance staff going about their work in the same place sometime later (Fig. 9). Another example, is a photograph of construction workers next to graffiti sprayed on a hoarding surrounding a new building on Bank Street and would seem to be a small gesture of resistance, when it reads: 'Needed: more banks, Flintstones reruns.' Sekula moves beyond the bank and its vicinity to include photographs of the United States Embassy and the Canadian parliament, including images of the kind of conspicuous monuments to war inexorably associated with places like these (Fig. 10).

Fig. 11. Allan Sekula, *Garden Court, Bank of Canada* from *Geography
Lesson: Canadian Notes*, 1985 – 1997. © Allan Sekula Studio.

Fig. 12. Allan Sekula, *War Memorial, Ottawa* from *Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes*, 1985 – 1997. © Allan Sekula Studio.

Landscapes and scenes in and around Sudbury continue Sekula's documentary including images associated with work and the nickel industry. He also chooses, like the photographs at the Bank of Canada, to introduce social relations once again. Although this time he shows them recuperated by the spectacle, like when a couple walk past 'The Peoples Jewellers' (Fig. 11), other times it is experience that is cut through by the same commodity form, the effects of work or the industrial character of the landscape. Like when he photographs people shopping for food at a local supermarket surrounded by promotional advertising and price signage (Fig. 12) or a wedding ceremony dominated by the chimney of the copper smelting facility. The juxtapositions that Sekula makes between images of power, the ideologies of money, the commodity imperative and the effects of capital with the reality of work, social relations and the everyday is how he draws our attention to their objective content.

Fig. 13. Allan Sekula, *Downtown shopping mall, Sudbury* from *Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes*, 1985 – 1997. © Allan Sekula Studio.

Fig. 14. Allan Sekula, *Discount supermarket, Sudbury* from
Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes, 1985 – 1997.
© Allan Sekula Studio.

There is throughout Sekula's documentary equally a contradiction playing out between
nature and industry, no more saliently illustrated than in a photograph of a sign that reads
'scenic lookout' hung above another which says, 'slag pouring site' (Fig. 13). A dialectic of
nature that continues even when the landscape is recuperated by representation – where
class relations are also on display. Like when Sekula photographs a painting by E.Y.
Jackson, hanging in the office reception of a uranium mining and processing company in
Ottawa (Fig. 14), which he juxtaposes with a print of a landscape painting that has a health
and safety message printed on to it hanging in the factory floor of a nickel smelting plant in
Sudbury. (Fig. 15).

Fig. 15. Allan Sekula, *Slag, Sudbury* from *Geography Lesson:
Canadian Notes,* 1985 – 1997. © Allan Sekula Studio.

Fig. 16. Allan Sekula, *Reception room, Eldorado Resources (uranium mining and processing firm), Ottawa. Landscape paintings by A.Y. Jackson* from *Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes,* 1985 – 1997. © Allan Sekula Studio.

Fig. 17. Allan Sekula, *Inco smelter* from *Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes,* 1985 – 1997. © Allan Sekula Studio.

Sudbury is a transitional place, its economic reason for being is in decline, Sekula is aware of this and includes indications of the transformation in the landscape. Like a social realist pastiche of a miner advertising the Big Nickel Mining Museum (Fig. 16) and a piece of industrial apparatus, now redundant, freshly painted as part of an installation at the same museum (Fig. 17). Or a photograph of families visiting an experimental vegetable farm at a former nickel mine and would seem to be the kind of images indicative of Sudbury's impending future.

Fig. 18. Allan Sekula, *Big Nickel Mine,* Sudbury from *Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes,* 1985 – 1997. © Allan Sekula Studio.

Fig. 19. Allan Sekula, *Big Nickel Mine, Sudbury* from *Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes,* 1985 – 1997. © Allan Sekula Studio.

Sekula's documentary images are edited in such way they infer the landscape is never serially or straightforwardly industrial or post-industrial: where one means of production seamlessly makes way for another. Both old and new tend to coexist, with each having their own ideological effects, often in conflict until the emergent eventually becomes the dominant means. What technology and social relations look like, as manifestations of the residual and emergent,[56] have repercussions for any landscape photography of a socially engaged kind, *vis-à-vis* what the capitalist production of space looks like in reality.

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[56] For an analysis of culture as 'residual', 'emergent' and 'dominant' associated with Williams's 'Structures of Feeling' hermeneutic see Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 121-135.

The post heavy industry landscape is also a place where myths about the past coexist with the socio-practical reality of long vanished labour, characterised by slag heaps, tailings and, sometimes, literal burnt earth. Delineations in the landscape that are symptoms of the loss, or lack, of the kind of work once found in abundance in these places and, additionally, are signs of the brutal and alienating nature of the work. Post-labour signifiers like the ruin, the disused and the discarded do not only refer to the work of the past, but they also signify, emblematically, the very future of work, labour and even the mode of production itself.

The upper Ebbw Valley is a hybrid place, today, where new technological industries reliant on highly skilled cognitive workers are moving to the region at the same time 'traditional' manufacturing industries, dependent on manual labour, continue to be the largest employers in the area. More frequent transitional periods are an inevitable effect of 2% growth *in perpetuum* prerequisite to late capital and it is the landscape which concretely registers the effects of this continuous economic process. No more rationally articulated than the antagonism of new architecture and the ruin supplying *the* substantive picture of the effects of endlessly having to start all over again. In regions like the Ebbw Valley and South Wales, having long histories of industrialised capital, it is a starting all over again from the same 'broken middle'.[57]

Sekula's photographs in *Canadian Notes* are not effortlessly readable celebrations of social relations, neither do they utter any obvious resistance to the status quo. To see their criticality is to first renounce any positivist notion of an image having a simple and singular 'meaning' and to accept Sekula's sometimes cryptic presentation of photographs as a visual mode – or code even – aimed at preventing undemanding or introspective rumination. A view underscored by Sally Stein: 'If seeking a quick show and tell, best turn back else fortify yourself.'[58] Instead, the viewer is asked to think and imagine across space and time and to understand the project in its totality:[59]

> Throughout *Canadian Notes* the structure established sets up a
> dynamic dialogue with viewers that virtually precludes lingering
> on single images. To Sekula, it is the whole interrelated

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[57] I have borrowed this term from Gillian Rose's book: *Broken Middle: Out of Our Ancient Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

[58] Allan Sekula, *Art Isn't Fair: Further Essays on the Traffic in Photographs and Related Media,* eds. Sally Stein, Ina Steiner (London: Mack, 2020), p. vii.

[59] For Hilda Van Gelder, too, the idea of understanding Sekula's work is not at the level of single images but must be appreciated at the level of his oeuvre. Hilde Van Gelder, 'A Matter of Cleaning-Up: Treating History in the Work of Allan Sekula and Jeff Wall', *History of Photography,* 31:1 (2007), p. 70.

understanding derived from the groups of photographs, each caption, and the essay that keeps each work, whether an installation or a book, animate. He has developed a strategy that cuts across the auratic identity embedded in individual photographic images [so they come] at you from different directions simultaneously.[60]

Sekula has edited *Canadian Notes* into several sequences each photograph in the sequence has a caption, sometimes a longer text, and each of these sequences has a place in a larger aggregate picture.[61] Sekula's writing, including the writing of others, serves to further extrapolate the photographs as knowledge, what Sekula terms a 'paraliterary' approach and a hybridisation of photography with literary forms and a coalition meant to make epistemological borders seem less opaque.[62] *Canadian Notes* has an ambitiousness in the awareness it tries to impart concerning the complexity and multifaceted dimension of national and global capitalist forces and their impact on local lives and communities. The simple caption does considerable work under these conditions, holding the project in a state of coherence, simply by ensuring the photograph is anchored to the immediate context under observation at any one time. In other situations, the text has a purpose extending the reach of the photograph's content, so it references more directly the universal issue which is at stake for Sekula.

In closing, Sekula produced *Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes* between 1985 and 1986 around the same time the first phase of the neo-liberal deindustrialisation of Western economies was nearing completion and the way ahead had been prepared for the service and finance sector. In 1986 Sudbury and Ebbw Vale would have had similar vistas corresponding to their historic social and economic reliance on heavy industry. The steelworks at the time was still in production in Ebbw Vale, although substantially reduced after the industry's rationalisation during the early 1980s and Marine Colliery, just to the south of the garden festival site, was still operating. Although, after the end of the 1984/85

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[60] Gary Dafur, 'Allan Sekula, Gazeteer' in *Geography Lesson, Canadian Notes*, p. 72. Cf. Benjamin James Young, *Sympathetic Materialism: Allan Sekula's Photo-Works, 1971–2000* (University of California, Berkeley: Unpublished PhD, 2018), pp. 118-119. Available at https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8fx7j2mw. Last accessed 18/11/21.

[61] For an extended discussion on photography and the overcoming of abstraction, related specifically to photography as mode of realism, including examples from Sekula's documentary practice and his own thoughts on this from his theoretical writing see David Cunningham, 'Renouncing the Single Image: Photography and the realism of abstraction', *Photographies*, 9:2 (2016), p. 150.

[62] Allan Sekula 'On "Fish Story": The Coffin Learns to Dance', *Camera Austria,* No. 59/60 (1997) cited in David Cunningham, Andrew Fisher and Sas Mays*,* eds., *Photography and Literature in the Twentieth Century* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2005), pp. 169.

miners' strike, pit closures accelerated rapidly and by 1989 the Ebbw Valley had lost the last of its collieries.

Today, Ebbw Vale and Sudbury continue to echo each other in their grand visions to attract new industries and businesses, with a similar tone to their advertising and marketing pitches which switches between the competitive and bucolic. It would be no surprise the City of Sudbury promotes itself as a place of leisure, green space and new technological industries with easy access to unfettered nature.[63] The Copper Cliff mine continues to produce nickel at the same smelting facility photographed by Sekula, although the then owner, Inco, has since been taken over by the Brazilian mining conglomerate Vale.[64] Sudbury's despoiled landscape, like the upper Ebbw Valley, has been mostly reclaimed and re-landscaped anticipating redevelopment.[65]

Capital's *form* of economic and social organisation and the where and how it makes space has changed since Sekula's project ended, but its *objectivity* has not: the production of surplus value further advancing accumulation. *Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes* is an exemplification of Sekula's documentary method because it so attuned to the essence of political economy and experience of the capitalist production of space. Sekula's use of photography is bound by vigilance to the object nature of multinational capital and its unceasing pursuit of profit where anything else, for Sekula, is the object ideologically obscuring the reality of its ends.[66] He modulates his formal approach to photography according to these variations, thus ensuring the reality of the object is always in critical view.

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[63] City of Greater Sudbury: https://www.greatersudbury.ca/play/conservation-areas-and-trails. Last accessed 01/12/21.
[64] http://www.vale.com/en/pages/default.aspx. Last accessed 23/09/21.
[65] http://viewpointmining.com/article/the-reclamation-of-sudbury. Last accessed 10/12/21.
[66] 'The camera for Sekula is a 'fact' collecting device, only they are negative facts 'parts of the fallen facticity of the world, that is, they are sites of cover-ups and myths, of clandestine and concealed "public" operations. These are the operations of capital; the continuous process of shifting, changing, and social political reorganization determines the pace and intervals of these facts. [Sekula] …records these intervals, the spatial discontinuities and temporal gaps occurring in the production of "facts"'. Buchloh, *Fish Story,* p. 199.

Chapter 2

The Desire that is Cognitive Mapping[1]

… for poets make the best topographers.

– W.G. Hoskins.[2]

2:1 Introduction

Jameson's cognitive mapping concept is appraised in detail in this chapter, including the political, economic and societal changes that brought about its initiation in his thinking. Why we need cognitive maps and the urgent need to understand our place in a global structure of capitalist relations is considered, and how a scheme of connection / revealing can be formally prepared for the task by this project. Jameson proposes art's figurability gives it a unique function to make visible capitalist activity, the chapter suggesting photography has a particular propensity for this, bifurcated, as it is, between the empiric and the aesthetic. Jameson's discussions on his concept, from a practical perspective, are often vague and underdeveloped; the research project has taken this as dispensation to develop a method of cognitive mapping disposed to the (historical) particularity of the Ebbw Valley, garden festival landscape and wider territory.

Jameson ponders there is an inevitable failure built into any practice of cognitive mapping. Granted, he does not mean failure in the terminal sense of defeat, but more as a labour of Sisyphus. That there is, indeed, a certain fulfilment – pleasure in fact – in the very labour, itself, of making connections and in the revelation of knowledge that can follow. Characteristics Jameson sees distinctive to a practice of realism because it diminishes, in practical terms, the enlightenment estrangement of pleasure from knowledge. A proposition that could well apply to the two case studies the chapter has selected to illustrate the employment of photography as a form of enquiry into capitalist enterprise. Although the photographers in question do not characterise – in any direct sense at least – their projects

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[1] This is after Toscano and Kinkle, who suggest the 'desire called cognitive mapping has not been quenched, a quarter of century from Jameson's original proposition.' *Cartographies of the Absolute*, p. 177.

[2] W.G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 17.

as cognitive mapping, this study considers them to have aims and outcomes that are not dissimilar to those Jameson describes.

A spiritualised attitude can often be associated with landscapes of capital, whether this is the outlook of the photographer, audience or the critic, and most evident in the sublime. Being aware of history and the social construction of the land, space and place, can help deter this kind of impressionistic perspective. The overview panorama has almost become the convention here, but as the chapter explains there is a dialectic at work, as well, where the photograph need not necessarily default to matters of formal contemplation.

Driving Jameson's concept is an inarguable 'commitment', where the everyday provides material for politicisation. The study believes that the 'everyday' and 'local' components of Jameson's concept are often underrepresented in subsequent commentaries and debates. Even though the chapter discusses the centrality of political commitment to cognitive mapping what is also acknowledged, there is a pleasure involved when working with form. And when considering the singular attributes of photography's realism, an opportunity exists to reunite knowledge (science) with pleasure (form). In essence, as well, there is an openness in play here, that only aesthetic practice can offer seen as an important to how a cognitive map should function.

2:2 Why We Need Maps

During the 1980s and the early 1990s, Jameson refused to see the phenomenon of postmodernism as anything other than the effect of a much wider societal change brought about by the progress of capitalism.[3] In what some have called a counter-revolution (against the post-war social contract), the neo-liberal re-organisation of capital was established on the belief in universal consumerism and economic deregulation. All forms of social solidarity were assailed as barriers to adaptable and cheap labour, the welfare state was dismantled, and public assets and services were privatised. Any semblance of a way of life identifiable with the collective was replaced by a liberal perspective and an attitude toward society underpinned by personal responsibility and 'traditional family values.'[4]

Capital was operating now at a global level of the market; business, manufacturing and finance were seeking ever more permeable borders and ever decreasing timeframes for

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[3] Forming the central tenor of Jameson's *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.* See also David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).
[4] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, p. 23.

their activity. This was a remodelling of capital that could only be facilitated by a comprehensive change to consciousness, itself. To this end, political strategy during the 1980s was organised just as much around ideology as the concrete transformation of the economy, society, work and labour. David Harvey quotes Margaret Thatcher on these terms; Thatcher knew she needed to have both an objective and ideological dimension to her grand scheme: 'Economics are the method … but the object is to change the soul'.[5]

An objectification of consciousness and the body, for Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, to the point that 'naked life' had all but been extinguished along with any possibility of an outside to exchange-relations.[6] Theodor W. Adorno and the Frankfurt School had similar concerns, with a philosophical exactness to match: *reality was the exchange-relation* and a false relation to society that become more insidious every time the forces of production evolved. Frankfurt School thinkers saw the transition from surplus value created by production to value created by communication technology as threatening the last remnants of a 'subjective spirit' able to differentiate objectively; any mediating ability thwarted by what Adorno described as the 'technological veil' of communication.[7]

This all brought new experiences of space and time. The subject is now a displaced and disoriented one: any meaningful bearings formally associated with community and history have been dismantled. Political action almost impossible now that the opportunity for collective organisation has been lost to an increasingly fragmented and atomised society; the subject interpolated 'into a multidimensional set of radically discontinuous realities … [framed] by the unimaginable decentring of global capitalism … the subject, or, more exactly, the fragmented and schizophrenic decentring and dispersion of this last'. Nevertheless, for Jameson, there were still 'urgent political dilemmas' to do with 'practical politics.'[8] Dilemmas that have only intensified, metamorphosising into an entire range of other problems since Jameson's original discussion.

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 32.

[7] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Late Capitalism or Industrial Society? Opening Address to the 16th German Sociological Congress', trans. Dennis Redmond (1968), p. 13. Available at: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1968/late-capitalism.htm. Last accessed: 05/11/2023. Adorno's definition of the objective nature of the totality of capitalist relations is a modification of Hegel: 'The best part, which by no means needs to be the best, is forgotten, namely the totality, or in Hegel's words the all-penetrating ether of society. This however is anything but ethereal, but on the contrary an *ens realissimum….* Insofar as it is abstractly veiled, the fault of its abstraction is not to be blamed on a solipsistic and reality-distant thinking, but on the exchange-relationships, the objective abstractions, which belongs to the social life-process.' Ibid., pp. 9-10.

[8] Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, p. 351.

Not least for representation, which gives rise to two overarching questions for this study. First: How can landscape photography critically challenge the production of space by, it seems, an unquenchable free-market order? Which directly informs the second question: What can landscape photography contribute to progressive awareness as counteragent to the omnipresence of received ideas about capital and its relations today? Neither question can be answered, this study proposes, unless each is appraised and mediated in the light of an ineradicable, abstruse and constantly evolving globalised capitalist form and the continuing domination of nature and the subject.

Capital's inculcate purpose is movement toward an absolute system of value production and accumulation and, as many have noted, certainly from the latter decades of the 20th century, is an incomprehensible phenomenon.[9] For its effective bringing to light, there needs to be a suitable and accessible formal apparatus for its disclosure. For Jameson this is a difficulty for aesthetic practice, engendered as it is with the means to make complex lateral connections across space and time and between epistemological disciplines.

The problem for Jameson is not that we are unable to experience capital as a phenomenon, as for most people it is existentially real, but the lack of appropriate conceptual frameworks or representational models from which to ascertain any kind of critical knowledge. Here Jameson sees art and the imagination as a means of bridging the gap between experience and knowledge.[10] Hence, *representability* is at the heart of cognitive mapping practice and a visibility contributing to nothing less than a renewed form of political agency: 'An aesthetic of cognitive mapping [is] a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system'. Where the

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[9] Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, pp. 35-36 and pp. 410-411. Jameson periodises (via Ernest Mandel) the three stages of capital's evolution from mid-nineteenth century market capitalism to late nineteenth century monopoly capital and, finally, post-second world and our own age of multinational capital, sometimes referred to as 'late capital'. Each stage of this history is economically, phenomenologically and technologically defined having repercussions for economic and social organisation. Ibid.

[10] Jameson's concept is modelled on Kevin Lynch's theory on orientating the city environment. According to Lynch, people orientate themselves in cityscapes by using a mental map of their surroundings, where physical forms in the immediate environment (buildings, paths, streetlights, shops, roads, houses, benches, etc.) are rearranged in the imagination as markers for navigating around the city. In effect, what is being produced by the imagination out of the empirical data provided by the everyday is an individualised mental map that allows navigation of a much larger and incomprehensible urban milieu. Lynch calls this process *imageability* and is 'the making of vividly identified, powerfully structured, highly useful mental images of the environment.' Kevin Lynch, *Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960), p. 9. In this sense, localised empirical markers and features are used to orientate within a much larger and imagined space of the city.

cognitive map's ability to resolve the 'global social totality' successfully 'stands and falls' on the 'matter of form'.[11]

2:3 How to Make a Map

T.J. Demos poses the following question, 'How can cartographic forms merge with affective systems in order to motivate the desire for oppositional political becoming, social justice, and economic right?'[12] As well as putting in clear terms what the outcomes should be for any orientation task, the question also draws attention to a potential issue and the formal resolution employed by some mapping strategies – expressly the kind that aim to 'map' capitalist enterprise. Jameson has already brought attention to this issue; that the cartographic aesthetic is highly questionable as a formal resolution to the problem. Jameson does not doubt the overall importance of 'maps' for producing knowledge about capitalist space and the urgency 'to name the system'.[13] The basis of his uncertainty is that he modelled his concept on the very bulwark of the system it was meant to criticise; that the cartographic is a form of visualisation valorised by capitalist logistics.[14] Toscano and Kinkle see a similar problem with this kind of solution.[15] Just like Jameson, they are resolute it is a problem worth overcoming to find an aesthetic that can register the operations of capital as a total-system, at the same time it should transcend the positivism associated with the cartographic. They see by bringing the landscape into an expressive form of representation, instead of the informational, it gives more attention to the 'geographic materiality' of capital's production of space.[16]

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[11] Jameson, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, p. 356.
[12] T.J. Demos, 'Another World is Possible …: *Notes on Uneven Geographies'* in Emily Eliza Scott and Kirsten Swenson, *Critical Landscapes: Art, Space, Politics* (Oakland, CA: California University Press, 2015), pp. 155-156.
[13] Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,* p. 418.
[14] Ibid., p. 416.
[15] Toscano and Kinkle, p. 58. They are specifically referring to diagrammatic drawings by Mark Lombardi. See note 17.
[16] Toscano and Kinkle, p. 64. The observation concerns the photography of Trevor Paglen and his work on secret military landscapes in the USA.

Fig. 20. Mark Lombardi, *Phil Schwab, CB Financial and Eureka Federal Savings c. 1981-6* (1997). © Estate of Mark Lombardi.

A more expressive approach would also overcome the assumption that information is knowledge and that the only way to 'see' capital is in a highly abstracted form, notwithstanding, is a form of visuality fetishised by many, including institutions of art. Often the density of graphic information present in a cartographic form of mapping, for example in the work of Mark Lombardi (Fig. 19), would seem to be more labyrinthine than the situation being drawn attention to.[17] There is also an assumption capital is something that cannot be directly experienced, which in some cases is true, but often capital's effects can be directly sensed and perceived. Returning us to Jameson's fundamental problem for cognitive mapping and that of representability.

Although, for the moment, staying potential difficulties. Jameson frequently – it must be said, rather enigmatically – casts doubt, at least in the context of art and the aesthetic, on the effectiveness of cognitive mapping to achieve the aims he himself has set out for it as a practice. That global capital will always remain recondite to understanding, as a phenomenon, because it is innately unrepresentable. He does, though, throw a lifeline to those who might feel let-down by such a conclusion. The enactment of the possible along with a desire to know, only to be thwarted by the impossibility of the task, is the 'triumph' of cognitive mapping (resolutely distinguishable from pursuing an emphatic answer, or other outcome exhorted by success):

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[17] Mark Lombardi illustrates political conspiracies connecting their protagonists to elicit financial sources. Other artists who employ a cartographic or diagrammatic aesthetic, along similar themes, include Hans Haacke particularly his projects *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971, Whitney Museum of American Art* (1971): https://whitney.org/collection/works/29487. Last accessed 09/09/22 and *MetroMobiltan Centre Pompidou* (1985): https://www.centrepompidou.fr/en/ressources/oeuvre/cEnXRjG. Last accessed 12/10/22 and Bureau d'Études intricate graphic mapping of capitalist produced for exhibition and book formats, https://bureaudetudes.org. Last accessed 02/09/22 Also see Brian Holmes, ed., *An Atlas of Agendas: Mapping the Power, Mapping the Commons*, (Eindhoven: Onomatopee, 2019).

spatial representation today need not be some uplifting socialist

realist drama of revolutionary triumph but may be equally

inscribed in a narrative of defeat, which sometimes, even more

effectively, causes the whole architectonic of postmodern global

space to rise up in ghostly profile behind itself, as some ultimate

dialectical barrier or invisible limit. [Giving] a little more meaning

to the slogan of cognitive mapping.[18]

In terms of the practical mechanics of making a cognitive map, then. Jameson proposes the

artistic community in addressing the problem of 'representability' should invent critically

apposite connections between what seem disparate real and / or imagined situations

associated with the geographies, topographies and landscapes of late capital.[19] This would

entail conveying empirical reality via some kind of aesthetic device to the imagination as an

alternate orientation of the subject's place in the global system.[20] According to Jameson, the

cognitive map should have the facility to render the empirical and every day into a

sophisticated – no less dialectical –, yet accessible, form and, importantly, with a content

that does not recourse 'to some older and more transparent national space'.[21]

Formally, the map would need to overcome the conventional documentary view, the 'mimetic

in that older sense',[22] by continually experimenting with the map's relevance to reality,

adjusting and renewing its aesthetic accordingly so that it functions 'on a higher and much

more complex level'.[23] Having said that, Jameson does not, throughout the various

manifestations of his cognitive mapping approach, give any specific detail about the map's

formal aesthetic make-up, although he does suggest the allegorical, the figurative and the

poetic might all have a place. A strategic vagueness on Jameson's behalf, it could be

suggested, allowing artists to explore possibilities relevant to the context in which they find

themselves. Actually, Jameson is quite frank about his own naivety concerning how the artist

should proceed with such a practical task.[24] He is, however, in no doubt it must be an

aesthetic of an activist kind: 'the new political art – if indeed it is possible at all – will have to

hold to the truth … to its fundamental object – the world space of multinational capital – at

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[18] Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, pp. 372-373.
[19] Ibid., pp. 347-349.
[20] Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic', p. 89.
[21] Ibid., p.92. The map must be able to withstand a 'pluralism of the aesthetic' which would inevitability follow a complex and multiple rendering of content. Ibid.
[22] Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,* p. 51.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Jameson, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, p. 347.

the same time at which it achieves a breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing this last'.[25]

Jameson's call for a practice of cognitive mapping is premised on renewing the progressive imagination and with this intention it is a schema that would recognise the collective and political body and its 'capacity to act and struggle'.[26] One course of action landscape photography, as cognitive mapping, could take in contributing to this latter objective – considering the context of the landscape under consideration in this study – is to recover a history of social relations (these of course would both the instrumentalised and collective kind). Although, even by the act of retrieving visual material from local and everyday experience rather than, say, the extreme or exotic could be seen, itself, as an acknowledgement of the collective character of the landscape.

Seeing the landscape in a way which is isolated from a history of social practice and the objective historical forces that produced them in the first place makes it vulnerable to the impressionistic, contemplative and phenomenological (particularly that kind of observance which excludes a critique of society).[27] A resolution of the landscape that would not necessarily be inclined to the rational and political understanding prerequisite to a practice of cognitive mapping (certainly of the category Jameson is proposing). The sublime, in particular, has become a perspective most appealing for some landscape photographers when faced with the scale and perplexing character of landscapes of capital. A criticism that could equally be directed at the province of theory and criticism and the response of an audience.[28] The sublime can be understood, certainly in more recent times, to include any

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[25] Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic', p.92.
[26] Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 54. It is worth highlighting at this juncture, the social dimension of Jameson's concept which is sometimes overlooked in discissions (as is the political dimension): 'The political form of postmodernism, if there ever is any, will have as its vocation the invention and projection of a global cognitive mapping, on a social as well as a spatial scale.' Jameson, 'Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', p. 92.
[27] For Dennis E. Cosgrove, the object is missing from the phenomenological view of the landscape: 'phenomenologists …, the aim of their particular mode of understanding [the landscape] is to overcome a personal alienation from the external world to replace it with a unity of feeling and meaning.' Dennis E, Cosgrove, 'Sublime Nature: Landscape and Industrial Capitalism' in Dennis E, Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic* Landscape (Madison, WI and London, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), p. 244. Also see, Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science,* p. 70. An assessment of phenomenology central to Adorno's philosophy as well. Adorno saw inherent to phenomenology, including existentialism, an idealism and a critique directed, mostly, at Heidegger's interpretation. A censure most pronounced in *The Jargon of Authenticity*. Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).
[28] As Tom Huhn notes, after Kant, the sublime is the erasure of the object in favour of the subject. In contrast to Adorno's negative dialectics and the Marxian view, the object is always ascendent to the subject. Tom Huhn, 'Kant, Adorno, and the Social Opacity of the Aesthetic' in Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervaart, eds., *The Semblance of Subjectivity: Essays in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), p. 385.

phenomena perceived to be beyond comprehensibility and rational qualification. A very current example of this subsidiary use of the sublime is the Anthropocene, a scheme that meditates the effects of human activity into anonymous and incomprehensible space-time. In a different rational scheme, what the Anthropocene describes is no more than the consequences of the capitalist mode of production with identifiable actors, places and timeframes.[29]

Perhaps *the* defining strategy, and most pronounced aesthetic feature of a spirituality infused form of landscape photography, is the transmutation of capital's expansiveness into the domain of the exalted.[30] The apotheosis figure of this variety of practice is Edward Burtynsky (although there are many other candidates). For Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle this is a result of Burtynsky's beholdenness to aesthetic excess: 'Scale and symmetry – along with focused detail, a divine panoramic view, and the absence or insignificance of human presence … elides both the inapparent logics at work in these processes and the enduring role of collective labour and agency. It presents us with beautiful monuments to alienation without any inquiry into the processes of their production.'[31] A

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[29] The Anthropocene has been 'illustrated' in a recent photography project by Edward Burtynsky, *Anthropocene* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2018). More specifically, regarding the research interests of this project, is an example of collapsing industrial capital into the concept of the sublime in a recent exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum of the commercial industrial photography of Maurice Broomfield. The photograph used on the exhibition home page seems to underline this affectual approach, at least in the connation it raises of the paintings of John Martin. *Maurice Broomfield: Industrial Sublime*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (6th Nov., 2021 to 5th Feb., 2023). https://www.vam.ac.uk/exhibitions/maurice-broomfield-industrial-sublime. Last accessed 13/12/23. Aside from the question why the sublime has become the preferred way to expound the effects and affects of capitalistic activity, its ideological dimension is often left unquestioned. The sublime is not merely an abstraction proposing a subjective response to an objective situation, it is a concept harnessed instrumentally by power in constructing an illusory authority, not least to mystify its activity. Conversely, those who happen to control the production of capital do not resort to matters of the sublime. Quite the opposite, they endeavour to understand the totality of circumstances affecting global trade and the markets (not only that which is economically contingent, but the extra-economic too – from political crisis to environmental disaster) at any one time. Financial trading relies on the production of abstract data in real time providing a panoramic view of the global economy and a perspective that remains, mostly, only accessible to those in power. Historically, of course, this has always been the case. From the mid-18th century, commercial and industrial activity became less experientially verifiable meaning new ways of representing a burgeoning economy had to be invented. So, the abstracted form came into its own: diagrams, pictures, illustrations and statistics provided information about the current state of political economy. Representations supplied to those who presided over the state of the Nation and Empire: The King, the physiocrats and other proto-economists. Susan Buck-Morss, 'Envisioning Capital: Political Economy on Display', Critical Enquiry, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Winter, 1995), pp. 434-467.
[30] Toscano and Kinkle*,* pp. 204-207.
[31] Ibid.*,* p. 205. T.J Demos suggests something similar. Burtynsky's images, while they reveal something horrifying, are also anesthetising at the same time. Where the technological tends to combine with the natural, rendering progress in an alluring way. Burtynsky's images never show the corporate side of what is behind such scenes of catastrophe or environmental destruction. T.J. Demos, *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today* (London and Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), pp. 60-65.

formalism that acts as a unifying aesthetic veneer that impedes the political view
– composition and design are the content, in the view of Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle.

Fig. 21. Edward Burtynsky, *Fuels and chemical storage, Houston,*
Texas, USA (2017). © Edward Burtynsky.

For many landscape photographers the overview is the perspective of choice, a 'sovereign'[32] view of the world epitomised in the photography of Burtynsky (Fig. 26). The same perspective is also integral to the photography of Andreas Gursky (Fig. 27) and the social landscape work of John Davies (Fig. 28), including many others, whose photographs are very rarely made from being in amongst the landscape, instead are made from the prospect of distance and from an elevated position.

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[32] In colonial art, the overlooking panorama was a signifier of entitlement and power, the absolutist perspective. This is what is meant by the sovereign view.

Fig. 22. Andreas Gursky, *Les Mées* (2016). © Andreas Gursky.

Fig. 23. John Davies, New Street Station, Birmingham (2000). © John Davies.

Sekula saw the aerial view in wartime reconnaissance photography as imparting: 'On the one hand, … an illusion of power and knowledge; [what is more] little can be known on whatever happened has happened.'[33] The elevated panorama has become *the* formal solution for an 'authentic' legibility of capital and is a perspective that can be seen to tend toward a bourgeois view of the world: the photographer's detached interpretation anticipates a similar detached viewer.[34]

Although there is an alternative interpretation. It could also be argued the overview – how it transmutes the landscape into a panorama of formal notation – can illustrate, quite acutely, the magnitude of the radical re-shaping of the land by capitalist interest that has taken place.

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[33] Allan Sekula, 'The Instrumental Image: Steichen at War', *Artforum*, 14:4 (Dec. 1975), p. 32.
[34] The technical overview is a co-ordinated and balanced perspective, coupled with physical distance from the subject matter, establishes the intellectual distance necessary for 'disinterested pleasure'.

A schematisation of the land particularly well delineated in Davies' photography, indicative of the astounding scale of late Victorian industrialism that has continued today; witness Burtynsky and the effects of modern industrialism. Both show panoramas that are indisputable empirical evidence of what capital has the means to achieve for the sake of profit (neither should we be stupefied, either – going back to what has already been said). Some of Davies' photographs chart this movement across history, too. Like when, in a more recent book project, he revisits locations he photographed years earlier when industrialism was still active in the landscape. We can see in some of the revisited locations that the same pattern of streets and houses still exist, although there are now voids where industry once stood. In others, nothing remains at all or that new developments now exist there instead.[35] Images that are telling of the transient and fickle nature of capitalist enterprise (and so very close to this project's interest).

The project is interested in the knowledge views such as these can impart, seeing them as part of constellation of other perspectives. The cognitive map presented in this project has attempted to assemble a variety of viewpoints, such as being 'in amongst' as well as the distance overview. Rendering, it is proposed, a more veritable view of the landscape that antidotes the self-controlled technical distance employed by some photographers (no more so, today, than the perspective of the drone, the most alluring kind of disembodied formalising of the landscape).[36]

What is important for photography concerned with the political and critical view, is that the extra-aesthetic is allowed to emerge. Walter Benjamin warned of the dangers of a particular modish practice of 20th century photography turning scenes of privation into objects of consumption.[37] The kind of 'absorbed'[38] landscape photography which turns environmental catastrophe, for example, into a product of taste, where the photograph 'ceases to be a compelling motive for decision and becomes an object of comfortable contemplation'.[39]

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[35] John Davies, Retraced 81/19 (London: GOST books, 2019).

[36] The landscape photography of Richard Mirach and John Kippin would be examples here, although there are many others. What is being suggested, the elevated view has become a genre and an officially sanctioned view (in both senses) limiting alternatives.

[37] Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer' in Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht,* Anna Bostock, trans. (London, New Left Books, 1973), p. 96.

[38] This is a reference to Michael Fried's 'absorption' concept and is to think the photograph autonomously on its own terms and 'beholden' to its own 'presentness'. Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art Like Never Before* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012). Jameson sees Fried's concept of absorption, as a turning away by the audience from the artwork's rhetorical or melodramatic affect. Fredric Jameson, *The Antimonies of Realism* (London and New York, Verso, 2015), p. 140.

[39] Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht,* p. 97.

For Georg Lukács contemplation was the subordination of praxis to entirely formal meaning; where it is content that becomes derived purely from the form(s) and an idealist stance to the object meant to overcome the irrational element of the object-in-itself by transcendental rationality, rather than direct experience as a source of knowledge, hence the subject is also purged: [40]

> The critical elucidation of contemplation puts more and more
> energy into its efforts to weed out ruthlessly from its own outlook
> every subjective and irrational element and every
> anthropomorphic tendency; it strives with ever increasing vigour
> to drive a wedge between the subject of knowledge and 'man',
> and to transform the knower into a pure and purely formal
> subject.[41]

The contemplative produces an interiorised and unmediated – or non-contextualised – judgement of reality: everything assumes an appearance of permanence and, in the case of the landscape, is a way of seeing more susceptible to conservative appropriation.[42] W.J.T Mitchell puts this in more straight forward political terms: 'We have known since Ruskin that the appreciation of landscape as an aesthetic object cannot be an occasion for complacency or untroubled contemplation; rather, it must be the focus of a historical, political, and (yes) aesthetic alertness to the violence and evil written on the land'.[43] Returning us to the problem of critical visibility and landscapes of capital.

2:4 Cognitive Mapping or, Healing the Rift Between Pleasure, Knowledge and Commitment

Considering what has just been said above, this should not exclude having a pleasure in form. From the artist's / photographer's point of view there exists a certain pleasure in working practically with form in bringing the empirical world into the realm of the aesthetic. Not only to produce affects, but knowledge and understanding about the world, too. As Jameson points out, after Brecht, realism's singularity is its propensity to materialise

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[40] Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1968), pp. 122 – 140.
[41] Ibid., p. 128.
[42] Ibid., p. 150.
[43] W.J.T Mitchell, *Landscape and Power,* p. 29. For Miriam Bratu Hansen the contemplative ensures a safe distance between viewer and the object. Miriam Bratu Hansen, 'Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street', *Critical Inquiry,* Vol. 25, No. 2, "Angelus Novus": Perspectives on Walter Benjamin (Winter, 1999), p. 336.

knowledge in the name of the possible and the gratifying and would be, at the same time, a dissolving of the division of labour between science and pleasure (the Brechtian point would be to invalidate the separation of worker from intellectual): '[R]ealism … puts knowing the world back together with changing the world, and at the same time unites an ideal of praxis with a conception of production … thus transforms the process of "knowing" the world into a source of delight or pleasure in its own right.'[44] In very simple terms, and if applied to a practice of cognitive mapping, is the delight involved in making connections and in the revelation of the outcome (for instance, confirming or shattering what was originally understood, either by the artist or the audience). The same kind of pleasure key to Walter Benjamin's 'wide-eyed' and revelatory approach to philosophy and knowledge, perhaps.[45] Photography's singular 'realism' has something notable to offer here, a space where the lost bond between science and art, knowledge and pleasure can be rediscovered. Photography's referentiality means it has a direct recourse to the empirical world (and is its affiliation with the apparatus of science). At the same time, it has an aesthetic capacity to figuratively resolve this same world, which means photography is able to confirm, modify, or even challenge its own empirical claim on reality. Photography by adapting, or altering in some way, what is empirically presented other meanings can emerge – perhaps, in the modernist sense of 'making strange' – so that the world appears all over again by way of its unfamiliarity. Or, just like Jameson suggests, to practically remake the world all over again – the way it ought to be.

One could also say, an openness of form is in evidence here, too, which could be interpreted as a kind of politics in its own in right. When considering the often-closed space of (dominant) signification and much of the conceptual world in general. An openness, mediateness, whereby documentary photography / social landscape photography becomes a space in which to think critically, less a place of the dogmatic message, which was Adorno's main concern with political / committed art (a dogma that he was equally concerned about in consideration of the concept and the inertia of the normative).

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[44] Fredric Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory* (London and New York: Verso, 2008), p. 441. Cf. A dialectic of the rational and the sensory Jameson sees as a mode of experiencing concretely and was 'the feel of dialectics' able to return the subject always to 'social ground'. Caren Irr, 'The American Grounds of Globalization: Jameson's Return to Hegel' in *On Jameson*, p. 226.

[45] Both Hannah Arendt and Susan Buck-Morss use the terminology 'wide-eyed' concerning Benjamin's approach to philosophy and knowledge, both meant to turn it away from Adorno's pejorative use (regarding Benjamin) to an appraisal of Benjamin's approach to epistemology as revelation. Hannah Arendt, 'Introduction, Walter Benjamin: 1892 – 1940' in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations,* Hannah Arendt, ed. and Harry Zohn, trans. (London: Fontana Press, 1992), p. 17 and Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt School* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), p. 102.

However, Adorno's position on committed art is much more nuanced than is often acknowledged. He sees art as commitment not simply as an obligation to a political cause or 'tendency' (a term he reserves for propaganda and sloganeering in particular Stalinist 'diamat' and Nazis ideology), it is the capacity for thought rather than reaction: '[Commitment is a] higher level of reflection than tendency; it is not out to correct unpleasant situations …. Commitment aims at the transformation of the preconditions of situations, not merely making recommendations; to this extent it inclines toward the aesthetic category of essence.'[46] Adorno suggests committed art is differentiated from the hegemonic and ideological as it generates a space of equivocacy:[47] '[W]hat gives commitment its aesthetic advantage over tendentiousness also renders the content to which the artist commits himself inherently ambiguous.'[48] WJT Mitchell similarly suggests the mediateness of the aesthetic produces an openness and a setting, as such, in which to think and strengthen a commitment to a cause, or to become committed to a cause you might already have had but did not realise it. Mitchell articulates this as a becoming committed in an unexpected moment of enlightenment.[49]

A comparable view of art shared by Grant Kester, that 'socially engaged art' far from being a practice despoiling the autonomous purity of art represents instead 'a compelling rearticulation of it'.[50] Art in this way can intervene and, or disturb inveterate conventions and affirmations associated with cultural and social understanding: the artwork giving 'counter-normative' insights by way of having an openness to the object that preserves an aesthetic unity without losing committed meaning and insight.[51]

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[46] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* p. 246.

[47] For a survey of Adorno's relation to commitment, along with Jean-Paul Sartre's see Raymond Williams, 'The Writer: Commitment and Alignment' in Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope, Culture, Democracy, Socialism,* ed. Robin Gable (London and New York: Verso, 1989).

[48] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* p. 246. The openness of art is a recurring theme in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory.*

[49] W. J.T. Mitchell, 'The Commitment to Form: Or, Still Crazy after All These Years', *PMLA,* Vol. 118, No. 2 (March 2003), p. 323. John Roberts also undertakes a mediation of Adorno's autonomous view of the artwork with the heteronomous view. John Roberts, 'After Adorno: Art, Autonomy, and Critique', Historical Materialism, Vol. 7, Issue 1 (1st Jan. 2000), pp. 221-239. For Jacques Rancière this is the double consciousness of the artwork, having both 'the readability of a political signification and a sensible or perceptual shock caused, conversely, by the uncanny, by that which resists signification.' Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London and New York: Continuum, 2009), p. 63.

[50] Grant Kester, 'On the Relationship between Theory and Practice in Socially Engaged Art', *A Blade of Grass,* https://abladeofgrass.org/fertile-ground/on-the-relationship-between-theory-and-practice-in-socially-engaged-art/. Last accessed, 12/03/2023. Also see Grant Kester, 'The Aesthetics of Answerability: Tactical Autonomy in Contemporary Socially Engaged Art', FEINART Lecture Series, University of Wolverhampton (17/02/2022). Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWJy7N7IDRY. Last accessed, 08/06/2023.

[51] I am extrapolating Kester's point here and how the formal, aesthetic and political, as a constellation arrangement, might come together in a counter-intuitive way.

It would be the kind of aesthetic mixed economy and openness utilised by John Kippin and Chris Wainwright and not at all dissimilar to the approach taken by the practice in this research project. For example, although not limited to, their social landscape photography project *Futureland Now*, that examines the landscape after the end of large-sale industrial production, mostly steel and coal-mining, in the North-East of England. As Kippin explains: 'It is intended that [the photographs] give pleasure through their aesthetic structures and strategies and that they create ambiguity and engagement (as with music). It is further intended that they present and describe the narrative intentions of their author (in as much as this is possible) and that they might generate discussion.' [52]

And is, perhaps, a similar pleasure in form, knowledge and political commitment being cultivated in a renewed interest in photography as a pedagogic practice; landscape-based photography having a principal place in this revival – most evident as an 'assembled' form of practice. The project *Nitrate* (2014) by the artist Xavier Ribas (b.1960) is a cogent example here, and close to the interests of this research project. The nature of the land, for Ribas, is one that is always in the purview of controlling and exploitative interest; landscapes of capital that have been worked-out, perhaps, their surplus value potential no longer tenable. The worker is absent, yet the presence of labour is everywhere as an effect on the land. To the fore, very often, is the fragmentary and the liminal, the discarded and the disavowed. The patina of the industrial process inscribed on the land, an envisioning of the labouring subject and the brutal nature of extractive enterprise, its fickleness and heartlessness. The hustle, too, of capitalist interest and other situations we are not privy to, the myth-making, wheeling and dealing, corporate excesses and how value produced by the land moves across continents and through history. Elements of a constellation that come together in Ribas' work in unexpected ways as a compound form of visual knowledge.

The project *Nitrate* aims to disclose the multinational corporate circuits associated with nitrate mining in South America and their historical connection with the UK.[53] Ribas constructs an aesthetic fieldwork of landscape imagery that leads him from the nitrate mines of Chile to the finance houses of the City of London, the troubles in Northern Ireland (nitrate was used in the manufacture of explosives) and even to the eccentricities associated with lavish parties hosted by one of the company's former directors – and more besides. In attempting to

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[52] John Kippin, 'Some thoughts on Photography, Landscape and the Post-Industrial'. No page numbers.
[53] https://tracesofnitrate.org. Last accessed 14/05/22. The project is also published as a photobook: Xavier Ribas, *Nitrate* (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2014).

authentically represent this often-disembodied trail from corporate boardroom to the English pastoral to the realities of work and labour, Ribas uses historical documents, company brochures, statistics and maps as correspondence devices. Staged in a constellation like format, it becomes incumbent on the audience to do interrogative and imaginative work (Fig. 20).[54] In addition to his landscape photographs, Ribas also presents discarded artefacts and then uses captions, sometimes longer commentary, that reinstate the objects with their original function and with the subject. Like for instance, a collection of tobacco wrappers retrieved from rubbish tips of abandoned nitrate mining towns in the Atacama Desert.

Fig. 24. Xavier Ribas, *Nitrate*, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (2014). Installation view. Installation photograph: Marc Roig. © Xavier Ribas.

A landscape-based project with a similar theme of the effects of the extractive industries and a comparable assembled is *The Copper Geographies of Chile and Britain* (2016) by the photographer Ignacio Acosta (b. 1985).[55] Acosta's project concentrates on the copper mines of Chile, including their history supplying the smelting industry of South Wales. Acosta triangulates the industrially defiled mining landscape of Chile with the redeveloped site of a former copper processing facility in Swansea, South Wales (Fig. 21) with the London based businesses and finance houses who profit, or have profited, from the industry (Fig. 22).

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[54] Carles Guerra describes Ribas's assemblage of photography as a 'confluence of knowledges, methods and modes of communication that overflows the bounds of photography as a medium and impels us to consider *Nitrate* as a documentary dispositive, that is to say, a collection of works that can be read both as an interrelated whole and autonomously.' Carles Guerra, 'Unfolding the Documentary Dispositive' in Xavier Ribas, *Nitrate,* MACBA, exhibition catalogue, Barcelona (2014), p. 13. http://www.xavierribas.com/Contents/Nitrate_cover/Nitrate.html. Last accessed 14/05/22

[55] Acosta, I., *The Copper Geographies of Chile and Britain: A Photographic Study of Mining.* (University of Brighton, Unpublished PhD, 2016), https://research.brighton.ac.uk/en/studentTheses/the-copper-geographies-of-chile-and-britain-a-photographic-study-. Last accessed 09/02/23. Most of the work from this project can be viewed online at: http://ignacioacosta.com. Last accessed 21/08/22. The practical component of the PhD has been published: Ignacio Acosta, *Copper Geographies* (Barcelona: RM Verlag, 2019).

Acosta's project, like Ribas', is also of interest not only because it is focussed on extractive industry, including metal processing, but a project that utilises an aesthetic methodology to effectively 'map' its subject-matter – the landscape providing the concrete, symptomatic and historical material from which the map is put together. The absence of work and labour is, like Ribas' project, reconstructed from traces, signs, detritus and other symptoms in the landscape. And, again, the tracking of capital as it moves through history, photographically accounted for often using figurative means and other suggestive devices, including how the industrial past provides the surface from which the present is concocted.

Acosta traces the copper trail, including the toxic materials used for its refining. He follows, for example, the route sulphuric acid takes to where it is used in the refining process (Fig. 23). He also documents the remediation measures that have been taking place to mitigate the effects of the mining industry on the environment, such as the treatment of contaminated mine-water using a natural solution (Fig. 24). We are also shown where refined copper is turned into a recognisable commodity by a wire manufacturer a factory based in the South Wales Valleys (Fig. 25).

Fig. 25. Ignacioa Acosta, *Panoramic View of a former Copper Smelting site, Lower Swansea Valley, Wales* (2014), from the exhibition *Copper Geographies* (2016). © Ignacioa Acosta.
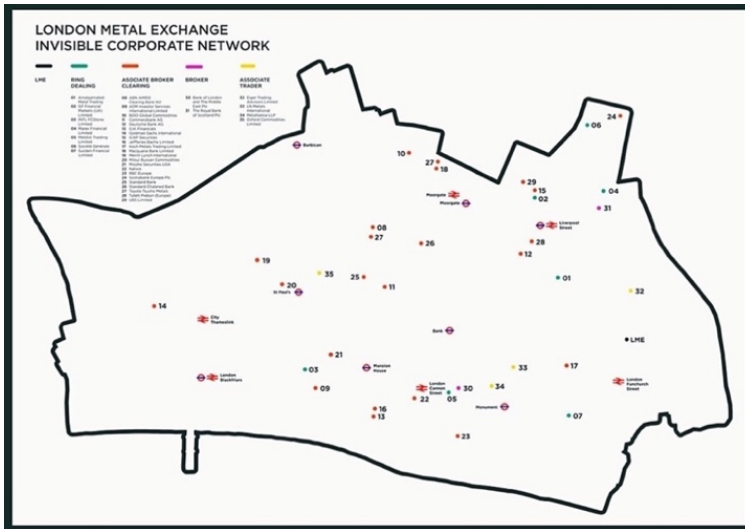
Fig. 26. Ignacioa Acosta, *Map of 35 Countries trading with the LME* (2015),
from the exhibition *Copper Geographies* (2016). © Ignacioa Acosta.

Fig. 27. Ignacioa Acosta, *Sulpuric acid route. Route 1, Atacama Desert,
Chile* (2012), from the exhibition *Copper Geographies* (2016). © Ignacioa Acosta.

Fig. 28. Ignacioa Acosta, *Forest of eucalyptus trees planted to absorb contaminated water
from Los Pelambres mine, Chile* (2012). © Ignacioa Acosta.

Fig. 25. Ignacioa Acosta, *Faulty copper wire discarded during cable production. Aberdare, South Wales* (2015)*, from the exhibition *Copper Geographies* (2016). © Ignacioa Acosta.

Interestingly, Acosta admits to the project's failure to show the full extent of the operations involved, especially corporate and financial activity, yet is an insufficiency put in front of the audience, nevertheless. What could be interpreted as a lack, becomes an invitation for the audience to do imaginative work: the incompleteness of data encourages a desire to understand. Here is Acosta on this point: 'As my research progressed, it became clear that it was not going to be possible to represent a subject of this complexity … [instead the photographs] function as mechanism to encourage viewers to think about what is hidden …. What is not visible is key to understanding the photographs.'[56] Marta Dahó corroborates Acosta's comments, that a lack does not necessarily equate to a failing but is an inevitable consequence of a photography project with ambition to show the totality of things, adding a supplement to Acosta. That the very act of making available – latterly unbeknown – information is a worthy end in itself: 'the aim of bringing to light those connections that could be of some use in public debate has become a more than reasonable goal.'[57]

For Liz Wells, they are both projects that represent a wider photography practice intent on disclosing hidden and effaced histories (often of corporate activity) using constructed strategies as a method of making knowledge available to an audience. A particular way of working and showing which is most evident in social landscape photography, according to Wells. Projects where a variety of visual material come together in an open expressive

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[56] Acosta, *The Copper Geographies of Chile and Britain: A Photographic Study of Mining,* p, 209.
[57] Marta Dahó, 'Landscape and the Geographical Turn in Photographic Practice', *Photographies,* Vol. 1, 2:2 (2019), p. 231.

gesture of the issue at hand, rather than as a set of closed documentary 'facts', where it is understood, by the photographer, or artist, that the audience has an initiative-taking part to play in the decipherment process:

> The challenge for photographers interested in investigating and drawing attention to invisible histories is one of unearthing evidence and indicating that which cannot been seen …. If the landscape veils histories, then the possibility of fuller historical reference relies on the effects and expressivity of aesthetic style as well as on titles, captions and artist statements, and on photographers' confidence in the curiosity of audiences willing to engage with imagery as touchstones provoking reflection.[58]

To finish then, Raymond Williams at the beginning of his essay 'Culture is Ordinary (1989 [1958])' narrates the passing vista on a bus journey he takes from Hereford to his home village of Pandy, just over the English border near Abergavenny in South Wales. His commentary can be interpreted as a kind of cognitive mapping of the landscape as it passes by. Castles come to meet steelworks and collieries as the pastoral nature of the Wye Valley gives way to the industrial landscape of the South Wales Valleys. Williams also describes the geology of the landscape as it graduates from the Wye Valley toward South Wales where it becomes plundered by historical forces. Williams's commentary of the changing vista does not convey it as a discontinuous scene, instead an interconnectedness becomes apparent between different histories, and with nature, as the landscape unfolds:

> We went out of the city, over the old bridge, and on through the orchards and the green meadows and fields raised under the plough. Ahead were the Black Mountains, and we climbed among them, watching the steep fields end at the grey walls, beyond which the bracken and heather whin had not yet been driven back. To the east, along the ridge, stood the line of grey Norman castles; to the west, the fortress wall of the mountains. Then, as we still climbed, the rock changed under us. Here, now, was limestone, and the line of the early iron workings along the scarp. The farming valleys, with their scattered white houses, fell away behind. Ahead of us were the narrower

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[58] Liz Wells, 'Hidden Histories and Landscape Enigmas', ibid., p. 191.

valleys: the steel-rolling mill, the gas works, the grey terraces,
the pitheads.[59]

Williams choreographs a seamless continuum of space and time giving the landscape legibility as a spatial and temporal process. The cognitive map presented as practice in this project has a similar methodological approach to the land, mapping deep and modern history and what seem like heterogeneous geographies that are, in reality, intimately interconnected not only by work and an objective capital, but the very nature of the land.

This brings us to a final observation, that it is for Jameson the local and (ostensibly) ordinary are that which give the cognitive map its political significance. Capital propounded in representation according to scale, extravagance or other formalisations tending to excess or the exotic become the idea limiting engagement to impressionistic expediency. Reality endeavours, nonetheless: 'Under cover of the sublime … all manner of dehumanization is being smuggled in'.[60]

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[59] Raymond Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary' in *Resources of Hope,* p. 3. See also, Daniel G. Williams comments on the same passage, highlighting Williams's narrative is a shared one with those on the bus i.e., his use of 'we' throughout and that his observations come from having a great familiarity with the environment. Daniel G. Williams, ed., *Raymond Williams, Who Speaks for Wales? Nation, Culture, Identity.* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2021), p. 7. Interestingly, the 'steel-rolling mill' Williams mentions is more than likely Ebbw Vale Steelworks), mapping the local to the national to the global, culture to nature and history to the present.
[60] Henri Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life Vol. 1,* trans. John Moore (London and New York: Verso, 1991), p. 123.

Chapter 3

Dialectical Valley

> Benjamin draws out of the things he witnesses an
> interpenetration of images – a montage effect, a dialectical
> image – which is a concentration of the energies of the world,
> in their most potent state, amplified because of the constriction
> of the space that holds them.
>
> > – Esther Leslie.[1]

> Historicism is concerned with the photography of time. The
> equivalent of its temporal photography would be a giant film
> depicting the temporally interconnected events from every
> vantage point.
>
> > – Siegfried Kracauer.[2]

3:1 Introduction

How Walter Benjamin's dialectical image concept can be utilised in landscape photography is the principal question for this chapter. The distinct historico-empirical characteristics of the garden festival location, its borders and wider hinterland are discussed and how they can be effectively brought into focus as a dialectical image.

The garden festival site is proposed as a fragment of spatialised time, a blend of objects and phenomena symptomatic of a particular period of capitalist history and an arrangement of the past not dissimilar to Benjamin's *Arcades Project*. An assemblage if set in motion in representation can give access to data and ideas beyond the confines of its own esoteric structure.

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[1] Esther Leslie, *Walter Benjamin the Refugee and Migrant* (Verso, 2014), www.versobooks/blogs/2283-walter-benjamin-the-refugee-and-migrant-by-esther-leslie, 2015) last accessed 14/11/2021, no page numbers.
[2] Siegfried Kracauer and Thomas Y. Levin, 'Photography'*, Critical Enquiry*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Spring, 1993), p. 425. Kracauer has reworked an earlier iteration: 'Photography presents a spatial continuum: historicism seeks to provide the temporal continuum.' Ibid.

Benjamin's dialectical image concept is diverse, but there two aspects which seem particularly congruous to the landscape in this study and to our present predicament. First, the redemptive realisation of the past's social relations and, secondly, its function as a scheme for revealing progress under the exchange-principle as false, unnecessary and terminally damaging.

Benjamin's dialectical image also has a role in the politicisation of auratic experience, one Benjamin understands that extends to all objects and not just the artwork, photography having a crucial function in this secularisation process. The dialectical image displaces the inauthentic aura displayed by the spectacle, the garden festival event, for example, instead with the socio-practical experience of history. Although, there is speculative side to this because we can never know the true experiential circumstances of the object recovered from history. Though it is possible, if the right kind of imaginative material is exploited in representation, to have a more novel understanding. A speculative understanding, nonetheless, substantiated by rational evidence provided by the context of the object's find. This is discussed in practice using fieldwork examples from the garden festival site, its borders and locations further afield and how this other kind of knowledge can be revealed in an aura of experience, one impelled by the political framework of the dialectical image.

3:2 A Landscape of Labour and Capital

The plentifulness of coal, limestone, ironstone and water in the upper Ebbw Valley determined it as a location suitable for iron and steel making. Ruins and remnants related to this history of industrial production can be found throughout the valley and not only the kind attesting to changes in industrial technology over time. Many of the ruins and redundant buildings that remain bear witness to changes in the role of the community such as social clubs, churches, hospitals, schools and parks. As each year passes, it is testimony to the past which becomes less evident as new developments intensify and nature takes its course.

A degree of scrutiny is needed to recognise, for instance, that the plethora of hollows, mounds, hills and other disfigurements throughout the valley are results of past industrial activity. 'Scouring' or 'patching' accounts for many of these defacements in the landscape caused by late 18th and early 19th century mining for coal, limestone and iron-ore conducted close to the surface of the ground. There are other signs of industrial activity prior to extensive mechanisation, like the drover roads on the tops of the valley and, in nearby Aberbeeg, an early 18th century pack-horse bridge over the Ebbw River indicative of the trade in wool and other proto-industrial activity. There is also the late 17th century corn-mill at the

bottom of the lane near Ebbw Vale town centre, adjacent to a long-ago culverted stream which, more than likely, would have powered the waterwheel. A building workers must have walked past over generations on their way to a shift at the former steelworks, just across the way. Then there are the numerous track-beds of mid to late 19th century tramroads running along the valley sides. One of the tramroads, just to the north of the garden festival site, formally carried sandstone from quarries on Manmoel mountain down to the valley floor for construction of the steelworks, collieries and houses for workers. A little way from where the tramline begins it intersects with the ruins of the garden festival's 'scenic' tramway at 'Manmoel Station'.[3]

Where the hot and cold rolling-mills of the steelworks once stood is now a vast open space extending around a mile from one side of the valley to the other and from Ebbw Vale town to the garden festival site two and half miles to the south. The tract of the former steelworks, although occupied by relatively new public buildings in some places is, still, mostly vacant. It is not the only large expanse of land that has been left fallow in the upper Ebbw Valley. Just to the south of the garden festival site, near the village of Cwm, is the former location of Marine Colliery and (at the time of writing) is now site of the largest coronavirus testing station in Wales. The colliery's sheaths (winding wheels) have been adapted as monuments, that mark the position of the two shafts, surrounded now by drive-in testing bays, industrial freezers and 'Heras' security fencing.

As the means of production speeds-up so does the creation of redundant and cast-aside matter, where it is increasingly mystifying to think of buildings and artefacts as 'historical' and even more bewildering to think of them as 'ancient and historical monuments.'[4] There is a further effect of an ever-present spectacle of the perpetually new as a sometimes failure to recognise the flotsam and jetsam of progress as originating in our own time, far less the reality of their social composition.[5] Objects of a historical category are mostly overlooked, seeming to have little meaning for us in the present. For Benjamin, on the other hand, they are the kind of artefacts that can bring about a 'profane illumination'[6] and the politically

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[3] For Lefebvre, the temporal leaves its mark on space in a certain complex manner, indicating, in turn, why we need a compound arrangement for its representation. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 110. Cf. Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), p. 118 and p. 139. Massey suggests it is our present 'depthless society' and the often-seen irrelevance of history that denies a complex resolving of space. Ibid., p. 120. Which, of course, would be Jameson's view as well, a perspective on society particularly acute in *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.*
[4] Borrowed from the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales.
[5] See Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983), particularly Chapter II: 'The Commodity as Spectacle'.
[6] The illuminating tendency of the 'profane', for Benjamin, is the object expressing an all too human quality.

enlightening possibility of the object's social history.

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Reaching the end of my walk through the garden festival site, I had turned around, near the village of Cwm, to head back to the town of Ebbw Vale where I live. Up on the hill in front of me was the Festival Park Retail Outlet, that opened not long after Garden Festival Wales closed, built on the slag tip produced by the blast furnaces of the former steelworks. I have always been fascinated by the discordant presence of this place. A shopping complex, something usually associated with the urban experience, set within a rural surrounding which is no more than fiction shaped, as it is, from industrial waste. An incongruous weaving of past and present which can be seen everywhere in and around the festival site and its territory, where by-products of industry shape and structure, literally, the present.[7] Fundamentally understood, it is historical labour that continues to give-up surplus-value many decades after the original industrial process ended. For Marx past labour, or dead labour, is the life blood of living labour and necessary for the creation of future surplus-value.[8]

Benjamin sees the political possibility of re-animating history's social relations, so they broker a critical dialogue between the past and present and the basis of his dialectical image method.[9] When at its most effective the dialectical image ensures a restoration of the past so that the lost subject of history, unlike the historicist view, casts judgement on the present.[10]

Walking through Festival Park today you might happen upon, if you are particularly vigilant, a piece of coal – paradoxically, it is quite uncommon to find coal, of any size at least, on a coal waste tip. Having a lustrousness still undiminished, even though it was unearthed from

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[7] Understanding waste is intrinsically a 'product' of work, labour and the production process, just the same as the commodity, as Raymond Williams explains: 'In our complex dealings with the physical world, we find it very difficult to recognize all the products of our own activities. We recognize some of the products, and call others by-products; but the slagheap is as real a product as the coal'. Raymond Williams, *Culture and Materialism* (London and New York: Verso 2005), p. 57.

[8] Dead labour returns and comes to dominate living labour: 'Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks.' Karl Marx, *Capital Volume 1,* trans. Ben Fowkes (London and New York: Penguin Classics, 1990), p. 342.

[9] Benjamin, *Illuminations,* p. 246. Benjamin pushes this elucidation further, so it becomes unmistakably political. Because if we ignore history, rather than activating it against dominant discourse and the ideological capturing of history, even the dead will not be safe. Ibid., p. 247. For a commentary on what can be seen as the necessary political dimension to the dialectical image and the inadequacy of ontological concepts to offer adequate meaning about the, in Jameson's words, 'nightmare history' of 'mindless alienated work', see Fredric Jameson 'Marxism and Historicism', *New Literary History*, Vol. 11, No. 1, Anniversary Issue: II (Autumn, 1979).

[10] A recurrent tendency in Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'.

a mile below ground several decades ago. The landscape in and around the festival site supplies many and varied 'remembering fragments' like this, imbuing the real and imaginary of the industrial past. For anyone inclined toward a materialist view of history most of their time, certainly in the case of the artist, is spent searching and scavenging the landscape and its debris for all that has been rejected by society and immune to recuperation.[11] Nevertheless, as the past is absorbed into the spectacle with ever greater intensification critically rich fragments have to be sought in appreciably marginal places and as decidedly more esoteric objects.[12]

The Garden Festival site, its post-festival speculations and de-industrialised hinterland are places, at least to the subjugating purview, superfluous to the needs of modern capital and all but exhausted of profitability. Capital has moved on. It was Sekula's opinion, the industrial landscape had become lost to 'incomprehension' and was no more than the 'product of forgetting and disavowal' and a figment of some long-ago epoch of manual labour.[13] From time to time it is the kind of landscape that emerges if it happens to suit a particular political agenda. For all that, their marginalisation is a paradox: effaced from visibility and sheltered from the effects of the spectacle,[14] they become landscapes replete with possibility for the re-orientation of meaning. As Benjamin remarked: 'Decline can be fruitful.'[15] 3

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[11] Jessica Dubow describes the experience of the historical materialist as one who 'wanders' the postindustrial landscape 'intensely' and 'peripatetically'. Jessica Dubow, 'Case Interrupted: Benjamin, Sebald, and the Dialectical Image', *Critical Inquiry*, 33 (Summer 2007), p. 827.

[12] For an elaboration on the absorption of the post-industrial ruin see Tim Edensor*, Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005), pp. 128-131. There is a related substantive side to this. Capital is in the business of deleting its history, cogently evidenced in post-industrial areas rapidly cleared of former manufacturing and factory complexes after closure. Particularly rapid were the demolition and clearance of collieries after closure, in South Wales at least. The myth at the time was the government were afraid of potential worker / management buy-outs. Interestingly, it was the policy of the UK Garden Festivals to dismantle and totally clear the sites of any evidence of past industrial activity. Unlike the German federal government policy for the *Bundesgartenschauen* to leave intact some of the original buildings and infrastructure of the steelworks and collieries as part of the visitor experience, to which many of the structures are still standing today in a number of 'ecological parks'. Two instances are (although there are a number of other examples in the Ruhr valley region): https://www.eghn.org/en/regional-routes/north-rhein-westphalia/ruhrgebiet/ https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/en/metadata/case-studies/a-flood-and-heat-proof-green-emscher-valley-germany/11305605.pdf Last accessed 20/04/22

[13] Allan Sekula, *Fish Story*, p. 54. Sekula suggests, in the context of maritime labour, the 'metropolitan gaze no longer falls upon the waterfront, and a cognitive blankness follows.' He continues 'In this sense elites become incapable of recognizing their own, outside of narrow specialist circles.' Ibid.

[14] The upper Ebbw Valley, as mentioned at the outset of this study, isolated as it is from other centres of populous and its mountainous surroundings exaggerates industrial capital's unsparing character.

[15] Walter Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London and New York: Verso, 2009), p. 56. The effects of uneven development, acknowledging Benjamin's elucidation, can provide a picture of the possible as well. The dilapidated, dated and forgotten can be seen as charged with future promise for restoration and reintegration in the name of collective interest (in a utopian sense of reversing the polarity of the dialectic, in a Jamesonian like way). Unlike the current civic imagination (admittedly, in some cases, at least, one that is limited by economic constraint) that only sees gentrification or

3:3 Industrial History as Dialectic Image

Benjamin's dialectical image concept is an *expressive* rearticulation of history, having a rationality inexorably bound to the image form so that the past is presented, fundamentally, in the negative of capitalist progress.[16] For Richard Wolin the reclamation of history, by Benjamin, was a mode of '*different understanding*' disclosing no less than 'the truth-content of the subject.'[17] Benjamin's compulsion toward history's arcane was in no way 'idiosyncratic', continues Wolin, but that 'actual' truth is not necessarily the same as a truth that is 'immediately recognizable, generalizable or apparent'[18] as the scope a positivist claim to truth is likely to engender. Instead, Benjamin's version of history, in accounting for truth, is to exceed the 'limits of rational quantification', underlining his method is composed of source material and phenomenon generally rejected or unconsidered by presiding epistemology.[19] Unlike those who govern the historical record, Benjamin sees the historical materialist method as one aware of the 'crude and material things without which no refined and spiritual things could exist',[20] and that nothing, in the end, becomes wholly historised, that history, like matter, is never fully cancelled or destroyed, rather it changes form.

Benjamin's dialectical image concept disavows the static and universal view of history proposed by historicism. It offers, alternatively, a completely new translation of history's material, including the place from where it originated and the correlation of that material with the here and now. The 'violent' removal of a concept, object, or phenomenon from its sanctioned place of use-value, economic value, or phantasmagoric circulation re-staged in the dialectical image is meant to put in sharp relief genuine historical destiny.[21] A veritable experience of the past is revealed when it emerges unexpectedly as an image coinciding with the present upsetting the supposed equilibrium of progress, including the conventions that have sanctioned such a view up until now.[22] Cutting aggressively into the timeline of progress, the dialectical image ensures the experience of history has its elucidatory moment

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demolition. There is a semblance of this kind of observation on uneven development by Doreen Massey, too, in 'A Global Sense of Place', *Marxism Today* (June 1991), p. 29.

[16] For Benjamin, the dialectical image is a historical schematisation, *The Arcades Project,* p. 929.

[17] Richard Wolin, 'Benjamin's Materialist Theory of Experience', *Theory and Society,* Vol. 11, No. 1 (Jan. 1982), p. 37.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in *Illuminations,* p. 246. Benjamin hoped to reclaim a lost history unoccupied by myth and rhetoric of powerful 'victors' and the class-consciousness of the dialectical image.

[21] Max Pensky, 'Method and Time: Benjamin's dialectical images' in David S. Ferris, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 186-187.

[22] Ibid., p. 247.

as history's other meaning. This other history exists in the fragmentary and marginal matter of society and, in Benjamin's view, merely awaits discovery by a politicising eye.[23]

When the dialectical image punctuates the present it is the unsettling moment, for Benjamin, that true understanding comes to exist. Because it shows the apparently new as no more than cipher for the same power structures presiding over a self-same society[24] and a 'recognisability' photography is most adept at yielding. Particularly, when the photograph passes into history, even a relatively recent one, the ever-the-same is revealed in an intense manner, shockingly even. In Adorno's reading of Benjamin's 'dialectics at a standstill' photography supplies an image of petrified progress, in both senses of the word, no more extraordinary it continues to endure as a phenomenon:

> The interlocking of the ever-same and the new in the exchange
> relation manifests itself in the *imagines* of progress under
> bourgeois industrialism. What seems paradoxical about these
> *imagines* is that something different ever appears at all …. The
> life process itself in the expression of the ever-same: hence the
> shock of photographs from the nineteenth century and even the
> early twentieth century. The absurdity explodes: that something
> happens where the phenomenon says that nothing more could
> happen: its disposition becomes terrifying. In this experience of
> terror, the terror of the system forcibly coalesces into
> appearance; the more the system expands, the more it
> hardens into what it has always been.[25]

Only by interrupting the movement of history does any alternative perspective escape the

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[23] For Benjamin, political experience and authentic experience are the same thing, Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing,* p. 289.

[24] Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms,* trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1997), p. 236.

[25] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Progress' in *Critical Models: Interventions and catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 159-160. Similarly, for Benjamin the catastrophe is that things just go on, where redemption looks for the momentary break in the ever the same of catastrophe. The problem for any redemption is whether what is seized is 'too early' or 'too late.' Walter Benjamin, Lloyd Spencer and Mark Harrington, 'Central Park' *New German Critique,* No. 34 (Winter, 1985), p. 50. Alert to this, Benjamin fashioned an alternative dialectic of history as progress: 'Catastrophe – to have missed the opportunity. Critical moment – the status quo threatens to be preserved. Progress – the first revolutionary measure taken.' Benjamin, *The Arcades,* p. 474, and similarly, ibid., p. 71.

historicist notion of history as progress.[26]

In assembling a dialectical image, inscrutable attention must be paid to the economic origin of the object, image or phenomenon otherwise a false, or idealised, vision of history will continue to be perpetuated.[27] Above all, the dialectical image has to confront universal history as a *false assertion* on progress, achieved by the construction of an antagonistic polarity whose resulting image of 'actuality' is history's 'now-time' of recognisability.[28] Practically, this means opposing a fore-history of the object, or phenomenon: the antecedent of the present-day, imprecise yet recognizable, and the original possibility of the object or phenomenon; with its after-life: a 'natural history'[29] of the object evident in the traces of discourse and utility that cling to it and the signs of its emergence and decay. In this confrontation, or force-field, the image of the possible is dislodged from the wreckage of the object's natural history when it is recognised by the present as one of its own.[30]

As a dialectical presentation, the object retrieved from history not only brings clarity to the present, but the present also furnishes meaning on the past; meaning that might not have been known or clear at the time, as Irving Wohlfarth explains: 'to rescue the past is also to rediscover the messianic resources with which to seize the present, and vice versa.' [31] The dialectical image preserves history's material as 'Ur-phenomena',[32] along with other 'primal' social material that aim to perform a 'collective redemption of lost time' or, in a messianic sense, what might have been. The dialectical image presents the past so that it testifies to more meaningful progress founded on non-reified human terms:[33] 'In the dialectical image,

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[26] For Benjamin it was the use of the quotation to 'upset the canon' of history. *Origin of German Tragic Drama,* p. 21.

[27] Benjamin, *The Arcades,* p. 462 and ibid., p. 460.

[28] 'Actualised within them, together with the thing … itself, are its origin and its decline.' Benjamin, *The Arcades,* p. 911.What Graeme Gilloch terms the 'aesthetic engineering' of fragments of history, so they come together suggestively. Graeme Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 2002), p. 4. For Benjamin's myth of progress and the eternal return of the same, see *The Arcades,* pp. 114-119.

[29] 'Natural History' in Benjamin's organon is when 'history appears concretely as the mortification of the world of things.' Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing,* p. 160.

[30] Ibid, p. 219.

[31] Irving Wohlfarth 'On the Messianic Structure of Walter Benjamin's Last Reflections', *Glyph* 3 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1978), p. 158. Also see Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing,* pp. 219-220 and p. 291. Both Wohlfarth and Buck-Morss highlight Benjamin's term 'presence of mind' as a politics of actualisation. In Wohlfarth's, translation / interpretation to have a 'presence of mind' is to 'save the day'. Wohlfarth, p. 158.

[32] An Ur-phenomenon is an 'image' of a concrete kind (an artefact, phenomenon or an actual image) and 'small particular moments' which contained the 'total historical event' and where the origins of the present could be discovered. Buck-Morrs, The *Dialectics of Seeing,* p. 71.

[33] Benjamin, *The Arcades,* p. xii. Benjamin sees an unconscious history of the collective as something utopian blended into 'a thousand configurations of life, from lasting buildings to the most fleeting fashions.' Adorno, *Prisms,* p. 237. For Raymond Williams, no matter where we happen to be in history

what has been within a particular epoch is always, simultaneously, "what has been from time immemorial." … [H]umanity, rubbing its eyes, recognises just this particular dream image as such. It is at this moment that the historian takes up, with regard to the image, the task of dream interpretation.'[34]

As a picture of past struggles and suffering, the dialectical image ascribes history as an unfinished undertaking and so must always be pregnant with possibility. A process of redemption that recreates the undisclosed potential of history, presenting it as a wish in the present for a new and transformed future.[35] It is not a curative recuperation of history, however. Quite differently, a challenge to the illusionary state of the present and a politic toward the past that renounces 'the tranquil contemplative attitude toward the object in order to become conscious of the critical constellation in which precisely this fragment of the past finds itself in precisely the present.'[36] An image of history, as already observed above, that adjudicates on the present and tantamount to any transformative consciousness (concerning the future), a view corroborated by Jameson:

> The past … rises up to call our own form of life into question
> and to pass judgement on us …. At that point, … it is not we
> who sit in judgement on the past, but rather the past … which
> judges us, imposing the painful knowledge of what we are not,
> what we are no longer, what we are not yet …, which radically
> calls into question the commodified daily life, the reified
> spectacle, and the simulated experience of our own plastic-
> and-cellophane society.[37]

The garden festival site does not only exist as a dialectical image in and of itself but further holds in place abundant other juxtapositions of past and present – other dialectical constellations that are looking for a 'politicising eye'.

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we are always looking for collective signs of life in things around us. Williams, *The Country and the City,* p. 424.

[34] Benjamin, *The Arcades,* p. 464.

[35] History constituted in this way demonstrates the other course humanity might have taken and is the substantive proof possibility will come to exist again in the future. Andrew E. Benjamin, *Working with Walter Benjamin: Recovering a Political Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 166 and p. 192. And is the 'pasts secret index', ibid., p. 167. Similarly hope, as demonstrated by the dialectical image, can be seen as a utopian view inflected in the negative: the identification and vicarious fulfilling of hope in history amplifies the lack of hope in the present.

[36] Walter Benjamin and Knut Tarnowski 'Eduard Fuchs: Collector and Historian', *New German Critique*, No. 5 (Spring, 1975), p. 28. Or having 'a presence of mind' toward the past. See note 31.

[37] Jameson, 'Marxism and Historicism', p. 70.

The splintered relics of original capital and industrialism, that intersperse the garden festival site and its borders, are symptomatic Ur-phenomena embodying a message of the previous century's post-war desire for a 'class-less' society and an end to inequality and depravation,[38] wishes trammeled by the dream-symbols of an incipient neo-liberal order. Whose appropriation of the collective wish, during the garden festivals, was no more than phantasmagoria 'fetishisticaly equating technological development with social progress.'[39] The truth of the neo-liberal dream could not be more palpable than in actuality: the festival site and the upper Ebbw Valley is a landscape that continues to be burdened by social and economic precarity.

Like Benjamin's fragment, the festival site today has an esoteric quality embodying a message of that which could have been, qualified in the negative of suppressed and unobtained desire and now so much clearer by historical distance. The garden festival landscape is a threshold to other spaces, histories and affects. Not because of its place in a chain of events, but as something unitary, a monad, or the whole of history abbreviated in the *idea*.[40] The dialectical image's purpose, certainly for this study, is to shatter the garden festival's mythic message – one fundamental to the (false) aura it conveyed – and a function not unlike the original intention of Benjamin's *Arcades Project*.[41] So it is we turn, now, to the function of the dialectical image as an important secularizing component in Benjamin's concept of the aura.

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[38] Buck-Morss, *The Dialectic of Seeing,* p. 114 and Benjamin, *The Arcades,* pp. 4-5. Specifically, a wish, prior to the garden festivals, identifiable with the post second world social contract. The wish-image, for Benjamin, was informed by the past's 'cultural memory reservoir' whose forms were influential for a new future. Forms having an operative capacity to inspire, rather than offering a concrete path to a new future and, as such, were 'not-yet knowledge'. Buck-Morss, *The Dialectic of Seeing,* p. 114 and p. 116. Benjamin's notion of the collective wish is contentious, it certainly was for Adorno. I am of the generation who remembers the post war wish, via my parents, if not my grandparents, and certainly it was a wish / dream composed both of the past and of the future, so I would ascribe, albeit anecdotally, some credence to Benjamin's thesis.
[39] Ibid., p. 282.
[40] Benjamin, *The Arcades,* p. 475. Benjamin's notion of the 'idea' is not limited by any rational principle i.e., a knowledge qualified by epistemology, instead 'had a total scope…. imposed by totality in contrast to its own inalienable isolation. … The idea is monad. The being enters into it with its past and subsequent history, brings – concealed in its own form – an indistinct abbreviation of the rest of the world of ideas, just as … every single monad contains, in an indistinct way, all the others.' Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* p. 47.
[41] Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing,* p. 79.

3:4 The Politics of Aura

It is first, for Benjamin, that auratic experience applies to all objects and not only to the artwork, as some commentors suggest, here he is on this point: 'First, genuine aura appears in all things, not just in certain kinds of things, as people imagine.'[42] Similarly, Miriam Bratu Hansen suggests the customary starting place for understanding Benjamin's work on aura has consequently limited other possible comprehensions and applications and that the 'broader anthropological, perceptual-mnemonic, and visionary dimensions of aura' are more relevant for 'current concerns.'[43]

Benjamin wished to replace fake aura with a narrative of the 'profane', a secular condition of the aura that has a practico-material origin yet is not without a speculative – imaginative – dimension, either. The dialectical image has the function to illuminate the kind of experience a false notion of the aura supresses, censors or rewrites according to its own repressive agenda, otherwise appearing as something 'natural' by way of its easy availability.[44]

The origin of aura, in Benjamin's account, is the primeval cultic object, one in the purvey of a priest. Worshipped at a distance, a remoteness whereby the object gains a referential, imaginary, use-value. Later mythologised in religious ritual, the basis of the aura's use-value was the continuity it provided in religious tradition and for the festival calendar. Eventually secularised during the Renaissance, the artwork was advanced during this period as an object imbuing the cultic by way of an unobtainable beauty. An effect of distance later harnessed by bourgeoisie culture in prescribing the autotelic character of art.[45]

The reproduceable artwork, along with the technological and machinic shocks of modern society, eventually liquidated any notion of authenticity associated with an artwork's origin or with the cultic. A reception of the cultural object was now less about reverence and more 'based on another practice – politics.'[46] However, as genuine aura waned, so the opportunity

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[42] Walter Benjamin, 'Hashish, Beginning of March 1930', trans. Rodney Livingstone in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings, Vol. 2, Part 1: 1927-1930,* eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknapp Press of Harvard University, 2005), pp. 327-328.
[43] Miriam Bratu Hansen 'Benjamin's Aura', *Critical Enquiry,* Vol. 34, No. 2 (Winter 2008), p. 338.
[44] What Adorno described in terms of the object acquiring a 'negative theology'. Ibid, p. 244. 'Unlike natural aura, the illumination that dialectical images provide is a mediated experience, ignited within the force field of antithetical time registers, empirical history and Messianic history.' Ibid.
[45] Walter Benjamin 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Illuminations,* pp. 217-219.
[46] Ibid*.,* p. 218.

arose for the production of a fake order of auratic of experience not only confined to the sphere of the commodity and entertainment,[47] but to political forces too – hence Benjamin's closing comments in the 'Work of Art' essay on the aestheticization of politics by fascism. In attempting to recreate, by fakery or otherwise, the experience of authentic aura what is fundamentally at stake is the satisfying of a human longing for an age before alienation and the loss of nature. A need largely fulfilled by the immediacy of popular culture and the entertainment industry.

What defines the object's 'authenticity', under the regime of commodity production, is its immediacy as 'likeness' and an appearance established by convention making it appropriate for consumption. Seeking solace of an 'authentic' kind in a corrupted aura only further occasions consolation – as a search for an unobtainable Real – with evermore deceptions becoming available to satisfy such desire. It is precisely against this background photography is being considered in this study. Particularly how a practice of landscape photography handles the two poles of concocted and genuine experience – a dialectic indicative of many ex-industrial landscapes today. No better example than the garden festival's mythologising of work and labour versus the reality of that same work and labour as traces in the landscape and, in the present, one only has to witness an often-impoverished community. The practice methodology is one attuned to this contradiction and employs visual and textual strategies to show the antagonism in representation. No more highlighted than in the constellation scheme that has been adopted by the photobook.

Auratic experience of a secular kind (or non-auratic aura, depending how Benjamin's theory happens to be interpreted), as far as Benjamin is concerned, emanates just as much from the circumstances of the scene being depicted as from the formal aspects of the representation itself – his 'Small History' essay[48] testifies to this view –, as Esther Leslie explains below. In addition, her thoughts also illustrate, cogently, the approach taken by the practice in revealing the historical experience of work, labour and other social relations as effects on the land and community:

> Benjamin details … a technological basis of the contemporary
> decline of aura …. But aura or auratic perception is not
> necessarily negated by photography if certain subject matters

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[47] A synthesised auratic experience is to 'Capture the gaze where distance is missing'. Benjamin, *The Arcades,* p. 314.
[48] Walter Benjamin, 'A Small History of Photography' in *On Photography Walter Benjamin* ed., Esther Leslie, trans., Esther Leslie (London: Reaktion Books, 2015).

continue to be represented and if certain social relations continue
to be obtained. Aura is permanently in a position to reappear.
Non-auratic photographs … depict collective experience or social
environments. The new politicized photographer sets out to
produce the non-auratic.[49]

Benjamin reinscribes the technical surface of photography as a place of authenticity,
photography's mechanicalness, its rationality was key for Benjamin in this respect,[50] of a
different order, where experience finds objectivity aside from the suppositious realism of the
cultic (in modern times, a false one imposed by entertainment and the spectacle).

Another kind of aura is possible for Benjamin precisely because of what already exists there
in the object and then by its inversion (a transposition that bewilders the dominant view and
often those, too, who have fallen under its spell). Benjamin maintains a secular auratic
experience must be understood dialectically as both a physical and ideological inscription
onto the object and then how they both appear to us: 'In the trace, we gain possession of the
thing; in the aura, it takes possession of us.'[51] The trace is the mark of production and
delineated the object's dissolution into abstraction and 'natural history'[52] and evidence of
labour requisite to the object's tactility and is a 'closeness'. Although indelible, the trace is
liable to decay over the course of time, both in physical terms and in meaning.[53] For Terry
Eagleton the trace is a sign of labour that defetishises the object, although a certain amount
of decryption is needed (and is to be politically active with the object): 'The erasure,
preservation or revival of traces … is a political practice that depends on the nature of the
traces and context in question: the object may need to be treated as a palimpsest, its existent
trace is expunged by overwriting, or it may secrete blurred traces that can be productively
retrieved.'[54] The trace, as we know, is dialectically entwinned with auratic experience,
although, as Graeme Gilloch remarks, it is an aura that may grow in magnitude as the trace
starts to fade,[55] where it is an emergent aura not only impelled by myth, but equally by a new
wonder of the object too, just as it is about to disappear forever.[56] A particularly significant

[49] Esther Leslie, *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), pp.145-146. See also: Carolyn Duttlinger, 'Imaginary Encounters: Walter Benjamin and the Aura of Photography', *Poetics Today,* 29:1 (Spring 2008), particularly pp. 90-91.
[50] A strand that runs throughout his Small History of Photography and the later Work of Art essay.
[51] Benjamin, *The Arcades,* p. 447.
[52] Gilloch, p. 135 and p. 183.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London and New York: Verso,1992), p. 32.
[55] Gilloch, p. 183.
[56] Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller' in *Illuminations,* p. 86.

point of view, one certainly influential on the process of representation that has been undertaken by the practice. So, too, the dangers that might arise as the trace of the original decays as forces of history take a hand in attempting to maintain an authenticity, falsely or otherwise.[57] We might say that with each reduplication of the object's meaning it becomes open to interference. Objects are written in their 'deepest being' profoundly dictated by a complexity of social relations that can never be fully known. The aura, regarding the idealistic order and according to the authority of the 'victor', is a rewriting of history so as to 'expel the traces of [the] ruptured, heterogeneous past'. Thus, what emerges is an experience of the object appearing to be straightforwardly apparent, undemanding and favourable to contemplative thought.[58]

The task of this project, demonstrated by the practice, has been to piece together those disparate fragments that a false notion of aura – to which the rhetorical overwriting of history by the garden festival event, including the numerous sanctioned manifestations ever since are examples – has not quite been able to reintegrate. So that they testify to true human value and to what really happened.[59] Nonetheless, like any reconstruction, by its very nature, something will always remain unintelligible. In a secular order of the auratic, in fact, necessary imagination work has to done in any reassembling of the close and known with that which is distant: the past.[60] The imaginary works, here, in the name of the utopian, in Jameson's view. Whereas the trace is the allegorical world after the Fall and the fracture of social relations, the aura offers, although informed by this history, a place for reconstructing the world according to the security of the prelapsarian symbol and would be a 'plenitude of existence in the world of things, if only for the briefest instant.'[61]

An element of the practice methodology has involved the search for, and documentation of, a variety of history objects in and around the garden festival location and not only limited to the recording of, as previously mentioned, building ruins and other infrastructure. There are many small seemingly insignificant items that lie around the festival site and periphery, ones that speak about a time prior to the inauguration of the festival. Sometimes, these are

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[57] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 215 and Eagleton, p. 32.
[58] Eagleton, p. 33.
[59] Ibid.
[60] The near and far are dialectically entwinned and irrevocably define each other. Fredric Jameson, *The Benjamin Files* (London and New York: Verso, 2020), p. 178.
[61] Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 77. Eagleton puts this in more political terminology, that the decline of aura offered new possibilities for the future if it were reinscribed according to desire derived from the social experience of both past and present (from which a new future can be imagined) and the revolutionary potential of aura. Eagleton, p. 42. Cf. Gilloch, p. 183.

objects that can be found just lying on the ground and other times some effort is needed to unearth them from old slag tips or other places of work and populace now long forgotten. Many of the objects are related to the steel and coal industries with an original purpose which may or may not be decipherable – or even understood today, for that matter. Generic objects such as nuts and bolts, although clearly decades old, judging by the thickness of rust clinging to them, give little away about their original function. It is the wider landscape of the find, along with historical maps and other research, which can at least provide a partial answer. When the object is more archaic, or of a singular nature, it allows a more precise identification of the original purpose or use, thus a more accurate picture of the subject can be built-up. Then there are domestic fragments like ceramic shards found on rubbish tips, either at the bottom of a former garden or at the end of what used to be street, useful for identifying where worker's houses once stood. Even in its decidedly fragmentary nature it can be deduced it was, for instance, once part of a teacup or a dinner plate. The surface pattern also gives a good indication of the date of manufacture and the economic and social circumstances of the subject – as mostly stoneware fragments, little evidence of china or porcelain. Many of the fragments have a transferware design derivative of 'willow-pattern' and no more illustrative, particularly when combined with the historical context of the find, of the 'natural history' of the object in question. The partiality of data the fragment provides gives the imagination a significant conjectural role, although the real of social history is always present, as Lefebvre noted: 'These memory-objects, these palpable, immediate traces of the past, seem to say in daily life that the past is never past. Not explicitly but implicitly, it signifies the reversibility of time …[As] a blending of memory, recollection, the imaginary, the real.'[62]

Nowadays, what is often overlooked in ex-heavily industrialised landscapes are the materials that were once needed for the manufacturing process. In the case of steelmaking, inordinate quantities of coal, ironstone and limestone that were either mined and quarried locally or supplied from further afield. They are commodities that have an after-life, too, and the steel and iron slag produced in copious quantities by the blast furnace process, or the waste produced by coal-mining. It is the kind of historical material that returns another side of social relations to our gaze: one that belongs to the anti-human, anti-social and brutalised nature of life and work and testimony in the landscape that should still trouble us, according to Hal Foster.[63]

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[62] Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life, One Volume Edition, Vol. 3,* p. 808. As Michael Ann Holly also asserts, no materiality exists unless there are both matter and imagination in play. Michael Ann Holly, 'Notes from the Field: Materiality', *The Art Bulletin,* Vol. 95, No. 1 (March 2013), p. 15.
[63] Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), p. 218.

A little distance away from Ebbw Vale is the village of Griffithstown, originally built for steelworkers and for workers at Pontypool Road railway marshalling yard. In the first quarter of the 20th century, it was the most extensive in the UK and the location where most of the coal and steel leaving South Wales for the Midlands and the North of England and further afield was organised, including coal and steel from Ebbw Vale. There is a railway embankment, overlooking the former yard, that forms part of a bridge structure, known locally as the 'Skew Bridge' because of the angle of its construction, which crosses the Brecon and Monmouthshire canal (which used to transport the same steel and coal commodities decades before the railway arrived). Now a pedestrian route and cycle-path, I use the embankment as an unofficial shortcut to get down to the canal towpath and often find pieces of coal scattered down the bank. I sometimes pick a piece up and imagine what colliery in the upper Torfaen or Ebbw Valley it had come from and where it was going. Equally, I wonder about the conditions of its production and when it was produced: in the age of the machine or of picks and shovels? Reflections that are not isolated from the here and now, either. Drugs paraphernalia is strewn all around and there is noise and hubbub emanating from the nearby car parts factory; a huge facility covering what was the former railway marshalling yard. I look at the coal I have in my hand as it catches the light reflecting a myriad of colours and so warm to handle, despite the time of year, and a material now so profoundly emblematic of the whole dialectical horizon of capitalism. A moment where questions concerning what we know now and what was known then and what we judge to be of value about the past cannot help but be pondered. Questions Benjamin's concept of the aura is still able to compellingly embody.

Kindled by the experience of aura, Benjamin accounted for the object as if it had a corporeal potency able to respond to our conscious probing: 'The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in turn. To experience the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look back at us.'[64] Buck-Morss situates this as an anthropomorphism of the look increasing the object's non-identical – genuine – presence.[65] For Hansen, it is a version of aura directly linked to Benjamin's dialectical image model of history and a return of the gaze equivalent to 'the intrusion of a forgotten past that disrupts

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[64] Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', trans. Harry Zohn in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings, Vol. 4, 1938-1940*, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W Jennings (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknapp Press of Harvard University, 2006), p. 338. Benjamin's note on this point is instructive, where the inanimate object 'is a wellspring of poetry' in the distance it draws the spectator into. Ibid, n. 77, p. 354.

[65] Buck-Morss, *Origins of Negative Dialectics,* p. 78. Cf. Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science,* p. 54.

the fictitious progress of chronological time.'[66] The object that looks at us in return can be can be seen as an experience of experience and is where the real of the past comes to light in the most genuine way (not as if the speculative and the imagination is not doing work here, either, significant, as already discussed, to the function of the dialectical image). The landscape has been encountered in this project as a place of profound experience to do with the past that is awaiting recognition. A landscape, in effect, always animated by an expressing subject. So that the past is, then, as far as this project is concerned, always an unfinished project.

It is for Benjamin that 'everything must metamorphose into a thing in order to break the catastrophic spell of things.'[67] In Jameson's assessment this is: 'to escalate the objectified in objects is to fill them with desire elevating them before they are integrated into other activities and so illuminating them.'[68] What he terms elsewhere a 'poetics of reification'.[69] The corollary for the practice, having the dialectical image as its model, has been to express the landscape by way of its alienated and disavowed objects or, in Benjaminian terms, by the aura of its political authenticity.

So, in finishing, the practice is an attempt to reconstruct the experience of the past from the landscape's many fragments, whether the ruin, a disfigurement, an artifact or waste product *but always with the present in view.* This was, of course, Benjamin's intention, too, no more presciently illustrated than in his *Arcades Project.* Esther Leslie's commentary on Benjamin's method of remaking the experience of the past, below, describes it as both a metaphysical process like Jameson's example earlier and a practico-experiential one. And, interestingly, a

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[66] Hansen, 'Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street', p. 311. Adorno attempts to fully secularise Benjamin's metaphysical contention: 'But is this concept not an indication of that … moment of human labour? Is not the aura invariably a trace of a forgotten human moment in the thing, and is it not directly connected, precisely by virtue of this forgetting, with what you call "experience"?' Letter, Adorno to Benjamin, February 29th, 1940 in Henri Lonitz, ed. and Nicholas Walker, trans., *Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin: The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 1991), pp. 321-322. The forgetting constituent of Adorno's observation is key here, any apprehension of the object of history will always involve some degree of 'forgetting', that some reification is inevitable and any true 'identification' with history was impossible (as far as Adorno was concerned). Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, p. 268. And is, according to Max Horkheimer, why history needs to be explained. Ibid, pp. 49-50. Benjamin, even though he accepted Adorno's account, refused to fully secularise his concept, evident in his reply to Adorno: that inanimate objects in nature reflect our conscious inquiry too, even though they are not fashioned by human labour – which was Adorno's original point. Letter, Benjamin to Adorno, May 7th, 1940. *Adorno and Benjamin: The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940*, p. 327.
[67] Theodor W. Adorno, 'A Portrait of Walter Benjamin' in *Prisms,* p. 232. According to Adorno, a detournement of the reified history of the commodity and the re-emergence of the subject is what preoccupied Benjamin, rather than its repudiation. Ibid.
[68] Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London and New York, Verso, 2015), p. 30.
[69] Fredric Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (London and New York, Verso, 1999), p. 169.

commentary that can be read either in a figurative or literal sense, when considering the methodology and the kinds of objects that have been utilised in this project's practice:

> fragments must be brought together, the pot remade, a task both secular and divine. Much like the mashing of shards of montage, or the restorative practice of Benjamin's Angelus Novus, the angel of history, the world is to be put back together – but it is a montage practice, using debris and rubbish, the broken pots and torn scraps, not the high, sublime reordering of harmony in a bloodless, hands off aestheticism.[70]

[70] Esther Leslie, 'Walter Benjamin: Traces of Craft', *Journal of Design History,* Vol. 11, No. 1, Craft, Modernism and Modernity (1998), p. 12.

Chapter 4

'Natural History' and the Cognitive Gesture of Photography

> I needn't say anything. Merely show. I shall purloin no valuables,
> appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse–
> these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to
> come into their own: by making use of them.
>
> – Walter Benjamin.[1]

4:1 Introduction

The Ebbw Valley, like many post heavy industrial areas is where nature and history tend to come in and out of focus, interweave even, in such a way it is sometimes difficult to decipher one from the other. There is often an ideological tendency in play as well, one that naturalises history and historicises nature according to its ideal. The garden festival programmes would seem to epitomise this kind of deliberate reworking of the dialectic. Something that has only continued at pace ever since, often in complex ways; the 'green-washing' agenda, for example. Where the garden festivals, particularly emphasised at Garden Festival Wales, can be seen as precursors to this phenomenon.

As an antithesis to this idealising, the chapter presents the argument for a representation of nature more actively as a political form – that representations of nature unqualified by society or history convey a distorted perspective. This would contrast with today's post-romantic trend toward mindfulness and the curative, an attitude to nature that can be seen emerging during the garden festivals, most markedly, again, during Garden Festival Wales.

A perplexity surrounded first and second nature during the garden festivals, that permitted a certain mythologising to take effect, one that underpinned a 'green' agenda for regions post their industrial era and a rhetoric that pervaded the publicity, displays and exhibitions of Garden Festival Wales. Advertorials and editorials capitalised on photography's mimetic disposition in a number of 'before and after' contrivances, often involving a pastoral vision of the future aligned to a new corporate culture and a 'post-industrial' message. A false and co-opted mimeticism that continues today in 'architectural impression', on developer billboards,

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[1] Benjamin, *The Arcades,* p. 460.

illustrating new developments and are a common sight in the upper Ebbw Valley landscape. A representation that is no more than speculation on what a development – often including a programme of 're-naturing' – will look like in the future. On the other hand, for Lefebvre, it is a mimetic expression that is no more than a false abstraction that captures a wish, only to foreclose on it sometime in the future.

There is mimetic form of expression, however, which is closer to nature and genuine experience. The photographer is discussed as someone who is exposed to the vagaries of reality in a most direct sense, certainly in documentary-based practice, where the mimetic is considered a cipher for this experience. To encounter the object mimetically, certainly in Adorno's account, is to 'recognise it' as an accumulation of experience, rather than a pre-established sign for something and so will yield knowledge of a different order.

Both Benjamin and Adorno share the importance of mediation and construction in any activity of mimetic expression, as a direct non-sensuous experience of the object is impossible post-enlightenment, so some form of construction must take place. It is the word, sign or concept that takes a role in conveying the mimetic gesture in lieu of the body. A constructed form that additionally questions the recuperation of mimesis by commercial interest including its sometimes fetishization in the artwork – landscape photography in particular.

It is proposed the photographer has a mimetic 'comportment' to the landscape that involves a certain labour of representation, where it is further proposed the audience engages with the artwork in a comparable way – with a certain intellectual labour. What Adorno terms as having a 'recognitive' stance to the artwork.

4:2 The Appearance of Landscape or, What Happened Here?

The upper Ebbw Valley is not without a mountainous grandeur more associated with the nearby tourist destination of the Brecon Beacons National Park. Sometimes, especially during the height of summer, it can be imagined the industrial past will, sometime soon, be sublated entirely by the bucolic.[2] Poignant observations are often common when industry

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[2] Derek Price pursues this bucolic reference regarding the re-landscaped valleys of South Wales, and the tension between the 'in comer' and the indigenous resident and how the new landscape is perceived by both: 'The notion that tourism is confined to highly specific places is a false one, for the whole of this landscape has been redesigned to cater to the putative visitor. And, by extension, to the managerial classes who might be persuaded to work and live in this improved environment. Who, after all, in the old tight knit, insular community would want to dine alfresco on the site of an

has left a region and nature starts to re-establish, yet they are often accounts percolated through with reified tropes. A view of the landscape prompting Adorno to assert nature should be expressed only in the negative and by our alienation, as nature, under capitalist relations, will always remain a dominated category. To affirm nature is to have a stance to it which is both 'illusory' and 'deceptive'.[3] Indeed, to think otherwise is its own form of instrumentalisation, as we will see.

Aspen, Alder, Birch and Ash proliferate throughout many de-industrialised regions of the UK, particularly where heavy industry produced inordinate amounts of waste material subsequently dumped arbitrarily into the landscape. They are especially hardy trees able to root in coal and steel slag. Interestingly, the maturity of the trees can be used to date the landscape, in its modern manifestation at least. Trees in the upper Ebbw valley, including the garden festival site, are around 20 – 30 years old and a timeline that delineates the closure of various heavy industries throughout the valley. Mostly cultivated, as can be seen by the staithes and other growing paraphernalia around the trees, they are grown in plantations for cosmetic reasons concealing the black waste of industry past and for practical reasons, to bind slag and waste into a more stable composition preventing them – in the case of coal tips – washing down into the valley. Also, their leaf litter provide material for a more nourishing topsoil suitable for other vegetation that further secure the ground with their root systems. Deciduous plantations are complemented by commercial conifer forest which proliferate on the higher reaches of the hills at the head and mouth of the valley.

Tree planting on waste tips can be seen as a 'second nature' emulation having a real social purpose, in Lefebvre's assessment and, as such, is a reconciliatory mimicking of nature.[4] Thus, we can say there exists a substantial constructed nature to the Ebbw Valley and a 'second nature' vista characteristic of many areas of the UK post their heavy industrial past. A panorama embodying a nature and nurture dialectic that often provokes impressionistic responses like 'nature always finds a way'. Despite this, and for those who are willing to see, it is a *naturalness* engendering potential for more insightful observations like: What happened here?

Representation, in Adorno's account, remains impotent to render nature other than into an often-inadequate myth whose 'words may glance off nature and betray its language to one

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abandoned colliery?' Derrick Price, 'Story of Slag Tip' in Liz Wells and Simon Standing, eds., *Change: Land/water and the Visual Arts* (Plymouth: University of Plymouth Press, 2007), p. 46.
[3] Adorno, *Aesthetics,* p. 78.
[4] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 376.

that is qualitatively different from its own'.[5] To express nature veraciously is to be aware of feigning immediacy as 'authenticity' (that a positivist claim on nature would likely foster). Instead, the expressive gesture would acknowledge nature is governed by the instrumental world: 'That today any walk in the woods, unless elaborate plans have been made to seek out the most remote forests, is accompanied by the sound of jet engines overhead not only destroy the actuality of nature as, for instance, an object of poetic celebration. It affects the mimetic impulse. Nature poetry is anachronistic not only as a subject: its truth content has vanished.'[6]

Just as it is impossible for art to 'embody pristine nature', so too the representation of the true horror of an instrumental world and the industrialism responsible for the destruction of nature in the first place. For Adorno, it is in their mediation or poetisation that a picture of nature, or industry for that matter, becomes 'freed of its ideological ingredient.' Just as erroneous is it to think the world could ever be anything other than industrial, that any inkling of a 'postindustrial' world is no more than romantic whimsy.[7] An expression of nature unacknowledged as 'second nature' is a false one, tantamount to the subject searching for solace in something that is, in truth, unattainable. A false connection to nature because all historical, social and political conditions of reality have been disregarded and an unmediated relationship Adorno refers to as an: 'Absolute subjectivity [that] is also subjectless.'[8] To express nature in any way veritably means holding in tension its negative image: the reified world.[9] Adorno proposes a method of depicting nature closer to essence rather than the pretence that can arise with appearance. This would be a mediation of nature and the

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[5] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* p. 73.

[6] Ibid., p. 219. It would rather be 'the authenticity of a form of experience that does not lay claim to an immediacy it has lost.' Ibid., pp. 218-219.

[7] Ibid. Adorno proposed two strategies how this might be accomplished by the artwork, one typically Adornoian and the other, as already mentioned in a previous chapter of this study, typically modernist. In the first instance by a 'determinant negation' and the exclusion of nature in its entirety from art, a negation whereby our alienation is all to evident: 'that art does not pretend nature is still present.' The second procedure is defamiliarisation. By defamiliarising the familiar, nature can be shown in its essence, rather than in the sham of appearance. This would be a mediation, where nature and alienation are dialectally entwinned. So, with this last, nature can be resolved in representation as something recognisable, yet estranged. Ibid. This seems to be what Adorno is proposing by the poetisation of nature and industry. Examples of artists / photographers whose work, perhaps, illustrate the approach Adorno is describing are: Sophy Rickett (b. 1970), https://sophyrickett.com/work. Last accessed 12/09/23; Helen Sear (b. 1955), https://www.helensear.com/. Last accessed 12/09/23; Liza Dracup (b. 1968), in particular, although not confined to, *Sharpe's Wood* (2007), https://www.lizadracup.co.uk/sharpes-wood-2007. Last accessed 12/09/23. Perhaps a more demonstrable example, although not photography, is Agnes Denes (b. 1931): *Wheatfields for Manhattan* (1982), https://www.publicartfund.org/exhibitions/view/wheatfields-for-manhattan/. Last accessed 12/09/23.

[8] Ibid. This should not dissent from representing nature as a place of alternative desire, however: 'The image of what is oldest in nature reverses dialectically into the cipher of the not-yet-existing, the possible.' Ibid. 73.

[9] Which, I suggest, is at the core of the visual solutions used by the artists quoted in note 7 above.

instrumental, so they are shown to be dialectally entwinned or, nature resolved in such a way in representation that it is recognisable at the same time is estranged.[10] The practice presented in this project has proceeded by a similar visual method – although not adhering to Adorno's aspiration as if it were a credo – interleaving nature with the consequences of the industrial past. This might take place within a single image or something construed at the level of the constellation (of the photobook). What is fundamentally being aimed at with this visual strategy is a representation of capitalism as *natural history*.

For Adorno, nature and history profoundly define one another, a view meant to secularise the metaphysical notion of a timeless and transcendental nature or, nature as something external to rational consciousness. Nature is, after all, a construction of discourse and the conceptual and a nature that is also sanctioned, or otherwise, by historical progress. Further, and on other side of the coin, to counter the idea of history as evidence of the inevitably of human progress as something independent of the natural process. Because it is a history that is at the mercy of an indifferent nature (where we can say, in a most fundamental sense of the definition, that history is a narrative of the human attempt to dominate nature). Lastly, as the dialectic will continue to unravel – as Adorno makes clear – capital presents itself, its social processes, specifically, as if it were something natural, rather than the result of the historical process.[11]

A natural history interlacing – effectively, reification – that Benjamin maintains is where social relations are most likely to appear (Adorno having little interest in this because of the speculation involved). The past's experiences and desires materialise, particularly evident in the discarded and marginalised of society, in the commodity as if it they were something natural; fossilised remains to be deciphered and read, as such, and key to the redemptive function of the dialectical image (See Chapter 3).[12] In the same way, there is also a co-option of this interrelationship by capitalist interest and the historicising of nature and the naturalising of history – the garden festival location is evidence of both these appropriations.

[10] Adorno, *Aesthetics,* p. 79. Adorno proposes another strategy how this might be accomplished by the artwork, typically Adornoian, by a 'determinant negation' and the exclusion of nature in its entirety from art. Ibid. This means if nature has presence, it will not necessarily dissent from nature as a place of alternative desire: 'The image of what is oldest in nature reverses dialectically into the cipher of the not-yet-existing, the possible.' Ibid.

[11] Adorno's intention in his essay 'The Idea of Natural-History' is to establish a 'new form of critical historiography' – a methodology, in fact. Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Idea of Natural History', trans. Bob Hullot-Kentor, Telos, 60, Critical Theory of the Contemporary (1984), pp. 111-124. Adorno's The Idea of Natural-History is profoundly influenced by Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. In many ways, it is the full secularisation of the theological elements of Benjamin's study.

[12] See section 3:3 above for a discussion on Benjamin's theory of natural history and mediation by the dialectical image.

The practice has attempted to visualise the various and incessant entwinements and appropriations, both empirically as they appear in the landscape and in terms of how discourse is written onto the surface of the land. No more evident, again, than at the garden festival location and its borders.

A new South Wales post-industry was projected to be, during the Garden Festival event, established on nature and leisure. Exhibitions, events and publicity, suffused with pastoral and recreational imagery depicted environments where new industries, businesses and communities were to be established in the future. To fully institute faith in this new future it meant the past had to be, somehow, invalidated. In the souvenir brochure, meaning from an earlier time of industrialism is inverted in photographs using a variety of encoding strategies; one of these devices is the 'before and after' juxtaposition. For example, a composite image shows a ruin of industry reproduced in a black and white, complete with grey skies, overlaid with text which reads: 'Dormant'. Reproduced below it is a colour photograph of the same location, only it has undergone a transformation; now people are engaged in a variety of recreational activities with a headline text proclaiming: 'Vibrant' (Fig. 29). There are other constructed inversions similar to this through-out the festival brochure, often anchored by captions and longer commentary emphasising an entrepreneurial logic. Another advertorial states: 'Welcome to the British Business Park', with two photographs of low-rise buildings, partly obscured by trees and plants given an expansiveness by a wide-angle lens which emphasises the blue sky above. The buildings are set in an open valley during the height of summer with a perspective leading the eye away to mountains on the far horizon. An example of the rural / pastoral motif that also runs throughout the brochure. Take another instance, and the Welsh Development Agency's proclamation: 'Preparing the Ground for A Better Wales' (Fig. 30), the introduction continues: 'The Garden Festival allows the Welsh Development Agency a perfect opportunity to demonstrate something beautiful is happening throughout the length and breadth of Wales.' The accompanying photograph shows an artificially created lake at the garden festival location surrounded by trees, the sun about to emerge through the clouds into a blue sky.[13]

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[13] The photograph shows a lake at the 'Wetlands Discovery Centre', which still exists but difficult to find amongst the overgrowth and seems to have been partially filled in.

Fig. 30. Advertorial, Cardiff Bay Development Corporation,
Garden Festival Wales Souvenir Brochure (1992).
Photographs © Unknown.

Fig. 31. Advertorial, The Welsh Development Agency, *Garden
Festival Wales Souvenir Brochure* (1992). Photographs © Unknown.

For Lefebvre, an abstracted form of mimesis is an expression of space as a not yet fully
understood course of the subject and its wishes: 'by assigning a model, which occupies a
space, to an as-yet ill-defined desire, imitation ensures that violence (or rather counter-

violence) will be done to that desire in its relationship with that space and its occupant.'[14] Observe the imitative and anticipatory projection of an idealised tomorrow that continues in the upper Ebbw Valley and its hinterland today, not dissimilar to the visual rhetoric of the brochure for Garden Festival Wales three decades earlier. Billboards, many of them now overgrown, erected around the festival site and wider territory show a conceptual vision, an 'architectural impression,' of a new landscape post-industry, contrasting markedly to the scene which surround them.[15] The reality of 'enterprise' and the 'entrepreneurial' could not be more starkly registered than by the signs of uneven development in and around the garden festival site and the economic and social toll on the upper Ebbw Valley more generally, since the closure of the festival in 1992.[16] A vista, returning to Lefebvre's observation, no more illustrative of a castrated wish. There is another category of mimesis, however, one which resists co-option and a concrete gesture that 'pitches its tent in an artificial world, the world of the visual where what can be seen has absolute priority, and there simulates primary nature, immediacy, and the reality of the body.'[17]

We can say the photographer is no innocent onlooker in the construction of meaning. They are affected by the conditions of reality they choose to photograph and are 'already a social actor' in the scene.[18] To experience the landscape is to be active within it, says Jeff Malpas,[19] suggesting the photographer is more of a mediator of the landscape – and less a detached observer, documentarian or witness. In John Roberts opinion, direct experience is important for photography, certainly as a wellspring of 'outward-looking, prospective realism'. A realism defined by the photographer's experience in terms of '*where they place*

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[14] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space,* p. 376.

[15] The 'architectural impression' is a digitally enhanced photograph showing how a new development will look in the future, including *de rigour* images of trees, plants, and grassy areas. Which, according to Lefebvre, attested to no more than a persuasive mimetic reproduction having an abbreviated social purpose and a configuration of nature that had been left 'in a no-man's land'. Ibid.

[16] The black and white photograph is of Cardiff Bay (formally Cardiff docklands and its residential area of Butetown, known locally as 'Tiger Bay') which has been substantially redeveloped post its coal and steel exporting era. The construction of the Cardiff Bay barrage, in the mid-1990s was one of the largest civil engineering projects in the world at the time, and the area has, indeed, become a destination for leisure. Such major redevelopment projects centred on metropolitan areas, however, seek only to emphasise economic, social and cultural inequity with the regions and is a geographically – read historically – ingrained division of labour. Cardiff was, and still is, an administrative, financial and governance centre with all the educational and cultural facilities such cognitive and administrative classes need and often demand, whereas the upper Ebbw Valley was, and still is, concentrated economically on industrial manufacturing and manual labour. Cardiff is thirty miles away, and the upper Ebbw Valley has struggled historically to attract new industry and, more recently, under a culture of regional competitiveness, has not yet managed to encapsulate a radical new idea of itself. The garden festival site, and surrounding environ, expresses this situation demonstrably.

[17] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space,* p. 376.

[18] Allan Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photoworks, 1973- 1983* (London: Mack, 2016), p. xi.

[19] Jeff Malpas, 'Place and the Problem of Landscape' in *The Place of Landscape,* p. 14.

themselves, in what spaces, in front of what intransigent forces.'[20] Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* is interspersed with references to the photographer's experiential encounters with the real. A 'having been there' scenario Barthes sees as fundamental to the photograph as a knowledge of the world. For example: 'The Photographer's "second sight" does not consist in "seeing" but in being there';[21] 'Photography's inimitable feature … is that someone has seen the referent … *in flesh and blood'*;[22] '[The portrait's] experiential order of proof';[23] '[This photograph], the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression'.[24]

<center>*</center>

There are two locations in the upper Ebbw Valley where nature struggles to re-establish. One is at the garden festival site, itself, and the other a little distance away near the town of Ebbw Vale, both are places where blast furnace slag was deposited in vast quantities into the surrounding landscape. The site near the town of Ebbw Vale, where the Ebbw Vale Iron, Steel and Coal Company originally had its works, is where, from around the mid 19th century up until the late 1930s, trams brought waste material from the blast furnaces before tipping it down the hillside into the valley below. The slag tip at the garden festival site was made by the Victoria Iron and Steel Company's blast furnaces from around 1880 to the early 1940s. From this date up until 1975,[25] when the blast furnaces were decommissioned, blast furnace slag was transported to a nearby uninhabited valley, known locally as Silent Valley, by an aerial ropeway. The valley during this period, was filled with 10,000s of tons of slag. Steel slag has a composition not unlike volcanic lava, after it has rapidly solidified, retaining a profile as if it were still flowing down the hillside. An unforgiving material making it a harsh place for plants to germinate, and it is only now, after a hundred years, certainly at the Ebbw Vale site, that plants are starting to appear.

Hills of industrial waste that have a direct and unmediated connection to the past, imbuing a 'natural history' of a most palpable kind and the origins of my fascination with the Ebbw Valley. The immediacy of the retention of human labour in the material affected a kinship,

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[20] Roberts, *Photography and its Violations,* p. 168.
[21] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1993), Ibid., p. 47.
[22] Ibid., p. 79.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., p. 4. Barthes continues: 'Every photograph is a certificate of presence' and 'The photograph possesses an evidential force'. Barthes, *Camera Lucida,* p. 87 and p. 89.
[25] The Victoria Iron and Steel Company was taken over by the Ebbw Vale Iron, Steel and Coal Company during this period and then, after various take overs and mergers, became Richard, Thomas and Baldwin. After nationalisation, The British Steel Corporation. Throughout this period the steelworks was known simply as Ebbw Vale Works.

manifested in a desire to touch and to know its arcane lexicon.[26] Photography is involved in this process too; augmenting my gesture as a humanising form of recognition so that the object speaks as a socially existing thing:

> What accedes to language enters the movement of a
> humanness that does not yet exist; it is compelled toward
> language and alive only by virtue of its helplessness. Stumbling
> along behind is reification, the subject limits that verification by
> means of the mimetic vestige, the plenipotentiary of an
> undamaged life in the midst of mutilated life.[27]

Photography turned to the landscape in this way assimilates its subject and the suffering of history *in absentia* and a burden that is correspondingly expressed.[28] An experience of the landscape not as though it were merely sign for (industrial) history, but – as already suggested in Chapter 3 – an embodied accumulation of historical experience that awaits recognition. The kind of relationship to the world Blake Stimson, after Adorno, describes as having a mimetic comportment to it,[29] and is a certain responsibility, commitment, that the mimetic necessarily imbues.[30] The camera is an extension to this comportment, part of a process of making similar, reconstructing the recognition germanely in representation.

A caution, however. This should not be mistaken for a spiritual feeling toward history and the landscape, as this would be no more than an affect contrived by convention as a necessary attribute for consumption by others.[31] Hal Foster elaborates on this caution, concerning the

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[26] For Zuidervaart, mimesis gives the object syntax; by entering the artwork the object is given the ability to speak. Zuidervaart, *The Semblance of Subjectivity*, p. 74.

[27] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* p. 117. In Zuidervaart's interpretation, what seem objective and dehumanised is enlivened by mimetic expression. Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory,* p. 112.

[28] An expressive gesture not dissimilar to Adorno's 'damaged life' cipher, that does the same expressive work on behalf of a universal subject see *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life.* A vicarious approach that can be seen, generally, in his philosophical and sociological writing. Steve Helmling explains Jameson's writings, as profoundly influenced by Adorno, do 'not merely analyze or expound, but enact, perform – indeed, *suffer* –the contradictions of their subject matter, the predicaments of society and culture in general'. Helmling, *The Success and Failure of Fredric Jameson,* p. 4. To paraphrase Adorno, to express something is to utter the broken promise of happiness. For Blake Stimson, having a practical familiarity with the landscape is to have a 'bearing' to it that demonstrates a social bond, one that can only be established through immediate experience, where even the lowliest object can be given recognition and gravitas in representation. Stimson puts photography in a special place in this respect with a capability to present knowledge as an unexpected revelation. Stimson, *Pivot of the World,* pp. 143-144 and pp. 173-174.

[29] Stimson, *Pivot,* p. 167.

[30] Blake Stimson, 'The Photographic Comportment of Bernd and Hilla Becher', *Tate Papers,* no.1 (Spring 2004), p. 9.

[31] To react to the object only in terms of 'feeling' is no more than futile sentimentality, as far as Adorno was concerned, as it seals off interaction with thought and the rational and hence 'a blind eye toward

bourgeoise appropriation of expression, as a gesture constructed from pre-existing concepts. The expressive, under this condition, becomes a self-referencing 'agenda' according to already circulating signs for pain, longing, loss, and alike, and no more than the uttering of 'empty signifiers'.[32] What is also being refused, by a photography collapsed into a spiritualised version of expression, is its potency as a universalising vocabulary. Photography's collective function, as original witness and communicator of events and phenomena is the result of the expressive act and one that Ariella Azoulay recognised is an innate civic tendency prerequisite to the 'citizenry of photography'.[33] Likewise, for Raymond Williams to express means is to recognise all participants, that every act of expression is a *production* of meaning from already meaningful social interrelationships of which other blends of meaning are made. To express something, is to create relations such that the significance of the act of expression lies in the social and material place of production.[34] Transcribing Williams's linguistic analysis to a practice of photography, the expressive act should not hinder the socialising possibilities of photographic representation. The spiritualised utterance should not gain the upper hand, save it becoming an expressive gesture of empty convention.

4:3 Mimesis as Construction, Mimesis as Labour

Adorno understands the mimetic is an enactment not just a straightforward imitation of the object or phenomenon, as this would be nothing more than a re-incorporation of the object into discourse. Rather it is an 'impulse of mimicry' a way of *doing* (rather than making) *and being* (rather than imitating) closer to the instinctual and a non-identical identification of the object in encountering it 'without imitating it as an object, without replicating it, but rather making itself similar in an entire mode of behaviour'.[35] As Sarah James explains: 'Mimesis

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truth'. Neither should thought be separated from feeling or the mimetic, thought needs feedback from the senses so it is refreshed by the real. Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, p. 331.For Adorno on the damaging effects of separating feeling from understanding see Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, p. 277.

[32] Hal Foster, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985), pp. 62-63. And would be no more than mechanistic affectation, an impression of something according to convention. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* p. 111.

[33] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), p. 85.

[34] Ibid., pp. 166-167. Cogently abridged by John Dewey: 'the more a work of art embodies what belongs to experiences common to many individuals, the more expressive it is.' Dewey, *Art as Experience,* p. 349.

[35] Ibid., *Aesthetics,* p. 42. Max Horkheimer warns against mimesis as a regressive enactment. The example he uses is the acting out of 'socially repressed mimetic drives' by the audience during National Socialist rallies. Max Horkheimer, *The Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), pp. 115-117. We can add to this another caution regarding the mimetic and the acting out of something that has already been signified, or which is already assimilated and reconstructed by the spectacle.

for Adorno does not pertain to the relation between sign and referent. It is not a category of representation. Rather, it aims at a mode of subjective experience; a preverbal cognition which is rendered objective in some works of art, and emerges in their aesthetic construction.'[36] Construction is central here. Benjamin sees mimesis as a reconstruction, adaption even, of the original scene, phenomenon, or object.[37] Unlike primeval non-sensuous mimesis it is the word – sign or image – that is needed to meld mimesis into a semblance or appearance of something which the senses are then able to recognise and make similar. Suggesting – which Adorno also understands – the need for narrativization or some other form of construction.[38]

Concomitant to a constructed version of mimesis is montage. Although, a practice of assemblage with an awareness – dissent, almost – of its own aesthetic result and a refusal of the innate propensity for realism to accord positively. A form of photographic montage, not surprisingly, advocated by Adorno and a construal that has dated little over subsequent decades, even though photographic technology, it would be obvious to say, has changed considerably in the same period.[39] Adorno's definitive project for the artwork is one of 'enigmaticalness'; the art object resolving into meaninglessness solely by the unity of its formal quality, placing it beyond any instrumentalised meaning. Even so, and this might be a surprise to many of his detractors, Adorno does acknowledge there are artworks that have a direct social function to challenge accepted meaning.[40] Nevertheless, the artwork should endeavour to question its own coalition with instrumental meaning. Montage can achieve this because it 'disavows such unity', yet has a formal expediency that 'reaffirms unity':

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[36] Sarah James 'What Can We Do with Photography?', *Art Monthly,* 312 (Dec-Jan 2007-08), p. 4. For an elaboration of this discussion see Sarah James, 'Subject, Object, Mimesis: The Aesthetic World of the Bechers' Photography', *Art History,* Vol. 32, No. 5 (December 2009), pp. 874-893Mimesis is an expressive action established by an unpremeditated mutual attraction, or kinship, toward the object, that may not, inevitably, be signified externally as such (Zuidervaart, *The Semblance of Subjectivity,* p. 47). Also, the object can be mimetically encountered in an antithetical manner. This time the object is recognised as something that is dissimilar and an unrecognition that calls upon a response more attuned to confrontation, cancellation and negation.

[37] Walter Benjamin, 'A Berlin Childhood Around 1900', trans. Howard Eiland in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Works, Vol. 3, 1935-1938,* eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, eds. (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknapp Press of Harvard University, 2006), pp. 390-391.

[38] Benjamin, 'On the Mimetic Faculty', trans. Edmund Jephcott in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings: Vol. 2, Part 2*, 1931-1934, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknapp Press of Harvard University, 2005), p. 722. Understanding Benjamin's interest in mimesis is language as the armature of transmission, for Adorno it is primarily the artwork. For Adorno, the mimetic post-enlightenment has been transferred to narrative and now exists in mediated relation to the object, rather than a primeval non-sensuous relation between subject and object. Adorno, *Aesthetics*, p. 41. Also see Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics,* p. 87.

[39] Montage would have the following (not exhaustive) cognates: assemblage, juxtaposition, distance, omission, deletion, redaction, disassembly, diptych, triptych, image and text and detournement (variations of montage to which Adorno seems to allude, as well).

[40] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 154.

On no account is the principle of montage a trick to integrate

photography and its derivatives into art despite the limitations

defined by their dependence on empirical reality. Rather,

montage goes beyond photography immanently without

infiltrating it with a facile sorcery…. It is photography's self-

correction.'[41]

It is a view of montage and photography requiring little revision; indeed, it could be said to have more resonance today than it did at the time of Adorno's original discussion. A mediation that disrupts photography's innate mimeticism, as one so coveted by power and commercial interest. Photography, as a practice of montage, enables a reconstruction of the referent on its own realist terms and is, if you like, a reflexiveness, that criticises the contrived nature of (dominant) signification in which photography is so often implicated.

How does this apply to the practice presented in this project? A tireless theme for this project is the representation of uneven geographical development which, at a formal level of practice, means finding alternatives to the conventional truisms used, more often than not, to illustrate economic inequality.[42] There is often a simplicity that overlooks the intricate character of the disparities associated with the uneven distribution of capital and the convolutions and contradictions that are ingrained in the ineradicable divide between high capitalism and poverty. That a juxtaposition of images, say, of affluence and impoverishment does little to address. Uneven development, in reality, frequently means economic discrepancies profoundly coalesce. Gail Day and Steve Edwards see the penetrating, yet subtle 'montage of realism' technique used by Allan Sekula being very well attuned to this complex and, seemingly, inexorable divide and its causes and effects: 'Sekula seeks to do more than demonstrate unevenness. His use of sequential montage and visual integration help to draw out the less visible, and less readily visualisable, aspects of the social world: that is, it aspires to capture the "combined" dimensions associated with [uneven and combined capital].'[43] Sekula's delicate use of his 'montage of realism' technique is, perhaps,

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[41] Ibid.

[42] As an example, footage of 'rundown' back-alleys of terraced houses in Burnley seems to have become a recurrent trope illustrating the government's 'levelling-up' agenda on the BBC News channel recently. Interestingly, we are never provided with a comparable image of what an area might look like once it has been 'levelled-up'.

[43] Gail Day and Steve Edwards, 'Differential time and aesthetic form: uneven and combined capitalism in the work of Allan Sekula', *BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research* Online (2019), p. 12. Available at: https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/18316/. Last accessed 23/07/22. Day and Edwards are interested in an aesthetic that captures the 'spatial and temporal complexities of modern capitalism—grasped in terms of its contradictions, combinations and unevennesses'.

the kind of method Adorno had in mind, particularly given his warning the alienation montage is likely to inculcate if stylistically overplayed as 'sorcery'.

A form of mimetic assemblage not unlike Adorno's concept of 'exact fantasy' – precursory to the constellation model he developed much later in *Negative Dialectics* – whereby an object, phenomenon or concept is apprehended, and its elements imaginatively rearranged so that something closer to the truth of the matter emerges. In effect, a mimetic remodelling that left in intact everything according to the original (concept, thing, phenomenon); any imaginative adjustment that takes place is controlled by the factual context of the original:[44] 'exact fantasy was … a dialectical concept which acknowledged the mutual mediation of subject and object without allowing either get the upper hand…. [I]t remained "immanent," within the material phenomenon the factuality of which acted as a control to thought.'[45] Once reimagined, the object, phenomenon, concept is *re-presented* as a successor to the original, only this time as a constellation of concepts and a compound arrangement of meaning central to its truth claim. Which, for Adorno, art retained, like philosophy, an advantage by the ability to assemble and rearrange experience into alternative and multiple concepts.[46]

An assembled form of the mimetic would not only be a critique of commercial interest and its co-option of mimeticism, equally would apply to a certain paradigm of photography that has, over the last 25 years, or so, dominated the 'fine art' gallery scene, particularly emphasised in landscape-based practice. The magnitude canon, to which many landscape photography practices are enthralled, means the presentation of the photograph at scale. And a staging of the landscape not only meant to provoke awe, but a consciousness of the inaccessible – technical and economic – character of the photograph's production, thus ensuring

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[44] Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Actuality of Philosophy', Telos, vol. no. 31 (March 20, 1977), p. 131.

[45] Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics,* p. 86. The mimetic integrity of the object often had to be transformed, 'precisely so that its truth might be preserved.' Ibid. p. 87.

[46] Ibid. and Adorno, 'The Actuality of Philosophy', p. 133. Buck-Morss suggests art, like philosophy, rearranges the components of experience into a cognitive shape. Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics,* p. 86. The aesthetic conduit for Adorno is the philosophical essay. See Chapter 5 of this study. Cf. Mario Lazzarato and his proposal for a mode of re-functioning the 'sign-world'. Like Adorno's 'exact fantasy' it is a detournement of the sign by channelling the discursive through the expressive in an ontological re-mapping of the objective character of 'semio-capital.' Lazzarato calls for cartographies as organisers of the expressive function and 'active initiators of subjectivation processes.' Channelling the semiotic through such a schema 'can open a pragmatic path to action'. For this to happen 'discourses, signs, and concepts must function as access points to new worlds, as the "diagrammatic initiators" of action (emphasised in original).' Mario Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines,* trans. Joshua David Jordan (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014), pp. 213-214. For Herbert Marcuse mimetic expression is recognition by exaggeration and happened when the object was brought into the full light of the world revealing a hitherto hidden meaningfulness. Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 45. Exaggeration, for Adorno, is also a fundamental function of mimesis, *Aesthetics,* p. 159.

exclusivity required for a place in high culture.[47] A fetishising of the mimetic that can also be attributed to the large-format film camera (we could also say its digital equivalent) that has, again for many years, claimed the mimetic as its own and, again, is particularly prominent in landscape-based photography practice. In addition, as an esoteric and archaic apparatus, the large-format camera creates a metaphysical and technical distance between the means of production and the audience. Charlotte Cotton suggests technical fetishisation, along with 'operatic authorship', is how the institution of the gallery and the museum 'extends the lifespan of the conventional notion of photography as a medium where the few can still be elevated from the many' and a conservativism preventing other possibilities for 'creating new channels of interpretation and discourse'.[48]

To finish then, a protracted and experiential tarrying with the landscape, it could be said, is the mimetic labour required to supplant conventional understanding predicated, very often, on received ideas about the 'post-industrial' landscape. An industriousness required, as far as Adorno is concerned from the viewer, too. His concept of the recognitive (*erkennend*) is to encounter the artwork in an 'active, insight-seeking' movement.[49] The artwork is faced-up to with intellectual curiosity and not only by the emotions.[50] To understand the artwork is to do conundrum work, in contradistinction to the consumption of art as entertainment.[51] Sarah James understands the photographs of Bernd Becher (1931 – 2007) and Hilla Becher (1934

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[47] Of course, this is no more than the mirror of production. By enhancing auratic affect so too the photograph's cultural capital, hence market value.

[48] Charlotte Cotton, 'Photography's place in culture Keynote 1: Photomedia Conference, Helsinki, 28 March 2012', *Photographies,* 6:1 (2013), p. 31.

[49] Adorno, *Aesthetics,* p. 329, n. 1. Cf. John Roberts, 'the importance of Adorno's own version of mimeticism on this score: the requirement of the spectator to match in animating spirit and cognitive attentiveness, the discontinuous and unfamiliar complexities of the work at hand as a condition of sustaining the life of the image as sensuous concept.' John Roberts, 'The Political Economy of the Image', *Philosophy of Photography*, Vol. 9 Nos. 1 and 2 (2015), p. 29. For Lynn L. Wolff: 'The work of the reader follows the author and thus mirrors his approach'. Lyn L. Wolff, *W.G. Sebald's Hybrid Poetics: Literature as Historiograph*y (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), p. 68. John Dewey also describes the labour required on behalf of the audience: 'The artist selected, clarified, abridged and condensed according to his interest. The beholder must go through these operations according to his point of view and interest … gathering together of details and particulars physically scattered into an experienced whole. There is work done on the part of the percipient as there is on the part of the artist.' Dewey*, Art and Experience,* p. 68.

[50] Adorno, *Aesthetics,* p. 185. Of course, the encounter with the artwork / photograph is often charged with emotion, although this need not distract from a proactive kind of engagement as Blake Stimson explains in relation to the Bechers' photography, where 'the beholder is called on to take up a sympathetic and responsible relationship to the subject photographed in the manner of a parent or benefactor comes to sympathise through a process of judgement that call the viewer to assess and to aid, if necessary, the photographed subject.' Stimson, *Pivot of the World,* p. 46.

[51] Typified by content which requires little thought and affirmatory in its content because it 'excludes everything but the predigested and the already integrated.' Theodor W. Adorno and Thomas Y. Levin, 'Transparencies on Film' *New German Critique,* No. 24/25, Special Double Issue on New German Cinema (Autumn, 1981 - Winter, 1982), p. 199.

- 2015) as mimetic formulations engaging the viewer in a similar process of intellectual work, that makes 'hermeneutics a process of labour, not transcendence.'[52]

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[52] Sarah James, 'Subject, Object, Mimesis: The Aesthetic World of the Bechers' Photography', p. 887.

Chapter 5

The Photobook as Cognitive Map

You artists who, for pleasure or for pain

Deliver yourselves up to the judgement of the audience

Be moved in future

To deliver up also to the judgement of the audience

The world which you know.

You should show what is; but also

In showing what is you should suggest what could be and

     Is not

And might be helpful.

– Bertolt Brecht.[1]

5:1 Introduction

In this chapter the photobook is considered as a presentational format suitable for a practice of cognitive mapping consonant with Fredric Jameson's call for an effective art-based strategy to represent a complex capitalism. Although the chapter is interested in the independent character of the photobook i.e., the photographer or artist owning and controlling the means of production, it does not ignore photobooks produced and distributed by mainstream institutions and publishers. Having said this, it is most sympathetic to independently produced photobooks,[2] or artist's books,[3] and considers, albeit implicitly, how

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[1] Bertolt Brecht 'On Judging', *Bertolt Brecht: Poems 1913-1956* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 308.

[2] The chapter is not meant to be a consummate survey of the photobook. This has been done in many other places, including, Russet Lederman, Olga Yatskevich and Michael Lang, eds., *How to See: Photobooks by Women* (New York: 10x10 Books, 2018); Matt Johnston, ed., *Photobooks &: A Critical Companion to the Contemporary Medium* (Eindhoven: Onomatopee, 2021); Martin Parr and Gerry Badger, eds., *The Photobook: A History,* three volumes (London and New York: Phaidon, 2004, 2006, 2014); Andrew Roth, ed., *The Book of 101 Books: Seminal Photographic Books of the Twentieth Century* (New York: LLP/PPP Editions, 2001) and Andrew Roth, ed., *The Open Book: A History of the Photographic Book From 1878 to the Present* (Gothenburg: Hasselblad Center, 2004). For a study of independently produced photobooks see Douglas Ronald Spowart, *Self-Publishing in the Digital Age: The Hybrid Photobook* (James Cook University, Australia: Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2011). Available at: http://researchonline.jcu.edu.au/32590/. Last accessed 23/09/ 22.

[3] The photobook if it is seen in the tradition of the 'artist's book' helps clarify this independent status. As would terms like 'self-published', 'self-produced' or 'hand-made' and books issued by small presses and small publishers as limited editions or otherwise. The artist's book is comprehensively

independent publishing and 'small press' photobooks can continue as a dissenting voice. Acknowledging, at the same time, the photobook has been absorbed into commercial and institutional interest. Yet, it possesses a certain formal dexterity that continues to yield fresh arrangements of photographic imagery, explicitly in correlation with other media and with text. It is with this in mind that the *formal* aspects of philosophy are considered as a way to think about the arrangement of a photobook and how it might make critical connections across space and time.

For example, Adorno arranged concepts and phenomena in his philosophical writing into constellations, the arranging principle behind his preferred essay format. A method of keeping in motion truth content and to deter any easy synthesis or affirmative reading. Also, for Adorno, any genuine claim on truth was contingent on the inclusion of the process by which it was arrived at, and not only by the result itself. Where, it is proposed, the photobook is conducive to showing this kind of 'working-out'. Although, there is a danger of course – a prejudice, even – about transacting theoretical thinking to practice. Not so for Benjamin, where he answers this scepticism with his concept of crude thinking that gives permission, if you like, for theory to be abridged so that it better fits the needs of practice.

The correspondences, for Benjamin, are a poetic mechanism for connecting disparate objects, phenomena and epistemes – including that data of true human experience – in both time and space, the chapter considering them to be a device especially productive for cognitive mapping. Text would be one of these possible correspondence devices and when deployed with a photograph can help facilitate the retrieval of experience. Not unlike Raymond Williams' 'structure of feeling' hermeneutic, the photobook acting like a container for the residual, emergent and dominant forms of social experience and behaviour.

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represented by Book Arts Research at the Centre for Print Research at the University of the West of England, Bristol: https://cfpr.uwe.ac.uk/project/book-arts-research/. Last accessed 07/05/22. The exhibition catalogue is an unusual case, having content that is sometimes a re-configuration of an exhibition presentation that does extra signifying work to the original exhibition – such as the inclusion of essays. Or, sometimes, the photographs undergo re-editing, in this situation it could be suggested the catalogue is a work in its own right. Two projects by Sekula previously looked at falls into this category: *Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes* and *Fish Story.* In the introduction to *Fish Story* Sekula considers the latter difference between work in an exhibition and when it comes to be rendered in a book / catalogue: 'The spatial relationship of image to image, image to text, and text to text necessarily takes a different form within the pages of the book furthermore, the book allows for the inclusion of another, parallel text, and becomes an altogether different object.' Sekula, *Fish Story,* p. 202. For a commentary on the confluence and divergence of the catalogue and photobook, see Liz Wells, 'Beyond the Exhibition – From Catalogue to Photobook' in Patrizia Di Bello, Collette Wilson and Shamoon Zamir, eds., *The Photobook: From Talbot to Ruscha and Beyond* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2020).

The chapter, in closing, considers the photobook's pedagogic possibility central to a politically activated practice of landscape photography and how Jameson's concept can be integrated into a collective context such as the community arts (having the photobook as its focus).

Even though there is a self-reflexive dimension to the chapter, it does not include a rationale why a particular image was selected, or other conclusions to do with the formality of page design and lay-out. It was adjudged to be unnecessary analysis and likely to result in a rational overdetermination of the photobook's imaginative presence and a deflation of its cognitive and speculative function – notwithstanding the intention, as outlined in the introduction, for the theory and practice not only to work together, but to function as discrete documents in their own right. A general survey of the photobook is offered, along with observations about a number of visual design and textual strategies, of which the book produced for this research project sometimes recognises in its design and layout.

5:2 The Photobook as Constellation

Independently produced digital photobooks[4] have gained considerable popularity in the last decade, or so, in part due to the full commercialisation of digital book production and the phenomenon of 'print on demand' making production technically and economically much more accessible. The photobook has become comfortably established as a genre, as well as being accepted into the museum collection and an ensconced place in cultural analysis and art-historical criticism.[5] Despite this, or in direct response to this kind of institutional capturing, the photobook continues to evolve. Mainly because of its versatility *as a repository for ideas,* having an organising environment that can augment the already plastic qualities of the photograph enhancing, further, their adroitness with other media forms.

The photobook, as is well known, is closely related to the photo-essay which is allied to the literary essay. This was the preferred format for Theodor W. Adorno because of its capacity to maintain the movement of a constellation of diverse concepts that defied 'the ideals of

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[4] Although text is acknowledged as having a key role in many photobooks, the more generic term 'photobook', rather than 'photo-text book', is seen as more appropriate for this study.

[5] The evidence for this is not difficult to find. Some examples are: *The Photobook Review*, a journal adjunct to *Aperture*: https://aperture.org/pbr/ (last accessed 28/09/22) and *The Photobook Journal:* https://photobookjournal.com (last accessed (01/09/22). One of the largest international photography festivals *Les Rencontres d'Arles* has had a photobook prize in place since 2016: https://www.rencontres-arles.com/en/prix-du-livre (last accessed 10/09/22) and the 'Photobook Cafe', perhaps the most elucidatory example of absorption: https://www.photobookcafe.co.uk/. Last accessed 13/09/22.

absolute certainty.'[6] The assembling of a wide gamut of contending concepts is crucial to any truth claim, in Adorno's philosophy, the essay format providing the necessary aggregate framework to support the totality of the matter at hand and the fullness of thinking it required.[7] Having a discursive arrangement, the essay ensures rationality and imagination are in chorus; where the cognitive process, for Adorno, is just as important as the outcome.[8]

If we think of the photobook as having a similar essayistic format, the viewer is procured to work through the issue at hand in a similar open manner in the anticipation other associations will surface as satellite concerns to the central theme under investigation. Insights that are returned as interactions with the photobook and the kind of interchanges Adorno sees as crucial to the essay format: 'Nothing can be interpreted out of the work without at the same time being interpreted into it.'[9] Blake Stimson's definition of the essay format is terminologically similar to Adornos, in that the reader / viewer becomes proactively involved in its constellation: 'the essay works between fact and symbol, between comprehension and intuition, between objective understanding and subjective realization in a manner that marks it as a third term, as an alternate way of experiencing and situating one's relation to the world.'[10]

For Adorno, the essay format is meant to temper the positive encounter with the object; as understanding derived purely from its concept and a would-be failure to recognise 'the subjective moment is framed, as it were, in the objective one. As a limitation imposed on the subject, it is objective itself.'[11] By subjectively approaching the object, the individual is already enmeshed in exchange ideology – the false concept – so is always turned toward it in the affirmative. To traverse this double bind, Adorno proposes a system of thought that supplants the transcendent subject with one turned toward the empirical world and to history. For Adorno, the object cannot exist without a subject, without an abstract intervention, which means the object must be historically constituted so must be, as well, open to the possibility of change (and the cornerstone of Adorno's negative dialectical

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[6] Theodor, W. Adorno, Bob Hullot-Kentor and Frederic Will, 'The Essay as Form', *New German Critique,* No. 32 (Spring - Summer, 1984), p. 161.
[7] Ibid., p. 159. Presenting the totality means: 'All its contents are presentable in such a way that they support one another that each articulates the configuration.' Ibid. p. 161.
[8] Ibid., p. 169.
[9] Ibid., p. 153.
[10] Stimson, *Pivot of the World*, p. 32. Cf. V.N. Volosinov who saw the book format as a space of verbal performance: V.N Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language,* trans. Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik (New York and London: Seminar Press, 1973), p. 95.
[11] Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', p. 180.

method).[12] By bringing the object's sedimented history into scrutiny by alternative, yet known, historical objects, phenomena and concepts, specifically those that are known by experience, in an interrogative constellation formally arranged as *Darstellung,* its veridical status can be ascertained.[13]

Darstellung is a presentational language that formally secures interpretative concepts not only so that they are composed of a 'stringency' of philosophical analysis, but an expressive provision, an agency, and where the political is most likely to manifest. *Darstellung* is a formal arrangement intended to *express* capital's effects, the subject being one of these effects. By incorporating the voice of the subject *Darstellung* becomes the formal location of a negative truth: 'Freedom follows the subject's urge to express itself. The need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth. For suffering is objectivity that weighs upon the subject; its most subjective experience, its expression, is objectively conveyed.'[14] The introduction of the subject is contingent it expresses via the object and a recognition that it had the upper hand in capitalist society and Adorno's acknowledgment the subject had been lost as a location of history. Even so, Adorno is no less preoccupied with interpreting the destiny of this lost subject.[15]

Adorno's constellation, or *Darstellung* method outlined in 'The Actuality of Philosophy' and later in the 'Constellation' section of *Negative Dialectics* is not meant to offer an undemanding interpretation of the problem of society. Instead, is a model for use in political practice to dissolve the question in the first place.[16] Meaning, in Adorno's interpretation, is the revealing of the inveterate instability of meaning as a promise of genuine meaning; that meaning is a matter of openness and this is its possibility (and meaning): 'Authentic negation generates a complex of meaning that preserves the category of meaning'.[17] Negation is, then, the refuge of meaning and truth.[18]

Forcing the concept to be evaluated against a variety of conflicting schema, the objectivity of the concept starts to unfold. The concept needs to be worked on by multiple constellations to find the correct permutation; the 'non-identical' is revealed as that which escapes, eludes or

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[12] 'The means employed in negative dialectics for the penetration of its hardened objects is possibility– the possibility of which their reality has cheated the objects and which is nonetheless visible in each one.' Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 52.
[13] Ibid., p. 163.
[14] Ibid., pp. 17-18.
[15] Ibid., p. 136.
[16] Adorno, 'The Actuality of Philosophy', p. 131.
[17] Zuidervaart*, Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, p 175.
[18] Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination,* p. 263.

is unrecognised by the exchange-principle, or that which an ossified (positivist) identity has, until now, obscured.[19] Importantly, any ideological husk which falls away during analysis should also be examined for veridical particles as reified content is, itself, 'socially necessary … is by this necessity also socially true'.[20] Vital to the functioning of Adorno's system is that any truth claim evidence is apprehended not 'as a result', rather the procedures and mechanisms in arriving at an object's conceptual veracity are reproduced as part of the truth claim.

Adorno's elliptical constellations are meant to preserve the non-identical qualities of the concept-object relation; keeping them in movement so that they resist affirmation and co-option by identical or positivist dogma. In essence, a method that does not accept 'the object of critique as valid',[21] rather unravelled society's untruth conundrum using a riddle of its own.[22] Or, as Jameson puts it, 'a movement of negation that can never reach a synthesis, a negativity that ceaselessly undermines all the available positivities until it has only its own destructive energy to promote.'[23]

What would photography look like, if it took as model Adorno's 'philosophy of disintegration',[24] and attempted to destroy the question in the first place and hold to critical account the conceptual world at every juncture? Specifically, and in line with the interests of this project, what would landscape photography look like as a practice of negation? Also, and considering the interests of this chapter, what would a photobook look like if it were modelled on the *Darstellung* schema of Adorno's negative dialectical method? In answering these questions means turning a complex philosophical model of thought into something much more rudimentary making it suitable for use in praxis, as Benjamin remarked: 'a thought must be crude to find its way into action.' Benjamin's notion of 'crude thinking', taken originally from Brecht, referred to the internal 'other' of the dialectic and the simplicity, or, better, pragmatic clarity, necessary for theoretical thinking to be enabled in praxis. A practice, or action, whose outcome is as subtle, for Benjamin, as any theory and a practical complexity that, in the end, will be returned to theoretical thinking.[25] After Brecht and

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[19] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 163.
[20] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 233.
[21] Nancy Love, 'Why Do the Sirens Sing?: Figuring the Feminine in Dialectic of Enlightenment' in *Rethinking the Frankfurt School,* p. 112.
[22] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 162-163.
[23] Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic,* p. 56.
[24] Or, a photography practice, to paraphrase Adorno, that gives itself fully over to the object.
[25] Walter Benjamin, 'Brecht's Threepenny Opera Novel' in *Understanding Brecht,* p. 81. Ibid. Also see Gerhard Richter, 'Crude Thinking Rethought: Reflections on a Brechtian Concept', ANGELAKI, *Journal of the Theoretical Humanities,* 10:3 (2005), pp. 3-13. Or Zuidervaart on returning praxis to

Benjamin, George Burchett also understands crude thinking expedient to art's political effect.[26] Certainly unlike Benjamin, Burchett has failed to recognise that crude thinking can only be a result of the complex dialectic from which it issues, as Benjamin iterates: 'crude thinking which produces dialectics as its opposite, contains it within itself, and has need of it.'[27] There is no crude dialectic without first acknowledging the necessary need for 'more dialectics' which, of course, Adorno consistently called for.

The photobook for this project has been produced using a similar essayistic approach, certainly it has not adhered to the sequential narrative associated with the traditional photo-essay format. Instead, there is a formal open-endedness, like Adorno discusses, a sometimes-ambiguous circuit of investigation that anticipates construal (by the reader). Thus, the photobook, in attaining any outcome, is given over to the audience / reader as an ongoing endeavour.[28] Even though the photobook, exists as an open condition of proof, it is an openness that, paradoxically, has a scheme, nonetheless, that ensure the content and message are kept within the confines of the context under investigation and do not lapse into arbitrariness or mere semiosis. Although is a constellation arrangement, one which contains the necessary ingredients – according to how the scheme should work as a negative dialectic, at least for Adorno – for the interrogation of the landscape in question: history, experience, the empirical and reasoned analysis (this last, although available in the introduction to the photobook and in subsequent texts that accompany the photographs, is more complete when the photobook comes together with the thesis writing, as discussed in the introduction).

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philosophy: 'What is possible can arise outside philosophy then become essential to philosophy'. Zuidervaart, *The Semblance of Subjectivity*, p. 19.

[26] Sally Stein comments crude thinking was a recurrent theme for Sekula. In a note accompanying this observation Stein includes George Burchett's account of Brecht's crude thinking (via Benjamin). See Sally Stein, introduction to Sekula's essay 'Photography Between Labour and Capital' in *Art Isn't fair: Further essays on the Traffic in Photographs,* p. 15. George Burchett's Counterpunch article on crude thinking can be found here: https://www.counterpunch.org/2018/02/20/plumpes-denken-crude-thinking/. Last accessed 19/09/23.

[27] Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht,* p. 81. See Graham Gilloch, p. 151 for more on Benjamin's relationship to Brecht's notion of crude thinking.

[28] Cf. Paul Lowe on contemporary independent photojournalism. Rather than producing a linear photo-essay, the tendency has become, in contemporary reportage, to assemble a context of testimony the audience is invited to work through, the photograph is a 'driver of uncertainty and questioning, rather than the categorical answer to the situation.' Paul Lowe, 'Triangulating Truths: Photojournalism in the Connected Age', in Fromm, *et al., Images in Conflict*, pp. 212-213. For Steve Mayes this is (documentary) photography's 'evolution from observation to understanding'. Steve Mayes, 'Truth, the First Casualty. Conflict Photography Considered as Bellwether for a Dawning Understanding of Digital Imagery as a New Medium', ibid., p. 164.

5:3 The Photobook as Correspondence

Benjamin's concept of correspondence is an adaption of Charles Baudelaire's *the correspondances,* and are devices meant to recover, figuratively, historical experience as something 'crisis-proof'.[29] In our own era, the kind of experience that can be seen to have survived the shock and rupture of capitalist relations. Hannah Arendt understands Benjamin's notion of correspondence in a more universal sense, as 'that element of the poetic which conveys cognition … between physically most remote things'[30] and a tendency to apprehend the true 'nature' of things by bringing disparate objects and events into recognition by analogous means. For Benjamin, Arendt suggests, it was not the doctrines of the philosophical or historical traditions of interpretation that interested him, rather it was the 'heuristic – methodological stimulus' when making connections between what seem like heterogeneous objects and phenomena.[31] Like, 'the correlation between a street scene, a speculation on the stock market, a poem, a thought, with the hidden line which holds them together and enables… [the recognition] … that they must all be placed in the same period.'[32]

In photographic terms, John Berger sees correspondences as a 'unity of appearances' and an effect of the interconnectedness we discover, if given the opportunity and imaginative space to do so, of events depicted in a photograph. And for the photograph that 'quotes at length', means it has some correspondence beyond what is manifest and is latent content that is activated by the memory-experience of the viewer, subsequently appearing as an 'idea' in remainder to the photograph.[33]

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[29] Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings, Vol.* 4, pp., 333-334.

[30] Arendt, Illuminations, p. 19. Habermas sees correspondences as an after-effect of a microcosmic and macrocosmic creed of similarity with nature, to which mimesis was staple, and a continuity we still search for in the contemporary milieu. Jurgen Habermas, Philip Brewster and Carl Howard Buchner, 'Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism: The Contemporaneity of Walter Benjamin', *New German Critique,* No. 17, Special Walter Benjamin Issue (Spring 1979), p. 49. Similarly, in Raymond Williams's explanation correspondences bridge the seemingly impossible discontinuity between myth and nature, history and space and aesthetics and knowledge. Williams, *Marxism and Literature,* pp.103-106. Patrizia McBride describes correspondences as characteristic of analogy and instinctually present in human behaviour and are both embodied and collective. Patrizia McBride, 'Narrative Resemblance: The Production of Truth in the Modernist Photobook of Weimar Germany', New German Critique, No. 115 (Winter 2012), p. 187.

[31] Arendt, *Illuminations*, p. 17.

[32] Ibid.

[33] John Berger, *Understanding a Photograph,* Geoff Dyer, ed. (London: Penguin Books, 2013), pp. 90-92.

Allan Sekula suggests, even under the most aggressive regimes of instrumentalisation and abstraction there is always something genuine which survives and can be reclaimed.[34] The kind of recovery of experience he, and others, had in mind for the 'picture book' project *Mining Photographs and Other Pictures 1948 – 1968*. Here is Sekula *et al* on their hopes for the project:

> what, we had in mind … was a picture book which allowed
> pictures to exercise their considerable power, to offer their
> density of meaning …. We wanted the reader to be able to
> think differently about the history of work, industry and
> everyday life, and to be able to think differently about the ways
> in which history is normally represented…. [T]his book is a
> "toolkit" for the reader.'[35]

It can be argued whether Sekula's ambition for the book has been achieved.[36] Nonetheless, his thoughts continue to be apposite regarding the difficulties involved in the retrieval of experience in photography and how the photobook can aid such a recovery.

However, Sekula's *et al* ambition for a 'picture book' could be taken further, particularly if Benjamin's correspondence concept is utilised in its full capacity to make temporal and spatial connections and for its recovery of 'crisis proof' experience. Instead of images only from the past, which comprises Sekula's *et al* book project, a picture of the present could also be integral to the presentation and a correlation between the past and present initiating a critical dialogue not unlike Benjamin's dialectical image (although, it must be said, a perspective not totally absent from Sekula's project). This is how the archive is dealt with by Julian Germain (b. 1962) in his documentary project *Steelworks: Consett, from Steel to Tortilla Chips* (1990).[37]

Consett steelworks ceased production in 1980, Germain producing his photobook about the

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[34] Sekula, *Mining Photographs and Other Pictures,* p. 251.

[35] Ibid., p. 250.

[36] Mieke Bleyen criticises Sekula's attempt to return the archive image to experience as a failure of design; the original photographs having become divorced from their original materially, for instance as commercial, press or family artefacts. Homogenised instead by the uniform formatting and general design *mis-en-scene* of the book. Mieke Bleyen, 'Mining Photography' in Nicola Setari and Hilde van Gelder. eds., *Allan Sekula: Mining Section (Bureau des Mines)* (Ghent: MER. Paper Kunsthalle, 2016), p. 68.

[37] Julian Germain, *Steelworks: Consett, from Steel to Tortilla Chips* (London: Why Not Publishing, 1990). The project is available at: https://www.amber-online.com/collection/steel-works/ including photographs that are not in the original photobook version of the project. Last accessed 11/01/2022.

closure and its aftermath ten years later. The central theme of the documentary is the impact on working-class experience as the nature of work changes. The book contains a complex narrative assembled from photographs and written material recounting working-life and the life of the community during the full productive capacity of the steelworks and the social and economic repercussions after closure. A number of voices from the community are given the opportunity to speak in the book, in both factual and expressive registers, voices that coincide with family photographs, local and national press photographs and commercial and community-based photography. A dissident kind of remembering emerges in the recalling of substantive detail – like the details Sekula describes in his *Mining Photographs* essay – imbued with struggle (Fig. 31) and community ritual; that kind of working-class ritual and experience the dominant class find so hard to comprehend (Fig. 32). It is likely to be, for some, and considering the time that has lapsed since the project was completed, a picture of the past that is no more than nostalgia for a lost collective which, in many ways, is true. Certainly, this seems to have been the case at the time of the book's original production, as can be seen here in the closing line of Martin Herron's commentary: 'A powerful sense of community, which is only felt in single industry communities, ended in September 1980 and this country won't see it's like again.'[38] There is, however, a dialectic.

There are human dimensions to do with social practice, value and meaning that endure, for Raymond Williams, although are dimensions often experienced in the negative of their absence (or sublimated according to an era's dominate regime – in our time communication technology and social media – often leaving them unfulfilled). Williams is worth quoting at length on this question, as his observations relate so pertinently to what has just been discussed above, regarding Benjamin, correspondences, Sekula's and Germain's projects:

> [R]esidual meanings and practices … are the results of earlier
> social formations, in which certain real meanings and values were
> generated. In the subsequent default of a particular phase of a
> dominant culture, there is then a reaching back to those
> meanings and values which were created in real societies in the
> past, and which still seem to have some significance because
> they represent areas of human experience, aspiration and
> achievement, which the dominant culture under-values or
> opposes, or even cannot recognise … I would say that we can
> recognize them on the basis of this proposition: that no mode of

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[38] Martin Herron, 'There's Work for them that Wants It' in Germain, *Steelworks,* p. 86.

production, and therefore no dominant society or order of society, and therefore no dominant culture, in reality exhausts the full range of human practice, human energy, human intention (this range is not the inventory of some original 'human nature' but, on the contrary, is that extraordinary range of variations, both practised and imagined, of which human beings are and have shown themselves to be capable).[39]

Fig. 32. Tommy Harris, *Consett,* before 1968, from *Julian Germain, Steelworks: Consett, Steel to Tortilla Chips* (1990). © Estate of Tommy Harris.

Fig. 33. Tommy Harris, Consett, before 1968, from Julian Germain, Steelworks: Consett, Steel to Tortilla Chips (1990). © Estate of Tommy Harris.

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[39] Raymond Williams 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory' in *Culture and Materialism,* p. 29.

Social practices that can be seen in many working-class communities even today; those traits, that have originated in long practical history, of a pragmatic and tacit nature. Albeit, it must be said, qualities now perceptible only in the margins and interstices of the spectacle and, even then, solely as a gesture or utterance of an ephemeral kind. However, for Adorno, they are aspects of social relations whose essential meaning (like Williams, in contradistinction to an ontological notion of a timeless human nature) can be objectively secured in form; if not for the present then perhaps for the future, confirming the formal redemptive faculty of the correspondences Benjamin had originally developed.[40]

Like Sekula's *et al Mining Photographs* 'picture book' project, Germain's *Steelworks* is an attempt to mobilise memory and experience from the archive, albeit a more diverse kind of 'archive' than the one used by Sekula. Unlike Sekula's project, Germain brings historical photographs to his own present-day documentary and landscape images. Where the past and present conspire to show the effects of the capitalist production of space on the lives and life of the community. Capitalist reality is compound in character, as redundant infrastructure is dismantled the new is often being planned and constructed. Even the stasis of capital, realised in fallow land, is part of this same production of space vista. Indeed, the correlation of redeveloped to redundant land is a useful, albeit anecdotal, indicator of the economic status of a region in comparison to other geographies of (uneven) development. Germain's documentary photographs, with captions that function as proxies for the (now demolished) past, show us this latter phenomenon, and not only as physical signs in the landscape (Figs. 33, 34 and 35). But the effects on people as capital re-capitalises before their eyes (Fig. 36). Germain's documentary project demonstrates the profundity involved in the destruction of one 'structure of feeling' and the objective ground on which the next is founded.

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[40] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* pp. 254-255. I have, to a degree, extrapolated Adorno's discussion to accommodate this dimension of working-class social practice and making the connection with Benjamin and correspondence.

4,000

JOBS

Fig. 34. Julian Germain, '4000 Jobs', Steel Works, 1986 – 1987, from
Julian Germain, Steelworks: Consett, Steel to Tortilla Chips (1990).
© Julian Germain.

8 MILES

OF PERIMETER FENCE

Fig. 35. Julian Germain, '8 Miles of Perimeter Fence', Steel Works,
1986 – 1987, from *Julian Germain, Steelworks: Consett, Steel to Tortilla
Chips* (1990). © Julian Germain.

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Fig. 36. Julian Germain, 'A Site, A Supermarket', Steel Works, 1986 – 1987, from *Julian Germain, Steelworks: Consett, Steel to Tortilla Chips* (1990). © Julian Germain.

Fig. 37. Julian Germain, Steel Works, 1986 – 1987, from *Julian Germain, Steelworks: Consett, Steel to Tortilla Chips* (1990). © Julian Germain.

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Williams's 'structures of feeling' concept qualifies social practice as 'dominant', 'emergent' and 'residual' as dimensions of experience that coalesce within the same time frame.[41]

The photobook presented in this project can be seen to accord with Williams' structure of feeling hermeneutic (in many ways Williams' theory is a mediation of Adorno's and Benjamin's theory of experience – the non-identical and the data of pre-history, respectively). Admittedly, the residual has almost retreated entirely from visibility in many ex-industrial regions, including the Ebbw Valley. So must come to light, in practice, in more figurative ways and to which the photobook has attempted achieve (as Williams points out, the fundament of social behaviour / relations is never totally lost to society) by 'showing' this as an absence. Especially apposite to ex-heavily industrialised regions is the loss / lack of obvious signs of community cohesion that once defined them: the social club, the pub, the workingman's club etc. including the industrial edifices, themselves, as crucial signifiers of these kinds of social relations. Thus, the project pursues presence by absence in the Adorno sense; that the loss or absence of something suddenly illuminates what it meant, in truth, in the first place.

Presence in absence is a visual strategy that also avoids the platitude and is a tendency, perhaps, when confronted with the kind of landscape being that is being represented. Better the reality of the situation, and a translation of social relations where the viewer is asked to question the very idea of sociality now, certainly its co-option into myth, the profit motive and the spectacle (also instanced throughout the photobook). Not least, the profundity of the social relations in question in the first place; often nuanced – repeatedly contradictory, even – that the truism tends to omit by its very nature. The practice equally attempts to intimate toward the (dialectical and historical) external forces that established the circumstances for particular social relations to arise in the first place. And like Williams, are the same forces that later took them away, as the same ones that have co-opted them in the present.[42]

What must now be evident, is that the project is self-conscious about playing to expectations that often orbit the kind of landscape and community being represented. The intention has been not to reproduce certain assumptions, save it subduing other issues. The text plays an important role in this, sometimes as a correspondence device, certainly in the 'Objects'

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[41] See Williams, *Marxism and Literature,* pp. 121-127. Cf. Ernst Bloch and Mark Ritter, 'Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics', *New German Critique*, No. 11 (Spring, 1977), pp. 22-28.
[42] Chapter 5 does deal with some aspects of the latter complexity to do with representability and working-class social relations.

section of the book, as do other texts / captions elsewhere. Very often imprecise, suggestive and quotidian in character, the text blends the past and present, including both sides of social relations: those that have been instrumentalised and those of real human nature. Not forgetting the constellation effect of the book – one that combines history with the present – a setting in motion, if you like, of Williams' structure of feeling hermeneutic in practice. The residual, emergent and dominant are all represented, one way or another, to a greater or lesser degree within the assemblage.

What can also be brought into correspondence is the actuality of a world that has not always looked and felt the way it does today – a phenomenon the commodity is so accomplished at yielding and photography is so adept at symbolically underwriting.[43] Photography, in a compound arrangement of past and present would, equally, be a negation of such a tranquillising panorama (to which, Germain's project would be a convincing example).[44]

5:4 The Photobook as an Open Thinking Space

As already proposed above, words are a resource often deployed in photobooks to turn the photograph toward knowledge, although they are words required to work quite differently to the connotative function assigned to them in conventional reportage or photojournalism.[45] Instead, captions, titles, or longer passages of text are employed in a way that challenge the affirmatory function of connotation by engendering a complexity – sometimes a contradictory one – that confronts the apparent inertia of meaning.[46]

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[43] In mind here is an earlier discussion in Chapter 3 and Adorno's example that the photograph, as a dialectics at a standstill, shows the ever-the-same of capitalist society. The suggestion being made, it is an image that can also be dialecticised. Perhaps, Geoffrey H. Hartman makes this point clearer: '"Saving correspondence" using the word in its Baudelairean sense: some link that keeps us attached to the world, vesting in it what sacredness – redemptive possibilities – there might be.' Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Critical Inquiry,* Vol. 25, No. 2, "Angelus Novus": Perspectives on Walter Benjamin (Winter, 1999), p. 348.

[44] John Berger suggests a strategy not unlike the construction of a constellation (indeed, of the open kind both Adorno and Benjamin asked for) so that photography can do this kind of dynamic work. In a system of correspondences that bring a manifold range of elements, including the past and present, together in a 'radial system' assembled around the photograph so it is seen 'in terms which are simultaneously personal, political, economic, dramatic, everyday and historic.' John Berger, 'Uses of Photography' in John Berger, *About Looking* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1980), pp. 62-63.

[45] '[C]onnation is to integrate man, reassure him.' Roland Barthes, 'The Photographic Message' in Roland Barthes, *Image, Music Text,* trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977) p. 31. Also see, 'Rhetoric of the Image', ibid.

[46] An image / text challenge to which Benjamin H. D. Buchloh is aware: that Brecht's (we could say Benjamin too, see below) prediction a photograph will always need a caption has been overtaken by the event. That what is needed today is a whole complex 'system' of text so that the occluded operations of capital might come to light, to which Sekula's *Fish Story* documentary is an example. Buchloh, *Fish Story,* p. 199.

The sort of application of text with image especially discernible in current reportage and documentary led photobooks, certainly those of an 'independent' category. They are usually books indifferent to what used to be the conventional separating of the photograph from attendant literature. A distinction Roland Barthes had called attention to; that each had a particular language structure and semantic outcome of their own, consequently respected either intellectually (by the reader) or by a physical / editorial distance on the page, or both.[47] Where it can be postulated, recent photobook projects have reconfigured this relationship to a point where the photograph takes part in a continuous 'literature', as there seems to be little semblance of hierarchy or differentiation between the photograph, the writing, or any other visual material for that matter. Shamoon Zamir describes the photographic image as laying a 'claim to equality with the text' and the encounter with a photobook is about 'integrating the two as an associative ensemble.'[48] This could be taken further, especially given some contemporary solutions, that the semantic limitations of each medium is taken for granted and assumes a familiarly by the audience each requires the other (in any claim to authenticity).

An example of this complexity of approach is Richard Misrach's (b. 1949) *Petrochemical America.*[49] Although, it is a sophistication of approach, as means of transparency, that would seem to have paradoxical effect weakening the intended political message, as we will see. Having a substantial landscape-based content, Misrach's project documents the petrochemical industry's impact on communities and the environment along the course of the Mississippi River as it passes through the state of Louisiana. The project combines photographs with scientific and health related data, including analysis of the continuing health ramifications for people who live in the region of the river. Mirach's book starts with a series of landscape photographs showing places that have been affected by pollution although, in most cases, it is left to the imagination of the audience as to what the affects have been on the lives of people who live there and to any environmental impact (Fig.37). The same photographs reappear later in the book, only this time they have graphics and text overlaid on them giving information about the chemicals used in their manufacture (Fig. 38). In another series, the photographs have been overlaid with chemical names and formulae. Both series of photographs are meant to illuminate the toxicity of the substances that have found their way into the community and are now so severely affecting people's health and the surrounding natural environment.

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[47] Barthes, *Image, Music, Text,* p. 16.
[48] Shamoon Zahir, '"Art Science": The North American Indian (1907–1930) as Photobook' in *The Photobook: From Talbot to Ruscha and Beyond*, p. 38.
[49] Richard Misrach, *Petrochemical America* (New York: Aperture, 2012).

Fig. 38. Richard Misrach, *New housing construction, Paulina, Louisiana, 2010*.
From the series *Petrochemical America.* © Richard Misrach.

Acknowledging it is a strategy meant to scandalise a hitherto unbeknown, for many at least,
situation, it is also to wonder whether the photographs now lose some of their persuasive
eloquence that they had originally. Because their imaginary authority – in an Adorno sense:
the possibility of their openness – would seem to have been tempered, replaced even, by an
overly explanatory surface. The infographic, particularly in the way it has been introduced to
the photograph, is inextricably allied with commercial interest which, paradoxically, the book
is attempting to criticise, a strategy, arguably, that has only sought to moderate the intended
political message.[50]

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[50] A project with a similar concern and with a similar comprehensive approach to reportage is Mathieu
Asselin's (b. 1973) *Monsanto®: A Photographic Investigation*. Unlike Misrach's project it avoids the
positivism in the material it chooses, or at least how that material is formally deployed. The project
assembles diverse historical and contemporary subject-matter, including photographs from
magazines, newspapers, company reports and protagonist accounts along with Asselin's
documentary photography. A combination of material chronicling the devastating effects of a chemical
company's products and operations. Mathieu Asselin, *Monsanto®: A Photographic Investigation*
(Dortmund: Verlag Kettler, 2017). Available at
https://issuu.com/mathieuasselinphoto/docs/ma_monsanto_fnl_english_hi-res_300517-
911pm_compre. Last accessed 12/05/2022.

Fig. 39. Richard Misrach, *New housing construction, Paulina, Louisiana* (2010) (details)*.*
From the series *Petrochemical America*. © Richard Misrach. © Scape.

The early photography / text work of Victor Burgin (b. 1941) comes to mind here, if only as antithesis to the approach taken by Misrach, in particular his series *UK 76* (1976) (Figs. 39 and 40).[51] Compared to Misrach's handling, there is a lyrical affect at work in Burgin's images, but they are no less informative or political – even considering the fact, quite clearly, it is a visual / textual strategy informed by the advertising industry. A certain openness exists between the photograph and text, although not an arbitrary or estranged one and, even considering the time that has passed since the original production, a formal strategy that has not been totally 'used up' or absorbed.[52]

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[51] *Victor Burgin: Between* (Oxford, London and New York: Basil Blackwell / Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1986). Infographics are appropriated by Burgin in a later project *The Office at Night* (1986). ISO symbols are arranged with photographs based on Edward Hopper's paintings. Ibid.
[52] Other image / text photography works, mostly landscape based, that have a similar unembellished formal approach (yet a complexity in the message) are: Wille Doherty, *Unknown Depths,* (Cardiff: Ffotogallery, Orchard Gallery and the Third Eye Centre, 1990); Roger Palmer, *Image and Text Works 1976 – 1984* at http://www.rogerpalmer.info/photopgs/phototext/trenthumber_estuary.htm last accessed 02/01/2024; John Kippin, *Nostalgia for the Future* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 1995) and Paul Seawright, *Sectarian Murder* at https://www.paulseawright.com/sectarian. Last accessed 02/01/2024.

Fig. 40. Victor Burgin, *A Promise of Tradition* (1976). Text reads: 'You mustn't be too hard on them. So many things to cope with. So much to do. They keep rabbits. They keep house. They keep up appearances. If they fail to keep their word you must excuse them. They're good people. Almost all of them. They may not see you. They may not hear you. They may not want to. It's not their fault. They mean well. They have promised to try again.' From the series *UK 76.* © Victor Burgin.

Fig. 41. Victor Burgin, *It's Only Natural* (1976). Text reads: 'IT'S ONLY NATURAL. It's not a matter of what this or that proletarian, or even the proletariat as a whole, pictures at present as its goal. It's a matter of what the proletariat is in actuality and what, in accordance with this being, it will historically be compelled to do.' From the series *UK 76.* © Victor Burgin.

Staying with the political work of text, only now in the register of naming or renaming something, T.J. Demos suggests we need to *name* the culprits of global warming; that the age of capital should not be shrouded in uncertain abstractions like, returning to a theme from an earlier chapter, the 'Anthropocene'. Instead, we should 'call violence by its name'.[53] The name Demos chooses is the 'Capitalocene'.[54] It is easy to see, with this example, how photography might participate in a similar task of 'naming' or renaming the world according

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[53] Demos, *Against the Anthropocene,* p. 60. This does relate to what Benjamin had to say about the caption: 'What we must demand from the photographer is the ability to put such a caption beneath his picture as will rescue it from the ravages of modishness and confer upon it a revolutionary use value.' Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer' in *Understanding Brecht,* trans. Anne Bostock (London: NLB, 1973), p. 95. One could say there is certain vogueishness to the term 'Anthropocene', certainly as an 'authorised' concept in the debate on climate change. See Chapter 2, note 42.
[54] Ibid., p. 54.

to the concrete, whether through the directness associated with mimesis or by the addition of a textual component.[55] In what seems like an almost effortless action of adding a caption, can have profound (political) effect. In re-routing the photograph closer to experience, the caption, or other textual addition, can be seen to be dispossessing of authority, including those who happen to control the means of communication. Naming, or renaming, is a course of action that would seem to have at least three effective scenarios. Firstly, photography becomes a source of reparation, where the unproductive and worthless, in fact any object or vista of experience dominant discourse has judged / judges as valueless, is recovered into representation by the act of naming. Secondly, a naming or renaming of something would be, in effect, a strategy of directness eliminating bourgeois euphuism, blandishment and metaphor. Thirdly, naming something would not only be a recognition of the original experience of the artifact but would also make it difficult for it to be subsumed as a false sign for something in the first place.[56]

This is not to say the language of photography and the language of literature, whether lyrical, factual or otherwise, cannot and should not be allowed the particularity of their effects (as discreet language forms in themselves). John Berger (1926 – 2017) is aware of this distinction and discusses it in relation to his photo-essay project, with Jean Mohr (1925 - 2018), *A Seventh Man* (1975) that documents the experience of a migrant worker in Europe:

> The book consists of images and words. Both should be read
> in their own terms. Only occasionally is an image used to
> illustrate the text. The photographs … say things which are

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[55] Benjamin sees the 'name' preserving an object's practical knowledge, or the experience that it had accumulated over time; the name endowing the object with 'the habitus of a lived life' and a preservation of a similarity that once existed between the name and the object, its 'context of experience'. (Benjamin, The Arcades, p. 868). The meaning of a word has a scriptural genesis (as it were), according to Benjamin, and the word of God prior to the Fall after which meaning is corrupted by subjectivation. In a secular sense, the concretised name (in a scriptural sense, the name before the Fall) cuts through the 'prattle' of the concept as a residue of 'the material community of things.' Walter Benjamin, 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man', trans. Edward Jephcott in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Vol. 1: 1913-1926,* eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (London: The Belknap Press, 2004), pp. 70-73. Benjamin, because of the 'fleeting' and often uncontextualized character of images, especially associated with reportage, sees a need to reunite them with their referent and something that could be achieved with the addition of a caption. Benjamin and Leslie, *On Photography,* p. 93.
[56] This of course, could be equally an unnaming of something by its naming according the concrete. Cf. Adorno's mimetic naming according to society rather than the metaphysical: 'The only justified communicability of philosophical language today is that which is in precise agreement with the intended things, and in the precise deployment of words according to the historical condition of truth in them.' Theodor W. Adorno, 'Theses on the Language of the Philosopher' in Donald Burke, Colin J. Campbell, Kathy Kiloh, Michael K. Palamarek, Jonathan Short, eds., *Adorno and the Need in Thinking: New Critical Essays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 37.

beyond the reach of words. The pictures in sequence make a
statement: a statement which is equal and comparable to, but
different from, that of the text. When documentary information
makes it easier to look into a picture, the picture has a caption
beside it. When such information is not immediately necessary
on the page, the caption can be found … at the end of the
book.[57]

The decision has been made with the photobook for this project, to have the majority of the
text / captions at the end of each section rather than accompanying the photograph.
Effectively, in agreement with Berger's discussion, so that the photograph does its own kind
of imaginative work. The text, at a distance, adds to this idea as data in excess of the image
– like historical information or what the image is unable to communicate, like a moral
utterance. Or, like Berger again, in other places the text is its own exegesis. Although, the
text does appear with the photographs in the last section of the book, the Objects section.
Where there is meant to be a dynamic interplay, again like Berger suggests, between image
and text. In general, though, there has been an eye on Adorno's constellation method as a
way to keep images in movement, shuttling them between the past and present – like a
Benjamin telescoping process – the image / text relation playing its part in this ferrying
process. Consequently, unlike the commercial message, they remain, in most cases, open.

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[57] John Berger and Jean Mohr, 'A Note to the Reader' in *A Seventh Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin
Books, 1975), no page numbers. Also see Berger's other photo-essay project, again with the
photographer Jean Mohr, chronicling the life of a community doctor. John Berger and Jean Mohr, *A
Fortunate Man: A Story of a Country Doctor* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2015). Of course, W.G.
Sebald would be another example of the specific rhetorical work that both the photograph and writing
are able to achieve, including the poetry that exists between them. See W.G. Sebald, *Vertigo,* trans.
Mike Hulse (London: Harvill Press, 1999); W.G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn,* trans. Mike Hulse
(London: Vintage Books, 2002) and W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz,* trans. Anthea Bell (London: Penguin,
2011). There is, however, a category of contemporary 'reportage' photobook which re-evaluates the
very nature of documentary language in even more innovative terms than the projects already
mentioned. Questioning, in a flux like manner, the relation between prose and lyricism, fact and
fiction. Resulting in a semantic / photographic complexity more akin to poetry and is the principal
characteristic for assimilation, rather than, say, the transparency associated with traditional
documentary factuality (and is to speculate, there exists a correlation between the photobook and
concrete poetry). The collaborative photobook work of Adam Broomberg (b. 1970) and Oliver
Chanarin (b. 1971), known during in their collaborative period as Broomberg and Chanarin
(http://www.broombergchanarin.com. Last assessed 14/03/2022), and their blending of reportage with
the expressionistic is an instructive example here, as is the work of Walid Raad (b. 1967)
(https://www.theatlasgroup1989.org/n38. Last accessed 7/08/2022), and his incarnation as The Atlas
Group (1989 – 2004) (https://www.walidraad.com/publications, Last accessed 14/03/2022).

In terms of the language form used, its inflection, if you like, is meant to overcome what Adorno terms the 'jargon of authenticity', or that of subjective blandishment.[58] A language form that does not exclude the subject, however, who appears in the guise of the author's voice or the experience of those he comes across in the landscape or those, generally, in history. These are sentiments, as alluded to a number of times already, devoid of the romanticised and received view of working-class experience and the industrial past, at least that has been the intention. With this in mind, they include a certain reflexiveness concerning the process of representation and is an aspiration Adorno often calls for in the artwork. Lastly, the captions, text and written commentary seek to underscore the view that no more part of the landscape, however unconnected it might appear, certainly in the part of the world that has been documented for this project, can be untethered from a history of (industrial) capital.

Returning now to the photobook format proper, although looking at it more comprehensively against the prevailing informationisation of the photograph, it can be seen in a more universal struggle for meaning. The scale and absolute volume of networked images means every individual appraisal of a photograph is exhausted by the quantity of all the others: 'the object essentially consumed by its mode of distribution'[59] and in a social media context expressly, the photograph, often devoid of context, becomes opportune for co-option. In the case of the photobook having an unhurriedness – compared to the speed required for the consumption of information –, a self-contained narrative form and a materiality whose frame of reference is committed to nothing else save finding possibility, makes it an imaginative space of a different order to the informational.[60] Indeed is an 'open thinking space',[61] one corresponding to the polis, perhaps, as a 'body of problems and solutions' and would be the

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[58] Adorno sees in certain phenomenological and existential theory, Heidegger he singles out in particular, essentially, the kind of rhetoric surrounding the commodity form.

[59] Walead Beshty, 'Against Distinction: Photography and Legendary Psychasthenia', *October,* Vol. 158 (Fall 2016), p. 87.

[60] What the book's material and narrative framework specifically achieves, here, is what Stephen Bury calls a 'persistence of vision'; the book instilling a commitment to doing and thinking, just by, for example, the turning of a page and the anticipation of a next phase of the story. Stephen Bury, *Breaking the Rules: The Printed Face of the European Avant Garde 1900-1937* (London: The British Library, 2007), p. 61. As Benjamin states: 'narrative has an amplitude that information lacks.' Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations,* p. 89. Also see Barthes on, amongst other things, narrative imagination: Roland Barthes and Lionel Duisit, 'An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative', *New Literary History*, Vol. 6, No. 2, On Narrative and Narratives (Winter, 1975), p. 271. The materiality of the book can be called attention to by bringing the photograph, or other media for that matter, into affiliation with the book's 'architecture': the front and back covers, the endpapers, the spine, the hinge and the gutter, for example. For an account of how the materialy of photography can be reintroduced as an antidote to screen-based informational forms see, Ruth Pelzer-Montada, 'Deceleration Through the Imprint: Photo/graphic interactions in contemporary art', *Photographies*, 11:1, 3-30 (2018).

[61] For Berger the 'truth is always first discovered in open space' and, what is being suggested here, is the kind of space photography is able to generate. Berger, *Understanding a Photograph*, p. 29.

kind of antagonism the photobook is able to stage and mediate (especially when considering what has been discussed, in a formal sense, so far in this chapter).[62]

As a supplement to dominant informational forms,[63] the photobook provides a stable place for social and political memory to cohere and, thinking photography in the utopian and from a collective perspective, an enduring location where an 'alternate future' might be debated. As far as this can only be the case by acknowledging photography's cognising potential and social ontological dimension intrinsic to its (reproducible) form. Where, it could be argued, Berger's following comments remain relevant even when considering the digital realm (certainly for those who wish to pursue such a project, not least in a community art setting):

> The task of an alternate photography is to incorporate
> photography into social and political memory, instead of using it
> as substitute which encourages the atrophy of such memory.

> The task will determine both the kinds of pictures taken and the
> way they are used. There can of course be no formulae, no
> prescribed practice. Yet in recognising how photography has
> come to be by capitalism, we can define at least some of the
> principles of an alternative practice.

> For the photographer this means thinking of her or himself not
> so much as a reporter to the rest of the world but, rather, as a
> recorder for those involved in the events photographed. The
> distinction is crucial.[64]

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[62] Roland Barthes, 'Photography and Electoral Appeal' in Roland Barthes, *Mythologies,* trans. Annette Lavers (London: Paladin / Grafton, 1989), p. 98. In his commentary on political photography, specifically the political campaign portrait, Barthes describes it as the kind of photograph that evacuates the problem / solution dialectic intrinsic to the political body. The suggestion being made here, is the photobook can aid in restoring this antagonism and the means for their mediation. Ariella Azoulay's interpretation of the political is useful here: 'Contrary to the presupposition that the 'political' is a trait of a certain image and absent from another, I say that the political is but a space of human relations exposed to each other in public, and that photography is one of the realizations of this space.' Ariella Azoulay, 'Getting Rid of the Distinction between the Aesthetic and the Political', *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 27 (7- 8, 2010), p. 251.
[63] It is worth emphasising, this discussion should not be mistaken for a conservative point of view on the photobook. The photobook is proposed as an adjunct to knowledge, acknowledging screen-based information systems are the dominate means to which, in a universal sense at least, there is not an outside.
[64] John Berger, 'The Uses of Photography', p. 58.

There is also a versatility in terms of the location where the photobook is presented or viewed. This could be a gallery setting just as easily as it could be a local setting like a library or community centre. A format that could easily be part of a physical and digital archive collection at a museum, for example, giving it longevity not afforded by the gallery, or the internet for that matter. If the photobook has been digitally authored, the photographs can easily be 'drawn down' from and alternatively installed as prints in a gallery or in an internet-based exhibition setting or reformatted as a pdf – the whole book or individual images – for distribution on social media, as easily as it could be turned into a blog or website, put in a post box, delivered by hand, or given away at an event.

The pressing point is, the photobook allows for the control and possession of production[65] despite, or against, those who historically have had jurisdiction – although this is only part of the issue. For Benjamin, to have control of production is to have a pedagogical inclination toward other cultural producers with similar desires in addition to any awareness raising faculty.[66] What Benjamin has in mind, here, is not merely a model of production, but a model of co-operation; collectively *is* the means of production able to grow by informing others, and that tendency, commitment, is not merely a personal inclination, rather is a matter for dissemination too.[67] The photobook, then, could be a repository as well as a product of this kind of collaborative work which, in turn, suggests the community-based possibilities for a practice of cognitive mapping, especially given photography's – like printmaking and bookmaking – long association with the community arts. Recognising this is a proposal that deserves considerable thought and debate. The community art aspect of cognitive mapping is underdeveloped, if not absent, in Jameson's thought, although the pedagogic is consistently present:

> Left cultural producers and theorists … have often by reaction
> allowed themselves to be unduly intimidated by the repudiation,
> in bourgeois aesthetics and most notably in high modernism, of
> one of the age-old functions of art – the pedagogical and the
> didactic. The teaching function of art was, however, or was
> always stressed in classical times … The cultural model I …

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[65] For Benjamin the division of labour hindered the holistic potential of a combined technical and cultural force able to instigate change. He proposes how this might be different, for example that writers become photographers and photographers take-up the word. I ponder, after Benjamin, what photography might look like in the hands of an economist asked to make photographs from an economist's world-view.

[66] Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht,* p. 98.

[67] Ibid.

propose similarly foregrounds the cognitive and pedagogical dimensions of political art and culture.[68]

The pedagogic function of art in relation to the photobook, not only applies to it having a collective focus, as important as this is, is equally relevant to the practicalities of production, and not necessarily in a 'how to' sense of the didactic. It is the understanding that issues from making choices and making work, independent decisions that must be made in the face of instrumentalised forms of experience (central to any consciousness of possibility). Including, the place and status of the producer in the production process.[69]

To bring this chapter to end, then, indeed the thesis, photography as cognitive mapping, proposed as a photobook in this research project, is an advocation that aims to re-address photography as a mode of knowledge and understanding and not only a means of channelling affects, as Steve Edwards observes: 'The sublime mode has a fashionable presence in art and theory …. If language or representation … are placed in question … it is not to turn away from cognition and the project of totalization, but to reach beyond the presently saturated state of capitalist consciousness to new social forms of social action and experience.'[70]

Photography, if practiced self-consciously, discursively and dialectically is a mode of expression with illimitable potential for meaning requisite to possibility and not a practice only at the behest of power and the spectacle, as some criticism would have it. Cognitive mapping provides, as method, the critical constellation schema for the past and present to coalesce and necessary for any material pedagogy; the landscape provides a readily accessible source of everyday images for political activation and the photobook is the armature of organisation, distribution and focus for any collective activity.

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[68] Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,* p. 50. The relationship of the artwork to pedagogy Jameson sees as often ignored, tabooed even: '"To teach, to move, to delight": of these traditional formulations of the uses of the work of art, the first has virtually been eclipsed from contemporary criticism and theory. Yet the pedagogical function of a work of art seems in various forms to have been an inescapable parameter of any conceivable Marxist aesthetic'. Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, pp. 347-348. For Adorno, creativity and cognition, production and reflection were inextricably allied and central to the dialectical correspondence between subject and object. That knowledge, political praxis and art were the foundation of all human activities: 'In this sense, both philosophy and art [have] a moral-pedagogic function, in the service of politics not as manipulative propaganda, but rather as a teaching by example. In comparison, the positivist, "scientific" notion of social engineering.' Buck-Morss, *The Origins of Negative Dialectics*, pp. 123-124.
[69] Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, pp. 101 and 103.
[70] Steve Edwards, *Martha Rosler: The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems* (London: Afterall Books, 2012), p. 112.

Conclusion and Closing Thoughts

The ruins of the garden festival at Ebbw Vale, now 30 years since it closed, manifestly impinge on the remains of heavy industry; a history of industrial work and community the festival had had the intention to ideologically foreclose. Overrun gardens and flowerbeds, remains of pavilions and attractions, dilapidated sculptures, overgrown steps, paths and weed infested water features surround the Festival Park Retail Outlet, abandoned two years ago and for let ever since. An assemblage of ruined dream-symbols, the garden festival site is an emblematic 'natural history' of neo-liberal capital. If there exists, today, a place that exemplifies Benjamin's idea of the past's signification reappearing in the present as allegory, then the garden festival site at Ebbw Vale would have to be considered.[1]

Chapter 1 suggests history is co-opted category in the garden festival programme. Exploited as 'heritage' (Section 1:2) in events and exhibitions as part of a more extensive ideological strategy designed to finally erase what remained of the collective and political experience of work and community. The festivals' modulated working-class history in a way that it seemed expendable, and that progress was merely taking its 'natural' course. Only for that same history to re-emerge in nostalgic and 'worthy' images of a simpler way of life in the festivals' 'visitor experiences'. Framed against, certainly at Garden Festival Wales in 1992, now a largely fragmented working-class society – since the demise of widespread industry and manufacturing – they must have seemed like images of an almost comforting kind.

Nature was also recuperated, the garden festival at Ebbw Vale was one of the first events in the UK where businesses and industries were promoted according to a 'green' agenda But as Adorno made clear, capital enlists nature as alibi, illustrated by the constructed notion of nature as 'natural beauty'. A conception of nature strategically deployed in 'post-industrial' rhetoric at the time; a pretext shrouding what was otherwise the initiation of new forms of value production and the acute economic and social depravations ex-industrial regions were suffering. An affirmatory apprehension of nature as 'natural beauty' that has only proliferated. For instance, the public murals now so common-place in many ex-industrialised regions, whose idealised and soporific message the prevailing order like to patronise.

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[1] History's signification returning in the present as allegory is Benjamin's central hypothesis in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama.*

A cognitive map of Jamesonian kind would, in contrast, recognise the landscape as a 'political unconscious' (Section 1:3), where the social struggles of the past have been ensnared and await figurative extrication. The landscape if thought of in this way is a place of real stories about the past and is to understand Jameson's political unconscious method is based on a class political view of the world. Which means the landscape, as a construct of human practice, must be read against a similar register of historical struggle.

Class and the machinations of capitalism are, for Allan Sekula, key to for examination of reality; that the domination of the subject by class interest, in the pursuit of accumulation, must foreground any documentary enquiry. An approach cogently demonstrated in his documentary *Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes* that scrutinises the winding-down of the nickel mining industry of North-East Canada chronicling a landscape remarkably similar to the upper Ebbw Valley.

Sekula's documentary is, foremostly, an analysis of uneven geographies – to which capitalist enterprise, power and money depend. Sometimes these are, certainly structurally, capitalist relations of production almost impossible to empirically 'show'. Sekula, instead, mobilises motifs and locations that are symptomatic of power and political economy which he then compares to the reality of where surplus value is materially generated. Sekula endeavours to show the other side of work too, including aspects of everyday life that continue despite the posturing of power and the instrumentality involved in the production of profit. Although, inevitably, are spaces and activities crossed or encroached upon by the objective character of exchange society. Indeed, he shows aspects of social relations that are conspicuously incorporated by the commodity spectacle.

What else is interesting about Sekula's *Geography Lesson*, if not all his projects, is not only the diversity and arrangement of documentary imagery and other devices he employs, like captions and longer expositions of writing, it is how he enables photography as a self-conscious practice. One that challenges the assumption photography, or documentary practice in general, is not, in some way, implicated or co-opted into the same capitalist instrumentality – Sekula including indications in his documentaries that involve photography in capitalist society's brute force.

It has been proposed that *Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes* is an exemplification of the application of Jameson's cognitive mapping concept. As it demonstrates not only photography's referential capacity to show the singular quality of everyday experience (as a required political content for any cognitive map), but photography's aesthetic capability to

organise concrete visual data into narrative forms and other assembled solutions. In putting a documentary together in this way, the imagination is invited to work alongside the rational and observational. A particular formal approach to photography Sekula called a 'montage of realism'. A necessary discursiveness, in Jameson's view, when considering a capitalist form whose reality is often obscure, clandestine and paradoxical.

Chapter 2 recounts first Jameson's proposals for a practice of cognitive mapping (Section 2:2) an aesthetic mode of making connections in such a way we can find something out about the operations of (global) capital. Although, it is stressed, the final presentation is unlikely to provide a synthesis or any kind of easy answer. Cognitive mapping necessary political practice for Jameson, even though the old social structures of the modern age have been dismantled by the neoliberal agenda, it is meant to function as a visual scheme in a political consciousness. Certainly, for Jameson failure is likely to be the upshot for any practice of cognitive mapping that sets out to represent the symptoms of a globalised capital. However, Jameson proposes there is an integral truth to the endeavour itself and that the 'failure' only seeks to call attention to capital's unlimited rule over experience.

Jameson doubts the validity of a diagrammatic or cartographic (Section 2:3), because it is already an aesthetic central to the organisation of capitalist interest, notwithstanding its fetishized status for many. Instead, he suggests an expressive treatment of the 'map', a figurative and poetic pursuit having the empirical world central as a source.

The research project sees the surface of the land registering discernibly capital's effects. Sometimes, it is just enough that this information is gleaned from the landscape then solely re-duplicated in the resulting photograph. Other times, a more figurative strategy is appropriate, so that the landscape appears as other than what it purports to be. The kind of figurability that serves to bring to light, what some have called, the immaterial activity of capital, including its ideological apparatus. A fluent and figural photography, in realist mode, allows a materiality – the 'experience' – of the landscape to emerge that a diagrammatic or purely cartographic resolution is less likely to capture. With the expressive and figurative, what is lost or absent in the landscape can equally emerge in the negative, social relations, for example, where it is the imagination that helps bring them into visibility. Particularly pertinent when considering the landscape being exemplified in this project, as blend of the historical and the still active community.

To be aware of social history in the landscape, more specifically to register it in some way in representation also overcomes an otherwise tendency toward affect and the impressionistic.

The sublime illustrates this propensity, an often-common retreat of the photographer, but could equally be the response of an audience or a mode of analysis adopted by those in the business of criticism, when faced with capital's objective practice of heterogeneity and obfuscation. A challenge to the impressionistic that would also be aware of capitalist interest and its harnessing of the sublime as a means of mystification.

An accusation of spiritualisation especially true when considering landscape photography that has adopted the panoramic overview as its perspective of choice. Described in the chapter as the sovereign view, it is a perspective chosen by the photographer that tends to resolve the landscape into a formal system of symbols. There is, however, another side to this argument, that it is the kind of distance on the land that can show, in a most vivid way, the expanse of the capitalist production of space, its objective effects on communities and the nature of the land. Including, the transientness of industry and enterprise, where place and space literally changes shape according to the movement of capital.

Pleasure is form, as far as this study is concerned, is an essential part of the practice of cognitive mapping (Section 2:4). Photography's possess a particular kind of realism that is both an indexical registering of the empirical world and where this same world can be formally and figuratively handled. Or how, according to Jameson after Brecht, a reunification of science with art or knowledge with pleasure becomes possible. That there is also an inherent mediateness to form and the aesthetic that creates a space in which to imagine and think, unlike the controlled and fixed, dogmatic, sphere of the spectacle.

The Chapter concludes by underlining that the everyday and the quotidian is where the political is most likely to arise – that the exotic and sensational would only seem to evacuate.

In Chapter 3, the landscape as it looks today, post heavy industry, is described (Section 3:2) as one which has been inscribed, multivalently, by a history of industrial activity and that each subsequent era leaves its identifiable marker on the land. The geology of the landscape is just as much part of this picture and determines, profoundly, how industrial enterprise, over many generations, has colonised the Ebbw Valley. All around the garden festival site and hinterland, besides those relics that are left after the festival event 30 years ago, can be found a plethora of objects that relate to this complex history of industry. Although reified and obscure as to their original purpose or experience they can, nevertheless, be given the opportunity to speak. Not only artifacts, either. But also, the land and the copious waste produced by industry permeate with dead labour that continues to have a life, if you like, in the giving-up its surplus value as the foundation upon which new

forms of value production have / or are being built. This, clearly, suggests the central concern for this research project: how to make history critically effective. Specifically, how the cognitive map's scheme can be organised so that history materialises as a politics of redemption, one able to rescue the suppressed and oppressed of history as a cause relevant to the present time (and the future, for that matter). Benjamin's dialectical image organon (Section 3:3) is proposed as the means to achieve this objective, a form of speculatively arranging the past into a constellation of imagery, concepts and objects that are set-in motion, in representation, toward the present to produce a truth of a revelatory kind by cutting violently into the sanctity of progress (the present).

The garden festival site at Ebbw Vale has been advanced as a 'dialectics at standstill' with little formalising needed other than for its documentation. A monad like repository, it becomes the locus around which the practical aspects of the research project have been convened. Like Benjamin's Arcades Project, the festival site has furnished a particular history of capital able to open other temporal and spatial vistas of experience far beyond its immediate borders.

The cognitive map, if thought of as a dialectical image, sends history toward the present in such a way it destabilises the apparent equilibrium of history as progress. By colliding a fore and after history of the object or phenomenon, the idea of progress becomes denuded in a flash of actuality, the past now exposes the reality of the present as no more than the ever-the-same of capitalist interest. In properly adhering to Benjamin's dialectical image method, the reality of progress must be understood and preserved as inescapable; progress under capital *is* history and cannot be arrested. Any redemption is fleeting and imagistic and no more than a momentary interruption: a dialectics at a standstill. Only by the end of history and the return of the Messiah, in Benjamin's hermeneutic, will progress end.

What also comes into view, in the dialectal image, is the past as a horizon of the subject and the lost, missed and little understood possibilities at the time and is a redemptive content from which political ends can be fashioned. Understanding, if such crucial decisions about the future existed in the past then they are the same decisions that must also exist for us in the present. In the unswerving reality of history, however, they have little chance of changing the trajectory of progress and remain the intrinsic utopian wish of the dialectical image.

Landscape photography, as a dialectical image, would be a substantive presentation of historical experience so that it gives off a genuine or, in Benjamin's parlance, a secular aura (Section 3:4). One that challenges, replaces, even, inauthentic aura like, for instance, the

kind on display at the garden festival events. By depriving the object, concept, phenomenon of artifice the real of its historical traces become much more evident: the signs of labour, the scars of production – the general *mise-en-scene* of its 'natural history' (understanding 'object' in the universal sense of, for example, artefact, fragment or location). Re-presented like in this unprocessed state authentic experience becomes more obtainable and so, too, the chance of political animation. Yet, there is an otherness – a distance – as well, because we can never truly know the experience of those of the past and a lack that we attempt to make-up for with the imagination. Photography, because of its aesthetic facility, can help maintain this imaginative correspondence between past and present in combinations of photographs and with other media like text, for example. Informed by Benjamin's dialectical image concept, the practice has been a piecing together of the experiences of the past often from the disclaimed and disavowed, all that is unhampered by today's spectacle, to be found in the landscape, thence transmitted toward the present in a constellation arrangement of photographs and text.

Chapter 4 suggests there is a naturalness, a certain pattern of appearance shared by many landscapes post their heavy industry past (Section 4:2). A vista often mistaken for first nature and so precludes questions concerning history. Rather, the landscape is handled in this study as an intertwining of nature and history each defining the other, the practice has adopted appropriate representational strategies, as such, to show this at work. There is an ideological side to this, the garden festival events naturalising industrial history according to a particular agenda and historicising nature to suit the same. The garden festival location, and post-industry environs, would seem to be, at every turn, this kind of natural-history vista.

The upshot, a direct and uncontrived experience of nature is impossible, as far as Adorno is concerned. To express nature through 'nature poetry' is mistaken, although this does not mean poetry cannot have a place in the expressive gesture. A poetic mediation of nature with instrumental forces is, perhaps, the best possible path to a veracious and critical expression of both. In practice a delicate interleaving of nature and history, the alienated and instrument world, so that we are moved to see nature closer in essence, at least its fragility (in human hands). The same for the reality of human nature, of the real social relations bound-up in the historical object awaiting extrication. Having a mimetic relation to the landscape can aid this process of drawing out real experience. The camera works in concert with the body in this mimetic gesture toward the landscape, in the Adorno sense of having a 'comportment' to it and an action of recognition that supplants the imperialism of the sign. Photography, in this kinship arrangement with the landscape, evacuates the instrumental so that the experience of history is given a chance to speak.

Nevertheless, Adorno warns the expressive is vulnerable to subjectivist appropriation and conventions for pain and suffering. In avoiding this latter, the expressive act should be one aware of societal reality, otherwise a vacant signifier will result. Furthermore, the expressive is collective; the subject expresses in relation to other subjects who have similar wants and similarly suffer the vagaries of society. No suffering is, in the end, unique. The expressive is for and of others, entailing that any one form of expression, in an Adornoian sense, embodies all the others. That any act of expression utters the objective character of society; a society that reduces the individual to a base limit of hardship, experienced consciously and, or unconsciously.[2] Although it seems paradoxical, to recover experience mimetically – to recognise it – means having to formulate it in some way (Section 4:3). Hence, for both Adorno and Benjamin the importance of assemblage in acquiring and securing the truth content of experience.

Montage for Adorno is one of these devices, although is less about a complex assembling, certainly something that is not over-aestheticised or based on technique. An assembled form, in addition, that would repudiate the mimetic so favoured by commercial interest. That even montage can be its own self-criticism, as part of wider censure of certain conventions like photographs at monolithic scale that emerged in landscape photography particularly associated with a controlled and aloof kind of aesthetic. Allan Sekula had similar thoughts, seemingly when he labelled his documentary practice a 'montage of realism', that can be seen to have adopted a similar delicate constructed approach to practice including similar criticisms as to those Adorno has in mind.

Chapter 5 proposes the photobook offers a formal space that is especially inclined to the already pliable qualities of photography as an aesthetic and reproducible medium (Section 5:2). Suggesting, further, the photobook is a space where construction can take place of a most diverse kind, conducive to a practice of making connections. Integral to this, the photobook format allows photographs to be arranged more as an *idea* or a constellation of thinking different from the narrative ordering associated with the traditional photo-essay. The photobook has been understood not as a self-contained entity, instead more like Adorno's essayistic approach to theoretical writing; that there is an expectation the audience contribute their own experience, thus animating the book's content further, even in directions not even predicted by the author. Of course, conveying concepts and forms from theory and philosophy to the sphere of art practice would be an anathema for some. But not Benjamin,

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[2] Adorno, *Aesthetics,* p. 71.

who saw Brecht's notion of 'crude thinking' as a mode of managing the dialectic in simplified form, thus allowing theoretical thought to be exploited by the pragmatic space of artistic production. Artists and photographers have long collaborated with theoretical models in this way, choosing and then adapting philosophical concepts and their forms so that they are appropriate for practice, knowing full well practice that will, in the end, profit theoretical thinking. A notion of praxis Adorno and Horkheimer had already advanced as fertile and necessary: 'Practice is a rationally led activity; that leads back to theory. Practice is driven into theory by its own laws.'[3] And on the other side of the theory / praxis coin: 'Theory is theory in the authentic sense only where it serves practice …. Theory that wishes to be sufficient unto itself is bad theory.'[4]

Constellation and correspondence devices (Section 5:3), along with other formal apparatuses associated with the dialectical image and the philosophical essay have been appropriated as useful ways to think about the organising principle of a photobook. Constellations are, principally, what Adorno's essay format consists, indeed his negative dialectical method, keeping concepts and analysis in dynamic tension, including the result which is presented as *Darstellung*. A constellation of thinking submitted as an idea rather than as an answer or other kind of synthesis.

Correspondences are those kinds of figurative devices, in a true Benjamin sense, that register the experiences of pre-history, social relations and rituals as ones which are non-identical or anthropological in nature, that might equate or correspond with a moment or event in the present. They also have a more generic purpose, to relate what might seem disparate scenes, situations or experiences across space and time, so they are revealed to be, in fact, objectively equivalent. Raymond Williams suggests, real human behaviour, the collective impetus, never fully disappears even under the harshest of technological regimes and ideology. The landscape at Ebbw Vale has been encountered as a place opportune with the correspondences, in the form of traces and other vague signs that connect history to the present.

An indispensable tool for making connections, or making disconnections for that matter, is text (Section 5:4). A number of image / text strategies have been discussed, each having a different semantic outcome. Sometimes the text, in relation to the photograph, challenges meaning, other times a new meaning comes to fruition, and with other associations the

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[3] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Toward a New Manifesto*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London and New York: Verso, 2011), p. 94.
[4] Ibid., p. 76.

supposed fixedness of meaning, itself, is put in question. Considering the variety of semantic and formal sophistication available to image and text practice, it is not to forget the humble caption, or brief account, as a simplicity of arrangement that can produce profound effect questioning the image / text solutions of more sophisticated approaches (in that they tend to mirror commercial forms of visuality, tempering the political message). Affiliating the photograph with text can be seen as an act of naming or renaming the object in question. By a simple textual intervention, the object can be disengaged from the conventional view. In a more universal appraisal of this action, is a usurpation commensurate to the redistribution of meaning. The text in the photobook has also been central to recalling experience and social relations, acting very much like a correspondence to the past and to realise what is absent in the present.

Like other reproducible media, the photobook, especially in its equivalent the 'artist book', has had a long activist history in the community arts recalling a pedagogy once associated with this sphere of practice. The photobook – in an independent form at least – as the container for a cognitive map, could engender a similar collective impetus or at least serve a pedagogical function, in the Benjamin sense of being model of production for others.

Now in a more general sense, the research project has identified categories and concepts it believes are constructive for reaffirming social landscape photography as a political practice. For example: negation, imagination, experience, knowledge, expression, collectivity, totality and the dialectic. Not that they are missing from social landscape practice *per se,* the intention has been to consolidate them and, most importantly, to qualify them politically. At the outset, cognitive mapping was seen as the most suitable mode for corralling these kinds of interests because, certainly in Jameson's elucidation, it proposes a method of practice *openly* engendering the political.

Whether the practice component of the research has demonstrated the theoretical thesis is open to question. From the outset the intention has not been to illustrate the theory, as such. Although, it has been profoundly influenced by its findings, producing new formal directions as well as other fields of inquiry along the way. Just as the theory has responded to the practice i.e., the practice producing content that had not been envisioned at the outset, that then had to be theoretically accounted for later.

There is an unpredictability involved in aesthetic practice and how it brings the world to understanding. As an illustration, there have been connections, and other correlations, between objects, spaces and times that have only 'emerged' during the making of the

practice. Ones that were unforeseen at the outset of the project often usurping the original line of enquiry. Of course, the aesthetic is directly linked to matters of the imagination (of the artist and the audience) which means the artwork will, more often than not, produce cognitive material in remainder to what has been set out, rationally, beforehand.[5] Indeed, as discussed a number of times throughout the theoretical thesis, the imagination, as a distinct function of art and the aesthetic, is central to cognitive mapping as a consciousness-raising practice precisely because it antidotes received (positivist) forms of knowing the world.

Returning to the success or failure of the practice. Rather than seeing it quite so dichotomously, it would be more useful if the practice were seen more as a *model* for other practitioners and fields of practice to consider, with the expectation they surpassed it as a model. It is only by considering the absolute principle of capital can anything truly meaningful arise (and, as we have seen, this is often by negative inflection). As Deborah Cook says, after Adorno, we 'must attempt to "think the totality in its untruth," [prove ourselves] a match "for the power of regression" by recognizing this power … and reaching a thorough understanding of it. What must precede radical change is therefore the enlightened, self-critical spirit of reason.'[6] No more illustrative of the ambitiousness of photography as cognitive mapping, as a rational scheme for representing the problem at hand. Where representability is key, for Jameson, to ascertaining knowledge of a society constructed by the always absent phenomenon of global capitalism. For some this is a task just too formidable, demoralising even. For others, it is completely futile. For some, though, it is a problem that needs urgent attention and is a turning toward the problem of capital rather than a turning away – as a turning inward.

And so, to closing thoughts. The project is my own cognitive mapping interpretation of the landscape of the Ebbw Valley, the garden festival site and territory. One informed by the community there, past and present, and my own experience of the landscape and community past and present. It is a project, in the foremost sense, of consciousness-raising, certainly in the tradition of politically engaged photography / art. It hopes, as a project, for a broad audience including, of course, the community of Ebbw Vale. Because, in the end, it is

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[5] To which this observation does contain some sympathy with Sekula's opinion and the difficulty of working intensely in both theory and practice in the (perhaps conceited) hope there will be some kind of reconciliation: 'If you are vain and stupid enough to style yourself as both an artist and a critical historian of art, as both [Jeff] Wall and I apparently are, you had best follow each path to its own separate conclusions and not expect the one enterprise to justify the other. In fact, you best anticipate the likelihood that one role might well assassinate the other.' Allan Sekula in Charles Guerra, 'Found Paintings, Disassembled Movies, World Images: Allan Sekula Speaks with Charles Guerra', *Grey Room* 55 (Spring, 2014), p. 136.

[6] Cook, *Adorno, Habermas and the Search for a Rational Society*, p. 155.

a story about a landscape – a passed over landscape, in truth – I believe should be told far and wide. As the macro issues it grapples with capital, nature, power and class, have since the start of the project – 10 years ago, now – only become starker, existential, even.

With this in mind, cognitive mapping has been approached and discussed *as both means and ends.* As a means, the project can be seen as a template, as already discussed, for others, not necessarily to emulate, but a place to start from – whether individual or collective. The project, from the start, did not have in mind a particular practice context whether the individual 'professional' artist / photographer or a community-based photographer / artist or a collective. Although, it has been concluded, if cognitive mapping is to realise, fully, its political potential, to have its greatest consciousness-raising effect as a scheme, it needs to be given to a movement; to be put in community and collective hands.

This would also mean giving over as well, I believe, the particular philosophy behind the cognitive map formularised in the thesis (recognising there would need to be adopted an appropriate pedological means to do this, which is a discussion beyond the scope of this research project). What is crucial here, is that the theorical analysis, in some way, accompanies – and this would be according to Adorno's negative dialectical scheme – the other knowledge producing components: experience, the empirical and history fundamental to the scheme of a cognitive map. The theoretical discussion, philosophical argumentation, rational analysis – whatever you wish to call it – is meant to question the subjective constituent of the utterance, what Adorno describes as the objective spirit of capital that has infected us all. The example Jameson gives, is the kind of opinion that descends into conspiracy theory whenever the matter of (global) capital or politics is raised. The theory component encourages a critical self-consciousness, a reflexiveness that questions the hegemonized view, the received, the normative, a false consciousness – again, whatever you wish to call it. Sometimes deeply ingrained in the scope of many and not only those who are in the business of documenting working-class communities – including the author, by his own admission, is not / has not been immune – but also members of the community themselves. A pivotal labour of the cognitive map would be the taking to task of the conventionalised view (the function of which is no more than alibi for the presiding class or for the purpose of mystification) and to draw attention to that which is untrammelled.

The other crucial function for the theory / rational analysis would be to re-enforce to the artist, photographer, the community, or anyone with responsibility for the production of the cognitive map that they give themselves fully over to the object, to use Adorno's terminology. To see the world from the objective perspective of capitalist interest, the motor of history and

social progress. And also, from that other objective outlook: the perspective of nature – more precisely from the perspective of their dialectical and mythological interweaving as a natural-history of capital. Only in this way, in comparison, do we stand a chance of recognising those fleeting situations in the everyday, in nature and in history as genuinely non-identical (to the spectacle / capitalist interest).

But what if the cognitive map were to be given over to the community, where or in what community context could it be taken-up? I can only speak in speculative, general and not in authoritative terms about how cognitive mapping might contribute to community action / community awareness in the Ebbw Valley, especially the particular community facilities, activities and other opportunities that exist in the region. Even so, what has become apparent to me during the considerable time spent researching the project are the number of local history societies that operate throughout the region. Although, there has been no in person contact, I have benefited from their published knowledge and research as historical information often missing or underrepresented in 'official' institutions. I wonder what they might think about local history channelled in a more activist fashion, and what they would think about Benjamin's notion of telescoping history through the present and if, as a methodology, they would be interested in following through with it themselves. Such societies would seem to be the natural setting for Benjamin's history as philosophy hermeneutic, close as they are to the community where the history was originally made. The kind of history out of scope, very often, for authorised institutions and what they see as worthy of authentication.

As stated at the end of Chapter 5, the major contribution to the community that this project can make in the short term is to get the photobook lodged, as a donation, at a local archive, Gwent Archives, for instance, along with the substantial photographic archive which it has been drawn from. The final book presentation has been selected from an initial circa 13000 photographs, edited down to around 2000 photographs and finally the 750 images of which the photographs for the photobook were chosen. Images which have been catalogued / meta-tagged according to date, location and status i.e., the relation each particular photograph has to the garden festival site at Ebbw Vale and the upper Ebbw Valley. A record that represents a comprehensive picture of the Ebbw Valley landscape, and by association other ex-industrialised regions of the UK, at our current interregnum.

Turning to direct engagement with the community. Ebbw Vale does have a community centre which organises a vibrant culture of events particularly around the history and community of Ebbw Vale, including an exhibition space. It would seem to be the obvious

place for the community to engage with a project of cognitive mapping. However, the events I have seen taking place there, so far, have had very little, if any, activist ambition, certainly there has been no political dimension to them (which is no reason not to approach them, of course). In many ways, this calls attention to precisely what has been inferred, although sometimes directly, too, throughout the thesis, that the affirmatory, the individualistic and celebratory are the ascendent means of agency promoted by many community-based projects. To my knowledge, at least, as it was not one of the original objectives the research was focussed on, there does not seem to exist what might be termed an activist community in Ebbw Vale, at least in any obvious organised sense. So, any introduction of cognitive mapping as a community practice would have to be started, as far as I can see, from scratch without relying on already existing assistance / context. Particularly ironic when considering Ebbw Vale, and the Ebbw Valley generally, was the epicentre of chartist radicalism in the UK in the middle of the 19th century. A militant consciousness that continued into the mid 1980s and beyond, even. However, we can take inspiration from this time of history. Printed ephemera, as is well known, was a significant means of public agitation during worker and other collective uprisings at the outset of industrialism and right through, certainly, to the miners' strike of 1984/85. No more so than the pamphlet and the poster. What better way to encourage a hands-on collective approach to cognitive mapping in the community? That even in the age of absolute digital data, 'traditional' printed media still has the capacity to stand out as an *artifact*. Something worth (literally) holding on to. Cheap and easy to produce and why not in a collective environment of photographers, artists and writers? Collective in the sense of the potential Benjamin attributes to this type of endeavour: a mode of production in its own right. Indeed, would be a significant part of any message.

George Orwell was not only a prolific writer of pamphlets; he was also a great collector and aficionado of the form. Here he is talking about its political relevance in 1943 – with little revision needed regarding today's political climate: 'The pamphlet ought to be the literary form of an age like our own. We live in a time when political passions run high, channels of free expression are dwindling, and organised lying exists on a scale never before known. For plugging the holes in history the pamphlet is the ideal form.'[7] An information form that also suggests, by its very nature, the commons and social interchange:

> 'Notwithstanding [the pamphlet's] commercial and contestatory
> basis, they assisted in creating informed critical debate about

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[7] George Orwell and the Art of Writing Author(s): Jeffrey Meyers
Source: The Kenyon Review, Autumn, 2005, New Series, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Autumn, 2005), pp. 92-114

news, politics and culture. Put another way, pamphlets became
a foundation of the influential moral and political communities
that constitute a "public sphere" of popular opinion. … a mode
of expression and a means of influencing the public.'[8]

In an Adorno sense, we could say this is an example of form as content. It would be interesting to see how the pamphlet might participate in the kind of connecting aesthetic cognitive mapping is interested to achieve. Although, as just discussed, purely as an artifact it has something say.

It is common knowledge the political poster – not of the propaganda variety – with very often a photographic image pivotal to its message has had a central presence in the history of activism. No more foregrounded than in the events of 1968. In many ways it has not lost its potency to move consciousness, for example the recent satirising of Elon Musk, probably 'From 0 to 1939 in 3 seconds', Musk atop a Tesla performing a Nazi salute, the most well-known – although there have been many others. A poster campaign, I suggest, that does not only preach to the choir. Where the John Heartfield resemblance is difficult to miss, both in form and content.

I wonder about posters 'installed' in the landscape of the Ebbw Valley and around the garden festival location, rather than just using them for information / agitational purposes, and how they might work as a form of negation of the environment into which they are directly inserted / displayed. An interventional, quite literally, message cancelling a false notion of aura, perhaps, certainly in regard to the garden festival and its speculations ever since. In a Benjamin redemptive sense, as well, a message to the past or from the past and a harnessing of the actual landscape into the dialectical image. In a similar procedure of negation, the numerous tranquilizing community art works around the Ebbw Valley. The poster drawing attention in some way, to the reality of the nature / history antagonism and would, at the very least, draw them into the realm of the politically relevant; to the climate emergency (and its cause, for that matter). These need not be overly theoretical messages, either, to have critical impact. A pertinent example are the political poster and billboard projects of Peter Kennard and Cat Phillipps.[9] Using an assembled form of photography and text their posters appear quite unexpectedly in the landscape, generally as a one-off work,

[8] Pamphlets and pamphleteering in early modern Britain Joad Raymond Cambridge University Press Cambridge and New York 2003
p. 26.
[9] https://kennardphillipps.org/category/street/

almost like a quotation, in Benjamin terms, meant to upset the rhythm of the spectacle into which they are inserted.

Given the right emphasis in form, just like the pamphlet, the poster speaks a particular language of collective history, of agitation, the public sphere and the atelier and not the private space of social media, the smart phone and the internet, generally. And seems to have been the case historically, too, as we see here: 'posters [are] very much part of the politics of the street, subject to public consumption and contestation, rather than the iconic agents of the passive politics of the living room.'[10]

Principles that could equally be applied to the photobook format. As speculated in Chapter 5, the possibility of a collective culture organised around the making of a photobook would be just as important – more important, perhaps – than the success or failure of the book. The collective process would involve not only the physical fabrication of the book, but also the making / taking of photographs, collection of materials, information and documentation and any writing that might be needed to make the volume in question. In this expanded view of the photobook, it can also be seen as an item of use-value carrying, as it does, a real message about the world and its collective means of its production. A collective culture around the making of a book that could also be the pedagogic setting to discuss and debate the theoretical, philosophical and politics integral to a scheme of making critical spatial and historical connections.

Photobooks need not be produced via commercial channels, print on demand outlets, etc. There is precedent and a long history of handmade books. Ones that are, quite often, simply fabricated using stitch, Japanese or staple binding, they could also be photobooks printed using non-professional inkjet / laser printers, this is where the pamphlet format is useful, very few pages and a simple binding. And is a practical setting in which to learn new skills as well as a place of unalienated labour. Having very little budget can also instil the mother of invention, crowd funding for example, and other collective participation, a self-sufficiency and an outside, of sorts, to corporate interest. The collaborative making of a photobook should be further grasped as a space of engagement between creators and audience, where new kinds of collective encounters are possible outside the limited and exclusive space of the art gallery or other institutional settings. The photobook continues to evolve mainly because of the versatility it has as a formal space to make a profusion of juxtapositions (just

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[10] James Thompson, '"Pictorial Lies"? Posters and Politics in Britain c. 1880-1914', *Past & Present,* No. 197 (Nov., 2007), p. 205.

like the multifarious possibilities of language). This allows the photograph to be re-imagined and re-animated (possibly) *ad infinitum*. A collective input could make a major contribution to this imaginative, critical and political unfolding.

The nub then, such a scenario of collectivity is, essentially, a process of self-determination and self-realisation with and for others, a united forum that the spectacle actively suppresses or repressively de-sublimates. The kind of agency that used to be foremost in community action before the days of an omnipotent neoliberalism. The Half Moon Photography Workshop, later Camerawork, comes to mind here as does the Docklands Photography Project. Community-based photography projects at their zenith circa early to mid-1980s, whose primary aims were, in the main, to reveal capitalist activity at work in the community counter to the real interests of local residents.

And finally, I noticed while drafting the thesis that Greta Thunberg had addressed a crowd and the press at a fringe event of COP 26.[11] She made her speech in Festival Gardens, Glasgow the last small part of the 1988 Glasgow UK Garden Festival to have not been redeveloped. Benjamin said an image of history always flashes-up unexpectedly at a moment of danger. We are about to enter the next phase of capitalism, one which will begin a new 'goldrush' for commodities like manganese, lithium, tin, nickel, copper, cobalt and hematite[12] further escalating the plundering of natural resources for the next phase of value production. What uncertainty and hardship for those involved in the work of obtaining and processing these commodities and the economic and environmental effects of such operations on communities is attested to by the landscape of the upper Ebbw Valley and the memory and experience, still, for many who live there.[13]

The 40th anniversary of the start of miners' strike will be marked next year. In 1984, just as neo-liberalism was sweeping the world, it was being remarked that the strike was the 'last

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11 'COP26: Thunberg tells Glasgow protest politicians are pretending', BBC News (1st November 2021), https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-59116611. Last assessed 11/01/22.
[12] Neil Hume, 'Europe faces critical shortage of metals needed for clean energy', *Financial Times* (25th April, 2022), https://www.ft.com/content/72400b96-4c67-4a7f-9a98-53371f5ab421. Last accessed 11/08/23. Aime Williams, 'Powering electric cars: the race to mine lithium in America's backyard', *Financial Times* (10th May, 2022), https://www.ft.com/content/dd6f2dd0-1dad-4747-8ca4-cb63b026a757. Last accessed 01/08/2023 Kenza Bryan and Harry Dempsey, '"Playing with fire": the countdown to mining the deep seas for critical minerals', *Financial Times* (25th April, 2023), https://www.ft.com/content/95ec1105-3f5e-4055-bde8-a0c194f02d35. Last accessed 08/07/23.
[13] Timely is a report detailing state intervention in a dispute over a nickel mine in Guatemala, once owned by Inco (see Chapter 1 of this study): Sandra Cuffe, 'Indigenous mine opponents targeted in raids during state of siege in Guatemala', Mongaby (15th Nov. 2021), https://news.mongabay.com/2021/11/indigenous-mine-opponents-targeted-in-raids-during-state-of-siege-in-guatemala/. Last accessed 19/11/23.

kick' of an outmoded collective. A seemingly irrelevant movement, to some at the time, Raymond Williams saw advocating for the future: 'Properly understood, it [the miners' strike] is one of the first steps towards a new order. This is especially the case in the emphasis they have [the miners] put on protecting their *communities*.'[14] Williams is not perpetuating a tired 'close-knit' mythology associated with the coal industry. Rather, he is attempting to universalise the issue at hand, he continues: 'challenging the destructive … operations of a new and reckless stage of capitalism, the miners have, in seeking to protect their own interests, outlined a new form of the general interest.'[15] For me a least, this is a 'now-time' moment, the past fleetingly redeemed. Yet, I know it is a possibility infinitely deferred in a Benjaminian messianic sense of postponement.

Benjamin's dialectical image, the image of the majority who have been erased by history's victors will never lose political potency for as long as class remains a universalising conceptualisation able to bring together all those, throughout history, that have been oppressed, discriminated and exploited by those with power. A political dimension that does not ruminate about the past, either. Rather is preoccupied with the activation of history so that it might enable the militant reasoning required to see the possibility of other futures.

The 'urgency of keeping the impossible alive, keeping faith with it', are motifs of the utopian whose weak signal Benjamin's messianic organon was intended to pick-up.[16] A signal today, perhaps, just too indistinct. The present, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, so 'hellish' it is beyond even the task of philosophy to reconcile.[17] For Adorno, possibility cannot be anything other than 'a message in a bottle' set adrift into the future.[18] Whether there is

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[14] Raymond Williams, 'Mining the Meaning: Key Words in the Miners' Strike' in *Resources of Hope,* pp. 123-124. Williams's emphasis.

[15] Ibid., p. 127.

[16] Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic,* p. 156. In the sense of Ernst Bloch, and of course Benjamin, that the utopian is pervaded in the everyday, albeit requiring a certain allegorical dislodgement and, for Jameson, the kinds of utopian hope to be ascertained in all things popular culture, most evident in science fiction literature and film. See Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London and New York: verso, 2005) and Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1986).

[17] 'It is not the portrayal of reality as hell on earth but the slick challenge to break out of it that is suspect. If there is anyone today to whom we can pass the responsibility for the message, we bequeath it not to the "masses," and not to the individual (who is powerless), but to an imaginary witness lest it perish with us.' Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 256. Or Horkheimer to Adorno in *Towards a New Manifesto*: 'it seems then as if we are working on a theory for keeping in stock …. Perhaps the time will come again when theory can be of use.' Adorno and Horkheimer, *Toward a New Manifesto,* pp. 99-100. The opening paragraphs of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* gives a semblance of this too. Also see Jay, *The Dialectal Imagination*, p. xx. One must surmise, understanding Adorno's and Horkheimer's work, that it was a 'hellishness' of a society caught in an ever more profound convolution of the instrumental and the irrational.

[18] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Towards a New Manifesto,* p. 100.

enough time, if a message of possibility were set adrift today, for the bottle to wash-up on a shore in the future is another matter entirely. Nevertheless, in an upending of a typically Adornoian kind, neither should we relinquish the utopian as without it 'thought itself withers away.'[19]

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[19] Ibid., p. 5.

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