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PRIDE REVISITED: CINEMA, ACTIVISM AND RE-ACTIVATION

Can there be a Progressive Nostalgia? Layering Time in *Pride's* Retro-Heritage

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Pride is notable for its dynamic treatment of time, which is key both to its appeal as a film and to its presentation of the processes of political change. By combining nostalgia, retro, and heritage, *Pride* manifests an artistic practice I refer to as temporal layering, which draws attention to how any single moment implies potential relationships with numerous interacting others. I use this notion to understand both the role that the 1984–5 miners' strike assumes in cultural revisions of the 1980s, and the kind of cinematic past that *Pride* presents. This past can be understood as a development in the heritage genre appropriate to reimagining modern British history, especially that of the 1980s, that could be called retro-heritage. By paying attention to the varied temporal layers thus present in *Pride*, a new perspective is offered on how nostalgia's presumed conservatism sits alongside the 'left-wing melancholy' (Traverso, 2017) that has dominated in the era of defeats since the 1980s. My ultimate aim is to ask what potential nostalgia may have when envisaging a different future.¹

¹ I am grateful in writing this essay for the kind help of Şahika Erkonan, and two anonymous reviewers.

In telling how a derided minority makes its way to the centre of public acceptability, *Pride* imparts a message of the importance of unexpected change. Its narrative elaborates the question of what constitutes the mainstream, and what transforms it; for at the same time that the cause of lesbian and gay rights finds unforeseen proponents in the mining communities, the latter's class consciousness loses its definitive place in political identification. But while *Pride* takes up the cause of the marginalised, it does not do so by adhering to the alternative ethos of the 1980s left. Nor does it belong to established artistic traditions in the representation of the manual working class. *Pride* instead employs the two ways of contemplating the past, retro and nostalgia, whose cultural significance lies primarily in their desire to please. If *Pride* offers an example of political filmmaking then, it is as part of the attempt to build a left populism, distinguished by the endeavour to be accessible, engaging, and widely appealing.²

Retro and nostalgia produce more intimate ways of feeling about the past than is conventional in historical accounts. They help *Pride's* campaigning purpose by embodying the notion that the personal is in fact political, and their interaction is part of the film's highly dynamic treatment of time. This dynamism allows us to consider the multiple timeframes potentially inherent to any single moment, whether as memory, repetition, reference, anticipation, emergence or regression. It also suggests that change occurs not according to a pre-determined course, but by a process of interacting—one might say dialectically transformative—forces.

Such opening considerations establish the aims of this essay as firstly, to understand the treatment of time in *Pride* as key to its status both as entertainment and what Raphael Samuel has defended as popular history (see Samuel, 1994). It puts *Pride* at odds, however, with a general critical hostility to indulgence in the past as a source of pleasure. Indeed criticism has tended towards what Alastair Bonnett calls an 'anti-nostalgic position', that situates nostalgia as 'the antithesis of radicalism' (2010: 1) and finds that 'regret is a dangerous sentiment ... induc[ing] resignation

² For a discussion of political populism, see de la Torre, 2015.

about the present, and so a certain acceptance of its evils' (Richard Sennett, 1977); 'in all its manifestations nostalgia is, in its praxis, conservative' (Susan Bennett, 1996); and '[ideologies] of resistance to progress hardly deserve the name of systems of thought' (Eric Hobsbawm, 1962. All citations from Bonnett, 2010: 2). As Bonnett points out, such positions do not represent 'analyses but gestures of disdain' (2010: 3). Secondly then, this essay proposes a way to analyse what it means to be simultaneously nostalgic *and* progressive (which not coincidentally is my own position on watching the film, as both a leftist and a child of the time when the film is set). For in condemning longing for the past, the left condemns significant sections of its own thought and practice, as a champion of both modernity and (albeit alternative) tradition, progress and (albeit oppositional) conservation. It would be better then to acknowledge that nostalgia has a 'constitutive and inescapable nature' (Bonnett, 2010: 3), and that left wing culture has never limited itself to cosmonauts, Bauhaus living, and the benefits of technological change, but also Luddite revolt, arts and crafts, and folk music. Such acknowledgement seeks not to exempt nostalgia from criticism, nor ascribe to it some supposed predetermined political effect. It focuses instead on determining the kind of nostalgia being elicited in any given moment, and how it is elicited. The following discussion of *Pride* will thus ask what nostalgia has to offer beyond proof of the moribundity of the 21st-century left.

The Strike and Time

If it seems bizarre that mining imagery should repeat itself—first as activism, and second as fashion item—this reminds us that the retro interest in history is more as a repository of cultural than factual material. The continuing resonance of the strike may nevertheless be considered surprising, given that received wisdom holds it to be a relic of a bygone age. The enduring fascination the strike holds can be seen precisely in how it illuminates the curious way that incompatible and apparently irreconcilable ways of life come into relief during moments of profound change. If the alliance of miners and gay activists may appear as the ultimate unity of opposites, then a further mismatch occurs between their community-based solidity and the individualism of the Thatcher era, as well as between principled opposition and

the coming age of compromise, disengagement, and New Labour. The strike thus acts not solely as a story of one group of workers against their employers, but as shorthand for the eclipse of an entire 'lost world' of working class life.³ While the miners lose out materially in this version of progress, they are handed a moral victory in the dignity of their struggle. Their predicament thus encapsulates the lost stability and (of course) pride of working class community, for which a satisfactory alternative has yet to be found.

The strike's place as the emblematic event of the British 1980s helps demonstrate that time itself can be a source of meaning, and a material factor in modern politics. The strike was both a sudden breach in the national fabric and a prolonged period of suspended animation, which had already achieved the character of a unique dramatic turning point while still ongoing, billed as a decisive confrontation between government and the trade union movement both in journalistic accounts (Crick, 1985) and in the desperate appeals for support by the miners' leader Arthur Scargill. While both left and right agreed on its epochal significance, it retrospectively forms the central act of Conservative leader Margaret Thatcher's premiership, occurring in the middle of her 11 years in power and the second of her three terms. For her Conservative government, it provided a rejoinder to the strikes of a decade previously when miners beat Edward Heath's 1970–4 industrial policy, prompting his Conservative government first to announce a three-day week, then to call and ultimately lose a general election (Darlington and Lyddon, 2001). Its focal position for the working class movement brought comparisons instead to the strike of 1926, which saw 1.2 million miners fighting alone for six months after the general strike that precipitated it was abandoned by a trade union leadership keen on negotiation. By the winter of 1984–5, with the dispute lengthening to a point which had achieved

³ The phrase used by Raphael Samuel in a more specific manner, to describe *The Lost World of British Communism* (2006). For a socio-cultural account of the 1984–5 strike see Popple and MacDonald, 2012; for a more general socio-cultural account of the British working class movement, see Jonathan Rose's *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (2001); for its changing status over half a century see Kirk (2010) 'Challenge, Crisis, and Renewal? Themes in the Labour History of Britain, 1960–2010'; for a historical anthropology of mining cultures from an international perspective, see Knapp, Pigott, and Herbert (1998) *Social Approaches to an Industrial Past*.

'no real parallel—in size, duration, and impact—anywhere in the world' (Milne, 1994: ix), victory became a question of endurance itself, of who could hold out the longest. When impasse became finality and the miners eventually did go back, it was not to the same world, but to devastated communities and the eradication of the entire industry (Rustin, 2015).

These swirling currents of rupture, repetition, and continuity deepen through the cultural afterlife the strike has achieved. The strike was already characterised as both unique, and yet expressive of a long industrial history, in the agit-prop films and videos made at the time to garner support, collected by the BFI in *The Miners Campaign Tapes*,⁴ as well as the first in the mini-genre of miners' strike fictionalisations, *The Comic Strip Presents' 1988 TV spoof The Strike* (Peter Richardson, UK). The very title of David Peace's novel *GB84* (2004) indicates time as an irreducible signifier, and it alternates a present-tense, day-by-day account with chapters that follow each unfolding week of the strike. Seamus Milne's (1994) investigative report *The Enemy Within* focuses instead on the climactic three-day period in which the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers (NACODS, who had the power to shut down the entire industry) considered joining the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) on strike and one of Scargill's deputies, who the book suggests was a secret agent, visited Libya. The immediacy of both Peace's experimentalism and Milne's espionage plot, as well as Jeremy Deller's 2001 re-enactment of the Battle of Orgreave (filmed by Mike Figgis for Channel 4), is however at odds with the mainstream narrative of decline dominant in the generation after the strike, found in the feature films *Brassed Off* (Herman, 1996) and *Billy Elliot* (Daldry, 2000), for which the strike confirms the inevitable obsolescence of industrial community. Alternatively, the 30th anniversary of the strike has seen a renewed argument for its continued relevance in Conservative-era austerity Britain, in the documentary *Still the Enemy Within* (Gower, 2014) and commemorations from the Facebook group 30 Years since the Miners' Strike to the sale of I Still Hate Thatcher badges. Indeed, the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party in 2015, not long after

⁴ I am grateful to the research of Jade Evans for this point.

Pride's release, suggests that many of the issues declared buried with the strike—of class, social division, and the primacy of deregulated private enterprise—remain unresolved. It is within this latter context of revival that *Pride* belongs.

Pride acts as both retro fashion and radical commemoration—indeed, subsequent to the film's release a blue plaque was fixed above Gay's The Word Bookshop to commemorate the work of the founding LGSM (Lesbians and Gay Men Support the Miners) member Mark Ashton. The film's retro interest in the 1980s places it, however, next to artefacts as diverse as *Good Bye, Lenin!* (Becker, 2003) and *Stranger Things* (Matt and Ross Duffer, 2016), as an international revisiting of a decade that has come to act rather in the way that the 1950s did for a previous generation (see Bayman, 2016). Retro is defined by its 'half-ironic, half-longing' (Guffey, 2006: 10–1) gaze upon the bygone novelties and passing fads of the recent past, and might seem to signal a certain loss of purpose or commitment to more substantial issues of historical change. The retro revisiting of the 1980s thus characterises the decade as a global turning point that nevertheless lacks a clear direction forwards, amidst the scrapping of the post-war social democratic settlement, the end of the Cold War, the move to post-Fordist production, and the replacement of Keynesianism with neoliberal economic and social policy.

To position the 1980s as the decisive decade of the post-war era broaches a feeling that the left's own time is up, and returns us to the moment when the defeats of the left became intractable crises, or even the historic victory of free market capitalism. These defeats saw not only the destruction of vital heavy industries, but a permanent blow to the working class as a coherent political force, receding from its primary position as the agent of change envisaged by socialism. Deindustrialisation in the UK has been cited as the cause of a range of processes from the triumph of Thatcherism and rise of New Labour, the eclipse of trade union power and the decline in popular political participation, to most recently Britain's decision to leave the European Union (Barnett, 2017). Yet these ongoing effects are signs not of new life, but decay.

In this context, *Pride* can be seen as one instance of what Enzo Traverso has diagnosed as the contemporary proliferation of 'left wing melancholy' (2017). Marxism requires a 'dialectic between past and future' (Traverso, 2017: xiv), in which

historical memory animates the struggle to build a better society. This relationship between history and progress has been lost, leaving us to mourn faith in the viability of positive change. Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams note that the once prevalent assumption that 'through popular political control of new technologies, we would collectively transform our world for the better' (2016: 1) has been replaced with a modern politics that 'remains stubbornly beset by a lack of new ideas. Neoliberalism has held sway for decades, and social democracy exists largely as an object of nostalgia' (2016: 2–3). Even language has altered accordingly, to the extent that 'to modernise, today, simply means to neoliberalise' (Srnicek and Williams, 2016: 63). Meanwhile, radicalism is to contemporary ears 'more likely to evoke fundamentalist Islam or a new business plan as to suggest the left' (Bonnett, 2010: 6). Amidst a politics of neoliberal inequality, Britain has festooned itself in the flag-waving commodity kitsch of keeping calm and carrying on, as Owen Hatherley diagnoses in *The Ministry of Nostalgia* (2016). Contemporary Conservative austerity according to Hatherley evokes its predecessor of 1940s austerity Britain, but without its notion of working together for a common public good. The left responds with its own anachronism, the call to the *Spirit of '45*, in the title of Ken Loach's documentary (UK, 2013), which can envisage nothing better than an old-fashioned social democracy (Hatherley, 2016: 3) unsuited to a global economy and multicultural working class (Chen, 2013).

Since at least the second half of the 19th-century, the call to turn over the productive forces of industrial modernity to the common good meant that to be progressive was to belong to the left. Contemporary attempts to reassert this link by writers like Srnicek and Williams call for a 'post-work society', that uses information technology, automation, and communications to transcend wage labour to reach a 'fully post-capitalist economy, enabling a shift away from scarcity, work, and exploitation, and towards the full development of humanity... [that] would enable the utopian ambitions of megaprojects to be unleashed, invoking the classic dreams of invention and discovery' (Srnicek and Williams, 2016: 183).⁵ But who can make

⁵ The notion of 'postcapitalism' is taken from Mason, 2015; for a feminist postwork imagination, see Weeks, 2011.

this happen? When even the president of the United States finds himself impotent to enact the promise that 'yes we can', we reach a point that Franco Berardi calls a 'crisis of futurability' (2017a), and are left instead to pursue the politics of nostalgia for past greatness.

In a polemic entitled 'Resisting Left Melancholia', Wendy Brown recalls the spirits of Walter Benjamin and Stuart Hall to equate melancholy, tradition, conformism, and conservatism, apparently even falsehood, feeling and attachment, as inimical to her desired 'critical and visionary spirit' that 'embraces the notion of a deep and indeed unsettling transformation' (2017). Yet to accept such an anti-nostalgic critique would mean to ignore the role of emotion in building political solidarity, in favour of the unlikely proposition of building a popular movement on the call to uproot all comforts of belonging. A richer field of struggle opens up if we instead recall that loss has been productive for the left. As Traverso points out, the left's empathy 'with the vanquished of history' (2017: xv) has constructed the socialist imagination upon the memory of past failures like the revolutions of 1848, the Paris Commune or the assassinations of Rosa Luxembourgh or Salvador Allende. Judith Butler notes the 'transformative effect of loss' while Douglas Crimp, a leader of the Act Up campaign group to raise AIDS awareness, called for: 'Militancy, of course, but mourning too: mourning *and* militancy' (Traverso, 2017: 20–1). Thus stated, the issue is one of analytical method: of resisting the dichotomy between progress and nostalgia, based as it is on the dubious assumption that time—whether imaginative or historical—is experienced in homogeneous, not multiple, forms. To see what this method might look like, we may now turn back to *Pride*.

Time and *Pride*

Nostalgia does not alter the sequential arrangement of events as in flashbacks, or the more experimental forms of the flashforward or montage, but it draws attention to the potential multiplicity of temporalities within a single moment via a practice I shall call temporal layering. Temporal layering can be seen already in *Pride's* publicity material (**Figure 1**).

The megaphone in the background echoes constructivist art of the 1920s, most specifically Aleksandr Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova's 1924 'Books!', whose

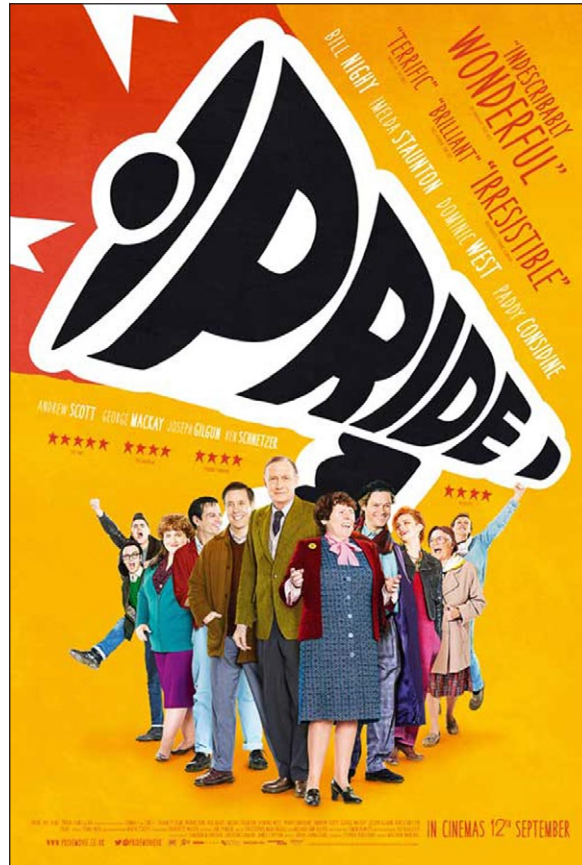


Figure 1: *Pride's* temporal layering. Image found at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/releases/pride-2014>.

suggestion of noisy movement pronounces the aim to break through conventions of formality, as it also refers to the megaphone painted on the side of the minivan used in the film. The film's many references to Soviet imagery recall 1980s radicalism, for example in Red Wedge's (1985–) appropriation of its name and logo from the not-dissimilar Lissitzky poster of 1919, and the Soviet vogue in 1980s pop culture (Guffey, 2006), exemplified by the cover design of Frankie Goes to Hollywood's 'Two Tribes' single, which appears on the film's soundtrack. This is futurism however as a period style. Its associations of utopian possibility and the disposability of fashion act simultaneously as a retro reclaiming of the exuberant revolutionary moment of the early 20th-century by the 1980s to which the characters belong; an announcement of the trends current in the film's period setting; and a signal of the characters' place

in history. Meanwhile, the players gathered beneath the megaphone range from the bricolage fashion exclusive to the LGSM members, the plainer jeans and DMs of Welsh LGSM member Gethin, whose similar clothing to Dai blends into the sober, functional outfits of the Welsh villagers – carefully chosen as already behind the times for the standards of the mid-80s of the film's setting. The foregrounding of the more famous members of the ensemble also recalls a living history of British theatrical talent as well as of the comedy of group belonging that bespeaks tradition in British film.

In recalling 1920s radicalism, post-war tradition and 1980s subcultures, these temporal layers emphasise the potentials that were to be extinguished by the events the film will recount. It also establishes time's multiple character. Indeed, the opening credits begin on the acoustic banjo of the song 'Solidarity Forever' over a black screen, its left-wing folk—itself a now somewhat lost movement of revival—promising eternal fraternity, in the first of the film's motif of a sonic transition anticipating a new setting. Continuing the markers of multiple interacting temporalities there follows archive news footage, much of which has in the intervening years become iconic of the strike, which also introduces its place in posterity; a placard states 'I am striking for my son's job', and Arthur Scargill tells a conference hall they can 'look back in ten years' time and say in 1984 I was proud and privileged to be a party to the greatest struggle on earth'. The thick black frame around the archive footage cuts to a final screen credit and then to Mark's council flat block and the 'present-tense' in which the film unfolds. Mark Ashton's attention is drawn away from the man coming out of his bedroom and to the coverage of the strike on the television in his kitchen, replicating the archive footage that made up the credits now in the televisual immediacy of 'news'.

Retro narratives delight in playing with time, which *Pride* does through using mixed media from the opening credits' folk song, the homemade placards, the disjointed montage and the shifts between television and film, archive, and narrative. Retro foregrounds what the spectator knows to be outmoded and obsolete: phone calls in *Pride* are shown being made from fixed lines and sometimes from red public

boxes, while photographs are shot on film and developed later at a chemist. Like Proust's madeleine, the retro experience makes past and present simultaneous in sensuous terms. While retro thus animates past habits, it also acts as an audiovisual museum of subcultural bric-a-brac (**Figure 2**). But by bringing us back into the past at a level of everyday experience, retro invites if not so much a suspension of disbelief, then a suspension of the inescapably retrospective aspect of our position. The spectator is invited to identify nostalgically with motivations whose eventual frustration we, unlike the characters who hold them, always know will occur, and encourages a wish for things to have been different; producing both the melodramatic longing of the 'if only...' (Modleski, 1984), and the fantasy common to history's losers of 'what if' things had turned out differently (Carr, 1961).

Typically for a period film, *Pride* seeks to faithfully recreate the past within dramatic situations that bring awareness to time's acute presence. The main character Joe's introduction is based around such awareness; he stares at the clock anticipating getting away from home, meets the support group in a chance encounter and decides to collect alongside them as he stops worrying about catching the last train. Later, Dai nervously awaits the arrival of LGSM at the village hall in a parallel example of anxious clock-watching. The film takes place over a year, and begins on Joe's birthday, while its climactic scene sees him leave home on his nephew's christening celebration. When Steph hears he is only 20, she jokes 'victory to the minors!', which is not solely a play on words, but another temporal layering—for not only must Joe



Figure 2: Subcultural bric-a-bric in Mark's flat. Screengrab from the film.

wait to turn 21, but so, the spectator recalls, must gay men wait for legal equality, with the age of consent changed to 16 in England and Wales only in the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act of 2000. The impulse to make time itself the subject with multiple focal points, and not a homogenous or background element is an important cultural development of modernity (Kern, 1983). To avoid this focus on time becoming an abstract or experimental factor, the nostalgic narrative emphasises the importance of time in the lives of its characters, and to the development of the narrative as well. *Pride* is a coming of age story, or of several ages, with Joe coming out, Gethin reuniting with his mother, and Mark eventually learning of his HIV diagnosis, to impart to a newly conscious Joe the moral that 'life is short'. This coming of age includes an affectionately infantilising relationship of LGSM to the villagers: Mark likens gay pride to standing up to bullies, and when he jumps up to make a speech, Hefina sharply tells him to get his feet off the table. Time also belongs to the creation of pathos. The film's climactic events employ the melodramatic temporality noted by Franco Moretti of being 'too-late' (2005): a committee meeting is rescheduled by three hours to prevent Dai from intervening on behalf of LGSM as he is still on his way back from London; Mark bumps into a lover after the triumphant Pits and Perverts gig who has already learned of his diagnosis; and Joe's mother withholds the news that Gethin has been hospitalised in a homophobic attack.

Although stopping short of avant-garde abstraction, the film's temporal layering nevertheless reaches a bewildering degree. During the first visit of LGSM to Onllwyn, a local picket, Carl goes to shake Jonathan's hand after Jonathan's legal advice gets him released from jail, replicating the image on the miners' banner of 'two hands shaking' which has just been the topic of conversation, part of a wider motif of handshaking, which will also be depicted in the film's final image. Playing in the background is 'You Can't Hurry Love', whose lyrics bear ironically on the situation; but rather than The Supremes' 1966 original, it is the less well-remembered 1982 Phil Collins cover version—a more precise marker of the historical setting and itself a painstaking reproduction of the by-then outdated studio sound of Motown. It segues into 'Karma Chameleon' (a song about transformation) by Culture Club, whose lead singer Boy George introduced the idea of a 'gender-bender' to the language but who

in 1984 was not publicly out as gay. Showing the past as embryonic with the present, this moment is one of the implied presence of gay culture within the mainstream at the specific juncture after liberation but before mainstream acceptance. As indicated by the motif of sonic transition, music literally takes precedence in retro narratives for its ability to be at once the carrier of meaning, affective charge, collective memory, and temporal shifts. The women remark to Jonathan on the local historical significance of 'a first this—men on the dancefloor'. Jonathan requests the song 'Shame, Shame, Shame', a moment of transformation in a film called *Pride*, but still a marker of the past within the past, as Jonathan ends his bravura dance performance on the line 'God I miss disco'. Carl is encouraged to join in by fellow villager Hefina, who states that she saw him dancing around naked as a child; this gives continuity to the scene's representation of a lifestyle change from traditional masculinity towards a more modern acceptance of myriad ways of being.

The scene exemplifies the film's jumble of temporal markers, as it also furthers its principle of transformation. Its brilliance as a stand-out set piece lies in its encapsulation of historical change in one exhilarating moment, locating the passage from old to new in the enjoyment of the retro item (the disco song 'Shame, Shame, Shame'). It contains further layers still. Jonathan is the one LGSM member to represent longevity, providing a bridge with gay liberation and having all of the most nostalgic lines, responding to an admonition to show less 'flamboyance' with 'I haven't spoken 1950s in quite a while'. He functions as the LGSM's contact with history and anchors the motif of transformation that underlies the film. But the scene ends on an implied elegy for the soon-to-be devastated community, as the characters go home at closing time and a brass cadence plays over a longshot of the terraced village streets. On LGSM's return to Onllwyn months later, the film's structural principle of repetition with transformation returns as the female members of the hall spontaneously stand to sing 'Bread and Roses', a song about the drudgery of 'marching, marching' and the desire for future pleasure (as well as another multiple reference point).⁶ In this structural repetition, the transformation is that the miners'

⁶ The phrase 'Bread and Roses' originated in a speech by Rose Schneiderman, which inspired a poem

vision of future liberation will remain unrealised, as will the class-conscious socialism to which mining communities adhered for over a century.

Repetitions with transformations bridge the initial opposition of LGSM and the mining community—Gethin returns to the Welsh village of his estranged mother while Jonathan is a reminder of the pre-liberation past. Yet in its relation to time, the world of the miners, encapsulated by the village of Onllwyn, lies in dialectical opposition to that of LGSM. When LGSM first decide to contact the mining community by picking it on the map, a change of pace immediately occurs in a cut to an empty hall, generating comic suspense because it seems like the old woman Gwen might be too slow ('too late') to answer the telephone which sits bathed in a shaft of sunlight. The air of almost heavenly quiet is emphasised as a harp plays the notes of 'Solidarity Forever', its first return since the archive footage of the opening credits. Another rousing sonic transition changes the pace back again as the harp is replaced by drums, heralding our return to the bookshop and the LGSM members jumping up and down singing. When LGSM first arrive in Onllwyn, a country and western band called Falling Leaves is playing, their autumnal name recalling an already dated American music which would have been old fashioned even in the 1980s, and that furthermore dwells on a mythical and now vanished West. Dai repeats several times how the miners' banner is 'more than a hundred years old, mind' and as an example of craft, it is distinct from the modern (but now obsolete) printing technology used by LGSM. They are taken out to a Welsh castle— 'none of your Norman rubbish', thus predating the 11th-century invasion—and their guide Cliff recites a poem of Onllwyn's originary legend. The miners' existence even has a geological basis, as Cliff recalls that the mine is built on the 'The Great Atlantic Fault' that 'our fathers used to talk about' as 'the dark artery'.

with the same title by James Oppenheim published in 1911, and became the popular name for the Massachusetts textile strike of 1912. The song has been recorded many times and is referred to in various guises including as the inspiration for the logo of the Democratic Socialists of America, the name of a London-based theatre company and the title of Ken Loach's 2000 film about the 'Justice for Janitors' campaign in Los Angeles.

These uneven temporal dynamics are replicated spatially. The villagers' lives are governed by regularity, community, family and stability, and are limited to a few terraces bounded by the surrounding natural landscape. The gay scene in London is instead a realm of impulsive decisions, random hookups, coming out, leaving home, emergency meetings, live performances, life-changing diagnoses and sudden attacks. The journey to Onllwyn is long, shown each time through snaking roads and rolling green, then later snowy, hills in panoramic vistas and an aerial view of the expanse of water underneath the Severn Bridge (a grandeur that is finally movingly recreated in London by the camera movements that show the miners arriving in Hyde Park, to one further, instrumental, return of 'Solidarity Forever'). When villager Cliff eventually quietly comes out as gay to Hefina while they make sandwiches in the village hall, Hefina's response—that she's known since around 1968—contrasts with the more comic scene in which miner's wife Gail passionately kisses LGSM member Steph after their night out in London. Spatio-temporal categories oppose spontaneity and openness to insularity and tradition, and they stand in for more intricate political realities, repeating the commonplace geographical conception of the coalfields as 'the antithesis' (Kelliher 2017: 110) to London's cosmopolitan diversity – a conception which as Diarmaid Kelliher (2017) notes overlooks the dynamic political and organisational trajectories of the miners, including South Wales miners, in the years leading up to the strike.⁷ Just as the film erases Mark Ashton's political context and active Communist Party membership (see Jackson, 2018) for a narrative of spontaneous awakening, so the 'mutuality of solidarity' (Kelliher 2017: 112) of miners and post-68 liberation movements is overlooked in favour of a narrative of neighbourly support and family history.

To analyse the film in terms of temporal layering thus demonstrates how time functions as not solely a unit of measurement but a source of meaning. Such meaning ultimately determines the political function of nostalgia in any given artefact. The film's structure of repetition with transformation ends on a triumphant closing

⁷ Including solidarity actions with the 1976–8 strike of mostly Asian women at Grunwicks, anti-Apartheid groups, and the Anti-Nazi League.

march over Westminster Bridge one year later on the attendance of the NUM en masse at the next gay pride march. The march stages the miners physically giving way to LGSM (**Figure 3**), their defeat transformed into the victory of gay rights and achievement of legal equality. This finale emphasises that those who fight for a cause will never find themselves truly alone, and visualises the unexpected nature of progress in the midst of loss. The meanings produced in *Pride's* temporal layering thus concern the old giving way to the new, which the film specifically conceives in identity politics taking political precedence over class, performative transformation over elemental existence, and the rapid turnarounds of spontaneity over the utopian potentials of planning.

When the film opens the strike has already been ongoing for four months, with Mark watching news of its progress on TV. Its place on the news establishes its public importance as it also suggests our distance from it, and identification instead with the perspective of Mark, and by extension, LGSM. Thus the different temporalities of the film are layered so as to identify the miners with tradition and the past, and LGSM with change, and therefore the present—not solely the present of the film's action but eventually that of the viewer. The film's temporal dynamics stage the supersession of the legacy of socialist culture by a politics based more in



Figure 3: Tradition giving way to change, defeat transforming into victory (screenshot from DVD).

sexual and personal identities than the economic collectivities of class. Change itself is furthermore no longer conceived as a planned march towards a utopian future but the unexpected consequence of a liberation of energy.

Left Heritage

Temporal layering can be seen at work within *Pride's* narrative, and it can also be employed to place the film within its contexts. Indeed, the opposition between LGSM and Onllwyn is in part an aesthetic one between retro and heritage: of the consciously fashionable, pastiche, ironic, stylish, and ephemeral on the one hand against solidity and tradition, rooted in a specific location, on the other. Retro and heritage express different attitudes towards recreating the past, which Raphael Samuel defines in retro's lack of respect for the integrity of history, playfully jumbling up the different time periods that heritage obediently keeps distinct (1994). The dynamic energy and pop culture of the LGSM members associates them with retro. The actors who play the older village members, and the status of *Pride* as a British costume drama, instead evoke heritage. Yet faithfulness to the historical setting of the 1980s, by which time retro was already a major cultural practice, makes heritage and retro collide.

Although it emphasises tradition, heritage is not static. Heritage cinema is the term given to British period dramas typified by literary adaptations like *A Passage to India* (Lean, 1984), *A Room with a View* (Ivory, 1985) and *Maurice* (Ivory, 1987), which were finding particular success around the time that *Pride* is set (see Higson, 1993; Monk and Sargeant, 2002; Monk, 2011; Vidal, 2012a). *Pride* does not exhibit the decorum and classicising attitude common to 1980s heritage (nor the 'alternative heritage' that Phil Powrie locates in art cinema [2000]). But it can be seen as part of a development in heritage cinema that we might call retro-heritage. Already in 1995 Claire Monk could write of 'post-heritage', a reaction to the heritage cinema of the previous decade through 'left-field sexual narratives' (Monk, 2001: 7) like *Carrington* (Hampton, 1995) and *Orlando* (Potter, 1993). Retro-heritage takes this development further, altering both the class and historical focuses to the working and lower-middle classes of the more recent past. The route of cultural transmission is from cinema to musical theatre rather than through the adaptations of novels, with *Made*

in *Dagenham* (Cole, 2010), *Billy Elliot* and *Pride* all staged as musicals subsequent to their cinematic production. Other differences to 1980s heritage include how retro-heritage focuses on conflict or rupture over accommodation and gradualism, is set in the more recently lived, rather than pre-war, past, and privileges an unofficial over official attitudes to history while embodying the uncontained emotionality of the lower orders over the restraint of their social superiors. These differences exist alongside important similarities: like 1980s heritage, retro-heritage concerns the effects of historical transformation on the personal realm, and more specifically, of the eclipse of a certain class-based lifestyle by something recognisably newer. It is a form of popular feel-good film that is more unabashedly entertaining than the novelistic 1980s heritage, but it replicates however heritage's polished, even 'mannerist', visual style (Vidal, 2012b: 27). It also displays the personal interactions of ordinary people rather than history's great or glamorous personalities (Dyer, 2002). Rather than the gradual decline of the British aristocracy amidst the rise of the bourgeoisie of 1980s heritage cinema, retro-heritage concerns the end of a popularly held image of working class communities at some point between the 1960s and the 1980s. This image is made up of terraced housing, manufacturing, and the drab uniformity that is the price paid for stability. In its place comes a liberation of energy through performance, fashion, entrepreneurship, and so on, observable not only in the films of deindustrialisation mentioned above, but in films like *The Damned United* (Hooper, 2009), *Eddie the Eagle* (Fletcher, 2016), *Legend* (Helgeland, 2015), *Northern Soul* (Constantine, 2014) and *This Is England* (Meadows, 2007).

Heritage cinema is so called due to a perceived affinity for Thatcher's decision to make the national heritage into an industry. Critics such as Patrick Wright (1985), Robert Hewison (1987) and Andrew Higson have levelled the charge that heritage is 'symptomatic of cultural developments in Thatcherite Britain' (Higson, 1993: 93), producing an idealised image of Britain's past to draw attention away from the contemporary reality of heightened class conflict. Retro-heritage is a cultural manifestation of changed historical preoccupations, coming after the hierarchical cultural distinctions of Thatcher-era heritage were replaced by the open-necked

informality of New Labour's Cool Britannia policy. But this would not be sufficient to deflect the charges frequently levelled against heritage film, in which, according to Higson, 'the past is displayed as a visually spectacular pastiche, inviting a nostalgic gaze that resists the ironies and social critiques so often suggested narratively by these films' (1993: 91). Such criticism institutes a binary: nostalgic pastiche *or* social comment; display *or* critique; and 'in most cases the commodity on offer is an image, a spectacle, something to be gazed at. History, the past, becomes, in Fredric Jameson's phrase, "a vast collection of images" designed to delight the modern-day tourist-historian' (Higson, 1993: 95).

Once again however, the anti-nostalgic position poses inconsistencies. Indeed, Wright's literal starting point in writing *On Living in an Old Country* was returning to the UK after living in Canada and noting the proliferation of nostalgia; if there is anything more nostalgic than realising that the country of your birth wasn't like it used to be when you left, one would be hard pushed to find out what. Industrial conservation is, of course, conservative, of a certain kind—emerging from the fear that post-war consumerism was effecting a kind of 'corrosion from within' (Lovell, 1996: 160) on the working classes, as articulated in its most influential form in Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), which seeks instead to preserve the authenticity of an independent working class culture. Mining reminds us that heritage applies not only to stately homes but also to a working class whose lives are continually uprooted by the tendency of capitalism to transform production. A.L. Lloyd's stewardship of the National Coal Board-funded competition that led to the collection *Come All Ye Bold Miners* in 1951–2, aimed at preserving the folk traditions of mining culture, which was the first example of industrial heritage (Samuel, 1994). The alternative British cinematic tradition to the period costume drama can be found in the social realism of the 1960s like *Room at the Top* (Clayton, 1959) or *This Sporting Life* (Anderson, 1963), films which are inspired by the spirit of Hoggart's cultural critique (Lovell, 1996) and whose nostalgia lies in what John Hill describes as their 'anxiety about the demise of the "traditional" working class, associated with work, community, and an attachment to place, in the face of

consumerism, mass culture, and suburbanisation' (2000: 250–1). One might even say that British Cultural Studies was born of nostalgia. E P Thompson's interest in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) was in the old craft and artisan labourers who found their conditions overturned by the industrial revolution. As he put it in the introduction to *Customs in Common*, many of the customs of the 18th-century plebeians were formed in opposition to a patrician class aiming to restructure their lives (1991). Going back further, Raymond Williams shows in the 'Golden Ages' chapter of *The Country and the City* that the upper peasantry whose conditions were being imperilled by the early modern period imagined a past time of 'temporary stability' after the Black Death. While this imagination 'is authentic and moving and yet in other ways unreal' (1975: 46), it also forms 'A moral protest' against the gentry that gave birth to class consciousness itself. Going back even to that very period of imagined stability, specifically John Ball's sermon during the peasants' revolt of 1381 (which remains today a much-repeated radical quotation), 'when Adam delved and Eve span,/Who was then the gentleman?' When the Garden of Eden provides the radical vision, then nostalgia and critique no longer stand in opposition.

Rather than their potentially 'corrosive' effects on political radicalism, display and the pop-cultural commodity are precisely how Joe in *Pride* realises his identity and commitment, and how he enters into the dynamics of historical change. Pop is given political meaning in *Pride*: Frankie Goes to Hollywood's 'Two Tribes' plays after the NUM representative Dai's first speech to the gay club, whose chorus 'when two tribes go to war a point is all that you can score' could refer either to the miners' opposition to Thatcher or to the initial hostility he encounters from the gay audience. In arguing to set up the support group, Mark says of the police that 'they stopped hanging round at our clubs lately. What's that about? Do you think they finally got sick of all that Donna Summer?' Activism is a kind of performance: the drag queen who introduces Dai to drum up support in a gay club states 'I've played a few tough crowds myself.' 'Politics?' asks Dai; 'Panto'. The turning points of the film—and thus of the political struggles it documents—occur in public performances, whether in the miners' hall, the gay clubs, and in the Pits and Perverts benefit gig. Such performativity is appropriate to the carnivalesque tradition of street protest

itself, as it also gives the LGBTQ community a sense of truth to their authentic selves. *Pride* thus offers a more emancipatory response to deindustrialisation than the loss of male virility (Monk, 2000) or the anxiety of emasculation that Sianne Ngai has noted surrounds performativity in post-Fordist labour in films like *The Full Monty* (Cattaneo, 1997) (2012: 212–5). Nor do the miners possess some pure folk tradition meeting a sullied mass culture; as mentioned, LGSM arrive in the miners' club to see a pastiche country and western band playing. While the miners in *Pride* have the dignity of tradition and LGSM the fun of retro, we are much more culturally estranged from the homophobes of the Bromley suburbs, who are aesthetically adrift in the ugly present of the 1980s. Rather than authentic purity, *Pride* acknowledges the political potential of constructed identities.

Perhaps this really does destroy the elemental existence of the manual labourer. But they are not the only characters to have brought about change while dressing up. In his first great articulation of his new historical method, Karl Marx considered pastiche as constitutive of political change, that 'Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce'. Let us leave aside Marx's own desire to call on the authority of a past master, Hegel, which Marx made up, and quote his analysis more fully:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past ... And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language. Thus Luther put on the mask of the Apostle Paul, the Revolution of 1789–1814 draped itself alternately in the guise of the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, and the Revolution of 1848 knew nothing

better to do than to parody, now 1789, now the revolutionary tradition of 1793–5. In like manner, the beginner who has learned a new language always translates it back into his mother tongue, but he assimilates the spirit of the new language and expresses himself freely in it only when he moves in it without recalling the old and when he forgets his native tongue. (Marx, 1937 [1851–2]: 1)

While Marx was surely hoping for humanity to go about making history with a greater degree of conscious reason, the point here is that pastiches of the past can *constitute* radical change. Revolutions make reference to the old, precisely because they *are* new, and they use the otherwise absent authority of example by clothing their novelty with the garb of tradition. The surface nature of the fancy-dress corresponds to the essential core of the transformation.

It might be worth counselling caution of those who would seek to take your past away from you. Wright points out that it was ‘Thatcher [who] responded to the 1984–5 miners’ strike by accusing Scargill of wanting to plunge Britain into a “museum society”’ (1985: 137), and neoliberalism that seeks a permanently mobile, unsettled workforce. In the context of debates over heritage, British filmmaker Derek Jarman defended his film *The Last of England* (1987) by responding that ‘tradition’ and ‘history’ should not be taken over by the right (Monk, 2011: 12). Whether as retro, heritage, history, nostalgia or melancholy, tribute towards the past can also be a reminder of the heroism within working class history, an image of solidarity, and a desire for greater harmony than exists in the world of today.

If there is a political problem with *Pride*, it is not only its erasure of difference in its image of a lost homogeneity and a male dominated manual working class. It lies also in its final conclusion that the future is unexpected. The greatest anachronism associated with the miners in *Pride* is their belief that they may one day consciously construct a better world system. Mark’s leadership is instead governed by spontaneous inspiration and off the cuff speeches, differently to the official procedure and formal meetings of the miners. His decision to start collecting for the miners is justified with ‘I know it’s not been planned, it’s not been thought through,

but it's a really good idea, isn't it?' His faith in the accidental is not specific to *Pride*, but characterises contemporary left-wing thought in general. Srnicek and Williams confront the lack on the left of a contemporary utopian vision in their manifesto for the future by concluding with the epigram that 'you live the surprise results of old plans' (2016: 165, citing Jenny Holzer). Berardi, in a rejoinder to Marxist historicism, recites the proverb that, 'the inevitable never happens because the unpredictable always wins' (2017b). The flipside of this however is the impossibility of conceiving of a planned alternative to the current global system; and that, as Jameson has put it, 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism' (1994: xii). Mark Fisher termed this 'capitalist realism' (2009), the acceptance of Thatcher's anaesthetising insistence that there is no alternative. The neoliberal era that thrives on such resignation is marked not so much by the end of history, but the end of the idea that humanity may, by conscious political design, work its way towards a different future.

Back to the Future

This returns us to the idea I introduced near the start of this essay, that, in Svetlana Boym's words, the 20th-century 'began with a futuristic utopia and ended with nostalgia' (2001: xiv). Yet my analysis of *Pride* as an example of temporal layering has intended to show that nostalgia, like any way of treating time, renders its particular moment as pregnant also with others. The critics of heritage state as much when they consider its longing for the past to express reactionary ideas about the present; but if that is true, then it may equally imply a vision of a different possible future.

Like other examples of retro-heritage, *Pride* dramatises a cultural as much as an economic shift from working class tradition and the primacy of industrial labour into a group belonging based more on pleasure, performance, and identity. Retro-heritage then implies a different way of discerning what kinds of future lay within the past from other traditions in the representation of manual labour. In the truly conservative nostalgia of *How Green Was My Valley* (Ford, 1941), the arrival of the coal mine is itself the encroachment of modernity, with its diabolical machinery despoiling the fantasy village life structured around respect for church, tradition and

family. In social realism, the rural workers of *La terra trema* (Visconti, 1948) or *O Canto do Mar/Song of the Sea* (Cavalcanti, 1953), or indeed the miners of strike narratives such as *Matewan* (Sayles, 1987) and the TV serial *Days of Hope* (Loach, 1975), have a timeless bond with the land, which offers consolation for the deficiencies of the present through hopes of future change. In *Pride*, this bond is subject to a final rupture. The miners aim for a future collectivity that was never to be; LGSM live only for today, but precisely this improvisatory energy forms the basis for the actual change that the film recounts.

If we are to take seriously the criticism that nostalgia offers a vision of the world we would desire to enter into (see Hewison, 1987), then we might want to think more about not only the loss that nostalgia mourns, but the future possibilities it may hold out. I began by detailing the division between the anti-nostalgic modernists on the left, and the contemporary prevalence of 'left-wing melancholia' (Traverso, 2017). Yet by applying the notion of temporal layering, and the different potentials within any represented moment, they may not be so irreconcilable as they first appear. Srnicek and Williams, we may remember, call to 'invent the future', a task they envisage in:

The expansion of desires, of needs, of lifestyles, of communities, of ways of being, of capacities—all are invoked by the project of universal emancipation. This is a project of opening up the future, of undertaking a labour that elaborates what it might mean to be human, of producing a utopian project for new desires, and of aligning a political project with the trajectory of an endless universalising vector (2016: 185).

Is this not a description of the enclave LGSM carve out in *Gays the Word*? Doesn't *Pride's* retro delight in pop music and culture, its foregrounding of albeit obsolete technologies and bygone commodities in constituting the historicity of our experience, bear a very real similarity to the harnessing of technology to create a 'post-work world [that] revels in the liberation of desire, abundance, and freedom' (Srnicek and Williams, 2016: 177), and a vision for changing our contemporary reality that is closer in reach than the preservation of folk tradition?

The film's starting point is the commonality between two meanings of pride—class pride and gay pride. Together, the miners and LGSM represent lifestyles that are defined in opposition to neoliberal modernisation, as two communities motivated by the welfare of all, rather than an atomised or competitive individual. In dramatising a shift away from the world represented by the village labourers of Onllwyn to that of LGSM, *Pride* envisages tradition giving way to creativity and expressivity—thus glimpsing the ideal of a future, as Srnicek and Williams put it again, 'that frees us to create our own lives and communities' (2016: 175). For if it is the privilege of those who control the past to determine the future, then retro, nostalgia, and commemoration also have their parts to play in forging the world anew.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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