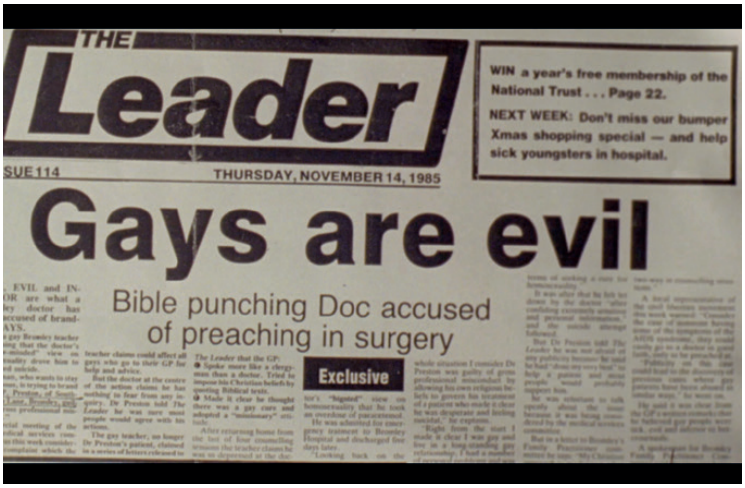
I first came across this black-and-white photograph at the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff. Two men are confronting each other in the middle of a field; between them is a small blackboard supported by an easel on which four lines of chalk writing are visible. In the background a man in broad tartan flares strides toward a street of stalls and tents, while a woman in a headdress and a grinning boy in a carnival paper cap are among the small audience to the encounter.

Of the men in the foreground, one is wearing a striped white shirt rolled up at the sleeves and wide black trousers, has short dark curly hair, and sports round, metal-framed spectacles. He holds above his head, in the attitude of a weightlifter at the top of his lift, a wooden railway sleeper into which the initials "W. N." have been roughly carved. He is staring into the eyes of a distinguished-looking man with swept-back salt-and-pepper hair in a sharp blazer and bootleg jeans who stands about six feet away. This man, who bears a passing resemblance to the poet Ted Hughes, seems to be shouting something at Atlas and his sign. The writing on the blackboard reads, as far as I can make out,

WELSH NOT
In 1870 English was
systematically imposed on
Welsh schools. The aim
was to destroy the Welsh language.

The two men are in postures of what looks like aggression, chests pushed out, feet planted wide apart.



Juliet Jacques, *You Will Be Free* (stills), 2017. Courtesy: the artist

A conversation with a well-informed invigilator, followed by a little research, revealed that the photograph was taken in 1977 at an exhibition of international performance art staged by the Welsh Arts Council as part of the Eisteddfod, an annual festival of Welsh cultures with an emphasis on national language and identity. The initiative was controversial, not only because a program of avant-garde performance art does not seem obviously to advance the cause of Welsh culture to which the Eisteddfod is devoted, but also because it was programmed by a curator from London who neglected to include any artists from Wales. So a local artist staged a protest to draw attention to the plight of the Welsh language and the culture to which it is integral, and the implication in their decline of a globalized art establishment.

The man holding the sign above his head is Paul Davies, who took inspiration for his protest from the boards inscribed with "W. N"—standing for "Welsh Not"—that nineteenth-century schoolchildren were forced to wear around their necks if caught speaking their native language. Having learned about the absence of Welsh artists from the event, he made an oversize replica out of a railway sleeper, turned up at the Eisteddfod, found a spot to stand up the blackboard that outlined his case, and hoisted the plank over his head. The implication is that the official program was a form of cultural imperialism on behalf of a remote power structure, comparable to the promotion of English over Welsh by a government based in a foreign city. On the third day Mario Merz, who had just finished performing a piece for piano, laser beam, rose petals, and coal sacks, came to find him.