

The Workers City group, Glasgow 1990

In what sense, if any, an image of the future?

Discussion & film screenings with Leigh French & Neil Gray of The Strickland Distribution

6.30^{pm} Friday 29th January 2016

Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh (ACE), 17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh, EH7 5HA

“The Workers City group point towards the future. It is of groups like ours the future will be made.”

- Farquhar McLay, *The Reckoning*, 1990

THERE'S	THERE'S
A LOT	A LOT OF
GLASGOWING	CON GOWING
ON IN 1990.	ON IN
CULTURAL CAPITAL	1990.
OF EUROPE.	

illustrations from *The Glasgow Keelie*

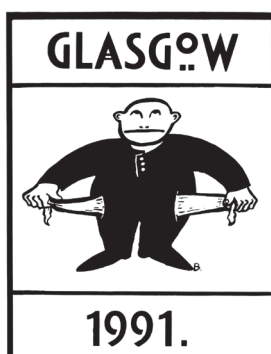
During the Glasgow-held year of European City of Culture 1990, the Workers City group provided the first and arguably most striking antagonistic collective response to the now ubiquitous ‘Culture Year’ city phenomenon. Notably, Glasgow was the first old industrial city to host the event and the first to explicitly tie it to urban regeneration policy. For their efforts, the group (comprised of long-term political activists, writers, younger artists and other figures from the cultural, political and literary scenes in Glasgow) were detested by the Left as much as the Right, as various members have affirmed.

Starting out from Farquhar McLay’s assertion above (as editor of the Workers City volumes) this point of provocation will provide an opening for French/Gray’s presentation, followed by two short film screenings and discussion. In looking at the Workers City group’s praxis, achievements and possible limitations, this event intends to re-examine the relevance of the group’s position towards the ‘Culture Year’ in light of the subsequent transfer of ‘cultural regeneration’ and ‘creative class’ policy scripts globally.

French/Gray’s reflexive reading will draw on their own engagements through *Variant* magazine with Glasgow’s cultural, social and economic conditions, in combination with their recent research (alongside Anna McLauchlan) through Strickland Distribution’s online archiving of the Workers City volumes – *Workers City: The Real Glasgow Stands Up* (1988) and *The Reckoning: Beyond the Culture City Rip Off* (1990) – as well as the group’s scabrous newssheet *The Glasgow Keelie*, all now publicly available at:

<http://www.workerscity.org>

French/Gray will suggest that the name Workers City itself is somewhat paradoxical given the group’s interest in political activity outside the formal workplace, and their recognition of the political implications of mass unemployment and precarity: a reckoning well in advance of the traditional Left in Glasgow. This position will be explored by examining the composition of the group, their actual positions and practices, their critique of the Left in Glasgow, and their incipient politics of space and social reproduction, alongside other interwoven concerns such as:



- The re-activation of history and histories from below
- Working class articulation
- Problems of nostalgia and claims to authenticity
- Workerism and anti-workerism
- Class re-composition
- Glasgow’s proto-typical neoliberal urban policy model and the material basis of its alleged art ‘miracle’
- Questions relating to the independence referendum and the kinds of institutional aggregation that are emerging with the foregrounding of national sentiment.

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FILMS SCREENING

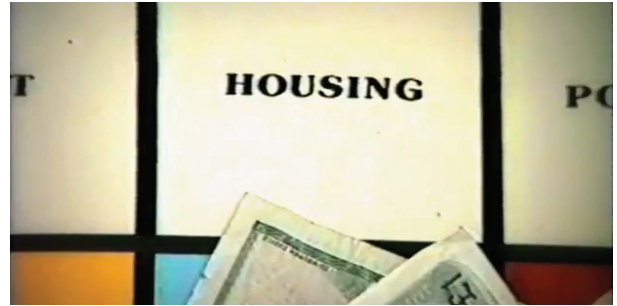
The two films to be screened investigate Glasgow's post-war urban re-development from the perspective of residents in the notorious peripheral housing schemes of Easterhouse and Drumchapel. These films provide a concrete context for the Workers City critique of the Culture Year, producing and documenting articulate forms of working class antagonism to abstract master-planning, paternalistic state mediation, alienation and poverty.



Whose Town is it Anyway? Easterhouse: People and Power

T Freeth, 1984, 30 mins.

Shows a working class community after 25 years on the receiving end of Labour Party urban policy. The film includes interviews with local activists, a meeting in a pub, workers with 'The Voice' community newspaper, and a discussion with unemployed young people. It lucidly conveys their articulate sense of anger and their attempts to self-organise following the failure of the authorities to deal with the housing and social needs of their area.



Drumchapel: The Frustration Game

De-Class'd Elements, 1989, 22 mins.

An absolutely devastating portrayal of Labour Party duplicity and chronic housing and social conditions. It provides a withering critique of mediating pseudo-'community' initiatives which have since become the norm, often defended by the Left. It resonates profoundly in the current 'Big Society' era. Possibly the angriest film ever made on a housing scheme in the UK.

<http://strickdistro.org>

<http://www.workerscity.org>

<http://autonomous.org.uk>

<http://srl.autonomous.org.uk/?p=71>

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