

The Strickland Distribution

Knowledge is Never Neutral strickdistro.org/knowledge-is-never-neutral/

invitation to participate in 'An economy of appearances' round-table discussion

7pm (start) to 9pm – Tuesday 26th February 2013

venue: The Pearce Institute, 840-860 Govan Road, Glasgow G51 3UU
MAP: <http://www.pearceinstitute.org.uk/contact-us/>
Govan Underground

The Strickland Distribution with Transmission Gallery would like to invite you to participate in a round-table discussion concerning the republication and contemporary engagement of Farquhar McLay's edited anthologies *The Reckoning* and *Workers City*, and the "scurrilous" *Glasgow Keelie*.

The 1990 Glasgow European City of Culture "had more to do with power politics than culture, more to do with millionaire developers than art. But a debate opened up and sustained throughout the year which the Labour Council, the festivals unit, the property speculators and entrepreneurs could well have done without. In *The Reckoning*, the argument continues. Biting insights into the secret agenda of the 'New Glasgow' are combined with fiction inspired by this great city", work from the "literary left" described as "an 'embarrassment' to the city's 'cultural workforce'."

We would greatly appreciate your participation in this discussion, which will be a necessarily small gathering of about 20 people – consisting of activists, academics, artists and writers, and much in-between – and which in this instance will not be open to a wider public.

The reason for the closed session is that it's intended to complement the larger public events Strickland have been hosting as part of the 'Knowledge is never neutral' series with Transmission, in providing an opportunity for close critical discussion of the questions raised in and by these publications.

This critical exploration will in turn inform the commissioning by Strickland of four short introductions to frame a *Workers City / The Reckoning* anthology to be republished later in the year by Strickland/ Transmission.

Our intention is to enter into discussion so as to inform the multiple ways we might approach *The Reckoning*, *Workers City*, *Glasgow Keelie* and critically engage their content and concerns for a more active reading in the present.

We hope this is something you would like to participate in, provided you have the time at such short notice – which we apologise for. If you can participate, could you please let us know asap by emailing Strickland at: contact@strickdistro.org

Many thanks,

Leigh French, Neil Gray, Gesa Helms, Anna McLauchlan
(on behalf of The Strickland Distribution / Transmission Gallery)

For the low/un-waged of us, we are able to cover local travel and £20 subsistence expenses – please do let us know when you reply so that we can budget for this and get cash to you on the evening. Unfortunately we are not in a position to extend this further due to limited funds, and we do appreciate remuneration may be a deciding factor in if you can or should wish to participate. We remain aware of the level of poverty of the means with which much working-class self-education activity was and still is carried out.

'An Economy of Appearances'

Concerns the publication, discussion and dissemination of three bodies of working-class self-education and communication documents from the Workers City group relating to counter-gentrification struggles in Glasgow in the late 1980s and early '90s: *The Workers' City*, *The Reckoning*, *The Glasgow Keelie*.

The reanimation of a tendency in Glasgow's recent radical history of struggles over culture, cultural democracy, spaces of communication, and the city politic; an anthology of existences real and imagined, exploring tensions over who is able to write history and what we can learn from the critical methods of a recent past. An exploration of commonalities and differences for a current phase of struggles over 'cultural regeneration', inter-city competition, city branding aggregations, mega-events (cf. 2014 Commonwealth Games), public space, censorship and exclusion, and living and working conditions in Glasgow. Who can write about the city and call it into practice in a city marked by various phases of struggles over how to engage with tradition and memory in contemporary experiences?

The re-branding of the city centre as 'The Merchant City', attempt(s) to sell off Glasgow Green, and the sacking of the People's Palace curators led to the establishment of Workers' City; a mobilisation against the Glasgow 1990 'Year of Culture' and the deepening gentrification of the city in that period. "While city elites have continually attempted to erase Glasgow's history – radical and otherwise – the Workers City group, at the minimum, created 'a record of opposition, some other history'" (Gray, 2010).

Unearthing and perusing issues of *The Keelie*, 'a scandal mongering organ' distributed freely and anonymously by the Workers' City group, the range of critical work draws attention to, "anti-poll tax campaigns, anti-militarism, housing campaigns, gentrification ('yuppiefication'), council corruption, the routing of the steel and oil industries, privatisation of common good assets, governance, and the deplorable health and wealth disparities of a city notorious for them to this day" (ibid).

Not just a politics of dispossession erupting around the 1990 City of Culture then, the Worker's City group was more diffuse and longstanding than that. Importantly for a current politics of the Transmission Gallery space, a number of former gallery members were involved in the Workers' City group, the production and dissemination of *The Keelie*, and the Glasgow Free University (which developing alongside these various struggles).

Some key questions raised in these writings, and a contemporary engagement with them, we suggest concern:

- * Archives being as much pre-production as post-production, developed through mutations of connection and disconnection, offering differing points of departure. This project will not only draw on informal archives but produce them as well, doing so in a way that underscores the nature of all archival materials as found *and* constructed, factual *and* fictive.
- * There is nothing passive about the word 'archival'. Do archival 'retrievals' offer space for associative interpretation and suggest new connections? Not so much a will to totalise as a will to relate, to connect; to probe a 'displaced' past against a displaced present, to collate its different signs; to ascertain what might remain for the present.
- * What of melancholia? Is there a will to connect what cannot be connected? What of 'ghosts of repetition'? Is there a subversive fragmentation to be posed against a symbolic totality? Can we turn 'excavation sites' into 'construction sites', recouping 'defeated' visions in art and everyday life into possible scenarios of alternative kinds of social relations?
- * How is an 'aesthetics of resistance' to be made relevant to an amnesiac society dominated by the culture industries, mass media, and mega-event spectacles?

* Is there a 'strategic essentialism' at work in an 'aesthetics of resistance'? One which runs alongside the gentrification narrative in which e.g. Glasgow is re-coded as bourgeois and consumerist, its 'true' proletarian identity expunged and disavowed – that underlying an official triumphant 'spin' there is a repressed 'truth' to be recovered?

* In arguments for 'usable tradition', can we query claims to guard and possess the 'really real' Glasgow, where its own active resistance is also vulnerable to processes of commodification (rather than over-writing) of working-classness? Should we consider how 'authentic' patterns of working-class Glasgow culture are valorised as episodes of 'real heritage', then aestheticised into postures and performances of rootedness where it becomes so much grist to designer-gallus?

* The work of the *production* and *reproduction* of labour power, and later the theory of affective labour, called attention to the gendered division of waged and unwaged service labour - even if not always in terms that could escape equating reproduction with the domestic sphere and 'women's work'.

Concepts put forward sought to understand a society where nothing was left outside capitalist production; the transition from the 'industrial factory' to the 'social factory' - where reproduction is no longer identifiable with a particular space or a distinctive set of practices but has become contiguous with production.

Once it is 'subjectivity' that is hired and managed in the expansion of such affective forms of labour, then the prescription and definition of 'tasks' transforms into a prescription of 'subjectivities', and so questions about how subjectivity is governed and who we become may be all the more crucial. (So we may consider 'Workers City' as a dialogical process which the researcher's past experiences necessarily both motivate and affect, as do those of the researched.)

How do we register and challenge the gendered organisation of labour within this frame today? Are there ways to pose the antagonism - the political struggle that poses life against work - and acquire some critical standpoints grounded not in separate spheres of labour practice but in the possibility of different qualities of life?

How to make visible, and subject to contestation, gender hierarchies and divisions of labour within both work and life - ongoing gendering of labour in the affective mode both in its waged and unwaged instances? To explore the question of the articulation between class struggles and women's struggles, between capitalist exploitation and masculine domination, between feminism and industrial workerism. How to make visible and contest the gender divisions of labour in relation to the construction of subjectivities and hierarchies without reproducing naturalised models of gender dualism?

If it is no longer possible to identify a practice that is 'outside' of work, on what ground might one establish a critical standpoint? What are the ways by which one can advance a theory of agency without deploying a model of the subject as it supposedly once was or is now beyond the reach of capital?

Resources:

The Glasgow Keelie (1990-1993)

<http://keelie.strickdistro.org>

Workers City : The Real Glasgow Stands Up

(Edited by Farquar McLay, Clydeside Press, June 1988)

<http://www.citystrolls.com/workers-city/index.htm>

Beyond the Culture City Rip Off – The Reckoning – Public Loss Private Gain

(Edited by Farquhar McLay, Clydeside Press, 1990)

<http://archive.org/details/BeyondTheCultureCityRipOff-theReckoning-publicLossPrivate>

Workers City (Variant Video)

http://archive.org/details/WorkersCityvariantVideo_214

Format:

Approx. 20 participants and 2 facilitators.

Facilitators The facilitators will be: Gordon Asher and Anna McLauhclan.

Participants Strickland will let everyone know who else is taking part as soon as we have confirmation from everyone.

Position papers Strickland will also invite four short outline/position papers of about 7 mins each. These will be spaced over the session and are intended as 'provocations' which will introduce 'themes' or problematics for discussion. As propositions and given the time constraints, we realise they will be limited in scope but are intended as prompts for self-reflection or sketches of areas of concern for further investigation. Each paper will be followed by facilitated round-table discussion of issues arising.

Facilitation The facilitation will follow the process for other Strickland events, which is:

"The event is centred on the notion of participatory dialogue – on listening and being listened to – and it is important that everyone should have the chance to speak with no one person dominating. Facilitators are there to encourage open, inclusive and participatory dialogue within this framework. Facilitators are not neutral, but active participants and can contribute their own points to ongoing discussions. The tendency can be to try and arrive at agreement around the most important themes or concerns. The process of agreement is often organised around resolving differences in experience or knowledge. In this process, however, we wish to try to give special attention to those divergences, not as differences to be conquered or argued but as positions to investigate."

Documentation:

Having considered it at some length, the discussion will *not* be audio recorded/filmed, as we do not wish to impede discussion, but Strickland as individuals will be making anonymised notes.

About:

Knowledge is never neutral is a series of projects organised by The Strickland Distribution taking place from September 2012 to June 2013 within and outside the Transmission Gallery space. Taken together, these projects set out to explore the circumstances that surround cultural and knowledge production. We look to situate this production within a wider set of social and historical relations, and to reflect on our practices across these relations. We invite you to join us in these processes.

Creating spaces for participatory dialogue – for listening and being listened to – the projects include a public walk, co-research inquiry, facilitated workshops, film screenings, reading and discussion groups, publication launches and the ongoing documentation and reconsideration of outcomes deriving from these projects.

The Strickland Distribution is an artist-run group supporting the development of independent research in art-related and non-institutional practices. Art-related includes research forms that directly implement artistic practice as a means of research method. Non-institutional includes forms of grass-roots histories, social inquiries and projects developed outside of academic frameworks and by groups and individuals normally excluded from such environments. The Strickland Distribution operates in the public sphere, seeking to stimulate and contribute to public education, discourse and debate around the topics and themes addressed through its projects.

The Strickland Distribution contact@strickdistro.org <http://strickdistro.org>

Transmission Gallery is managed by a voluntary committee of six people. Each member of the committee serves for up to two years and is then replaced. Transmission evolves under the influence of each successive committee member and continues to draw in a young peer group as active participants. The regular changes in the gallery's committee maintain a fluid and varied relationship with developing concerns in the world of the visual arts. The broad perspectives on contemporary culture offered by the individuals involved ensure Transmission's prominent role in these discourses and the gallery is committed to keeping its engagement challenging and current.

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