

Appendix 3_ HHWG Farewell Welfare: What can be done?

Title: Pre- Post Film discussion “Sharp end of the knife.”
Type: Transcript excerpts
Event: dis-place *thiscollection* @ *Glue Factory, Garscube, Glasgow*
Format: Transcript/ Web Promotion/ Journal
Contributors: S.B (HHWG),
A., Le., members of Glasgow Social Center (GSC),
L., Rebel Clowns (RC), and
Public, Stefan,
Activist/ Writer/ Filmmaker: Cathy McCormack,
E & Pe: (People’s assembly)
Category: Discussion/ Notice/ Notes
Date: 13 May 2011
Recorded by: Yasser Youssef

Pt 5 APPENDIX number pending

S introducing the shoebox university. Radicalised by documentaries redistributed by this activist. He made some for us you can help yourself. Independent filmmakers making documentaries set free from film festivals who otherwise have very little distribution. A short introduction of how BBC producer Barbara Orton introduced me to Cathy McCormick and her documentary "Sharp end of the knife."

S: We hope that you are inspired and take the DVDs away with you, host screenings, leave an email for a social justice film night circuit?

Free Hetherington do free screenings but pls take the DVDs leave an email and spread the word.

5 Also for your information Yasser is recording more for documenting the events in the space, more for research than for any other reporting facility.

It is a small group, we could all maybe introduce ourselves? Cathy is quite keen for it to be a conversation.

Adjust Lights/ Encouraging a circle. Silhouetted.

10 S: Flyered around Garscube great conversations but disappointed by the response. Maybe that is interesting is film the best medium to engage certain groups of people? If you had any advice on how to get more people.

15 Stefan: Got an email 11 mths here from Austria. Work in a Kitchen and had no time to find spaces and was a bit sad and melancholic. All I made was this superficial system stuff. I am more a travelling to separate myself from this nonsense that is going on. I read the little bit of the fantasy of what you are doing, and for me it is very important to connect a little bit to ...(emotional)

To me it is important to connect to a network or group or so on. So I started with a lot of electronic work, in my former life and so on.

20 I don't have much to say but for myself I can't cooperate with what's going on.. more and more everyday it is take a step back and ... (What I want to say)... I'm just interest.

E & Pe: (People's assembly)

25 Pe : Member of Glasgow's people's assemblies. Am interested in film and Cathy's work. We're probably contemporaries more or less...

Cathy: Sorry?

Pe. :We're contemporaries... My big interest how do you organise people, or how do they organise themselves for democracy as opposed to what we have today.

30 L. RC: Am L., known Cathy for a long time. We were involved in the Scottish parliament when it first started when we were trying to get the SNPs to do something and not become a Westminster which it looks like it has now become unfortunately. ... and uh I was heavily involved in setting up an anti poverty unit in the west end called Westgow.

35 Cathy: Thanks L., hope to hear more about what you've been up to and have more of a discussion.

40 A.GSC: I live across the road, I read the flyer and was excited by people doing self organising but it is very frustrating but it is really satisfying when it goes well. Interested in the work you did in Africa, cos I worked with communities in Cape Town and am really interested , expecting to find different problems but it was the same problems that we had in Glasgow. Which was really weird.

S.B: I'm S.B and I came here at 2pm part of the Hillhead library writing group, and I just discovered time we knew each other was up in Iona, cos I am a member of the Iona community, so am very interested in trying to set up communities all over the place. Am retired well retired, so just here.

45 S: Would you like to introduce the film?

Video file: 00026MTS

50 Cathy: 1999. Showed around the world. Lynn Browne from Africa came and noticed how Glasgow reminded her of a township. So she invited us over to see how they organise. The 5 min film helped us get the momentum to make Sharp edge of the knife. I am very interested in popular education. War without bullets against the poor and those on benefits armed with briefcases not Guns. All I had was common sense, my mother's faith in Justice and the spirit of a community that refused to die. Once we connected the sickness of our children, homes, communities and planet we were emboldened to make change.

55 Cathy: £50 a week to heat the house. Up to their eyeballs in Debt. 10 million pounds a year to heat the sky above them. So we campaigned for change. 36 flats.

P: Fuel poverty is rising again. Govt has cut all the subsidies and forced corporations to deal with it, but it ...

L: Energy companies are making the biggest profits ever. Subsidised by tax money. Poor drained by the rich as usual.

60 Cathy: Told this was the promised land. But the houses were cold and damp and the children started to get sick.

Film begins: Sharp end of the knife.

Reflection: GF is cold and hostile as opposed to a cinema.

Was I creating a social centre in an art gallery? Why was there a boundary? Was it contrived? Why is sincerity associated with ignorance. Why do we presume the learning together has to happen behind closed doors?

Are there exceptions? Can we be brave enough to endure and embrace everyone's unknowing? Is it draining? Is it pointless? Or is making it seem like we know what we are doing and posing as if all is well pointless?

Institutional confusion? Trust broken.

Is this a welfare state mentality? Programmes to build identity & solidarity necessary. Direction or space allocation is important.

Film quotes

People are valued no matter if they are on the dole or not.

We need education.

Cathy

S: Thank you for putting up with the cold. Reminds me of the Glasgow social centre.

Le.(GSC): Yea.

65 S: Any questions for Cathy?

Cathy: We started in the 1999 there were very few real activists or resources out there so, there was an aspiration to get some kind of leadership going but it didn't happen.

70 There were just too many issues... in actual fact that's why I was interested in Popular Education. That's why **we started a popular education group to try and train community activist to be popular educators and stand in the council.**

Unfortunately, the people who took part, they lived in the projects in Easterhouse and they were afraid to be identified in case the politicians or the councillors see that they were associated with us and they would be discriminated against get fined or taken away from the projects.

75 P: Was it a form of control.

C: Absolutely Easter house is made up of 15 communities. So every community had to compete for resources that's why I mentioned Nicaragua because I wanted to see popular education happening out there. What was happening in communities (Easterhouse), people were divided so much, in particular. you know... families next door to you who are working, you know really started to take on the voice of the oppressors, and actually did believe they were out working to keep people unemployed. So they called them scroungers. Even up right close there was so much division.

80

85 A.: Kind of like saying we're not like those people instead of how we are similar, a lot of the problems is due to a lack of hope, people are tired, life is hard and they don't want to come to meetings or whatever...but even when they do come they don't have confidence to make any difference so let's just do what everyone else does. A lot of it is jaded and we tried that before and it never changed anything. .. Maybe in the film they did manage to make a change it changed the politics but it didn't change the economic situation. So maybe they have some idea and confidence in their ability to change things. But here I don't think people have any faith in themselves or their communities ability to make a difference and I think that stops people from trying.

90

Cathy: Absolutely totally agree. Particularly Easterhouse, there were so many barriers for whenever people try to make change. Prob... remember in my book, that in Easterhouse in particular we were part of a local authority board, it was called the Ayr management group. it was supposedly set up by local people, in each and every community there were democratic elections, 15 people on the community board. 5 then were elected to go on the Ayr management group which made decisions about funding and various issues. There was never any real opportunity for people in the community to air their issues. Those on top made up the agenda. We tried to change this situation and they wouldn't accommodate us. They decided they were going to change the economics and social aspects, the 5 activists on the Ayr Mgt group, they withdrew their support until we got action. They wrote to the Scottish office to say we're self-appointed superstars and not representative of the people. The Scottish office withdrew our funding and we got evicted over this - out on the streets.

95

100

105 So really after that the people were devastated, once they changed the system, they couldn't make any decisions until the community was involved. So they set up another system and the communities elected the same five people but they were sacked. The struggle became too much and the people were fed up with it.

110 Le.: Do you think in South Africa they know the system and have so much anger at the system that could feed into organising at grassroots level, where else Easterhouse, still tries to play the system, find a way round the system play by its rules. Maybe that's the difference they shouldn't accept the system.

115 Cathy: I will always believe that people should work together, but as I said the divide was too great so there was no sense of community. **In Easterhouse, one woman who stood up in a popular education event, she said her whole life she has been made to feel like she was a piece of rubbish, but now she realised that she wasn't a**

120 **piece of rubbish anymore and she broke down and cried. That for me, even if**
only one person started to heal, for me it is worth it. People in Easterhouse were
up in arms with people like me to get them to see similarities between people like us
and people in Nicaragua. They were told they were experiencing poverty, but when I
said that they started to realise and take ownership that they were being oppressed. I
was hearing recently, speaking to an activist, I can't believe this is still happening.
125 But these area management group types of things, that give the community some kind
of voice, but sorry it isn't very hopeful because what devastated people is the anti-
war march that didn't work.

*ST: Confidence for D. Forbes it wasn't smart design it wasn't effective, but it was
transformative and it was possible, even if it did take resources. It made a difference.*

130 L.: South Africa it was known around the world because of the injustices of the system,
but no one knows about the UK, no one looks at the injustices of the UK, because
everyone holds up USA and UK as perfect models of democracy, which is a bag of
shite. Everyone looks at Egypt, yes, Tunisia, yes, Libya yes, but we have been stuck
with this conspiracy of the UK being a perfect model. I remember talking to an
American boy, going through the United States. It shocked me, he was quite a young
guy, he said there is no poverty in the United States. But we've seen poor
communities on telly. But not where I live, he said. Genuinely for him he had never
135 actually looked out his window and seen it. The other thing was the victimisation, if
you put your head above the parapet, you would either become the snitch or an MSP,
or you will be victimised, either way you are the loser because either way you are
called the superstar or you become absolutely tired because nobody is gonna have
anything to do with you. No way to get around it.

140 Cathy: Hearing the story about .. protestors, peaceful protestors becoming described as
domestic terrorists. My real frustration is obviously the poverty is getting worse, I
really don't like that term poverty. Uhm... people really have serious issues about
whenever I say apartheid. OR if I say there is war against the poor. They go how can
you talk like that. There is a real fear of trying to take ownership, obviously people
145 you know say South Africa it is black and white. It is harder to understand these
concepts if the oppressors are the same colour. I think that it is partly the struggle.
Lynne Brown was shocked. How come people in the middle class communities
support the action against apartheid in South Africa yet completely ignore what is
going on in their own city. I don't know how you solve the problem, or if there is a
150 way for them to see poverty in a different way, cos obviously there are so many
misconceptions. Uhm....

Le.: Do you try to find a different identity a different way of describing?

155 Cathy: That would be a useful discussion. Because when I do speak to people experiencing
the war without bullets, people experiencing the "bullets" think it is a useful term.
But people who have no experiencing it actually feel quite no so much insulted but
feel guilty...It's how do you they get that proper balance, how do we really find the
right kind of language. I mean for me I remember setting up a commission for
Scotland, and someone was quite middle class saying: What is the carrot? What is the
160 carrot? I was like excuse me a wee minute do you know we have all been robbed of
our humanity here? And we need to somehow find a way to heal, but obviously that
isn't going to heal, because the war is being intensified. I don't know if people
know about all the stuff going on in welfare? But there is a definite plan, as far as I
am concerned, to abolish it. Which is what I find so shocking so... already a whole
165 generation of working class teenagers lives upended completely too. This is gonna be
the next wave, whilst all these cuts really really take effect. But I mean like...
watching that film...did you maybe find resentful in any way about making
comparisons?

170 E. (PA): I agree with your comparison whole heartedly. It's profound and unrecognised. We moved to Glasgow last year, after visiting Glasgow to visit P's son over a number of years about 25 yrs. when we moved here, it was almost as if Glasgow was being victimised. We live on the South side but never been to Easterhouse. I thought there was neglect there that wasn't being recognised at all. I agree with your comparison whole heartedly. That is something that is happening all around Britain and it isn't talked about. Every oppressed area through out the world, suffers the same as South Africa, looking at the reservation in South Dakota in North America, South America where the people featured there, the oppression does breed also a very insecure feeling of and withdrawing into yourself which comes out in different ways. Yea I agree with your comparison whole heartedly.

175

180 Le.: It would be great to bridge these oppressions together to communicate to each other through technologies Do you think that might be one way of moving fwd. all suffering the similar experience and building solidarity.

Cathy: I totally agree with you which is why I work closely with Sunny Govan, to make programmes not just for Suny Govan just to try and get a much broader dialogue debate discussion. Because... I got invited to Austiralia last year because to talk about my analysis about the war without bullets, cos I work with David Briar who is a community psychologist. When we first heard his conversation with David on radio, it was empowering for people, for people to hear that unemployment and poverty is socially constructed, that unemployment is used to keep down inflation. So you never get these kind of real truths through mainstream media. So any alternative media is desperately needed.

185

190

S: But..it is important to know that building online communities is that ground conversation must back it up, no point just posting a blog or updating your twitter and fb if you don't have the ground conversation at the same time. At this point I would like to give gifts to those who came, just tools or materials for you to use to carry on those conversations.

195

P: I want to say one thing... You are making such concrete comparisons in townships, Edinburgh, Dundee ... as we talk about what is happening in these communities of working class, as unfashionable as that term may be, the war without bullets, we're talking about a class war. There must be some characteristic which leads to this powerlessness. It is because we don't own and control means of production, we don't own and control the way things are done. And this is why they use funding for a tool of social control really in these areas. At the same time when we are looking at what's happening in the working class, we should also be looking at what is happening in the ruling class. And from that we can draw a great amount of optimism, if we look at the phenomenal break up it has taken place of the traditional political status quo, which is taking place really under the impact of globalisation and the impact of the financial crisis, where we have a coalition, we have this incredible wiping out of the Scottish Labour Party. This break up of the status quo in fact, it may not immediately appear to be positive, but there is within that a movement, and we have to see where do we fit into the movement.

200

205

210

215 Sure the Stop the war programme didn't stop the war. Surely the lesson to be drawn from that is not that we need a bigger protest, but that we need a different political perspective, one which is mobilising to replace this really collapsing ... **I think it opens up big opportunities for us... what we say about new technologies is absolutely true and in fact to test the young generation. I know they don't immediately appear to be a force of change and revolution, but they are, cos they haven't got a past, they haven't got a future, so they must fight for a future. We have seen it in Tunisia and Egypt, I think we do have to seek out new directions. I think the**

220 break up of political status quo is great and I approve and we need to work a way out of it, a regeneration of law and ...

225 Cathy: I agree, really do, my only concern is that the actual government has become a financial institution to service the rich. But people are stuck in their belief that they live in a democracy... this is why I was so interested in popular education, because in these communities, people kept voting for the Labour Party. But the Labour Party see people like us as the enemy.

230 S: But that's why I thought your comment on the youtube video, "So we stand", you said we have to know our past, growing up in the 80s and 90s they were constantly erasing our past, you need a committee or you need government to do anything. That's why popular education to reconnect us, like with the writers' group, all their stories of how things were before, we lose touch with that and we have got to reclaim that power from the past. See mistakes and not repeat the same route.

Transcription of this section to demonstrates a snapshot of the ideological differences in negotiating common ground to be analysed.

The issue of tension arose when the group addressed the 2011 poverty commission report and its efficacy of its recommendations in actually making impactful change. One of the non-activist members SB defended the well meaning intention of those collating data for the report. The activists were defensive that these efforts were whitewashing the issues on the ground.

235 Le.: When you (Cathy) were talking on film ... you were talking about how to gather evidence, you (E.) talk about neglect, but the word neglect, sounds as if like people are just being ignored, but the actual neglect you get in the East end has been systematic for a distinct purpose. Purpose behind it is the systematic marginalisation of people and disenfranchisement of people. I think trying to gather that evidence of what has been happening for 2 - 3 generations by now...

240 S.B: They are trying to do that in the poverty commission, I don't know a great deal about it, but I have heard other people talk about it. Does anyone here know about it?

Cathy: I was disappointed in the poverty commission report because...

S.B: But that was what they were trying to do weren't they? Sort of gather evidence.

245 Cathy: No... the commission that I was talking about was completely different. But the poverty commission for me there wasn't any kind of Social economic analysis. They supported people who had issues...and that was fine, but the big picture, there was no address.

S.B: Yep.

250 P: When it came down to it, what was their outcome? Well the outcome was we have to help families, we've got to... of course we do, but to my mind, where is the poverty where has it come from? It was like a given wasn't it, as if poverty was just there, and never really examined it. I read the report quite carefully and I was astonished.

Cathy murmurs in agreement.

255 L: For us it is the usual thing, set up a commission to look at it. Have a nice wee book, nice cover and it will go in a drawer, and there will be, right what will we do next?

260 S.B: I think you are wrong there, because I know some of the people involved in it, I'm too old to get myself involved in it as I am so involved with asylum seekers at the moment I just couldn't, but I know Molly who is totally involved in it, and I just can't believe what you just said c ould have any...

L: I'm not talking about the people on the commission, I am talking about the people who commission the commission to do it...

265 S.B: They do... they are very much involved in the middle set, I don't think there's much funding for it at all. They are doing it themselves.

Cathy: The commission I am talking about is winding up.

S.B: Maybe I am thinking about the wrong thing.

270 P: No.. The report was done recently. The evidence they did gather was pretty stunning.

Le.: You want that evidence to be used by communities to..

S.B: This is what they were trying to do... I must defend them in that. If none of us were involved I don't think we can criticise them too much. It was a real effort. And the whole solidarity thing, is what I liked about the film. I lived in Africa

275 for 5 yrs, no matter how bad things were, the solidarity amongst women, there was a division between women and men no doubt but the solidarity among women especially was incredible. If you could provide a bit of seed corn, money for various projects for them to get started it was amazing what the women could do.

280 Cathy: The sad thing about South Africa is that all the community activists came out to parliament and sort of left the communities

S.B: ...that's what happens.

Cathy: I am quite optimistic, I think what we really need is a spiritual revolution. It just feels, I don't mean it as a religion, but I think more and more people spirits

285 are starting to...

S.B: We need trust, trust takes a vast amount of risk, one of the most important words in the English language at moment is risk. Let's get rid of caution, take risk.

P: Throw caution to wind.

290 Le.: That's the word you used a lot, healing. Healing is a word you use a lot, when you describe things getting down. Maybe that's where the focus should be communities healing themselves.

S.B: It's happening in Govan, Gallgale, there is a real spiritual feel.

295 Cathy: To sum it up, the poverty truth commission was about, maybe I am getting it wrong, but poverty will never change unless people experiencing poverty make/get? their voices heard. I think that's a total cop out.

(Points to L.)

300 You're right. I have got a drawer filled of poverty reports, millions and millions of pounds that have been spent saying to get people in poverty's voice heard. But the point is no body's listening. And I never thought, I never in my wildest imagination, did I ever think that when I started down that struggle, that people will be experiencing the real poverty that they are experiencing now.

305

310

315

320

325

330

335

At least when we started we were the first lot that had a giro, but we had the put food on the table. The thing that really scares me now, is because benefits has increased over the past four to five years, and we've always had to choose between to eat or heat the house . Some families now don't even have that choice. You know they don't have free choice. It's scary because obviously ... the vision is to me, that vision is to me to really that people have got to become Malnutrition, coming to grips, when I started there was a 10 year gap in life expectancy in East end vs West End. Now it is 28yrs difference. (A. clarifies) It's shocking, we're facing a real serious major public health catastrophe. In this country the unemployed people...

L: With the NHS no one can afford.

P: Just a side note, they've handed public health education funding over to McDonalds. They have shut down public health basically

Cathy: I suppose the other scary thing about i t is I used to wonder why there was such resistance to getting rid of poverty and then I realised that if poverty was to go, everything would have to be reinvented because there is no way the society or market could actually benefit anybody unless there were people to be exploited.

P: You are right in that the way the system existed just now it can't. When New Labour was voted in the largest majority in history, they could have done anything, they could have nationalised the banks, they could have done anything with that majority, but they wanted to facilitate globalisation, that shows that even within the existing system, even the party that rebuild sees no alternative in the existing system. Maybe they are right in the existing system there is no alternative.

Cathy: Obviously that is really hurting peoples, cos they don't have any kind of government to address or support their issues.


P: There is a 22% increase in food prices this year.



Le.: Food prices are pretty stable and low now compared to the 70s. Food is cheaper now. A lot is about to changed.

A.: We don't need reports on poverty, we already know the situation, what we need is reports on how can we change things and how can societies change things. I don't know why I need another poverty alliance commission to tell me poverty exists, I know it does, it is just miserable reading. How can we and communities actually make change? Those kind of solutions and impact.

Closing remarks, Invitation to the pub to carry on the conversation in more habitable conditions.

A group of us speak to Stefan privately to offer encouragement.

Back  **Farewell Welfare: What can be done?**
May 5, 2011
community free glasgow activists Glue Factory 8+

Cinepoetry
this collection
10 followers  



Ming Tse interprets Cathy McCormack's message

Friday the 13th and no spooks or serial killers, but a horror of a different kind and you are the heroes.

In face of a community eroded, a division between them and us, systematic stigmatisation and destabilisation of ties that bind, is an apolitical united front possible?

This Friday the 13th we invite anyone who seeks an alternative to join us to face these demons to dig deep into the dusty forgotten toolkit to recover the power of our hands and feet to see what we can begin to do together.

5-7pm

Conversation with Cathy McCormack: What can be done? Free Film Screening

Poster by MING design, blog post promoting screening.

 **Cinepoetry**
this collection
10 followers  

Activist Campaigner Cathy McCormack was forced to try and keep her three children alive on welfare away back in 1982 when Britain was changed from an industrial to a money market economy; she managed to inspire both rich and poor who supported her to go on a journey all over the world in search of the truth. Now Cathy has come home, and would love to share and engage in real conversations with people who are really interested in asking the same questions and exploring possible solutions. She shares her powerful film "At the Sharp End of the Knife" (52mins) about her visit to the townships of South Africa to meet fellow activists building the 'New' South Africa. She may be dodging the bullets, but finds energy and inspiration in the people she meets as she makes intriguing parallels with their lives, and her own back in Glasgow's infamous Easterhouse housing project.

2-4pm

The screening is preceded by a unique writer group that meets at 2pm, they share their co-operative practice that has developed over the past 18 months through self governance. Though they originally began in Hillhead Library, the negotiation of use in Public spaces may mean the group will have to migrate soon. Come discover your voice, be inspired perhaps to start your own group to share experiences. Cathy, author of [Wee Yellow butterfly](#), shares her activist writing experience with the group as well.

Entry is Free, All Welcome. The venue can get drafty so please wrap warm and hope to see you there.




Special thanks to <http://www.sowestand.com> for their support in Glasgow