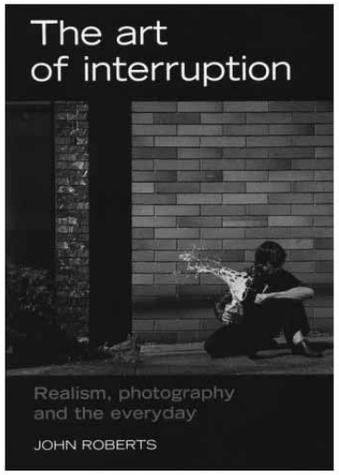
POLITICS TACTICS PRAGMATIC ANTICS

James Kelman's Everyday Strategy

Ken Neil



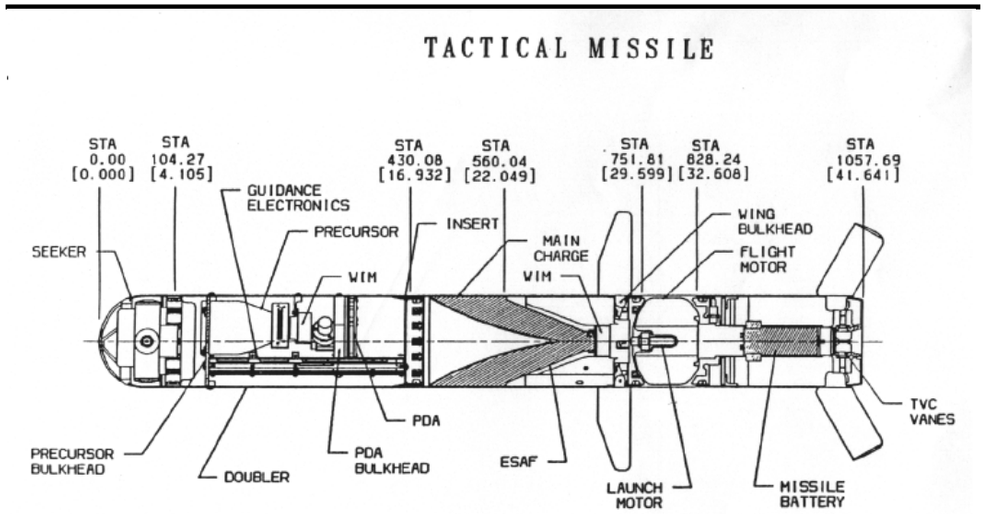
i) Twofold Tactics

At the December 2011 launch event for their recent publication, *The Red Cockatoo: James Kelman and the Art of Commitment*, Johnny Rodger and Mitch Miller proposed that we might understand Kelman's highly diverse life and work as cohering around the central idea of anti-establishment radical *tactics*. For Rodger and Miller, Kelman operates as a writer and activist under an 'anti-establishment ethos concerned with human rights and freedoms, international in both provenance and scope of its humane attachment to first principles, while firmly rooted in the local'. To establish this core mission for Kelman, their writerly methodology, or intellectual *strategy* let's say, is to read Kelman through Noam Chomsky using Michel de Certeau as reagent.

Central to Rodger and Miller's approach is de Certeau's utilisation of the distinction between strategy and tactics as described by renowned military theorist Carl Von Clausewitz (1780-1831). In short: strategy is that mode of command carried out in their power base by those in power; tactics are devised by those of no fixed base, those in the field who operationalise the strategy of others, in the face of the exigencies and contingencies of their immediate surroundings.

The incorporation of de Certeau's strategic use of Von Clausewitz allows Rodger and Miller to read singular significance into the fluidity and anti-hierarchism of Kelman's use of language. That fluidity is evidenced by the diversity of registers brought to bear in his life and work, from locale-specific working class speech, to broader dialect, to wider Scottishisms, to standard English, to meta literary norms. The tactical play within such a range is persuasively understood by Rodger and Miller as an assault on normative schema which would have strategic control of language based in standard English, promulgated from the institutions of Literature's Main Operating Base. Drawing on de Certeau's geographic model for the playing out of Von Clausewitz's concepts, this fluidity, this range of linguistic tactics is for Rodger and Miller a means by which Kelman can 'poach territory from those who would be in control of language'. Kelman's anti-establishment commitment is immediately evident, then, in this linguistic resistance to the hegemonic strategy of standard English literary Generals. To cement this point, Kelman's Booker Prize Acceptance Speech (1994) was quoted on the launch night:

> There is a literary tradition to which I hope my work belongs. I see it as part of a much wider process, or movement towards decolonisation



> and self-determination: it is a tradition that assumes two things, 1) the validity of indigenous culture, and 2) the right to defend it in the face of attack. It is a tradition premised on a rejection of the cultural values of imperial or colonial authority, offering a defence against cultural assimilation [. . .] my culture and my language have the right to exist, and no-one has the authority to dismiss that right.[1]

As well as employing a wide range of linguistic styles to rebel against given commands of literary convention, Kelman makes use of a number of stylistic tactics within that range. One of these is his lethal a-hierarchical use of punctuation. Punctuation as a powerful strategy of command and control that would normally hold in ranked order the components of Literature is regularly and famously dispensed with by Kelman. One important effect of this is the levelling of narrator as story strategiser and protagonist as local tactician: the *structural* difference between narrator and character on the page is not easily seen, and the fluidity of language ensures that it is not easily *heard*. Kelman loosens the strategic grip of Literature with his prolonged campaign of diverse language and scurrilous structure and, thus, strips rank from all of the players.

In this example from *How Late it Was How Late*, the destabilising tactic of depunctuation is clear to see as Kelman effects a blending of narrator with protagonist. More than that, though, the guerrilla amalgam which results seems now to comprise all at once the book's narrator, Sammy *and* Kelman himself. Do we read the aggressive judgments of Sammy, or narrator, or author; whose head is it we occupy now that we fall, rudely into the scene?

> ...ye're an ignorant bastard, a fucking dumpling; ye spend all these years inside but ye know fuck all about the system, know what I'm talking about, that's what they think about ye, ye're just a fucking
>
> Ah fuck it man who gives a fuck.
>
> Fuck the football, he reached for a tape. Some of these voices man they would drive ye nuts; grown men, know what I mean, raving away about football. The tape was in, he found the play button.
>
> Fucking Willie Nelson man that was the last thing he wanted.[2]

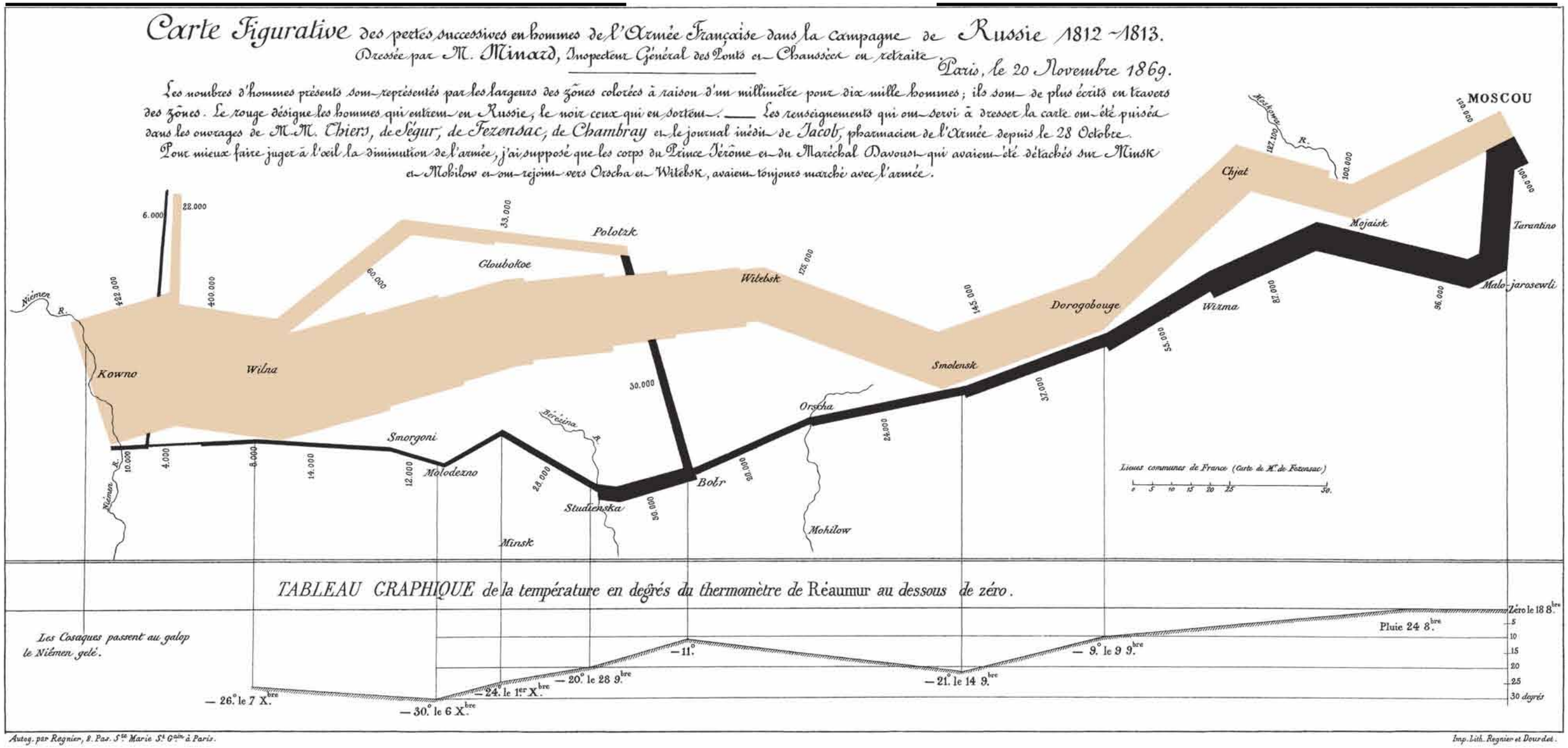
We might read the 'who gives a fuck' here, following Rodger and Miller's lead, as voiced tactically in unison by each of the constituents of the anarchic amalgam. Altogether the narrator, Sammy and Kelman proclaim 'fuck the system': the penal system, the care system, the football system, and the literary system, but best of all, just the *System*, for the System is the product of strategists and ringknockers who hold power and who hold power away from the likes of regular Sammy, his narrator *and* Kelman as sentinel for the workerist everyman.

In Rodger and Mitchell's assessment, then, Kelman's key anti-establishment radical tactic is double-layered; it is linguistic and stylistic. Firstly, there is the diversity of language from the guttural expletive to the utterly normative which levels out the pernicious strategic hierarchising of institutionalised, Sandhurst Literature. Secondly, within that purposive diversity, there is the mutinous stylistic depunctuation which as well as destabilising familiar textual infrastructure serves to blur the demarcations of protagonists' roles and responsibilities in text, with readers implicated to boot.

As Rodger and Miller pointed out on the night, Kelman gets his fair share of invective from those who identify more readily with the etiquette and strategy of Literature's Main Operating Base, those who would see the levelling in Kelman working in the wrong direction (by virtue of the levelling working at all, I guess, a revealing proclivity which I will return to in conclusion) – his work is a levelling down, they cry, to the basest common

denominator. Having reported the de Certeauian conceptual context, I want to think further about this double-layered central tactic in Kelman to suggest that Rodger and Miller might be sending pernicious orders to Kelman by fielding the author as principally a tactician.

There are two reasons for this speculative criticism of Rodger and Miller's perspective. Firstly, there is a risk that Kelman and his brothers and sisters in arms are held in predetermined ranks by the assumption that his is a life of, if not rank subservience to the Officer's Club, then at best one which sees a reactionary concatenation of more or less effective tactical responses to the big Orders of Staff Sergeant Bourgeois. Secondly, it might be that the force of Kelman's double-layered assault is much more than an insurgent's predictable response to established order; it might be that his assault is a *bone fide strategy,* one which succeeds in battle, if not in war, as is evidenced, to a degree, by the nature of the invective which is mortared to Kelman's very own Forward Operating Base. What follows is an exploration of these two possibilities for Kelman's operation in the zone.



ii) Parrhesiastic Strategy

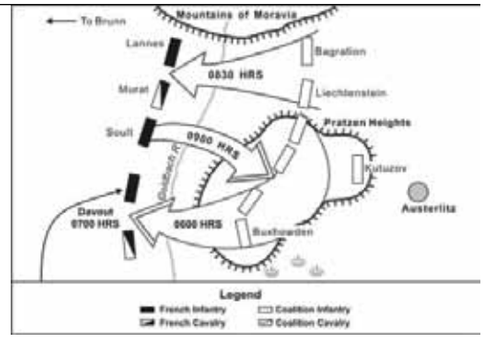
At the launch event, to reinforce the dehierarchising of conventional linguistic strategies Rodger and Miller introduced Simon Kövesi's analysis of Kelman's work. They spoke to the following excerpt from *The Red Cockatoo* which cites Kovesi's critique:

> Kövesi in an extended discussion of this aspect of Kelman's work shows how, by a 'flattening of the usual hierarchies' in presenting working class characters, i.e. those hierarchies where the omniscient narrator presents the action in 'standard English', while the direct speech is written in some non-standard or dialect form, Kelman avoids the situation where: 'Narrator and reader become *cognoscenti* while the working class character...is patronised, made primitive and animalised'.[3]

Now, Kövesi is not wrong to note as salient the remarkable levelling at work in Kelman's writing, and Rodger and Miller do well to illuminate it with clarity in their work. As all three literary critics note, the tactic of problematising conventional roles of narrator and actor works effectively to usher in the working class character from the conventional cold, but the cognoscenti still lurk in the Main Operating Base assessing the conspicuous class-positionedness of Kelman's characters and, of course, of the author himself.

The overt issue of class in much of Kelman's work, coupled with the dehierarchising tactic, could, strangely, be taken as an offence against the persistence of the importance of issues of class politics in Scotland, and elsewhere, for the tactic on this count lines up with some post-industrial views of late capitalism. In theory, Kelman's levelling accords in some sense with the flattening of variegated Enlightenment-Marxist terrain as part of a sociopolitical scenario wherein, to cite John Roberts, '"new movement" politics effectively breaks down the 'productivism' and 'universalism' of the Enlightenment-Marxian legacy'. From that angle, Kelman's is indeed a tactic at the service of another's strategy, as capitalism finds new ways to dedifferentiate the erstwhile ranked strata within various sociopolitical and cultural systems and, indeed, between those grounding systems. The working class situatedness is but one of many in this model, overt but indistinct, a form on a surface across which tactics are played out by remote control. This would be the depersonalisation of class war, seen from afar, Roberts might complain, by virtue of the telemetry of the Main Operating Base.

For Roberts, this situation has art and literature acting not as a light, but a blind. This is the operation of tactics, spectacular and distracting in all their linguistic and stylistic aggression, as a mask for strategies which lie behind. Rodger and Miller made us aware of negative criticism of Kelman's work which aims at roughly the same spot. Shortly after the Booker Prize was announced in 1994, Simon Jenkins, writing in *The Times*, accused Kelman of 'acting the part of an illiterate savage'. By that judgement, Kelman would be the purveyor of poverty or class pornography; a disingenuous peddler who capitalises on what media scholar, John Corner called the 'psychodynamics of anxiety and security'. Kelman gives us just enough time with Sammy and the narrator (and himself) to absolve our anxieties about being distant from the very real sociocultural unevenness which is a



by-product of the very real pre-post-industrial outlook on class politics. Yet the work somehow secures us against the actualities of any underlying strategies, the hyperbolic Sammy and the utter collapse of Literature's conventions make for a potent injection, the effects of which last, so, no further inoculation will be required from that stratum for quite some time.

Whatever the plausibility of the above interpretative tactic, it does not seem contentious to state that there will always be present in work like Kelman's an inherent risk of spectacularising poverty or class, a risk of precipitating Jenkins-style criticism. The most damaging facet of that type of criticism is that spectacularised or paradigmaticised poverty stories (think of the BBC's recent television series *The Scheme*) ultimately endanger serious consideration of what lies beneath the surface of the tactical domain. Roberts is quite right (so too Rodger and Mitchell) to reinvest the flattened post-industrial landscape with some sociocultural peaks and troughs. And, contra Jenkins, Kelman's work for Rodger and Mitchell is effective tactically in assaulting actual strategic imperatives, but, reflecting on the launch night and on *The Red Cockatoo*, and because of what I have just set out, it might be that their assessment of Kelman as tactician does not do justice to the nature of Kelman's form of cultural class warfare.

For Roberts, writing in *The Art of Interruption*, it is an act of post-industrial ideology to flatten the discourse of class, as if now identity-based politics have smoothed the landscape on behalf of all inhabitants. If Jenkins is right, then Kelman plays a perverse part, albeit unwittingly, in removing the normative, concrete and stratified stylistic, linguistic and sociopolitical infrastructure from discursive territory (at the limits of this line of argumentation at least) – an end product to delight neo-capitalist, post-industrial strategists to the same degree as it disgusts Conservative Commanders in HQ. Roberts puts that unwelcome dedifferentiation this way:

> The issue of an identity-based politics, in some sense 'taking' over class politics as a matter of liberation from the 'productivist' and 'universalist', is suspect on concrete, material grounds. In these terms post-structuralist and post-Althusserian claims to 'plurality' and 'difference' do not so much draw attention to the realities of power-relations, as empty them of effective content, insofar as treating class as one identity among many is a *withdrawal* from ascribing explanatory priorities.[4]

Ideology in Roberts's vocabulary is 'eradicationist' – it clears away the actual differentiation of material conditions and turns away from addressing the world as we know it to be. In respect of the actualities of class, Roberts calls up Terry Eagleton's essay 'Defending the Free World' to put the point beyond doubt. Eagleton pinpoints the ineradicable particularity of class as a sociocultural and political phenomenon:

> On the surface, the triplet appears convincing enough: some people are oppressed because of their race, some on account of their gender, and some in accordance with their class. But this is of course grossly misleading. For it is not that some individuals manifest certain characteristics known as 'class' which then results in their oppression; on the contrary, to be a member of a social class just *is* to be oppressed, or to be an oppressor.[5]

Eagleton's perspective is persuasive; more persuasive than that of the Aunt Sally who would have Kelman score own goals on Sammy's football team in the name of anarchic dedifferentiation. Kelman's contribution, and Rodger and Miller's, corresponds with Eagleton's assessment of the terrain – out there in the field there is indeed the oppressing officers' club and the oppressed grunts, and Kelman is fighting back, or fighting forward, therefore, doubt about the direction or impact of his levelling might fade.

As the above quote from the Booker Prize acceptance speech shows, Kelman the author is

the Kelman the activist, the resistance fighter, the defender of indigenous culture and of his right to self-determination, social, national, linguistic and stylistic. And Kelman's writerly practice as defence is one of *attack* against the colonialist enemy in whatever guise. Even if, to the dismay of fellow Scottish writers, Kelman exploits pictorialist variants of Scottish working classness as sharp, vivid and exaggerated components in his counterattacks, his project is one of actual redifferentiation. Roberts has found a comrade, then, for he is clear that to replace class with 'conceptually loose concepts such as "identity" and "difference" in the name of revivified (social democratic) "civil society" is, effectively, a surrender to capitalism'.[6] Now, I am less concerned about the strength of Roberts's political argument here and more concerned with defending Rodger and Miller's reading of Kelman's work as a substantive contribution to the counter-insurgency following Roberts's battle cry. However, Rodger and Miller, perhaps no thanks to the lobby of he Robertses and Eagletons, hold something over Kelman and his fellow fighters by identifying him in de Certeau's panorama as the reactionary, tactical fighter.

Political scientist, Michael Walzer can help develop this second reason for my doubt about Kelman as *tactician*. Although Roberts and Eagleton are undoubtedly correct in their reassertion of the actuality of class unevenness and oppression, Walzer takes a pragmatic line on critical debates about class to which my critical perspective subscribes. For him, class politics too frequently comprises uncritical reconnaissance work carried out by anti-capitalist activists and redifferentiaters. Going over the top, Walzer writes:

> The old accounts of inequality and exclusion, focused on dominant goods and ruling classes, still carry a lot of weight, but they have tended in recent years to produce among excluded and marginal groups theories of systematic oppression, tales of conspiracy, that can not sustain empirical analysis.

Perhaps Kelman, and Rodger and Miller for that matter, would disagree, but while deliberating, Walzer would return with the corollary:

> Individual members of excluded groups, thus protected, make their way forward or upward, winning at least a small share of social goods. And so an insidious myth is born, a counter-myth to all the conspiracies, which holds that the remaining exclusions are no longer unjust, that they are indeed the unexpected product of justice itself. Excluded men and women get what they deserve, or what they have chosen [...] no one else is responsible for their fate.[7]

The extent to which, let's say, Scottish liberal democracy is effecting protection of excluded and marginalised groups is not for debate here. At issue is the deeply pernicious counter-myth identified brilliantly by Walzer. And this is where Kelman is much more than, for the sake of argument, a puppet of Robertsian ideology (which would eradicate the progress acknowledged by Walzer) much more, therefore, than a grunting tactician.

The vitriol against Kelman which Rodger and Miller sampled on the night is vitally important to this second aspect. The slagging received by Kelman is evidence for Kelman that the counter-myth is to be Kelman's main writerly-military objective. Think of the three-headed amalgam in *How Late*, the counter-myth would have it that the linguistic, stylistic, fictional and symbolic collapse of complex Sammy is but *his* fault – no one else is responsible for his fate. But 'repulsive nobody' Sammy is positively saintly in the face of the repugnant, dismissive counter-mythers, and it is this repugnance that Kelman meets with all his creative force, not as a mere regular insurgent, but as a fighting Officer, with a *strategy*.

Kelman's strategy is to present to the Generals and Politicians of the Main Operating Base of Society and Literature a form of writing which, by force of its double-layered assault, flushes out the counter-mythmakers who would see the vitriol as nothing but the making of the author's own otherness. Contempt for Kelman is his proof of 'our' secreted contempt for Sammy – proof of the natural oppression of one class by another as Eagleton outlined. In this way, the *fuck it*, is far from a resignation.

If this view on Kelman's position in this discourse has purchase, then his work might be described, following Michel Foucault, as evidence of the strategy of the *parrhesiastes*, that person who would speak from 'below', with courage, at the injustices purveyed by 'above'. Courage applies here, Foucault explained, for the parrhesiastes speaks out at great risk to him or herself. And this speaking is indeed of the order of strategy, that mode of conduct for use by self-determining individuals; those who would relegate their immediate self-interest for the cause of defending their dearly held first principles. 'The king or tyrant generally cannot use parrhesia', Foucault made clear, 'for he risks nothing'. Kelman as the great revealer, the killer of the counter-myth, requires a relationship to the Other, the Base, yes, 'but the *parrhesiastes* primarily chooses a specific

relationship to himself: he prefers himself as a truth-teller rather than as a living being who is false to himself',[8] and with this forms a life of self-determination which is unmolested by the given superstructures of a Roberts and maybe even an Eagleton.

A reference to Alain Touraine might augment this closing point. Touraine shares a pragmatic something with Walzer when he points out that, notwithstanding Roberts's and Eagleton's redifferentiation of the class war battleground, there might be a form of paralysis in the field:

> Is our society still capable of using its ideas, hopes and conflicts to act upon itself? Attempts are being made on all sides to convince us that this question has to be answered in the negative. The liberals ask us to abandon what they see as a cumbersome exceptionality and to let ourselves be guided by the markets. At the other extreme, the ultra-left is content to denounce domination and to speak in the name of victims who have supposedly been prevented from understanding the meaning of their situation.[9]

Touraine is worried that the reconnaissance intel might be paralysed by a degree of intellectual and political stasis – a paralysis grounded on the assumption 'that social and political change is no longer possible, and that the only possible action that can be taken against economic domination is revolt and an appeal to difference, and that leads to the break up of society'. Touraine's response is to defend in his work and life three ideas:

> The first is that the globalization of the economy has not dissolved our capacity for political action.
>
> The second is that the actions of the most underprivileged categories are not restricted to rebellion against domination, that they can also demand rights, and cultural rights in particular, and can therefore put forward and innovative (and not merely critical) conception of society.
>
> The third is that, if it is not based upon demands for equality and solidarity, the institutional realm is ineffective or even repressive.[10]

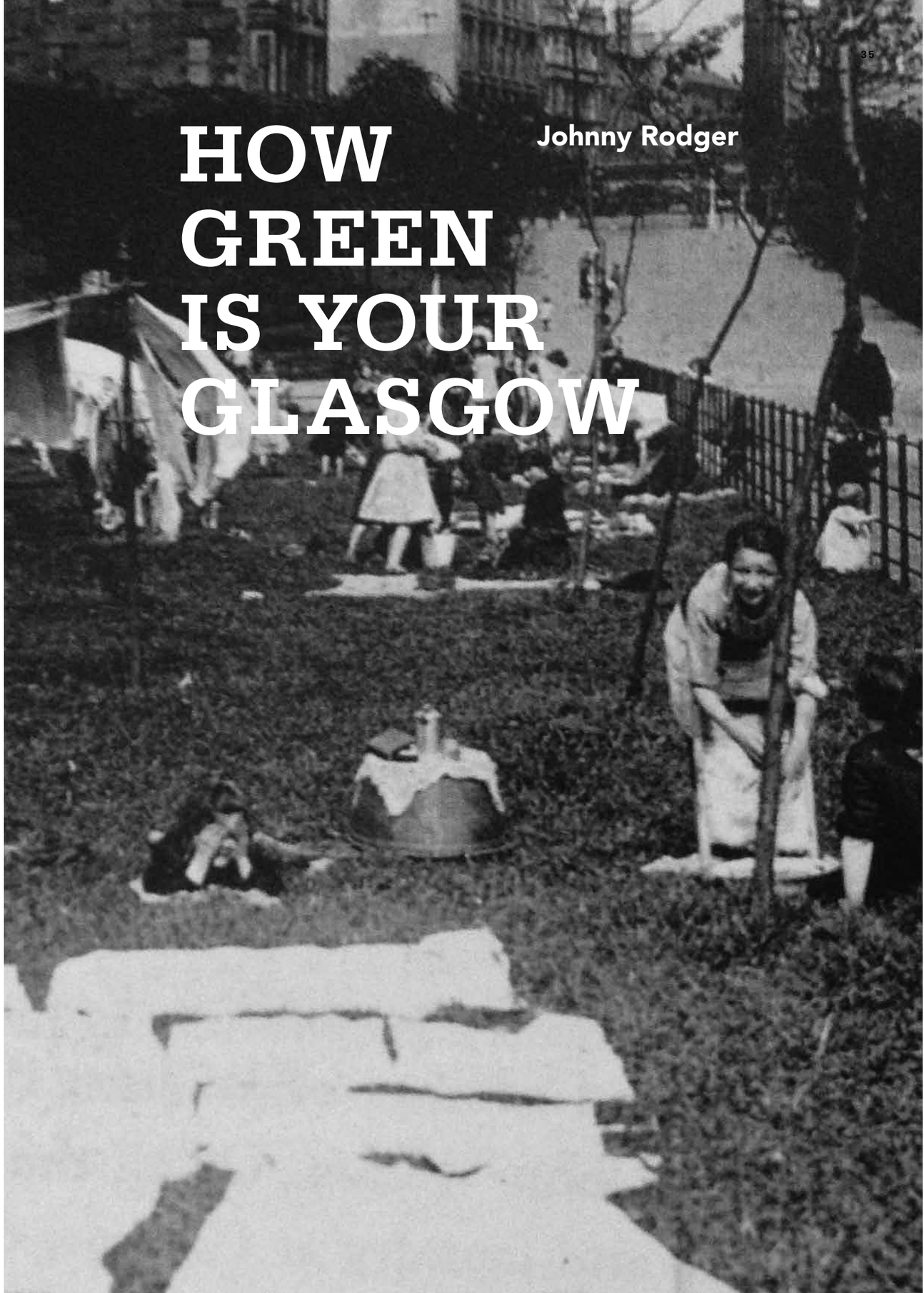
Kelman's parrhesia, his *fearless speech*, as termed by Foucault, might be understood as a strategic refusal of the dominant world-picture of domination sent to the front by Roberts, by Eagleton - and by Rodger and Miller. Redifferentiation is a must, still, and Touraine would agree, for the lived relations of class are never to be squared away by the marketing tactics of neoliberal brochures on identity and difference. However, the alternative is not to quarantine in barracks a class of regular tacticians, those whom we anxiously empathise with and then secure ourselves from, expecting them to carry out the reactive orders of another's Weltanschauung while we observe through binoculars.

Kelman's strategy throws into relief the repugnant, residual oppression of a class based on the adopted notion that no one but the oppressed one has brought about the lingering oppression. This Kelman does as a strategising parrhesiastes, an Officer of class, one through creative praxis who remains at the front and on the front foot, fighting for first principles which he cannot drop only to avoid slings and arrows.

1 James Kelman, 'Elitist Slurs are Racism by Another Name' [Booker Prize Acceptance Speech], *Scotland on Sunday*, 16 October 1994, Spectrum Supplement, p.2.
2 *How Late it Was, How Late*, James Kelman, London: Minerva, 1995, p.136, first published 1994.
3 *The Red Cockatoo: James Kelman and the Art of Commitment*, Mitch Miller and Johnny Rodger, Dingwall: Sandstone Press, 2011, p.50.
4 John Roberts, *The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography and the Everyday,* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998, p.159.
5 Terry Eagleton in *Roberts*, 1998, p.159.
6 *Roberts*, 1998, p.160.
7 Michael Walzer, *Thinking Politically,* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007, p.83.
8 Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, New York: Semiotext(e), 2001, p.17.
9 Alain Touraine, *Beyond Neoliberalism*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001, p.1.
10 *Touraine*, 2001, p.2.

HOW GREEN IS YOUR GLASGOW

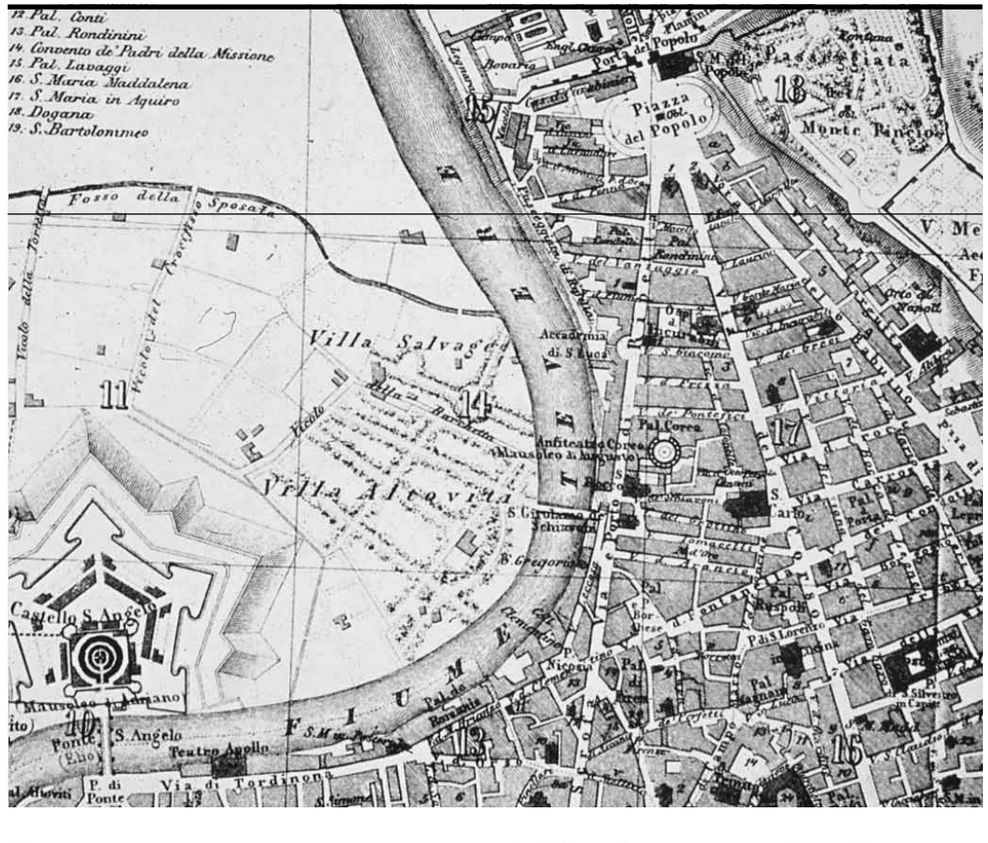
Johnny Rodger



Glasgow Green is Britain's oldest public park. In the late 20th Century the integrity of the Green as an open public space at the ancient heart of Glasgow was under threat.

The threat came in several forms, but generally from one source – the City authorities. From the 1970s onwards there existed a plan to complete the Inner Ring Road around Glasgow City Centre by routing the motorway straight through the Green to link the M8 in the north to the M74 in the south. In the late 80s the authorities further planned to lease more than one third of the Green (Flesher's Haugh) to private developers for 125 years – in effect a privatisation of a large chunk of public land.

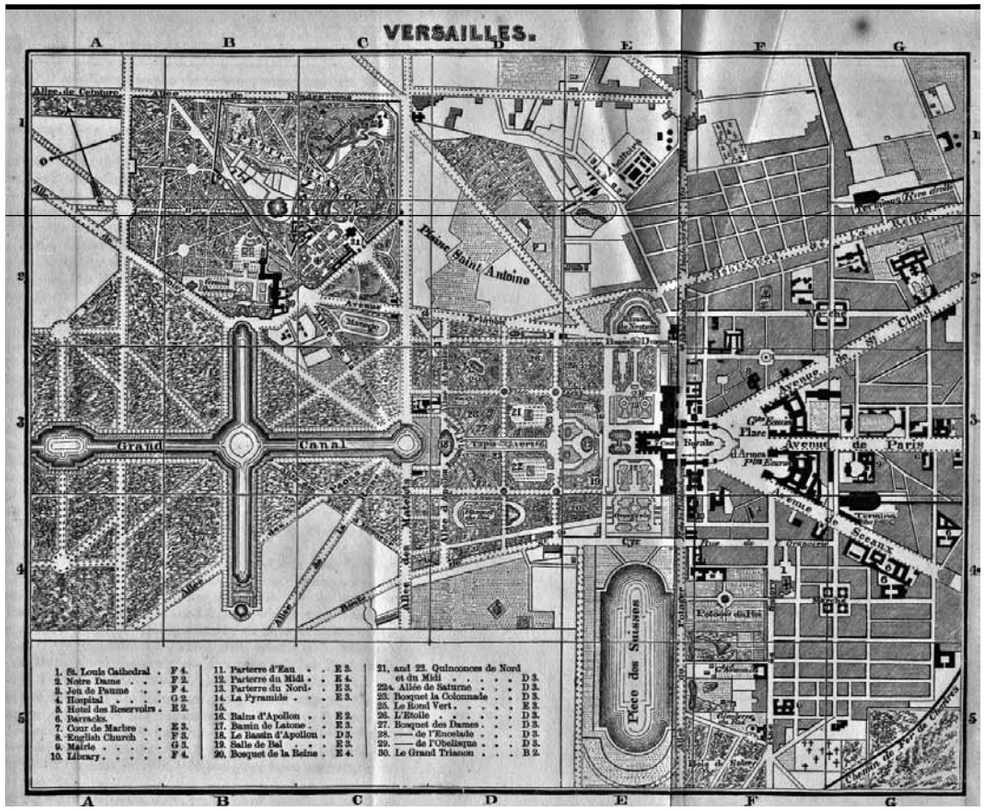
Yet today if you stroll on Glasgow Green you find its tidy swept paths, well manicured leafy borders, hedges and trees, and rolling landscape to extend to almost exactly the same unbreached borders as it did nearly two hundred years ago. You'll also find upgraded replaced and renovated monuments (the Doulton Fountain, the McLennan Arch and so on), realigned and engineered roads and paths, a smartly refurbished People's Palace, replanted Winter Garden, and even a German pub with its home brewed beer. So what's to complain about? Evidently the cooncillors saw the light, breathed deep in the fresh people's air and directed the road traffic engineers and the corporate capitalists to take all their works elsewhere. And clearly complaint, suspicion, or protest about this much improved state of Glasgow's 'people's park' could only still reside in the fanatic hearts of the churlish, the paranoid or the extremely politically partisan?



Well, perhaps that all depends on how we let history weigh on our own hearts as we read the centuries long story of the struggle between competing claims over this green space. So let's ponder here on the relationship, if any, between a couple of events in the history of the park.

From 1814 on, public executions were carried out on Jocelyn Square (popularly called 'Jail Square') which sits at the extreme west end of the park, in front of the High Court of Justiciary (where the condemning sentence would have been handed down, and which was also the jail), built by William Stark in 1809. Those condemned were hanged 'facing the monument', in other words, with their back to the Court building, looking out over the park, and facing in particular the 44m tall sandstone obelisk monument built in 1806 by David Hamilton to commemorate the British Imperial victory over the French by Nelson. In August 1820, after having been found guilty of high treason for taking part in the 1820 Scottish Workers Rising, James (Pearlie) Wilson was hanged 'facing the monument'. Wilson, a weaver who had invented the 'purl' stitch was 63 years old, he was brought before a crowd of 20 000 gathered at the corner of the park for the event. The extraordinary brutality of the crown in ordering Wilson hung drawn and quartered demonstrated how shaken was the British Establishment by the 1820 Rising and the political mood of the people of Scotland.

In 1821 the Superintendant of Public Works in Glasgow, Dr James Cleland (1770-1840) carried out a survey of the Green which revealed that one and a half million tons of coal lay beneath the surface. The Council were eager to mine this resource in order to pay off their debts, but public protest stopped the work going ahead (as it did again in 1858, 1869 and 1888). Cleland's survey did however lead to the planning and laying out of a new Baroque (although the council has never used this description) style layout of paths and monuments (incorporating the Nelson monument) which changed the freeflowing, common agricultural land aspect into that of a more recognisably decorative garden. Grazing continued on to the 1870s, but it was now carried out amongst the somewhat incongruously formal features of the plan. These features are recognisably baroque because of their adoption of certain spatial strategies and elements: including regular ordonnance of pathways and streets (in terms of measurements, materials, markings and directions), use of diagonal and converging ways with boulevards and treelined avenues, and creation of vistas through regular spacings of space markers and monuments (the High Court portico, the obelisk). This baroque organisation of space has been used historically as a mapping of power, control and authority through the regularisation of space. And the use of such urban plans to adapt space for the display of the pomp and pageantry of power is seen for



example in Louis XIV's Versailles, and Pope Sixtus V's Counter Reformation Rome. But why, we might ask, should such a well known and recognised form of urban planning be applied to a park of medieval origin at the heart of a rapidly growing industrial city?

We might speculate about connections between those two events as outlined above, but without more detailed and deep knowledge of the historical details our musings as to meaningful relationships or cause and effect can remain only at the level of speculation. And that's why the work of one particular group, the Workers City, provides a pointed and salutary lesson in active local democracy. The Workers City group was formed in the late 1980s, that very period when, as mentioned above, Glasgow Green was 'under threat'. Their resistance and conscious raising campaigns encompassed vital struggles for democracy during that time which encompassed many different forms: benefits organised to raise money for the campaign to save the Albion motorworks at Bathgate; the campaign to expose waste, corruption and cynicism at the heart of the Council's European City of Culture project; picketing the opening of the Glasgow's Glasgow exhibition (which demanded payment from citizens to view objects which had previously featured in free museums, and which lost the City an estimated £6M in its 8 month duration); the fight to protect Elspeth King's post as head curator at the People's Palace; and, not least, the campaign to resist wider threats to Glasgow Green as the people's park.

Workers City was originally formed by a few individuals who had long and distinguished track records in grassroots leftist and anarchist activism. The inaugural meeting of the group took place in the basement workshop of anarchist printer Tommy Kayes' Clydeside Press, and included Farquhar McLay, writer and activist, Hugh Savage, ex-communist activist and labour historian, and Jeanette McGinn, feminist activist and widow of Communist folk singer , Matt McGinn. Study of this group is particularly rewarding in terms of contextualising the history of Glasgow Green, and understanding the patterns of motives, aims and manoeuvres carried out over that public space, because of the coherence and commitment with which they developed their canon of mobilisation for engagement with the authorities. For, not only did the group lean heavily on traditional methods of engagement such as demonstrations, marches, pickets, organised benefit nights and fund raisers, and letters to newspapers, but writing, printing, documenting and disseminating information was a key strategy for them. In order to raise awareness levels of the motives for their own actions they realised it was necessary to make clear the context of their operation and to distribute that knowledge widely. This entailed opening up wider working class politics to new methodologies, to non-mainstream forms of protest, to anarchistic as well as cultural and artistic forms of engagement, and to the importance of historiography. The ability

to do this was grafted in with the genealogy of the group as seen in the connection (through Savage, Taylor Caldwell, Ned Donaldson and others) to the Labour History Group (who published for example, Savage and Forster's *All for The Cause: Willie Nairn1856-1902, Stonebreaker*, Philosopher, Marxist, and Forster and Donaldson's *Sell and Be Damned; the Merrylee Housing Scandal 1951*), and with the subsequent membership of the writer James Kelman, who brought to bear among other things his experience of London and Caribbean black and anti-racist groups like the George Padmore Institute and the Caribbean Artists Movement, the Southall Monitoring Group, and others.

At any rate Workers City published a satirical and scurrilous newssheet *The Keelie* (Kelman called it 'an irregular scandal mongering organ') and also two books of essays on Glasgow politics and culture past, present and future, *Workers City: the Real Glasgow stands Up (1987)*, and *The Reckoning* (1991). That through their work they managed to rattle the confidence of 'those in control' (Kelman) is clear from the comment by the then Council Leader Pat Lally (who was broadly seen as a main driver of the city boosterist agenda, and was a species of apparatchik bête noir for the group) dismissing them as 'misfits, dilettanti, well-heeled authors and critics; professional whingers, crypto-communists, self-proclaimed anarchists, trotskyists.'

As recounted elsewhere (*The Red Cockatoo*) the two books bring a range of essays, poems and prose pieces which both demonstrate a centuries long tradition of grassroots working class mobilisation and writings in protest – including work from Alexander Rodger (1784—1846), and James McFarlan (1832—1862) – and the current day health of that tradition with pieces of agit prop and critique relating to contemporary issues. But what is of direct concern to us here is the documentation of the historical engagement over Glasgow Green found there. This documentation is remarkable because in separately written and presented pieces the struggle over the green as a public space is approached first in the form of historiography, then as political critique and manifesto, and finally as literary art; and that publication history – interesting and instructive in itself – is as follows.

A major feature of the 1987 *Workers City* publication was John Taylor Caldwell's essay 'Battle for the Green'. This was a lengthy edited chapter from Caldwell's biography of the anarchist Guy Aldred (*Come Dungeons Dark, 1988*). It outlines not only the long history of the status of

the green as a public place and the struggle over the maintenance of its status as such, but also a detailed narration of the fight to abrogate a 1916 bye-law which the authorities instituted banning public speaking and protest on the green. This narrative is vital for the education of subsequent activists as to the repertoire of actions which might be available and effective in protest. There are particular lessons to be learned from the piece by activists in any age; namely to adapt protest forms to suit the aims, conditions and context in hand. Aldred (as recounted by Caldwell) managed, by example, to dissuade the socialists and communists and others, who were up for a pitched battle over rights to free speech on the green, from confronting the cohorts of the police head-on, as he realised that nothing – except mass-hospitalisation – would be achieved. There are interesting and enlightening titbits dropped in throughout the essay regarding relationships between personalities and political blocks at work (like the implied education through activism which Harry McShane received in operating in the vicinity of Guy aldred) but the main thrust is to show that Aldred saw that the correct place to pursue the rectification or removal of an unjust law – an *ultra vires* one by the council, as Aldred ultimately proved – was in this case, through the Courts.

If that essay by Caldwell sets a wide historical context, and opens a range of vistas for understanding the threat under which Glasgow Green remained in the late 80s , then the Workers City second volume *The Reckoning* (1991) takes us right to the heart of the action. Founder member Hugh Savage contributes a short essay 'Campaigns' to that volume, which outlines the work of the group and includes: the reconvening of the traditional May Day Parade on the Green; the protest and publicity about the fight for Elspeth King's post in the People's Palace; and, most significantly for us here, a description of a spontaneous piece of direct action which the group held in 1990 at the City Chambers to disrupt the work of the 'East End Management Committee' which was convened to decide on approval for the plans for development (aka privatisation) of the green. Savage recounts how this mobilisation proved successful inasmuch as the Council ultimately dropped the development plans, and in his subsequent optimism he finishes on a call to arms:

> We welcome this. But we must stay vigilant and encourage ordinary people to assert themselves. Do not let career politicians of any party use you as voting fodder: we are many, they are few!

James Kelman had not been a member of the group when the first collection of essays (including Taylor Caldwell's) had been published in 1987, but he features prominently in *The Reckoning* (alongside Savage and others) with two pieces. One piece is about the Elspeth King/People's Palace affair (and so is not unrelated to the Glasgow Green story) and the other, which is much more significant for us, goes under the cryptic title 'Subjective Account'. In this latter, the most immediately striking point is that Kelman seems to be writing in the style he would use for his

literary fiction. It is indeed a 'subjective account', a 'story' in effect, and Kelman launches straight into the action without any form of description, explanation, setting of the scene, or narrative outlining of the background:

> About 200 folk turned up. Mostly individuals unconnected to any grouping. Very few young folk. We took it to them by moving into the Chambers en masse. Inside we were asked to wait in the lobby while […]

Thus Kelman doesn't step outside his experience as an individual feeling and cogitating about the event in order to explain or put it in context. He is there, he tells us what he sees and what he thinks personally. This has been called the 'existential' style in his fiction i.e. the individual is paramount, his body and his thoughts are there, Kelman doesn't claim to be representing or speaking for anybody any set manifesto, or point of view. In fact, although at first the reader may be perplexed by a certain equivocation in the style (– is it fact or fiction that is being presented here: is it art or reportage?) – it soon becomes apparent that this is all part of the dilemma which Kelman wishes to pose to us in terms of 'representation'. Indeed different forms of that latter word are found at numerous points throughout the text, and the writer opens up a problematic – ironic of course, given his own artistic representation of himself here and taking part in the protest – as to who has the right to speak for whom and when? Does the Council have the right to speak for the city, for the people? Does the protest group have the right to speak for the people? Can a spokesperson 'represent' the views of the group? In its myriad representations of the question, and takes on the question of representation that are set up in this essay (is it an essay?), we are tumbled into a political hall of mirrors. Ironies abound: this is not Versailles but the Glasgow City Chambers, and the endless reflection of representations in that bottomless political pit throws up a Militant councillor (real trotskyists, pace Pat Lally, so we were often told in the 80s) who gets his Snow White moment when, like the evil queen, he takes the issue of representation in hand and confronts the protestors with the question, 'Who do yous fucking think yous are?'

As this appears in the same volume as Savage's piece: we soon realise that it is Kelman's subjective account of that same 'direct action' in the City Chambers. But is Kelman saying that the only way to prevent oneself falling into the bottom-less pit of reflections is to speak up for yourself? Yes and no. He also acknowledges that it is not always possible or desirable for everyone to speak. Certain formats – the official council meeting –, and contexts – a rightly 'angry and emotional' protest – may make some people uncomfortable or unwilling to enunciate their point of view. Intellectual and artistic contexts for analysing Kelman's standpoint in this piece abound. His representation of his physical self in the direct action brings to mind Amalia Jones's questions about the validity of the artist posing their body in the struggle – is it a sentimental approach to personalise the political question to the point of making it a somatic one? Equally can the dilemma it poses be seen in the light of Marx's differentiation between *artistic* representation of the material and *political* representation as an agent for other people, as read through Spivak's 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'. But disregarding those intellectual frameworks for the moment, the important thing is that this documentary activity of the group Workers City bequeathed an inheritance of histories, manifestoes, readings, understandings, interpretations, analyses –and perhaps most important of all, 'tactics' for social and civic engagement with the authorities.

By the early nineties then, as mentioned at the top of this piece, it could have appeared that the Battle for Glasgow Green had been won. The Workers City initiatives were undoubtedly successful in overturning the plans for the 'privatisation', and other groups, like 'Glasgow For People' may have had some influence on the decision not to route the urban motorway straight across the parkland. Yet is it still so evident that the city authorities have had a change of heart of Glasgow Green? In an interesting parallel with events in the early 19th century, a few years after the popular struggles on and over the Green a plan was set up by the Council to revamp the park. In the late 90s the Council launched a £15.5M Glasgow Green Renewal Project. A recently published document (Glasgow Green Management Plan 2011-2016) by the Council lists the two main achievements of this project as 'imaginative new planting schemes, enhanced play and event provision, restored monuments and informative interpretation' and also the publication of *The Wee Green Book*, a pocket book which 'tells the story of the Green's heritage and provides informative interpretation [it too…] in a lively and engaging way.'

The most immediately noticeable changes that have come about in the park as a result of this project concern those 'new plantings and monuments' mentioned. In effect what has happened is that the Baroque plan set out by Cleland in the 1820s has not just been reaffirmed and renovated, but has been extended and

elaborated. The Doulton Fountain has been incorporated into geometric landscaping laid out in front of the People's Palace with circular pathways paved inside that favoured form of the Baroque, the ellipse. Meanwhile the monumental McLennan Triumphal Arch (originally the entrance to a Robert Adam building on Ingram Street) has been removed from its former position at the bottom of Charlotte Street (on the N side of the plan), and placed at the extreme west, where it now creates a ceremonial gateway to the formalised layout of the park.
The role of the triumphal arch as a propagandistic symbol of authoritarian power and as an integrated and central structure in the Baroque notion of formal order is well established in history. Both in Bourbon Paris and in Sixtus V's Rome at Piazza del Popolo we note the centrality of the triumphal arch to the ordered promenade, and the fact the Kim Sung built the world's largest triumphal arch in North Korea in 1982 should need no further comment. This new plan for the Green is nothing if not coordinated and thorough, for the 'imaginative new plantings' consist partly in 86 topiary yews laid out in strict linear form to stress the formal ways through the park (think Versailles and see the image here, top p39). Furthermore a new set of relationships between the newly rebuilt and strictly measured and engineered roads, the plantings, the ordered series of public spaces as you enter (half ellipse – circle – square – etoile) , and regulation of distance through markers imperial (Nelsons obelisk) and triumphal, all go towards the creation of a tight and perfectly formed planners' noose around the area of this alleged 'peoples' park – we are quite literally forced to 'face the monument', and our views are directed along certain prescribed sightlines.

The other achievement cited is the publication of *The Wee Green Book*, subtitled as 'The extraordinary story of Glasgow Green: Britain's oldest public park.' The main title is clearly a play on a long established and popular footballing almanac *The Wee Red Book* published annually by the *Evening Times*. But the other cultural reference which unavoidably flashes into the critical mind is from Tom Leonard's *The Voyeur*. For no-one can have read the opener to that poem, 'What's your favourite word dearie/is it wee/I hope it's wee/wee's such a nice wee word…' without having to reach for the proverbial sickbag when they encounter such a phony and grovelling title as has this book… or do I go just a teeny wee bit too far?

At any rate the book was commissioned from publicist Neil Baxter, who also happens to be Pat Lally's biographer (and who notably employed yet another hollow populism in that title as *Lazarus only done it once*.) In a chapter titled 'Preaching, Politics, and Performance' Baxter gives a fair summing up (given the size and scope of the publication) of the history of protest on the Green, with brief outlines of the appearances there of Daniel O'Connell; the Calton Weavers strike; the Red Clydesiders including John McLean and Guy Aldred; and the UCS march with Jimmy Reid, Tony Benn and others. But despite the publication date (2007) the 1971 UCS demo is the last he mentions, and he ends the chapter on a somewhat complacent note with 'the Green is not, perhaps, quite the place of protest and politics it was in the time of Wesley, Auld Hawkie and John McLean.' Has not the new layout of the park to do with this, we might ask? Perhaps Baxter is simply expressing the dearest wishes – or indeed the plans afoot – of his masters, the City Council here. Did he not hear of the Anti-War march that attracted over 100 000 citizens to march from the park in 2003? Had he never heard of Workers City – and was he unaware of their documentation and archive of written material about the Green? Baxter cannot claim to have been unaware of the threat that his masters hung over the Green in the 1980s, and the accompanying protests that saved it. On p19, he writes

> In 1988, a Council plan proposed an ambitious leisure development at the Haugh. As with so many other issues in the Green's long history, the proposal was met with vehement public protest and, eventually, rejected.

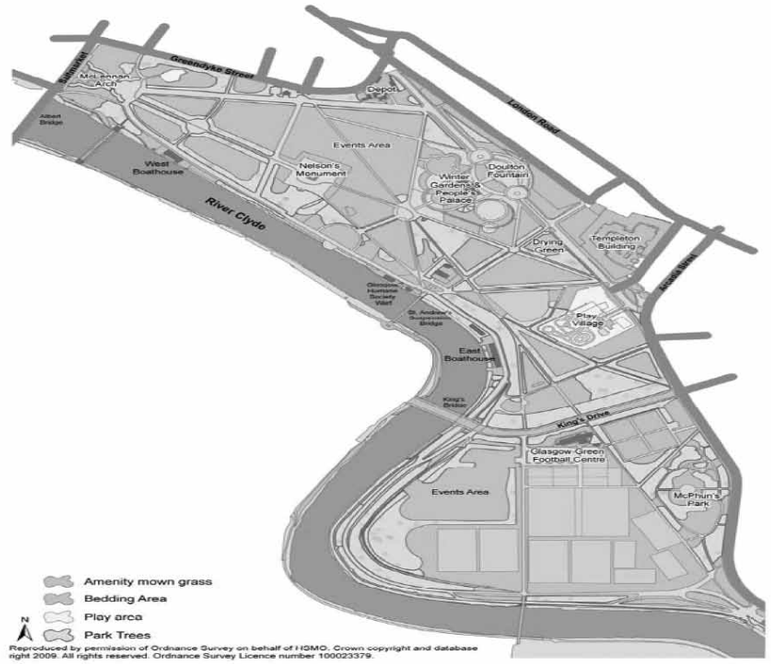
No need to get all hot under the collar then, but again he writes on the same page

> More threatening was the 1970s proposal to create the eastern flank of the proposed Inner Ring Road which would have cut a north-south scar across the Green…

There is no mention of the protests or the campaigns – on into the 1990s – which saved the Green from those threats. But perhaps Baxter thought it politic not to mention more recent protests, especially those from people who had already been dismissed by his biographee and former leader of his bosses at the Council, as 'misfits, dilettanti, well-heeled whingers… and whatever…

If nothing else then, the history of the Green and the struggle over the rights of the citizens to use it as they see fit tells us that the city authorities will always seek strategies to control that space by restriction, exclusion, fragmentation, rigid compartmentalisation, formalisation, and if they can get away with it, by sale to the highest bidder. History seems to show us a cycle of rights won then

2.3 Map of Facilities



control reasserted; but if that be so, then how turns the wheel of freedom these days? There appears to be no prominent – nor even notorious – group like the Workers City, tirelessly agitating, yapping at the heels of the high heid yins.

So should we be worried? The Green (not the park) Party certainly think so. They point to the paltry assortment of land and properties assembled and declared on Glasgow's Common Good Fund:

> 5 ranges of shops from Sauchiehall Street to Byres Rd etc.
> The Citizens Theatre
> A Bowling Green in Dumbarton Rd
> Nithsdale Hall
> 2 plots of vacant land
> Humbie Farm
> Pollok Country Park

There are several laws from the 1990s (and before that), which place an obligation on Local Authorities to hold a complete and accurate Common Goods Fund Asset Register. Despite the fact that in some of their own documents the Council refer to the Green as' common land', along with some other parks it does not appear in the Register (as seen above). Indeed Pollok Park was only added to the Register after the Save Pollok Park campaigners successfully fought the Council's attempt to lease out (for 99 years, so again effectively a privatisation) part of that park to the entertainment company 'Go Ape'. The law states that the Common Good Fund should be administered by the Local Authority but should not be regarded as general reserve, and it would be *ultra vires* for the authority to place any proceeds from that fund into their General Fund. Yet when the Green Party gained representation on Glasgow's Council in 2007 they found that the proceeds from the Common Good Fund had been used to fund civic receptions and subsidise the Private Members' Dining Room. Since then they have forced the Council to admit it has no asset management policy and they have campaigned to make CGF income 'available for wider public benefit'.

Glasgow Green might not be officially registered on the CGF, and there may not be an official strategy for managing the assets in that fund, but that does not mean there are no plans for the park. As it happens, just over a year ago, a 70 odd A4 page document with plans and colour photos was published by the Council as the Management Plan 2011—2016.

Not only do we see there – in full colour aerial snaps – the abovementioned reaffirming and re-elaboration of the Baroque layout undertaken since the mid 90s, but some rationalisation is given for the restructuring of the park in terms of strengthening the ground to give greater capability for supporting and coping generally with corporate events. In fact in turns out that much of this document is given over to preparation of marketing strategies for the so-called peoples' park as a corporate venue. This would-be utilitarian

rationalisation is put in an even more sinister light when the Council composers of the document not only show themselves to be perfectly aware of the popular and political history of the park, but they exploit it as a source of pride, giving four points out of their 17 important points of history in the Green over to details of popular risings and political protests that took place there (including the Calton Weavers strike of 1787). Yet despite the discussion and promotion of a corporate marketing strategy, nowhere is there a discussion of how the park and its new layout should or could be made welcoming, amenable or even just safe for manifestations of the popular voice and popular feeling which the Council itself claims is an important part of the heritage. It could be argued of course, that it is difficult to cater for such spontaneous – or even organised– demonstrations of popular feeling. Perhaps the people demonstrating would not even want to feel as though the authorities – often those the demonstrators are organising against– were catering for them. But on the other hand, should the authorities be left alone to actively plan ground layouts which might thwart the very possibility of such gatherings and demonstrations? There is furthermore, published alongside their Masterplan, the Council's very own 2010 Public Consultation results which give a clear response to these questions. We find there that over 70% of users say they use the park simply for walking (ie without interest in any kind of business transaction). And in answer to a straightforward question 'How do you feel about the current number of events held in the park?' 71% of respondents felt that there were either already 'enough' or 'too many'.

It makes us wonder why the Council even bother publishing these results when they blithely ignore them in their accompanying strategy document.

The point is that this restructuring of space at once to maintain and increase social control, and to boost profits and the money making ventures of the Council is not, as we've seen with this history here, a sudden development. And although some parts of the plans are no doubt deliberated upon behind the closed doors of the City Chambers, it cannot be completely seen as conspiratorial, for the results – even those which go contrary to public desire as published by the council themselves – are etched out across the open and public space for all to perceive and experience. But if they can thus simply ignore the expressed wishes of their constituents, and press on regardless with their own plans for a comprehensive recodification of public space, why do they still get so angry with particular sets of campaigners – witness Pat Lally's denunciation of 'misfits… etc etc.? What is the raw nerve that had evidently been touched here at the controlling heart of an otherwise aloof and paternalistic city council? Might it not be that until very recently an awareness of the sense of the instrumentality of space, and how it can be actively used against the citizens wishes, and to restrain and control them, has been limited to those groups, like the Workers City, who have expanded their progressive critical horizons to encompass and understand the value of all forms of cultural, historical and spatial practice within their political consciousness and operation? This form of consciousness and operation would have appeared maverick and irreverent to standard political procedure and perhaps even bewildering to a more mainstream or establishment so-called left organisation like the Labour Party.

But of course no-one would seriously accuse the Glasgow Labour Party, who have been the ruling group on the Council for decades, of being a bunch of leftists. There's no doubt that they – and the

Scottish Labour Party in general, have sheltered their conservatism, their authoritarianism, and their reactionary defence of big-business, in a most cynical exploitation of a somewhat standard mid-twentieth century leftist rejection of localism, regionalism and nationalism. One form of this rejection is the oft cited political evangelism of the Scottish unionist left in its concern *not* to opt for national autonomy in order, with the weight of Scottish Labour votes, to save England from its alleged own natural right wing tendencies and an eternal Tory government. – An erroneous reading of political history and poor psephology too, as it happens. But on a wider level this outright rejection by the established left of such spatial and regional consciousness as shown by groups like the Workers City was possible because that group's operation could be seen as a diversion from the overarching and historic struggle of the universal working classes; or, to put it in the in the words of Edward Soja, as 'a dangerous fetter on the rise of a united world proletariat, a false consciousness inherently antagonistic to the revolutionary subjectivity and objective historical project of the working class.' But now that, in the post-soviet globalised era, that false consciousness excuse is wearing extremely thin even for pseudo-leftists, what will become of places like Glasgow Green? Will the Glasgow Labour Party here stop pretending it is a leftist party with an 'objective historical project' for the working class, and admit it is in control of these places just because it is in control? Will it come to take its responsibility for the people of Glasgow and the people's spaces in Glasgow as its real challenge? Or will it, with its own outdated and phony consciousness, just be swept away from power? And what's the chances that those who might sweep them away, show any greater consciousness, like those pioneers of the Workers City, of how democracy plays out through space? The first test of those questions might come in the Council elections in a month's time (May 2012) – but don't expect any speeches or hustings to be heard on Glasgow Green.