

Books

Let's get radical!

The Tory-led coalition, like the heavy weather, is liable to leave us tired and depressed. **Chris Moss** recommends a festival designed to shake off any political apathy

Books

'Sometimes you feel as if London is just one big fuck off advert.' So said a northern friend of mine, Mike, on his last visit. A villager but by no means an idiot, he detests central London's labyrinth of retail façades – a sort of never-ending high street – and the whole Thatcherite lie about consuming being good for us, which London has most fully embraced and which David Cameron, for all his bleating about our need to be poor and humble, believes in right down to his gold cufflinks.

It's timely then, that on July 14 Housmans bookshop is kicking off a free programme of talks and walks that celebrate radical aspects of the capital's social history. Called London's Burning, the series aims, says Housman's co-manager Nik Górecki, 'to bring to life the stories of rebellion, counter-culture and free-thinking that have made London the vibrant city it is today. This year's series goes deeper than ever into the lesser known, and often "lost" aspects of our capital.'

It opens with 'Walkwalkwalk London', a live art event inspired by a stroll through east London, focusing on Bethnal Green. Gail Burton, Serena Korda and Clare Qualmann, who make up Walkwalkwalk, have created a vast archive of found objects, printed ephemera, texts and recordings which document the history and mythology of the route. The trio will present readings and a selection from their archive, including found objects from the walk.

'Searching for "finds" creates a different kind of looking and being in the city,' says Burton. 'Observation and scanning close to the ground leads to encounters, engagement, adventures and stories.'

'Finding is anti-commerce. We are inculcated into buying as a way to exist in public space. The found object is a testament to this purchasing and consumption, its trace, but also proposes a challenge to the imperative to buy and own or choose. Finding is free, is random, possibly dirty, always unregulated!'

The basic premise is that by revisiting familiar places, people will see the overlooked, grimy side of the city hidden by the tourism packagers.



Left on the pavement A bottle top from Walkwalkwalk's found object archive; classic radical texts; Housmans bookshop

Typical items collected are chip forks, flotsam from broken furniture and discarded bottles. Burton says there is a dearth of objects in Kensington and Chelsea (visited in a previous year) so closer looking is needed to uncover chips from paving slabs worth £100 per square metre, or a fragment of a love letter, or an oyster shell.

Such finds, detritus to most of us, reveal, she says 'occupations, pastimes, passages and demographics – and they deny explanations or certainty.'

They are a trace of human presence.'

Both oral and written stories are used to bring the objects to life. Text, in its ephemeral form as posters, is returned to the routes from where the stories originated, or are re-employed in permanent artworks – as is currently the case in a series of pieces on display in Bethnal Green Town Hall Hotel.

This is politics in its oblique form, but a fitting opener for a programme that will go on to explore radical poetry, the role of the partisan coffee house, Soho

Noir and London's fight against Fascism from Mosley to the BNP. Turn off the telly, then, and look out for the truth of this city in its dogshit, discarded Champagne bottles and detritus – and keep half an eye out for those Lib-Dem flyers, too.

Walkwalkwalk (www.walkwalkwalk.org.uk) is at Housmans, 7pm Wednesday July 14, 5 Caledonian Rd, N1 9DX (7837 4473). King's Cross St Pancras tube/rail. See the full programme at www.timeout.com/books

Global revolution, repackaged

Left politics is often in danger of becoming parochial Sarsialist Worker tubthumping. If you find yourself inspired by London's Burning's radical agenda but want to get in with the Internationalists – by Trotsky, that sounds unfashionable – then take a look at Faber's new eight-novel 'Revolutionary Writing' series. Okay, it's a repackaging, and to that extent is as much about commerce as killing rich people and nicking their farms, but chances are you'll discover at least a couple of unread masterpieces. Having already read Hanif Kureishi's 'The Black Album' and Mario Vargas

Llosa's 'The Feast of the Goat' (both magnificent examples of writing that manage to be political but never platitudinous or preachy) I dipped into Paul Auster's 'Leviathan' and found myself gripped – or, rather, seized by a

virtuoso prose stylist and shown a study of how an extremist can be born from the finest human materials. The books are £7.99 each; for the complete list see www.faber.co.uk/list/revolutionary-writing.

