

Grassroots

Media

Zine

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Grassroots Media Zine

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The Ghost of George Clark

From An Interview With Stuart Hall



George Clark addresses a crowd in Hyde Park

Image courtesy *The Guardian*, October 1997

by

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The Third Question

Introduction

As we put the finishing touches on this second edition of the *Grassroots Media Zine*, I thought it might be helpful to take a moment and explain why we chose to bring our information to you in this particular way.

Early in the Spring of 2013 Dr. Mugiko Nishikawa and I sat down to discuss how we might collaborate on documenting her current research for publication. We had several goals in mind for what we hoped to achieve: first, we wanted to ensure that this information was accessible to an English speaking audience, and we wanted the work to be scholarly but not pedantic; we sought a format flexible enough to cover a heterogeneous range of topics, yet still allow us to also clearly illustrate the threads connecting them; and finally, we wanted to keep the whole process open enough to allow for participation from those whose memories, stories, and perspectives formed the foundation upon which this body of work was being constructed.

The necessity of it being a series was clear from very early in the process, but it was also obvious to us that it would be a very tough sell for any commercial publisher, given that the research itself was still in progress, so we were aware that anything we decided to release before the research was completed, we

would probably have to distribute on our own.

Ultimately we settled on the idea of producing a series of essays in ‘Zine’ format, styled somewhat like a travel journal, with each individual Zine representing the various stopping points along the way. Some of these stops would be quite different from one another - we would go from describing the creation of a Japanese language radio show in the middle of the cornfields of Illinois in our first edition, to following the ghost of George Clark around 1960s London in the second - but eventually, over time, the shape and purpose of the larger journey would begin to reveal itself, and the reader would see how all of these people, places, and activities related to one another.

A ‘Zine’, for those unfamiliar with the term, might be best described as a small-scale, self-produced publication which has been created as an act of self-expression, and which is intended primarily for a limited audience comprised of fellow enthusiasts. We felt that this format would be a perfect vehicle for our collection of essays, given that one of the themes of the *Grassroots* series is looking at how ordinary people have found ways to use independent media in order to create possibilities for collaborations beyond social and regional boundaries. We felt therefore, that a Do It Yourself ‘DIY’ process, such as producing a Zine in concert with others also interested

in the various topics we addressed, aligned perfectly with the quest for praxis we began in 2011 with the introduction of a self-produced, non-commercial radio show, The Harukana Show.

It is important that an anthropologist be reflexive in her work, and so in this series our story is told from the perspective of Mugiko herself, however this is primarily qualitative research we are attempting to elucidate, so wherever practicable we also share transcripts of the many interviews Mugiko has conducted in order to allow the people involved to describe their own thoughts and experiences in their own words, editing them only to the extent necessary for clarity and focus.

Ultimately it is our hope that the Grassroots series will prove to be both enlightening and entertaining, and that throughout these Zines the reader will be inspired not only by the groundbreaking work of the activists of the 1960s discussed in this and some of the subsequent editions, but also by the knowledge that each of us still has the opportunity to make the world a better place just as they did.

The work did not begin in their time, and it didn't end there either, it's still ongoing and we are, all of us, part of a much larger story that's still being written.

Thomas Garza - Oct. 12th, 2014

Chapter 1

What is "local community" in the busy city of London?



Photo By: Mugiko Nishikawa

Grove Neighbourhood Centre, August 2006

A stranger in London after September 11th 2001

In 2001 I took a sabbatical year from my university in Japan and went to London to do historical research in the British Library on the European Vagrancy Act as it was applied in late 19th century British India. This was an extension of my earlier fieldwork on begging in Bangladesh rural areas, and I was seeking to understand what impact the colonial period may have had on modern policy-making related to this centuries-old social practice. Once I'd arrived in London I moved into a flat in Hammersmith, on the western most side of the inner city.

I'd expected my time there to be enjoyable because I love to travel and see new places, and London is a fascinating town for visitors, but my stay there began in an unfortunate way. I'd arrived in London just after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in the US, and the pervasive atmosphere of tension and suspicion I felt around me everywhere I went reminded me uncomfortably of experiences I'd had in Bangladesh ten years earlier.

On January 18 1991, I arrived in Bangladesh on what also turned out to be the second day of the Gulf War. It was clear before I left Japan that some sort of conflict in Iraq was imminent, but I had not antici-

pated there being any noticeable effects of a war being fought in such a distant place, yet when I ventured to come in from the country to visit the downtown of Dhaka, as I'd often done without incident while staying in Bangladesh before, I found myself inadvertently caught up in a crowd of demonstrators supporting Saddam Hussein and chanting slogans against the United States and the coalition forces. I was riding in a 'baby taxi' (the local name for an auto rickshaw), and we found ourselves trapped by the crowd, unable to move. As some of the demonstrators began to notice that I was Japanese, they turned their attention in my direction because Japan was a known supporter of the United States. The situation quickly became very tense. I was an easy target for the protesters since I obviously stood out on account of both my appearance and dress. One of the things they shouted at me in fact was: "If you were a Muslim woman you would cover your head!"



Bangladesh

Photo By: Mugiko Nishikawa, 1991

Thankfully one man began doing his best to calm the others, telling them to leave me alone because I was a woman. While he engaged their attention my driver saw a chance to move finally and we managed to escape the turmoil, but not before I was struck hard on the back by a rod of some sort.

This frightening experience, and other similar events during my stay, all became deeply engraved into both my mind and my body, and even after leaving the country I continued to have nightmares of being attacked by a crowd for many years afterwards.

Although I had long been anticipating the opportunity for research and life in London, once there I found myself mostly staying in my flat and reliving the tension I'd felt while in Bangladesh all those years ago. I watched scenes on television showing the attacks on Afghanistan, and Muslim protestors in Pakistan, and whenever I did go out I couldn't help but be acutely conscious of the fact that I stood out in any crowd, and all I could think about was just how vulnerable outsiders are in times of crisis, when people tend to cling to the familiar for mutual comfort and security, and difference is viewed as inherently threatening. I started worrying about what might happen in London, and I was afraid to go to the British Library since it seemed to be such an obvious target for terrorists. All in all I felt miserable and

alone, and I wondered what I should do if another terrorist attack were to happen here.

Grove Neighbourhood Centre as a corner shop

After living with this stress for a while, a friend introduced me to a place called the Grove Neighbourhood Centre (GNC), a charitable organization near my flat. Overall most of the people I'd met in London had been friendly enough, if a bit distant, or else they tended to ignore me altogether, and whereas I might have ordinarily just accepted those kinds of attitudes as a natural consequence of my being a stranger there, during this fraught and stressful time I felt compelled to try to create some sort of relationship with the local people in order to feel less like an outsider and perhaps learn to understand them better.

To this end I created a routine where I would go to the British Library almost every day and then occasionally stop in to visit the Centre as well. Although I am someone who is generally uncomfortable participating in group activities, and I dislike crowds, the community centre came to be a place where I could relax. The interior was simply designed with a gently curved roof, white walls, and natural lighting, all of which worked together to give me a sense of relief, and it felt like a refuge despite being open to the outside. A woman architect was re-

sponsible for this design and I found it very pleasing. It felt like a corner shop in which a diverse group of people would drop in from time to time in order to use the space for their own purposes. The staff welcomed everyone and seemed happy to talk and listen to them.

After a while I began to wonder about how the community centre was organized, where the operating funds came from, how different the volunteering system was from the welfare-related services provided by the public administration, and who had founded it in the first place. Staff members at the centre invited me to join any activities in which I was interested and by the beginning of the New Year I surprised myself by agreeing to become a member of the steering committee of the centre.

What is "community" for residents?

Through my interactions with the residents I began to realize that this neighbourhood centre served a set of 'neighbours' who, for the most part, only rarely recognized one another, who didn't have an attachment for any specific areas or groups, and who didn't share a sense of belongingness to the region overall. I found myself wondering about why -- in a situation in which people do not seem to really share "a sense of community" to any substantial degree -- was it important for them to use the word, "community" at all?

Was it to appeal to the residents, or to help administrate local organizations given that the word is familiar to everyone and contains various implied meanings? I tried to understand how residents in a city with such a high migration rate defined their relationship with others living and working in a given area, so I picked the word, “community” to use as a keyword in my researches, and I began to explore the subject further.

As a member of the steering committee I now had access to the Centre’s records, and so in order to learn more about the place I decided to dig into their files to see what could be discovered there. To do this in an organized way I took it upon myself to go through their stored papers and put them in some kind of order. Most of the people I’d been discussing the subject of the GNC’s past with knew little more than the most general outlines of its history, and so I thought that undertaking this project would be a good way to satisfy some of my curiosity without having to pester the people around me with a lot of questions. I also thought that the project itself would prove to be a useful service for the members of the staff, as I knew that they would likely never have the time or inclination to take on this sort of task alongside their other regular duties.

To my surprise, what I discovered as I began going through all of those boxes of files and memoranda was

far more than just the details of the community centre’s administrative processes. I also came across a great deal of information about the people behind its creation as well, and what they had hoped to achieve through their work. The centre wasn’t just the local government’s idea of a useful convenience for its residents as I’d initially supposed, it was created by the people themselves in order to further an idealistic vision about how healthy communities could and should come together and solve their own problems. In and amongst all those pages were the voices of people who were grappling with one of the very same questions I’d found myself asking: How can people create community for themselves in places where propinquity, culture, or mutual interdependency do not in and of themselves provide a sufficient framework? Certainly the activists whose work was being revealed to me had other pressing concerns on their minds too – poverty, crime and racial strife to name just a few – but even so, the method they chose to answer all of these questions always seemed to revolve around a belief in the need to find a way to create a sense of community, empower the people in that community, and then trust that together they will find the way.

I have always been interested in how people interact and form connections with one another, I am an anthropologist after all, and so this excited me because here I’d found not only

examples of those very personal and individualistic processes as they played out through these people working together, but also carefully articulated theories about how to do these things on a grand scale, and how doing so could, in effect, save the world from itself. How could I not be fascinated?

I had stumbled upon people attempting to create practical methods for turning ideals into blueprints for action, and so in order to learn more about them and their innovative ideas, I also began visiting the local libraries and archives in search of information, and the deeper I dug, the more I discovered.

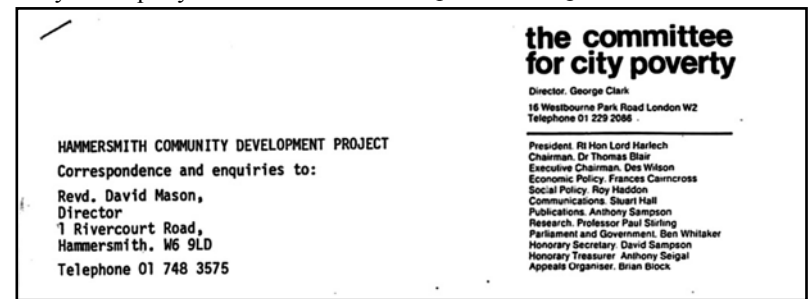
One example of this process was the way the Grove Neighbourhood Centre itself came into existence. The GNC was, after all, my entry point into this larger story, and so its history was naturally the place I chose to begin my journey.

As I read through all the documents I could find relating to the Centre, I discovered that the GNC was originally set up by the Hammersmith

Community Development Project (HCDP) in 1973, and that the HCDP was a venture of the City Poverty Committee (CPC), a nation-wide charitable organization that had been created just a year earlier.

The director of the CPC was a man named George Clark, and the director of the HCDP, was the Reverend David Mason. Both of these men had worked in Notting Hill (North Kensington) in the 1960s, and along with others they set up the CPC in order to attempt to solve the problems of twilight areas in the inner cities. Using the experience its creators had acquired through their involvement in Notting Hill, they hoped to reproduce and promote these activities, introducing them into other areas as well. Grove was chosen as a target for their project in Hammersmith.

The Community development projects these men and their respective groups created and supported were based on the idea that poverty and deprivation can only be solved with the active participation of the citizens themselves, so the GNC was set up in order to provide a base for local



Hammersmith Community Development Project, 1973

organizing, as well as to be a centre for community activities in order to help bring the neighbourhood together. Mason and Clark brought the idea of a neighbourhood council to the residents of Grove, intending it to be a kind of self-governing organization headed by representatives chosen by local election in the ward similar to what they had done in Notting Hill.

I found that documents about the HCDP vividly reported the progress of their community activities in the Grove Ward in the early 1970s. Revd. Mason wrote most of the reports, and his comments about George Clark made me feel that this was also someone I needed to learn more about. For example, the “Ham-

mersmith Community Development Project: First Report 1972-73” began with the sentence: “The Hammersmith Community Development Project is an offshoot of the City Poverty Committee, George Clark played a vital role in the early stages of the Project.”

Because of this and other similar comments I’d run across, I elected to begin my research focussing on these two persons in particular.

Mason’s involvement seemed as if it might be relatively easy to explain, as a man of the church he might naturally become involved in projects that would likely serve a beneficial or charitable purpose. Clark, however, was more difficult to understand.

The more I found out about him the less I felt I understood him. On one hand he appeared to have been the motivating force behind many of the activities that I found so fascinating and was intent on researching. His ideas were innovative and creative, but his methods seemed to be quite controversial and, as I found over time, just the mention of his name was enough to make some people I spoke with very angry. Even after all these years they resented his treatment of them or still felt strongly about some aspect of their dealings with him.

So who was this man who on the one hand held such idealistic notions about community and people working together in order to make their lives better, and yet who at the same time, when he worked with others, could engender such bitterness and anger in them despite the passing of many decades?

As the originator of or driving force behind the creation of many of the entities I’d chosen to study, as well as because of his elusive personality, George Clark would end up being my guide for an unexpected journey into the Notting Hill of 1950s, 60s and 70s, and on this trip I was to also meet many other inspiring activists whose work and ideas would come to influence me over the course of the following decade.

An election...without parties

From front page
campaign for the needs of the neighbourhood. And it won't be frightened of kicking up a stink at the Town Hall on your behalf when you need it.

People...
The people of Golborne elected a neighbourhood council which persuaded the GLC to push through slum-clearance when the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea called a halt. Neighbourhood Council members have been consulted by GLC and Borough councillors on decisions affecting Golborne. The Neighbourhood

Council has also helped the people directly: an adventure playground has been started, a Christmas dinner was laid on for 300 pensioners, and 200 children of poor families were taken on a month's holiday in the country. Now the idea is being taken up in other London neighbourhoods and in provincial cities like Leeds and Liverpool.

...not politics
Your Neighbourhood Council has the backing of an Old London charity, the City Parochial Foundation. The neighbourhood

Council will be non-party, though it has the unique distinction of being supported by all parties. It will be non-religious though all denominations are concerned, and the organiser is Methodist David Mason (tel 748-3573), of Rivercourt Methodist Church.

A Neighbourhood Election is planned for the third weekend in June. In the meantime, there will be public meetings. We want you to come. So watch out for posted leaflets through the door, or copies of this newspaper - NEIGHBOURS

Chapter 2

The ghost of George Clark in Notting Hill



Western Ave. Construction, North Kensington, 1966

Photo By: North Kensington Playspace Group

“Notting Hill”

The name “Notting Hill” is more often used than the name “North Kensington” to describe the area that encompasses the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea in west London, so throughout this Zine we will also refer to this area as Notting Hill.

The Notting Hill that George Clark introduced me to was a very different place from what one likely imagines when one hears that name today. Now Notting Hill is perhaps best known as the home of the Notting Hill Carnival, or the fashionable Portobello Road Market, but not so many years ago if you were to come across the name ‘Notting Hill’ in the news, it would almost certainly have been a very different kind of place you’d be reading about.

The Notting Hill of the late 1950s and early 60s was famous primarily on account of its poverty, crime, and scandals. It featured notably in what came to be known as the Profumo affair, it was the location of the murders committed by the notorious John Christie, and was the home of the housing scandals of Peter Rachman.

George Clark’s Notting Hill was a busy place of transition, where people were constantly coming and going, old ways of thinking were being replaced by new ideas, and the more I read, the more captivated I became by the vibrant life of the place at this chaotic point in its history. I was also caught up in the optimistic enthusiasm of the activists who all came to the area at this time and who were convinced that they could

help find a solution to its problems. Tenants’ associations were formed, community centres for residents’ activities were created, a free legal counselling centre and youth clubs were established, and playgrounds were opened.

Meeting with Revd. David Mason

On 22nd August 2003 I interviewed a woman about activities in the 1970s and the transition of the centre. She was one of the Neighbourhood Councillors in 1973 that later became a full-time staff member at the Grove Neighbourhood Centre, and she spoke to me about how she first came to be involved:

“One day, a letter came to the door and it said come to a meeting. A lot of people came to the meeting and there was a positive and lively atmosphere. Mason (Reverend David Mason) gave a speech, and I learned

about the Neighbourhood Council for the first time. I was impressed with the idea of “grass roots.” He asked people to leave their names on a list if they were interested, so I left my name and then Mason came to my house and asked me if I would like to stand as a candidate and I said “yes.” There were two candidates from my street and I was elected and became one of the first Neighbourhood Councillors.”

She remembered Revd. Mason quite well, but she did not know his current whereabouts. At that point I knew of David Mason only as one of the members whose name appeared in documents relating to the Hammersmith Community Development Project, but I had never been able to find any contact information for him. Later, however, when I was helping at an event at the Grove Neighbourhood Centre, a participant who’d been involved in the GNC since the 1970s told me that she had seen Revd. Mason in Hammersmith only a year ago. I was surprised to learn that he was still in the area but could get no farther in tracking him down until another friend, who knew about my research, inquired at the headquarters of the Methodist Churches in London on my behalf. On 1st September 2003, my friend sent me an e-mail giving me Mason’s information in Hammersmith, and I called him immediately. After clumsily introducing myself and explaining my research, he kindly offered me



“Neighbours W.6” Newsletter for Grove Ward, May 1973



Revd. David Mason Photo By: Mugiko Nishikawa, 2003

an interview and we decided to meet the next morning at his home.

Mason was a hale and hearty gentleman in his middle seventies. After the HCDP ended in 1976, he visited Africa and other countries to continue his work. He was a Methodist minister and a community development and human rights expert and he was also interested in politics and had belonged to the Labour Party for long time, was member of the Great-London Council, and stood for Parliament. He came back to Hammersmith several years ago.

George Clark, an enthusiastic and radical community activist

After that first meeting I used to regularly visit David Mason whenever I came to London. We would discuss community activities in Notting Hill and in Hammersmith, and one name, which came up fre-

quently in our conversations, was that of George Clark. Both Mason and Clark were born in 1926. They first met in Notting Hill around 1964 and remained close friends until Clark died on September 20, 1997. David Mason wrote Clark's obituary in *The Guardian* (October 8, 1997), and I'll quote a little bit of it here since it will introduce him better than I could on my own.

"George Clark who has died of a heart attack aged 71, was a founder of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and exercised an iron discipline as chief marshal of the annual Aldermaston to London march. Later he quarrelled with CND and transferred his allegiance to the more radical Committee of 100. His early life remained a mystery; no details were ever revealed. But the peace movement remained a life-long, passionate concern for him. For his last 30 years, however, his dominant interest was urban poverty. He threw in his lot with the community workshop movement that toured the country analysing the causes of poverty and urging the poor to take control of their own affairs."

Mason told me that George Clark rarely ever spoke about his past and never mentioned his birthplace, his educational background, or his career before he appeared in public as a radical activist. In another obituary of George Clark, *The Times*, October 13, 1997, an unknown writ-

er carefully referred to his career:

"According to his own account, he was born in Edmonton, evacuated to Cambridgeshire during the war, did his National Service in the Navy, attended the Cambridge College of Technology and Goldsmiths' College, London, where he took a degree in sociology. When he first appeared on the political scene, he was doing market research for the Metal Box Company."

In *The Guardian* obituary David Mason focused on the activities of George Clark in 1960s and early 70s in Notting Hill:

"In the mid 1960s George's community workshop went to the back streets of London, in Notting Hill and North Kensington. It was there that he made his permanent home. At that time he sold the idea of a summer project to the Notting Hill Social Council, a loose federation of community workers, teachers, clergy and councillors. In the summer of 1967 students descended upon Notting Hill for six weeks. Sleeping in schools and churches they undertook a massive survey of local housing conditions while neighbourhood centres were set up in churches and youth clubs. Magnificent play schemes were created in the most run-down of neighbourhoods."

Revd. Mason added an intriguing comment on the Notting Hill Summer Project saying:

"There were problems, and George Clark was not the easiest of leaders, but the project was a great success."

I wondered what he meant by "not the easiest of leaders", however Revd. Mason did not elaborate and went on to describe Clark's next venture:

"He was convinced that the success could be reproduced. In 1972 he founded the Covent Garden-based City Poverty Committee, . . . It pioneered a North Hammersmith community development project in the Grove ward, which within four years became autonomous. It was one of the first urban neighbourhood councils."

G. Clark was at his peak in the late 1950s working as a strong campaigner in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and as an innovative community worker in Notting Hill during the 1960s. Also in his obituary, David Mason said:

"As George entered his late sixties he slowed down physically and this - limiting his initiatives - enormously irritated him."

And he ended the obituary with the sentence:

"Notting Hill has lost a champion of the people, one of its best loved citizens."

Through my conversations with

Revd. Mason I imagined that although G. Clark was perhaps not a well-known activist in Britain, he was an enthusiastic one who was very popular with the local people and on the streets. Mason referred to Clark, in the interview in August 2004,

“One day here was a man who suddenly stood out during a public speech at Hyde Park. George and I were completely different type of speakers. I wrote a manuscript and gave a speech based on that. George truly gave speech on the streets anytime, anywhere. The only problem was that his speech was way too long. Once he started, he couldn’t control himself”.

Clark would suddenly stand up and give a speech anywhere, on the street, in the pub, or at the podium in the square, and he would go on and on.

It was through my talks with Revd. Mason and in trying to understand how all of these various projects were set up and just what it was they were designed to do that the elusive ghost of George Clark began to take on some shape and substance.

While staying in London, I continued my research in the local archive of the Kensington Central Library in London. There are housed many of the original local documents, newsletters, minutes of meeting of the local residents groups, posters, local

newspapers and magazines, photos, and many other things which were typed and written by the activists themselves in the 1960s. It was here that I discovered that George Clark was talented at gaining publicity through a clever use of the media. He left many records of his work and ideas behind, such as the newsletters that he published, and articles he sent to newspapers and magazines.

I found also that George Clark set up interesting projects one after another. His one consistent policy was to organize projects based on his concept of “community”. He devoted himself to promoting local community in any way that he could, and was never afraid of the power of any authority. I was becoming involved in the world that the ghost of George Clark was showing me and at this point I still thought of him as a driven and active man who worked tirelessly for the good of others, but as my researches continued I began to discover that there was much more beneath the surface, and that I would also need to utilize many other sources in order to truly understand that place and this person.

The Many Faces of George Clark

One afternoon in August of 2006, while I was talking with the staff at the GNC, a woman named Beryl Foster, dropped in. She was director of a group called Standing Together

Against Domestic Violence and she had stopped in on the way to her office in Hammersmith. The staff introduced me to her and I explained a little about my research and was surprised to discover that Beryl had also lived in Notting Hill in late 60s and 70s and knew David Mason at the time. It was a short conversation, only a few minutes long, but I was inspired by it to run back to my flat and pick up my research paper and then go to visit her office. She was busy and had to go out so I just left the paper and showed her a recent photo of David Mason taken in 2003.

In Christmas of that year I sent a card to Beryl Foster and wrote a short message telling her that I had found an interesting book titled “*The Politics of Community Action: a decade of struggle in Notting Hill*” (by Jan O’Malley, 1977). When I wrote to her, I had just started reading the book but it was already evident to me that this would be an important book for helping me understand the details of the community activities in Notting Hill from the inside.

Six months later I got a surprising response to my card, not from Beryl Foster, but from Jan O’Malley herself. She wrote:

“I am Jan O’Malley, the author of ‘*The Politics of Community Action*’, if you are interested in it, please contact me”.



I was so surprised to discover that B. Foster was a friend of Jan O’Malley and that she’d mentioned my Christmas card and research to her.

Thanks to Beryl and now Jan, I was able to meet other activists who were also involved in activities in 1960s Notting Hill who in turn also introduced me to their friends and acquaintances thus widening the circle even further. One of these was John ‘Hoppy’ Hopkins, who we referred to in the first GMZ. All in all I visited socialists, peace movement activist, local leaders, historians, filmmakers, photographers, book-sellers, artists etc., and each person I met left me with strong impressions, and through them I discovered how chaotic, crazy, and creative Notting Hill was in 1960s.

I was also beginning to see how far beyond my capacity it was to treat this topic as a single coherent 'whole'. I found that I was rapidly losing a sense of direction in my research because too many different aspects of it intrigued me and I wanted to know as much as I could about every one of them. Adding to this was the problem that even my elusive ghost was beginning to take on a new and confusing shape as well. Most of the people I met were happy to talk to me about their experiences, but as I mentioned earlier it was becoming increasingly clear to me that if I brought up the name of George Clark it would very likely elicit strong and often negative reactions. This didn't just happen once or twice, but over and over again. Many of the people I spoke to seemed to feel compelled to point out to me that he was "a bad man". They told me that he was "an interventionist" and "amoral", and that "he treated people with contempt." I was told that, "he acted as if he was above people, a bit like a God."

I was shocked and confused by the growing gap between my imagination of George Clark that the media accounts of him in the journals and newspapers at the time had engendered, and the memories of the activists who'd actually worked with him. It seemed that the more I discovered, the less I felt I actually knew and I longed for some stable point of reference.

Chapter 3

George Clark and the New Left



Stuart Hall

Illustration: Thomas Garza

Unexpected Development of Research

Another name that I often ran across in my studies was that of Stuart Hall (1932-2014) who was also a member of some of the organizations which George Clark founded. For example, Stuart Hall was a member of the City Poverty Committee during the time that George Clark was its director. When I was back in Japan I continued to research these topics using whatever relevant materials I could get a hold of. I read New Left magazines from the 1960s in the library, and I bought used books from Japan and other countries through the Internet. Clark's name appears in the notes or in the bibliography of some books, though all of them only mention him briefly. Collecting

fragments of information, I found that Clark was involved in the British peace movement and the "New Left movement" from the end of the 1950s to the 1960s.

Stuart Hall referred to George Clark in an article in the *New Left Review* (1/1, 1960) and I saw the two names together often enough that I felt that Stuart Hall would likely know the real George Clark as well as anyone, and that as a fellow academic he might also be able to provide a contextual analysis of Clark and his work that would help me to better understand how the public and the private sides of this man fit together. I never imagined however that it would be possible for me to meet Prof. Hall given that he had gone on to become quite a famous person

and one of the most influential cultural theorists of his day.

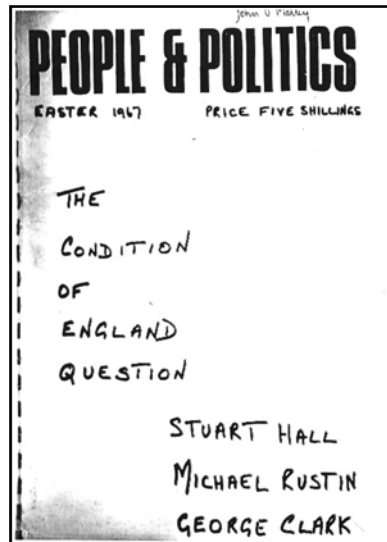
Besides, it seemed to me that even if somehow we could ever speak, it might not be appropriate for me to ask him about George Clark given that the latter was seemingly such an unreliable man and the memory of having worked with him might be embarrassing. I wondered what kind of connection George Clark actually had with Stuart Hall, or if he had perhaps been simply using this influential scholar's name from time to time without his consent. However, be that as it may, I had no way to approach Prof. Hall, and so these remained questions without answers for me.

On February 18, 2011, I visited Jan and John O'Malley. The O'Malleys had worked with George Clark in what was known as the Caravan Workshop, a venture which George Clark organized in the early 1960s. The Caravan Workshop was a group who used to travel by bus and campaign for the disarmament of nuclear weapons. John and Jan had also gone into Notting Hill with George Clark in order to take part in direct community action there as well.

During my interview with them, I referred to Prof. Michael Rustin, who wrote a paper on the Notting Hill Summer Project in 1967. This was an event where the organizers had rounded up student volunteers from around the country and then

organized them to mount an extensive investigation into the many housing and social problems that were to be found in Notting Hill at the time. I had tried to get in contact with Michael Rustin through an email address I found from the University where he worked, but had hitherto been unable to do so.

I'd found out that John and Jan were from the same generation as Michael Rustin and that they had known him very well but had not been in touch with him for some time. Jan thought to look and see if she could find his telephone number on an old note she remembered receiving from him with the idea that perhaps this could be used to track his present whereabouts. She eventually succeeded in finding the number and dialed it, discovering that he indeed still had the same telephone number all these years later. She then kindly ar-



ranged for me to meet with him and so thanks to Jan and John O'Malley, three days later I had the opportunity to visit and interview Michael Rustin.

I asked him how he came to know George Clark:

"Probably through Stuart (Stuart Hall). When the New Left started, they began to have these meetings in Central London. I was still at school at the time. I was 18 when I went on the big Suez demonstration in 1956 and I was kind of taken on as a young enthusiast. I was sort of seen as the young student, a person of the future . . . someone who would do stuff later on."

"Stuart Hall subsequently married my wife's younger sister, so he is my brother-in-law. They live nearby, the sisters are very close." I've known him now for 54 years. We've been political associates and we've worked together in different magazines and projects all through that time. I got to know George through Stuart probably, and then I got to know John O'Malley and Jan probably through George. George had a group of young followers which included John and Jan, Roy Haddon, and Chris Holmes."

-----*from everything I've heard, Stuart Hall and George Clark were very different types of people. How were they connected with one another?*

"George was an activist but he wanted some kind of theory . . . a framework. Stuart was an intellectual primarily, but he was also very active in CND. Both George and Stuart were active in CND and in fact they probably met through the CND. George was always a leading figure of one of the wings of CND, the non-violent resistance. George wouldn't have been very interested in the more ordinary, bureaucratic labourist-kind of socialist, but he liked Stuart. Stuart was interested in new politics, and George represented a certain version of new politics."

-----*Quite a few people had good connections with George Clark at first, but after working with him for awhile many found him very difficult.*

"Stuart and George wouldn't have had much to do with each other. They remained reasonably friendly. I remained reasonably friendly with George too, in part because we didn't work all that closely together, and I didn't have to deal with George's particular qualities that would have upset people, which I suppose was basically that he wanted to control everything that was going on."

"He did lots of stunts. He was a great man for looking for publicity. He organized a hunger strike in Parliament Square. We were pushing him around in a wheelchair and he was on a hunger strike for a long time. When? Early 70s I suppose it

would be, 1971, I'm just guessing, I don't know exactly."

"He also had a lovely stunt when the Vietnam War was going on. There was a reception at the American Embassy in Regent's Park. George got himself in with a lady, dressed up very smart, to go into this reception, and in the middle of the reception he said, "I want to make a toast to the people of Vietnam!" and was then ushered out. The newspapers and we were all outside: we were basically the support group outside, and we thought it was a clever thing to do, to get publicity from doing that. Of course, quite a lot of the diplomats, you know, actually supported him. He had quite a lot of support inside."

-----So the press took photos?

"Press were there of course. They were told to come, they knew this thing would happen. George Clark was very good at stunts like that. He was an unusual kind of character. He basically devoted himself to the causes he was committed to. He was very into self-sacrifice. I think he was inspired by Gandhi's philosophy of non-violent resistance."

After our conversation I asked Michael Rustin whether I could see Stuart Hall. He gave me his email address and I decided to write him straightaway.

Correspondence with Stuart Hall

In my email to Stuart Hall I made a point of mentioning that I wanted to speak with him about George Clark even though I was afraid that subject might make him as uncomfortable as it had some of the others that I'd discussed this man with, but I didn't want to mislead him about my purpose.

• Email to S. Hall on Feb.21, 2011

Prof. Stuart Hall

My name is Mugiko Nishikawa and I am a professor of Anthropology at Konan University in Kobe, Japan. Presently however, whilst on sabbatical, I am a visiting scholar at the University of Illinois in Urbana & Champaign, United States.

My current research subject is based around community activities in Notting Hill during the 1960s. I came to London for the research and I will stay until the 28th of Feb. Today I visited Prof. Michael Rustin at his place and I got your email address from him.

In my research I initially focused on two persons: George Clark (I think you know him well), and John Hopkins, known as "Hoppy". As I understand it, these men led the way in 1960s London counterculture, and both of them placed a great deal of importance on the role of information and the media, and were well

connected both inside and outside the area; not only with local residents, but also with a variety of activists, artists, intellectuals, journalists and politicians.

During the course of my research I ran across your name and George Clark in various papers such as: "ULR Club at Notting Hill" (written up from notes by George Clark) in New Left Review, 1/1, 1960, People & Politics: The Condition of England Question (Easter 1967, by Stuart Hall, Michael Rustin, George Clark), and in the various documents on Notting Hill Summer Project (1967), The Grove Community Trust (1969), The Committee for City Poverty (1972), Notting Hill Seminar (1996), etc.

So I am writing to you today because I am interested in your work in Notting Hill in the 1960s, and your connection with George Clark -- I was wondering if I could meet and speak with you.

I am coming back to Illinois, next Monday, 28 Feb. Before that day, if you have time, may I visit you? If I could see you and talk to you, I would be very glad,

*Best wishes,
Mugiko Nishikawa*

I was surprised to receive a long response from S. Hall the next day in which he wrote about his contacts with George Clark.

• A Reply from S. Hall on Feb.22, 2011

Many thanks for your e-mail.

I am of course interested in your research. I knew George Clark well and also, much less well, Hoppy. We had many connections - it is through the Universities and Left Club that George first went into Notting Hill, and I saw him regularly and discussed his many projects. He was also very active in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and you should look up the CND Caravan Workshops, which tried to take CND in the direction of community organizing.

George was one of the very early community organizers but I myself would be very wary of calling him a member of the counterculture unless you have a definition of this different from mine (Hoppy was a different matter). When I met him first he was working as a manager for a well-known company and there was nothing 'counter' about him, though he was both a courageous and innovative figure in subsequent years. But community organizing and local politics was the main focus of his work.

He was of course in contact with the press about his work, though he was not very interested in national politics and very anti-party politics; his constituency was the local community. In that sense he was a

forerunner of what became a major political trend later (68 and after), but you mustn't overdo the culture as against the politics. It was the alarm those of us on the left at seeing the Mosely fascist group appear on the streets of London again for the first time since the war vilifying the black immigrants who settled in Notting Hill which brought the Left Club and George into Notting Hill in the first place. Notting Hill was a fascinating place - but don't forget that it was an extremely run down and decaying suburb of London into which black immigrants moved in multi-occupation rooms and bedsits. You should have a look at the novels of Colin MacInnes and Sam Selvon to get a sense of what went on there. But as far as I know he did not hang out with the counter culture, drugs, rock music, transcendental experiences or any of that. It would give a very false impression of him as someone who hung out with artists and intellectuals. The history of NH has never been properly written but it was an extremely complicated brew.

I am afraid however that you have caught me at a bad time. I am leaving today for a short time out of London and won't be back until after you return to Illinois. Perhaps you will be here again when we can arrange to meet or if you have particular questions I will try to answer them.

Stuart Hall

As it turned out, Stuart Hall did indeed know George Clark and he didn't seem averse to speaking with me about him. One thing he said in particular struck me. Stuart Hall pointed out that:

“George Clark was not very interested in national politics and was very anti-party politics; his constituency was the local community.”

This confirmed what I'd discovered in my research thus far and what had initially piqued my curiosity about this man. George Clark's ideas and activities had indeed been focused on “community” throughout his forty-year career as an activist, and I looked forward to understanding more about what this meant and how it worked. Discovering that Stuart Hall had in fact worked with George Clark made me even more interested in speaking to him about this man and finally perhaps getting a better look at this “ghost” I'd been pursuing for so long. As it turned out however, during my stay in London in February of 2011 I was unable to see Stuart Hall and had to postpone our getting together until some indefinite later time.

It was some two months later that I wrote to Stuart Hall again.

●Email to Stuart Hall May 23, 2011

Dear Prof. Stuart Hall.

I trust you have been well.

As some time has passed since our last contact, I should take a moment to re-introduce myself to you. Last February Prof. Michael Rustin introduced me to you and we exchanged letters at that time. I am currently researching and writing about George Clark and Notting Hill in the 1960s, and I expressed an interest in meeting and talking with you about this subject. My original intention of course was to follow up with you on this quickly, but all my plans changed in March when I heard about the terrible earthquake in Japan.

Like much of the rest of the world I spent days and nights glued to the television and internet, feeling at once more connected to and yet much farther away from friends and family than ever before. My solution to this was to busy myself setting up a radio show in Japanese at the local Community FM here in Illinois, with co-hosts in Japan. I wanted to find a way to bridge that distance and bring Japan to the US and the US to Japan; not as nation to nation, but as person to person.

I feel that America's view of the world is overwhelmingly self-referential, and yet America touches and is touched by every other country, and Americans are of necessity citizens of the world whether they like to think of themselves that way or not.

I felt that using the media for mul-

tiple languages, and to express the thoughts and interests of varieties of people was important in any world, even in this primarily English-speaking/thinking one.

In any event, now that I have the show going I feel able to get back to my research and to that end I have been planning on returning to London in late June or early July. If it would be possible to coordinate this trip with your schedule so that we could meet and talk, I should be very glad. Can I hope that you might have time during this period to meet with you?

*Sincerely
Mugiko Nishikawa*

This time I didn't receive an immediate response, and it wasn't until some time later that I got a short reply from him in which he said:

“I have been unwell and out of communication. I am trying to be as much out of London over the summer, but when you get to London you can try me to see if I am here with any spare time”

He then kindly gave me his phone number so that I could call him the next time I was in town.

I arrived in London again on July 10, 2011 and I both sent an email to and then called S. Hall, but was unable to establish contact with him. I worried that his health might be

failing, but I thought that I would perhaps call him just once more to see if I could find out anything and if not, I'd give up on the idea of seeing or speaking to him during this trip. This time however, a woman answered the phone and she said that Stuart Hall would be there around 9:30 am the following morning, and she directed me to call back at that time.

I called the next day and was relieved to speak to Stuart Hall himself. He didn't sound especially ill to me but he told me that he was going to the hospital the next week and I realized that his condition was worse than I'd hoped, and I would likely not be able to see him after all. He then asked what it was I want speak with him about and I told him I only wanted to visit for a half an hour or so and ask about Notting Hill in the Sixties and about his relationship with George Clark. He considered this for a moment and then told me I could come by at 4:30 pm the next day, so on July 16th, 2011, I went to see Prof. Stuart Hall at his home.

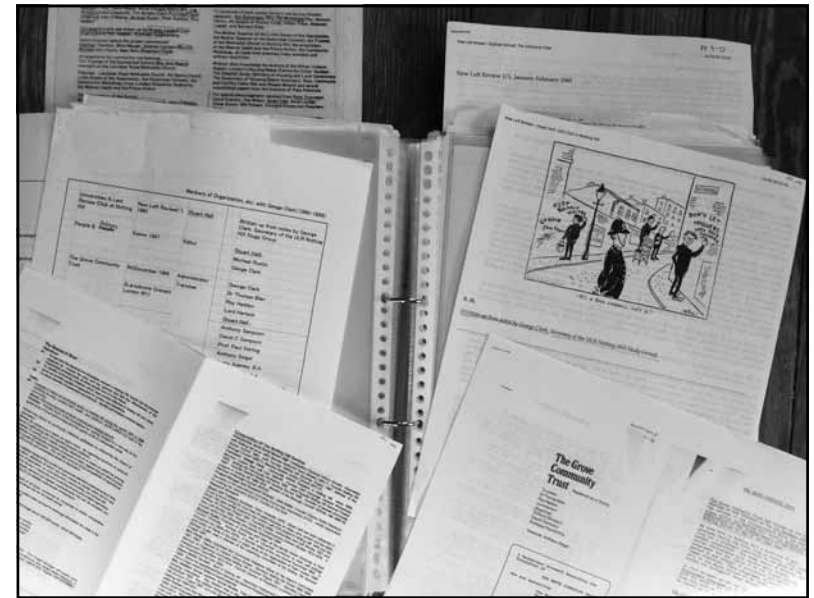
Visiting Stuart Hall

During my stay in London I made a point to trying to visit different people and places every day. Whenever I had an interview planned, I'd choose copies of documents I'd found in the local libraries and then put them together in a file to take along with me and share with the

person I was going to talk to. These documents were mostly minutes of meetings, articles from newspapers and magazines, or flyers and posters of local events that the person had been involved in.

Throughout my research I would always try to obtain some kind of documentary evidence of any pertinent event that someone I hoped to talk to had organized, recorded, or even just attended, if it seemed to have anything to do with Notting Hill in 1960s, because in my experience old documents, maps, or photos, inspire people to recall things they might not otherwise remember. I also knew that I needed to be careful with this sort of thing too, since not all memories are good ones, and people often still have strong feelings about particular persons or situations even long after any regular association with them has ended.

For my meeting with Stuart Hall, I selected several articles that he wrote with George Clark, and a document issued by Clark naming Stuart Hall as a member of an organization they both belonged to. Given what he'd told me about his precarious health, the amount of time he'd generously offered to share with me wasn't long enough for us to just sit and talk about anything and everything that came to mind, so I felt I needed to go into this conversation with specific questions, and then just let him take however long he felt he needed in order to answer



them. I was prepared to stay as long as he had the energy to talk to me, but I wasn't going to ask anything more than what could easily be discussed in the short period he'd set aside for our conversation.

There were two particular points that I especially wanted to talk with him about. The first of course was the true extent of his dealings with George Clark. Throughout my research I'd regularly run across the name of George Clark and quite often it was also alongside that of Stuart Hall as well, yet I had never been able to discover how the two were actually connected.

The second point was to try to understand what Notting Hill meant to Stuart Hall personally. He'd referred to the riots of 1958 in inter-

views, and I'd read in several books that he'd been born in Jamaica in 1932, and then had moved to the UK in 1951, so given Notting Hill's place in the lives of so many of the West Indian migrants of that time, I thought it might be an area that he would have some attachment to, or at least somewhere he'd be familiar with, and I wanted to listen to the way he spoke about it.

British Carrot Cake

I arrived at the nearest tube station about an hour before my appointment with Stuart Hall. Had I had been a Londoner, I would have easily known something about where I was going simply from having read the address, however for me, that address was just a location on a map, and I didn't have any sense of

what kind of place it would be until I actually got there. I spent some time walking around the neighbourhood. It was a quiet residential area with Victorian era terraced houses. There was no café or shop to visit nearby, and in order to rest and fill the extra time I was eventually obliged to just sit on a bench down the street from his home. It was initially a bright day, but the weather in London is changeable, and dark clouds soon came and it started raining, so I found myself ringing his bell a bit ahead of my 4:30 appointment.

Stuart Hall himself, using a walker for support, answered the door wearing a sky-blue coloured jumper. Despite his use of the walker Hall still seemed to be a very solidly built man, and he definitely had the air of someone who was strong willed and serious minded, and that impression, combined with the fact that I had been nervous about our meeting beforehand anyway, increased my tension a bit, yet he welcomed me very graciously and invited me into a bright dining room/kitchen area. Here there was a long table, on which books and a computer sat, along with many papers, and it looked like a comfortable office in which to write or chat and this eased my mind a bit. He then made us tea and I helped him bring the tea set and a whole cake to the table. He said that it was an “English Carrot Cake” and cut a piece for me, and I felt very grateful that he was clearly trying to help me relax.

Once we’d settled ourselves comfortably, I re-introduced myself and recapitulated my initial email to him in order to explain what I hoped to talk to him about. He thought for a moment and then began what seemed like a small lecture that he’d prepared just for me. Throughout he’d sometimes stop and ask me, “Okay?” in order to see whether I was able to follow what he’d been saying. My impression that he’d been trying to help me relax was reinforced, and I felt that he was very kindly seeking my level so to speak, trying to ensure that I got the most out of everything that he told me. I felt encouraged and comfortable asking questions and I got his permission to record the interview and use it for my research.

The following is an edited transcript of our 1 hour and 45 minute long interview. He began our talk with a short lecture for me on the background history of Notting Hill and New Left in the late 1950s, and his meetings with George Clark. I just sat and listened at first and then I asked questions in order to try to understand the details.

Chapter 4

Interview with Stuart Hall



Stuart Hall

Photo By: Mugiko Nishikawa, July 16th 2011

The Universities and Left Review

“There was a journal in 1956 called *Universities and Left Review* and it was [created] in response to Suez – so it was anti-imperialist – and the invasion of Hungary – so it was anti-Soviet. [This was an] independent left journal. Eventually that journal merged with another journal, a communist journal called *The New Reasoner*, and the *New Left Review* was the result of that merger. So in the early days we were friendly with the *Reasoner* people, but they were a different generation from us. We were graduate students. They were eminent figures, E.P. Thompson (Author of *The Making of the English Working Class*) etc.”

“So the New Left has a history

predating the *New Left Review*. Between 1956 and 1960 there is *Universities and Left Review* coming together with the *New Reasoner* – people setting up clubs around the country, with a big club in London, a very active club with meetings and speeches and talking to politicians – and it’s not until the late 1950s that we get involved in Notting Hill.

“Okay so George Clark first came to the Universities and Left Review Club, that’s how he got in touch with us, he came to meetings at the club. He was then a manager in a firm called Metal Box and he was a rather middle-class man in a suit, and we were all in jeans and so on, but he came to the club and he started coming to meetings and talking to people.”

“The Universities and Left Review Club was extremely active in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. The advertising for the first Aldermaston march, which was in 1957 or something like that, was done from the Universities and New Left offices in Soho, so we were very closely involved, and it is through this that George Clark made his first connection with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.”

Notting Hill Riots

“The Notting Hill riots mark the New Left’s first involvement in Notting Hill although throughout the later part of the 1950s we were becoming aware that questions of race and colour were coming into British politics, and the Notting Hill riots were just one of the first explosive moments of that combination. All of the sudden people were saying ‘there is a lot of trouble in Notting Hill you know, but why?’ Well the answer was because it’s very heavily immigrant settled. Lots and lots of black Caribbean were living in Notting Hill. The reason for this is because Notting Hill was declining -- had big houses . . . an old middle class area, North Kensington -- but going down in social status. And it was therefore a convenient place for black immigrants to get rooms in which to stay. Landlords would rent them a room, and then another room... so these buildings were absolutely full of black people living in one room, two rooms . . . whole

families sometimes living in just two rooms. So it became known as an area which was changing because of race, and that stimulated a lot of resentment on the part of young local white residents, including working class white families. They thought ‘we are poor enough and now look at what’s happening to our area – it’s becoming overridden by black people. We don’t know who they are, we don’t know where they come from, we don’t like them, we don’t like what they do.’”

“So Notting Hill becomes an area of tension around race between black and white people. And forces outside of Notting Hill used that tension to stimulate racism.”

Oswald Mosley

“So when we went to Notting Hill



Notting Hill Housing Trust, 1964

Oswald Mosley was speaking. Mosley had never appeared in public since the war. He was a persona non grata. He was a fascist, he was pro Hitler, and after the war you know, he was a discredited person. Yet all of a sudden he’s on a platform in Notting Hill saying ‘we should send these people home, the Jews and blacks.’ So you know this was very strange. The war was over in 1945 and this is 1957-58, and here is the first right-wing fascist movement on race developing in Britain -- all the ones that have come after that, the British National Party and on and on, we’ve had small right wing fascist groups ever since then, but Mosley was the first one – here is Mosley in the Portobello Road Market preaching his racist stuff, and what I am trying to communicate to you is the shock of seeing Mosley on a public platform talking about race. We thought we would never ever see that again in England.”

“Do you know the history about Mosley?”

“Oswald Mosley was active in the 1930s leading a pro-Hitler fascist movement called the Blackshirts. They wore black uniforms, marched like the German army and were very anti-Semitic. There were clashes between communists and fascists in the east end of London in the 30s before the war. Then there was World War II, Germany was defeated, and everybody said that this episode is over, we will never have fascism in

this country again. People like Mosley will never again be allowed on public platforms to preach racism and so on, but in 1958 there he was again, with all his men around. So it was a big shock, a political shock, to see Moseley engaged in public politics again.”

“And one of the changes that had taken place is that he moved from being anti-Jewish to anti-Black - more focused on Blacks than he was on the Jews. In the 1930s he was anti-Semitic, and in the 50s and 60s, anti-Black.”

“Okay so that’s one strand of the story.”

The background of the riots

“I was teaching in an ordinary secondary school in South London. I had just left university but I didn’t know what I was going to do, so I taught in the school. It was a working class school - the boys were not very clever. I was also editing Universities and New Left Review, and I used to leave the school at 4 o’clock in the afternoon, take the tube train to Soho in the centre of London, do my editing, go back, and go into school the next day.”

“One evening when I’m on the tube I see about 10 boys from my school and I said:

‘What you are doing here? You never leave South London that’s your manor’

- that's what they called it . . . 'your manor' is the place where you hang out.

They said:

'We're going over to Notting Hill, Sir.'

'What for?' I asked.

'Trouble over there.'

'What kind of trouble?'

'The Blackies sir.'

'Well what about them?'

'Well they're over there, they fill up all the houses, they drive big cars, they play music in the streets, they're taking our women . . . '

You understand what I'm saying? They'd be lucky to have any women of any kind, these are just 14 year-old boys . . . they're just putting it on. But still, they're leaving South London in the afternoon to come over to Notting Hill so I ask myself 'what is going on there?'

"Well what was going on was this - women coming out of the tube station at Bayswater, Notting Hill, walking back to the areas where they lived would pass the pubs, and the men, the boys would stand in front of the pub and shout racist abuse at them and behind them their fathers would stand prompting 'go on, go on.' And sometimes they would even attack the women going back. All of that is before the riots really started, but this is the background to the Notting Hill riots, and unless you understand that you don't know why there were riots there."

"And again I emphasize to you that

there had not been anything like this before even though black migration begins in a very big way in 1948."

"The Windrush was a big boat that arrived in 1948 with a lot of black migrants, and there was a lot of trouble about this, but there were no riots or open violence until 1958. This was the first post-war race riot in Britain. Okay? People from the New Left club said we've got to do something about this but what can we do about it? Well one of the problems in that area was that everybody was experiencing poor housing, very bad housing. You couldn't get anywhere to live, you had to pay a lot for it, loose roofs were leaking, you know, very, very bad housing."

To build alliances in Notting Hill

"So what we decided was that one thing we could do to try to prevent things from descending into a racial struggle was to get poor white and poor black people together in the community to build alliances between tenants rather than to allow Mosley and the other fascists to polarize the situation between black and white. We said the problem is not black and white, the problem is that you have bad housing and you are very poor. That's what the problem is."

"So people from the club started to do a bit of work in Notting Hill, building these alliances and so on. First of all we needed to find out

what the situation was because nobody knew - it hadn't been written about. One person from my club, Universities and Left Review club, discovered that a man named Rachman had bought up all these houses and didn't do anything to fix them up, but was renting them to black people at very high rates."

"So at the Universities and Left Review club we are keeping our eye on what is going on in Notting Hill. There are the riots, and that's terrible you know, and there's violence, people burning tires in the streets, and it's a very dangerous situation. Some people from the club chose to work in Notting Hill rather than in other activities and one of those people was George Clark. He went into the Notting Hill world. He moved, gave up his job, and moved into Notting Hill and started to work in the community. He became a community organizer."

"I don't know exactly when he left his job but he started doing more work with the club in Notting Hill and became drawn into community projects there and so did less work elsewhere. At one point he said 'I'm going to live in Notting Hill. I'm going to give my time to this, rather than work', and he gave up his job. Well George was trying to build alliances in the area and so he was talking to black tenants, he was talking to the church, he was talking to the Labour Party, and he was trying to get all of these organizations

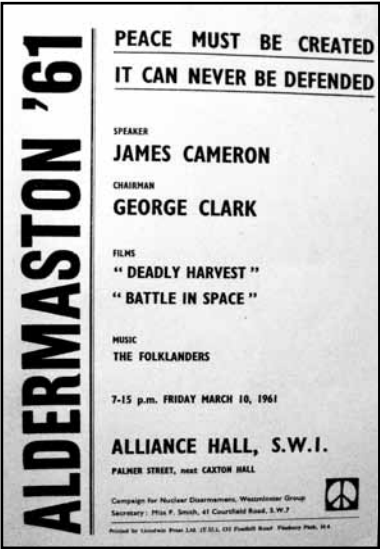
together. "

"David Mason can tell you more about that because that's when he knew George. His church is one of the ones that became involved in this activity."

"We initially regarded George as rather a middle class manager with not very radical instincts - not much politics and so on but he gradually became radicalized by what he was doing."

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Direct Action

"The first Aldermaston march was in 1958, and George gets involved in community action in Notting Hill in the CND, in the wing of the campaign that was called 'Direct Action.' They don't believe so much in



ALDERMASTON '61

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JAMES CAMERON

CHAIRMAN
GEORGE CLARK


FILMS
"DEADLY HARVEST"
"BATTLE IN SPACE"

MUSIC
THE FOLKLANDERS

7-15 p.m. FRIDAY MARCH 10, 1961

ALLIANCE HALL, S.W.1.
PALKER STREET, near CAXTON HALL

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Whistonville Group
Secretary: Miss F. Smith, 41 Courtyard Road, S.W.7
Printed by Victoria Press Ltd (1961), 117 Finsbury Street, London, E.C.2



Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, 1961

marching or having meetings, they believe in sitting down in Trafalgar Square, lying down, etc. He is active in that way.”

“So George bridges the gap between a sort of more traditional political campaign and a more activist, more direct action political campaign. That was the wing led by Bertrand Russell. The other campaign was very respectable, and I thought CND should not insist on one rather than another. If people wanted to sit down they should sit down, if people didn’t, then they should march. I didn’t go to all of the Committee of 100 demonstrations but during the Cuba crisis I sat down and was arrested. In any event George and I talked quite a lot about this division between direct action and conventional politics in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.”

No politics would happen without him

----- *His ideas are innovative, creative, optimistic, however there is always some trouble.*

“Yes there was always trouble with George. He had his own ideas. George Clark was one of these political figures without whom nothing happened. They are absolutely critical but sometimes you can’t stand them. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

-----*He used his innovative*

ideas to encourage people, but it seems that he cannot keep a good relationship with anyone.

“Yes that’s what I’m saying because he’s absolutely essential because no politics would happen if he weren’t there. So he’s very creative, innovative, thinks in new ways you know etc, always trying out new things, talking to new people. Very optimistic etcetera. So you know the Caravan Workshop is a brilliant idea of taking the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament to the local communities. Not marching up and down, taking them to local communities, brilliant idea.”

Essence of George Clark

-----*He always finds some kind of “community” to organize at the local level. That is his idea?*

“Yes. That’s the essence of George’s policies. He went to marches but he did not believe they would change anything. He hated political parties, he didn’t trust them. He didn’t want to get involved in that. Local community democracy, community action, that’s where he... We weren’t exactly on opposite sides because I supported him.”

-----*What ‘sides’ are you referring to here?*

“Well one side is conventional politics. Have a big Aldermaston march, thousands of people turning up in

Trafalgar Square. Have a lot of big meetings with figures like A.J.P. Taylor and academics and bishops and so on. That was what CND was. But then there was a local CND movement as local groups. And George wanted to energize the local groups not through this other thing.”

“My position was – we need to do both because there are a lot of middle class people who are supporting CND, who are not going to sit down in Trafalgar Square. So what are we going to do, just let them go? We need to find a form of political expression for them. But young people are there. They want to get on with things, they are going to sit down. They should sit down. They feel like sitting down. So I was trying to prevent a choice between two opposite sides.”

“George sort of sympathized with that. But basically he was on the side of local community action. That’s what he thought was important and the idea of caravan workshops was to take CND around the different local groups and to talk to the local groups, to talk to individuals, not to talk to the chairman or the secretary. To go to what you what you call the grassroots, yes.”

“It’s quite an interesting development that this thing that begins with community action in relation to CND takes root in Notting Hill.”

-----*So for him Notting Hill is a*

practical area for his ideas...

“Yes it’s sort of a laboratory but it’s a laboratory because of what I’ve told you before because it’s suddenly a cauldron of racial violence – what I’m looking for is to try to explain to you why CND becomes located in Notting Hill because Notting Hill was not an active CND area. So it’s the strategy of Caravan Workshop that could have applied to why George becomes active in Notting Hill – but he was working in Notting Hill before with the University and the Left Review club. And I described what we were doing in that article you have.”

“The club was not as active as he was. After a while we went in there, we were active. We turned up on demonstrations against Oswald Mosley etcetera. But George was actually living and working there day by day, meeting the local churches, meeting the local clubs, talking to it. So he was much more bedded into the area than the New Left Club was – University and New Left Club.”

-----*Did you keep in contact with George Clark after the 60s, after the Notting Hill club?*

“Oh yes. 1960s, 1967. I’m still talking to George. This is his journal. He said ‘come on, you and I will talk’ and he told me to write something.”

"I think we are the academic intellectuals. George is the activist. But George was interested in ideas. So if you look at this, he has got lots of ideas about equality and social justice and so on."

"George – you know he is doing a lot of different things. He doesn't come to us to talk about Caravan Workshop style, community activities. He goes to John O'Malley, yes. He goes to people who go with the bus that went around England with Caravan Workshop. They know how to work in a community. I'd not really done that kind of work for any length of time. He's talking to us about the ideas what's going to happen. How should the movement go? Should we concentrate on the Labour Party or should we leave the Labour Party behind. Is party politics finished? What is the Left? George is very radical in practice but he is not an extreme leftist. Do you know what I mean by that? He doesn't have a class analysis, he's not a Marxist."

"He thinks parties are irrelevant. He thinks the community is where the action is."

-----*Oh yes community, and yet he always wanted to be the head or something. How can I say . . . he's like a king of the neighbourhood. He wanted to control people.*

"He was controversial - people want to argue with him. A lot of people

think he's taking things in the wrong direction. They couldn't get on. I don't know about that. I mean little local things, I don't know about you. Where's the bus going next, who's organizing the food etcetera? Even though, that level – George is in charge and nothing is happening etcetera. People didn't take easily to him but they had to react to him because he was such a strong character."

"Generally, speaking George was what in other kinds of politics we would call a "sectarian." He had his ideas. He wasn't going to compromise his ideas. And if that meant leaving the organization, fine. The organization was wrong, I will leave it. But the ideas go with him. So he sets up another one, yes. So he's controversial, imaginative, innovative, annoying."

"I wasn't advising him. I wasn't the leading person advising him. I was a friend. He would talk He knew we were interested in the same things. I was looking for new kind of independent left politics and he was looking. And he was looking for a new kind of radical community politics. And so we had a long conversation over a long period of time about these things."

-----*'Conversation' means that sometimes you met with him?*

"Yes but New Left Review then had a building in Soho - it had a coffee

bar, it had a library, it had offices. So he would drop in. I would go to Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament meetings and he would be there."

"Well, I didn't keep the relationship long after '64 because I left London to go to the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in '64. Even in the last years just before that we weren't terribly close."

-----*So you are not involved in his activities in your organization in Notting Hill?*

"Well remember what I've been doing. I was involved in the activities. We took him to Notting Hill in the first place. I was involved in building tenants associations in Notting Hill. So he would have never gotten into Notting Hill without the club. But I didn't stay in Notting Hill. I was doing thousand other things. I was not a community activist. But I supported community activism."

"So I would give my name and I would talk it over informally with George so if he wanted to consult me, give him my advice etcetera. So I'm not the front line. People like John O'Malley, they are the front line. They are with him all the time. They live in Notting Hill or nearby they spend all their time there. They think about that. Their activities are related to that place. Mine are not."

-----*More people who were involved in 1960s Notting Hill left in*

the 70s I think. More students and more people left. Then they started new activities, other activities. But George Clark stayed after that.

"Remember these are not very well-established organizations. You set up an organization, they come to it, people move on. Students graduate and go somewhere else. You set up another one. It's not like a long lasting political organization. You start organizations to keep the momentum going to keep them going or to do a new thing. Get new ideas, you start new organization. So a lot of people pass through but George stayed."

Michael X as a kind of spokesman

"Now another person who stayed, and I don't know what you knew about him, called Michael de Freitas. Michael X, okay."

"Well Michael X had a different story to George. But he came to see me in Universities and Left Review too when we started to work down there. He said 'I see you people are coming into Notting Hill.'

I said 'Yes there was lots of trouble down there.'

'I work in Notting Hill down there.' And I said 'Michael what do you do?'

'Well, I work for housing.' 'What sort of housing?'

He was employed by people who were employed by Rachman. And

what he did was to move black tenants out - if they didn't pay their rent he and his group put their things on the street. He ran prostitution, all sorts of rackets. But he was like Malcolm X. He said 'I don't like doing this but that's my life. That's what I do. How can I do anything different?' And so we started to talk and he became more radicalized and eventually you know. Do you know his story?"

"He was not a very political person to begin with. But he becomes inspired. I'll tell you one of the reasons why he came more and more involved because there was nobody who could talk to the media about what was happening in the black movement and he was very good at that. So they'd always go 'Michael what's going on down there in Notting Hill?' Michael would tell them. So he became a sort of informant."

-----*Media means...*

"Television, radio, journalists. He mediated between what's happening in there and the wider public. So he became a kind of spokesman for the movement. Then he became a leader of the movement. Then set up his own political party. He wrote to me one day and said 'I'm setting up a political party. The political party is called RAAS.' R-A-A-S. This is a swearword in Jamaican patois. It's a dirty word but nobody knew it. No English person knows Jamaican patois. So he thought it was a huge

joke that all these people were saying I belong to the RAAS party. And he wrote and said 'I would like to have you as my foreign secretary.' I said 'yes Michael whatever you like.'

"Lots of people moved through, came, did some work, moved through. And I talked it over with them. I was like a confidential uncle. Let's go and see Stuart. And see what he thinks."

-----*For you, was Notting Hill in the 1960s a place where you observed how society is changing? - how can I say, a case study.*

"It's not a case study, it's not a case study - it's one of the examples of how the country's changing. One of the instances, many instances. But as a political analyst of the society, Notting Hill is a big moment. Though, I don't stay with Notting Hill, okay. It's was a big moment race enters British politics. After that race is a constant theme in British politics and the Notting Hill riots is the first time it exploded. There is another thing, a lot of people who are in the explosion in Notting Hill are young people. Teddy boys, yes? And so it's also a vehicle for Britain's anxiety about young people. What are they doing? Where were they going? What do they believe in any longer, etcetera? So the thing about race and the thing about violence and the thing about youth all come together in Notting Hill.

That's what I call, following Gramsci, a 'conjuncture.' Different things coming together."

"But I was interested in CND, I was interested in the Labour Party. I was a socialist, I was editing New Left review. I was going to the Centre for Cultural Studies. I was not devoted to Notting Hill. I don't want to underplay its importance but I didn't stay with it. Have you read a book called 'Policing the Crisis'?"

A transitional zone

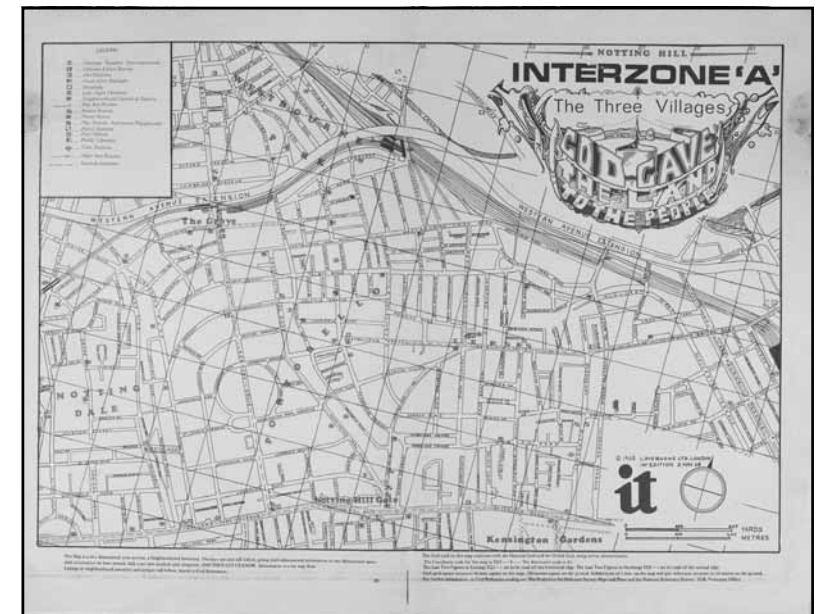
-----*Notting Hill also is one of the place for making culture, new culture. New culture, meaning underground culture or more? My interest is that Notting Hill - I am very interested - you said about Michael*

X, Michael de Freitas, his media.

"I mean it is part of Central London. So it would get more coverage in the media than other places, that's true. What was interesting about the culture of Notting Hill is that it's the beginning of black British culture, the drinking clubs, the parties, the bands. The black counter culture begins in Notting Hill. So that's one of the things that interested Cultural Studies about it."

-----*Early 60s, late 60s more and more, how can I say, for example John Hopkins? People like that started doing more things.*

"Oh, yes, many more things. It became a kind of hub for the counter culture after '68 for the, you



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know...”

“Yes all of these threads go into Notting Hill for some reason. And if you ask me why, I would say it’s because Notting Hill is what I would call a transitional zone. It is where people of different cultures, different ages, different classes. Because remember what I told you, the houses are middle class housing. North Kensington was a middle class area full of Irish working class people and blacks.”

“Remember they come into an old working class area with their own culture. So it’s a white working class culture, Irish culture, Irish Catholic culture, black culture, middle class culture trying to get out - it’s a clash of cultures.”

“So it’s a clash of cultures, it’s a combination of cultures and it’s a joining of cultures, and people like Hoppy and you know, artists and musicians. Of course, they are dying to go down there. For one thing the Jamaicans are there so you get marijuana, you can hear good music, you can get invited into the blues parties at night, etcetera. Notting Hill becomes a kind of counter cultural centre.”

Use different kinds of Media

“I wouldn’t emphasize the media too much. The media are important because of course outside in an area like this they will go to Notting Hill. So what’s going on down there?”

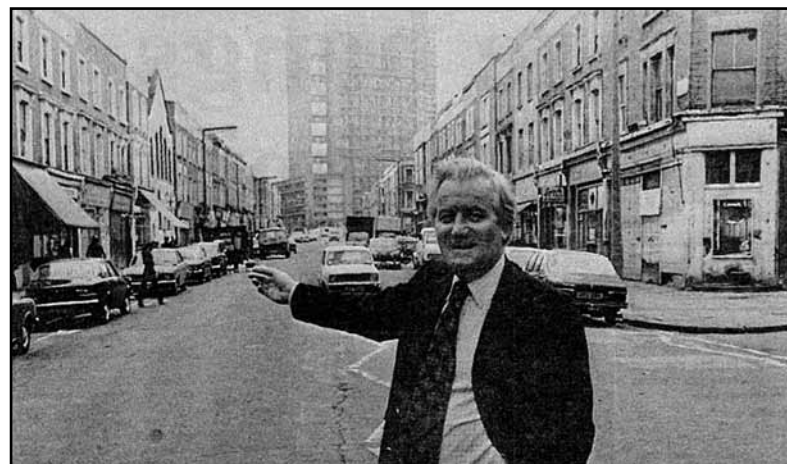
Well they depend on the media, it’s on the news. It’s in my Guardian. So the media are important. But the media relayed the news to other people. What is going on in the community? It has nothing to do with the media.”

-----*But media – so many kinds of media, one kind is mass media, the other kind is alternative media, International Times also.*

“That’s what I am saying to you. It doesn’t have anything to do with the mass media. It’s not oriented towards the mass media. In fact everybody in Notting Hill is very dubious, suspicious about the mass media. They don’t know what we’re about, the coming on air, they want to take pictures, they are going to write a story, and they don’t know what’s going on, etcetera. They don’t trust the mass media. But they need them to get the message out. What’s happening inside the culture? It’s a completely different. Of course, it’s using media in the sense that it’s using music, and it’s using painting and it’s using abstract art. It’s using street happenings and events. I would call that a counter culture rather than a media.”

Chapter 5

The Third Question



George Clark in the Golborne Rd, with Trellick Tower

West London Observer, Sept. 21st 1978

I actually had one more point I wanted to talk to Stuart Hall about. It was a big question for me, but I felt it might be a difficult one to approach directly. I wanted to know why Notting Hill in 1960s had not been comprehensively researched in the area of cultural studies. I could not find any works that purported to take the whole of the history of that place into account. I’d read some that described the experimental community activities (which continue to be influential to this day), the creative counter-cultural movements of the time (which quickly became popular culture), and even the complicated postcolonial situation, and the beginnings of mass society in Britain. There are indeed many articles and research reports

on the place and the time from specific perspectives and topics, but no one seems to have taken on the entirety of the subject, and I wondered why.

For my own part I have been interested in Notting Hill in the Sixties and whenever possible have tried to visit and speak to someone who was active at that time at least once a year. These meetings with the activists, and their passionate talk and creative activities, have inspired and influenced my own life and work. (It was with all of these things in mind that I became interested in the idea of having a Japanese language radio show in U.S. - see GMZ#1) However, it is far beyond my capacity to research the place or that era in its totality, or seek out and compile

sufficient data in order to construct comprehensive theories from the details. This is work for an English-speaking native to take on. Someone who lives in and intimately knows Britain. Ideally, I thought, someone like Stuart Hall himself.

Stuart Hall told me:

“Why there isn’t a book? I think it was difficult in any case, not just because you are a Japanese. It may be because there are so many different aspects. Nobody feels they know all of it. Think of a book that Hoppy would write, that David Mason would write, that George would write, that Michael de Freitas would write. All of these books would be about Notting Hill in those years but they would all be very different from one other. I think it may be because there are so many different aspects.”

“I wouldn’t write a book about Notting Hill because I only know one corner of it. I just have one point of entry, but what about that point, and that point, and that point eh? By the time I’ve learned all about counter culture, all about black culture, all about George Clark, all about Michael de Freitas, all about the churches, and all about the Labour party. I would never write it. By the time you’d finish something like that, you’d have been at it twenty years.”

Through my conversation with Stu-

art Hall I realized that I would never be able to grasp Notting Hill in the 1960s as a whole, and that I should instead find a more specific perspective to cut into it.

“That’s why I told you that it’s difficult to write a book about it, everybody has a different experience, everybody has a different perspective on it, everybody has a different interest in it, so there’s no one single story. If you wrote a book about Notting Hill everybody would be at your throat tomorrow.”

I asked him whether I could use the interview with him for my research paper and I told him that I wanted to write a book. He said:

“Yes, sure” and “You should write.”

Since that day I’ve listened to my recording of this interview many times, and I have been thinking a great deal about my own perspective on Notting Hill. I was initially interested primarily in George Clark and his idealistic concept of community, and Notting Hill itself was just the place where Clark had been trying all of his ideas out, and so even though I had also over time become interested in the place itself and its history too, the lens that I was seeing Notting Hill through was still primarily that of a stage set for the play that George Clark had done his best to be the star of. So if this was indeed the case, and George Clark was to somehow con-

tinue to be my guide, how clearly could I feel I was seeing anything he showed me when I still couldn’t even quite see the man himself? How was I going to answer all of the questions I still had about him? Was he an idealist, a manipulator, or somehow both simultaneously? Was he a good person who also did bad things, or a bad person who also did good things?

I’ve listened to the recordings of the many other interviews I did with some current and some ex-activists, and read many other documents besides which raised some of these same questions. Why were all of these people involved in activities led by George Clark if they considered him to be such a controversial person, as Stuart Hall described? What was it about him that attracted people to join him in these community activities during such a turbulent time?

As I consider the subject now I think the way I would attempt to answer these questions would be by saying that it is because many people at that time believed that they could change society and bring about a better future, and so they were looking for some social movement or new theories that they could believe in, and follow, to help them do that.

George Clark had never belonged to any political party and had always gone about things his own way so he didn’t bring too much of that

sort of baggage along with him, and what he offered people was a simple, straightforward philosophy that asked them to look to the “local community” to find a base upon which to build, and he also required them to work directly with the residents in a non-violent way which also fit very neatly with the overall temper of the times (even though it could be fairly stated that his character itself and his treatment of others had a kind of violence to it. It certainly annoyed many people).

So why and how did this appeal connect with so many people, including younger students, academics, activists, politicians and the local people themselves?

It is my opinion that what George Clark offered the people around him was the same thing his ghost offered me: a sense that what you can conceive and believe in, you can also achieve, if you’re willing to work hard enough at it. And what he was trying to achieve was the same thing many other people were also looking to accomplish in the 1960s, in Notting Hill and elsewhere - they wanted to create a better world with a brighter future, a world without war, where people could work together as neighbours and friends in order to solve their own problems in their own way.

Clark offered a simple, straightforward prescription for achieving this that he promised would work, and it

was the very embodiment of one of the most popular slogans of the day: 'power to the people'.

Ultimately I've decided that it was through learning about the innovative activities of George Clark that I was personally able to touch the enthusiasm and idealism that seemed to inspire so much of what went on in the 1960s, but it wasn't Clark himself as a man that attracted me necessarily, and I'm not sure it was the man himself that drew others to him either, except perhaps in the sense that his firm belief in his own ideas inspired others to believe in them too, (if only until they got to know him well enough that they became disillusioned with him and by extension everything he'd touched.)

Times have changed and it is not easy now to imagine the heady atmosphere of the sixties, but interestingly, George Clark's concept that a shared sense of "community" should be the basic framework of social connections has survived to the present, and his ideas about the types of organizations that are best for dealing with local problems, such as elected neighbourhood councils for example, have persisted, and been reinvented, and are still in use today, especially in urban areas where people don't have strong relationships with their neighbours. As a result, I initially met and was in a sense following the ghost of George Clark in my research into the local community organizations

of today's London well before I ever knew anything about the man himself. Indeed, few people remember much about George Clark the man, but the idealistic concepts to which he devoted his life continue to be reproduced, not only in many of the grass roots activities taking place today, but in government, religion, and even commerce.

I am still curious about George Clark himself, but regardless of what I discover about him I think that his ghost is indeed a very good guide to 1960s Notting Hill for me, not necessarily because of who he was as person, but because of what he believed was possible, and all of the different and interesting ways he went about trying to achieve those things.

In the following GMZs we will learn more specific details about many of the topics that were mentioned here. We'll discuss the Caravan Workshop, tenant associations, the London Free School, The Notting Hill Summer Project, Neighbourhood Council, etc. Thanks in part to our guide, the ever-present ghost of George Clark, but also very much to the voices of the many activists who have supported my journey into the Notting Hill of the 1960s, and who continue to inspire my life at the present time.

In closing I would like to offer this edition of the GMZ to the late Prof. Stuart Hall with great sorrow for

his passing, and many thanks for his encouraging me to write. I am saddened that I could not show this paper to him nor get any more comments from him as I'm sure he had much more to say on the subject, however, I will continue on my way as he suggested, listening to more voices from the present and the past.

Acknowledgements

Throughout my fieldwork in London, U.K. and Urbana-Champaign, U.S., I've met many people who have supported me and helped me in my research. Thanks to their encouragement I have been able to remain on this long journey with sustained interest, and I have also been able to meet the multiple challenges inherent when trying to work in praxis, through the self-production of a radio show, and the creation of the *Grassroots Media Zine*.

There are many more people who have been vital to the various aspects of my research than I can acknowledge here, but I wanted to at least recognize those whose contributions have been invaluable for this particular volume of the GMZ. They are all very busy people yet each has been extremely generous with his or her time in reading this draft, and in giving us valuable suggestions and comments, and of course permission to use their interviews, materials, and documents.

I would like to express my gratitude to: Prof. Catherine Hall, Prof. Mi-

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Grove Neighbourhood Centre in Hammersmith gave me the first opportunity to pursue my interest in the local "community" in London and Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Centre encouraged me to have a Japanese language radio show in the US, and I would like to offer my special thanks to Mr. Thomas Garza who staffs our show, and is the editor of the GMZ. He has inspired me to use grassroots media as a communication tool to connect people beyond boundaries.

Mugiko Nishikawa, Nov. 17th, 2014

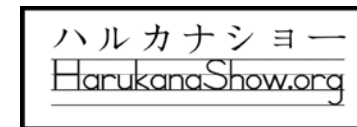
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