



PEOPLE, SIGNS AND RESISTANCE

ON THE FRONT LINE



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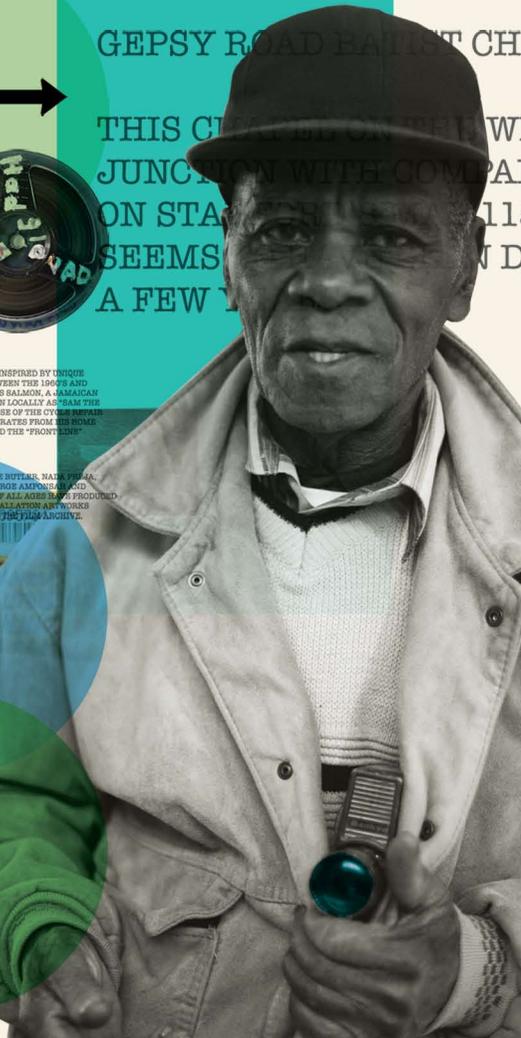
SEEMS... N D

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AN EXHIBITION INSPIRED BY UNIQUE
FILM SHOT BETWEEN THE 1960'S AND
1980'S BY CLOVIS SALMON. A JAMAICAN
MIGRANT KNOWN LOCALLY AS "SAM THE
WHEELS" BECAUSE OF THE CYCLE REPAIR
SERVICES HE OPERATES FROM HIS HOME
IN BALMUT ROAD THE "FRONTLINE"
OF BRITTON.



ARTISTS GEORGE BUTLER, NASH PUNJA,
TIM BLAKE, GEORGE AMPONGBI AND
PARTICIPANTS OF ALL AGES HAVE PRODUCED
VIDEO AND INSTALLATION ARTWORKS
IN RESPONSE TO THE FILM ARCHIVE.





Photograph by Jana Carrey

INTRO



“I was twenty-four when I came to England from Jamaica in November 1954. I had my own bike shop in Jamaica and most of my jobs in England were making bicycles: Claude Butler and then Dayton Cycles where I stayed for ten years. The foreman at Holdsworth Cycle Co. didn’t believe that I could make a hundred pairs of wheels before 5 o’clock, but he gave me the job. I nearly get the sack the first day because the foreman saw me reading a newspaper. He said ‘Bloody hell! You don’t even start work and you reading newspaper!’ He was shocked when he saw the eighty wheels I had finished making. He called the governor and the governor called the newspapers and BBC television. It was a world record. I stayed for twenty-five years. An Irish girl called Madge at Holdsworth gave me the name Sam the Wheels and in Brixton everybody knows me as Sam the Wheels.

I went to an English church and the vicar told me not to come back because his members would leave

so black people had to find their own places to worship. I was a Pentecostal preacher and in 1959 I started filming church services. My first camera was a ‘Chinon Master’ and one of my first projectors was a ‘Standard 8 Eumig’ and I would screen films at the church from October to January when it was darker. As I started to establish myself I filmed weddings, christenings, birthdays, funerals.

I also filmed the riots of 1981 with my camera hidden inside my jacket. Black and white youths were fighting with the police and petrol bombs were being thrown everywhere. No one on Railton Road felt safe in their beds and my place was evacuated that Friday night when the riots kicked off. People, Signs & Resistance is important because my films can be shared for future generations. I want to continue making films.”

Clovis ‘Sam the Wheels’ Salmon
November 2008

PROCESS



04-05

This unique project combines historic and contemporary documentary film, visual arts, collaborative web based technologies and grassroots community action. The purpose is not just to conserve and publish rare film footage of 1960s, 70s and 80s Brixton but to bring it alive in communities now, and create a space for people to interpret and reinterpret it in ways that are relevant to their challenges and experiences today.

In Brixton from the late 50s to the present day, Clovis Salmon aka 'Sam the Wheels' has captured accounts of everyday life, protest and people, offering a lens through which the struggles, sufferance and joys of those times can be seen with an authenticity uncontaminated by a media agenda. In sharing his historic footage, Sam has served as a living lens on those times, offering his own experience of arriving in London during the 1950s as the catalyst for a community arts and heritage collaboration that resonates with present day Brixtonians and beyond.

Sam's film, 'The Great Conflict of Somerleyton Road', follows the story of Jesus Saves, a Pentecostal Church demolished to make way for the 'Barrier Block' on Coldharbour Lane, concluding with the aftermath of the 1981 Brixton Riots. It reveals the important role churches played for new Caribbean communities who built their own places of worship and social spaces after being excluded from English churches, pubs and clubs.

> The process

The collaboration, entitled 'Sam the Wheels', has engaged artists, activists, documentary film makers, curators, volunteers, youth groups, poets, writers, technologists, community figures and others in a rich creative explorative process over the last year. Funded primarily by the Heritage Lottery Fund, the project has drawn on film, photography, arts, web and community development techniques to directly engage people in a co-production that is at once historic and contemporary; factual and artistic; educational and entertaining;

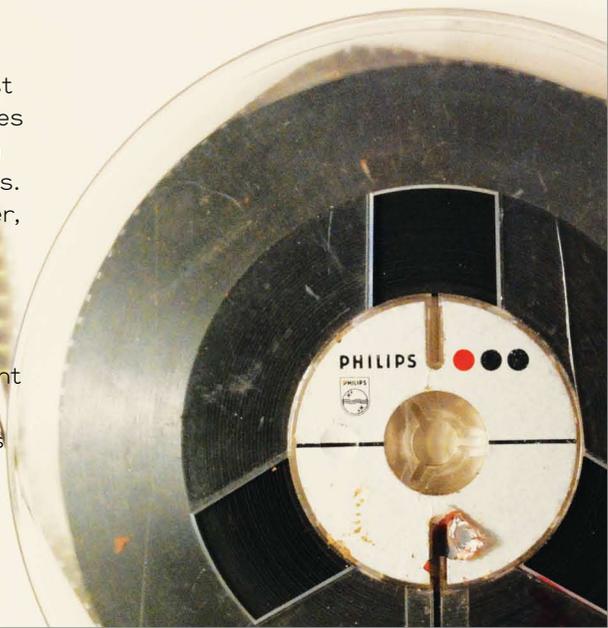
personal and communal; above all, interactive and engaging.

The co-producers of the 'Sam the Wheels' project are Mutiny Arts (aka George Butler and Tom Keene) and 198 Contemporary Arts and Learning. Together they invited and enabled a multitude of response through a collaborative website, exhibition, publication and series of events. The resulting multi-layered project brings a fresh reinterpretation of recent history by partnering artistic and critically engaged approaches with a diverse array of social and cultural perspectives.

Sam's 8mm celluloid films were first digitised, then presented in a series of events and workshops, which ran alongside four artists' commissions. George Amponsah and George Butler, both with origins in documentary film, worked with volunteers and young participants to tell stories and trace ideas of identity, belief and belonging and Nada Prlja learnt about the varying importance of religious ideology within Brixton's

culturally diverse population. And in Tim Blake's own words "The more I travel the more I realise what an amazingly diverse place London and a lot of England is, OK this may be something to do with our "old Empire" but as Ghandi said 'No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive'".

A core group of local residents aged between 10 and 80, including Sam himself, volunteered their time and made the project come alive through discussion, researching his own narrative, his films, local places and people. They shared their thoughts,





findings, films and photographs on a website created with myself, that acted as a sketchbook and sounding board for their discoveries. Rather than attempting to create a definitive archive, its focus was on collecting snippets of information, recording the collaboration, then retrospectively making sense of what has been shared.

Archive seems to be a word that unifies and helps make sense of the project as a whole. It has been a process that has gathered information on the interactions between an individual, a place, institutions and groups of people. Our approach towards the project's ethnographic material has not been divorced from our relative social, political and cultural positions, a methodology that a museum or historian may employ, but intimately connected through research driven by personal and group experience. Consequently, having grown up in New Cross and engaged with the area's sound system culture, the project has provided a deeper understanding of the West Indian culture I grew up with.

> *The Legacy*

Perhaps the most important outcome of this project was the simple enjoyment of conversations among people who wouldn't normally get the chance to spend an hour together, let alone a period of months. Sam's films triggered discussion on belief systems, the origins of Rastafarianism, the political statement of an Afro hairstyle, the repurposing of churches, social resistance, musical influences, activism amongst young people, the list goes on, but illustrates the complex social makeup in and around Railton road.

Made available in un-edited form for others to view and share, digital versions of these films have been deposited with both Lambeth and the Black Cultural Archives, alongside original and interpretive footage that has been distributed via www.samthewheels.co.uk and www.archive.org. Released under a Creative Commons [Attribution, Noncommercial, Share alike] License, which means anybody has permission to use these films for non-profit use, as long as they clearly credit the



DO NOT PASS



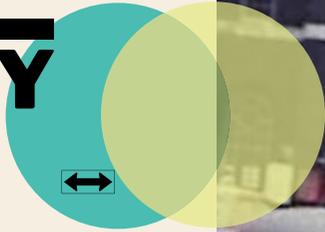
original author and share their work with others under the same license terms.

While the project's legacy is a material archive that features the films of Sam the Wheels, our aim has been to embrace, honour and celebrate the importance of a living archive as embodied by Clovis Salmon.

Tom Keene - 2008



A BRIEF HISTORY OF BRIXTON



In the summer of 1978, I began attending the Black Ink Collective Writers Workshop on Coldharbour Lane, Brixton. As a young black man of West Indian migrant descent growing up in Hackney, coming to Brixton was a pilgrimage to the 'Harlem' of London. But this small area in the London Borough of Lambeth has been portrayed in the media as predominantly black where 'muggers' roamed the streets even though it is only 24 percent African-Caribbean. How did this myth emerge and why is Brixton seen as the soul of Black British social, cultural and political identity where Muhammad Ali and Nelson Mandela visited amongst many other prominent black figures? Addressing these questions requires a brief history of Brixton that also provides a context to the archive of film created from 1959 by Clovis Salmon aka Sam the Wheels that documents the lives of West Indians in the area.

Brixton was a middle class suburb in the 19th Century and by the

1920's had the largest shopping centre in south London and Morley's, an independent department store still survives today. The Brixton area was bombed during World War II, contributing to a severe housing crisis, which was followed by slum clearances and the building of Council housing. The SS Empire Windrush arrived in 1948 from Jamaica with 492 demobbed West Indian service men who were temporarily housed in the Clapham South deep shelter, close to Brixton. Many subsequently settled in Brixton and became the first wave of West Indian immigrants who as British citizens considered Britain the "Mother Country" as many of their countries were still colonies.

But anti-colonial movements and struggles for independence were brewing throughout the Caribbean,



Africa and South East Asia. The Civil Right Movement was resonating internationally and by 1962 Jamaica was independent. The assassination of Malcolm X in 1965 and Dr Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968 radicalized a generation and an emerging West Indian community began to resist racist immigration laws, housing, education and employment policies. Emergent political, cultural and artistic voices were expressed in pamphlets, newspapers and bi-monthly magazines produced by the Black Power Movement and the Race Today Collective both based

cultural and artistic elite of Black British society.

Unfair arrests and convictions and house parties and 'Blues'/'Shebeens' on Somerleyton and Geneva Roads being closed down by the police was commonplace in Brixton. And it was well known that the police often claimed that they were 'Nigger Hunting' when on their beats. In 1966, Joseph A. Hunte's report Nigger Hunting in England for the West Indian Standing Conference documented these excesses by the police. Our fears as young black



people was not being 'mugged' but being stopped by the police or attacked by racists, which the police would turn a blind eye to. Linton Kwesi Johnson is a world-renowned dub poet and activist from Jamaica who lives in Brixton and was a member of the Black Power Movement and the Race Today Collective. His collection, *Dread, Beat & Blood* reflects life in Brixton for many black people and his poem; *Sonny's Letter* (Anti-SUS poem) recounts a young black man's letter to his mother from Brixton Prison, where he describes physical brutality at the hands of the police. Clovis Salmon's son was arrested in Brixton after leaving work on a charge of stealing from a woman's handbag. The case was dismissed when it came to court like so many.

In January 1981, 13 young black people perished in a fire at a birthday house party in Deptford, New Cross. The police discounted arson with a racist motive, though the area was a base for the far-right British National Party and National Front and many black homes had

been attacked. In response, a Black People's Day of Action in March saw 20,000 black people march from New Cross to central London demanding justice and an end to racist murders. In April, police in Brixton launched 'Swamp 81', as part of a London-wide exercise known as 'Operation Star'. It involved "stop-and-search" policies under the SUS law, where young black men were routinely stopped and searched by the police without any reason being given. Over six days in Brixton 943 people were stopped by the police.

On the evening of Friday 11th April police questioned a young black man as he lay bleeding from a stab wound on Atlantic Road before calling an ambulance to help him, a crowd had gathered and intervened turning on the police. The ensuing riot saw police and black and white youth in street battles through Friday night into Saturday until the early hours of Sunday morning. That summer also riots in Southall, Handsworth (Birmingham), Toxteth (Liverpool), St Pauls (Bristol), Moss Side (Manchester) and Leeds,



Leicester, Southampton, Bedford, Halifax, Gloucester, Coventry and Edinburgh. While Lord Scarman's subsequent report attempted to find the causes of the 1981 riot, Brixton saw disturbances in 1985 following the police shooting of a black mother, Dorothy 'Cherry' Groce after the police entered her house looking for her son Michael Groce. It wasn't until the 1999 Macpherson Report into the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence that the police were found to be 'institutionally racist'.

Eddy Grant's 1982 hit, *Electric Avenue* is about one of the first streets to have electric lighting in the UK and evokes images of urban

deprivation while also celebrating the vibe of the area of Brixton market. And everyday, particularly Saturday, Brixton market is buzzing with African-Caribbean and African shoppers buying their yam, green banana and palm oil and arguing with Asian stallholders over the price of fish and goat meat.

On Coldharbour Lane there is a fortress of towers called the 'Barrier Block', which during the 1970's was part of the Greater London Council's plan to redevelop Brixton by building a huge flyover. Many black residents in the Railton Road area eventually sold their properties to Lambeth Council. The flyover was never built, but it marked the beginning of Brixton's gentrification as left wing and anarchist white squatters moved out and middle class homeowners moved in. Railton Road may no longer have a Frontline and Brixton has become a trendy social spot, but its heart and soul is still beating.

Michael McMillan
November 2008

GEORGE AMPONSAH & PARTICIPANTS

YOUNG FILMMAKERS

14-15

Born in England of Ghanian heritage, filmmaking has provided me a medium through which I can explore my concerns with identity. I began the project's process by asking a group of young people (10-14 years) about their experience of working with video, film or photography and what movies, television programme or even a clip on YouTube had inspired them. This age group is usually seen as the 'internet generation' and they found engaging with and navigating around the Sam the Wheels website amazingly easy. Once they had familiarised themselves with the Super 8 movies of Clovis Salmon, he then visited 198 Contemporary Arts & Learning and shared his insights as a filmmaker and experiences of arriving to Britain in the 1950s.

Then over a number of days the group learnt about basic video camera skills, recording sound, using a boom pole and professional microphones. They also learnt about working as a documentary production crew: director, cameraperson, sound recordist and interviewer.

Out of a brainstorming process the group then committed their ideas for some short films to paper: The Windrush Generation, The 'Stop and Search' powers of the police,

Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech, Knife Crime and Things for young people to do in Brixton.

We then made these films with the young people behind and in front of the camera and on a daily basis they reflected on the creative process by logging into the blog section of the Sam the Wheels website.

George Amponsah



16-17

NADA PRLJA

JESUS DIES FOR OUR SINS

JESUS DIES
FOR OUR
SINS

JESUS DIES FOR OUR SINS is an art project inspired by the constant transformations and re-use of urban spaces initially, intended for religious purposes.

The initial inspiration for this project derives from the 'The Great conflict of Somerleyton Road', filmed by Clovis Salmon aka 'Sam the Wheels', which shows the demolition of the Jesus Saves Pentecostal church in 1977, despite the importance that this particular church had for a local community in Brixton. The church was demolished on Lambeth Borough Council's request and the empty land plot was infamously 'transformed' into the 'Barrier Block'.

While the project does not investigate the reasons for the church's demolition and many others, it does focus on the relevant and

constant current issue - What has happened with the physical spaces after their demolition? Is there any consideration for the faith and 'hope' that inhabited these spaces while they were used as places for prayer, worship and religious ceremonies?

One of the features of the project JESUS DIES FOR OUR SINS is extensive research into Brixton's re-developed churches. The Lambeth Archives offered an all-encompassing source of information about the history of religious spaces that has been meticulously researched through written

documents dating back several centuries. The archive also includes photographic material and records of weddings and other ceremonies and events from more recent times (focusing in particular on the cultural practices and everyday life of the Jamaican and West Indian migration in the area).

The research showed unexpected results: most of the deconsecrated churches have been redeveloped into casinos and nightclubs (some even with 'pole-dancing'), etc. This fact does not belong only to the past, but very much also to the present. It is a reality that remains a threat feared by many active religious places - like, for example, the Raleigh Park Baptist Church. My realisation of the continuous transformations of spaces intended for religious purposes surprised and shocked me; it provided the basis for the art object, which is positioned within the window space of 198 Contemporary Arts & Learning.

The project is not about an intended revival of a romanticized 'moral' and idealised world; it is a direct and powerful message that has the intention to act as a warning / reminder to the gallery visitors, as well as to everyday passers-by, about the careless redevelopment and redefinition of Brixton and London in general. And coming from the former Yugoslavia, I am intimately familiar with loss



and memory and how places and identities have been redefined.

Visually, the art object refers to the widely used practice of displaying religious signs and slogans, in a manner and purpose not dissimilar from the application of modern neon advertising signs. Shining and glowing, the visual message that today's religious institutions and places of worship are giving to the public, has never been closer to that of contemporary advertising techniques. The need for self-promotion ('to make known, announce, broadcast, proclaim, trumpet, call attention to, bill, promote, market, beat/bang the drum for, informal push, plug, hype, boost' *) in the most direct and derogatory manner is adopted by all layers of society. Does this current situation demonstrate that both sides of society - one 'good' and the other one, 'evil' - are taking the same direction, adopting the shape and form of the commercialized, mass-produced and mediocre world?

*Describes the word 'advertise' as noted from 'Oxford Dictionary'.

Nada Prlja - 2008

TIM BLAKE

IMPERFECT IMPERIALISM, PERCEPTION & MISCONCEPTION

18-19

According to the Collins Dictionary, ethnicity relates to a human group having racial, religious, linguistic, and other traits in common. Today, there are more than 5000 different self defined ethnic groups and sub-groups living in 189 nation states and in 150 there are at least four different ethnic groups within their borders. In two out of three countries there is at least one substantial minority group, representing 10% of the population. And approximately 900 million around the world face some aggravated form of discrimination because of their minority status.

As Homi Bhabha argues in his book 'The Location of Culture', while cultural diversity is entertained and encouraged, cultural difference is often contained within a framework defined by the dominant culture in society, which says that while these other cultures are fine, we must be able to locate them within our own grid. It is this contradiction between the creation of cultural diversity and the containment of cultural difference that many minorities attempt to resist that interests me as an artist.

This body of work explores issues of cultural identity and the different practices both the dominant and minority cultures used to navigate a changing social landscape. One practice is religion, which can be simultaneously exclusive and inclusive. The church was a vital spiritual refuge for many newly settled West Indian migrants in Brixton, as reflected in Sam's films. Excluded from the mainstream black run churches were created out of necessity and generated widely



varying perceptions of them between the attendees and the English people.

The Windrush generation of Post War immigration signified the start of a process of colourising British society, where today the national dish is a curry and many urban youth speak a Jamaican English. The empire has long gone, but symbols remain giving power to contemporary imperialism in a globalised world. Have attitudes about cultural diversity shifted?

Is Britain now a classless society? I use a tongue-in-cheek approach to explore these issues through film with political figures such as Keith Hill, George Galloway and Ex-MP Tony Benn. This is collaged with music, photography, Topiary sculpture and different cultural perspectives such as Njonjo Mwangi, who was born in Nakuru, Kenya and settled in Britain during the 80's.

Tim Blake

20-21

GEORGE BUTLER & PARTICIPANTS

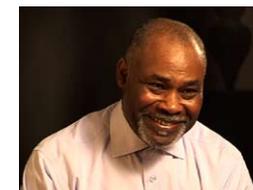
IDEOLOGY, IDENTITY AND BELONGING



Railton Road in Brixton has been the epicentre for various social and political groups from the 60s to the present day that included: Pentecostal and black run churches, the Black Panther Movement, gay activists, women's groups, squatters, Rasta's and Punks. These seemingly diverse groups shared similar objectives, organizing methods and gave members a sense of identity and belonging through a shared struggle. This mixture of black sub-cultures and counter-cultures such as squatters was already familiar when I came to London because this was what I had grown with in Derby.



Photography by Roger Smith



This was the subject of the film project, which involved a group of young people from 198 Contemporary Arts & Learning and volunteers researching the backgrounds of people active in these different groups around Railton Road. They were then interviewed on video by the group, who also helped with the technical work of setting up lights, microphones and video camera.

The recorded footage, Clovis Salmon's archive Super 8 footage and other footage shot by the participants was edited into short clips and incorporated into the Sam the Wheels website. We created an interactive non-linear film using the Korsakow system, computer based software where the author decides the way scenes relate to each other in no fixed order. The process is generative



as the order of the scenes is calculated while the viewer looks at a Korsakow produced project thus allowing them to influence the film.

George Butler - 2008

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There have been over 130 people involved at different stages of this project & we would like to thank all of them.

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www.samthewheels.co.uk | www.mutinyarts.co.uk

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Lambeth



engage in the
visual arts



DVD



X



ROAD CLOSED

DO NOT PASS

SAM THE WHEELS [51mins]
Edited highlights 60s to 80s

- Somerleyton 1** Street scenes of Brixton
- Somerleyton 2** High street & market.
- Somerleyton 3** All along Railton road
- Somerleyton 4** Jesus saves, Pastor Hedlam
- Somerleyton 5** Jesus saves is taken down
- Somerleyton 6** Post riots
- Church** Preaching & singing
- Fays wedding** Bride, Groom & Guests
- Ministers & Church** Preaching, singing, baptism
- Row Ban Baileys** Baptism & high emotion
- Row Sis Rule 1965-1970** Communion
- Taylor, Powell** The Latouche group play music
- Unknown** Electric guitars, baptism

2008 INTERVIEWS [70mins]
Filmed by volunteers of all ages

- Ajamu X** Queer rights activist
- Andy** Anarchist
- Ashton Allen** Brixton resident
- Bishop Powell** Friend of Sams for 50 years
- Clarence Thompson MBE** Social scientist, Poet
- Clovis Salmon** Amateur filmmaker
- Canon David Isherwood** Evangelical Anglican Rector
- Linton Kwesi Johnson** Broadcaster, Journalist, Recording artist
- Michael Newland** Writer
- Rita Keegan** Artist
- Shane Collins** Green campaigner
- The Mighty Dread** Rastafarian

