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History Workshop Journal, Issue 57, Spring 2004, pp. 101-115 (Article)

Published by Oxford University Press



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‘Not Even Past Yet’

by Bill Schwarz

I'll begin in Edward Thompson's Worcestershire kitchen.¹ The time is November 1978, when Thompson was beset with rage against the increasing encroachments on civil liberties in Britain. His ire, in this moment, worked its way toward the unsavoury figure of Chapman Pincher, a *Daily Express* ideologue of Stasi temperament, whose commitments to the imperatives of the secret state were unremitting. For Thompson, this was personal as well as political. Both he and Pincher had served in the same tank regiment during the war, and while Thompson looked back to European liberation as a time of high democratic hope, Pincher, according to Thompson, became an early, malevolent conspirator in Cold War intrigue, a foe to those selfsame hopes. This past and this present conjoin in Thompson's imagination.

It is difficult to explain how memories affect one in middle life. For months, the past stretches behind one, as an inert record of events. Then, without forewarning, the past seems suddenly to open itself up inside one – with a more palpable emotional force than the vague present – in the gesture of a long-dead friend, or in the recall of some ‘spot of time’ imbued with incommunicable significance. One is astonished to find oneself, while working in the garden or pottering about the kitchen, with tears on one's cheeks.²

This is an unusually private, domestic Thompson. He speaks of a memory which might be called an involuntary historical memory, in which historical time (the Second World War) and human or mortal time (‘the gesture of a long-dead friend’) come to be superimposed. These are, Thompson suggests, specifically memories which coalesce ‘in middle life’. They rearrange the experience of time, from the ‘inert’ to the explosive, the latter carrying a high emotional charge. And, crucially, they are embodied: ‘the past seems suddenly to open itself up *inside* one’. We leave him (or ‘one’) with tears on his cheeks.

This short reminiscence, in fact, represented an anticipation of Thompson's final scholarly investigations, in which affective, immediate memories of his father and brother inspired formal historiographical reconstruction. Certainly in the case of the latter, and to a degree also in the former, he set out to atone for ‘the betrayal of the past and the calumny of the dead’.³ In 1993 Oxford University Press in India published his account of his father's relationship with Rabindranath Tagore, while after his own death there appeared what I find to be E. P. Thompson's most moving work

– though also perhaps his least known – *Beyond the Frontier*, about the execution by Bulgarian fascists of his brother, Frank Thompson.⁴

Here we can witness, in a distinguished professional historian, a dialogue between what we might loosely designate as ‘memory’, on the one hand, and on the other, ‘history’. This is no revelation, and only has significance to the degree that we still hear historians insist that each is the other’s contrary. Even if we turn to the historiography of Eric Hobsbawm, who has been forceful in his denunciation of memory, as analytical tool or political resource, we can find Hobsbawm himself pondering the nature of what he terms the ‘twilight zone between history and memory’. As he notes: ‘For individual human beings this zone stretches from the point where living family traditions or memories begin – say, from the earliest family photo which the oldest living family member can identify or explicate – to the end of infancy, when public and private destinies are recognized as inseparable and as mutually defining one another . . .’. Indeed, this is how Hobsbawm chose to open his history of the epoch he designated ‘The Age of Empire’, with a vignette of the individual destinies of his own parents.⁵ The narrative form of this ‘twilight zone’ is more history than memory. But even so, there is something *particular* about the ways in which Hobsbawm and Thompson resurrect these familial, and in part autobiographical and remembered, pasts. Thompson was, and Hobsbawm is, a professional historian; *their* memories in middle life and after were and are located in an unusually complex consciousness of the shape of the historical past. They alert us to a specific issue: the capacities for historical time to be known and to be made conscious. They invite us to ask the question how historical time can be lived. In an older vocabulary, they address the issue of historical consciousness.

Memory; historical consciousness; the lived forms of historical time – these are complex, overlapping, but essentially separate analytical objects. Recently perhaps, the conscious, lived recuperations of the past have been overshadowed by the ever-encroaching analysis of memory, with its characteristic emphasis on the unconscious operations of the human mind. For all my enthusiasm for the new field of memory studies I have reservations, though these are not principally conceptual. There are certainly many unresolved methodological issues. Often we expect memory studies to explain too much (in the elusive idea of collective memory, for example). There are many dimensions of temporal and mental life where the literature on memory will not be able to deliver very much. We need simply to keep this in mind. There are too important pedagogic questions. There is a density to much of the critical writing on memory that can make entry daunting for a newcomer, or indeed for many of us who are very far from newcomers. The speed of intellectual development in the field has perhaps made this inevitable, not to mention the inherent complexity of the issues confronted. I also wonder whether increasing specialism isn’t pulling discussion increasingly inward, thus making it more difficult to connect

work on memory to other areas of inquiry. I leave this as an open question. But it is in this spirit – in an attempt to draw from recent work on memory in order to connect with other issues – that I've framed my comments today.

Elsewhere, I've explored the question of the relation between memory and historical time.⁶ Two issues came to intrigue me, each of which only obliquely touches on the question of memory.

The first was the question of temporality itself. The debates on memory, wittingly or unwittingly, foreground questions of temporality. It was only really through theorizations on memory that I came once more to understand the centrality of the complexity and plurality of differing temporalities.⁷ The manner in which memory collapses the given external distinctions between past and present is itself of great significance, but at the same time raises the more general question of the way in which the past inhabits the present. A very important text in this regard is Althusser's essay on 'Contradiction and overdetermination', where Althusser, in conventional marxist manner, confronted the question of the ways in which past forms 'survive' in the present – as in older feudal forms 'surviving' in early twentieth-century Russia. Althusser made it clear, though, that he didn't know how to develop this concept theoretically. He couldn't determine, for example, whether survivals were largely a matter of objective, external historical time (his preferred explanation), or whether it was something to do with the way in which the past entered the mind, through acts of memory – rather like Thompson's entire 'inside' being opened up to the force of the past. Althusser was reluctant to contemplate the latter option, as for him it smacked too much of idealism and of Hegel. To centre memory in this way, it seemed, would be to pitch things too much in the domain of consciousness. Down this route, Althusser surmised, lay too many phantoms, in which the past could only appear in the present through the medium of ghosts and spirits.⁸

My own view is that we needn't be frightened of phantoms: of understanding the past-in-the-present as principally located in the human imagination. To speak of the past-in-the-present is precisely to grasp the symbolic, psychic means by which the past is *represented* in the present: in which, as Pierre Nora suggests, the past in all its myriad forms is governed and articulated in the contemporary moment, and organized by contemporary determinations.⁹ Individual memories are one means by which the past-in-the-present is activated. But I don't think that the analytical procedures which the study of memory offers can carry the full weight of coming to terms with the articulation of the past-in-the-present.

I wonder, secondly, whether we haven't been too quick to move from the conscious to the unconscious domain, and whether there isn't more to explore about the general question of internal-time consciousness: of how, in other words, we apprehend time itself, and bring it into consciousness. This, at any rate, is the tack I will follow here – circumventing the approach to memory which has come heavily to be identified with the notion of trauma.

Yet there is an established theoretical literature devoted to this issue, which occupies the same historical time as the great classics of memory studies. This is the tradition of phenomenology, beginning with Husserl's lectures at the beginning of the twentieth century (on what he explicitly identified as 'internal-time consciousness'), passing through Heidegger and Levinas, and popularized in various literary derivatives of existentialism. Within most versions of phenomenology the starting-point for knowledge is experience, or the lived experience of human consciousness. Much of this writing determinedly brackets out the dimension of external historical time, and much of it (though not Levinas) seeks to locate the issue in the consciousness of the individual. Does it make sense to imagine something like a phenomenology of *historical* time, as a way of trying to reach the lived, interior forms of temporality, including both memory and historical time? What would it look like? Would it help us understand the ways in which 'history' is lived? I'm not suggesting that we can resolve historiographical problems by displacing them on to the terrain of phenomenology. But in the transactions something might happen.

These are rhetorical questions. I don't have the expertise to follow them through – an afternoon with Husserl persuaded me of that. I was exercised simply by the fact that there exists this body of literature, at one remove from the classics which now form the memory canon, dealing with overlapping issues but never, or barely, mentioned. There I left the matter, and got on with other things which were exercising me. In particular, these extra-mural philosophical reflections were pushed aside as a result of my deepening absorption with the Caribbean.

* * *

In fact, quite unexpectedly, I found myself confronting some adjacent conceptual issues. I had become interested in how the riots and rebellions which swept across the Caribbean in the 1930s entered historical consciousness: how blackness had come to be articulated as a political project, and how the memories of these events had been enlisted as a political resource for the future.

Perhaps the most significant intellectual organic to these dramatic events in the Caribbean was C. L. R. James, whose *The Black Jacobins* was published in 1938, in the moment of insurrection itself. This history tells the story of the making of the first black republic, in San Domingo at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and of the revolution's inspirational leader, Toussaint L'Ouverture. Reading Hegel against Hegel, black Toussaint – in James's account – becomes the world-historical spirit on horseback, the slave whom history has transformed into the military commander of brilliance. In this instance, in full Hegelian mode, Toussaint becomes the realization of all prior human history, elevated to a higher plane.¹⁰

There is, though, something strange about the relationship between James and the Caribbean in these years, which requires our attention. We

know, thanks to the services of the Special Branch, that at this time James was agitating in public about the events in the Caribbean: or at least that he did so on one occasion.¹¹ But his writing is marked by an extraordinary silence. One could read the James of this period and, with exception of four pages in a relatively slight work and one short article in a revolutionary paper he edited, find no mention of the dramatic occurrences in the Caribbean. James, always, was a ferocious writer. The years from 1935–8, which coincided with the breakdown of the colonial order in the West Indies, marked a hugely creative moment in his intellectual life. Within little more than a couple of years he had drafted his play about Toussaint; saw it into production with Paul Robeson in the lead; and made preliminary arrangements with Eisenstein to make the movie – one of the great unmade movies of the twentieth century. He published a mighty denunciation of the Third International, and translated Boris Souvarine's colossal biography of Stalin. Accompanying *The Black Jacobins* he wrote a synoptic account of black uprisings in the modern era.¹² And, in the occasional moments left to him, he produced reams of journalism – both on politics and on cricket. Yet the degree to which the contemporary Caribbean is absent from this great frenzy of writing is stunning. More so, given that he, at the height of the crisis in the West Indies, was pouring his unsurpassed energies into writing the history of the foundation of Haiti, led by the figure he was to identify as 'the first and greatest of West Indians'. We know that the dramas of the Caribbean *past* were active in his imagination.¹³

Why did he, of all people, prove so reticent in making the connections between the political present and the historical past?

Part of the answer can be found in his conception of world-history. From the moment of the first edition of *The Black Jacobins*, and on many subsequent occasions, James argued that his burning preoccupation had shifted from the Caribbean to Africa. 'The book was written not with the Caribbean but with Africa in mind', he claimed many decades later.¹⁴ *The Black Jacobins*, in this rendering, tells the epic prehistory of what Africa was about to achieve. If in the time of the French Revolution Toussaint had incarnated the highest level of historical consciousness, a century on that role – in James's vision – was to be taken by the emergent leaders of black Africa.

But if the locale of world-history had shifted to Africa where, in James's politics, did this leave the Caribbean? The only answer we have to this is a silence. For James, the Caribbean was subsumed to Africa, or to the larger identification of Pan-Africanism. What mattered was not locality but universality. World-history was about to take place elsewhere.

James possessed an overpowering conception of historical consciousness. In many ways this is what his life was about: the desire to realize what he believed to be immanent in the historical process itself, which would effect the transition from bondage to emancipation. In politics, the story of his life turned on this incessant, driven and – one has to say – impressively resourceful search for new historical universals.

But this wasn't only in politics, narrowly conceived. For James humanity itself, in its broadest possible conception, was caught up in this extraordinary historical drama. This was, for him, what history *was*. The human predicament was tragic insofar as universal redemption was relegated to some future epoch. This touched every aspect of his life. It even enveloped his deepest subjective desires. In 1938, with the cricket season over, James travelled to the United States in order to conduct political work for the Fourth International. Shortly after his arrival, he fell deeply in love with a young white American woman, Constance Webb. For James – amidst the whole psychic array of projection, splitting, ambivalence – Constance herself came to represent a new universal: feminized; fearless; located in the everyday experience of modernity at its highest tempo, as opposed (in the case of Toussaint) to a life cast in tragic mode; and promising, above all, an unimagined expansion of the self. James was happy to share with her his thoughts on Ginger Rogers, and the success (or not) of her new frocks. He prided himself on his insights into the minutiae of every zone of the commodified cultures of the United States. But in his own mind this had its political preconditions. In July 1944 he wrote to her in the following terms:

I belong to the twentieth century. I have a comprehensive view of life. I become more and more interested in all aspects of life, as in our modern society all aspects of life become more closely interrelated . . . you were born and grew up after the Russian Revolution. Do you know what this means? The mental world in which you grew up as a child was the widest and freest the world has ever known. The greatest group of men the bourgeois world has ever known were Ricardo, Goethe, Shelley, Beethoven, Hegel and that group. They lived in a world which had been illuminated by the French Revolution. Think of all the things you have studied and read and talked about from early, what you were doing, at 15 for instance. But, unlike Europeans, you did it without fear, without perpetual anxiety, even without hunger, i.e., without these things being a major and permanent part of the society around you.¹⁵

Here, the world-spirit – the historic legacy of Ricardo, Goethe and 'that group' – converges with everyday life and mass culture, and takes living form in the young woman of his desires, Constance Webb. She, however, although living (it seems) this history objectively, is not conscious of the fact. For her to become conscious of her place in history, she must learn it from one who knows: from James himself. ('Do you know what this means?') With it, of course, comes the whole package of psychic complexes in which this fantasy has taken life. The tangled story of the relationship between C. L. R. and Constance is, in part, the story of these complexes.

To see James in this way presents a problem. To comprehend history in the Hegelian manner as the drive for universal consciousness, where the conditions for consciousness are also immanent in the historical process

itself, can lead to many unnerving outcomes. Throughout his life, James was always on the look out for new universals which – politically – would embody both history and the future. During the uprisings in the Caribbean in the 1930s, James imagined the emergent universal subject of history to be the black masses of Africa, allowing him to elaborate an inspiring Pan-African vision of the future. In a different register, but revealing the same underlying sense of history, the projections he imposed upon his lover carried with them faith in the lived cultures of the American people. In James in particular we quickly become aware of the close affinities between Hegel and Marx, and their shared understanding of the universal properties of historical evolution. To shed doubt on this conception of history is to do little more than to repeat a contemporary post-marxist commonsense. But this leaves the question: can we imagine a notion of historical consciousness – an idea deeply imbricated in the Hegelian system – without also taking on the accompanying categories of absolutes and universals? The very idea of historical consciousness, at least in Hegel's scheme of things, too easily assumes a transparency, or immediacy, between the past and its mental representations, which pays insufficient heed to the symbolic forms in which we apprehend the past. Most especially, it pays insufficient heed to interior time and to the workings of memory. Can we imagine a different conception of temporality which would allow for a more complex and variegated consciousness of the historical past?

By way of a response, I'll offer another Caribbean story: that of James's close friend, the novelist, writer and activist, George Lamming.

In 1937 Lamming, as a young boy, witnessed the labour riots of his native Barbados, at close quarters. He lived in Carrington's Village, which nestles in medieval proximity to the splendour of the gleaming white Governor's residence, just on the edge of the nation's capital. Carrington's Village possessed a reputation as a bad village, where the law and the authority of the state barely impinged. Many of his neighbours were involved in the riots, and it seems a number were indicted; another, Hilda Miller, was one of the fourteen civilians killed by the police during the riots. In the aftermath of the riot, Lamming witnessed in nearby Queen's Park the public spectacle of the Moyne Commission, set up to inquire into the social conditions of Britain's colonies in the Caribbean. Some fifteen years later, whilst living in Chiswick, memories of this moment were reassembled to form a narrative dimension of *In The Castle of My Skin*, a novel which tells the story of G., a boy of about Lamming's age growing up in Barbados in the thirties. 'In the desolate, frozen heart of London, at the age of twenty-three, I tried to reconstruct the world of my childhood and early adolescence. It was also the world of a whole Caribbean reality.'¹⁶

In The Castle of My Skin was published fifty years ago. I find it a beautiful novel. It stands, historically, as a precursor not only of an entire regional genre – the West Indian or Caribbean novel – but also as a purposively

black, postcolonial literary form. It met immediate success when it was published in Britain; and its reputation still stands high today.

Part of the drama of the novel, which we can still get a sense of today, is that – in a manner akin to the fiction of Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, and in some respects, to the writings also of James Baldwin – black subjectivity lies at the centre of the narrative. This may seem too obvious a comment to make. But it couldn't have just happened, naturally, as it were – as if it were of no significance that the internal lives recreated were those of blacks, rather than whites. An entire history intervened, of which Lamming was deeply conscious, which *made* this an issue, whether he wished it so or not, and which had literary as well as political consequences.

I've argued elsewhere that there is a close connection, in form and in history, between the ways in which the sensibilities of the black dispossessed were articulated in the riots in Barbados in 1937, and the speech-forms of this novel.¹⁷ The novel is both about the events of 1937, and made possible by them.

But given this, there are some unexpected features to the narrative. There are no Toussaints here, in the fictional Creighton's Village in Barbados in 1937. There is neither heroism nor tragedy, nor the merest hint of the universal subject awaiting around the corner. The insurrection itself takes place off-stage. For Lamming's villagers, knowledge of the past is accreted from the Bible, from a bricolage of ideas culled from school and Sunday-school, from family and village myth, and from bits and pieces of information – about 'the race' – from returning migrants. Some of this knowledge of the past works, explicitly, as a screen memory, displacing other histories and bequeathing only the trace of an incommunicable anxiety about past bondage. We enter, I think, a complex historical world in which the author's commitments to the lives of the dispossessed coexist with a vision of history which is, above all else, unhomey. The story begins with a flood, which is the first in a sequence of dislocations experienced by the villagers. Through the narrative, customary relations – customs in common – collapse and commodification (of land most of all) intervenes. The narrative is punctuated by evictions, emigration, the disintegration of the village, the literal moving and collapse of homes. I find something compelling about the mundane ordinariness of *this* history – of everyday exploitation, of the hopes for dignity, of fears and terrors and ambivalence, without tragic grandeur. This is a history which is happening when world-history is occupied elsewhere.

We hear the inner doubts and fears of G., the principal protagonist, when he listens to Trumper returning from the United States and championing Paul Robeson and the making of a new, racial historical consciousness. 'Suppose I don't find it. This was worse, *the thought of being a part of what you could not become.*'¹⁸

This, I would argue, is about the impossibilities of historical consciousness – or more accurately about the impossibilities of a historical

consciousness founded on a Hegelian quest for universal realization. It is not a refusal of history, for Lamming was emphatic that he was trying to summon in his imagination 'the world of a whole Caribbean reality'. But this historical reality is one of a kind.

Let me make clear – in passing – that I have no intention of setting up Lamming against James, or James against Lamming. Between them there existed an enormous complex of debt and counter-debt, which at some point should be unravelled. Nor in fact, despite my reservations, do I think we could or should entirely jettison James's Hegelian commitments to some notion of formal historical consciousness. Rather, I want to suggest that inside the work of each of them we can witness an unresolved dramatization of competing philosophical-political positions. Put simply, one point in this drama would be represented by a Hegelian-marxism, the other by a preoccupation with subjectivity and interior life informed, loosely, by derivatives of phenomenology. The same tension, I think, is evident in the work of Fanon, a contemporary of James and Lamming – between, on the one hand, the combative writings concerning the collective historical subject which can be found in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), and the very different, phenomenologically-inspired musings of *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). James and Lamming present us with a rather similar scenario.

From the 1940s James increasingly involved himself in the intellectual world of existential and phenomenological philosophy, making the argument (which echoed the convictions of Richard Wright) that there existed a correspondence between this field of high European philosophical thought and the lived cultures of the dispossessed of the black Atlantic. From the time Lamming arrived in Britain in 1950, if not before, he too immersed himself in this philosophical literature, reading especially Heidegger and Sartre. Textual evidence for this can be found in a number of key passages in *In The Castle of My Skin*. After the novel's publication, de Beauvoir and Sartre alighted upon it, and subsequently translated and published it in a series associated with *Les Temps Modernes*. Their close ally, Richard Wright, volunteered to write the introduction for the US edition of the novel.

But this wasn't simply a narrowly textual matter, about the narrative possibilities for representing the interior world of black self and white other. It was a political matter too. The group around Sartre and de Beauvoir were serious, as no comparable intellectual grouping in Britain was at this time, about the philosophical and political dimensions of blackness and its historical correlate, colonialism. Explorations in the concept of negritude were an offshoot of Sartre's attempts to think together existentialism and marxism. This was Fanon's intellectual world, as it was too of the incubator of modern theories of negritude, *Présence africaine*. The movement from Sartre, through Wright and Fanon, to the *Présence africaine* First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Paris

in 1956 is evidence of the capacity that these intellectual traditions possessed to cross the threshold and to create a new black politics.¹⁹

This became Lamming's world too. If we are looking for an anglophone existential writer in the postwar period – aside, say, from Colin Wilson or Iris Murdoch – we could look to the four novels published by Lamming.²⁰ If we are looking for a figure formed in the traditions of British civilization who might be seen to be investigating similar political and philosophical issues to Fanon, then Lamming again would be of key significance. The crucial text, in this regard, would be his address to the Paris Congress, 'The Negro writer and his world', which drew heavily from Sartre.²¹ These connections are, I think, once more becoming a political resource for us, at the start of the new century.²²

The intellectual ties to Fanon may also illuminate my earlier argument. Phenomenology provided an intellectual resource, in the 1940s and 1950s, in which blackness could be imagined. (And conversely, as Simon Gikandi has suggested, we should not underestimate the extent to which blackness gave to the philosophers of phenomenology a political *raison d'être*.)²³ In an enigmatic comment which repays attention, Fanon stated that 'The architecture of this work [*Black Skin, White Masks*] is rooted in the temporal'.²⁴ This idea of the temporal turned, in part, on the historically-specific issue of recognition, or more particularly, of the dialectic of recognition and misrecognition between black French West Indians and the native white population of France.

In accounting for Fanon's attachment to phenomenology in the late forties his biographer, David Macey, places great emphasis on the fact that Fanon was from Martinique.²⁵ Indeed, Macey contends that 'there is considerable textual evidence to indicate that *Peau Noire* [Black Skins] could not have been written by anyone but a Martinican'. Fanon's black man (in Fanon's own words) is specifically a Martinican, a 'West Indian who does not think of himself as black; he thinks of himself as West Indian. Subjectively, intellectually, the West Indian behaves as a white. But he is a *nègre*. He will notice that once he is in Europe, and when they talk about *nègres*, he will know that they are talking about him as well as about the Senegalese'. On the famous occasion on a cold Lyons street ('*Tiens, un nègre!*') Fanon is reduced to his being-for-others – to becoming exactly what he is not in his own eyes. Phenomenology, 'philosophy in the first person' as David Macey describes it, provides an abstract means by which this historical experience can be thought. As Macey sees things, however, Fanon 'is not a terribly sophisticated phenomenologist'.²⁶

There is much here which is compelling, but maybe not exactly in the terms Macey spells out. The idea of Fanon as a 'bad' phenomenologist is wonderful, and may have many unexpected virtues. Clearly for phenomenology to work as an intellectual resource for black politics of the period, philosophical nicety, or technical sophistication, was not necessarily uppermost. Lack of internal consistency could work in fruitful ways.

Phenomenology, conceived broadly as 'philosophy in the first person', could open up new political possibilities. Out of 'bad' phenomenology could come the impetus for elaborating a philosophy of human life able fully to incorporate the formerly-enslaved and colonized, and a politics which endeavoured to imagine a world after colonialism.

I'm happy to imagine Lamming as another 'bad' phenomenologist, and this – phenomenology in its weak form – connects to the points I was making at the beginning of this paper . . . before an afternoon's encounter with Husserl. But there's a further issue too.

Macey is too strict in believing that the misrecognition internalized by Fanon in that street encounter in Lyons resulted solely from the fact that he was Martinican: precisely the same held too for a generation of migrants from the British Caribbean, when they travelled to Britain. They too did not imagine themselves to be black; they too only became black in response to being-for-others. The Caribbean migrant coming to Britain in the forties and fifties, for all the shock of encountering the actually-existing metropolis, recognized what they saw. What they did not anticipate was the depth of the misrecognition which greeted them. How the West Indian migrants internalized and reworked this experience is a difficult, complex story to recover, spread across two or three generations – although its principal features are now there for all to see.

Alongside this, however, Fanon's insistence on the effectivity of the temporal seems to me of the first importance – indicating, perhaps, where the historical is interposed in this dialectic of recognition and misrecognition. In words which continue to haunt me, Lamming observed that 'We have met before' – suggesting that enclosed in the migrant experience was a heightened consciousness of the historical past, which the putative host population just could not properly comprehend.²⁷ 'We have met before' signalled the recognition in the mind of *the West Indians* of the prior history of the empire, and suggests too the existence of a measure of forgetfulness on the part of those who did the colonizing. Indeed, it may even be that the migrant experience gave *that* past – the history of slavery and colonialism – a new salience in *this* present – the moment of decolonization itself. This is not to invoke a generalized, abstract idea of the-past-in-the-present. On the contrary, it is to tell of an embodied, lived historical experience, in which political realities in the present recomposed the shape of the past, and brought it into consciousness in the present. This is part of a longer argument. It concerns a much broader landscape of Caribbean philosophy and aesthetics. In summary form, let me just suggest that in the future the most profound impact of Caribbean thought may be on our – on native British – capacities to imagine the past, and to strive to bring it into consciousness.

* * *

You will be aware that I have come this far and not yet made any reference to Raphael Samuel, in whose memory this lecture is delivered. I don't mean

by this a discourtesy. Even if I had devoted the entire time of the lecture in trying to grasp the energy and creative power of his historical imagination, I would have made little headway. I'm conscious, most of all, that my closing comments can't possibly encompass the largeness of intellect and being which he embodied.

Let me make some preliminary comments, in order to see what connections might be made between what I've been discussing here, and Raphael's historical imagination. In truth, he never shared my enthusiasm for understanding the Caribbean presence to be a matter of *central* significance for the lives of native white Britons. I suspect that he sensed an orthodoxy forming, too tightly tied to a rectilinear reading of race, and if there was one thing which Raphael abhorred, it was an emergent orthodoxy. We know, from the second volume of *Theatres of Memory*, that from early on he possessed profound misgivings about what has come to be institutionalized as postcolonial studies.²⁸ Many years ago, when I first gave a History Workshop seminar on the figure of the white man in the British empire, and tried to suggest that the racial imaginings of the colonial past were still active in the postcolonial present, he would have none of it. With perhaps a vestige of the old political militant still in place, he indicated that all this was something of a diversion, and that *the real issue* lay in the location in Britain of Jews and Gypsies. We differed, and had a pint.

On the place of phenomenology in understanding historical consciousness, there is more ambiguity. I hope it has become clear that my commitments here are wayward, organized by a suitably heterodox reading of an important philosophical tradition. It will, I'm sure, also be apparent that there is a particular generational determinant here. I came to intellectual life, in its anti-empiricist manifestations, via structuralism. That's how I learned what empiricism was; for a while I thought anti-empiricism and structuralism were synonymous. I knew – intellectually – that there were antecedent intellectual traditions which, although no doubt they had much going for them, never really touched me: various forms of humanism, existentialism, phenomenology. My current engagements with these traditions, exciting as they are for me, will no doubt leave those only a little older than me puzzled – unclear, perhaps, what all the fuss is about. I don't expect them to share my revivalist enthusiasms. After all, in the Britain of the fifties and early sixties, anyone who possessed a spark of intellectual curiosity, and who couldn't stomach English philosophy, automatically enlisted as a full-time existentialist. It's no surprise that, looking back to the primary intellectual commitments of the early New Left, Raphael's memories took the following form: 'In philosophy we argued for a more phenomenological understanding of reality, contrasting the urgencies of Merleau-Ponty and Sartre with the frivolities of Oxford philosophy'.²⁹ We shouldn't make too much of this. But I wonder what traces of 'a more phenomenological understanding of reality' remained with him.

Which brings me to the opening volume of *Theatres of Memory*, which

has been in the back of my mind all along.³⁰ Raphael, for me, is – now – an active, continuing presence in that uneasy, disturbing twilight zone between memory and history, and so too is this first volume of what was to be a succession of studies on the theme of memory itself. Mortal time impinges. I remember, after an especially affecting book-launch which he shared with Sally Alexander,³¹ walking in the early morning down a deserted, wintry Oxford Street with him and Alison Light, Raphael complaining vociferously that the book was *too long*. Some time later, with his illness advanced, he made the journey to Goldsmiths College to listen to a symposium on *Theatres of Memory* which Sally had organized. This was the last time I saw him.

For these reasons I've not found it easy to reread it. But, in the past weeks, with this lecture imminent, I did go back to it. I'd remembered much of the detail (or rather: I'd remembered an overall impression of the detail), but its conceptual architecture had become hazy in my mind. In a conversation a short while ago, Peter Claus, now a member of the Raphael Samuel Centre, reminded me of its radical – 'subversive', as Raphael would have put it – determination to understand the study of history, not as the summation of historiographical texts, but as a complex field of socially-constituted knowledge, with its own internal social divisions of labour, its own internally-sanctioned hierarchies of genre, its own arcane mystiques. Raphael, as ever, went out of his way to champion the anonymous footsoldiers, and the knowledge they produce.

My overriding impression, though, this time around, was how little it addressed the question of memory: or at least, how little it addressed the intellectual conventions we now associate with memory. Its title – *Theatres of Memory* – echoes Proust and Benjamin, and Benjamin's readings of Proust, but little of this registers. Very little of the psychoanalytical apparatus is present. This is not a memory text which confronts fantasy, or its particular variants, such as trauma. The question of repressed or displaced memories, or of what systematically has been removed from memory, is barely addressed. I began to wonder how much it is about memory at all.

Indeed, I began to suppose that *the real issue* which the book confronts may have less to do with memory than with the larger, overlapping, but as I've tried to argue, distinct question of the-past-in-the-present. Perhaps the subtitle is more illuminating than its principal title: 'Past and present in contemporary culture'. The first authority cited is Faulkner (regarded by many literary cartographers as a displaced Caribbean author who should, by rights, have found himself a few degrees to the south). The quote is famous: 'The past is not dead. It is not even past yet'. At this point my own reveries began to take control. What is *Theatres of Memory* but a – 'bad' – phenomenology of the-past-in-the-present? Isn't that what the book does? Maybe the ghosts of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty are more consequent than we could have ever imagined? And maybe *we* need to attend more carefully to the-past-in-the-present.

Theatres of Memory is not a history book organized on a conception of redemption. History, in this vision, can possess no such powers. At best, to borrow from Heidegger, it is about 'the quiet force of the possible'.³² This, I think, with some modification, would do for an epitaph for the volume. But it does need modification. This idea of history doesn't at all capture Raphael's irrepressible delight in the wonders and excitements of the historical imagination. And even though history might carry 'the quiet force of the possible', and even though Raphael might have found this an appealing notion, it was not one about which he himself could have remained quiet. Voluble, but not quiet. Let's remember, with love and gratitude, Raphael's voluble passions.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 This is a revised version of the 2003 Raphael Samuel Lecture. It is short, but – even so – many people helped. Deep thanks to the Raphael Samuel History Centre at the University of East London for the invitation, particularly to Kate Hodgkin, Susannah Radstone and Barbara Taylor; to Sally Alexander and Lynne Segal who provided necessary encouragement on the way; and to *HWJ* friends who read and commented on the written draft – Matt Cook, Rebecca Spang, Anne Summers and Barbara Taylor.

2 E. P. Thompson, 'A State of Blackmail', in *Writing By Candlelight*, Merlin, London, 1980, p. 132.

3 Thompson, 'State of Blackmail', p. 130.

4 E. P. Thompson, *Alien Homage. Edward Thompson and Rabindranath Tagore*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1993; and *Beyond the Frontier: the Politics of a Failed Mission, Bulgaria 1944*, Merlin, Rendlesham, 1997.

5 E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire. 1875–1914*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1987, p. 3. In Hobsbawm's work too, as he advanced in years, his formal history increasingly interconnected with the story of his autobiographical self. See especially the BBC2 television programme which featured him, *Stories My Country Told Me*, which opens with his search for his family's graves in Vienna (transmitted 14 July 1996); the fascinating interpolations in his *Age of Extremes. A History of the Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991*, Michael Joseph, London, 1994; and his *Interesting Times: a Twentieth-Century Life*, Allen Lane, London, 2002.

6 Bill Schwarz, '“Already the Past”. Memory and Historical Time' in *Regimes of Memory*, ed. Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin, Routledge, London, 2003. See too the companion volume, *Contested Pasts. the Politics of Memory*, ed. Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, Routledge, London, 2003. These are wonderful volumes, indispensable for readers who want to follow the current field of memory-studies.

7 It was instructive, from this vantage, to return to Thompson's 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', republished in his *Customs in Common*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1991 – whose object is precisely transformations in the 'inward notation of time', p. 354.

8 Louis Althusser, 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' in his *For Marx*, Allen Lane, London, 1969.

9 Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*', *Representations* 26, 1989.

10 C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, (1938), Allison and Busby, London, 1989; the argument I indicate here is elaborated more fully in Stuart Hall, 'Breaking Bread with History, C. L. R. James and *The Black Jacobins*', *HWJ* 46, 1998. I also draw here, and later, from my own 'C. L. R. James and George Lamming: the Measure of Historical Time', *Small Axe. A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 14, 2003.

11 PRO: CO 318/427/11.

12 C. L. R. James, *A History of Negro Revolt* (1938), Race Today, London, 1985, pp. 58–61;

C. L. R. James, 'British Barbarism in Jamaica! Support the Negro Workers' Struggle', *Fight* 1: 3, 1938 (republished in C. L. R. James, *The Future in the Present*, Allison and Busby, London, 1977); C. L. R. James, 'The Black Jacobins' (James's play) in *The C. L. R. James Reader*, ed. Anna Grimshaw, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992 (first performed March 1936 under the title *Toussaint L'Ouverture*); C. L. R. James, *World Revolution, 1917–1936. The Rise and Fall of the Communist International*, Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1993 (first published 1937); Boris Souvarine, *Stalin. A Critical Survey of Bolshevism*, Secker and Warburg, London, 1939. For an insightful consideration of James's play, see Cora Kaplan, 'Black Heroes/White Writers: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Literary Imagination' *HWJ* 46, 1998.

13 James, '1963 Appendix' to *Black Jacobins*, p. 418

14 James, '1980 Foreword' to *Black Jacobins*, p. vi.

15 C. L. R. James, *Special Delivery: the Letters of C. L. R. James to Constance Webb, 1939–1949*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1966, p. 66. I have commented further on this in 'Becoming Postcolonial' in *Without Guarantees. In Honour of Stuart Hall*, ed. Paul Gilroy, Lawrence Grossberg and Angela McRobbie, Verso, London, 2000.

16 George Lamming, '1983 Introduction', *In The Castle of My Skin* (1953), University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1991, p. xlv.

17 Schwarz, 'James and Lamming: the Measure of Historical Time'.

18 George Lamming, *In The Castle of My Skin*, Longman, Harlow, 1970, p. 291.

19 An ambitious attempt to map the pre-history of this politico-intellectual formation can be found in Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora. Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2003.

20 Mary Chamberlain perceptively refers to Lamming as a 'home-grown existentialist' – the idea of 'home' in this context suggesting certain ironies: 'George Lamming' in *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*, ed. Bill Schwarz, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2003.

21 Originally published in *Présence africaine* 8–10, 1956; reproduced in *Conversations. George Lamming. Essays, Addresses and Interviews*, ed. Richard Drayton and Andaiye, Karia, London, 1992. For a contemporary account of Lamming at the Congress, see James Baldwin, 'Princes and Powers' (first published in *Encounter*, of all places, in 1956) in *Nobody Knows My Name. More Notes of a Native Son*, Dell, New York, 1961.

22 See David Macey, *Fanon. A Biography*, Granta, London, 2000, pp. 165 and 167; and David Scott, 'The Sovereignty of the Imagination. An Interview with George Lamming', *Small Axe* 12, 2002, pp. 121–34.

23 Simon Gikandi made this observation in a symposium on Lamming, hosted by the Center for African and Afroamerican Studies at the University of Michigan, in October 2002.

24 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Paladin, London, 1972, p. 11.

25 I follow here my 'James and Lamming: the Measure of Historical Time'.

26 David Macey, 'Fanon, Phenomenology, Race', in *Philosophies of Race and Ethnicity*, ed. Peter Osborne and Stella Sandford, Continuum, London, 2002, pp. 30, 50, 35 and 33. The quote from *Black Skin, White Masks* comes from Macey's translation.

27 George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, Allison and Busby, London, 1984 (first published 1960), p. 12.

28 Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory Vol. 2, Island Stories: Unravelling Britain* (edited by Alison Light with Sally Alexander and Gareth Stedman Jones), Verso, London, 1998.

29 Raphael Samuel, 'Born-Again Socialism', in *Out of Apathy. Voices of the New Left 30 Years On*, ed. Oxford University Socialist Discussion Group, Verso, London, 1989, p. 42.

30 Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory Vol.1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, Verso, London, 1994.

31 Sally Alexander, *Becoming a Woman and Other Essays in 19th and 20th century Feminist History*, Virago, London, 1994.

32 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1962, p. 446.