

# Intellectual Lives, Performance and Persona: The Making of a People's Historian

## Introduction

The most important aspect of British historian Raphael Samuel (1934-1996) was his entire way of *being* a historian. Samuel, a former youth member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, is best known as a founder of the first British New Left (1956-1962), the driving force behind the first History Workshop movement (1963-1979) which pioneered a distinctive 'history-from-below', and as the author of *Theatres of Memory* (1994), an idiosyncratic exploration of the past in contemporary culture. Despite all this, he did not advance an especially ground-breaking historical argument or historiographical theory. He set his sights elsewhere, on the democratisation of history making. To achieve this end, he created a distinctive persona as a people's historian through which he projected a radical transformation of what it meant to study history. Yet posterity was both condescending and neglectful, and until recently the full significance of Samuel to post-war historiographical thought has received little close attention.<sup>1</sup>

The problem, as Herman Paul observed, is that intellectual history tends to focus on historian's products but not their 'doings' or performances.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, this was the case for Samuel, as Sheila Rowbotham, a former Workshopper, noted of her old friend:

Writers leave visible traces, they contrive their own record. Organisers, in contrast, have a powerful impact upon those with whom they have direct contact but tend to live on in oral memory alone.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sophie Scott-Brown, *The Histories of Raphael Samuel: A Portrait of a People's Historian* (ANU Press, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Herman Paul, 'What is a Scholarly Persona? Ten Theses on Virtues, Desires Skills and Desires', *History and Theory* 53, 3 (2014): 348.

<sup>3</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, 'Some Memories of Raphael Samuel', *New Left Review* I/221 (1997): 128-132.

If Rowbotham is right, conventional approaches to intellectual history, which give little space to *in situ* performances, will not suffice. This is where biography, with its traditional concern for the individual, offers traction, making visible those powerful personalities who leave unconventional records of themselves. But how, then, can, or should, this relate to intellectual history?

Intellectual biography would seem a natural point of fusion, but this is not straight forward. Reflecting on the ‘return’ of biography, Malachi Hacoen, biographer of Karl Popper, commended its capacity to illuminate the ‘situational logic’ underpinning intellectual work, making it ‘an essential methodological component’ of intellectual history.<sup>4</sup> He went on to sound a note of caution, however, saying, in reference to the Popper study, that whilst it could be ‘a stage, in the history of economic discourse’, it could not ‘answer the broader and perhaps more weighty historical questions broached by the latter, relating to the triumph of economic paradigms, and their historical influence.’<sup>5</sup> Biography, by this account, seems restricted to providing richer contextualisation around intellectual work.

Two points might be made in reply. Firstly, it is hard to discern how the relationship between formation and product (in this case economic theory) is formulated. How can we judge the point when formation and product divide? To make such a call risks falling into a myopic presentism<sup>6</sup> which takes the product (discerned in the present) as *the* necessary and inevitable outcome towards which all inquiry must be directed. The effect of this is to over-determine some aspects of cultural process whilst neglecting others.<sup>7</sup> This downplays the significance of chance, contingency and improvisation in intellectual work. Hacoen argued that only by making discourse, as an integrated whole, visible is critical assessment possible, but the very assumption that discourse is an independent entity, rather than a way of seeing, simply reproduces its discursive power. Criticality, in this sense, becomes only the substitution of one model for another. We could, with Ray Monk, reject the idea that there *is* anything beyond on-going

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<sup>4</sup> Malachi Hacoen, ‘Rediscovering Intellectual Biography and Its Limits’, *The History of Political Economy*, 39, 1 (2007): 9-29.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>6</sup> See David L Hull, ‘In Defense of Presentism’, *History and Theory*, 18, 1 (1979): 1-15.

<sup>7</sup> Tim Ingold and Elizabeth Hallam, ‘Introduction’, in Ingold and Hallam, eds., *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation* (Berg Publishers, 2007).

formation and that thought is indeed unfolded through small, ad-hoc, and often contradictory, connections.<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, Hacoen assumed a limited view of intellectual biography as, by definition, a fundamentally empirical exercise. Not only does this neglect the question of the assumptions which frame the selection of such empirical evidence, this may also, as Nick Salvatore contended, be more a question of the biographer's approach than something inherent to the form. For Salvatore, by contrast, biography offers an ideal lens into the interplay between the individual and the micro, meso and macro scales of intellectual life through which they operate.<sup>9</sup>

How are these scales first defined and then traversed? Shadowing parallel tendencies in intellectual history there have been two dominant approaches.<sup>10</sup> The first, 'internalist', commonly associated with the 'history of ideas' approach<sup>11</sup>, focuses on the subject primarily as a mind interacting with other minds mostly through 'texts' (broadly construed to include a range of cultural artefacts). Scale here is a question of moving from the 'unit-idea' outwards to the idea within a longer historiographical tradition, a course generally plotted by reconstructing a textual genealogy. The second, 'externalist', draws on sociology and anthropology to emphasise the subject as a situated body, responding to the constraints imposed by a specific time, place and social structure.<sup>12</sup> Ideally, as Donald Kelley remarked, historians should seek ways to integrate the strengths and insights afforded by both perspectives.

It is to this idea of interplay—between minds and bodies, performances and products, contexts and scales—that Herman Paul proposed the concept of 'scholarly persona.' This he defined as 'a culturally sanctioned model, embodied by influential figures, that defines certain types of behaviours as being

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<sup>8</sup> Ray Monk, 'Life Without Theory: Biography as an Exemplar of Philosophical Understanding', *Poetics*, 28, 3 (2007): 527-570.

<sup>9</sup> Nick Salvatore, 'Biography and Social History: An intimate relationship', *Labour History*, 87 (2004): 182-194.

<sup>10</sup> Dominick LaCapra, 'Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts', *History and Theory*, 19, 3 (1980), 245-276; Donald Kelley, 'Intellectual History and Cultural History: The Inside and the Outside', *History of the Human Sciences* 15, 2 (2002), 1-19.

<sup>11</sup> The classic example is Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: The Study of the History of an Idea* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> This approach is exemplified in Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Polity Books, 1988). For a good recent example see Thomas Akehurst, *The Cultural Politics of Analytic Philosophy: Britishness and the Spectre of Europe* (Bloomsbury, 2011).

essential for a scholar.<sup>13</sup> Such a model, he argued, is rooted in deeply held beliefs about the nature, status and purpose of intellectual work, generated within and through the wider cultural resources available to think with, mediated by the concrete situations in which such resources are encountered.<sup>14</sup> Beliefs, with varying degrees of deliberation, produce a framework of values which determine a set of virtues (prized moral behaviours). Virtues inform preferred intellectual practices and behaviours, including everything from research methods, teaching and writing style.

For Paul, *persona*, as a composite of personal, social and intellectual identities, provided an important missing historiographical link capable of integrating factors.<sup>15</sup> Here again, however, there is a risk that *persona* becomes something reductive and static, a pre-determined cultural caricature that makes little proviso for the contradiction and conflict experienced by the empirical personality. It can also retain a privileging of product, simply promoting the importance of performances in contributing towards a given outcome. What if, as in the case of Samuel, the means were the end? That the crafting of an alternative scholarly *persona*—an alternative way of being a historian—*was* the idea?

The challenge, then, is to retain *persona* as a useful ‘integrational’ tool, able to forge wider connections, but to bring from biography the greater sense of precision and dynamism permitted by a finer grained perspective. In responding to this, activist intellectuals, like Samuel, offer particularly good case studies because as, Jeffrey Alexander observed, they consciously orientate themselves to meaning and the mechanics of its making.<sup>16</sup> Given their motivation to change minds and stimulate action in others, they often display a heightened awareness of both the intellectual and social environments they inhabit, and consciousness of themselves as actors within them. Still there is a need to step carefully. Just because a biography takes an activist intellectual as its subject does not automatically mean that it will privilege performance over product.

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<sup>13</sup> Herman Paul, ‘A Missing Link in the History of Historiography: scholarly personae in the world of Alfred Dove’, *Journal of European Ideas* 45, 7 (2019): 1011-1028.

<sup>14</sup> Herman Paul, ‘Introduction’, in Paul, ed., *How to be a Historian: Scholarly Personae in Historical Studies 1800-2000* (Manchester University Press, 2019), 1-14.

<sup>15</sup> Herman Paul, ‘A Missing Link’, 1011.

<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey Alexander, ‘Dramatic Intellectuals’, *The Drama of Social Life* (Wiley, 2017), 106.

Take, for example, recent studies of E P Thompson, Samuel's fellow historian and New Left activist. Whilst these illuminate how Thompson's personal values shaped his political commitments or, equally, how New Left debates informed his masterpiece, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), they do not examine his intellectual persona as the medium through which these component pieces were fused and translated into practice.<sup>17</sup> This misses a vital insight into both the brilliance and limitations of his political and historical imagination. Thompson's early Methodist education, with its emphasis on public demonstrations of morality, combined with his early ambitions for a career on the stage, later taste for Elizabethan and Jacobean literature and sense of himself as, first and foremost, a politically committed *writer*, all mean that one cannot judge his historical writing as one might other 'professional' Communist historians such as Christopher Hill or Eric Hobsbawm.<sup>18</sup> As Jonathan Ree noted, in Thompson's case there was always theatre, he was a polemicist more than a theoretician.<sup>19</sup> By implication, then, works like *The Poverty of Theory* (1976), his notorious attack against French sociology, should not be read as counter theory, but in the same spirit as one might approach Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal*.

In this paper, however, I focus on Samuel and argue that his cultivation of the 'people's historian' provides an ideal case study of the potential persona has to offer biography as intellectual history. To explore these ideas further I first examine how he came to refine it in response to heated historiographical debates around politics, theory, and method. I then turn to consider more closely the 'conversation' between cultural persona and empirical person by examining the 'back stage' of his people's historian, the points at which what he presented in public was the result of previous strategizing, sometimes at variance with his private thoughts.<sup>20</sup> Finally, I assess his effectiveness and offer some concluding thoughts on biography, persons, and persona.

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<sup>17</sup> David Eastwood, 'History, Politics and Reputation: E. P. Thompson Reconsidered', *History*, 85, 280 (Oct 2000), pp. 634-654; Scott Hamilton, *The Crisis of Theory: EP Thompson, The New Left and Post War British Politics* (Manchester University Press, 2012); Madeleine Davis, 'Edward Thompson's Ethics and Activism 1956-1963: Reflections on the Political Formation of *The Making of the English Working Class*', *Contemporary British History*, 28:4 (2014): 438-456.

<sup>18</sup> EP Thompson, *Beyond the Frontier* (Stanford University Press, 1997), 52; Dorothy Thompson, 'Introduction', *The Essential EP Thompson* (The New Press, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Ree, 'A Theatre of Arrogance', *Times Educational Supplement*, 5 June 1995.

<sup>20</sup> I draw here on the ideas of Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Penguin, 1990).

## The People's Historian: Contexts and Contours

In this section, I examine the making of Samuel's 'people's historian' persona as a dynamic process. Although forged in the early days of the History Workshop it was given its most explicit formulation during a series of fraught historiographical debates which erupted during the late seventies and early eighties. This context is important as it was through defending the Workshop that he was able to negotiate and adjust the role as a distinctive political project.

The Workshop had modest beginnings. On joining the teaching staff of Ruskin College in 1962, Samuel found the emphasis on teaching for, and to, the Oxford Special Diploma demoralising for many of the adult students and out of keeping with the spirit of the College's radical history.<sup>21</sup> Established in 1899, Ruskin's roots were firmly in worker's education—education that would be of use and benefit to the advancement of the working class as a whole, not only individual members—and the College had had, from the start, close ties with the trade union movement. By the early 1960s, although reduced in number, many students still identified as workers and attended through union funded day release schemes.<sup>22</sup>

For Samuel, the former Communist, this had formed its primary attraction, although the reality turned out to be different. The curriculum for the diploma was remote from the lived experiences of his working-class students, much less any wider class struggle. It existed simply to lever the students to a standard required for entry into a conventional degree programme. Finding this both insulting and a lost opportunity, he began the Workshop as a small pedagogical project in which the students were

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<sup>21</sup> See Lawrence Goldman, *Dons and Workers: Oxford and adult education since 1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), ch. 5; Jonathan Rose, 'The Whole Contention Concerning the Workers' Educational Society', in *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: London: Yale University Press, 2001), 256-297. For alternative accounts see: Roger Fieldhouse, 'The 1908 report: Antidote to class struggle?', in Geoff Andrews et al, eds., *Ruskin College: Contesting Knowledge Dissenting Politics*, 35-58; B. Jennings, 'Revolting Students: the Ruskin College Dispute 1908-9', *Studies in Adult Education*, 9, 1 (1977), 1-16.

<sup>22</sup> Geoff Andrews et al, eds., *Ruskin College: Contesting Knowledge Dissenting Politics* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1999).

encouraged to develop their own research plans with his support. The results were an astonishing series of densely empirical studies of working-class life.<sup>23</sup>

Capturing the countercultural mood of the times, Workshop meetings quickly expanded, drawing many from outside the College who were attracted by the provision of a platform to explore alternative forms of history making. The first national Women's Liberation conference, for example, grew out of a Workshop meeting (1972), followed by ground-breaking sessions addressing the histories of women and children. Such plurality, whilst undoubtedly the Workshop's great strength, was also the source of conflict. Workshopers shared a common appetite for alternative forms of history but defined this quite differently. As Bill Schwarz later recalled, the Workshop, in a microcosm of wider debates amongst the post-war left, was soon beset by the collision of inter-generational political 'moments' and agendas.<sup>24</sup> On the one hand there was the 'socialist humanism' characteristic of E.P. Thompson (and, broadly, of the first British new left<sup>25</sup>), with its historical concern for individual experience as showcased in his magisterial *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963).<sup>26</sup> On the other was a burgeoning Marxist cultural theory, heavily influenced by Antonio Gramsci and French Marxism but, in domestic idiom, stemming first from the work of Raymond Williams,<sup>27</sup> later substantially developed, along different lines, by Stuart Hall, Perry Anderson and the second New Left generation.<sup>28</sup> Complicating this binary were the dynamics between the traditional class-based politics represented by the unions and those of emergent groups such as the women's movement led, at Ruskin, by Rowbotham, Anna Davin and Sally

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<sup>23</sup> Early Workshop pamphlets included: Frank McKenna, *A Glossary of Railwaymen's Talk*; Sally Alexander, *St Giles Fair, 1830-1914*; Bernard Reaney, *The Class Struggle in 19<sup>th</sup> century Oxfordshire*; Stan Shipley, *Club Life and Socialism in mid-Victorian London*; Dave Douglass, *Pit Life in County Durham*; John Taylor, *From Self Help to Glamour, the Working Men's Club, 1860-1970*; Alun Howkins, *Whitsun in 19<sup>th</sup> century Oxfordshire*; Dave Marson, *Children's Strikes in 1911*; Dave Douglass, *Pit Talk in County Durham*; Jennie Kitteringham, *Country Girls in 19<sup>th</sup> century England*; Edgar Moyo, *Big Mother and Litter Mother in Matebeleland*.

<sup>24</sup> Bill Schwarz, 'History on the Move: Reflections on History Workshop', *Radical History Review*, 57 (2002), 202-220; see also Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham: London: Duke University Press, 1997), 45-124.

<sup>25</sup> E.P. Thompson, 'Socialist Humanism: An Epistle to the Philistines Part I/II', *The New Reasoner*, 1, Summer (1957), 105-143; Madeleine Davis, 'Reappraising Socialist Humanism', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 18, 1 (2013), 57-81.

<sup>26</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Pelican, 1963)

<sup>27</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958); *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961).

<sup>28</sup> Dennis Dworkin, 'Socialism at Full Stretch' and 'Culture is Ordinary', *Cultural Marxism in Post War Marxism*, 45-124.

Alexander. There were further tensions still between worker student participants, academic historians, and political activists.

In its original form, as a project with the Ruskin students, the Workshop's case studies of working-class life appeared to align closest with Thompson's work and to be seen as a continuation of his project.<sup>29</sup> Thompson, however, was sceptical about the claim, seeing the Workshop's focus as myopic.<sup>30</sup> Samuel too rejected it stressing firstly, the Workshop's more extensive approach to everyday life<sup>31</sup> and secondly, importantly, the equal concern given to the act of history making as with the product.<sup>32</sup> Working-class people (or other socially marginalised groups) should not, he argued, defer the cultural production of history to others—even those, like Thompson, who performed this service exceptionally well.<sup>33</sup>

By the time that *Village Life and Labour* (1975), the first Workshop edited collection, was published, Samuel's editorial was already defensive. Against Thompson's charge that the Workshop evacuated 'large territories of established political and economic history', he argued that there was nothing intrinsically 'micro' or 'macro' in the study of history.<sup>34</sup> He went on, setting out an early framing of the Workshop's approach to people's history: 'the Workshop began as an attack on the examination system, and the humiliations which it imposed on adult students,' later adding: 'in the early years, when such research activity was wholly unofficial, even—from the point of view of the curriculum—clandestine, there was not even recognition or support from their own college.' This last claim was later contested by H. D Hughes, the College's principal at the time, suggesting that Samuel may have used some poetic licence to bolster his defence.<sup>35</sup> In contrast, failure on behalf of authority figures was juxtaposed by the determination and sacrifices made by the students: '[A]ll that sustained them was the seriousness of their commitment, and the awakening pride that comes from mastering a craft for oneself.' On the 'job' of the socialist historian Samuel was non-committal vaguely stating that it was 'keeping the record of

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<sup>29</sup> Harvey Kaye, *The Education of Desire: Marxists and the Writing of History* (London: Routledge, 1992), 122.

<sup>30</sup> Terry Hott, 'Interview with EP Thompson', *The Leveller*, 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 1978, 22.

<sup>31</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 320.

<sup>32</sup> Raphael Samuel, 'General editor's introduction' *Village Life and Labour* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), xix.

<sup>33</sup> Hilda Kean, 'Public History and Raphael Samuel: A Forgotten Radical Pedagogy?' *Public History Review*, 11 (2004): 51-62; Sophie Scott-Brown, 'The Art of the Organiser' *History of Education*, 45, 3 (2016): 372-390.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Raphael Samuel, *Village Life and Labour*, xix.

<sup>35</sup> H.D. Hughes, 'History Workshop', *History Workshop Journal*, 11 (1981), 199-201.



the oppressed.<sup>36</sup> In discussing his and Davin's, his co-editor and companion at the time, personal role in the process, he employed heavily domesticated imagery: 'the manuscripts line the passageways, crawl up the stairs to sleep at night, and invade the children's bedroom. For us, as for many of the contributors, they are the troubled product and labour of love.'<sup>37</sup>

In 1976 the *History Workshop Journal* was launched, intended to provide an extension of the Workshop meetings, a platform and outlet for the work produced:

Like the Workshop, like the pamphlets and books in the Workshop series, the Journal will address itself to the fundamental elements of social life—work and material culture, class relations and politics, sex divisions and marriage, family, school and home. In the Journal we shall continue to elaborate these themes but in a more sustained way [...]<sup>38</sup>

Whatever the original intentions, the journal soon became the focal point of fierce debate with the publication of Richard Johnson's critical examination of Thompsonian socialist-humanism (1978) which, he argued, had been an important, but limited, developmental stage towards a more sophisticated theorisation of culture and ideology.<sup>39</sup> His article prompted a barrage of responses published the following year.<sup>40</sup> A little later, Samuel's fellow Ruskin tutor David Selbourne joined the fray with an extensive critique of the Workshop's 'naïve empiricism' and lack of theoretical substance.<sup>41</sup>

Samuel did not contribute directly to these exchanges; he was still struggling to define his ideas. In an interview with his friend, the oral historian Brian Harrison in October 1979, when asked what 'socialist history' was, he stumbled and evaded the question: 'it's an awfully big question, Brian. No, I think it'll

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<sup>36</sup> Raphael Samuel, 'General Editor's Introduction', *Village Life and Labour*, xix; Brian Harrison, 'Interview with Raphael Samuel', 23 October 1979, transcripts held in the Raphael Samuel Archive, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

<sup>37</sup> Raphael Samuel, 'General Editor's Introduction', xxi.

<sup>38</sup> Editorial Collective, 'Editorial', *History Workshop Journal*, 1 (1976), 1.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Johnson, 'Edward Thompson, Eugene Genovese, and Socialist-Humanist History', *History Workshop Journal*, 6 (1978), 79-100.

<sup>40</sup> Tony Judt, 'A Clown in Regal Purple: Social History and the Historians', *History Workshop Journal*, 7 (1979), 66-94; Keith McClelland, 'Towards a Socialist History: Some comments on Richard Johnson, "Edward Thompson, Eugene Genovese, and Socialist-Humanist History"', *History Workshop Journal*, 7 (1979), 101-115; Simon Clarke, 'Socialist Humanism and the Critique of Economism', *History Workshop Journal*, 8 (1979), 138-156.

<sup>41</sup>: David Selbourne, 'On the Methods of the History Workshop', *History Workshop Journal*, 9 (1980), 150-161.

lead us off into a different track to this. It's too big a question.'<sup>42</sup> At the same time, he rejected his earlier claim made in 1975 'I mean, I say "the job of the socialist historian is *keeping the record of the oppressed...*" and I don't know how that came about, and it certainly wasn't one that we'd been using before then quite explicitly like that [...]'<sup>43</sup>

*History Workshop* 13, December 1979, was intended, and deliberately choreographed, to be a reckoning of these matters, but in the event, it was something of a disaster. The Workshop's jubilant pluralism finally imploded, the meeting was simply too big, with too many themes and papers. Many of the Ruskin students felt alienated by the theory driven work, the theorists largely ignored the historians and spoke amongst themselves. By far the most devastating event was the bad-tempered exchange between Stuart Hall, Johnson, and Thompson on the theme of 'Culture, Theory and History.'<sup>44</sup> Thompson impatient with being, as he saw it, 'admonished' was in no mood to be fraternal.<sup>45</sup> Not even Hall's measured distinction between culture and 'culturism' could restore peace. It was the last Workshop to be based at Ruskin and seemed to confirm an unbridgeable gulf between the fragmented components of the left.

The experience propelled Samuel into a concentrated period of reflection on what people's history, and by extension, the people's historian, really meant. The first evidence of his conclusions appeared in his editorials to *People's History and Socialist Theory* (1981) the book collection of the workshop papers. The first addressed the genealogy of people's history. Starting from the early nineteenth century (considerably pre-dating the recent 'discovery' of 'history from below'), he surveyed its appropriations across different times and ideological perspectives, identifying a common link:

People's history, whatever its particular subject matter, is shaped in the crucible of politics, and penetrated by the influence of ideology on all sides [...] Each in its own way represents a revolt

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<sup>42</sup> Brian Harrison, 'Interview with Raphael Samuel', 23 October 1979.

<sup>43</sup> Raphael Samuel, 'General Editor's Introduction', *Village Life and Labour*, xix. Brian Harrison, 'Interview with Raphael Samuel', 23 October 1979.

<sup>44</sup> Raphael Samuel, 'Culture, Theory and History', in Raphael Samuel, ed., *People's History and Socialist Theory* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).

<sup>45</sup> EP Thompson, 'Letter to Raphael Samuel', RS7 / 'History Workshop Events', Raphael Samuel Archives, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

from ‘dry as dust’ scholarship and an attempt to return history to its roots, yet the implicit politics in them could hardly be more opposed.<sup>46</sup>

A similar juxtaposition reappeared in unpublished notes relating to Samuel’s article ‘British Marxist Historians 1880-1980’. Here, again, imported artificiality or cold formality contrasted with homely, organic authenticity.<sup>47</sup>

The Marxist history that emerges from the Birmingham Centre of Contempt Studies [Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies]—a hot house of theoretical—self consciously setting out to naturalise French Marxist structuralism will necessarily be very different from the one that emanates from the kitchens of Spitalfields and L. Pimlico or the terraces of World’s End and Wolwroth—the characteristic habitats of the History Workshop Collective.

In recent years the scholarly mode has been no less influential all kinds of books which bear the marks of the PHD even when they take on an explicitly Marxist problematic as with RQ Gray and Gareth SJ [...]<sup>48</sup>

Ten years later, in *Theatres Of Memory* (1994), Samuel provided further dramatizations, this time with a satirical framing:

The enclosed character of the discipline is nowhere more apparent than in the pages of the learned journals, where young Turks, idolizing and demonizing by turn, topple elders from their pedestals, and Oedipal conflicts are fought out [...] Academic rivals engage in gladiatorial combat, now circling one another warily, now moving in for the kill. In seminars such conflicts service the function of blood sports and are followed with bated breath.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Raphael Samuel, ‘People’s History’, in *People’s History and Socialist Theory*, xx.

<sup>47</sup> Raphael Samuel, ‘British Marxist Historians 1880-1980’, *New Left Review*, 1/220, Mar-Apr (1980), 21-24.

<sup>48</sup> Raphael Samuel, ‘Notes on British Marxist Historians’, Samuel 135/ British Marxist Historians, Raphael Samuel Archive, London.

<sup>49</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 4.

As in the earlier examples, this functioned as a rhetorical device rather than being a serious analysis of academic practice. Nevertheless, brevity and caricature notwithstanding, it drew upon the same technique of deflating the mystique and grandeur of professionalism by presenting it in terms of its ‘profane’ realities.

If, on the one hand, attending to the everyday could dislodge the dignity of professionals and send them up for laughs, it could also bestow dignity upon those everyday historians, of whom he approved. This could, in one sense, be tragic:

We might begin by recognizing the enormous scholarly input involved in retrieval projects, saluting the courage of those who have risked their lives—and in the case of the scuba-divers occasionally lost them—to enlarge the domain of the historically known.<sup>50</sup>

Or, in another, it might be romantic:

The pawnbroker at the Black Country Museum, Dudley, drawing on local knowledge of the three brass balls—not least that of the town’s one surviving pawnbroker—had found a narrative for every object in his store [...] The 1920s storekeeper explaining the mysteries and signs of the grocery trade was a mine of information, most of it gleaned, she explained from museum visitors.<sup>51</sup>

Like the predecessors he had identified in his 1981 editorial (see above), Samuel’s people’s history invoked everydayness as an ethical critique of cultural authority.<sup>52</sup> Against the ‘enclosure’, remoteness and even hypocrisy of the professional, who turned historical knowledge into a personal commodity, and the theorist, who reduced its complexity to serve their hypotheses, the people’s historian was open-ended, humble and worked close to the ground, on the streets, in communities, with people as they really were.

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<sup>50</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 274.

<sup>51</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 280.

<sup>52</sup> For further discussions on the use of ‘the ordinary’ as a device for social and political critique see: Bryony Randall, *Modernism, Daily Time and Everyday Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2007); Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

At this point Samuel made an important additional move. The old activist in him could not settle for description and analysis alone but sought to apply those insights to practice.<sup>53</sup> Translated back to history, people's historians could not, then, simply narrate the people's story on their behalf, they had to actively create the conditions in which the people of whom they spoke could become producers of their own history. In many respects, this was the logical conclusion of people's history as an idea. If it had always been an attempt to expand the scope and range of the discipline, expanding the number of participants, of people recognised as history makers, would (theoretically) maximise the diversity of content. As such, the meaning of *being* a historian was transformed from history making as an essentially private occupation to history making as a generative social activity. A people's historian was a practice and a relationship, not a structural thing.

### **The People's Historian: Back Stage**

By making this shift, from narrator to facilitator, Samuel substantiated his theory through action. Within this, the people's historian's persona was vital. Not only did it literally embody his political ideas, it was its only viable mode of expression. Constrained by the need to show rather than tell (having conceded the authority of the theorist), he had also to enlarge his egalitarian performance to convey his message clearly.<sup>54</sup> Given this, he had to craft his persona as self-consciously as he would have done a piece of writing.

In what follows I go 'backstage' of the people's historian to consider the conversation between the cultural persona and the empirical person.<sup>55</sup> To illuminate this, I draw attention to the points at which what Samuel presented in public was the result of previous strategizing, sometimes at variance with his private thoughts. I also consider examples of where this failed and how failure actually helped him to develop better strategies for realising . his historical vision.

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<sup>53</sup> See: Andrew Feenberg, *The Philosophy of Praxis: Marx, Luckacs and the Frankfurt School* (Verso, 2014); Peter Thomas *The Gramscian Moment* (Brill, 2009).

<sup>54</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralis: Reflections on a Damaged Life* (Verso, 2005).

<sup>55</sup> Term drawn from Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Penguin, 1990).

Accounts from former Ruskin students suggest that Samuel was successful in projecting the sort of warmth necessary to inspire and nurture confidence amongst those traditionally excluded from intellectual work:

He had this tremendous understanding of the inner inferiority that mature students have in a society that tells them they've missed out. He not only understood what was inside the student, he unlocked it and channelled it in written and verbal debate. There wasn't an ounce of superiority in him. In those tutorials he was often as much the student as the lecturer. He learned from you and you learned from him. He was fascinated by other people's experience.<sup>56</sup>

As with any performance, not all found it to their taste. Selbourne, his Ruskin colleague, and not a working-class student, remarked:

Samuel embodied a peculiar style of privileged patronisation of working people [...] He often seemed a kind of vicarious proletarian himself, romanticising the lives and labours of the industrial working class whilst flattering as well as encouraging his students. This often silly class condescension was an uncomfortable thing to observe.<sup>57</sup>

Selbourne may not have liked it, but the fact he saw Samuel's approach as *embodied*, rather than affected, suggests that its integrity held. Yet for all its effectiveness, there were those, especially amongst his closest friends, who were aware of Samuel's hidden layers. Rowbotham, for example, recognised that

Raphael was not simply a writer but a renowned organiser, the kind who was an initiator of great projects with a capacity to yoke his fellow to the concept and carry them on regardless of

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<sup>56</sup> John Prescott, 'Genuine Love for Others', *The Guardian*, 10 December 1996. Other student accounts echo this view: Dave Douglass, 'Ruskin Remembered', *Raphael Samuel: Tributes and Appreciations*, 1997; Paul Martin, 'Look, See, Hear' in Geoff Andrews, Hilda Kean and Jane Thompson, eds., *Ruskin College: Contesting Knowledge, Dissenting Politics* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1999), 146-147.

<sup>57</sup> David Selbourne, 'The Last Comrade Raphael Samuel, the Ruskin Historian Who Died Last Week Was the Conscience Keeper of the Old Left', *The Observer*, 15 December 1996, 24.

grizzles and groans. The deliberately dozy and slightly dotty front disguised an iron resolution.<sup>58</sup>

Stuart Hall, a long-term friend from Oxford University and former New Left co-founder, had also become familiar with Samuel's *modus operandi*:

His passionate intensity was overwhelming. He could fix you with his deep, dark eyes and, especially when he was trying to persuade you about the unpersuadable, his voice would acquire a deep, rich seductiveness and gradually what you had originally thought to be your 'better judgement' would slowly melt away.<sup>59</sup>

The tensions that Rowbotham and Hall alluded to, between Samuel's presented self and his private intentions, reinforce just how deliberate a creation that persona was. Moreover, these 'cracks' provide insight into the sorts of calculation involved in realising it within the given pragmatics of a situation.

In fact, Samuel's upbringing predisposed him to just such a role and equipped him with the skills required to achieve it. He was only five years old when Minna, his mother, followed her sisters in joining the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in 1939, quickly becoming a party organiser. Always bright, and frustrated with her suburban life, she threw herself into politics with gusto, becoming a progress chaser in an aircraft factory and later the key organiser of the large Slough branch of the CPGB. A gifted musician, she assumed the roles of literature secretary, class tutor and engagements secretary for the Worker's Music Association.<sup>60</sup>

For a significant portion of his childhood Minna, a one-woman dynamo of public activity, organising, teaching and public speaking, provided an important early model of committed intellectual work. But if she epitomised this role for her son as a child, she did not invent it. As Samuel's essay series, later

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<sup>58</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, 'Some Memories of Raphael', 131.

<sup>59</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Raphael Samuel 1934-1996', *New Left Review*, I/221 (1997): 119-27.

<sup>60</sup> Raphael Samuel, *The Lost World of British Communism* (Verso, 2006), 63-68; See also Alex May, 'Keal, Minna (1909-1999)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; Paul Conway, 'Minna Keal: 1909-1999', <http://www.musicweb-international.com/keal/>.

book, *Lost World of British Communism* (2006) documents, the party leadership set out a strong line concerning intellectuals. Rajani Palme Dutt, the CPGB's chief ideologue, expressed it thus in 1932:

[T]here is no special work and role for Communists from the bourgeois intellectual strata [...] The intellectual who has joined the Communist Party [...] *should forget that he is an intellectual* (except in moments of necessary self criticism) *and remember that he a Communist.*<sup>61</sup>

It also defined clear roles and modes of practice:

In the localities, too, authority was expected to be self-effacing. Branch secretaries were expected to *comport themselves as co-workers*, taking on a good deal of the dogsbody work, as the price of the trust which reposed in them. At branch meetings he/she was to *exercise a pastoral care, drawing the members in by allocating tasks to them, 'involving' them in the processes of decision making [...] encouraging new comers to 'express' themselves [...]*<sup>62</sup>

and:

One started at the 'level' of the sympathiser, emphasising common ground, 'building' on particular issues, while at the same time investing them with Party-mindedness. Plied with Party literature, invited to Party meetings, above all 'involved' in some species of Party work [...] the sympathiser was drawn into the comradeship of the Party by a hundred subtle threats [...]<sup>63</sup>

If the party had shaped this role, it did so in dialogue with a distinctive moment in its history: the turn to popular front communism in 1935. The previous policy of class against class had maintained a severe allegiance to class politics, alienating the national branches from any collaboration with other mainstream political groups in their countries. The change in line to popular front, which was announced by Georgi Dimitrov, leader of Communist International, in 1935, was prompted in part by the effective demise of the German branch of the party, whose isolation had rendered it powerless to withstand the

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<sup>61</sup> Rajani Palme Dutt, 'Intellectuals and Communism', *Communist Review*, September (1932), 421-430.

<sup>62</sup> Raphael Samuel, *The Lost World*, 125.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 125-126.



rise of the Nazis. It effected a more outward facing attitude towards other progressive forces and gave a revitalised form to party activism. Not only did it attract people to join who would not otherwise have done so, it altered the functioning of roles within the party, putting more emphasis on the art of friendly persuasion than hard line combative arguments.

Seventeen years later, in 1952, the party of Samuel's young adulthood had changed again. At the peak of the Cold War, the Soviet Union, no longer the wartime ally, had become the new public enemy. These were tough times, charm and persuasiveness, always important tools, were now essential just to get a hearing. As Samuel recalled in an interview with his friend, the oral historian Brian Harrison:

the great fear of Communism was of being an outcast. The whole effort was simply to accept our legitimacy. And that meant quite a lot of bending, in effect, to, as it were, present a political position in a palatable way, as it were in liberal terms. So a lot of my communism by force of necessity became a re-presentation of belief in terms that could be sympathised with, and ideally, supported by liberals.<sup>64</sup>

As the quote suggests, Samuel was an experienced strategist, accustomed from an early age to translating his ideals into forms which fitted the pragmatics of his situations. In his archive, alongside the voluminous notes and drafts one might expect of an historian, there are a striking number of planning documents from every stage of his career, which give a glimpse of the mechanics of this process. From detailed strategies for the New Left Club network and *Universities and Left Review* (the journal he edited with Hall, Gabriel Pearson and Charles Taylor between 1957 and 1960) to carefully orchestrated breakdowns of Workshop events, they make clear that, as Rowbotham said, the 'deliberately dozy and slightly dotty front' really did mask—and protect—a purposeful agenda.

To see this feature more clearly, let us return to the fateful Workshop 13 which provided a good example of Samuel's planning, his self-control *in situ*, and his response to crisis. As discussed above, from the mid-seventies, the Workshop was besieged by simmering tensions, mostly clustered around the issue

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<sup>64</sup> Brian Harrison, 'Interview with Raphael Samuel', 18 September 1987, Raphael Samuel Archives, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

and status of critical theory in history, which were fast becoming destructive. As its founder and at this time its primary driving force, he felt a need to act in order to prevent further bifurcation. So determined was he in this that he undermined the Ruskin Student Collective's decision to make the theme 'Repression and the State', persuading them, instead, to go with 'People's History and Socialist Theory.'<sup>65</sup>

For someone supposedly committed to playing a supportive role of other people's interests, this was an incongruent move. Samuel went further still, allocating the students a project on 'Worker Historians in the 1920s.' The obvious symbolism was clearly calculated: Ruskin worker-historians presenting on the history of worker-historians offered a potent reminder of the Workshop's roots in empowering working-class people to become cultural producers. Ironically, the poetic significance was lost on the students who failed to become enthused by either the new theme or their project. They regularly missed meetings and put little effort into their own contributions.<sup>66</sup>

Single-mindedly, Samuel forged ahead, and Workshop 13 became the biggest and most ambitious event to date with a huge programme and ensemble cast. Local history panels sat alongside global history, theory-led panels nestled against community history projects, feminism, colonialism, and labour history threaded in and across the programme. Pluralism had always been one of the Workshop's professed values but the sheer size and scope on offer here was dysfunctional. Perhaps this was the point; to show that no single theory or methodology could ever hope to capture all the possible varieties of experience. In the event, it only fostered frustration.

The Thompson-Hall-Johnson plenary, held on the Saturday evening, was an equally strategic move which Hall, at least, was aware of, later recalling the feeling of being 'heavily disguised as the ghosts of culture, theory, history.'<sup>67</sup> If, in Samuel's slightly cumbersome drama, he was there representing 'culture', Thompson was history.<sup>68</sup> Against Thompson's notorious prowess as a polemicist, Johnson,

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<sup>65</sup> Raphael Samuel 'Post-Mortem of History Workshop 13', RS 7: 'History Workshop Events', Raphael Samuel Archive, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Memories of Raphael Samuel', *New Left Review*, 1/221 (1997): 119-127.

<sup>68</sup> Jonathan Ree, 'A Theatre of Arrogance', *Times Educational Supplement*, 5 June 1995.

as the young ‘theorist’, stood little chance.<sup>69</sup> Presumably, Samuel anticipated that such a stage-managed confrontation would provide a reconciliatory airing, but he was wrong. The result was a bad-tempered collision which left the audience so uncomfortable that the intended roundtable discussion on the topic, due to be held the next day, was cancelled.

In Workshop 13 Samuel had mismanaged the performance. Rather than celebrate plurality as a virtue, it had simply reinforced the destructiveness of fragmentation amongst the left. Sensing contrivance, his ‘actors’ had not wanted to play their assigned parts. He had now to act quickly to retrieve something of the situation. His first response was silence. As with the earlier debates in the Journal, he did not react directly. He had not intervened in the plenary (despite chairing it) but had been responsible for cancelling the second session. In the following days, as a steady stream of complaints came in from upset attendees, he maintained this stance. He corresponded with an unapologetic Thompson about the incident and even drafted a letter which seemed about to defend, or at least contextualise, his former comrade’s outburst, but he did not complete it and no part of it was published.<sup>70</sup> What he did produce was a very detailed ‘post-mortem’ in which he systematically assessed each of the problems in turn.

Samuel’s silence frustrated some who felt he ought to have taken more of stand,<sup>71</sup> but keeping slightly aloof gave him time to manage his response. Given his commitment to the twin virtues of collectivity and plurality, he needed to avoid becoming positioned as another combatant in the debates. Instead, he addressed the matter obliquely, using his editorials, sweeping historiographical surveys on ‘People’s History’ and ‘History and Theory’, to reassert the multiplicity, variety and fluidity of history making.

The tone of these pieces was good humoured, done in his capacity as the Workshop’s genial general editor. He saved his more astringent critique of the left for his essay ‘British Marxist Historians 1880-1980’ which he chose to publish in *New Left Review* (NLR) (pointedly not in HWJ), the journal he had initially co-founded and been forced to abandon following the departure of Hall as chief editor, a role

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<sup>69</sup> Jonathan Ree, ‘A Theatre of Arrogance’, *Times Educational Supplement*, 5 June 1995.

<sup>70</sup> Raphael Samuel, ‘Draft letter to History Workshop Journal’, RS7/‘History Workshop Events’, Raphael Samuel Archives, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

<sup>71</sup> Carolyn Steedman, oral communication with author, University of Warwick, May 2012.

assumed by Perry Anderson in 1962 who had, consequently, led the journal in a far more explicitly theoretical direction.

Once again it was history, or rather histories, that provided his preferred method of critique. The current debates surrounding theory, he argued, privileged ‘the epistemological status of Marxist concepts, rather than their political or historical determinations’ but this was to miss the point.<sup>72</sup> Far from being a single developmental entity advancing through time, Marxism was always an ensemble of ideas ‘so far from being immune to exogenous influences. Marxism may rather be seen—in light of its history—as a palimpsest on which they are inscribed.’<sup>73</sup> The argument is by now familiar: to Samuel, the importance of historical knowledge was not that it endowed predictive authority on a select few who understood it properly, but that it undermined the very plausibility of totalising claims whilst, at the same time, revealing multiple interpretive possibilities.

Now, with the Workshop itinerant, he faced the challenge of re-inventing his people’s history project for a new age. The 1980s, dominated by Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government, was a much colder political climate for the left than the mid-1960s when the Workshop had begun. At the same time, history in popular culture appeared to be enjoying something of a renaissance, appearing on film, television, books and not least through the boom and flourishing of a heritage industry.<sup>74</sup> Like many of his colleagues on the left, Samuel was initially sceptical.<sup>75</sup> Thatcher’s championing of ‘Victorian Values’ such as self-help, provided an attractive smokescreen for drastically reduced public spending. Her invocation of national glory during the Falkland Islands conflict appeared an equally cynical bid to boost her flagging popularity. He called the Workshop to arms, hosting sessions on ‘Patriotism’ (1984)

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<sup>72</sup> Raphael Samuel, ‘British Marxist Historians 1880-1980’, 21.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>74</sup> See: Peter Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); David Cannadine, ‘Conservation: The National Trust and the National Heritage’, in *In Churchill’s Shadow: Confronting the Past in Modern Britain* (London: Penguin Press, 2002); Alex Murray, ‘The Heritage Industry and Historiographic Metafiction: Historical Representations in the 1980s’, in Philip Tew et al, eds., *The 1980s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 125-150.

<sup>75</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1983); Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (London: Verso, 1985); Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London: Methuen, 1983).

to combat Falklands jingoism, and 'Victorian Values' (1987), and wrote articles bemoaning the gentrification of his beloved Spitalfields neighbourhood.<sup>76</sup>

Yet, whilst Samuel's personal scruples may have inclined him to view the commodification of the past with distaste, the people's historian could not help but perceive an opportunity: this history was *popular*. To condemn everyone who was moved by an appeal to national identity, who watched a Merchant Ivory film or visited a country house as either a Neo-Tory or a member of the ignorant masses was to resume the role of the historian-as-legislator, or cultural elite, which had to be avoided all costs, out of keeping, as it was, with his projected ideal.

By the time *Theatres of Memory* (1994), his monumental study of the past in popular culture, was published, Samuel seemed to have completely switched track. This sudden change astonished both historians and the political left alike. Richard Hoggart felt the book to be the product of a 'traumatised Marxist' struggling to overcome the breakdown of his former identity.<sup>77</sup> Patrick Wright substituted trauma for vanity, suspecting that Samuel was motivated by a desire to 'play the part' of the people's historian.<sup>78</sup> Stefan Collini similarly perceived something disingenuous about a trained historian of Samuel's calibre being so willing to abandon his responsibilities as a social critic.<sup>79</sup>

As discussed above, *Theatres* was certainly full of caricatured provocations towards his favourite bogeymen (the theorist and the professional historian), but there was as usual more to it than met the eye. The book worked across three agendas. Firstly, it maintained its defence of history-in-the-plural by rejecting both normative and singular historical accounts of the heritage industry (as, for example, the product of postcolonial trauma; a late capitalist fetish; an instrument of conservative hegemony).

Secondly, it recognised a far more extensive range of activities as valid forms of history making, reinforcing Samuel's commitment to inclusivity. Developing this further still, other chapters offered forensic excavations of the active thinking processes at work when people were apparently 'passively'

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<sup>76</sup> Raphael Samuel, 'A Plaque on all your houses' *The Guardian*, 17 October, 1987

<sup>77</sup> Richard Hoggart, 'Review of *Theatres of Memory*', *Political Quarterly*, 66, 3 (1995), 215-16.

<sup>78</sup> Patrick Wright, 'Review of *Theatres of Memory*', *The Guardian*, 5 February, 1995.

<sup>79</sup> Stefan Collini, 'Speaking with Authority: the historian as social critic', *English Pasts: Essays in History and Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 95-105.

consuming the past, watching a period drama, buying an old farmhouse jam, or visiting a living museum.

Finally, interspersed throughout the book, never announced but clearly on show, were subtle techniques for stimulating further inquiry, the people's historian's *raison d'être*. The chapter 'Dickens on Film' was as much a guide for how to connect a personal experience into a historical discussion as an examination of Dickensian film adaptations. More explicit still were the suggestions offered for how to use photographic sources as prompts to further investigation: 'school photographs, if they were illuminated by comparative analysis might be equally serviceable for the study of corporate loyalties and pedagogic ideals.'<sup>80</sup> In this jubilant, if not always coherent, combination of impassioned polemic, popular history and pedagogical enthusiasm, *Theatres* was truly emblematic of Samuel's people's historian at large and in-action.<sup>81</sup>

## Conclusion

Was Samuel successful in anticipating, and crafting, his alternative 'culturally-sanctioned' model of the historian in the age of plurality? Yes and no. Whilst no transformational cultural shift has occurred in how professional historians understand, practice and receive recognition for their role, or how they are typically represented in popular culture, there is, undeniably, a greater variety to what is considered acceptable as historical research.<sup>82</sup> There is also the growth of public history courses, many of which, in the UK, owe some direct links to Samuel's influence (via, for example, former students, Workshoppers or simply readers of *Theatres*). Outside of the academy, perhaps the more likely site for realising this persona, the growth of public engagement programmes attached to cultural institutions, such as archives, museums and libraries, have created a new strata of educational roles which, without the associated pressures of a formal educational setting, have afforded opportunities to accommodate greater creativity. Often, these roles are filled by the graduates of public history courses. And, finally, it is worth noting that Samuel's ethical critique of professional history, far from becoming redundant,

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 332-333.

<sup>81</sup> Sophie Scott-Brown, 'Setting the Stage: Performance, Personality and Politics in *Theatres of Memory*', *Rethinking History*, published online 4 June 2019.

<sup>82</sup> See Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice* (Bloomsbury, 2019).

still stands. In his book *Historians and the Uses of the Past* (2012), Jorma Kalela was still able to urge the need for a fundamental attitudinal change from historians towards ‘giving respect’ to different forms of knowledge and ‘creating trust’ amongst their students.<sup>83</sup>

For the purposes of this article, however, questions of legacy are interesting in as far as they indicate the success, or otherwise, in generating the cultural change he desired, but legacy is not the main point here. Of more relevance here is the extent to which Samuel’s case demonstrates the potential of persona as a concept able to integrate scales and capture multi-dimensional complexity. Into his people’s historian were fused older traditions of people’s history, selected strands of Marxist thought, along with post-war debates on historiography and politics. This, in turn, was mediated by how his personal positioning allowed him to receive, perceive and experience them, and then re-negotiate through the pragmatic demands imposed by the ‘real time’ contexts of place and personalities in which and with whom he worked.

So far, this supports Paul’s claim for persona as an integrational concept, necessarily moving across, between and through different historiographical factors. What this paper has attempted to add is how closer attention to feedback between the cultural persona and the empirical personality enriches this further. At points in Samuel’s life, such as HW 13, the desire to enforce the cultural agenda was insufficiently tempered by an accurate reading of the empirical context, resulting in both behavioural inconsistencies (the imposition of authority whilst effecting anti-authoritarianism) and, ultimately, failure. At other times, such as the early heritage debates in the 1980s, the empirical personality, and its instinctively negative reaction, was, in effect, ‘admonished’ by the persona, this time with the result of expanding the scope of his historical imagination.

Life encompasses all that we are and all that we aspire to be. If biography is ultimately, as Hachohen suggested, defined by empirical detail and precision, that need not—ought not—to preclude inquiry into the wider reaches of our social imagination nor overlook how this, in turn, is translated back to us

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<sup>83</sup> Jorma Kalela, *The Historian and the Uses of the Past* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

in solid forms. It should, however, prompt us to seek out the sort of conceptual tools that provide us as full a range of intellectual movement as possible, whilst also keeping us close to the ground.



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