

# Labour History and its People

The 12<sup>th</sup> Biennial National Labour History Conference  
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Edited by Melanie Nolan

**Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Canberra Region Branch  
National Centre of Biography Australian National University**

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\* Indicates that the paper was refereed by two blind referees



PRIME MINISTER  
CANBERRA

**MESSAGE FROM PRIME MINISTER JULIA GILLARD**

**TWELFTH BIENNIAL LABOUR HISTORY CONFERENCE  
AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY, CANBERRA**

I offer my very best wishes to the organisers and attendees at the Twelfth Biennial Labour History Conference, to be held - very appropriately - at the university founded by Ben Chifley and at the centre named after our finest historian, Manning Clark.

Although I can't be present with you, I wish to state my conviction of the enduring value of labour studies to the wider discipline of history and to the proper understanding of our journey as a nation and as a people.

Labour studies have a proud place in Australian intellectual life, both in the academy and outside, combining appropriate scholarly rigour with a passion for the values and ideals of the Labour Movement.

The field of labour studies would not, of course, be complete without consideration of the life and work of remarkable individuals who have stamped their presence on this history of our nation.

Biography has a profound place in the study of history that changing intellectual fashions can never shift, and I warmly welcome the fact that this conference has been jointly organised with the National Centre for Biography, custodians of our greatest historical work, the Australian Dictionary of Biography.

The Biennial Labour History Conference is the pre-eminent event in Australia's labour history calendar. It is a gathering of lasting value for the intellectual, social and political life of our nation.

I thank Dr Abjorensen and his colleagues for the opportunity to share this message, and trust the conference will be successful both in its scholarly aims and as a moment of fellowship, sharing and solidarity.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Julia Gillard'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

The Honourable Julia Gillard  
Prime Minister of Australia

# Note on Refereeing Process

In accordance with the Australian Government's Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research's Higher Education Research Data Collection (HERDC) Criteria, the papers published in these Proceedings meet the definition of research in that:

1. The 12th National Labour History Conference is a conference of national and international significance;
2. Each paper in the refereed stream, in its entirety, was double blind, peer reviewed before publication by independent, qualified experts;
3. The proceedings will be made available to libraries; and
4. Author affiliation is identified for each paper.

The conference organizing committee would like to acknowledge the following for refereeing the papers for 12th National Labour History Conference Proceedings:

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# Raphael Samuel: A Biography in Development

**Sophie Scott-Brown**

'If we describe a [person] by his [or her] life we are making [them] a verb, which is the only valid method since everything else is too arbitrary'.

Leroi Jones 1964

'It may be that universal history is the history of the different intonations given a handful of metaphors'.

Jorge Luis Borges 1959 <sup>1</sup>

I am writing an intellectual biography of the British historian Raphael Samuel (1934-1996) which, whilst an exciting undertaking, seems fraught with potential pitfalls and theoretical quandaries. At such an early stage of the project it seems an apt opportunity to reflect on the nature of biography and its wider relationship with historical writing. At stake is defining the extent to which an individual life can provide a rich source of insight into the historical processes at work in the time that that particular life spanned. This is a reflective piece of writing, an attempt to mark out the ground for such a project to proceed. It is the story of the beginning of a relationship between biographer and subject: a negotiation of the rules of engagement.

What do I mean by intellectual biography? I am using intellectual biography in the sense that my primary interest in Samuel is in his social identity as an intellectual, who wrote and was published in the public sphere. The element of Samuel's work, which is of most interest to me, is his conceptions of the role of history, in particular social history, as a form of social knowledge. Through my research I am going to consider Samuel's ideas in relation to the wider landscape of historical thought that he wrote within. As an intellectual biographer one of my guiding principles is concern for how I can represent Samuel's historical thought and work as both a product of but also as a contribution to the period he lived in.

Samuel certainly constitutes a fantastic candidate for an intellectual biography. He had a working life of endless activity covering a vast array of different interests. He was first and foremost an historian but he was also a tireless educator, energetic facilitator, prolific editor, enthusiastic writer, and shrewd social critic. He was always at the heart of events, uniquely and endlessly fusing the political, historiographical, and social elements of his life together. In his early days he was a member of the Communist Party and a founding member

of the *New Left Review* in 1957; he went on to establish History Workshop in 1967 and *History Workshop Journal* 1976, and then moved on to broader campaigns, including issues concerning the 'history in schools' debates of the 1980s and the growth of popular history during the 1990s. Samuel simply did not stand still.

With all this in mind, why is it that I feel a sense of trepidation about committing to my subject? It is all very attractive; he was a dynamic intellectual, whose work placed him mostly on the margins of establishments, whose friendships and relationships impacted vividly upon that work, and whose intellectual life spanned the whole second half of the twentieth century, a time renowned for the fast pace of its intellectual and political currents of thought. My concern relates to the potential for historical context and the means at my disposal for bringing this to the fore through the lived experience of an individual.

Biography has often had an uneasy relationship with historical writing, sometimes deemed too much of a 'literary form', or viewed as too narrow in its outlook and lacking the wider perspective of 'history proper'.<sup>2</sup> Does focusing on an individual really limit one's ability to interpret critically the wider significance of his/her historical times? If I was to take a conventional approach to intellectual biography I would focus on key developments in Samuel's intellectual life, for example, the time he spent with the Communist Party Historian's Group whilst still a school boy, during the 1940s. I would examine his student days at Oxford University and his abandoned postgraduate studies at the London School of Economics. I would discuss his position as a tutor at Ruskin College Oxford and the staff and students he encountered whilst working there. I would consider the role of influential relationships that he had with other thinkers of the time such as Stuart Hall and Paul Thompson and the impact that his relationships with feminist scholars such as Anna Davin or Alison Light had upon his thought.<sup>3</sup> My narrative would be determined by his life span and my analysis would be on the process of personal development of Samuel's own historical thought. Samuel would have full agency as a character in this story, in other words he would be in a position where his intellectual work developed as a result of the course that his life took. The benefit of this approach is that it allows for a deep consideration of an individual personality, in this case Samuel, but the downside is that by focusing intently on him as a thinker, I am more limited in my capacity to comment on wider social context or create a broader social picture of the period he lived throughout. How can I combine the richness of an individual thinker against a consideration of the structures that shaped and informed the social world they thought about?

In this paper I am going to, firstly, consider methodological approaches that would represent Samuel in relation to the wider social contexts that he worked

within, and assess the benefits and downsides of using these approaches. Secondly, I am going to experiment with an approach that negotiates between the agency of Samuel and the social contexts of his times and finally I will comment on how this approach contributes to the discussion about the benefits and possibilities that biographic approaches offer to social history.

### *Biography and Context*

What approaches are available for looking at Samuel's intellectual work within a wider socio-cultural context? An initial clue comes from an approach sensitive to the sociology of knowledge and certainly there seems ample material for such a perspective. One might draw on the analysis of theoreticians such as Pierre Bourdieu for an indication of how to proceed.<sup>4</sup> Bourdieu's work, particularly on education, posits intellectual endeavors as the manifestations of a wider and subsumed web ('non discursive' practices) of ideological interests emanating from the dominant political forces in power at the time. The intellectual's thought inevitably responds according to their location within this web, the presence of which they can have only a negotiated consciousness about.

These ideological forces are not confined to high politics or economics, but infiltrate into socio-cultural and intellectual life; they are not static but in a constant state of flux so as to preserve the dominant hegemony of political interests. This is why the subject can have only a limited comprehension of their location in respect to them. One of the manifestations of this structure is in the practices and organization of social institutions that individuals come into contact with in the course of their life, for example schools, universities, media and the legal system. The role of the historian therefore is to identify what the subject could not have identified about their own position in their own times. This is an approach closely associated with disciplines such as anthropology and sociology, as it concerns determining the invisible power relationships that criss-cross the various avenues of life.<sup>5</sup>

If this is applied to the example of Samuel, one might focus on the element of marginalization recurrent in his life and in his thinking. Samuel was born into a Jewish/communist family in 1930s London. In *Lost World* he recalls his own memories of communism as having been a force that in a sense supplanted Judaism in providing a matrix for family unity. For his mother, communism was 'a bridge by which the children of the ghetto entered the national culture'.<sup>6</sup> Of himself, he says 'I combined a powerful sense of apartness with a craving for recognition'.<sup>7</sup> This is an early indication of a sense of 'otherness' in Samuel's thought, but it is possible to see it manifest again in the creation of History Workshop.

The Workshop existed on the margins of academic history. It was started at Ruskin College where Samuel worked as a tutor. Ruskin was a college of adult education, affiliated with Oxford University. It had a reputation for rebellion, most notably striking in 1909 over attempts to make the college conform to Oxford examination systems. The distance from conventional academic history practice is a factor to which Samuel repeatedly returns. In the 1950s and 1960s there was an increasing presence of left-wing academic historians and a growth of interest in approaches to history, which did not privilege individuals but focused on social structures. This is best exemplified by the creation of the Oxford University based journal *Past and Present* (founded in 1952).<sup>8</sup> Economic history enjoyed a boom in popularity, as it offered an alternative to the high politics, which had previously dominated the academic study of history.<sup>9</sup> 'Cultural studies', which had had an initially close relationship with literary criticism,<sup>10</sup> began to assume a considerable academic presence and became increasingly linked with sociological approaches, to the extent that by the late 1980s it had become 'institutionalised, internationalised and virtually depoliticised'.<sup>11</sup> This was not the approach advocated by the early History Workshoppers, who felt history should be about lived experience and characterized by containing a conscious political message.<sup>12</sup>

Politically the immediate postwar period in Britain was rather dismal for Labour. After the 'success' of the welfare state, the country went into a period of 'consensus politics', with very little difference seeming to separate the major political parties<sup>13</sup>. The Labour Party entered a prolonged period of stagnation due largely to the changing nature of the composition of British society.<sup>14</sup> The traditional support base for Labour had been the 'working classes', the term for which had been derived from an economic position, which had then translated into a social position. Increasingly categories such as class were becoming too fragmented to use politically. When Samuel organized the conference on 'People's History and Socialist Theory', it was due to the instability of the terms 'people' and 'socialism'. In this sense Samuel is outside of having any political representation for his views.

Another factor, which would support a reading of Samuel's thought in terms of marginalization and dislocation, are the affiliations that Samuel, the Workshop and the journal had with the feminist movement.<sup>15</sup> The feminist movement, which grew politically and academically during this period, highlighted the extent to which British society operated to marginalize large components of the population, thereby preventing them from occupying dominant positions within its social structures.<sup>16</sup> Samuel repeatedly credited the feminist movement with stressing the hidden ideological apparatus that underpinned all spheres of public and private life, selecting some and excluding others from participation.

Is this where we find the best grounds for Samuel's story? Working from a thesis of exclusion is certainly a compelling point of departure and one that has a degree of currency amongst many historians.<sup>17</sup> There is, however, an underlying problem with this approach, which an intellectual biographer cannot ignore, and that is that examples from Samuel's life are at odds with this thesis. In reply to an article by David Selbourne criticizing History Workshop's methodological approach, Samuel declares that History Workshop originated from a sense of alienation from mainstream teaching practices at Ruskin College. H.D Hughes, the Dean of Ruskin at the time of History Workshop's commencement, wrote a letter to *History Workshop Journal* stating that he was aware of no such antipathy. In his view, the College had supported History Workshop.<sup>18</sup> This would indicate that Samuel was capable of deliberately using the identity of the 'outsider' as a literary device. The other drawback of this approach is that 'thought' is reduced to only its social and cultural structural manifestations.<sup>19</sup> If all intellectual manifestations are in fact products of intersecting elements on an unseen grid of power relationships, there is in fact no way of judging the potency of an idea, or its capacity to stimulate change. Thought becomes little more than a series of materialist representations.

An alternative approach, which focuses more on the nature of thought, would be to adopt a discourse-analysis approach.<sup>20</sup> J. G. A. Pocock is most associated with developing discourse analysis as an historical methodology. He stressed that the job of the historian is to determine exactly what would have been available to the historical subject to 'think' with. This involves a deep analysis of language to try and determine the character of the conceptual vocabulary in a given historical time.<sup>21</sup> This approach has the effect of disrupting the sense of historical continuity in thought, as all ideas can only be understood within the boundaries of their own discursive possibilities.

How might this be applied to the thought of Raphael Samuel? An example of the issue of Samuel's thought in terms of historical continuity or discontinuity was raised by two somewhat conflicting obituaries of Samuel written by Gareth Stedman Jones and David Selbourne. Writing in the *Independent*, Stedman Jones described Samuel as 'a prophet, a close and uncanny reader of "the signs of the times"'.<sup>22</sup> He based this on Samuel's willingness to engage with political issues and phenomena that the traditional left preferred not to confront, for example Samuel's fascination with Thatcherism<sup>23</sup> or patriotism.<sup>24</sup> David Selbourne writing in the *Observer* portrayed Samuel as '[T]he last comrade' and 'the conscience-keeper of the old Left'.<sup>25</sup> Selbourne saw Samuel as the last of the old 'new left', whose heyday had been in the 1960s-1970s and whose conceptual vocabulary pivoted around terms like 'fraternity' and 'solidarity', creating in Selbourne's view a condescending romance of the working class. It is also possible, however, to see in Samuel's work the presence of an even older discursive tradition.

Samuel, whilst still at secondary school, used to frequent the Communist Party Historians' Group (C.P.H.G.), which contained such notable Marxist historians as Christopher Hill, Edward Thompson, and Dona Torr. Bill Schwarz sees the C.P.H.G. as the closing of a tradition of popular, political and non-academic writing.<sup>26</sup> The members stood against the rising tide of history, infused with emerging 'totalising' social science methodologies, preferring to maintain an older sentiment of 'socialist humanism' that emphasised categories of analysis such as experience and considered how an individual perceived their social and political identities. They drew much of their conception of history writing as social activism from the communist popular-front movements of the 1930s which, in the wake of the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International in 1935, saw mass left-wing movements spring up across Europe.<sup>27</sup> In Britain these mass movements often involved different interest groups uniting together to work toward common causes, for instance providing support for resistance fighters in the Spanish civil war, or protesting against Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia.<sup>28</sup> The key concern of the historians' group was the relation of 'the nation' to 'the people'. They viewed the Communist Party as the natural inheritor of traditions of English radicalism. The strong current running throughout, concerning the natural links between producing history and social activism, had precedents in early twentieth-century British intellectual culture, and especially in the work of the radical liberals Barbara and John Hammond, and the Christian socialism of R. H. Tawney.<sup>29</sup> If we now relate this to Samuel, it is possible to identify this older tradition of historical discourse in his works, and subsequently to read him as increasingly remote from the actual nature of his political and intellectual times.

If we take Samuel's *Lost World*<sup>30</sup> as a test case, there seems to be supporting evidence for locating Samuel in this older discursive landscape. In discourse analysis the historian must look beyond overt references, and consider the linguistic practices, which would not necessarily have been conscious acts. These might include the structure of the writing, the use of metaphor, and, in the case of history writing, the selection of sources. Throughout the collected essays, there is no direct chronological narrative; the first essay, *The Lost World of British Communism*, opens with a reflection of the modern situation of the Communist Party and then proceeds thematically looking at issues of social composition and ideological shifts.<sup>31</sup> For the reader, the shifting time periods give a sense of the writing as being quite spontaneous in character. Overall, the structural effect of the essays can be construed as reflective of the disintegration of a whole, the loss of unity, with the writer, Samuel, sifting through the remains and explaining the pieces, having 'lost' the coherent organizing narrative.

Samuel's use of metaphor is also quite symbolic. Chapter headings such as 'War of Ghosts'<sup>32</sup> evoke an image of death and haunting. Other sections have titles such as 'A Church Militant'<sup>33</sup> and 'A New Faith'.<sup>34</sup> The religious nature of these metaphors shows a concern for the emotive dimension of membership of the Communist Party, which is ironic considering communism's antipathy to religion. Samuel does not use this metaphor ironically; it is intended as a comment on the element of belief which motivated many members of the party. The sources employed by Samuel cover a range of material, including standard party and Marxist texts, but what is more interesting is that he continually uses sources from the cultural life of the Communist Party. Lenin sits alongside Bill from the factory branch at Heston Aircraft Works, who tells Samuel about the party meetings at the local Magpie's Pub.<sup>35</sup> Samuel also draws upon his own personal memories of his 'family communism'. It all points to a historical imagination shaped by the primacy of the experience of human beings and their emotional and cultural lives, similar to the concerns of the earlier C.P.H.G.

It is a biographical approach that again highlights some of the weaknesses of this position. Lynne Segal puts forward an interpretation of *Lost World* where she sees Samuel as consciously choosing to portray this 'lost world' as a means of signaling that it does not exist anymore and that times have changed.<sup>36</sup> In Segal's view, Samuel is fully aware of the techniques he employs in doing this, which indicates that individuals, and particularly intellectuals, are capable of manipulating literary form, and equally of employing different rhetorical strategies for different purposes. If this is the case how can we treat textual analysis as a stable means of assessing the discursive context of thought? Segal's position also illustrates another residual problem with discourse analysis, namely that the means by which the historian can approach establishing a discursive context, is entirely dependent upon the reading strategies employed by that historian, which in turn depend on her personal convictions.<sup>37</sup>

What is of key importance is that by concentrating on socio-cultural structures or discursive spaces there is a danger of over-looking the points in an individual's life where they did not fit the 'contextual model' being superimposed upon them. The major strength of biography is that it permits change, inconsistency and dynamism within a person's actions and thoughts. If the individual is represented as being an example of social forces in action, then the historical subject loses the ability to create or construct any sorts of social identity for themselves. I now want to consider a means of balancing the creative and fluid nature of Samuel as an individual thinker against the interplay of the forces that shaped his thought.

## *Reading His Times*

Michel de Certeau was critical of both structural and discourse approaches for their neglect of the individual. However, unlike a more conventional biographical approach, which locates the individual at the heart of the historical process, he envisaged a more negotiated model.<sup>38</sup> In de Certeau's thought, the individual is subject to the socio-cultural apparatus and linguistic possibilities of his time but, to a greater or lesser extent, is able to achieve a degree of literacy about his situation and to make choices within the range of his circumstances. In de Certeau's book *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988), he focuses on the capacity of an ordinary person to do this. How does this translate to a study of an individual who, by the nature of his profession, was acutely sensitive to both the dynamics of the past and the present and to self-analysis?<sup>39</sup>

David Harlan, in his critique of contextualism offers a similar means for approaching intellectual history.<sup>40</sup> Harlan advocates abandoning the old historical ideal of a quest for 'truth' or 'origins', and suggests instead that the historian applies herself to processes of interpretation.<sup>41</sup> In Harlan's formulation the potency of an idea lies in its ability to be re-appropriated and to be made relevant in contexts outside of its original construction; the living idea. In terms of biography, Nick Salvatore emphasizes the importance of the interplay between the individual and the larger forces surrounding them. Unlike earlier formulations of social history, which rejected the privileging of the individual, he does not see this as being incompatible with a socially conscientious approach, as it requires the historian to explore the means by which a person is able to interact critically with his or her world.<sup>42</sup> This person need not be 'a great man', and biography does not need to explain historical 'events' so much as it needs to inquire into their nature and their ongoing relevance to our thought and understanding of the contemporary world.

Samuel's historical work can be viewed as a form of intellectual autobiography, a constant act of interpreting the present against the memories of lived experience, and measuring those perceptions and memories against the constructed past (history).<sup>43</sup> The starting point for an analysis that focuses on this act of interpretation, is to concentrate on the 'reading strategies' employed by Samuel. This orientates the biographer's attention on to the relationships, as opposed to the explanations, between Samuel's thought and the wider context.

Reading strategies refer to the way in which a reader negotiates with a text. In the act of reading, the reader will be more or less active in determining how they will put the text into practice. Roland Barthes suggested three types of reading: one that takes pleasure in the words; one that rushes on through to the end; and

one that cultivates the desire to write.<sup>44</sup> There are many more reading strategies employed by readers, but in the case of Samuel the one of particular interest is how he read to inform his own writing. Terms such as 'reading' and 'text' can be expanded beyond the narrowly literary. One can 'read' any form of communication, such as a house or a cityscape,<sup>45</sup> therefore a 'text' can be any means by which there is an attempt to organize such communication. In terms of intellectual biography, the analyst's primary concern is upon text in a more literal definition, as that is the 'currency of exchange' for an intellectual, especially an historian. Reading is an act of interpretation, and writing is the process of organizing a plurality of interpretations into an illusion of a coherent whole. In the process of writing, the author is constructing the social world, as they have actively interpreted it.

How do we analyze texts in terms of their interpretive or reading acts? If we take for example Samuel's article, *Grand Narratives*,<sup>46</sup> we need to analyze this in terms of how it was constructed from multiple simultaneous conversations happening alongside the process of its construction. Samuel wrote the article in response to the 'history on the national curriculum' debate, which had been a recurrent issue throughout the 1980s. Margaret Thatcher's government was attempting to pass legislation that would make 'British national history' the focus of history syllabuses in schools throughout the country. This finally reached breaking point in 1989 when a History Working Group was commissioned by the government to design such a curriculum. Samuel had been engaged with this particular 'conversation' throughout the decade, most notably with his forum piece in *History Today*,<sup>47</sup> in his preface to the *Patriotism* series<sup>48</sup> and in several articles in the national press, including *The New Statesman* and *The Guardian*.<sup>49</sup> *History Workshop* had organized a series of three conferences on the subject, which proved to be heated affairs that received considerable coverage in the national media.<sup>50</sup> *History Workshop Journal* ran special features on the subject, publishing papers in two editions<sup>51</sup> from several of the conference participants. *Grand Narratives* as an article in itself is an example of Samuel reading the Thatcher government's education policy against his own understanding of the nature of history as a pedagogical source of knowledge. At one point in the article, Samuel explores the benefits of studying British imperialism in a transnational spirit, as a two-way movement of people and ideas. He advocates focusing on the 1920s and 1930s, reading this period as contributing to a national story of exchange between Britain and other cultures. Samuel argues that this view of British history provides a means of internationalizing British history, which he believes to be important given the changing nature of British international relations in his present, in particular, the 'impending entry into the European Monetary Union'<sup>52</sup>. During the course of his article, Samuel also reads other writers both in contrast to one another and against contemporary political situations. A particularly good example of this is in footnote 24, where he groups

together the writers Jonathan Clark, Perry Anderson and Martin Weiner.<sup>53</sup> These writers are usually seen as ideologically distinct<sup>54</sup> but all three argued that there had been a protracted 'ancien regime' in Britain, which for Weiner had stifled entrepreneurship, for Anderson had foiled the possibility for bourgeois revolution, and for Clark had led to deliberate misinterpretations of British history. Samuel links the writers thematically as advocating the 'ancien regime' position, which the Conservative government of the time had adopted and were using as part of a political rhetoric based around returning Britain to greatness.

The first act of reading considered here is the Conservative government's history education policy against Samuel's understanding of how history could (or should) be taught. The second act of reading contrasts the use of evidence from the past against the political situations and needs of the present. The third act of reading is of other historians and writers against each other and against Samuel himself. What does this tell us about Samuel's interpretations of the 1980s? It tells us that Samuel saw a marked conflict between the right wing government's use of history, the values of social history, and between Samuel himself as a 'social historian'. He accepts and acknowledges that the evidence of the past is necessarily subject to interpretation and that differences of interpretation between historians were predominantly ideological rather than historical. This creates a picture of the 1980s as being a time of overtly conflicting ideological positions, which were expressed indirectly through ideas about the role and practice of history as a form of social knowledge. These conflicting positions related to Britain's world position and the forms of British identity that were being proposed in the public sphere. Britain in the 1980s was no longer either an imperial or economic world power.<sup>55</sup> The government, under Margaret Thatcher, interpreted this loss of position as a developmental failure, which had its roots in Britain's historical development, namely in the persistence of an influential aristocracy that had hampered British economic development by the socio-cultural infrastructure that they had installed into British society, specifically in civic institutions such as universities, which was not conducive to, and in fact discouraged, free market development. The governmental response to this problem was that Britain should adapt its social and cultural infrastructure, and attitudes, to be supportive to the creation of capital. The role of history at school level should be to provide students with a sense of their identity, and therefore responsibility, as British citizens. The Thatcher government actually bought academic history under pressure by reducing government funding to university history departments. History, for the government, was not a form of social criticism, but a foundation for a sense of national identity. For many established left wing thinkers<sup>56</sup>, national identity was of less significance than the capacity for thinking and acting on an international level<sup>57</sup>. This attitude had led to a failure to fully engage with the government's policy on the school's history curriculum. Left-wing social history had become increasingly concerned with

analytical categories that transcended 'national identity' and instead considered the more transnational concepts of gender, race, economics and international relations. By firstly interpreting and defining these two distinct positions, Samuel is then able to determine and negotiate his own position, which unites the broader social interests of the left but acknowledges the appeal of the right's concern with national history.

### *Conclusion*

In this approach I have tried to show how Samuel can be represented as an active interpreter of his times, and how in writing an intellectual biography of Samuel, I can focus my analysis on examples of how he constructed his own ideas in direct relation to his interpretation of those times. I have shown that the relationships between his interpretation of his time and his construction of his thought can be found in his references to other texts, writers or to political and social events. How can this approach be used in thinking about the relationship between social history and biography?

At the beginning of this paper I discussed how the main critique of a traditional biographical approach for a social historian was that in keeping the individual in focus a broader view of the potential for highlighting connections between that individual and the social forces acting upon them became more limited. I went on to talk about how the main critique of a socio-cultural approach for a biographer was that the individual lost the agency over their actions, and in this case their intellectual work, and became only symbolic of structural changes, which seemed to curtail the biographical ideal of writing about lived experience.

By using a more negotiated approach, the individual constructs their social identity out of their interpretation of the social context they inhabit. This allows for social structures to gain the dynamism of life writing, and for the individual to be viewed as actively engaging with the political, social, and cultural structures that organized their social world. What this approach fundamentally demonstrates is the need to re-define the key question being asked of the individual in the past by both social historians and biographers. Instead of starting from the issue of what we can understand about the historical subject in their times, and then debating the best ways of demonstrating this understanding, we should instead consider asking what our historical subject understood of those times and how they were then able to construct themselves as a social actor in their perceived social world.

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- <sup>1</sup> Leroi Jones, 'Hunting is Not Those Heads on the Wall', *Home: Social Essays* (New York: Akashi, 2009), 199; Jorge Luis Borges, 'The Fearful Sphere of Pascal', trans. Anthony Kerrigan, *Labyrinths* (London: Penguin, 2000), 224-7.
- <sup>2</sup> Barbara Caine, 'Historians and the Question of Biography', *Biography and History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 7-26.
- <sup>3</sup> For an example of this form of intellectual biography see Avron Fleishman, *George Elliot's Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- <sup>4</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988).
- <sup>5</sup> Whilst Bourdieu is a key theorist for this concept, particularly for sociology, it is possible to see this approach in the work of the fourth generation *Annales* school. In particular the work of Roger Chartier whose work on literary cultures in revolutionary France focused on the means by which ideas became accessible to wider numbers of the population. Another example of this approach is Jurgen Habermas, who again focused on changing patterns of communication and access to the public sphere. Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991). Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Boston: MIT Press, 1991).
- <sup>6</sup> R. Samuel, *The Lost World of British Communism* (London: Verso, 2006), 67.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.
- <sup>8</sup> Jim Obelkevich, 'New Developments in History in the 1950s and 1960s', *Contemporary British History*, 14:4 (Winter, 2000), 125-42; Brian Harrison, 'History at the Universities 1968: A Commentary', *History*, 53:179 (1968), 357-80; 'Popular Memory Group, Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method', in Richard Johnson, Gregor McLennan, Bill Schwarz, David Sutton (eds.), *Making Histories: Studies in History Writing and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 205-52.
- <sup>9</sup> See Negley Harte, 'The Economic History Society, 1926-2001', in Pat Hudson (ed.) *Living Economic and Social History* (Glasgow: Economic History Society, 2001).
- <sup>10</sup> Ioan Davies, 'British Cultural Marxism', *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, 4:3, 1991, 323-44; Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham N.C: Duke University Press, 1997).
- <sup>11</sup> Davies, 'British Cultural Marxism', 337.
- <sup>12</sup> Raphael Samuel, Afterword, *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981) 410.
- <sup>13</sup> Martin Pugh, *State and Society: A Social and Political History of Britain 1870-1997* (London: Arnold, 1999); David Runciman, 'Socialism in One County', *London Review of Books*, 33:15, 2011.
- <sup>14</sup> For comprehensive analysis of the dynamics of modernity and late modernity see Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990); Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).
- <sup>15</sup> Samuel had relationships with several high profile feminist thinkers and leaders including; Jean McCrindle, Sally Alexander, Anna Davin and Alison Light. Feminist members of History Workshop called for their own conference in 1970, see Sheila Rowbotham, 'Some Memories of Raphael Samuel', *New Left Review*, 221 (January/February 1997) 119-132. *History Workshop Journal* changed its subtitle from a journal of socialist history to a journal of socialist and feminist history in 1981.
- <sup>16</sup> Dworkin, 'History From Below', *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain*, 182-218.
- <sup>17</sup> For example Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- <sup>18</sup> H.D Hughes, 'History Workshop: Letter', *History Workshop Journal*, 11 (Spring, 1981) 199.
- <sup>19</sup> Robert Darnton highlighted this issue in a discussion about historiographical methods of approaching the history of ideas in the French revolution, Robert Darnton, 'Discourse and Diffusion', *The Forbidden Bestsellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: W.W. Norton &

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Company, 1995) 169-80. See also Daniel Wickberg, 'Intellectual History Vs. Social History', *Rethinking History*, 5:3 (2001), 383-95.

<sup>20</sup> For a background to discourse see Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> See for example, J.G.A.Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>22</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Obituary for Raphael Samuel', *Independent*, December 1996.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Raphael Samuel, 'preface', R. Samuel (ed.), *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity, Volume I* (London: Routledge, 1989), xvi.

<sup>25</sup> David Selbourne, 'Obituary for Raphael Samuel', *Observer*, 15 December 1996.

<sup>26</sup> Bill Schwarz, "'The People'" and History: The Communist Party Historian's Group 1946-1956', in Richard Johnson, Gregor McLennan, Bill Schwarz and David Sutton (eds.), *Making Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 44-95.

<sup>27</sup> Jim Fyrth, 'Introduction: In The Thirties', in Jim Fyrth (ed.) *Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart Limited, 1985), 9-29.

<sup>28</sup> For example Women's Guilds, Communists, Labour Party members, Liberals and religious groups.

<sup>29</sup> Schwarz, 'The People', 44-95.

<sup>30</sup> *Lost World* was originally an essay for the *New Left Review*, which expanded into two further essays with more promised, so it is hard to conceive of the overall organization of the work. Nevertheless the separate essays assume similar structures; they are broken down into four sections and these are broken down into further subtitles.

<sup>31</sup> R. Samuel, *The Lost World of British Communism*, 1-76.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>36</sup> Lynne Segal, 'Lost Worlds: Memoirs of the Left', *Radical Philosophy*, 121 (2004) 6-23.

<sup>37</sup> For interesting discussions on the personal processes of historical thought in biographical writing see Susan A. Crane, 'Historical Subjectivity: A Review Essay', *The Journal of Modern History*, 78 (2006), 434-56; Liz Stanley, 'Biography as Microscope or Kaleidoscope? The Case of "Power" in Hannah Cullwick's Relationship with Arthur Munby', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 10:1 (1987) 19-31; and Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (Rutgers N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

<sup>38</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Randall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>39</sup> Gabrielle Spiegel looks at this in terms of the process of revisionism in historical writing, Gabrielle Spiegel, 'Revising the Past, Revisiting the Present: How Change Happens in Historiography', *History and Theory Theme Issue*, 46 (December, 2007), 1-19. See also a special edition of *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100:2. 2001. On the contribution of Michel de Certeau to historical practice.

<sup>40</sup> David Harlan, 'Intellectual History and the Return to Literature', *The American Historical Review*, 94:3 (June, 1989), 581-609.

<sup>41</sup> For historians who have attempted such an approach see Garry Wills, *Augustine's "Confessions": A Biography* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011); John Diggins, *The Bard of Savagery: Thorstein Veblen and Modern Social Theory* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978) and Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

<sup>42</sup> Nick Salvatore, 'Biography and Social History: an Intimate Relationship', *Labour History*, 87 (November, 2004), 187-92.

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- <sup>43</sup> I am borrowing this term 'intellectual autobiography' from Liz Stanley, 'Biography as Microscope or Kaleidoscope?', 19.
- <sup>44</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Sur La Lecture', *Le Francais Aujourd'hui*, 32 (January 1976), 15-6.
- <sup>45</sup> See for example Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969); de Certeau, 'Spatial Stories', *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 115-30.
- <sup>46</sup> R. Samuel, 'Grand Narratives', *History Workshop Journal*, 29 (Spring, 1990), 120-33.
- <sup>47</sup> R. Samuel, 'Forum', *History Today*, 34:5 (January, 1984).
- <sup>48</sup> R. Samuel, 'Preface', *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity, Vol. I* (London: Routledge, 1984).
- <sup>49</sup> R. Samuel, 'Little Englandism Today', *New Statesman*, 21 October 1988; R. Samuel, 'Schools and the Nation', *Guardian*, 13 March 1990.
- <sup>50</sup> R. Samuel (ed.), *History Workshop Collectanea 1967-1991*; a fourth conference was planned and an accompanying book but characteristically these never materialised.
- <sup>51</sup> See *History Workshop Journal*, 29, (1990), and 30, (1990).
- <sup>52</sup> Samuel, 'Grand Narratives', 128.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.
- <sup>54</sup> Jonathan Clark is usually located as being a right-wing historian, Perry Anderson, as the editor of *New Left Review*, is defined as a Marxist historian. Martin Weiner is often interpreted as being a liberal thinker.
- <sup>55</sup> Stephen Howe, 'Internal Decolonization? British Politics since Thatcher as Post Colonial Trauma', *Twentieth Century British History*, 14:3 (September 2003) 286-304.
- <sup>56</sup> For example historians Tom Nairn and Anthony Barnett.
- <sup>57</sup> See comments by Hugh Cunningham, 'Language of Patriotism, 1750-1914', *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (Autumn, 1981) 8-33.

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