

Introduction: On the Archaeologies of Black Memory

David Scott

A thousand ages in thy sight are like an evening gone . . .

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Many years ago I had the privilege of working at the Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers Project at the University of California, Los Angeles, doing some very preliminary work on the documents being assembled to form the basis of the Caribbean volumes of the papers.¹ I was then a graduate student just back from nearly two years of historical and ethnographic research in Sri Lanka—in the middle, so to say, of another life, a long *détour* through an island postcolonial state imaginatively constituted (unlike the Caribbean) through a surfeit of memory.² (Indeed, this contrast between the seeming *excess*

1. So far a total of ten volumes of the papers have been published by the University of California Press: seven volumes (1–7) devoted to the American series, two (9–10) to the African series (volume 8 is still in production), and a volume to mark the Garvey Centenary in 1987 (*Marcus Garvey: Life and Lessons*). A total of five volumes will be devoted to the Caribbean series: three volumes on the Caribbean and Circum-Caribbean (excluding Jamaica) and two volumes dealing exclusively with Jamaica. For a sense of the scope of the project, visit its Web site at: <http://www.international.ucla.edu/africa/mgpp/>.
2. That detour produced my book *Formations of Ritual: Colonial and Anthropological Discourses on the Sinhala Yaktovil* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). In a very instructive essay, written against the background of his participation in the famous Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS) conference in Kingston, Jamaica, 3–9 January 1971, the Sri Lankan novelist James Goonewardene has reflected on this contrast between Sri Lanka and the Caribbean—see his “Nationalism and the Writer in Sri Lanka and the West Indies,” *Savacou*, nos. 11–12 (September 1975): 12–17. Inspired by Kamau Brathwaite’s “Timehri” (*Savacou*, no. 2 [September 1970]: 35–44), Goonewardene contrasts the disillusioned sense of rootlessness that stems from an “absence of ruins” (the title, memorably, of Orlando Patterson’s 1967 novel) with the situation in Sri Lanka where “there are nearly two thousand five hundred years of history from which to dig up our roots” (“Nationalism and the

of memory in Sri Lanka and its seeming *dearth* in the Caribbean has been a long-germinating seed for me.) Robert Hill, the founder and editor-in-chief of the Garvey project, was (I hope he won't mind my saying so after all these years) a most exacting taskmaster; but there was something fecund and enriching going on in the ordinary, daily round of activity in those offices at Kinsey Hall where the project was housed, something rarely-if-ever explicitly theorized, but something I later came to think about in terms of the idea of an *archaeology* of black memory (I first elaborated this idea in the preface to my interview with Hill).³ I gradually came to realize that embedded in the seemingly quotidian construction of this archive of the mass movement founded and led by Marcus Garvey—its events and institutions and rituals and personalities and correspondence—there was an activity of thinking and imagination that opened out vast possibilities not just of memory but of *counter*-memory: the moral idiom and semiotic registers of remembering against the grain of the history of New World black deracination, subjection, and exclusion. And consequently this activity suggested to me a relation between the idea of an archive, the modalities of memory, the problem of a tradition, and practices of criticism.⁴

One way of approaching criticism is to think of it as a dimension of a community's mode of remembering, an exercise, literally and metaphorically, of *re*-remembering, of putting back together aspects of our common life so as to make visible what has been obscured, what has been excluded, what has been forgotten. I do not mean to suggest by this, however, that criticism's relation to memory is an antiquarian one. Hardly, memory is always memory-in-the-present: the exercise of recovery of the past is always at once an exercise in its re-description, an exercise in arguing with the past, negotiating it, a persistent exercise in the questioning and re-positioning of the assumptions that are taken to constitute that common life. Memory seems to me the distinctive temporal idiom of tradition. And if criticism is a mode of re-remembering, then naturally it will depend upon the assembly and re-assembly of the sources that make memory possible, that keep alive the events and figures, the sensibilities and mentalities, the knowledges and rationalities, that have been part of shaping and reshaping the traditions of who we are. And this practice of recovery in turn will depend upon the construction of an archive, and the distinctive labor, therefore, of an archaeologist.

An archive, to be sure, is a domain of positivity, of pure materiality. Without the impulse to collect, to order and classify—without the endless compilation and meticulous registration

Writer," 14). If in the one instance the sense of pastlessness has led to a fervent search for a rooted identity, in the other "the plethora of experiences and traditions from which to choose" is precisely the problem (Ibid.).

3. See the preface to David Scott, "The Archaeology of Black Memory: An Interview with Robert A. Hill," *Small Axe*, no. 4 (September 1998): 80–84. In the interview itself, Hill gives a fascinating account of the paths by which his Garvey project came into being. In this and the following paragraph I paraphrase several passages from this preface.
4. Much the same could be said of the other two archives Robert Hill has been assembling, the Rastafari archive (that has already yielded quite new ways of thinking about the textual sources of Rastafari theology) and of course the C. L. R. James archive (from which there is much to expect).

of fragments and details (clippings, images, jottings), their assignment to complex lists and inventories, their organization and amalgamation into files and folders, their consignment to cabinets and hard drives—without this impulse to collect, there would be no archive. Collecting therefore is the indispensable, elementary labor of the archaeologist.⁵ But the archive has also to be thought of as having another dimension, a more abstract and, so to speak, *meta*-dimension, that is crucial to its identity and function. In the well-known chapter of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* entitled “The Historical A Priori and the Archive,” Michel Foucault challenged us to consider the archive as something held less in museological apparatuses, than in language, in discourse; the archive, he suggested, is more than a collection of materials, more than “the sum of all the texts that a culture has kept upon its person as documents attesting to its own past, or as evidence of a continuing identity.”⁶ Rather, an archive should also be understood at the level of a discursive condition of *possible* statements of knowledge, at the level of a *generative* discursive system that governs and regulates the production and appearance of statements—what can and cannot be said. An archive therefore is an implicit and constitutive part of the epistemic background of *any* knowledge, the dense network of allusions, events, concepts, images, stories, figures, personalities, that inhabit the sub-terrain of statements, animating them, giving them sense as well as force. It follows, consequently, that to fully understand a statement (a document, say, a narrative) it is not sufficient to attend to the level of the statement alone; it is necessary to be acquainted with the archive in which the statement is located. And because the archive is not in any simple way already *there* waiting to be read, it has at once to be recovered and described in order to be *put* to critical use. And this is the work of the archaeologist. The archaeologist recovers/describes the archive, and in so doing, participates in the construction of what might be called an *institution of memory* and an *idiom of remembering*.⁷

Anyone who has ever worked at the Garvey project for any length of time will tell you that Robert Hill’s relationship to the documents that constitute the archive he has built up now

5. I remember a distinguished Jamaican professor teaching at an Ivy League university saying to me, in a thoroughly disparaging tone, that Robert Hill is a “collector” (meaning, of course, a *mere* collector). Indeed, he *is* a collector, but what this professor overlooked is that “collecting,” as Hill has been involved in it, is at once an art and a mode of intelligibility. Think of the work now being done on Walter Benjamin’s obsession with collecting. See Ursula Marx, Gudrun Schwarz, Michael Schwarz, and Erdmut Wizisla, eds., *Walter Benjamin’s Archive: Image, Texts, Signs* (New York: Verso, 2007).
6. See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 128–29.
7. There is now a growing body of work on the question of the archive. A number of critics even speak of an “archival turn.” Some of this work has of course grown out of the postcolonial critique of historiography. See, for example, Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993), and Nicholas Dirks, “Annals of the Archive: Ethnographic Notes on the Sources of History,” in Brian Axel, ed., *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and Its Futures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 47–65. For a broader sampling,

over more than three decades is an unusually intimate one. Many are the stories I heard, while working at the project, of documents becoming detached from their identifying coversheets and straying from their assigned place in the elaborate system of files, and Hill having to be consulted as to their correct location. Unfailingly, he would be able, unaided, not only to correctly identify the document in question but to provide an account of its internal history and external connections, an inventory of the specific activities of Garvey or his associates or their detractors to which it pointed, and a genealogy of the various authorities whose annotations and deletions and comments crowd its margins in a sometimes barely legible scrawl. And the reason, as I began to see only years later, is not simply that these are all documents he has personally tracked down, one after the other, and brought together (though there *is* that too); it is rather that *in doing so* he has developed a distinctive relation to—I should more properly say *sensibility* toward—the very idea of an archive. Documentary records, for Hill, do not have a *merely* instrumental validity; they are not *simply* means to an ulterior end; they are not *just* empirical windows, or data, through which a separable and more real past is glimpsed. Rather, they are for him, above all, a fundamental discursive *reality* in their own right. The documentary records of the Garvey movement have, for Hill, their own structured densities and volume, their own semiotic complexes and patterned voices, their own internal sutures and interconnections and conundrums and paradoxes; in short, their own quasi-autonomous registers of intelligibility that demand, correspondingly, the building up of distinctive strategies of research and distinctive disciplines of reading. And *this* form of understanding is what an archaeological sensibility consists of.⁸

It has seemed to me, then, that part of what Hill's Garvey project allows us to see is the idea of an investigation in which the conventional end of scholarly research—the definitive

see the two issues of *History of the Human Sciences* devoted to the archive: 11, no. 4 (1998), especially the essays by Irving Velody ("The Archive and the Human Sciences: Notes toward a Theory of the Archive," 1–16) and Carolyn Steedman ("The Space of Memory: In an Archive," 65–83); and 12, no. 2 (1999), especially the essays by Patrick Joyce ("The Politics of the Liberal Archive," 35–49), Thomas Osborne ("The Ordinarity of the Archive," 51–64), and Harriet Bradley ("The Seductions of the Archive: Voices Lost and Found," 107–22). See also the special issue of *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 32, no. 1 (Spring 1999). See too Antoinette Burton, ed., *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), in particular her introduction, "Archive Fever, Archive Stories" (1–24). Clearly a good deal of this has been inspired by Jacques Derrida's meditation on the inescapable paradoxes of archivization, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). For a fine reading of this essay, see Carolyn Steedman, "Something She Called a Fever: Michelet, Derrida, and Dust," *American Historical Review* 106, no. 4 (October 2001): 1159–80, as well as more generally her book *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

8. See the discussion of the collection and the principles of the editorial process in "The Papers" and "Editorial Principles and Practices," both in Robert A. Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, vol. 1 (1826–August 1919) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), xci–xcvi, xcvi–cii. On what I have elsewhere called Hill's "poetics of the document," see Scott, "Archaeology of Black Memory," 120–31.

authored monograph—is forever *deferred* (if not displaced), while the discursive conditions of *any* possible monograph are fundamentally transformed by the construction of a new archive of sources and at the same time (in the introductions that frame the collected documents) the organization of a new cartography of the relationship between a life and a movement and the global worlds of their activity.⁹ And therefore what it enables is an enlargement of the sources of public memory, a complication of the possible pictures of the past available for remembering, and an enrichment of the possibilities of criticism by which to reshape our present.¹⁰

II

Undoubtedly, Robert Hill's Marcus Garvey Papers project would count as an exemplary instance of Pierre Nora's famous *lieux de mémoire*, one of those disparate sites where, as he says, "memory crystallizes and secretes itself."¹¹ Certainly the archive, that great storehouse of the materiality of the trace, the textual remains, the recorded sound, the visible image, is for Nora one paradigm of the fabrication of modern memorial consciousness. Indeed, Nora's work has had an enormous impact on the emergence in the humanities, since around the late 1980s, of a concerted preoccupation with "memory" as a key concept marking off an attitude toward the past connected to, perhaps, but nevertheless distinct from and in tension with, "history," in its modes of apprehension, understanding, and representation. For many, memory connotes a sense of immediacy, imagination, and authenticity, an auratic sense of the past's presence beyond the temporal constraints of secular-rationalist historical consciousness. The virtue of memory, so it is sometimes said, is that unlike history, it is openly partial, selective, fragmentary, allusive, nonlinear. If history commemorates the achievements of dominant powers, the prerogatives and interests of states and empires, for example, memory recalls, often in the

9. See, for example, Robert A. Hill, general introduction to *Marcus Garvey*, vol. 1, xxxv–xc.

10. This is especially important where memory appears about to congeal into "heritage," that mode of state-sanctioned memorialization that seeks to fix the past in an uncritical attitude of reverence. One might well recall here the furor in Kingston in 2001 over Stanley Nelson's documentary film "Marcus Garvey: Look for Me in the Whirlwind" (February 2000). Robert Hill was the executive consultant on the project. There was a sense among some in Jamaica that the kind of exploration of the memory of Garvey engaged in by Nelson (using dramatization as well as archival footage) was "unworthy" of its estimable subject. See Cecil Gutzmore, "That Marcus Garvey Film," *Gleaner*, Tuesday, 15 May 2001, C9. See also David Scott, "The Dialectic of Defeat: An Interview with Rupert Lewis," *Small Axe*, no. 10 (September 2001): 173–74.

11. See Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," in "Memory and Counter-Memory," special issue, *Representations*, no. 26 (Spring 1989): 7. (See the helpful contextualizing remarks by Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn, in their introduction to "Memory and Counter-Memory" [1–6].) Nora's essay was originally published in 1984 as "Entre mémoire et histoire" and formed the introduction to the first volume of the massive collaborative history of France carried out under his editorship, *Le Lieu de Mémoire* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1984), 23–43.

minor key of pathos, the stories of those who have been excluded and marginalized by those powers: the dispossessed, the disregarded, the disempowered.

The rise of memory-work and memory-talk in the academic humanities, needless to say, has a complex ideological history, too complex indeed to be recounted here.¹² But it is hard to completely separate its new prominence from a number of intersecting and mutually reinforcing shifts and trends gathering momentum in the last decade of the fin de siècle. To begin with there is the withering away of the symbology of emancipationist hopes, and the narrative emplotment of Romance through which modern subjects were interpellated into the horizon of “longing for total revolution.”¹³ With the evaporation of the secure guarantee of a utopian future-to-come, there has been a reorganization of the temporal frames of our imagination such that the past that once seemed hinged to a progressive movement forward, has now assumed a more intransigent—a more lingering, more *haunting*—presence.¹⁴ The past no longer finds its ready-to-hand Hegelian resolution in the optimistic gesture of “dialectical” overcoming. Shaped in part by this post–Cold War context (a context of shifting *sensibilities* as much as a context of social and political change) is the emergence of new political discourses of repair for past injury and injustice. The last two or three decades have witnessed a rapid

12. For an insightful and skeptical reading of the ideological history of the contemporary uses of memory in the humanities, see Kerwin Lee Klein, “On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse,” in “Grounds for Remembering,” special issue, *Representations*, no. 69 (Winter 2000): 127–50. For Klein, memory has become regrettably hypostatized—it has become anthropomorphically invested with both transcendental agency and the therapeutic magic of re-enchantment. He writes suggestively: “Our use of memory as a supplement, or more frequently as a replacement, for history reflects both an increasing discontent with historical discourse and a desire to draw upon some of the oldest patterns of linguistic practice. Without that horizon of religious and Hegelian meanings, memory could not possibly do the work we wish it to do, namely, to re-enchant our relation with the world and pour presence back into the past. It is no accident that our sudden fascination with memory goes hand in hand with postmodern reckonings of history as the marching black boot and of historical consciousness as an oppressive fiction. Memory can come to the fore in an age of historiographic crisis precisely because it figures as a therapeutic alternative to historical discourse” (145). See also, in the same issue of *Representations*, Idith Zertal’s “From the People’s Hall to the Wailing Wall: A Study in Memory, Fear, and War” (96–126). Notably, Klein’s and Zertal’s essays appear in an issue of *Representations* again devoted to memory. But these essays are on the whole less sanguine about memory’s virtues. As Thomas Laqueur writes in closing his sensitive introduction to “Grounds for Remembering”: “Memory is a means of making loss survivable but it is also therefore a means of allowing the past to have closure. Pain slowly fades; and with closure comes one sort of forgetting, that of critical history. Probably in the world today a bit less memory and a bit more history would not be such a bad thing. Or to put it differently, we might want to concentrate on the task of representing temporal contingencies rather than spatial absolutes, on the history of the political and moral failures, for example, that produced the Holocaust rather than the memory of its horrors” (8).
13. The phrase is Bernard Yack’s and has been now for many years a source of great fascination for me; see his *The Longing for Total Revolution: Philosophical Sources of Discontent from Rousseau to Marx and Nietzsche* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).
14. See David Scott, “Tragedy’s Time: Postemancipation Futures Past and Present,” in Rita Felski, ed., *Rethinking Tragedy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 199–217; and more generally, David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). An important site for thinking about the “haunting” of the past and its relation to the end of revolutionary praxis is of course Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).

rise of a discourse of reparatory justice (“reparatory” as distinct from the two other registers of liberal justice, “criminal” and “distributive”) in a number of cultural-political fields: On the one hand, there has been a renewal of debates concerning “older” instances of reparations claims—from the German historians crisis around representations of the Holocaust and the 1997 Swiss decision to establish a fund for victims of the Nazi terror who lost money in Swiss banks, to the 1988 Civil Liberties Act on the basis of which the US government compensated Japanese Americans for wrongful internment during World War II, to the renewal of a movement for reparations for slavery in the African Americas.¹⁵ On the other hand, there are the “newer” reparatory claims for repair to victims of catastrophic violence perpetrated by Cold War authoritarian regimes; these—from Argentina to South Africa (and now, importantly, including Grenada)—often derive their justificatory rationale from truth and reconciliation processes.¹⁶ And in all these spaces of debate, notably, justice is inseparable from memory practices, and that domain of memory is framed by a deliberate focus on historical trauma.¹⁷

Now, Nora has been much—and I think, rightly—criticized for the conserving elegiac tone of his project, the atmosphere of melancholy despair, perhaps, over the postcolonial fragmentation of the secular republican identity of contemporary France. And true enough the project is shot through with a curious enervating nostalgia. But the limitations of the work notwithstanding, what I think Nora helps us to fasten our attention on is the *historicity* of the arts of social memory, in particular the relation between the artifices and contrivances by which we collectively remember the past, and the mobile powers, structures, and sensibilities of the modern order of things. Again it isn’t necessary to endorse Nora’s dubious idealizations of the supposed organicity of premodern life to see the suggestiveness of the contrast he draws between “memory” and “history” as temporalities connected to *different* organizations of social life. “We speak so much of memory,” he says, “because there is so little left.”¹⁸ And there is so little left because the traditional *milieux de mémoire*, or environments of memory, have been systematically disorganized and reorganized by modern powers. There are no longer cultivated arts of memory—“mnemotechnics”—such as were widely practiced prior to the age of printed

15. See Elazar Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

16. See Priscilla Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths: Confronting State Terror and Atrocity* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

17. This literature connecting trauma and memory is a vast—and growing—one. But see Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), in significant part a critique of Caruth’s work; Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernhard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser, and Piotr Sztompka, eds., *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

18. Nora, “Between Memory and History,” 7.

books because in the modern world the practice of the virtues does not depend on the training of the faculties of memory.¹⁹

Not the least significant of the restructuring powers by which the modern world was made, of course, were those trans-Atlantic racializing powers that produced the African Americas—*island as well as mainland*—and the distinctive conditions of subjugated labor and abjected life that constituted New World plantation slavery.²⁰ There is, needless to say, no need to rehearse here the graphic details of that “peculiar institution.” It is enough for my purposes to attend to the fact that (perhaps as a consequence of the distinctive technologies of subjection and cultural erasure that defined plantation slavery) the question of the past—or anyway the past *as* a question—has been an enduring preoccupation for New World peoples of African descent. Here, for example, is Arthur Schomburg (an archaeologist of black memory if ever there was one!) announcing this preoccupation in the opening sentences of his essay “The Negro Digs Up His Past”:

The American Negro must remake his past in order to make his future. Though it is orthodox to think of America as the one country where it is unnecessary to have a past, what is a luxury for the nation as a whole becomes a prime social necessity for the Negro. For him, a group tradition must supply compensation for persecution, and pride of race the antidote for prejudice. History must restore what slavery took away, for it is the social damage of slavery that the present generations must repair and offset.²¹

The register is that of postivist history, to be sure (as any memorializing strategy has necessarily in part to be). But there is an obvious connection between the worry that animates the direction of Schomburg’s appeal and the one that frames Toni Morrison’s reflections on the place of memory in the “literary archaeology” (the phrase is hers) of the slave narratives that shape her work. Here is the startling image through which she evokes the recurrent force of ineluctable remembering:

19. See Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); and Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). For a very useful discussion of Yates, see Patrick Hutton, “The Art of Memory Reconsidered: From Rhetoric to Psychoanalysis,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48 (1987): 371–92. More generally, see Patrick Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993). See also Aleksandr R. Luria, *The Mind of a Mnemonist: A Little Book about a Vast Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), for a fascinating account of a curious case of almost pathological remembering in which the classical techniques of spatialized mnemonics are employed to help recall large quantities of random material.
20. See helpfully Geneviève Fabre and Robert O’Meally, eds., *History and Memory in African-American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Nora’s essay “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*” is reproduced here (284–300). See also Christine Chivallon, “Rendre visible l’esclavage: Muséographie et hiatus de la mémoire aux Antilles françaises,” *L’Homme* 180 (October–December 2006): 7–41; and Joanne M. Braxton and Marie I. Diedrich, eds., *Monuments of the Black Atlantic: Slavery and Memory* (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2004).
21. Arthur A. Schomburg, “The Negro Digs Up His Past,” in Alain Locke, ed., *The New Negro* (1925; reprint, New York: Atheneum, 1968), 231.

You know, they straightened out the Mississippi River in places, to make room for houses and livable acreage. Occasionally the river floods these places. “Floods” is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All the water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was. Writers are like that: remembering where we were, what valleys we ran through, what banks were like, the light that was there and the route back to our original place. It is emotional memory—what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared.²²

Memory in the African Americas, in short, is inseparable from the rhetoric of that unnamable, unspeakable loss that came with being coercively “straightened out” by modernity’s enslaving powers. And the recurrent “flooding” that memorializes that loss of an irretrievable past is echoed, in different registers, in a wide variety of New World black expressive practices: in, for example (choosing more or less at random), the Burning Spear’s prophetic ode, “Slavery Days”; in Saidiya Hartman’s inconsolable lament, *Lose Your Mother*; in Kamau Brathwaite’s commemorative journey, *Arrivants*; in M. NourbeSe Philip’s mourning-work, *Zong!*; in Kara Walker’s scatological *mise en scène*, “The End of Uncle Tom and the General Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven.”

In exploring such sites of black re-memory I am prompted to pose the following questions: What range of *lieux de mémoire* are recognizable across the African Americas? What practices of remembering—and of forgetting—circulate around them? What modern powers—of the state, for instance, of nationalism, of neoliberalism, of globalization—are invested in them and how do they shape the kinds of remembering and forgetting they urge us to practice? What does the institutionalization of the past in “heritage” do to practices of memory? What critical tools and strategies do we need to acquire in order to more adequately engage and unpack the reproduction of fossilized or repressive or vindictive remembering?

III

One aspect of the broad terrain of memory-thinking that has particularly preoccupied me over the better part of the last decade—as a dimension, really, of the imagining of the Small Axe Project as a whole—is the relationship between social or collective memory and generations. This, anyway, is how I understand the interviews I have conducted with Caribbean writers, intellectuals, and political actors since 1996.²³ I don’t deny that they can be read in a variety of ways depending on your purposes, but for me they are an archive—a dialogically constituted one—of *generational memory*: another *lieu de mémoire*.

22. Toni Morrison, “The Site of Memory,” in William Zinsser, ed., *Inventing the Truth* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 198–99.

23. So far, eleven interviews have been published, the most recent of them being David Scott, “To Be Liberated from the Obscurity of Themselves’: An Interview with Rex Nettleford,” *Small Axe*, no. 20 (June 2006): 97–246.

How do generations remember the past, the cultural-political past especially?²⁴ In a widely known formulation, Maurice Halbwachs (who denied the distinction between individual and collective memory) urged that no memory is possible outside of the “frameworks” used by socially constituted subjects to determine and retrieve their recollections.²⁵ Memory, in other words, is *inescapably* social, always constructed in particular socially inscribed circumstances through mnemonics embedded in particular social practices of individuality and sociality (in this, one recognizes Halbwachs as a critic of Henri Bergson’s late-nineteenth-century individualistic philosophy of memory). On this view, generations may be said to recollect their pasts within distinct frameworks shaped not only by their direct collective experiences—of wars or riots or political transitions or natural catastrophes—but also by their collective *hopes*. What is the relationship between the frameworks of memory of successive generations? What continuities and discontinuities mark the ways in which successive generations remember the shared past? How does each younger generation, from within the frameworks that shape their own recollections, connect *to*—or disconnect *from*—the collective memories of an older generation? How might that younger generation *learn* to remember in ways that encompass *both* the distinctiveness of their own generational standpoint *and* the difference between that standpoint and the frameworks of their elders, and do so moreover without being imprisoned by the authority of established memory? This sense of an embodied argument (an uneven, unending conflict of moral perspectives) over a shared past and its place in the present, is to my mind a central aspect of the idea of a *tradition*. Memory and tradition are inextricably intertwined. Indeed you might say that in one of its dimensions at least a tradition is an ensemble of agonistically connected frameworks through which successive generations *remember* a shared past and through which they criticize it. On this view, memory is at once conserving *and* a condition of criticism, revision, and change.²⁶

As I have said on more than one occasion now, I am acutely aware of being part of an Anglo-Creole Caribbean generation that has no tangible experience of colonialism and

24. See helpfully Howard Schuman and Jacqueline Scott, “Generations and Collective Memory,” *American Sociological Review* 54 (1989): 359–81; and Ron Eyerman and Bryan Turner, “Outline of a Theory of Generations,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 1, no. 1 (1998): 91–106.

25. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). For an interesting discussion of Halbwachs in connection with the work of Phillip Ariès, see Patrick Hutton, “Collective Memory and Collective Mentalities: The Halbwachs-Ariès Connection,” *Historical Reflections/Réflexions historiques* 15, no. 2 (Summer 1988): 311–22.

26. There is work to be done here in trying more systematically to connect memory and tradition, but on the idea of a tradition, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984); and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990). See also David Scott, “An Obscure Miracle of Connection,” in *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 106–27, for some discussion of the uses of the idea of a tradition in thinking about intellectual discourse in the African diaspora.

anticononialism, no direct memory of the first singing of the national anthem, no share in the existential anticipation of the certainties and uncertainties that shaped the longing for independence and the expectations of its aftermath. And one particular obsession of mine—given what seems to me the terminal crisis of the Caribbean nation-state projects that grew out of the agendas of nationalism and constitutional decolonization—has been to try to reconstruct something of the discursive terrain of memory of those still-living generations that, through their own direct experiences and their own recollected pasts, imagined the postcolonial futures that are my inheritance. In a formulation, versions of which I keep repeating because it so evokes for me the temporal conundrum of future's past I mean to identify: how does my generation look back through the veil of memories of an older generation, listening to the ways in which its account of the past shapes its hopes and longings for a future horizon of possibility that I now experience as ruin? One generation's futures are another generation's rapidly accumulating past. (This, parenthetically, was my preoccupation in *Conscripts of Modernity* with C. L. R. James's imagination of Toussaint Louverture. The magnificent closing sentences of his preface to the first edition of *The Black Jacobins*—in which he alludes to the proximity of the world around him and to the fact that were he writing in another time and place it would have been a different but not better book—are nothing if not a profound meditation on the disjunctive temporalities of generational memory.²⁷) So far as I am concerned, then, these interviews are critical dialogical engagements not because they aim to demonstrate the shortcomings of my now aging interlocutors, the poverty of their particular ways of understanding their pasts (indeed, I have no interest in this style of criticism), but because they aim to reconstruct the “frameworks” (as Halbwachs might say) of their memories in such a way as to help us take the measure of ours.

At the same time, however, it is important to see what aspects of memory neither the Garvey project nor these interviews speak to, perhaps to some degree even obscure. In both instances there is a clear focus on the *formal* reflexive registers of remembering, the way the past is re-presented to us in words and images. However, there are other registers in which remembering figures significantly, those associated, for example, with the whole range of popular (often unrecorded) idioms and performances. But one register that seems to me to bear particular thinking-about (especially because it connects to the problem of a tradition) is that of the body and its diverse habits and acquired dispositions. It is often missed or elided that the body is a memory-machine. As Paul Connerton reminded us many years ago, focusing on what he calls the body's “habit-memory”—or, its *habitus*, to invoke Mauss rather than Durkheim—re-orientes our attention to the ways we preserve the past without explicitly

27. See C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint Louverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Dial, 1938), viii–ix.

re-presenting it to ourselves in words and images, to the social disciplines and rituals and techniques by which the body (in its distinctive postures and gait and modes of adornment) learns to be—and acquires the memory of being—a body of certain kind: a black body, for example. In habit-memory, the past is not “pictured” as such but sedimented into the body.²⁸

IV

Such, anyway, are some provisional orienting thoughts. I should like to think of the occasion of our “Archaeologies of Black Memory” symposium and seminar (sponsored by the Ford Foundation and held at the University of Miami in conjunction with the Caribbean Literary Studies program and the online journal *Anthurium*) as having constituted a platform on which to connect aspects of the criticism of pasts in the presents of the African Americas in two of its postemancipation formations: the regional Caribbean and the mainland United States. Foregrounding memory and the memory-practices by means of which pasts are remembered, documented, circulated, and made available for the labor of intellectual and artistic work in the present offers a terrain for instructive comparative work and exchange. It has seemed to me that given our particular histories of black disenfranchisement in the Americas the idea of an archaeology of memory has an especial salience. What the sources and modalities of our remembrances are, and what analytics and poetics are required to render them visible or audible is not, I suspect, always self-evident. Our symposium and seminar were directed toward the exploration of this suspicion. The contributions by Saidiya Hartman, Robert Hill, Michael Hanchard, Patricia Saunders, and M. NourbeSe Philip published here, speak in different ways to that occasion’s preoccupations—even if they are not necessarily exact replicas of what was presented there. To be sure they do not require formal introductions from me. They speak eloquently enough for themselves and, in discontinuous ways, to each other. Through the vistas they open up it is not hard to see what a rich vein of potential work this platform has provided. It is our hope that it is one that we—in *Small Axe*—can build on in stimulating future collaborations around the question of black memory in the present.

28. See Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). See also Marcel Mauss’s classic essay “Techniques of the Body,” *Economy and Society* 2, no. 1 (February 1973): 70–88.