

**African Caribbean Pupils and Art  
Education**

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## **Thesis Abstract**

This work looks at the implications for teaching art and design to children of African Caribbean heritage in the British educational system. It is organised in three sections. The first provides the broad rationale for the thesis and includes an analysis of viewpoints on the diasporic state, this instead of a literature review. It asserts that children of African Caribbean and wider diasporic backgrounds are disadvantaged by not being made familiar with material from their cultural heritages. This has come about, I argue, by the enduring effects of the rupture that was the slave trade and the lack of acknowledgement of the significance of the black presence in the West. Consequently, the study contends, diasporic peoples are rendered invisible. The thesis asserts that culture as a context for teaching is fundamental to art and design education. Therefore African Caribbean learners, whose cultural heritages are not seen, are disadvantaged and appear culturally impoverished relative to others. To substantiate this critical viewpoint, key texts by theorists on diasporic studies are referenced and analysed. These include David Dabydeen, CLR James, Stuart Hall and Kamau Brathwaite. My intention in this first section, therefore, is to throw light on the tensions surrounding the black subject, their lack of a positive presence in the critical and contextual material that children are exposed to and how this tension impacts on the teaching of art. The values disseminated in such pedagogies are central to the enquiry.

Section two is dedicated to the presentation of the research findings. Six London-based art and design educationalists that work in environments with high numbers of African Caribbean students are interviewed about the undergirding rationale that drives their work. Four of the educationalists are black. This number of black teachers was selected in the expectation that they would have a particularly high commitment to black children's learning, and as such would have experimented with pedagogies that take account of their learning needs. The outcomes are, however, at times very different from what I had anticipated. This element of surprise is fundamental to the research and the analysis of the meanings embedded in such unexpected material is critical to it. One group of six African Caribbean young people from south London was also interviewed. This interview provided an opportunity to garner information from African Caribbean learners on their experience of state education. The short interview with them furnished critical viewpoints that throw light on young people's perceptions of teaching and learning in London schools.

The third section presents a theoretical analysis of key points emerging from the data that could have a bearing on African Caribbean student learning in art and design. Finally, the concluding chapter reflects on the findings in the thesis and provides a pointer to their significance for teachers and school pupils.

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## **Glossary of Terms**

### *African Caribbean*

African Caribbean is clearly a misnomer when used as a descriptor of British people of African Caribbean origin. When the terminology is used in this text, I make reference to those black young people who were either born in the Caribbean but now live in the UK or those born in the UK with at least one parent, grandparent or great grandparent of African Caribbean origin.

### *The Caribbean*

The Caribbean could be perceived as a group of islands in the Caribbean Sea. This, however, can only serve to exclude people from mainland territories such as Guyana, Surinam and Belize, whose experience parallel those of Caribbean island communities. Some inhabitants of the southern states in the US could also be said to have had a Caribbean cultural experience. The Caribbean for me therefore includes all the islands plus mainland territories that share a Caribbean cultural experience in the region.

### *Black*

The generic term black with reference to students in this study, is used only in contexts where reference to all African descended peoples is relevant to the enquiry or where African Caribbean student communities are understood to be the subject of commentary.

### *Culture*

Hall (1995) provides an excellent interpretation of culture as I use the term in this work in saying that, 'It provides a kind of ground for our identities, something to which we can return, something solid, something fixed, something stabilized, around which we can organize our identities and our sense of belongingness. (p. 4)'

### *Diasporic*

Throughout the paper I use the term diasporic as a means of referencing peoples of African Caribbean and wider American origin who are the descendants of slaves. This term is taken therefore to reference specifically the descendants of the enslaved. They would have suffered the trauma of cultural rupture, which is central to the enquiry.

### *Mixed heritage*

Many young people in the UK have a parent or relations who is wholly or partly of Caribbean origin, and a second parent and group of relations of a different ethnicity without any natal or cultural Caribbean connections. Some in this latter category may be from the majority ethnic group and hail from Ireland or Scotland. Young people who are the products of such unions are for the purposes of this study also categorised as diasporic and African Caribbean. This I justify on the grounds that most young people in this

category also lack access to information on the Caribbean and its wider cultural affiliations that are part of their cultural identity.

### *Problematise*

This word is used in the context of 'making an issue of' or the 'interrogation of' a particular matter or concern.

### *Race*

The term 'race' though sometimes used in this work, is dangerously misleading and as such I avoid it whenever possible. It is generally accepted now even by those who would prefer to see the separation of peoples on the basis of differences in heritage, ethnicity and background that we are all of one race. Indiscrete use of such terminology can, in my view, only subvert the project of creating a more harmonious and enriching environment for young people in the UK.

## **Preface**

In the summer of 2006, the physicists George Smoot and John Mather were awarded the Noble Prize for recording the echo of the *Big Bang* that gave rise to the formation of the universe. Somehow these two gifted scientists isolated the ongoing reverberation of that extraordinary moment and recorded it on tape. It was an important scientific achievement of far reaching significance. But whilst marvelling at the genius of Smoot and Mather, it is humbling to think that fourteen million years after the event, the boom from the singularly most important moment in Creation still resounds in the solar system. Britain's involvement in the slave trade which ended just two hundred years ago, was in many respects a Big Bang in the political, cultural, economic and social worlds of people in the Western hemisphere and beyond. It, too, has its echo in our everyday lives and has transformed our existence forever. Yet, as a result of the shame and embarrassment attached to it, we are tutored not to 'hear' its resonance. The invisibility to which Ellison refers in this work, is indeed a direct result of this 'deafness', a lack of willingness to 'hear' or 'see' or 'feel' the presence of the trade in our lives. For diasporic children it is of particular importance. Nearly every aspect of their being, from the names they are given to the way they socialise and even construct themselves as subjects, is at least partly attributable to the influence of the slave trade. The way we conduct our teaching is also partly determined by the sale of Africans for labour. Our lack of understanding or acknowledgement of this hateful legacy is, I will argue, impacting still on African Caribbean student experience and performance in schools.

### **Structure of the thesis**

This work is organised in three sections. The first section deals with the formation of African Caribbean student identities. The second part is concerned with the empirical research and my interpretation of it. Section three reflects on key points emanating from section two, including a more extended chapter on the politics of black hair.

## **Section 1**

This section is divided into four chapters. The first is the introduction to the thesis. In it I talk about the origins of the research concern in schools and how this led to wider enquiry about the backgrounds of African Caribbean subjects. I then list the research questions that drive the enquiry, providing more in-depth information on why they are significant.

The second chapter, *The Process of Gap*, is sub-divided into four sub-sections. It looks at key texts dealing with diasporic identities. The four sub-sections are:

1. Traditions of practice
- 2: Theorising the effects of the rupture; the complexity of identity and the ontology of diasporic peoples
3. Race, Representation and Belonging: the dialectic of the UK Centre
- 4: The politics and history of the image of the black body

It is the space in which the key concerns are placed before the reader. Most especially the chapter problematises the issue of the lack in African Caribbean and broader diasporic cultural histories that shape their perceptions of themselves as subjects.

Chapter three locates these issues in the context of multicultural education. It looks at inclusive pedagogies that could allow space for African Caribbean identities to emerge.

Chapter four looks at contemporary art, proposing that such approaches have the potential to offer a great deal to African Caribbean learners. These, the chapter suggests, would sit comfortably with the final teaching model discussed in chapter three.

## Chapter 1 – Introduction

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allen Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fibre and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination – indeed, everything and anything except me (Ellison, R. 1949, Page 7 prologue).<sup>1</sup>

This work looks at the learning of African Caribbean pupils in art and design classrooms in the UK. Its central purpose is to throw light on the key issues that impact on the pedagogic experiences of such learners. The research proceeds from the proposition that African Caribbean pupils, as the descendants of enslaved peoples, whose cultural lineage has been blurred by the skewed relationship with the white majority group, are uniquely disadvantaged in the classroom. Their ancestors' enslavers, and subsequent British Imperial power, engendered a culture of exclusion that has permeated to this day in all areas of black/white interaction, impacting even on their self-image (Shohat and Stam (1994); Fanon (1986); West (1993); Gilroy (1993) and (2000); Malcolm X (1964); hooks (1990) (1992) (1994) and (2001); Parker (1992); Young (1992)). The study will therefore include an analysis of the historical constructs that have shaped black pupils' identities and the pedagogies in which they are produced as learners. The issue of the rupture that was the slave trade and its enduring impact on the formation of African

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<sup>1</sup> For an extended extract from Ellison's great work, please see appendix 1.

Caribbean student subjectivities will in this regard be central to the study. I posit the theory, shared by others, that by framing learning in a culture in which children are positively produced as subjects, they are stimulated to learn (Grigsby (1977); Erickson and Young (2002); Gillborn (1990); Moore, (1999); Barrow (2005); see also Adu-Poku (2002). My thesis argues that African enslaved peoples who were made to adopt alien practices that at best relegated them to an inferior space, devised ways of surviving often at variance with the ambitions of those in the mainstream. Parker (1992) refers to such acts of subversion as ‘... the subordinate groups devising a whole range of (sometimes contradictory) strategies for survival (p. 296);’ See also Boime (1990); Price and Mintz (1976); Farris Thompson (1993). Such concerns for identity and recognition shape the way students learn in all contexts including art and design classrooms (Atkinson 2002; John 2006; Moore 1999; see also Harland et al 2000). The way we see ourselves as people, and the aesthetic valuation we place on our own physical attributes are imbibed from the culture in which we live (Pascall 1992; Bogle 1994). As a consequence, African Caribbean learners in art and design education, being outside Western identificatory frame-works, are faced with traditions of knowing and representing that often fail to positively ‘see’ their presence and cultural histories. This study is intended to explain how these areas of invisibility work.

An analysis of the key concern, the issue of the invisibility of the diasporic subject, is provided in this chapter. It also sets out the origins of the

research by reflecting on my experience as a teacher in London schools. Initial projects delivered by me are posited, which were attempts to address the issue of demographic change in the school population. These experiments, however, only served to emphasise the lack of Caribbean representation in available art and design resources. This lack initiated my research into the backgrounds and origins of African Caribbean subjects. It was the beginning of the quest for an appreciation of African Caribbean cultural identity, one that would support the identification of resources that could be used in teaching. Much of the culture that surrounds African Caribbean student learning, the chapter argues, could be linked to the rupture that was the slave trade.

There has been since the start of the slave trade a distancing and alienation that have marked the experience of the African subject (DuBois in Lester 1971). The structures that were erected to ensure their subjugation, I will argue, are still in position if only at a psychic level, and perpetuate a system of white domination and black degradation.<sup>2</sup> In other words black learners

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<sup>2</sup> See episode one of Professor Robert Winston's *Child of Our Time* (BBC 2005) for evidence of how this is still being perpetuated even in children as young as four. In research carried out by the University of Kent for the series, a group of four year old children from different 'racial' and ethnic backgrounds were shown images of young people of similar age, ethnicities and heritages to themselves. The children were asked questions about them such as 'who they would prefer as a friend?' and 'Who would most likely be the worst behaved in school?' And so on. Almost all the children picked the black children for the bad things and identified

are required to succeed in environments that do not nurture their subjectivity with, inevitably, dire consequences for many (Coard 2005; Searle 2001). How does social marginalisation play out in the art and design classroom? Are the cultural voices of African Caribbean children stifled in such environments? These are some of the concerns that this study will interrogate.

### **1.1 The origins of the research**

My interest in the plight of African Caribbean pupils in art education started with appointment to my first teaching post in 1969. School-on-the-Hill, as I will call it, was a troubled West London comprehensive, a dysfunctional institution of low teacher and pupil morale. An ethos of disunity and failure, overseen by an ineffective head teacher pervaded the school. Children attended out of habit, to see their mates or while-away the time in disruptive and often violent behaviour. I shall long remember the sight that greeted me on my first day there. Walking down the main corridor I noticed that the glass panes in the door to each classroom had been removed. In a couple of them even the wooden panels beneath had been kicked in and, during registration, students secreted their legs through the apertures to make playthings of the frames, mindlessly swinging back and forth as if dawdling on a merry-go-round in a playground.

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the white children for the good ones. Most of the black children involved made similar choices.

School-on-the-Hill must have been more than 80% black, and at break time it was noticeable, the first time I had been in such an overwhelmingly African Caribbean school environment in the UK. But the pattern of under-education, marked by poor attainment and particularly disruptive behaviour, was to be repeated in many largely 'black' comprehensive schools that I was to visit in subsequent years (See Coard 2005). This chaos of learning, which has an echo even in some present-day school contexts, fills me with disappointment and anger. Disappointment at the downward spiral that some children get into in respect to their attitude to teaching and learning, and anger that schools, despite the strictures of the National Curriculum and its enforcer Ofsted, have not yet devised schemes to better stimulate and educate their black intake. Both these themes, the lack of adequate curricula to meet the needs of children of diverse cultural backgrounds, particularly those of Caribbean origin, and the negative attitude of many African Caribbean children to schooling in this country will be addressed in this work.

After eight weeks in West London I was appointed to a part-time post at a girls' school in east London. Haggerston in the 1970s and 80s was affected like most inner city schools by the demographic changes that were impacting on inner London schools at that time. The intake of the school was largely white working class with a number of black and a few Asian pupils. By the time of my departure from the East End in 1985 the intake of Asians had greatly increased, though the population of black African and African

Caribbean students had not seen a significant change. The demographic shift alerted me to the need for curriculum change and motivated the development of a pedagogic approach that encompassed the celebration of practices from different cultural groups.

My earliest multicultural schemes were constructed within assimilationist and integrationist ideologies, the first two models listed by Chalmers (1966) in this work (3.1). They emphasised the celebration of difference located often in artefacts associated with traditional and cultural paraphernalia, religious worship, traditional festivities, dress, personal adornment, etc (West 1990). I started a resource bank that consisted of artefacts provided by the children and various objects I had collected from other sources. These consisted of posters, pictures of jewellery, beads and other bric-a-brac. When they were first displayed in the art room the atmosphere changed overnight. Pupils of south Asian background showed a particular interest, crowding round the exhibits at the beginning of lessons, speaking animatedly in their first-languages to better express their feelings and share anecdotes about various items. These positive responses to my displays, and experiments with multicultural approaches, encouraged me to try a different means of making teaching and learning more relevant to the lives of children from south Asian, Caribbean and other backgrounds.

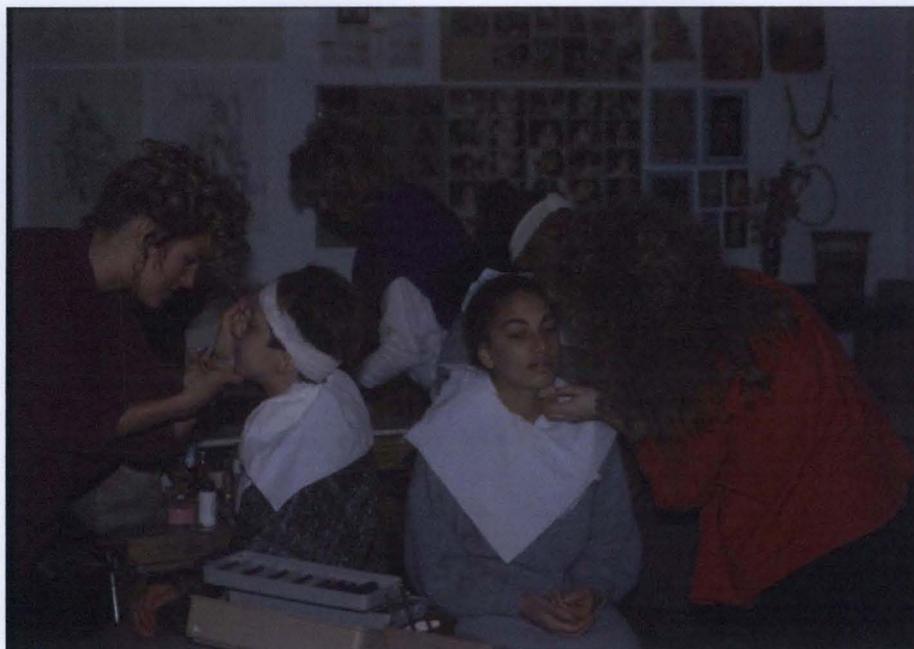
### **1.2 Personal adornment project**

One multicultural project that I devised for a group of year 10 students was

based on personal adornment. I chose this theme because it allowed personal interpretation and stimulated a diversity of responses. The group was shown slides and photographs of jewellery from different countries around the world. Many brought in examples to share with the class. In the meantime I contacted the London College of Fashion and the Jewellery Department at Sir John Cass School of Art to see if their students could contribute to the scheme. Both institutions sent a group of final year undergraduates who worked with the fourth year pupils in two separate sessions (Figs. 1 & 2). Students from John Cass led workshops that dealt with making jewellery from recycled materials, while the LCF group concentrated on facial make-up. The school pupils responded to this stimulus by working in a variety of media with which they were acquainted, such as clay and paint, and by making use of bric-a-brac found in the department. Several drew on the display in the art room, particularly the poster portrait of Padmini, a leading heartthrob of the Bollywood movie industry of the day. One Fijian pupil of South Asian background made a ceramic piece based on the life-size arm of a Hindu bride. The piece was decorated in a traditional way with jewellery made by her from various scrap metals, beads, coloured plastics and other materials. Another made a sculpture inspired by the traditional facial make up of a South Asian woman. Through this project, the learners began to 'talk' about issues, in art and design, with a relevance to their lives and experience (Emery 2002; Mcfee 1998; Barrow 2005).



**Figure 1 A Haggerston pupil making jewellery in the John Cass student-led workshop**



**Figure 2 Three students from London College of Printing lead the make up workshop at Haggerston School**

### **1.3 The lack of black Caribbean representation**

A cornerstone of my practice, then, was to acquaint pupils with artefacts and practices generated by the traditions of their classmates, hence the sharing of *objet d'art* in the possession of the learners themselves. Whilst experimenting with approaches that encompassed south Asian and other cultural traditions in project development, however, it became apparent that some groups were underrepresented. Most Caribbean cultural traditions, possibly with the exception of carnival, were not seen. Caribbean pupils simply did not contribute artefacts from their homes that showcased their cultural differences or traditions. My experiments with multicultural approaches, therefore, whilst demonstrating a need for such schemes, only served to emphasise the dearth of distinctive Caribbean resources available for such teaching. The British Museum, Museum of Mankind and countless other galleries and museums in London held a wide range of resources that could be used by art and design departments in schools for cross-cultural project planning<sup>3</sup>. In a similar light, informative books on the artistic practices of peoples from different countries and traditions were also available to the teacher willing to put some effort into finding resources from different cultures for classroom use. However, in planning for teaching with a Caribbean component, appropriate cultural materials from the Caribbean

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<sup>3</sup> At the beginning of my research, I contacted the British Museum to establish what Caribbean resources they held in their collection. I was informed by a member of staff that there were only five artefacts from the Caribbean region held by the museum and these had been produced by indigenous Carib and Arawak peoples.

could not easily be found. Those resources that were accessible offered a limited range of pedagogic possibilities in art and design. It was this absence, the then inexplicable lack or acknowledgement of African Caribbean cultural heritages: their invisibility - that drove my interest in Caribbean cultural representation in schools. Wider reading, my own theorising and research in art and design departments have made evident the centrality of the slave trade to the lack of Caribbean cultural representation in education (see Dash MA dissertation 1992).

The rupture or cut that was the slave trade places the African Diaspora subject in a category arguably unlike any other in the modern world (Hall 1997). Others have been similarly or even more barbarically brutalised by the Nazis, Pol Pot and by warring factions in Rwanda, where whole communities have been systematically exterminated. But the sustained objective over several centuries to 'de-culture' and dehumanise peoples by suppressing their human rights, is unique in modern history (Robinson 1983). Grigsby Junior (1977), quoting Basil Davidson states that,

Africans brought to the New World vestiges of culture of the various societies from which they came. In some cases this package of culture was virtually intact, and when opened, continued much the same as they had known it in the Old World. In other instances, parts of the package of culture were lost or damaged and strains of the old culture were difficult to transplant, especially those parts that had to be carried externally. (P. 47)

The transplanting (Glissant 1989) of African peoples to the New World, however, resulted in a new set of possibilities born of the syncretisms that took place on the slave ships, the tropical plantations and elsewhere (Hall

1992). These separations gave rise to an ontological separation from historical heritages and ways of life that continues to impact on the way diasporic peoples make sense of their world (Mintz and Price 1976). As such diasporic people live in a limbo of representation<sup>4</sup> - forcibly disconnected from African tribal mores they share Western beliefs and aspire to similar ideals but by virtue of 'racial' alterity, are denied a full Western identity (Davidson 1977).

The effect of this stripping away of cultural practices and traditions, coupled with the attack on their presence and even self-image in the West, has eroded the self-confidence of many diasporic subjects in educational circles and in other contexts (hooks 1994). These modes of representation shape the image of the black in the eyes of everyone, both black and white, and can have an impact even beyond the West in the enduring effect of Hollywood movies, popular literature and even present-day broadcasting (Shohat and Stam, 1994; Morley 2000; Bhabha 1994, Fanon 1986; Trinh-T-Minh-ha 1992; Congdon-Martin 1990; Bogle 1994). The construct of the black as inferior or lacking 'higher' qualities inherent to the white subject has also penetrated the way we use language and impute value to epidermal differences (Boime 1990; Gates 1986). Such stereotypes are evident, too, in the novels of Dickens, Lawrence and Thackeray, and are fundamental to the writing of Enid Blyton (Said 1994). Perhaps the racism with which black athletes are

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<sup>4</sup> The notion of representation is intended here to mean the traditional ways in which the black subject has been constructed in the West.

confronted when practising their sport in Eastern Europe, is partly due to the popularisation of black degradation in different forms of popular culture. Derogatory representations of black subjects are also a feature of Western art (Boime 1990; Vercoutter *et al* 1976). This study will determine how such constructs, though often projected as deficiencies inherent to African Caribbean children themselves, continue to influence the attitudes of African Caribbean learners in the classroom (Searle 2001; Gillborn 1995; John 2006). It will analyse teaching and learning to see if and how Caribbean cultural identities are rendered invisible in school art and design environments.

#### **1.4 Research concern**

The main research concern, therefore, is that African Caribbean children, by being the descendants of enslaved peoples who were exposed to a coordinated attempt at cultural extinction, are disadvantaged in schools. Written out of history, and not effectively represented in their Western settings, they are rendered invisible. This invisibility has taken various forms from a clear lack of acknowledgement of their presence to the systematic stripping away of any concrete allegiance to ancestral peoples in Africa (Bygott, 1992; Price and Mintz 1976; Cummins 1994; Jones 1986; Oliver 1969; Harris 1973; see also Marcus 1992, for an account of the importance of culture to constructs of identity). This denial of access to central tenets of their historical and ethnic identity denies diasporic peoples access to many traditional building blocks of self-expression, particularly in art and design

education discourses. Ultimately it undermines their self-esteem and self-confidence. As Jones (1986) infers,

It is not enough for Black children to be proficient in Mathematics and English, it is more important in many ways for them to be aware of their cultural heritage – their history. History provides them with the psychological foundation on which to build their whole educational castles. Without the knowledge of history, their castles will be without a foundation (p. 35).

This echoes George Lamming's theory of the black subject being 'Exiled from his god, exiled from his nature, exiled from his own name (Quoted in Parker, 1992, p. 300).' As Kearney (2003) states, '... this knotty problem of identity is *the* central factor in our quest to secure a meaningful education in a culturally diverse society (p. xi).' A key challenge for educationalists with an interest in equality of opportunity for such children must therefore be the creation of contexts for learning that enables them to position themselves within historical frameworks (Gall 2002). I argue in this thesis that the echo of the slave trade still effects African Caribbean pupil performance and, as inheritors of Euro-centred traditions of teaching and learning, teacher pedagogic approaches. Even in multicultural pedagogies the invisibility of the diasporic subject excludes her from being seen or represented. The thesis will seek to establish to what degree teachers are addressing these concerns.

Culture is central to art practice and art education; it provides the framework and organisational context for making. Teachers naturally reference their own cultural habits in devising schemes for the classroom (see Pascall 1992; Gardner 1990; Atkinson 2002). In multicultural classrooms educators seek new ways of locating teaching material in the ownership of all children by

drawing on or referencing their cultures and mores (Grigsby 1997; Efland and Stuhr 1996; Mason 1989; Adu-Poku 2001). African Caribbean students, as learners whose cultures have been rendered invisible, are by this means disadvantaged - they engage other people's icons and mores and use them as the inspiration for their own creative activity. This can only further obscure their voices and knowledge of self (Gall 2002).

### **1.5 The research questions**

To address the research concern the study posits three broad questions:

1. What strategies are teachers of art employing to make Caribbean cultures central to teaching and learning in multicultural pedagogies?
2. What resources are used in such teaching? Is the Caribbean regarded as part of a wider diasporic entity? Are connections made with Africa or are they instead looking to contemporary practice for philosophical and resourcing solutions to the issue of classroom diversity?
3. In their teaching, how are teachers more effectively acknowledging and celebrating Diaspora contributions to the Western mainstream?

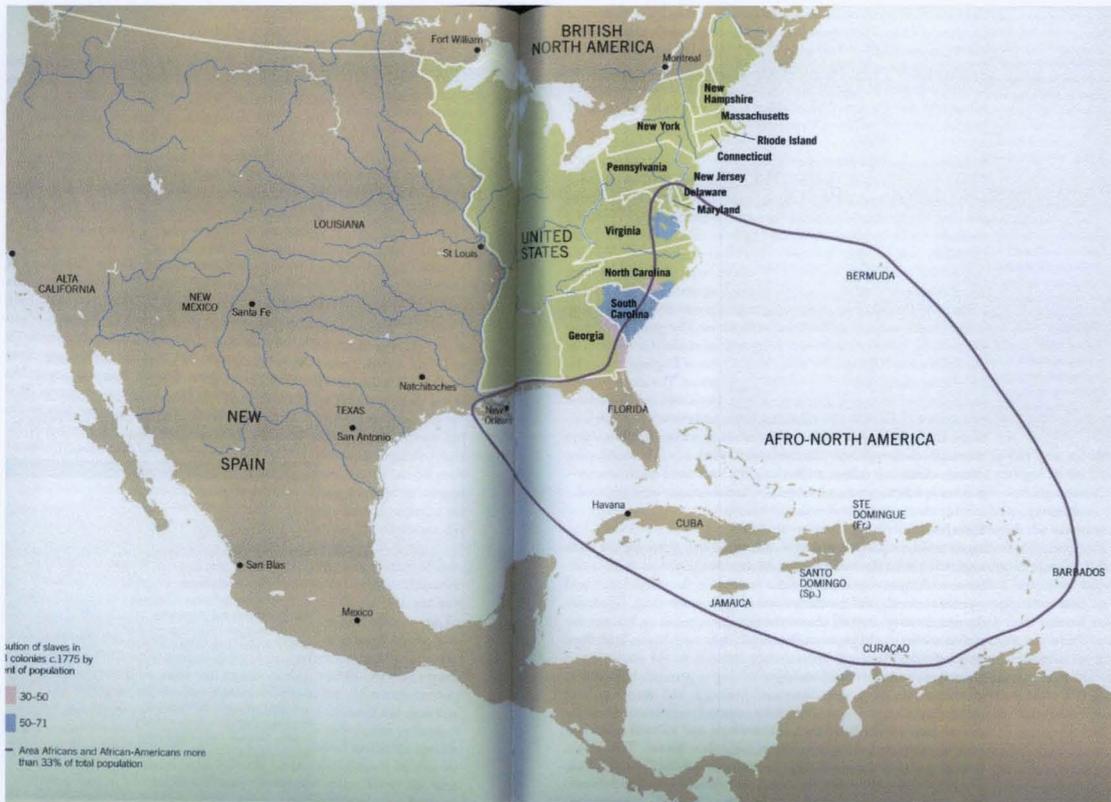
**1.6 Question 1** – *What strategies are teachers of art employing to make Caribbean cultures central to teaching and learning in multicultural pedagogies?*

For the purpose of this study I would identify the Caribbean (geographically)

as a collection of islands in the Caribbean Sea and an assortment of territories that rim the Caribbean basin. These states include Surinam, French Guyana, Guyana, Honduras, Belize, Costa Rica and other nations (Fig. 3). The Caribbean is therefore a cultural and geographic constellation, a confluence of Diasporas: European, African, Asian and other settlers, and indigenous peoples. Through them have emerged values distilled partly from traces left by the former British and other European colonisers, ancient traditions generated by people indigenous to the region, cultural retentions carried by the African enslaved, traditions from the Indian sub-continent, China and elsewhere (Walcott 1992; Hall 1997; Knight 1990). To better appreciate the reality of Africans in the Americas, therefore, one has to be *au fait* with this demographic and cultural mix, whilst having some awareness of the trauma of African enslavement in the region and its legacy (See also Trinh T. Minh-ha 1999 and Homi Bhabha 1994).

The research will therefore question others' understanding of what constitutes the Caribbean. From which territories should resources be culled for 'Caribbean' project development in the classroom? Can constructions of identity that look to the metaphysical and the psychological, alongside the geographical and material be the basis on which to explore concepts of Caribbean cultural belonging (Rogoff 2000; Efland and Stuhr 1996)? In other words, can the notion of identity formation look beyond a geographic space that poses its own problems of boundary demarcation and embrace a concept of memory, imagined spaces or new places of settlement (Lavie et al, 1996;

Isihoro, P. Caribbean Times 26.11.1991)?



**Figure 3 Map showing the extent of significant African American presences in North America<sup>5</sup>.**

### 1.7 Question 2

*What resources are used in such teaching? Is the Caribbean regarded as part of a wider diasporic entity? Are connections made with Africa or are they instead looking to contemporary practice for philosophical and*

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<sup>5</sup> While it was not intended to provide a true record of Caribbean presences in the region, this map shows the extent of African Caribbean involvement in North America. What it fails to do of course is to offer a similar indication of significant African Caribbean presences in the south and west of continental America.

*resourcing solutions to the issue of classroom diversity?*

Ancestral traditions permeate all areas of a people's culture, forming the backdrop to the commissioning and creation of distinctive art forms (Mason 1989; Pascall 1992). This is apparent in traditions as diverse as Nigerian metal works and textile arts from Japan (Fig. 4)<sup>6</sup>. Masks are recognised as integral to artistic expression across the African continent. They are key motifs in traditional practices that give expression to fundamental needs and beliefs (Schmalenbach 1988). Their forms and symbolic meanings, inform the practices of artists with a background in Africa, even when settled in Europe and elsewhere (Njami 2005). The art work of internationally acclaimed painter Chris Offili is strengthened by his familiarity with African artistic and cultural traditions. Though often making pieces about the black experience elsewhere, much of what he says is shaped in a visual language rooted in African traditional symbolic practices. Similar connections to an ancient cultural resource cannot, however, be experientially made by African Caribbean artists. They are outsiders to traditions with rich, symbolic meanings at the disposal of the African subject (Brathwaite 1974). The voice of the diasporic artist is instead honed by an amalgam of African traces and

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<sup>6</sup> The symbols in Figure 4 are used in traditional architectural and other designs in Africa. They provide the visual language that could inform practice for Nigerian, Malian, Ivorian and other artists from Africa, irrespective of their places of domicile. Diasporic artists, however, lack cultural access to a similar rich spread of visual symbolism that could form the experiential basis of their art.

exposure to other life-worlds in the West, more especially the Western canon to which they have been acculturated and the new syncretic forms they have played a major part in constructing (Hall 1992 (a); Hebdige 1979; Willis 1990; Bailey and Hall 1992 (b); Gall 2002; Patton 1998). Traditions of making attendant on, say, rites of passage were therefore lost on embarkation on the slave ships, and with them many traditional skills in the ownership of the enslaved. This lost connection with tribal communities in Africa has become an ontological feature in African Caribbean and other diasporic life-worlds (Mintz and Price 1976; McEvilly 1976). Oliver (1969) in his comments on African retentions in the Americas puts it thus,

In spite of a remarkable tradition in West Africa, wood sculpture soon declined and the sculptors, who were also often the smiths, were put to blacksmithing. Only a decorated tool or a strangely formed grave-marker hints at links with Africa (p. 10).

As indicated above, not only do young people from African Caribbean communities not experience the kudos exposure to traditional crafts would afford them in the classroom, they are also required constantly to be immersed in the practices of the majority group and those of other heritages. Diasporic students move in and out of such worlds without fully being part of them (Parker 1992; Hall 1992). The research will therefore seek to establish whether teachers are sensitive to the sense of loss that characterises African Caribbean cultural identities. It will also garner the measures taken by them to reclaim cultural imperatives that are the birthrights of diasporic subjects.

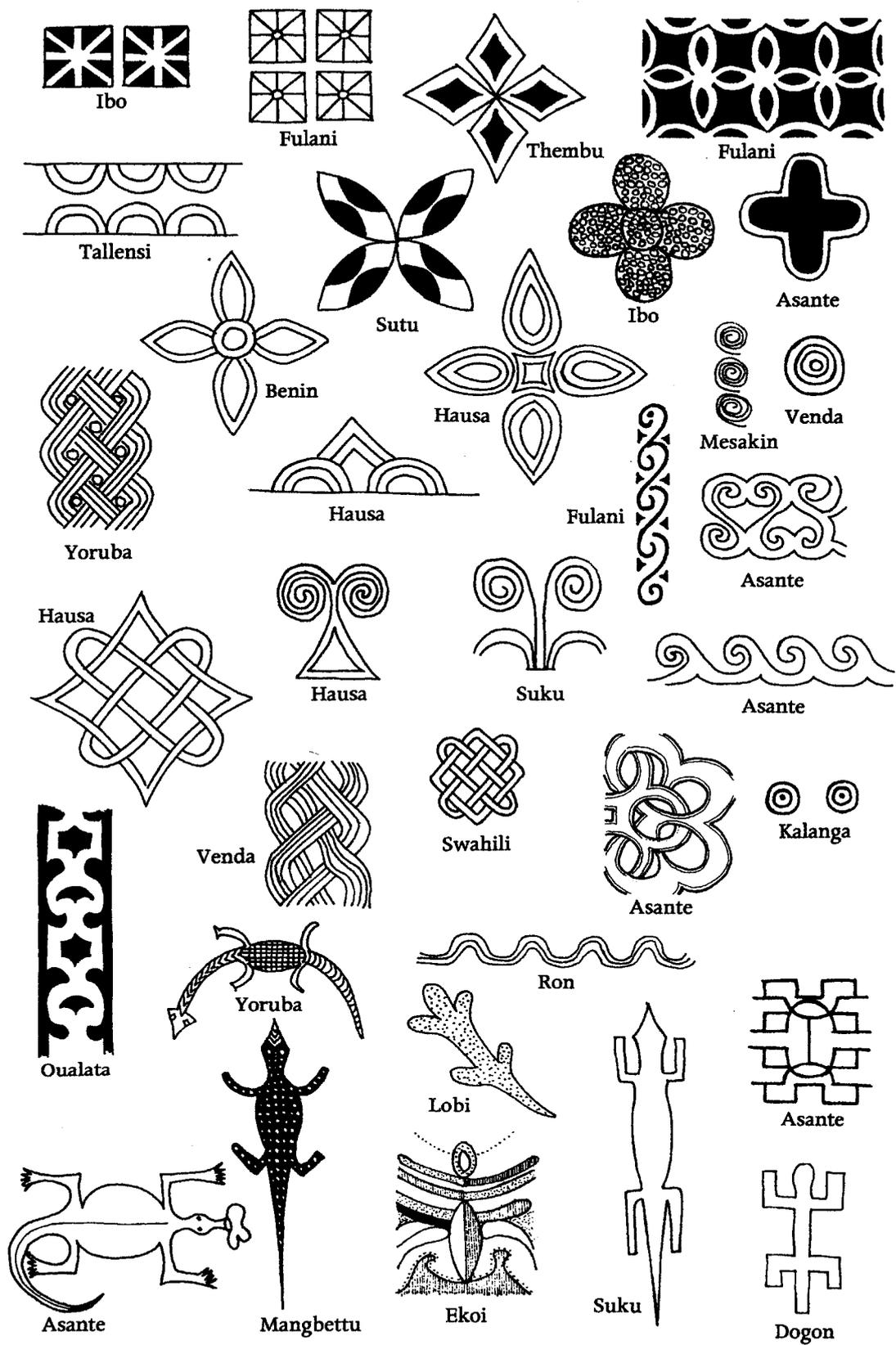


Figure 4 African symbols

As a corollary to the discourse of re-forging links with Africa, I will look at contemporary practices in art and design to see how the work of present-day African Caribbean and other artists who comment on issues pertinent to African Caribbean peoples' life-worlds, influence teaching and learning in classrooms. Are teachers familiar with such material? Are children being systematically exposed to the practices of artists engaged in issues-based work that problematise discourses of belonging and identity? Are teachers comfortable with the work of artists using materials and concepts at odds with their own experience of art making? Are the practices of present-day African Caribbean, African and other artists offering teachers and school students a new and meaningful way into the study of representation in respect to the black subject?

### **1.8 Question 3**

*In their teaching, how are teachers more effectively acknowledging and celebrating Diaspora contributions to the Western mainstream?*

As I argue below the Western world has been shaped by the enslavement of African peoples (Moura 1999; Hall 1992; Dash 2005). The manifold ways in which lives in the West have been enriched by the slave trade, has yet to be properly acknowledged in education and other contexts (Drayton 2005; Moura 1999; Williams 1964; Patton 1998; Michael Burke, BBC 2007). Taking the city of Bath as an example I have argued previously (Dash 2000) that the labour of the enslaved in the Caribbean and North America contributed directly to

the realisation of Bath as an elegant and significant British city. It is therefore apparent that diasporic people are more than a victimised group, stripped of many allegiances with a past that otherwise define them. Yet, they are key contributors to the process of social and economic construction in the West (Cohen 1997). This process of re-creation started from the moment they were thrown together with people from other tribes and nations, aboard the slave ships off the coast of Africa (Mintz and Price (1976). Diasporic presences in the West have impacted, too, on the mainstream culture in ways that have reshaped it (Moura 1999; Efland et al 1996; Williams 1964). Bygott (1992) offers examples of British dependence on the cheap labour of enslaved Africans, for their financial and social well-being,

Banks and finance houses grew rich from the fees and interest they earned from merchants who borrowed money for their long voyages. Those who financed slaving expeditions and ran plantations with slaves included MPs and Mayors of London, Liverpool and Bristol, as well as families such as Baring and Barclay, names still famous in financial circles today (p.19).

As such the Diaspora subject has contributed to the identity formation of those with whom they have come into contact in the West, including their erstwhile oppressors (Bhabha 1994; Hall 1992; Erickson and Young 2002). I will therefore argue that in the same way that the descendants of UK peasant farmers who laboured for long hours to feed the British nation, and miners who toiled in shocking conditions to produce the coal that fired the industrial revolution can claim a stake in UK society, the descendants of the African enslaved have similar rights. This challenge to notions of home and belonging grounded in geographical affiliation, has an echo in present-day postmodern theories of identity (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996; Rogoff, 2000;

Cohen 1997). Clifford (1997) in highlighting the search for adequate descriptors of cultural hybridization, describes the chaos attendant on it,

An unruly crowd of descriptive/interpretive terms now jostle and converse in an effort to characterize the contact zones of nations, cultures, and regions: terms such as "border," "travel," "creolization," "transculturation," "hybridity," and "diaspora" (as well as the looser "diasporic (p.245)").

In identifying diasporic influences one therefore has to see the way cultures shift, become amorphous and are constantly in the process of recreating themselves (Hall 1997; also Clifford 1997). The task for the teacher is to show how this is done as it has implications for identity formation and the way we position diasporic peoples, both in history and in the present-day world. This work will therefore seek to establish the strategies teachers are using to demonstrate to African Caribbean children that they have a true stake in this society as the descendants of historical contributors to its wealth and identity.

### **1.9 Summary**

This chapter mapped the key concern of the thesis. It demonstrated that Caribbean cultural identities, as a result of the slave trade, are amorphous: they cannot be reduced to a specific cultural lineage. The lack of a firm cultural anchorage, normally emblematised in a network of codes, myths (Hall 1997; Barthes) and iconic referents, places the African diasporic subject at a disadvantage relative to other groups in school art and design classrooms. Teachers grounded in practices that look to the interpretation of historical events from a narrow culturally-based perspective, are stymied by access to

the clearly identifiable material that can enable recognition of the Caribbean 'presence' to take place. Under-representation creates a gap in the curriculum that signals a lack. To address the concerns and questions raised by this imbalance, the research involves two clear dimensions. There is the need to explore theoretical issues relating to identity and pedagogy, and secondly a programme of research was carried out to explore the attitudes and practices of art teachers and the learning through art of pupils of African Caribbean origin.

## Chapter 2 - The process of gap

The elision of identity in these tropes of the 'secret art of invisibleness' ... is not an ontology of lack that, on its other side, becomes a nostalgic demand for a liberatory, non-repressed identity. It is the uncanny space and time *between* those two moments of being, their incommensurable differences – if such a place can be imagined – signified in the process of repetition, that give the evil eye or missing person their meaning ... Their poetic and political force develops through a certain strategy of duplicity or doubling (not resemblance in Barthes's sense), which Lacan has elaborated as 'the process of gap' within which the relation of subject to object is produced (Bhabha, 1994 p. 53).

### Foreword

I visualise this section as a polo-mint, the mint with the hole. The key property in the polo-mint, apart from its taste and reputation for refreshing the consumer is its shape, more especially, the hole in the middle. The mint itself is gritty hard matter. This hard surround, which isolates an empty space, I liken in this section to the mapping of the diasporic condition. In other words, the gritty matter is the theorising, which unlike the uniform sameness of the mint is patchy, textured, sometimes visual, often conceptual and contrasting in its form. Far from being mere empty space, the hole in the middle, is more akin to a Black Hole. It is subject simultaneously to the pull and push of centrifugal and centripetal forces: things can get hurt in there. Its intense magnetic pull twists and distorts, at times it can almost be referred to as heavy matter. This much beaten upon centre is the identity of the diasporan. The hole in the middle is the lack of representation, the invisibility of the diasporic subject.

## **2.1 Defining the diasporic presence in the West**

The review of the background to African Caribbean diasporic identities is structured in four sub-sections. I adopted this strategy to give four viewpoints on African Caribbean student invisibility. As indicated, it is not a standard literature review but an attempt to provide different background strands to the diasporic state. The chapter deals with theory which addresses the four sections and forms the background to the research. It problematises the issue of diasporic lack or 'invisibility' in the West, which is located as I see it in Lacan's notion of 'the process of gap (1977, p. 206).' The chapter starts by reflecting on the memory of 'Africa that is no longer there (Hall 1997, in Woodward, p. 55)', the 'inner expropriation' which 'cripples and deforms', creating in Fanon's vivid phrase, '... individuals without an anchor, without horizon, colourless, stateless, rootless (Hall in Woodward 1997, p.53).' It draws attention to the artefacts produced, the craft skills practised within African communities at the time of the rupture that was the slave trade. From this it briefly deals with the kidnap of the enslaved and transportation to the Americas. The memoirs of Olaudah Equiano, the enslaved diarist, are quoted to provide an indication of the realities of capture to the individual victim of enslavement.

The material then explores the diasporic subject's settlement in the New World, in particular the means by which the enslaved and their descendants had to adapt to new life conditions as degraded beings. African continuities and the emergence of new syncretic practices by the enslaved then provide

the focus of the writing. The text starts with practices of the enslaved in communities that have clear connections with traditional African mores. Key to this is an account of the arts and crafts of Maroon communities of Surinam and practices generated by the people of Haiti, the first nation in the Caribbean to proclaim its independence from a colonial power. I also look at African-like continuities in toy making in the Caribbean and the wonderful structures erected by enslaved peoples on the Melrose plantation in Georgia, that draw on traditional African design.

The theorising of the Barbadian poet, historian and scholar Kamau Brathwaite and the Trinidadian historian and thinker C.L.R. James are at this juncture put in dialectical opposition. Their contrasting views on cultural belonging, is the springboard for enquiry into African Caribbean links with traditions of making in Africa and Europe. Emerging from this is a sub-section that directly explores diasporic connections with Europe. It posits the question, how can we map African Caribbean identity without taking into account our historic social, economic and political links with Europe? The study demonstrates the centrality of slave labour to the well-being of the British nation in the days of enslavement and the foundation that cheap labour laid for the growth of British commerce. It problematises the notion of spatialization or in this case, the meshing of identities with contexts beyond a geographic, natal site of identity.

The work moves into an exploration of notions of boundary formation, the

means by which we create barriers of difference through cultural and historical markers. It looks in particular at the signs of difference that were used to separate the enslaved from their oppressors. Such markers, described here as boundaries and lines of demarcation, are problematised to establish the way discrimination works, its rationale vis-à-vis the positioning of the black figure in Western cultural spaces. The issue of the black body as a signifier is addressed, while history as a discourse is also interrogated. Dennis Atkinson provides the theoretical framework for an exploration of cultural signs. Issues of race and representation are interrogated. Marxism is problematised as a political system in respect to the representation of the black subject and this theme is further analysed through the writings of other experts in the field. To achieve this, the chapter, as indicated, is arranged in four sub-sections, namely,

Sub-section 1: *Traditions of practice*

Sub-section 2: *Theorising the effects of the rupture; the dialectics of cultural origins, identity and the ontology of diasporic peoples*

Sub-section 3. *Representation and Belonging: the dialectic of the UK Centre*

Sub-section 4: *The politics and history of the image of the black body*

## **2.2 Sub-section 1: Traditions of practice**

This sub-section is intended to provide a snapshot of the cultural environments from which many enslaved peoples were taken; their later

settlement in the New World as forced labour and the traditional practices they managed to retain in the Caribbean and North American contexts. To achieve this, evidence taken from ethnographers and anthropologists who specialize in African civilizations and cultures, alongside the writings of Western visitors to Africa during the days of African enslavement are referenced. I write about ancient artefacts found in Ife and Benin that have been carbon dated to the end of the first millennium. This is intended to demonstrate the depth and quality of art skills that are the inheritance of peoples south of the Sahara. I then look at the trauma of enslavement through the eyes of Olaudah Equiano, the former slave who wrote of his experience of kidnap and transportation. An analysis of African traditional craft-based retentions in the New World provides much of the focus in the second part of this sub-section.

### **2.2.1 A first acquaintance with African traditions of making**

The sub-section sets out to demonstrate the economic and cultural wealth in many African communities at the time of the arrival of Western explorers to the continent. In particular it demonstrates the craft skills developed by them. To do so I make reference to Nigerian ironworks and the views and writing of travelers and experts in the field of African studies. The material briefly highlights the achievements of Benin and Ife artists in bronze and terracotta. It draws then on the writing of Olaudah Equiano in providing some indication of what it would have been like for many people who were kidnapped and taken as slaves to the New World.

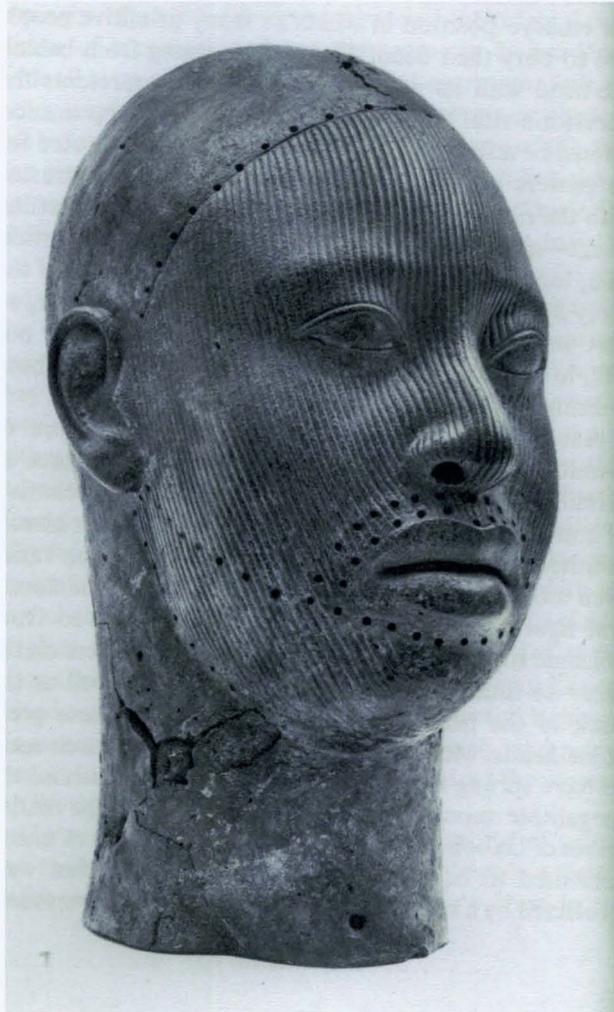
### 2.2.2 A visit to the Museum of Mankind

Much has been done in recent years to reveal the hidden histories of African civilisations (Davidson 1966; Ali Muserwi 1986; Mintz and Price 1976; Schama 2005). DuBois (1971) quoting other sources in his speculations concerning African priority in the technology of smelting, states:

Boaz says, "It seems likely that at a time when the European was still satisfied with rude stone tools, the African had invented or adopted the art of smelting iron. Consider for a moment what this invention has meant for the advance of the human race... It seems not unlikely that the people who made the marvellous discovery of reducing iron ores by smelting were the African Negroes. Neither ancient Europe, nor ancient western Asia, nor ancient China knew the iron, and everything points to its introduction from Africa ... (pp.470-71)."

In a similar vein, exhibition notes accompanying *Man and Metals in Ancient Nigeria*, a 1991 British Museum exhibition on the working of metals in Nigeria, confirms the presence of such technologies in the sub-Saharan region centuries before European colonisation of the continent. It was postulated in the literature that, 'While more research is needed to confirm the Nigerian origin of the Igbo-Ukwu metals, it seems increasingly likely that this technology was devised wholly in Africa (Unpublished exhibition notes, '*Man and Metals in Ancient Nigeria*', 1991).' Benin artists utilised this local expertise to produce powerful bronze reliefs and freestanding sculptures. Examples of their work can be seen in several museums in this country, among them the British Museum where several pieces, among them bas reliefs and intricately worked sculpted heads, are held. These straightforward representational portraits are of exquisite quality, arguably amongst the finest

works of their kind in the world (**Fig. 4**). Terracotta and bronze pieces excavated from sites in Ife, Nigeria, are also in the ownership of the Museum. African skills in working iron and bronze were employed in a wide range of other applications from the production of armour to the casting of jewellery and cutlery, the forging of swords, spears and other weapons of war (Spring 1993). Similarly impressive craft skills were used in weaving and related textile arts.



**Figure 5 12<sup>th</sup> century bronze head from Ife in Nigeria**

W.E.B. DuBois (in Lester, J. 1971) quotes Barth on the craft skills of the Hottentots and Ashantis, and gives a clearer indication of the breadth of manufacturing industry in Africa at the height of the slave trade:

In the dressing of skins and furs, as well as in the plaiting of cords and the weaving of mats, we find evidences of their workmanship. In addition they are good workers in iron and copper, using the sheepskin bellows for this purpose. The Ashantis of the Gold Coast know how to make "cotton fabric, turn and glaze earthenware, forge iron, fabricate instruments and arms, embroider rugs and carpets, and set gold and precious stones." Among the people of the banana zone we find rough basket work, coarse pottery, grass cloth, and spoons made of wood and ivory. The people of the millet zone, because of uncertain agricultural resources, quite generally turn to manufacturing. Charcoal is prepared by the smiths, iron is smelted, and numerous implements are manufactured. Among them we find axes, hatches, hoes, knives, shields, and water and oil vessels are made from leather which the natives have dressed. Soap is manufactured in the Bautschi district, glass is made, formed and colored by the people of Nupeland, and in almost every city cotton is spun and woven and dyed. Barth tells us that the weaving of cotton was known in the Sudan as early as the eleventh century. There is also extensive manufacture of wooden ware, tools, implements, and utensils (p. 468).

The wadded clothing seen by Barth represented a small selection of a wide range of textile products. Indeed the breadth of organisation and trade that supported manufacturing industry was far-reaching. Whilst not wanting to glorify war in any form, I think it is important that children are made aware of the technologies, craftsmanship and social organisation that supported the production of such artefacts. African skills in metalwork challenge the notion that Africans south of the Sahara are incapable of devising complex technologies without massive outside assistance. It also highlights the cultural dilemma of African Caribbean pupils who, as a result of misguided teaching, even where teaching on Africa is taking place, would probably regard such items as wholly in the ownership of the tribal communities that

produced them. Children should instead be made aware that many important cultural items were produced in about the tenth century, and would therefore have been made several centuries before Europeans first arrived in the Americas. Adu-Poku (2001) most succinctly describes the significance of African art, in stating that,

The art of Africa is like a great river that runs far, wide and deep. It reaches out and connects with major art forms of many cultures. Understanding its historical, cultural, environmental and its cross-cultural and [sic] functions can enhance multicultural art education (p. 73).

If textile arts and metal work were important to the production of suits of armour in Africa, it is in the coiling of ceramic ware that craftspeople from Nigeria and elsewhere have shown an originality and flair rarely equalled in world pottery. Often made by women, traditional ceramic pots are shaped and worked entirely by hand. They were therefore crafted without the need for tools or equipment such as potters' wheels, wire cutters, knives or pug mills. Ceramic arts rooted in longstanding tribal traditions from Africa have continued in the Caribbean and elsewhere in the Americas (Powell1997; Patton 1998). Locally crafted ceramic ware in Barbados such as Monkey jugs are a remnant of African craft traditions (Walmsley 2003).

Enslaved Africans were removed from environments that gave rise to the production of arts and crafts that met their cultural needs. Transported to the New World, they were required from the outset to re-position themselves as subjects in new demographic formations in which their lives would be played out in harrowing and often brutal contexts (Mintz and Price 1976). This study revisits these early moments of the creation of African identities in

the Americas through the work and voice of noted ethnographers and researchers.

Olaudah Equiano who with his sister was kidnapped and enslaved, speaks (in Edwards, 1967) of his experience as a young man in Benin. In the following passage he shares the pain of forced removal from family and finally separation from his much loved sister,

The next day proved a day of greater sorrow than I had yet experienced, for my sister and I were then separated while we lay clasped in each other's arms. It was in vain that we besought them not to part us; she was torn from me and immediately carried away, while I was left in a state of distraction not to be described (p. 14).

From the moment Equiano and other kidnapped peoples were taken aboard the slavers off the coast of West Africa, they entered a world where traditional values no longer applied. They were shackled with people from different tribes and made to coexist alongside them on the perilous journey across the Atlantic. Far from a culturally unified labouring class, as many perceive them, we see a splintered heterogeneous group who spoke different languages, worshipped different gods and adhered to different life principles (Mintz and Price, 1976; Edwards 1967). They were as different from each other as Germans are from Frenchmen, the Spanish from the Welsh (Grisby (1977). The relationships between diasporic peoples on the slave ships, therefore, apart from the trauma of their kidnap and forced transportation, must have been challenging as they lacked the shared experience of homogeneous communities.

In the New World settings enslaved craftsmen and women worked in iron, wood, gourd shells, clay and other materials. Their skills were utilised by their enslavers in myriad ways, most especially to increase personal fortunes (Patton 1998; see also Moura 1999). Many produced furniture, built homes, worked iron and demonstrated high skills in other materials to enhance the quality of life for their masters. High quality cabinets and other artefacts produced by African slaves and their descendants can today be found in museums, auction houses and private homes in the United States, the UK, the Caribbean and elsewhere (Brathwaite 2001). According to Patton (1998),

Among the highly valued slaves were male carpenters and carpenter-joiners and blacksmiths. They built the vast majority of plantation structures, especially the service buildings, often the main house, including the architectural ornamentation: fireplace mantel, window-frame mouldings and newel-posts. They provided the decorative ironwork and puttywork classical motifs, plants or flower garlands, to adorn the fireplace mantels and ceiling borders (p. 35).

Such diasporic contributions to Western life-styles remind us of the centrality of the enslaved to the life-worlds they inhabited. Lacking adequate records of what they achieved, or a determination on the part of those in positions of authority to celebrate them, their longstanding contributions to American culture remain largely unacknowledged (Brathwaite 2001; Aguilar and Emanoel 2000; Bygott 1992; Congdon-Martin 1990; Gall 2002). I will now briefly focus on cultural retentions in Haiti and the Surinam 'bush', two largely marginalised areas in the American hemisphere.

### 2.2.3 The Maroons of Surinam

The Maroons of Surinam are the descendants of slaves who escaped captivity in 1667 when the British gave the colony over to the Dutch, in what became known as the treaty of Breda. They founded self-governing states in the bush that withstood the assaults of their erstwhile captors, devising in their communities cultural patterns modelled on African village life (Dark 1970). Maroon religious and domestic artefacts are clear indicators of the close ties that these people have with their African past (See also Thompson 1993). Like the Haitians, they engage in elaborate Voodoo<sup>7</sup> ceremonies, practise Obeah<sup>8</sup> and worship spirits that have roots in African religions (see also Kahn, M. 1936 a; Kahn 1936 b; Kahn 1929; Price 1979). In the retention of African mores, the acquisition of new skills, the syncretization with indigenous Amerindian cultures and the fusion of disparate African traditions, they are, to the anthropologist, a treasure-trove of African remnants and new syncretized aesthetic creations (Thompson 1993). As communities they are also amongst the most artistically productive in the Western world, making a wide range of wood carvings, textile arts and calabash (gourd) decorations while engaging in '... myriad arts of performance (Price and Price: 1980).' A popular theme in their visual art activity is the carved comb, a richly ornate design of Afro comb (Fig. 5). This type of implement can be found throughout Africa and the Diaspora but Maroon designs are complex and highly symbolic. Some are

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<sup>7</sup> More information is provided on this below.

<sup>8</sup> As stated in the Concise Oxford Dictionary, Obeah is 'a kind of sorcery practised especially in the Caribbean'.

worked with interlocking snakes, crocodiles and other fauna. Others are fantastical, taking on the appearance of gargoyle and siren imagery. Treatment of form demonstrates a sophisticated awareness of contrasting values: long teeth sit below heavier interlocking animal forms, which are in turn juxtaposed with well-considered spatial gaps and so on (Dark 1970).

In 1997 I did some research on Maroon artefacts held in museum collections in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. There was at one institution a large-scale exhibition of Maroon *objet d'art* but the curator presented the work as a collection of ethnographic curios rather than serious artwork, thereby placing the pieces outside the realm of serious artistic activity. Wilson (1993) commented on curatorial practices in Western museums vis-à-vis the artistic productions of autochthonous subjects, asserting that,

When exhibited as ethnographic specimens, roped off, organised by function or size, and identified by labels such as 'ceramic object, late 20th century', expressive objects lost their individuality and their link with their creator. (p. 76)

(see also Wilson 1992 and Barringer and Flynn 1998). Some museums I visited house extensive displays of artwork from Indonesia that sometimes fill several rooms on different floors. Whilst appreciating the inherent richness of Indonesian visual art and culture and the need for a large space in which to display it, I am perplexed by the coyness on the part of museum directors to make more of what I consider a rich and important African diasporic resource. Teachers engaged in pedagogies involving critical studies in art and design education could critique museum curatorial policy to throw new light on issues of display and representation (See also Golding 1999; Barringer and

Flynn 1998; Grigsby 1977; Mason 1995).



**Figure 6 Carved combs from the Aucaner tribe in Surinam**

#### **2.2.4 Haitian Art**

Sharing similar experiences of retention and rejection as the Maroons, the people of Haiti have devised social structures that enable their society to develop independently of European and North American influences. After a protracted war against Napoleon's army which ended in defeat for the French in 1804, they, under the leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture, proclaimed their independence, becoming the second independent state in the Western hemisphere (Williams, E. 1964). However, military success, led to rejection and isolation from the West (James 1980; Knight 1990). According to

Sheldon Williams, (1969):

Napoleon like many other great generals before and since, accepted his enforced retreat with bad grace. In a show of pique, he withdrew all the Christian missionaries from Haiti. In this way, the island was not only politically isolated, it was also put out of touch with Western culture in its most traditional colonial form - the church (pp.xii-xiv).

In that state of isolation, the people of Haiti retained many ties with African traditions, particularly in their patterns of socialising and in religious practices (Thompson 1993). The Cult of Voodoo<sup>9</sup> which was derived from the West African religion of Vodun (Dark 1954), is of particular significance to any appreciation of Haitian culture (Williams 1969). Haitian art owes much of its character and uniqueness to the way the people of that country have had to find their own solutions to artistic, religious and other concerns (see also Hurbon 1993). Though most of the Haitian population is thought to follow the Catholic faith, one hundred per cent is said to believe in Voodoo. This strong adherence to an African faith has informed and given shape to one of the most extraordinary contemporary artistic developments in the western hemisphere.

Haitians practise their art as people in Africa make music: it is a communal activity. Whether driven by political intrigue, given expression in a mural or

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<sup>9</sup> According to the New Oxford Dictionary, Voodoo is a 'black religious cult practised in the Caribbean and the southern US, combining elements of Roman Catholic ritual with traditional African rites and characterised by sorcery and spirit possession.'

painted at an easel in celebration of the power of a Loa<sup>10</sup>, their art is an articulate communion between equals, a language that sits outside Western concerns for aesthetic values mediated by the elite (Williams, S. 1969). This demystification of artistic production: the removal of art-making from the domain of 'high' culture to that of the commonplace and the plebeian, is, to my mind a refreshing feature of Haitian art. It is at one with creative practice in Africa, in which artistic production is in the ownership of the masses. As such it should have a special resonance for children in our classrooms who naturally take to communal activity. In the next sub-section I will demonstrate how African visual traditions, particularly in the use of recycled materials in toy-making, are being perpetuated not just in Haiti but elsewhere in the Caribbean.

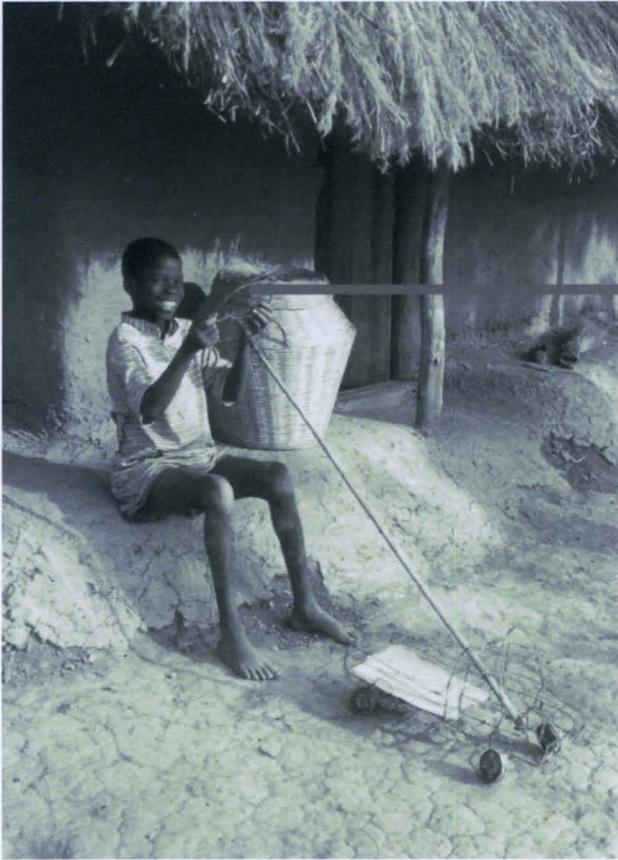
### **2.2.5 Children's toys**

The propensity to use scrap material in the production of utensils and aesthetic artefacts is intrinsic to African art everywhere (Kwame 1996; Carrington 1996; Dash 1996).<sup>11</sup> Whether in the construction of briefcases the manufacture of footwear or the production of musical instruments, African and African diasporic artists and artisans use found materials as a cheap but important resource (Njami 2005) (Fig. 6).

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<sup>10</sup> The New Oxford Dictionary states that 'a Loa is a god in the voodoo cult of Haiti.'

<sup>11</sup> See also Douglas-Camp's *O'goni Bus* project for a modern-day high-art elaboration of the genre.



**Figure 7 A South African boy plays  
with a homemade wire toy**

Toni Morrison in conversation with Paul Gilroy (1993) beautifully describes the centrality of recycling to African and African diasporic art, in suggesting that,

The major things black art has to have are these: it must have the ability to use found objects, the appearance of using found things, and it must look effortless. It must look cool and easy. If it makes you sweat, you haven't done the work. You shouldn't be able to see the seams and stitches. (Morrison in conversation with Gilroy, p.181)

Caribbean young people traditionally make toys that draw on improvisational skills that echo the recycling abilities of African artists and craftspeople. While growing up in Barbados in the 1950s, I saw pull-along toys that were made by other children from scrap wood and metal, very much in the way that African children do today. Many adults made more elaborate and

sophisticated models that they sold to supplement their incomes. Such homemade playthings were designed to carry cane, just like the Bedford trucks that we saw on the high road. Their bodywork were constructed from recycled timber and flattened out tin cans. Wheels were fashioned from boot polish tins and finished with bottle cap hubs. The invention of the steel pan, an instrument made from discarded oil drums found near the oil fields of Trinidad, is arguably the most celebrated example of this aesthetic.<sup>12</sup>

Allied to working with recycled materials, people in Africa have traditionally utilised natural resources for building. Elaborately worked mud mosques, straw dwellings and even churches hewn from solid stone feature in African architecture (Higgins, 1994, **(Fig. 7)**). However the use of earth as a material for building has traditionally been projected as an indicator of African primitiveness and lack of sophistication (see Boime for an outline of the way stereotypes of Africans as backward and primitive under-girded their exploitation during the slave trade). As a consequence, Africans in the Diaspora have regarded traditional African architecture with suspicion and embarrassment. Yet, apart from being perfectly suited to their function in the African environment, some mud structures are among the most hauntingly

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<sup>12</sup> Steel pans are an original Caribbean instrument with a distinctive sound. The instrument was invented in the mid-twentieth century in the oil producing state of Trinidad and Tobago. Discarded oil drums were salvaged by local people who heated the bases over a hot flame to make them soft and pliable. These were then skilfully beaten with special hammers to create a concave surface into which the notes were punched with a blunt metal tool.

beautiful, effectively insulated, economical and environmentally friendly structures in the world (Higgins 1994; see also Denyer 1978).



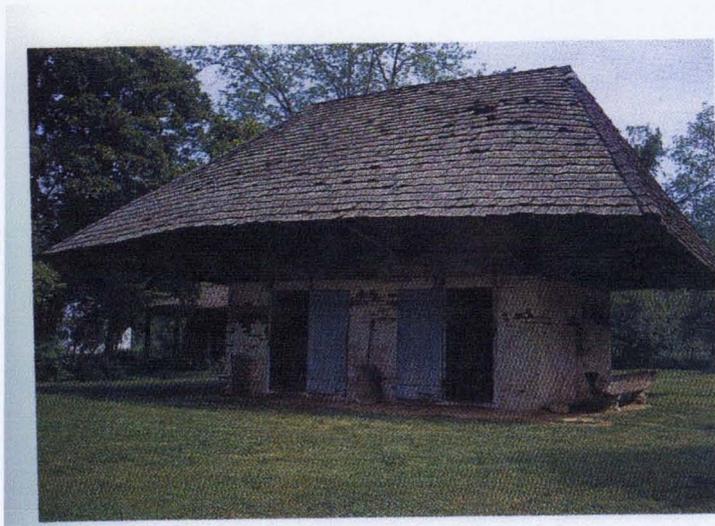
**Figure 8 1904 Djenne Mosque in Mali**

### **2.2.6 Natchitoches, Louisiana**

Enslaved African builders and architectural designers took many of their traditional skills in building construction and design to the Americas. Though operating at the behest of white slave 'owners', many utilised design features and building methods from Africa in the structures that they erected. The Melrose Plantation, Natchitoches, Louisiana is an example of enslaved people's ingenuity in the use of building materials. Sharon Patton (1998) indicates that the main African house on the plantation was built from,

... local materials: cypress and palmetto from the yucca tree ... at ground level the construction is of whitewashed soft bricks, supported on which is a loft made with timbers filled in with moss, mud and deer hair (p.33).

Melrose was owned by Marie Therese (1742 - 1816), a former slave whose parents were born in Africa (ibid p. 32). She established the 'Yucca plantation (later renamed Melrose plantation by new owners in the 1870s) along the Cane River (ibid p.32).' As in many traditional African buildings, there is in these structures an imaginative use of line, mass and space that are at once practical and poetic. The huge overhanging roof juxtaposed with the delicately designed soft brick structure with its pleasing door and window perforations, invests the *African House* with a unique charm and poetic simplicity that presages many modern and postmodern designs in America, Europe and elsewhere. Children of African Caribbean origin should be introduced to such diasporic achievements. As with body culture, they show a practical resistance to enslavement through refined creativity.



**Figure 9 A slave-built house on the Natchitoches estate**

### **2.2.7 Summary**

This sub-section provided an indication of the institutions and societal norms from which many enslaved peoples were taken. The biographical writing of Olaudah Equiano poignantly illustrated the specifics of enslavement on the individual. Despite the trauma of kidnap and separation from loved ones, enslaved peoples asserted their dignity and their humanity in extraordinary ways. The sub-section also demonstrated the craft skills of enslaved peoples in different communities in the Western world and the importance of such abilities to the well-being of the slave masters. But rebel communities also functioned and expressed their subjectivity in the isolated worlds they inhabited. Their example offers new perspectives on civilisations in the West. The material showed how African continuities occur in such spaces but also in activities such as children's toy making. Melrose Plantation Museum at Natchitoches in Louisiana was seen as a site of special interest because of the clear links there with African traditions in building.

### **2.3 Sub-section 2: Theorising the effects of the rupture; the dialectics of cultural origins, identity and the ontology of diasporic peoples**

This sub-section looks at notions of cultural rootedness in the theorising of two key diasporic thinkers. It starts with a short quotation from the Barbadian poet and historian Kamau Brathwaite who talks about the importance knowledge of the past, to the well being of the subject. The discourse of ruins as concrete history and metaphor for cultural continuities is explored. Cultural origins and heritage are seen in the context of history and tradition. To this end the writing of Foucault and

Badiou are referenced. Brathwaite's views are set in dialectical opposition to those of CLR James. Their positions offer contradictory perspectives on where diasporic subjects can culturally locate themselves. The views of other thinkers are referenced in support of their positions.

### **2.3.1 Brathwaite and James in dialectical opposition**

Kamau Brathwaite (1970), the Barbados-born poet and historian, acknowledges the challenges that separation from long-standing heritages in Africa poses for diasporic people and their creativity,

Most of us, coming from islands, where there was no evident loss of civilization – where, in fact, there was an 'absence of ruins', faced a real artistic difficulty in our search for origins. The seed and root of our concern had little material soil to nourish it (pp. 46- 47)

In other words, 'ruins' for Brathwaite, meaning cultural history, the seedbed of creativity, is the material soil that should provide nourishment for diasporan artists. As such diasporic peoples as cultural orphans, are denied the 'seed and root' of that which should feed their art. Nobel Prize winner Derek Walcott (1992) in his acceptance speech to the Nobel Committee, affirms the lack of ruins in Caribbean cultural life in stating that,

The sigh of history rises over the ruins, not over landscapes, and in the Antilles there are few ruins to sigh over, apart from the ruins of sugar estates and abandoned forts.

Guyanese writer Wilson Harris (1973) reveals similar concerns in alluding to the bareness imposed on diasporic peoples by the enslavement of their ancestors,

What is the position that the West Indian artist occupies? He lives in a comparatively bare world ... where the monumental architecture of the old world is the exception rather than the rule (p.13).

Brathwaite implies that the inability to draw on such longstanding legacies seriously impairs the ability of the African Diaspora visual artist to make artwork of profound significance. This in contradistinction to the poets, dancers and musicians whose art is rooted in patterns and rhythms carried in the 'traces' of the tribal past of the enslaved and sustained by practise, furtive or overt, in the slave huts and now on the streets of Kingston, Rio de Janeiro, New Orleans and elsewhere. The act of tapping out rhythmic patterns if only for idle play, the reiteration of the rhythmic cadences in communal work songs, the impromptu jigs that erupted in fields and backyards are the conceptual 'ruins' in which rhythmic 'memories' were retained. Hall (1995) acknowledges this in stating that,

First, and especially with respect to the populations that had been enslaved, the retention of old customs, the retention of cultural traits from Africa; customs and traditions which were retained in and through slavery, in plantation, in religion, partly in language, in folk customs, in music, in dance, in all those forms of expressive culture which allowed men and women to survive the trauma of slavery (p.7).

Oliver (1969) confirms how such traces, unlike the production of artefacts, were condoned by enslavers and in the process unwittingly supporting the survival of some traditions of the enslaved,

Though his tribal identity had been destroyed, if his skills could be channelled into effort that was to the advantage of the slave-owner, they had a chance to survive. This applied to the traditional leader-and-chorus songs which accompanied group work in Africa. Other traditions were expressly forbidden, as in Mississippi where the Black Code laid down that slaves should not play drums or horns – instruments which could be used for codes and communication purposes as they had in Africa, and which could be used to incite insurrection (pp. 9-10).

From such continuities have emerged calypso, reggae, jazz, samba, break-dancing and rock and roll. It could also be argued that the reciting of folk tales and tribal fables (Bygott 1992) has nurtured the strong traditions in poetry and prose that today characterise diasporic writing, leading to the towering achievements of Walcott, Brathwaite, Morrison and Hughes. The materiality of Brathwaite's construct of ruins is also a metaphor for culture as an historical marker.

Foucault (1979) reminds us of the importance of history in laying the foundations for identities to emerge,

History, as we know it, is certainly the most erudite, the most aware, the most conscious, and possibly the most cluttered area of our memory; but it is equally the depths from which all beings emerge into their precarious, glittering existence (p. 219).

From these statements it could be argued that the march of history is enmeshed with the presence of ruins. History is memory and as such ruins are memory rendered tangible. This has crucial implications for the creative artist in any sphere and at any level. Rituals and organisational structures become the ruins, the essential details in the creative process that lead to authenticity and notional 'Truth' in a work, 'the depths from which all beings emerge into their precarious, glittering existence.' Barthes (1991) made reference to this when he wrote of the grain of the voice that is integral to the singing of artists who speak not just for themselves but for a whole nation. He uses the example of the traditional Russian bass, encapsulated in whose voice is,

... something which is directly the singer's body, brought by one and the same movement to your ear from the depths of the body's cavities, the muscles the membranes, the cartilage, and from the depths of the Slavonic language, as if a single skin lined the performer's inner flesh and the music he sings. This voice is not personal: it expresses nothing about the singer, about his soul; it is not original (all Russian basses have this same voice, more or less), and at the same time it is individual: it enables us to hear a body which, of course, has no public identity, no "personality," but which is nonetheless a separate body; and above all this voice directly conveys the symbolic, over and above the intelligible, the expressive: here, flung before us all in a heap, is the Father, his phallus. That is what the "grain" would be: the materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue ... what I have called signifying [significance] (p. 270).

Bob Marley's music captures the grain of Jamaican culture. Through it pulses the texture and rhythm, the hopes and fears of Jamaican life. For this reason Marley's fans around the world resonate with his music – they sense its authenticity. But Jamaica is in the Caribbean and Marley was of part African ancestry. One might therefore ask, does this not prove that African Jamaicans as dispossessed peoples have established their own genius outside the grain of longstanding African civilisations? As I argue above, music in the diaspora survived the brutal censorship of the slave master, retaining many of the rhythmic patterns and organisational features inherent to traditional African sound. It is precisely because this taproot, with the admixture of New World influences, has not been severed, that a vibrant and distinctive Jamaican music has emerged. Historical traditions, therefore, furnish the 'depths' to which Foucault refers and can add weight to the creative process. The day-to-day rituals that shape the life of the Benin or Ibo subject are the ontological ruins that position their lives within a cultural framework that gives them meaning. Many of these anchors are missing from the historical memory, the day-to-day habits of the diasporic visual artist.

C.L.R. James (1985) in conversation with Kofi Buenor Hadjor held an oppositional viewpoint from Brathwaite on the cultural inheritance of the diasporic subject. In confirming diasporic disconnectedness from African traditions, James located their creative and cultural origins in western civilisations,

I do not know what are the African roots of the language and culture of Caribbean intellectuals. I am not aware of the African roots of my use of the language and culture. I pay a lot of respect to Africa. I have been there many times. I have spoken to many Africans. I have read their literature. But we of the Caribbean have not got an African past. We are Black in skin, but the African civilization is not ours. The basis of our civilization in the Caribbean is an adaptation of Western civilization (Shaw, 1985, p. 19).

Unlike many Caribbean intellectuals (Nettleford, 1978; Brathwaite 1970; Glissant 1989), James appears to be saying that African Caribbean people, despite their African ancestry, are intrinsically European in the way they give expression to their lived experience and aesthetic sense. Gilroy (1993) in his analysis of *The Souls of Black Folk* shows how W.E.B. Du Bois, shared James's viewpoint. He highlighted,

Du Bois's desire to demonstrate the internal situation of blacks, firmly locked inside the modern world that their coerced labour had made possible. To this end he carefully displayed a complete familiarity with the cultural legacy of Western civilisation. He claimed access to it as a right for the race as a whole, and produced a text that demonstrated how he regarded this legacy as his own personal property (p.121).

Despite his alignment with European traditions, James betrays a concern that diasporic artists may not reach 'full development and towering efflorescence' (p.19) presumably because of the lack of 'ownership' of the aura that informs western artistic activity (Benjamin 1999).

### **2.3.2 Summary**

This section focused on the discourse of diasporic connectivity to an ancient past and the implications of such rootedness to the creative process. It posits two related questions, can the diaspora subject realistically re-forge links with Africa or should he/she assert a claim to a full part in Western civilisations? These issues are of key importance as the direction taken in addressing them could determine the rationale for diasporic life-worlds. In the next part of this section, 'Race, Representation and Belonging: the dialectic of the UK Centre,' I will open this debate to address issues of diasporic representation in the UK.

### **2.4 Sub-Section 3 - Race, Representation and Belonging: the dialectic of the UK Centre**

This section addresses the issue of diasporic connectivity to the European Centre. It posits the viewpoint that diasporic identities, as fluid formations, cross psychic and geographic boundary lines of demarcation. Most especially the European Centre by the forced and in the post-slavery contexts, the voluntary contributions of diasporic peoples to the welfare of the West, is in the shared ownership of the diasporan. This construct of diasporic identity formation and rootedness is argued through the art practice of Ingrid Pollard, the discursive writing of Irit Rogoff (2000) and other experts in the field. I make reference to Bath Abbey, the historical records there of managers of empire and the importance of that national resource to the cultural and historic memory of the diasporic subject.

### 2.4.1 Pollard's photography

The Guyanese born British photographer, Ingrid Pollard, in a number of photographic series explores the theme of the diasporic subject's connectedness to the European centre. In the collection *Hidden Histories, Heritage Stories* (1994)<sup>13</sup>, Pollard reveals how the images were taken 'in the northern part of the Lee Valley, where fresh water streams and rivers criss-cross one another and join the river (Postcards Home 2004. p. 64).' A stretch of canal was drained. Pollard used the histories revealed by that activity as a metaphor for the hidden presences of diasporic peoples in the making of modern Britain. As she puts it,

When the water recedes, hidden things are revealed ... The leisure industry dominates the surface but there's all this other stuff underneath, hidden, which is the story of the valley. As the river system is developed for leisure, the industrial history is masked although you can still see tomatoes growing in vast greenhouses, redundant flour mills and idle gravel extraction plants. It's there and it's not there; you pass by, looking at tomatoes, looking at history. You don't have to go very far below the surface to get at the past and how the people lived in that valley. It's a kind of cultural archaeology (p.64).

Not only is the text a metaphor for hidden histories but it is also a reminder of the debt owed by the West to the African enslaved whose labour drove the industrial revolution that generated the wealth that we associate today with western organisation, sophistication and mature polity (Williams, E. 1964; Bygott 1992). Pollard previously engaged these concerns in a series entitled *Wordsworth's Heritage* 1992. In this collection she deploys black subjects in quintessentially *white* geographic spaces where they engage in hiking and

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<sup>13</sup> First exhibited Pickett's Lock, 1994

other related recreational pastimes. In writing of the motivation behind the series, she reflects on,

Going to the Lake District over the years, collecting postcards, deliberately searching out England's timeworn countryside 'the way it's always been', searching the postcard-stand for the card that shows a sunny upland scene with a black person standing, looking over the hills. Never finding it. I fantasize about encountering that image amongst the England of craggy rocks, rushing streams and lowly sheep. Simple stories, simple connections.

There were many Cumbrian 'Lakeland' postcards curling and fading green in the rain, showing Wordsworth's Dove Cottage, Rydale Water, Grasmere, the Langdale Peaks. I placed walkers in these locations, thinking about a heritage that Wordsworth wrote about, looking back to a received heritage and forward to a future inheritance (p. 58).

By positioning her hikers in such contexts Pollard problematises the notion of cultural ownership and belonging. She plays on tensions generated by our predilection for locating black subjects in inner city environments where they are functionally ghettoised, and the sense of order and stasis associated with the *white* inhabited timeworn countryside 'the way it's always been'. But she was really seeking 'simple stories, simple connections' or unseen and unacknowledged narratives woven through the crags and peaks of those spaces: or the story of the black presence in those environments. This insertion of the black other in the 'home' of the British countryside, where they affirm their sense of belonging by donning hiking apparel<sup>14</sup>, a marker in

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<sup>14</sup> The proposed sculpture of Nelson Mandela that many activists have been working to see positioned on the east side of the north terrace in Trafalgar Square would certainly disrupt traditional notions of essence and exclusion associated with that spatial icon. For here, surely, the image of a rebel black man symbolically positioned at the centre of the British Empire, the Other on the inside of power and control, problematizes issues of nation and boundaries in a way not seen before in such symbolic

the hermeneutics of dress of middle-class, white respectability, disrupts the socio/spatial division that connotes white power (Rogoff 2000). By this I reference the withdrawal of many whites to the shire counties in the UK as immigrants, often black, seek accommodation and employment in inner city environments. Pollard's figures are indeed, to follow Lefebvre's (1991) metaphor of the antechamber, occupying 'a space of negotiation between' the absolutist 'royal power' of white British tradition 'and those of lesser status' the descendants of the enslaved 'who are petitioning it (Rogoff 2000, p. 23).' Her hikers, the petitioners of white power, become '... more empowered since they are representing others outside of the space (ibid. p. 23).' The others are more than the sum total of black inhabitants of the UK; they also consist of the memories of generations of diasporans who have been exploited for economic gain. The 'commoners' in her piece are effectively claiming the right of ownership and access to inheritance, the fruit of their ancestors' labours and the right to occupy the space of those that have benefited from that labour. I speak of the British nation emblematised in the countryside, the most hallowed space of identification. In a related series, *Self Evident* (1995), Pollard makes explicit reference to the UK/Caribbean connection. One piece, an image of a black male standing on a gentle incline, encapsulates the underlying message of the series. The figure's gaze is fixed on a distant place as if contemplating a far off shoreline or musing on a private thought, while in his right hand he holds a copy of the establishment

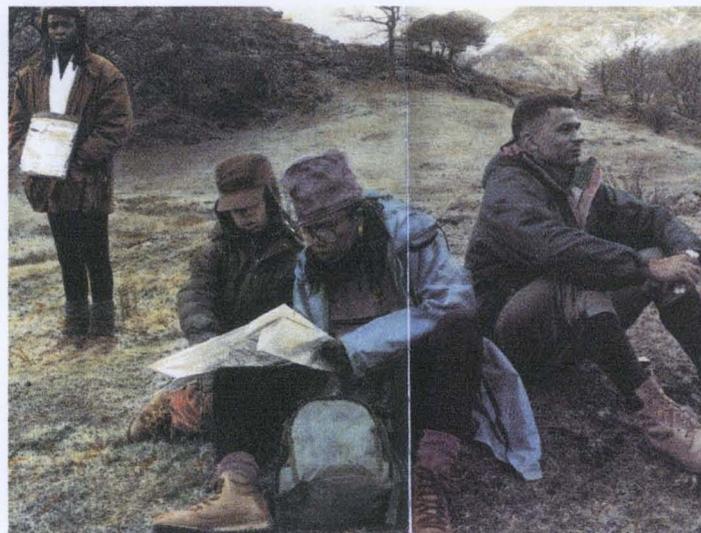
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spaces. Only the sight of a black army colonel leading the parade at trooping the colour would stimulate greater unease.

newspaper *The Times* and in his left two lengths of sugar cane. On seeing this image I think of Clifford's (1997) assertion that,

Large sections of New York City, it is sometimes said, are "parts of the Caribbean," and vice versa ... Diaspora discourses reflect the sense of being part of an ongoing transnational network that includes the homeland not as something simply left behind but as a place of attachment in a contrapuntal modernity (p. 256).

African Caribbean peoples as subjects of multiple diasporisations most clearly confirm that 'separate places become a single community (Clifford 1997, p. 246; see also Kondo, 1996; Sarup 1996).'



**Figure 10 Ingrid Pollard (1992), an image from *Wordsworth's Heritage***

As indicated, the complex relationship between diaspora peoples and the European centre has an echo in Irit Rogoff's (2000) concept of spatialization.

In her theorising,

... space is not understood through the named activity for which it is intended (a tennis court as a place in which the game of tennis is played) or through the titles that its buildings or other solid entities might uphold. Instead an active process of 'spatialization' replaces a

static notion of named spaces and in this process it is possible to bring into relation the designated activities and the physical properties of the named space with structures of psychic subjectivities such as anxiety or desire or compulsion (p. 23).

The active process of spatialization therefore allows an inhabitation of material space by spiritual means as well as memory and psychic involvement. As a child in Barbados, a small Caribbean island some fifty miles from the nearest landmass, St Lucia, one's contact with the world was maintained through British colonial rule and our immediate access to radio. One's sense of the world was therefore managed or constrained by the British who occupied a geographical and psychic space elsewhere, but our sense of place was partly determined by the politics and psychological impact of their radio broadcasts and governance. That form of spatialization, one dominated by the 'absolutist royal power (Rogoff 2000)', the British, is now being interrogated by Caribbean people and those with an interest in the politics of the slave trade. Their 'memory' or understanding of that era problematises our conceptions of space, time and belonging (see also Morley and Robbins 1995; Lavie and Swedenburg 1996; Lefebvre 1991).

This re-reading of the psychic and temporal structures in which we locate our sense of self, history and cultural affiliation brings into focus the skewed relationship between the subjugated subject and the white hegemonic figure. It demonstrates how we are linked by different means including psychic connectivities (Rogoff 2000). Richard Drayton in his piece (Saturday Guardian 20.8.05) entitled *The wealth of the West was built on Africa's exploitation*, problematised concerns about otherness, difference and

displacement. Referencing Robert Beckford's *The Empire Pays Back*, a documentary broadcast on Channel 4<sup>15</sup> that dealt with the theme of Western indebtedness to enslaved diasporans, Drayton asserts that,

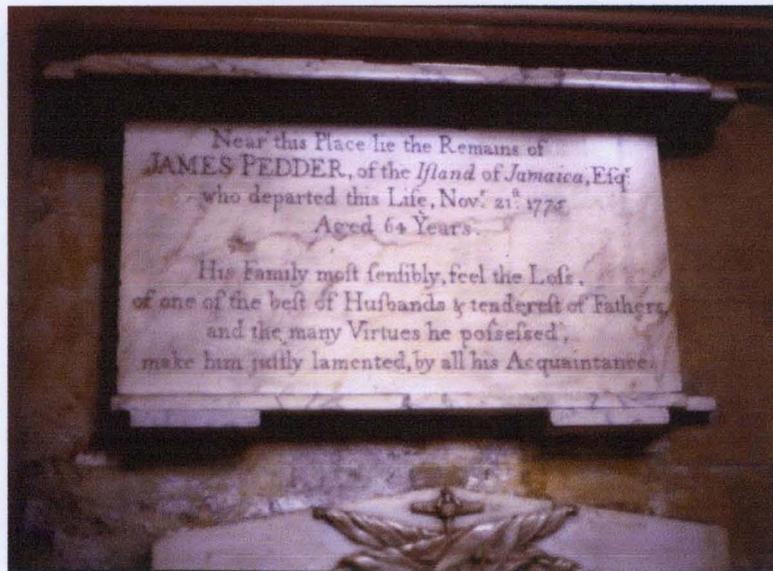
Beckford's experts estimated Britain's debt to Africans in the continent and diaspora to be in the trillions of pounds. While this was a useful benchmark, its basis was mistaken. Not because it was excessive, but because the real debt is incalculable. For without Africa and its Caribbean plantation extensions, the modern world as we know it would not exist.

Bath Abbey in commemorative tablets embedded in its walls, contains a clue to the significance of the black presence at the heart of the British nation. Bath could be regarded as a quintessentially English largely middle-class city. Elegant stone-fronted Georgian architecture, sporting perfectly proportioned windows and gorgeously organised decorative ironwork, evoke memories of distant power, wealth and social elegance. But quintessence, as essence, should be interrogated. On a visit there towards the end of the twentieth century, I was struck by powerful evocations of British imperial power and influence. Fixed in the floor and the walls of the Abbey are celebratory tablets to the memory of functionaries of empire: diplomats, Governors, explorers and soldiers who saw service in Montserrat, Jamaica, Antigua, Barbados, St Croix and elsewhere (Figs. 10-11). There was the excitement of discovery, a notion of a clearly delineated history realised, a hidden identity rendered palpable. Yet, as a black subject, excluded from the Euro-centre, one resists the temptation of an emotive or conceptual encroachment into the rarefied world of a celebrated British cultural icon. In other words my

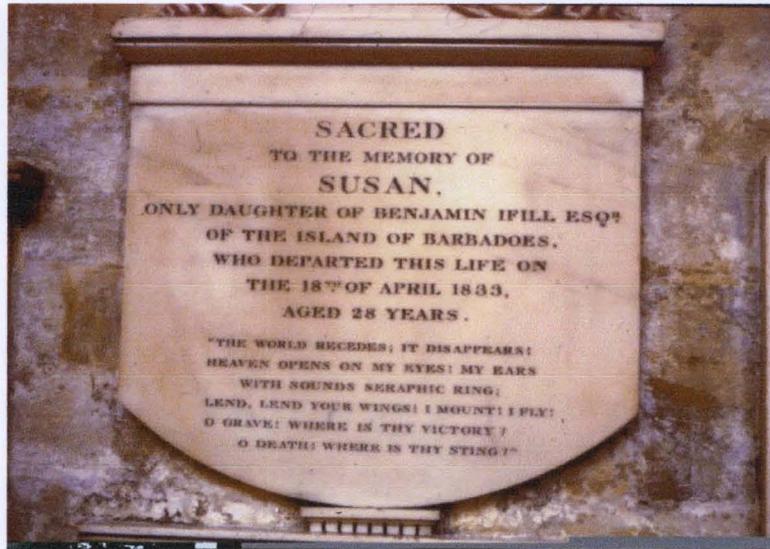
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<sup>15</sup> Channel 4 is a national television broadcaster in the UK

understanding of cultural origins precluded a sense of ownership, the reflex of withdrawal from European supposed essences too ingrained to allow immediate emotional accommodation. But, on reflection, it became apparent that the interaction of my enslaved ancestors and their colonial masters that carved their presences on the identity of each other ensured my right to ownership of a historical moment sealed like a Pharaoh's tomb in the stone walls of the Abbey.



**Figure 11 A tablet in Bath Abbey dedicated to the memory of James Pedder**



**Figure 12 A tablet In Bath Abbey celebrating the memory of Susan Ifill of Barbados**

Despite this the challenges inherent to taking ownership of that from which one has always been culturally removed, 'the dimension of doubling (Bhabha, 1994, p. 50)' are difficult to overcome. Yet, somehow, the city of Bath is tethered to my sense of self. I think of the 'persistent questioning of the frame, the space of representation (ibid. p. 46)' or as Bhabha earlier stated, "you' are continually positioned in the space between a range of contradictory places that coexist (ibid. p. 48).'

Sir Edward Elgar's ironic lyrics to *Land of Hope and Glory*, lustily proclaimed each year as the finale to 'The Proms'<sup>16</sup>, encapsulate more than a pride in nationality but an insensitivity to the plight of the descendants of subject

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<sup>16</sup> The Proms is a hugely popular celebration of classical music attended by thousands of music lovers over several weeks each year at the Royal Albert Hall in London. The Proms traditionally ends with a rendition of Sir Edward Elgar's choral piece *Land of Hope and Glory*.

peoples at the heart of the UK Centre. Edward Said (1994) alludes to this mind-set when he speaks of 'a massive colonial system whose economy, functioning, and history had acquired the status of a virtual fact of nature (p. 162).' Inclusive teaching that takes account of African Caribbean cultural and political histories would require us to look again at cultural markers such as the city of Bath. By looking more explicitly at the way the city was implicated in the slave trade and British colonial rule, children would experience the diversity of contributions that have been made to its growth and development. Multiculturalism as such would assume a different meaning by positioning the complexities of our manifold inter-relationships at the centre of learning. By this mean African Caribbean learners would begin to be represented in the classroom. Bath as I have argued would not exist in its current elegant state without the slave trade (Dash 2000; see also Drayton 2005). As such it is enshrined in the history and heritage of every African Caribbean subject. We need to find ways of articulating this connectivity to every black and indeed white school student. Stuart Hall in *'Whose Heritage?'* (1999) while locating his assertion in a wider colonial context makes a similar point. We have not yet found a means of acknowledging the debt we all owe to the enslaved and their influence on our present-day way of life. But in reflecting on Drayton's piece it is apparent that in mapping the Caribbean one must be cognisant of the social, economic, psychic, geographical and political processes of spatialization at play in any socio-cultural construct of the region. In that regard James and Du Bois were right in claiming access to Western civilisations. In mourning the disconnectedness with the auratic that

gives shape to the grain of the African diasporic voice, however, Brathwaite's theorising, in looking to earlier times for reminders of heritages modelled and crafted by descendants with whom we share an ancestral bond, is similarly pertinent to an appreciation of Caribbean identities.

In the diverse classroom where children sit cheek by jowl with learners from different traditions and cultures, the teacher of art would be ill-advised to make central to learning the 'authentic' experience of any one group or in Bhabha's words, '... the fatal notion of a self-contained European culture and the absurd notion of an uncontaminated culture in a single country (Bhabha 1996, p. 53; see also Sarup 1996).' Such pedagogic approaches serve only to underscore the notional dominance of one tradition over others, and effectively disenfranchise some students. Instead, what art education should do for all children is to demonstrate the way in which knowledges are contingent and shared (Badiou 2001; Dash 2005; Parker 1992; Sarup 1996). Such teaching should demonstrate that cultures borrow from and are enriched and regenerated by interaction with others. Guardian columnist Maya Jaggi, in a piece on Wilson Harris in which she quotes the author, puts the point well,

Harris ... is a believer in what he calls "cross-culturality". "It's a threshold into wholeness," he says. It means one faction of humanity discovers itself in another; not losing its culture, but deepening itself. One culture gains from another; both sides benefit from opening themselves to a new universe (Guardian 16.12.06 p. 11. col. 3)."

Learners should be made aware of the degree to which our lives are mutually dependent on and are constructed upon a mass of economic, cultural and

historical collisions (Wells 2002; Herskovits 1990). In other words, teaching in the modern-day classroom, should provide the knowledge-base that could engender in children a sense of being part of a wider psychic and cultural space, beyond the boundaries of their natal community. At the same time the immediate socio/cultural inheritance that children take with them to school should be recognised and celebrated.

#### **2.4.2 Summary**

Pollard's photographic pieces problematize identity and belonging discourses in a way that destabilises the givens through which notions of identity are formed. This is of particular relevance to the African Caribbean student because of the gap that exists between themselves and their ancient historical legacy. But we need to see that the stand-alone constructions in which we invest notions of heritage are dubious forms that can deny pupils their right to a full cultural inheritance. By looking again at the relationship of the diasporan to the European Centre, new possibilities for teaching and learning are opened up that should bring benefits for all.

The next section will explore issues relating to permanent African settlement in the West. It will first engage notions of difference and the structures of separation created in the New World to isolate diasporic peoples from the mainstream.

## **2.5 Sub-section 4 - The politics and history of the image of the black body**

Representational discourses of difference with emphasis on African Caribbean subjects whether dominated by epidermal, social, economic or other considerations, have important implications for teaching and learning. The prejudices that shape us as subjects have been inherited from social environments to which we have been acculturated. An important challenge for teachers therefore is in challenging constructs of otherness that define us and through which we perceive ourselves and others. This sub-section will look at the mechanics of boundary construction in which discourses of difference and otherness are formed. It starts with an exploration of lines of demarcation, the markers of difference. In sub-section (4b), epidermal difference is scrutinised. Reference is made here to the representation of the black body in a range of contexts, including the bible. Marxists doctrine is briefly addressed to determine the way in which blackness is problematised in such theorising. Atkinson (2002) provides an analysis of the challenges inherent to representing the subject. The depiction of the black body in works of art then forms a substantial area of enquiry. This is done largely through an exploration of David Dabydeen's (1987) *Hogarth's Blacks* and Albert Boime's (1990) *The Art of Exclusion*.

### **2.5.1 Constructing the boundary**

Twentieth century theorists on race, class, gender and sexuality such as Foucault (1970); Bhabha (1994), Badiou (2001), Hall (1992), Trinh T. Minh-ha

(1992) have questioned the frame of identity. They have also made the lines of demarcation between peoples central to discourse. In such theorising, the notion of the 'in-between space' in which the black subject resides has been explored by thinkers Bhabha 1996; Hall 1992; Foucault 1970; Gilroy 2000 and 1987; and Hebdige 1979. Morley (2000) cites Ignatieff who reflects on terminology commonly posited by theorists in this ontology. He lists, "hybridity, collage, melange, hotchpotch, synergy, bricolage, creolisation, mestizaje, mongrelisation, syncretism, transculturation, third cultures (p.241)." Steinberg *et al* (1997) speak of borders that are

... heavily defended lines drawn between territories, categories or identities. But they are, closely watched and well-defended precisely because they are points of danger for one or other or both of the territories and identities involved (p. 14).

The space of contestation is a place of possibilities where new solutions to problems emerge. But by their newness they are perceived as hostile to 'safe and trusted' systems and ways of life (Sarup 1996). Stuart Hall (1997) asserts that, 'Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference (p. 58).' Homi Bhabha's (1994) notion of the questioning of the frame of representation, 'the dimension of doubling' or being neither inside nor outside that from which one 'has always been culturally removed' but to which one has a peculiar and historic allegiance, is also central to an appreciation of present-day readings of diasporic and other identities (see also Hall 1999). Our lack of acknowledgement of these contradictions, fuels the anger that occasionally erupts in street disturbances such as the furore visited on the people of France by black and North African peoples in the summer of 2005.

Sarup, (1996) interrogates the notion of boundary divisions between groups by critiquing the work of specialists in the field of post-structuralist theory. He references Derrida and his use of the term 'undecidables', indicating that the concept includes other Derridian notions, namely pharmakon, hymen and supplement. Sarup explains that,

In French, the word 'supplement' has a double sense: to supply something which is missing, or to supply something additional. The pharmakon is a Greek word standing for both membrane and marriage, which for this reason signifies at the same time virginity – the difference between the 'inside' and the 'outside' – and its violation by the fusion of the self and the other (p. 10).

In exploring theories of artificial order, he cites Zygmunt Bauman who postulates that 'All visions of artificial order are by necessity inherently asymmetrical and thereby dichotomising (ibid. p. 9).' Sarup develops this argument by interrogating the binary friend and stranger, positing that, "The repugnant and frightening 'out there' of the enemies is both the addition to and displacement of the cosy and comforting 'in here' of the friends (p. 10)." The stranger on the other hand is 'neither friend nor enemy (ibid. p. 10).' But strangers are problematic to a community, meaning a dominant category, because they are undecidables, or unclassifiable,

A stranger is some is someone who refuses to remain confined to the 'far away' land or to go away from our own. S/he is physically close while remaining culturally remote. Strangers often seem to be suspended in the empty space between a tradition which they have already left and the mode of life which stubbornly refuses them the right of entry. The stranger blurs a boundary line (p. 10).

The Caribbean subject is psychically, culturally and economically linked to the UK by centuries of coerced labour and the extent to which such exploitation

benefited the UK economy and its peoples. As such in material and economic terms the diasporic subject as a stranger, blurs the boundary lines of identity. By that binary relationship of slave other and historic source of British wealth, s/he is also a pharmakon, a membrane at the boundary of British notions of self and other dualities – they are inside British traditions having contributed their labour towards the accumulation of them but remain undeniably outside by virtue of their stranger status and epidermal difference.

Atkinson (2002) describes the difficulties inherent to representing the world outside the subject, preferring a notion of *signification* in which the individual presents an interpretation of their perception of a particular signifier. In his theorising the world is mediated through the culture of the individual who perceives it. Their *representation* of experience is certain, therefore, to be coloured by the individual's epistemological frameworks, their ways of knowing and making sense of the world. But there is an element of intentional distortion, which sits alongside a societal perception of, say, blackness that frames it within very particular delimited spaces. The distorted psycho-cultural filter through which the black subject is mediated could be described as malicious tampering with the subject. Absorption of such distortions has set in train a myth of black inferiority. This resides as a backdrop to our perception of the diasporic subject. Immersed in racist constructs of themselves, often without access to coherent, informed argument, each subject can internalise these biased precepts (Carter 1986;

Edwards 1999; Malcolm X 1964). bell hooks (1996) describes this phenomenon precisely in saying that,

Many black folks see us as "lacking," as inferior when compared to whites. The paucity of scholarly work looking at the issue of black self-hatred, examining the ways in which the colonization and exploitation of black people is reinforced by internalized racial hatred via white supremacist thinking, is awesome (p. 148).

Teachers tintured by the racist environments to which they have been acculturated can display similar racist behaviours and attitudes that militate against the advancement of black children (Searle 2001). Such skewed learning ethos can have implications for the way children are taught and the expectations teachers have of them, and their perceptions of themselves.

Gay and feminists politics overlap with revolutionary black politics and the class antagonisms articulated in the theories of left-wing or Marxist writers such as Berger (1972); George (2004); Steinberg et al (1997); Butler (1990 and 1993); Hall (1992); Foucault (1980). Their texts show how collusion between excluded minorities both within and without national formations in the contemporary world, have rendered boundary construction even more porous than before and erased positivistic frameworks for determining cultural groupings. In their theorising the different worlds in which we once live now overlap, merge have become syncretised or creolized. As Bhabha (1994) puts it,

The very concepts of historical traditions, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or 'organic' ethnic communities – *as the grounds of cultural comparativism* – are in a profound process of redefinition. The hideous extremity of Serbian nationalism proves that

the very idea of a pure, 'ethnically cleansed' national identity can only be achieved through the death, literal and figurative, of the complex interweavings of history, and the culturally contingent border-lines of modern nationhood (p. 5).

Sarup (1996) references Kai Erikson who draws on Durkheim in suggesting that 'the only material for marking boundaries is the behaviour of its participants (p. 11).' He continues,

Within the boundary, the norm has jurisdiction. Durkheim, asserted, first, that a social norm is rarely expressed as a firm rule; it is really an accumulation of decisions made by a community over a long period of time (p.11.).

Timothy Garton Ash (2004) employing the binary 'Island' and 'World', sites examples of change within geographical boundaries that destroy the notion of stasis in the way we live and the values regarded as essential to a notion of Englishness.

'Island' is the Britain, but more especially the England of the parish church, the pub, the club, the college; of the retired colonel ... reading the Daily Telegraph and the gardener reading the Daily Mail; of country lanes, cricket, warm beer and shepherd's pie (Page 4).

'World' is the environment outside the area of our immediate cultural organisation (Morley and Robins 1995). Yet the notion of world can be muddled with notions of Englishness. Evidence of this cultural twist can be experienced in West London where in walking on Putney High Street, the pedestrian will see,

... Hot Wok Express, Il Peperone Pizzeria, Enoteca (an Italian restaurant), the Odeon cinema (probably showing an American movie) , Sydney (an Australian bar-restaurant), La Mancha ( a Spanish tapas bar and restaurant), Pizza Hut, Blockbuster Video, La Noche ( another Spanish restaurant), Superdrug, McDonald's and right next to it the coffee places Costa, Cafe Nero, Starbucks, then United Colours of

Benetton, Prêt à Manger, Burger King, Rogerio's Café, the Piccolo Bar – and that's only up to the railway station (Ash, 2004, P. 4).

Other changes to 'island' Britain are playing a similarly if not more important role in shaping modern lifestyles. Black subjects, once positioned as savage and inferior, now have a voice to demand full representation in new social regimes; women once press-ganged into the kitchen and positioned as 'obedient wife' and 'doting mother' under the authority of 'the superior male', demand the right to a career and the sharing of household responsibilities; gay lovers previously derided as queer and perverted articulate their right to fullness of expressive possibilities and an acceptance of difference of lifestyle in mutually respectful relationships (George 2004; Epstein 1997).

Badiou (2001) is categorical in asserting that fundamental differences in our humanity are based on myth, positing the theory that a system that promotes difference as a philosophical determinant is dangerously misguided. There is, however, an acknowledgement of specific cultural though superficial differences:

Every modern collective configuration involves people from everywhere, who have their different ways of eating and speaking, who wear different sorts of headgear, follow different religions, have complex and varied relations to sexuality, prefer authority or disorder, and such is the way of the world (p.27).

He further emphasises the importance of truth over difference in stating that,

Only truth, as such, is *indifferent to differences*. This is something we have always known, even if sophists of every age have always attempted to obscure its certainty: a truth is *the same for all* (p.27).

(See also Myrdal 2000; Bendict 2000; Todorov 2000 ; Banton 2000; Clifford 1997; Cohen 1997; Mercer 1994). Wells (2002) (see also Kohn 1996 and Gilman 1985) problematises physiological differences. He cites Darwin in saying that,

... outward appearance had been over-emphasized in classifying humanity. In the *Descent of Man*, written towards the end of his life, he notes that: 'In regard to the amount of difference between the races, we must make some allowance for our nice powers of discrimination gained by long habit of observing ourselves (ibid. pp. 8 - 9)."

This resonates with Foucault (1970) who asserts that, '... because of an essential rupture in the Western world, what has become important is no longer resemblances but identities and differences (p. 50).' Parker (1992), a South African by birth, alerts us to the insidious nature of such categorisation. Physiological differences he contends are superficial and not worthy of serious reference (p. 296).

The act of naming and categorising creates the structures we live by and the symbolic markers through which we convey meaning (Sarup 1996). Meaning making is therefore predicated on the bias of a group that chose to classify the world from their own ideological viewpoint. Shohat and Stam (1994) puts the point well in stating that,

The power of creation is inextricably entwined with the power of naming – God lends Adam his naming authority as a mark of his rule, and Eve is "called woman because she was taken out of man." Naming likewise played a crucial role in colonial history, as the "discoverer" gave names to places as a mark of possession ("America" as celebrating Amerigo Vespucci) or as indices of a European perspective (p. 142).

Bolton (1993) quoting Sartre contends that, " Culture ... is a product of man: he projects himself through it and recognises himself in it (p.3)." The

discourse of 'truth', which cuts across all categories and is located in an arena beyond human bias, is often difficult to access when clouded by the filter of prejudicial structures often embedded in naming that shape our life worlds.

Popular culture, by its seductive qualities and ease of access, can be particularly influential in framing the world view of young people. For many the fictive black of the Hollywood screen is the real diasporan/African (hooks 2001, Malcolm X, 1964). Diasporic subjects reared on racist supremacist material such as that critiqued by Boime, internalise and absorb its teaching.

As hooks (1995) contends:

When black psyches are daily bombarded by mass media representations that encourage us to see white people as more caring, intelligent, liberal, etc., it makes sense that many of us begin to internalise racist thinking (p. 117).

African peoples in the Diaspora are constantly the outsiders looking into a different world of representation to which they are obliged to find an accommodation. This has parallels on the small screen where black actors subvert their knowledge of 'black' lifestyles in speaking lines that fail to echo the reality of black talk. To quote Shohat and Stam (1994),

The film or TV commercial in which every eighth face is Black, for example, has more to do with the demographics of market research and the bad conscience of liberalism than with substantive polyphony, since the Black voice, in such instances, is usually shorn of its soul, deprived of its color and intonation. Polyphony does not consist in the mere appearance of a representative of a given group but rather in the fostering of a textual setting where the group's voice can be heard with its full force and resonance. The question is not of pluralism but of multivocality, an approach that would strive to cultivate and even heighten cultural difference while abolishing socially-generated inequalities (p. 215; See also Bogle 1994).

Such characterisations are driven by the fear of a perceived white veto in representation. In a similar vein, Morley (2000, p. 152) cites Sallie Westwood and John Williams who argue that, 'UK soap operas "are suffused with notions of Englishness and belonging which exclude ... the Other British – the myriad and diverse peoples who are part of the nation (p.152)."' Later, quoting J. Hargreaves from his 1993 study, *The representation of immigrants and ethnic minorities of Third World origin*, he opines that,

His analysis demonstrates that, on French television, members of ethnic minority groups are principally represented as "problems" of one sort or another – in news or current affairs ... moreover, by contrast they feature in none of the intimate relationships seen in French-made programmes of 'ordinary life (soaps, sitcoms. Etc.) (p. 164).'

The construction of difference by fictive and ideological means continues therefore to inform the self-perception of many. Those who sit outside hegemonic groups are under particular threat, even in an age when there is greater awareness of how prejudice and injustice work against marginalised members of our society. In education we can best effect change by constructing pedagogies that provide pupils with opportunities to question long-standing givens and their own positionality in identity and belonging discourses. African Caribbean cultural heritages, by their location in an in-between space are a wonderful resource for foregrounding such theorising.

### **2.5.2 Summary**

This section analysed theories of boundary formation between different groups. It interrogated discursive positions on societal differences and the possible impact they could have in the classroom. The material then

problematized national identities through the problematics of change in popular culture: the ontologies of the high street. I argue that these echo popular taste and demographic shifts. The discourse of signification and notions of difference as myth were addressed and the importance of the power to name as a means of defining difference discussed. Representations of the black body in the popular media and cinema were also highlighted. The next sub-section will explore issues of boundary distinctions around discourses of the black body.

## **2.6 Section 4b - The politics and history of the image of the black body**

This sub-section shifts from identity and terrestrial landscapes of difference and separation, to an exploration of 'racial' and epidermal markers of difference: the politics of the black body. The section starts with an analysis of key points from Sanders Gilman's review of nineteenth century accounts of scholarly enquiry into the status of the black figure. Much of this centres on dubious academic appraisal of the physiognomy of Saartjie Baartman, also known as the Hottentot Venus. Marxist theory is briefly reviewed for the lack of appreciation of racism as a category outside broad working class concerns. The black body will therefore be analysed in the context of power and control mechanisms integral to Western social and political frameworks. An analysis of texts dealing with representational strategies in works of art is fundamental to the section. This is done primarily through the theorising of David Dabydeen (1987) and Albert Boime (1990). A critical component in Boime's

work on the art criticism of the nineteenth century African American critic Freedman Henry Morris Murray is also presented.

### **2.6.1 Saartjie Baartman**

Sanders Gilman (1985) demonstrates how in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the theory of polygenetics or multiple human origins, was used by some as a key categorical determinant. Some theorists of that era positioned the black figure as biologically and 'racially' Other; the opposite to the ideal white subject (Herskovits 1990). As indicated by Gilman,

The antithesis of European sexual mores and beauty is embodied in the black, and the essential black, the lowest rung on the great chain of being, is the Hottentot (Black Bodies, White Bodies p. 231).

(see also Mirzoeff 1999) Saartjie Baartman also known as Sarah or Saat-Jee Bartman, and more popularly the Hottentot Venus was regarded as the embodiment of black primitiveness (see also Mirzoeff 1999). 'Hottentot'<sup>17</sup> women were perceived as 'the epitome of the sexual lasciviousness (Gilman 1985. p. 232).' Saartjie Baartman, exhibited as an oddity in the great Paris exhibition of 1810, was by her exaggerated buttocks or steatopygia<sup>18</sup>, seen as

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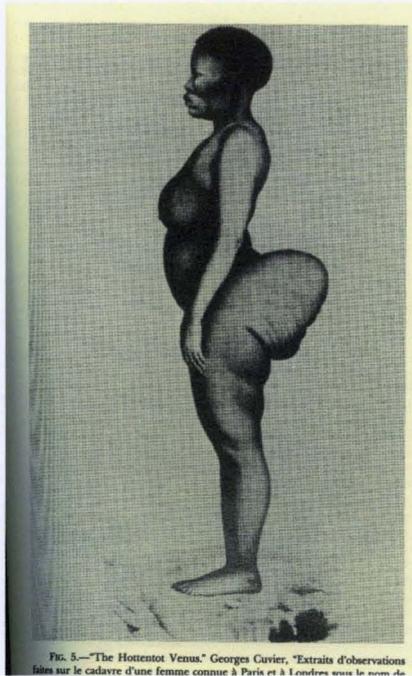
<sup>17</sup> According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary Hottentot is used to refer to Khoikhoi peoples of southern Africa. It later adds that the word is 'now regarded as offensive with reference to people (where Khoikhoi is the standard term) but is still standard when used in the names of some animals and plants.'

<sup>18</sup> Steatopygia according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary is an 'accumulation of large amounts of fat on the buttocks especially as a normal condition in the Khoikhoi and other peoples of arid parts of southern Africa.'

a metaphor for black sexual depravity. At that time the researcher Georges Cuvier suggested that,

... the black female looks different. Her physiognomy, her skin colour, the form of her genitalia label her as inherently different. In the nineteenth century, the black female was widely perceived as possessing not only a "primitive" sexual appetite but also the external signs of this temperament – "primitive" genitalia (ibid. p. 232).

This positioning of the black as 'different', presumably meaning genetically different, led to stereotypical constructions of the diasporic figure. The consequence of this has been a mode of representation in which black subjects are positioned in imagined spaces, far removed from who they are, hence Ellison's 'phantom in other people's minds (Ellison 1949, p. 7).' This blurring of perception has led to the ascription of stereotypical or even fetish values to the 'different' diasporan. It was argued that white women of the 'lower social orders', were more closely related genetically to Africans, referred to as Hottentots, than the white bourgeoisie (Gilman 1985), while the Irish, lesbians, criminals and the mentally subnormal were thought to have the Hottentot gene (Dyer 1997).



**Figure 13 Print of Saartjie Baartman,  
Circa 1810**

Material questioning the mental capacity, if not the humanity, of the black subject continues to be promulgated in some texts (see Herrnstein and Murray 1994). Much of this has an echo in visual representation. I think particularly of my father's illustrated Bible. In its depictions of the devil were always brown, spectral constructions, far removed from significant resemblance to European physiognomic types (see also Shohat and Stam 1994). The facial definition and body colour of these ciphers of evil placed them in the arena of African physical types. No incisive interrogation of such good/evil, god/devil, European/African, white/black binaries was tolerated. God was the Word, the Word was the Holy Bible and you did not question 'It', nor the graphic imagery printed on its pages. As such, it was difficult to separate the language of the scriptures from their visual text. Whiteness,

powerfully invoked in the Christ figure was equated with goodness; blackness, where it was represented, symbolised evil and ugliness (Boime 1990). hooks (1995) acknowledges the influence such exposure had on her development in the Deep South of the USA, saying that,

Years ago most black people grew up in houses where art, if it was present at all, took the form of cheap reproductions of work created by white artists featuring white images; some of it was so-called great art. Often these images incorporated religious iconography and symbols. I first saw cheap reproductions of art by Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci in Southern black religious households. We identified with these images. They appealed to us because they conveyed aspects of religious experience that were familiar. The fact of whiteness was subsumed by the spiritual expression in the work (Hooks 1995, pp. 7-8).

This inter-weaving of the Christian story with a masked political statement created a 'no-go' field of enquiry, that subliminally under-girded the elevated status of whites relative to blacks. We lacked the spaces and possibly the insights to challenge such constructs. Instead each made sense of the material as best they could, often subliminally, aware that the space they occupied placed them in an inferior position relative to other groups in our society. Christianity became the opiate of people who, by fear of punishment from on high, were reluctant to question the way they were positioned within its doctrine. As such, Bible imagery constructed by Europeans became a crucial weapon of oppression against the diasporic subject.

### **2.6.2 Marxist theorising and the black subject**

Cornel West (1993) demonstrates how in Marxist theorising, as in aspects of Christian practice, the black subject is simply not seen. He argues that Marxism does not 'see' the individual as a specific subject of oppression,

indicating that,

... there exists a paucity of sophisticated Marxist treatments of racially structured societies ... Marxist theorists of African American oppression have put forward rather bland and glib views. For example *class reductionists* have simply subsumed African American oppression under class exploitation and viewed complex racist practices as merely conscious profiteering – or a divide-and-conquer strategy – on behalf of capitalists (p. 261).

West explains that Marxist theory is 'materialist and historical to the degree that it attempts to understand and explain forms of oppression in terms of a more or less determining base and a more or less determined superstructure (ibid. p. 259),' a relation that Raymond Williams calls "the mutual setting of limits and exerting of pressure (ibid p.259)." Rather than look to pedagogies driven by Marxist doctrine, therefore, he sees it as incumbent upon the black subject to create a 'new regime of truth', linked to,

... yet not confined by, indigenous institutional practices permeated by the kinetic orality and emotional physicality, the rhythmic syncopation, the protean improvisation and religious, rhetorical and antiphonal repetition of African American life (West 1993, p. 82).

In a similar vein Gen Doy (2000) assesses Edward Said's theorising of Marxist philosophy. According to Said, Marx did not sympathise with the sufferings of Indians and other colonized peoples because they were 'only' Orientals ... The collective Orient was easier for him to use in illustration of a theory than existential human identities (p.30).' Doy also references Kobena Mercer's assessment of Marxist theory in relation to the black subject, inferring that Marxism was oppressive, dis-empowering and implicitly Eurocentric, while embracing the work of Foucault and Deleuze who reject Marxism, 'because they recognised the political and ethical violence implicit in Marx's statement (Ibid. p.30).'

Marxism offers much to the advancement of black subjects in the Western world but as shown here, there are concerns that need to be addressed if its doctrine is to provide greater opportunities to diasporic learners. While Marxist theory provides a clear account of white working class exploitation in the West, it fails to effectively engage white racism and its impact on the life experience of the black subject. The fall out from the slave trade therefore and the distortions created by racist constructs in which black subjects are produced, is not interrogated or dealt with in such concepts. Without clear acknowledgement of this socio-cultural experience, the major source of oppression in the lives of diasporic subjects will not be seen.

The next section will foreground key texts that have dealt with the representation of the black subject in works of art in galleries and museums. This is critical to the experience of African Caribbean learners who, on entering such environments, regularly encounter problematic depictions of black subjects which they are often ill-prepared to engage.

### **2.6.3 David Dabydeen's Hogarth's Blacks**

David Dabydeen in his polemical work *Hogarth's Blacks* (1987) advanced a powerful and sympathetic argument in support of William Hogarth's use of the black figure in his many print series and paintings. He explains that while working in a scheme of representation that situated 'Ethiope' subjects at a socially inferior level, Hogarth often positioned black people alongside the

oppressed white working class. Consequently in many of his works, there is a clear alignment between Black and white in common struggle.

Much of Dabydeen's work is dedicated to an analysis of the role black subjects played in Hogarth's four great metaphorical works, *The Rake's Progress* (c. 1732-35), *A Harlot's Progress* (c. 1732), *Marriage a la Mode* (c. 1743-45) and *The Four Times of Day* (c. 1738). From Dabydeen's viewpoint, Hogarth used the Black figure both satirically and metaphorically. Drawing attention to 'Noor' (Fig. 13), from the *Four Times of Day* series, he says:

The black man, a 'Hottentot' type who to the white mind was the embodiment of lust and cannibalism, by his very presence contributes to the overall mood of 'savagery' (ibid. p.64).

Dabydeen opines nevertheless, that,

Hogarth's black is however a positive figure, for the group he belongs to, though they exist in dirt and passion, are preferable to the aristocrats, their shared animal energy, however squalid, and their naturalness, being in positive contrast to the reserve, polish and ostentation of the latter group (ibid. p.64).

Hogarth aligned the black subject if not physically then philosophically with the white proletariat, in the way they interacted with and sought to get 'one over' on the bourgeoisie. In focusing on the employment of blacks in the eighteenth century, Dabydeen asserts that:

seventeenth and eighteenth century art testifies to the variety of their occupations, blacks being depicted as footmen, coachmen, pageboys, soldiers, sailors, musicians, actresses, prostitutes, beggars, prisoners, pimps, highway robbers, street sellers, and other similar roles. They were not by any means passive or subservient in their roles (ibid. p.20).'

The text accompanies an engraving by an anonymous artist. It shows a black Street-seller attempting to sell rabbits to a woman, whilst adopting the coded

kneeling posture in which black subjects were positioned in many works of art of the period. There is in this work, however, an indication of playful interaction, a degree of camaraderie between seller and customer, not apparent in contemporaneous high art representations of black and white relationships. Despite this, I am disturbed by Hogarth's use of the black subject as an expose of corrupt white morals. By positioning the African figure as a symbol of human debauchery and corruption, Hogarth draws on the accepted notions of black inferiority without making any attempt to challenge such prejudices. They, the black subjects in his works, are an accepted sign of degraded humanity. It is as if he is implying that 'even' a black, this base and corrupt humanity, would be shocked by the impoverished morality of the white upper classes. Consequently the series must, in my view, be regarded as congruent with prevailing racist thinking. Much of the book is informed by this sub-text, thereby making the claim in favour of Hogarth's positive multi-racial credentials less than convincing.



**Figure 14 William Hogarth. *Noon* (1738)**



**Figure 15 William Hogarth (1792).**

***The Rabbits***

#### **2.6.4 Albert Boime's Art of Exclusion**

Albert Boime's *The Art of Exclusion* (1990) engages similar issues of representation and the black body. In his survey of black representation in nineteenth century art works, he exposes the coding devices used even in iconic works of the era that positioned the African as inferior and foil to the white subject's supposed superiority (see also Ghazala 1986). Critiquing Manet's *Olympia*, (1863) he articulates the way in which the black woman servant is not allowed to engage the viewer as an equal. She can only look to her white mistress, the prostitute, who meets the eye of the spectator/punter. The scheme of codes, more especially the power of the gaze, is exploited

here to underscore the lowly position of the black woman, and infers a notion of racial superiority even in the white prostitute, by her freedom to look beyond the frame.

The black woman, Sarah, has, until recently, rarely been the subject of serious discourse, relegated as she is to the status of a prop, an unarticulated compositional feature. Yet the maid is the first character black children see on coming to this painting. She has meanings for them beyond Manet's apparent erotic intentions, as sister or aunty, mother or neighbour. To ignore her presence therefore is to delimit the scope of the black child's practice and experience. Such negation can be damaging as it confirms her/their [the servant and the student] lowly status, her/their invisibility. This has been the experience of many black children in the history of art education in the West, my own included (see also Bygott 1992, John 2006). And it has been the lot of white children, too, who, by the silence on the topic of black representation in works of Western art, are not exposed to a candid account of the black presence in such works. By this means school pupils are inculcated into a way of seeing that treats blackness differently: as marginal to discourse (Gall 2002). The historic degradation of the black subject is by this means perpetuated in our times through white supremacist educational practices (John 2006). Georgia Belfont's<sup>19</sup> *Re-evaluating Olympia* (1987-88), a piece that subtly re-positions the black servant, Sarah, in Manet's racialised scheme,

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<sup>19</sup> For more on this work, see Eddie Chambers' teachers' pack *Black Art: Plotting the Course*.

has much to offer educationalists when using the French artist's great work as a resource for teaching.

Boime looks, too, at the symbols encoded in other works from the nineteenth Century. Notional black fickle-mindedness is defined in pieces where black figures are shown making light of their lower status (see William Stanley Mount's *Farmers Noonning*, 1836, p. 93 and *Dawn of Day* 1867, p. 99). By the apparent happy acceptance of their degraded position, we have a sense of black people lacking the moral fibre of whites. Through such works, the myth of the happy-go-lucky black is created. This myth gave rise to lantern jawed, beady-eyed, thick-lipped grotesques that have become synonymous with black representation in popular media, and shows the way that racist stereotypes, left unchallenged, can regenerate themselves (Shohat and Stam 1994; Bogle 1994; Congdon-Martin 1990; Aguilar and Emanoel 2000). Ellison's trope of invisibility is nowhere more clearly articulated than in such problematic imagery. Boime shows how the underlying conceptualisation of blackness speaks of a sub-class, a people of supposed lower intellect and animalistic habits. In discussing the structure of Thomas Eakins' *Negro Boy Dancing*, (1878), he focuses on the characterisation of the black subjects, stating 'At the moment they do not perform on the white man's stage, and they form their own triangular enclosure in this rare glimpse of the private side of black life in the nineteenth century (p. 102).' The sitting banjo player who strums his instrument with concentrated assurance, studiously eyes the efforts of the child while an older man, standing and leaning on a chair, taps

his foot in time to the music. A top hat and cane on the seat of the chair suggest preparation for the stage, but for the present this family is "oblivious to the vaudeville public (ibid. p. 102)." The scene reminds us that popular theatrical entertainment was one of the few avenues of expression open to black people, although they were systematically excluded as spectators or participants from the music halls, theatres and clubs available to white performers (ibid. p. 103; see also Oliver 1969; Mercer 1994).

Theodore Gericault's *Raft of the Medusa* (1818-19) is another classical work which could provoke similarly productive responses. In 1816 an expedition of four ships, under a new commander Captain Hugues Doroy de Chaumareys, set sail for Senegal from France. Off the coast of Africa the frigate *Medusa* ran aground. Lacking a full complement of life-boats, a raft was constructed for 152 persons and set in tow, 'But after a few hours ... Chaumareys gave the order to cut the guy ropes ... (Boime, 1990, pp. 51-52).' So began an epic struggle for survival and ultimately the subject for Gericault's great work.

The *Raft of the Medusa* is a seminal piece that represents a significant break with the coded rules of exclusion and subjugation implicit to many works of the nineteenth century. Here, no one sits in the margin, black and white are locked in a shared struggle against the elements. It is as if Gericault, by creating a metaphor which constructs us all as castaways on the mountainous seas of life, is proclaiming the fragility of human existence and the need for social cohesion to better ensure our mutual survival. Significantly in the black figure that is held aloft by two white men to signal to a passing ship, Gericault

challenged the practice by which black subjects were relegated to the lower register of works in which there was a white presence. The black man as an active participant in the struggle for survival, as opposed to an impassive onlooker, further subverts the canon. This powerful graphic metaphor for the human condition opens up possibilities for meaningful development in schools across a wide range of applications.



**Figure 16 Theodore Gericault. Raft of the Medusa 1818 - 1819**

The great English painter Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851) was an ardent abolitionist who in *The Slave Ship* (1840), made a significant contribution to the debate on the slave trade. Boime articulates how the painting tells a story of the mass killing of slaves thrown overboard from a slaver at a time of dwindling supplies and disease aboard ship. Some 132 slaves were ejected in three groups. One man '...caught a rope trailing from the ship, pulled himself on board, and somehow survived to bring the story

back... (Boime 1990, p. 67; see also Schama 2005).’ Turner’s great work highlights the plight of slaves in the middle passage, and should be seen as a link in a chain of enquiry on the theme of resistance to oppression in the Americas and elsewhere. Such an approach could involve children in project schemes that reference classical antiquity in the West, the works of Shakespeare, Dickens and other important Western cultural icons (Said 1994). By this means teaching and learning should be more meaningful and fulfilling for all pupils, whilst supporting a more inclusive and holistic pedagogy.

Boime devoted the final chapter of his book to the work of the little known black art critic Freeman Henry Morris Murray. According to Boime, there is ‘scant documentation’ on the life of Murray. We do know, however, that he was a typesetter by training, and that he wrote and lectured extensively on art history, illustrating his public papers with lantern slides (Boime 1990, p.156).’ In 1916 he wrote and published what Albert Boime refers to as, ‘one of the most remarkable and idiosyncratic texts of art criticism in the modern epoch (ibid. p. 153).’ The piece of art criticism to which Boime refers is *Emancipation and the Freed in American Sculpture* (1916). Driven by a need to inform the wider black public of the covert derogatory messages built into public art, Murray states:

... when we look at a work of art, especially when "we" look at one in which Black Folk appear - or do not appear when they should, - we should ask: What does it mean? What does it suggest? What impression is it likely to make on those who view it? What will be the effect on present-day problems, of its obvious and also insidious teaching? In short, we should endeavour to "interpret" it; and should try to interpret it from our own peculiar standpoint (Boime 1990, pp.153-154).

This extraordinary statement from Murray is relevant to today's readings of works of art from that period in which there is a black presence. In saying that Murray, despite the acuity of his analytical powers, could sometimes misread the subtle codes employed by nineteenth century artists in communicating their racist messages. Responding to critical comments made by Charles Caffin of John Quincy Adams Ward's *Freedman* (1863), he contends that,

... the "Freedman was conceived and modelled in a time of "stress and struggle," while the burial parties were gathering the dead Black soldiers from a half-dozen bloody battle grounds, including Port Hudson and Fort Wagner, and two-hundred thousand more Black men were rallying beneath the flag whose triumph they hoped and believed would insure their freedom. Mr. Ward and many others then living had been witnesses of, and participants in, the agitations and struggles, the sacrifices and martyrdoms, which had culminated in the war then raging and which had prepared the way for the Emancipation Proclamation (ibid. p. 160).

*The Freedman* is an impressive piece of sculpture, not a mere caricature. The man's body is beautifully sculpted; there is some celebration in the rendering of his physique. Having said that, in the uplifted face there are echoes of the black toadies in P. Mignard's 1682 portrait of *The Duchess of Portsmouth* and the *Portrait of James Drummond, 3<sup>d</sup> Duke of Perth*<sup>20</sup>. In the semi-dressed state of the Black figure there is a clear allusion to his African past, widely regarded in the white world as bestial and primitive. This portrait echoes works by many artists of the period such as Richard Caton Woodville's *War News from Mexico* (1848) in which a group of white figures share news from

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<sup>20</sup> (As presented in Ghazala, F. (1986). No further details are available on this work re-name of artist or year of completion.

the front. On the fringes of this group sits a black man with a girl who remain detached and in the margins. The black subject is similarly detached in John Singleton Copley's *Watson and the Shark* (1778). In this work eight white men are active participants in a dramatic scene of rescue on a small rowing boat, while a lone black man is a virtual spectator at the event.

#### **2.6.5 Marie-Guillielmine Benoist's '*Portrait d'une Negresse*' (1800)**

One work which is not mentioned in Boime's important book is *Portrait of a Negress* (1800) by Marie Benoist. In this piece the black female sitter addresses the spectator in a direct gaze, unusual for works of the period. The black woman is indeed beautifully painted, the natural tints of her face and breast rendered with honesty and a celebration of "blackness" rare in the representation of a black subject. Though revealing the woman's right breast it is not to my mind a sexually suggestive exposure, neither is her facial expression perversely stereotyped. The sitter's features are delineated instead by evidence of what the painter saw in front of her, eschewing the dictates of a predetermined schema. All that is needed to assert her equality of status is a name. But despite this, by its directness and the honest rendering of the black woman's body, *Portrait of a Negress* is a refreshing and unusual early 19<sup>th</sup> Century work (Fig. 14).



**Figure 17 Marie Benoist's (1800) Portrait of a Negress**

### **2.6.6 Summary**

This section focused on notions of boundary formation in the construction of lines of demarcation between human groups. Most especially it problematised the issue of the black body as a site of division and a marker of difference. The writing viewed these discourses primarily through analyses of works of art. Marxist theorising was briefly engaged before a broader analysis of boundary construction was presented. The theorising of Badiou and key thinkers in the field offered insights on boundary formation, and the divisions that are created in bolstering the presences of Europeans at the expense of other groups. I will in the remaining chapters in this review explore these questions through the views and theories of art educators and other experts in the field. It starts with an exploration of multicultural and

postmodern theories. The material then moves into an analysis of responses to two key publications with a bearing on the teaching of African diasporic students in our schools.

### **3. Chapter - Multicultural art teaching content and Diaspora children**

This chapter will analyse a range of pedagogic approaches developed by teachers of art and design that could be categorised as multicultural. The writing problematizes such approaches to establish what multicultural teaching can offer African Caribbean learners. It starts by briefly mapping the context that gave rise to the development of such pedagogies, showcasing early multicultural experiments against a backdrop of inner-city unrest and government reaction. The writing proceeds by taking the reader through key moments in the evolution of such approaches to the present times. It ends with an analysis of present possibilities by exploring through the writing of Freire and other experts in the field, issues of identity, cultural difference and pedagogy.

#### **3.1 Early experiments in multicultural teaching**

In the 1980s black and white working class youth in Brixton, Toxteth, Liverpool 8 and other inner city areas took to the streets in an orgy of violence that left many in fear of their lives (Bygott 1992). The unrest highlighted issues of marginalisation and alienation. Parliament debated the concerns and a number of reports were commissioned among them the Rampton Report (1981), which looked into the education of 'West Indian' children in 'our' schools. Rampton was followed by the more wide ranging

Swann Report (1885) that considered the education of children of nine ethnic minority groups. Tomlinson (1990) states that Swann,

... stressed the relevance to schools and LEAs of changing the curriculum, producing policies, and generally ensuring that a more appropriate education would in future, be offered to all pupils ( p.12).

Nick Stanley, Phil Slight and Helga Loeb (1987), and Iain Macleod-Brudenell (1986) demonstrated in the 1970s and 80s a range of approaches to teaching in art and design that foreground cultural norms and practices from different cultures and traditions<sup>21</sup>. These were published as a series of booklets centring on themes such as Islamic calligraphy, Persian rugs, Aboriginal paintings and Benin bronzes (See Mason 1989). Similar material could be accessed through a growing number of multicultural resource centres and, more especially, by visits to museums and galleries. Diasporic cultures, however, despite the call for change and the recognition on the part of the authorities that a more inclusive curriculum was needed, were simply not being effectively represented. Apart from carnival and Anancy stories, few books dealt with diasporic cultural material, the museums apparently not regarding such resources as significant or worthy of display (Wilson 1993). Len Garrison's London-based African Caribbean Educational Resource (ACER)<sup>22</sup> was one of the few resource bases that prioritised Caribbean cultures and peoples. Carnival studies, though popular in primary schools,

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<sup>21</sup> See In Macleod Brudenell's series of Nottingham Supplies Cross-Cultural Art Booklets (1986) and Development Education Art in Action: Music, Drama, Visual Art (1984).

<sup>22</sup> ACER was set up by Len Garrison, an educator of African Caribbean origin, to provide resources to teachers and schools about Caribbean peoples and cultures.

often focused on the colour and fun of the event without looking in depth at the political, sociological and historical connotations of mas<sup>23</sup> (for more on the background to carnival see Burgess-Macey 2003; Harding 2003). By focusing almost exclusively on the narrow colour/fun elements of carnival, teachers ran the risk of further stereotyping diasporic people as merely fun-loving, superficial and lacking discipline (see Boime 1990). African Caribbean cultural histories and events were therefore underrepresented or, when used, were projected from the perspective of narrow European hegemonic viewpoints that served to undermine learning about the region.

By this time, the 1980s, many teachers, particularly in primary schools, had for some years been developing multicultural pedagogies (Mason 1988). Slight (1987) indicates that,

From the late 1960s there was a shift towards cultural pluralism and integration and with this came a move from denial of culture to concern about culture. Two assumptions were made: these were that racial equality could be achieved through cultural diversity, and that negative self-images of ethnic minority children could be addressed by means of cultural compensation (Changing Traditions Catalogue, page 8).

Several experts in the field have since the 1960s listed categories of teaching in art and design that could be described as multicultural, among them Grigsby 1977; Mason 1988 and 1996; Troyna 1992; Efland *et al* 1996; McFee 1998; Moore 1999; Emery 2002, Dash 2005; Troyna 1992; Richardson;

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<sup>23</sup> 'Mas' – an abbreviation of masquerade - is the term popularly used for carnival in Trinidad and Tobago and much of the English speaking Caribbean

2005). Chalmers (1996) posits a rationale for such approaches in stating that,

... reluctant, grudging, or tacit recognition by one culture of an-other must be replaced by genuine appreciation and proactive corrective action; that no racial, cultural, or national group is inherently superior to another; that no one group's art is basically superior to another's; and that equality of opportunity, in the art classroom and elsewhere, is a right that must be enjoyed by every student regardless of ethnic, cultural, or other differences (p. 2).

He references Zimmerman (1990) and Stuhr (1991) who posit five models of multicultural teaching,

- The first approach is simply to add lessons and units with some ethnic content.
- The second approach focuses on cross-cultural celebrations, such as holiday art, and is intended to foster classroom goodwill and harmony.
- The third approach emphasizes the art of particular groups – for example, African American art or women's art – for reasons of equity and social justice.
- The fourth approach tries to reflect socio-cultural diversity in a curriculum designed to be both multiethnic and multicultural
- The fifth approach, decision-making and social action, requires teachers and students to move beyond acknowledgement of diversity and to question and challenge the dominant culture's art world canons and structures. In this approach, art education becomes an agent for social reconstruction, and students get involved in studying and using art to expose and challenge all types of oppression. Although this last approach may not be multicultural per se, students will probably be dealing with issues that cross many cultural boundaries (p. 45).

These resonate with a list put forward by Troyna and Carrington (1990) that, 'drew on concepts derived from the sociology of race relations and specify ideological and policy responses in terms of the following: assimilation, integration and cultural pluralism (p. 20, see also Moore 1999).' Troyna (1992) further elaborated on these concepts, asserting that 'crudely stated, assimilation refers to the process of becoming similar ... assimilationist ideas

prompted the development of monocultural education (p. 68).’ He then described the genesis of integrationism, saying in the process,

Roy Jenkins, the then Home Secretary, spoke in 1966 of the need to prioritize integration as a social, political and educational goal ... For Jenkins, integration referred not to ‘a flattening process of assimilation’ but to ‘equal opportunity accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance’. On its own, of course, such an exhortatory statement meant little to educationalists. However, research pointing to the alleged negative self-image of black pupils and its relationship to their tendency to underachieve in education (Milner, 1975), alongside concern about emergent resistance to racist forms of education by black pupils and their parents prompted a reappraisal of the efficacy of monocultural education (p. 68).

Following the failed attempts at assimilationist and integrationist strategies there was ‘a fusion of integrationist and cultural pluralist convictions. By the mid 1970s, then, multicultural education had risen like a phoenix out of the ashes of monocultural education (p. 69).’ According to Troyna (1992), Brian Bullivant specified three ‘key assumptions’ underpinning multicultural education:

- (a) that by learning about his [sic] cultural and ethnic ‘roots’ an ethnic [sic] child will improve his educational achievement;
- (b) the closely related claim that learning about his culture, its traditions and so on will improve equality of opportunity;
- (c) that learning about other cultures will reduce children’s (and adults’) prejudice and discrimination towards those from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds (p.69).

Troyna (ibid.) argues that he and Mullard (1982) suggest that ‘multicultural education was simply the latest and most liberal variant of the assimilationist

perspective. The differences, such as these were, tended to be in degree rather than kind (p. 71).'

Teachers of art when running projects that build on approaches from other traditions often draw on the first two models, which correlate with Troyna's definition of assimilationist and integrationist policies (see also Swift 1996). Evidence of this can be seen in schemes where cultural materials from the backgrounds of pupils in the classroom are used to foster goodwill (Efland *et al* 1996, p.79), a policy described by Troyna (1992) as 'the 3Ss interpretation of multicultural education (Saris, Samosas, and Steel bands)' (see also Mirza 2005). The third approach will often engage pupils in study that draws on practices from another tradition in more in-depth enquiry. Such approaches would question long-standing views and assumptions by meaningful exposure to the work of others. Benin bronzes, Egyptian art, Indian Rickshaws, artefacts generated by the Mexican *Day of the Dead* and Aboriginal paintings are resources frequently used in such approaches, pedagogies described by Efland *et al* (1996) as 'a haphazard inclusion of various cultures (p. 43).'

The fourth approach as I understand it will draw on materials from and be celebratory of different cultures and ethnicities without necessarily challenging societal structures and 'norms' that under-gird ethnic division. It is an approach that acknowledges diversity in the community and the classroom, placing ethnic and cultural plurality at the forefront of teaching and learning. Pedagogies in model four would draw on differences in religious activity, cuisine and use of language alongside the literature and arts

of a people. Such teaching approaches would therefore offer more holistic approaches to 'multicultural' activity categorised in the first three groups. The fifth approach, 'decision-making and social action', provides opportunities for learners to critique the world around them and their place in it. It therefore prepares, '... students to challenge social structural inequality and to promote the goal of social and cultural diversity' (ibid, p. 82). This approach, therefore, has at its core a notion of radical reconstruction that could have critical implications for teaching African Caribbean and other pupils. It moves from an exploration of difference or a celebration of it to an interrogation of how we live and the impact our actions have on the lifestyles of others. In this regard it goes beyond the scope of the first four models by questioning attitudes and long-standing prejudices. Seen in this light it could be described as anti-racist.

### **3.2 Issues in teaching for liberation**

... racism resides 'squarely in the policies, structures and beliefs of everyday life' ... antiracists must provide the appropriate organizational, pedagogical and curricular context which allows children to scrutinize 'the manner in which racism rationalizes and helps maintains injustice and the differential power accorded groups in society (Trotna 1992, p. 70).'

The discourse of antiracist education is so huge that a comprehensive explanation of it could take up the whole of this work. By interrogating mainstream practices to reveal discrepancies in provision in respect to African Caribbean learners, however, this work promotes structural change to educational provision that could identify it as antiracist. Antiracism, despite its more militant profile, is at times subsumed into multiculturalism. John

(2005) in assessing antiracist strategies in education opines that,

The language of antiracism bears a striking resemblance to that of multiculturalism. There are those who would argue that multicultural education in its truest sense is essentially antiracist and that antiracist education, at its best, is truly multicultural.

He then argues critically that,

Antiracism concerns itself with structural issues in a way that multicultural education does not. Moreover, it seeks to challenge institutional practices and individual acts which derive from an ideology of racism. (p. 106)

The need for structural change is the motivational force behind this work. Indeed, as John contends, the curriculum itself needs to be transformed if antiracism is not to be perceived as 'clinical sanitizing of existing nasties' and a useful tool 'of conflict management and little more (ibid. p. 107).' Redesigning the curriculum to better celebrate the central contributions of diasporic subjects to world civilisations and more especially to the West, therefore, would require a complete re-conceptualising of how teaching and learning is done. Inevitably it must draw on politics. Erickson and Young (2002, p. 6) acknowledge this in stating that 'What is more important is that contemporary students realize that history and curricular materials are highly selected and sometimes the selection process is more political than educational. Paulo Freire (1993, p. 53) speaks of traditional approaches to teaching and learning being the "banking" concept of education. This is where 'Education becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories (ibid. p.53).' 'Knowledge', he suggests, 'emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world and with each other

(ibid. p.53).’ From Freire’s viewpoint, therefore, social action in education should be transformative, or in hooks’ (1994) word, transgressive. In proposing a pedagogy that emphasises “wholeness, a union of mind, body, and spirit (ibid. p.14)’ she draws on the theorising of Thich Nhat Hanh, who ‘always speaks of the teacher as a healer (ibid. p.14).’” Such a ‘progressive, holistic education (ibid. p. 15),’ she argues, ‘emphasizes well-being. That means that teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students (ibid. p. 15).’ Relating this more specifically to teaching diasporic learners, the taking of higher degree qualifications with a focus on diasporic student disenfranchisement, could be perceived as a particularly productive mode of transformation through self-actualisation. Given the lack of support for such pedagogies, I regard the strategy of in-service training and enrolment for higher degree qualifications with an emphasis on such concerns, as possible ways of addressing some of the issues pertaining to African Caribbean student need.

Efland *et al* (1996) divide educational practices in art and design education into two broad conceptual frameworks, the modern and postmodern. They state that,

The term modern means “of, pertaining to, or characteristic of recent time or the present ... The modern era in philosophy has been dated as far back as the Renaissance, but most often is identified with the rationalist views that developed or emerged in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, a period referred to as the Enlightenment (p. 5).

In this theorising the history of art has evolved through developmental stages

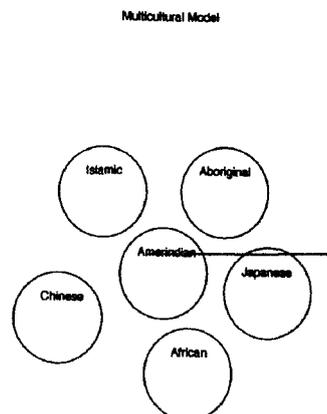
over several millennia starting with the Egyptians. The concept of the postmodern, however, '... is to call into question the philosophical assumptions of the Enlightenment, especially the idea of progress (ibid. p. 11).' Postmodern teaching therefore, in repudiating the notion of linear progress embraces theories of chaos and cultural collision. Pedagogies designed within this rationale draw on a diversity of experience, including those emerging from the learners' own subject positions (Figs. 15; 16; 17).

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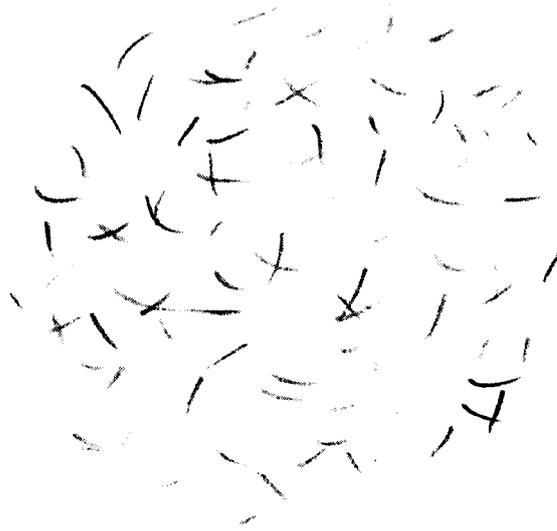
Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Medieval, Renaissance, Impressionist, Cubist, Surrealist, Modern, Post modern

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**Figure 18 Eurocentric model**



**Figure 19 Multicultural model**



**Figure 20 Chaos Model**

Figures 18, 19 and 20 combine theories of the modern and the postmodern. Across and through them flow the five approaches posited by Chalmers. They model frameworks inclusive of long-standing concepts of cultural origins and epistemologies, over-layered with present-day concerns for diversity and representation. Figure 18 shows how in traditionalist or modernist theories of knowing in the West, history is linear and moves through historical movements or developmental stages. In such theorising Greece is the well-head of Western cultural origins (Clark 1999; Pascall 1992). The notion implicit to this model of Western civilisation evolving through different stages to the present time, fails to acknowledge the impact of other cultures on our present-day life-styles outside its linear developmental framework. This crucial blindness to our shared cultural past is to my mind disadvantageous to diasporic learners.

Figure 19 is located between modernist and postmodern approaches to teaching and learning. It is a model that represents some approaches to multiculturalism probably akin to models one to four in Chalmers. Efland *et al* (1996) referencing Sleeter and Grant, assert that,

Multicultural education, as defined by Sleeter and Grant (1990), can be understood as a cultural democracy approach, for it "promotes cultural pluralism and social equity by reforming the school program" ... This approach is the "most popular term used by educators to describe working with students who are different because of race, gender, class or disability (p. 81)."

In such pedagogies the teaching of Aboriginal art could be followed by the study of Benin bronzes, leading to an analysis of Bengali rickshaw design. While pupils may in such approaches learn a great deal about the art practices of other nations, they fail to appreciate how cultures mix with and cross-fertilise one another. Importantly, too, they fail to acknowledge the imperatives that give rise to specific cultural 'norms'. For the African Caribbean learner there is in such approaches limited opportunity to showcase Caribbean cultures. Multicultural teaching therefore only serves to disadvantage African Caribbean learners. Such pedagogies fail to acknowledge diasporic cultures as meaningful and significant because they are perceived as lacking a unique cultural past (Gall 2002).

The third figure demonstrates how in post-modern conceptions of the world knowledges are contingent, nothing is freestanding and unique. Stuhr *et al* (1996) show how,

Geography, as well as history, has been re-conceptualised. From this

new perspective, culture is no longer viewed as contained within a certain land form. Cultures intermingle, mix, and impose on each other, the result of which are crises that change the face of maps (p. 23).

Here knowledges impose upon and are integral to one another. In such approaches teaching would not be based on a notion of linearity but could start from almost any starting-point. Teachers in developing schemes in art, therefore, could present starter material from a diasporic viewpoint whilst also emphasising their interconnectedness with other traditions. Pedagogies that are contingent and offer a range of avenues of exploration are, however, dependent on teacher engagement or self actualisation. As a new way of conceptualising the world, new teaching styles predicated on teacher research is central to their success. In other words teachers must be prepared to put the work into redesigning curricula content in a manner that problematise longstanding givens and ways of making sense of the world. The national curriculum does not require teachers to position teaching and learning in such frameworks (John 2006; Searle 2001). Ingrid Pollard in her photographic series *Wordsworth Heritage* (1992) and Yukinori Yanagi in his seminal work *Pacific* (1992), provide exemplars that model human interconnectedness, and demonstrate similar attitudes to identity and belonging.

As indicated, Pollard in placing the Caribbean subject at the centre of the English landscape, challenges notions of place as a marker of identity and cultural ownership. Similarly, Yukinori Yanagi's *Pacific* (1992) in which a colony of ants tunnelled their way through adjacent sand-based flag

constructions to colonise the piece, problematises the notion of geographical right to place in the name of race, or cultural affiliation. Badiou's (2001) ethical considerations and Hall's theory of new ethnicities (Hall 1992; see also Procter 2004) share this concept of cultural dynamism and identities being ontologically in the process of making. Work in schools that draw on pieces such as *Pacific* or *Wordsworth Heritage* could support enquiry round notions of belonging, identity and geographical space. Given their history of diasporisation, this discourse of cultural de-centring is particularly significant to the learning of African Caribbean pupils.

Discourses of cultural mediation are theorised by Atkinson (2005); Young (1992); Hall (1992); Foucault (1980); Badiou (2001); Sarup 1996). Efland *et al* (1996) state that,

... once one culture has been written about by another, there has been an interaction between them that changes both. The cultures we have had contact with have been influenced by the contact, just as knowledge of other cultures has influenced ours (ibid. p. 25).

Paulo Freire (1970) in theorising the distortions that can emerge from mutual estrangement cites the need for social action, '... true solidarity with the oppressed means fighting at their side to transform the objective reality which has made them these "beings for another (p. 31)". 'Beings for another' is the ontological state that characterised the life-world of the enslaved – they were literally living to serve another. Change has come about only sluggishly since that era. Freire opines that, 'The oppressor is solidary with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons who have been unjustly dealt

with, deprived of their voices (ibid. pp 31-32).’ Teacher solidarity with marginalised African Caribbean subjects is essential if their cultural identities are to be acknowledged and suitable pedagogies formulated to accommodate their aspirations for social justice. In being disabused of the myth of white superiority/black inferiority, the assault on injustice would also be beneficial to white children.

European hegemonies position the West as the anchor point to which all other traditions are tethered: the centrifugal source from which civilisation radiates. In such constructs the way we make sense of the world is mediated from Western hegemonic viewpoints. African Caribbean pupils are influenced by this and subliminally respond to it (Parker 1992; see also Winston, 2005). Postmodern pedagogies challenge this narrow construct and the Euro-centred perspectives on truth and reality it fosters. Inherent to such practices is the notion of deconstruction.

In postmodern pedagogies the strategy of deconstruction is at the centre of a revolution in thinking about how children learn and how they perceive themselves in the world (Emery 2002). It is largely student-centred and draws on individual interpretations of a given subject, which is used by the creative teacher to encourage personal responses to a theme. As a pedagogic approach, deconstruction presents opportunities to make teaching and learning in art and design more democratic and celebratory of diversity. Emery (ibid. 2002) states that,

.... deconstruction is a tool for examining texts and images to reveal the meaning systems upon which the work is based. For postmodern art teachers the challenge is to provide students with the cultural and social understanding that equips them to think critically when responding to artworks. It also requires teachers to introduce students to appropriate methodologies so that they can interpret postmodern art in various ways (p. 49-50).

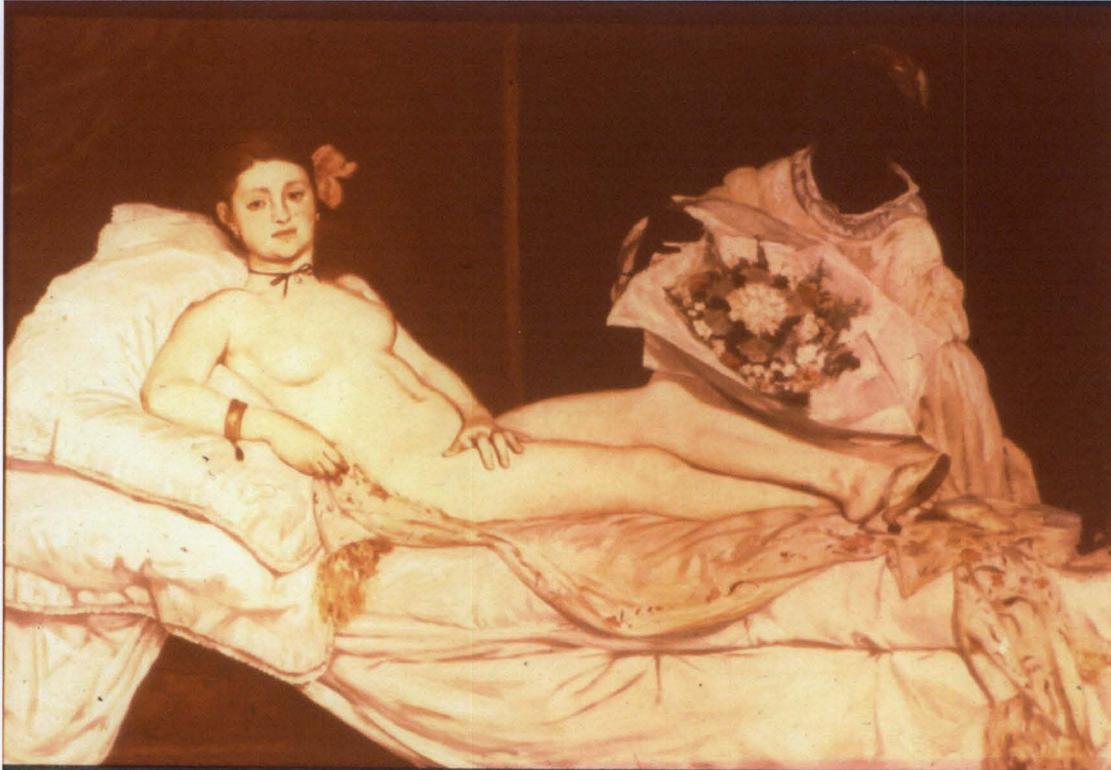
While Efland *et al* (1996) see "deconstruction" as action 'to unearth hidden, oppressive elements in democratic society (p. 28).' They further assert that,

Deconstruction was developed by Derrida to reveal the multiple meanings, especially the contradictions, of literary texts. ... In some cases, deconstruction involves a "turning upside down" of old myths that have been taken-for-granted and the "unpacking" of social constructs that have become so embedded in society as to appear natural. This process can be helpful in illustrating the fragility of meaning and the relation of truth to power (p. 28).

Taken literally the unpicking of meanings embedded in Manet's *Olympia* (1863) (Fig. 21) that problematise the gaze and the symbolic system of codes inherent to it, would constitute a critical act of deconstruction (see Boime 1990). As indicated in this work, the presence of the black servant in the *Olympia* has rarely been explicated in analyses of the piece, whether in written or oral discourses. Seen in that light discussion about the presence of the Caribbean woman in Manet's great work, could inspire individualistic responses from African Caribbean students.

The way we relate to the past shifts according to the experiences we are exposed to in our day-to-day lives, through the media and by other means (Hall 1992 and 1997; Njami 2005; Shohat 1994). Present-day interpretations of works of art from the past, therefore, may be very different from the way they may have been perceived when first exhibited. Black spectators can

bring new nuances of meaning to Western-generated texts. Such reanalyses of representational strategies in Western art, could help African diasporic learners to better appreciate the way in which subjects such as themselves are depicted in history (Chambers 1989). The deconstruction of historical works could also shed light on inequalities that have a bearing on the representation of other minorities (John 2006). Reinterpretations of historical works, therefore, have significances for everyone. Pedagogies that allow such enquiry, by providing space for marginalised subjects to redefine their epistemic frameworks, look to the future by truly redrawing the contours of the past (Freire 1987). For this to happen, teachers need to relinquish their control on how works are interpreted and allow children to find their own routes through them Said (1993) (see also Atkinson 2002). By this means works of art by significant European artists from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries could be deconstructed to show how they contribute to the exploitation of people from this country, the African Diaspora and elsewhere.



**Figure 21** Manet. *Olympia* (1863)

### **3.3 Hermeneutics, regulation and African Caribbean student learning in art and design**

Atkinson (2002) problematises the hermeneutics that regulate children as producers of art in school art practice. It is by the dismantling of traditional power relations (Atkinson 2003. p. 38) that the teacher, dedicated to social justice in art and design education, can begin to formulate strategies to support learners. Referencing Habermas, Atkinson shows how our ways of making sense of the world through art practice are regulated by socio-cultural conditioning:

If we consider art in education we might want to reflect upon the kinds of practices that are valued and the ways in which they are assessed as involving specific power relations that establish forms of discrimination.

For example, do the practices of teaching and assessment that we initiate produce ways of learning that are gendered or culturally or racially biased? Habermas's project therefore concerns developing a state of emancipated communication and practice through critical enquiry (p. 38).

Similarly, in referencing Bryson he asserts that 'Processes of visuality are not concerned with the reception of information via light waves but with immersion in visual semiotic structures (p. 81)'. My reading of Atkinson's theorising is that the process of seeing and reading works of art is infused with politics which is imbibed through our acculturation to cultural-specific 'norms'. Developing the ability to stand outside the social and political treadmill of biased valuation, however, to recognise multiple viewpoints, can be disquieting. Freire (1987) acknowledges this in stating that, 'Liberation is ... a childbirth, and a painful one. The man or woman who emerges is a new person, viable only as the oppressor/oppressed contradiction is superseded by the humanization of all people (pp. 30-31)'. African Caribbean students on making work that speaks from their own ontological worlds may respond in ways antithetical to teacher expectations. This surely must be a reflection of the very different lifestyles in which they are immersed. Challenges inherent to what they produce may be signs of their authenticity. I think of the anti-social lyrics associated with some hip-hop music that mirror the life-worlds of the urban dispossessed in Western inner cities (Bayodi and Davies 2005; Johnson 2006; Willis 1990). Music produced by young people who see themselves in the margins of society, speaks of a world that is not experienced by many teachers in schools, even black ones. Visual art work produced by the young may similarly be located outside the experience of the

middle-class teacher brought up in a different cultural and ontological milieu. The art of Jean Michel Basquait, the New York-based artist of Haitian background who died prematurely from a drugs overdose, has a rawness to it that echoes his life on the streets of New York. Black and other graffiti artists create pieces ('tag' walls) that can shock and communicate an aggressive message of rejection. Their art speaks for them. Atkinson (2002) demonstrates how teachers produced by a symbolic order through which they make sense of the world, acknowledge abilities that coincide with the values and attributes that frame their own subject positions. Teachers must be mindful not to demonstrate similar prejudices in classroom contexts where African Caribbean students make work that speaks of their experience.

### **3.4 Summary**

This chapter raised the issue of teaching styles and the types of pedagogic approaches that could bring benefits to African Caribbean young people in art and design classrooms. Several approaches were analysed, and I concluded that issues-based approaches that allowed pupils a voice in determining lesson content had the potential to engage African Caribbean learners in a meaningful encounters. Five approaches listed in Chalmers (1996) were analysed. The last, decision-making and social action, offers a rationale for pedagogies intended to make teaching and learning more inclusive of African Caribbean and other learners. This is perceived in my theorising as a framework for pedagogies that could have an impact on the self-perception of African Caribbean learners. Pedagogies that embrace such approaches could

be described as postmodern or anti-racist. Chapter 4 will explore in greater depth contemporary practices as a resource for teaching in the art and design classroom.

## **Chapter 4 - The contemporary cultural space; African Caribbean subjects and the pedagogic context**

This chapter proposes the development of practices that borrow from contemporary art allied to intercultural schemes, as a tool for ensuring the democratising of practice. Such pedagogies should bring to the centre of teaching and learning, pupils from all backgrounds and levels of ability. Most especially, the chapter explores the discourse of contemporary practice to assess its relevance to the needs of pupils of African Caribbean heritage. The chapter starts by posing the question 'What is contemporary art?'<sup>24</sup> An attempt is made through the theoretical writing of educationalists and experts in the fields of culture and fine art, to provide a definition of this. Contemporary practices are then seen in the classroom context. It ends with a discourse on the art of diasporic artists, problematising the dialectic of black art and the position black artists occupy in Western artistic practices.

### **4.1 What is contemporary art?**

Burgess and Addison (2000) assert that 'contemporary art often refuses classification' (p. 19), (see also Dawe Lane, 1996) while Adams (2006) contends that contemporary practice, '... inevitably elides the boundaries between author, spectator, producer, and participant, and call into question

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<sup>24</sup> Contemporary art is regarded in this chapter as synonymous with post-modern art practices. While a distinction may be drawn between the concepts, I regard the fundamental principles attached to them to be largely indistinguishable.

individual agency itself (p. 24).’ Downing and Watson (2004) in *School Art What’s in it?* a survey of contemporary practices in schools, were unable to provide a clear description of such approaches, asserting instead that, ‘The definition of what constituted contemporary art practice, or of a school that demonstrated a commitment to this, was left entirely to those identifying the schools (p.5).’ Emery (2002), however, while acknowledging the difficulties inherent to providing a firm definition of contemporary practice is more forthcoming,

Critics look at the diversity of postmodern art and see a huge range of incoherent and conflicting practices. What is more, postmodern art often seems ‘anti-aesthetic’. It is sometimes shockingly confronting but at other times sweetly reminiscent of past practices or even crassly derivative of popular art styles. It is hard to know what postmodern art is about, if indeed it is important to know (p. 8).

Efland *et al*, (1996) in *Postmodern Art and Education: an approach to Curriculum*, explore issues around the formulation and development of an art and design education which engage issues of representation in a period which may be described as post-modern. Their theorising embraces strategies that could be described as a celebration of multiple voices (Shohat and Stam 1994). From the outset they analyse the Enlightenment and modernist frameworks through which we theorise cultural meanings and practices. Deconstructing Foucault’s theory of power-knowledge Efland *et al* (1996) look at modernist epistemology and the modern conception of location. They state that,

History is considered in the past, whereas geography is concerned with stable land forms that contain closed cultures within their boundaries. Allied with this perspective is a pervasive belief in the cultural supremacy of the West. This representation of progress is built on a linear and progressive sense of time (p. 19).

Providing a framework for 'A Model Postmodern Art Education Curriculum: 1990 – Present (p. 72)', under 'Content and Methods' they list,

Recycle contents and methods from modern and premodern forms of instruction.

Feature the mini-narratives of various persons or groups not represented by the canons of master artists.

Explain the effects of power in validating art knowledge.

Use arguments grounded in deconstruction to show that no point of view is privileged.

Recognise that works of art are multiply coded within several symbol systems (ibid. p. 72).

In keeping with this Downing and Watson (2004) assert that contemporary art provides an opportunity 'for the exploration of social, moral and political issues and recognition of art as a visual communication tool (p.5).' Such practices lend themselves to thematic enquiries that enable personal responses to issues as diverse as 'Taboo' 'Identity' or 'Metamorphosis (Kennedy 1995).' Central to these are notions of fissuring, fragmentation, contestation, controversy, difference and even cultural conflict (Efland *et al* 1996 p. 56). Critically, in respect to the African Caribbean learner, contemporary art provides opportunities for teachers to draw on the work of present-day Black and Asian artists who problematise issues of identity, representation and social justice. As stated by a teacher participant in the Tate/Goldsmiths Contemporary Art in Schools research project (2005),

We should be looking for black and Asian artists ... Chris Ofili features quite highly, partly because of his politics, which are quite pertinent really – particularly in my school which has a lot of race problems. It's good to look at his work and see what statements he's trying to make.

Contemporary art and the pedagogies that espouse its conceptual principles, prioritise the value of individual and collective subjectivities (Efland *et al* 1996). Attaching to it modernist<sup>25</sup> values such as an ability to draw in a classical tradition could therefore destroy its intentions. Problematising the valuation of non-standard drawing practices Atkinson (2002, p.50), demonstrates that in children's drawing, we should 'attempt to enquire into the student's experiential relation with the subject of a drawing and consider how this relation is articulated by the student through the semiotics of the drawing'. In other words it is the responsibility of the teacher to enter into the life-word framed by the pupil, which is articulated in his/her semiotic codes. By this means the manifold worlds of the classroom are valued and fore-grounded. In supporting such practices, the alert teacher would be receptive to the diverse voices inherent to the works.

The notion of an aesthetic defining itself through practice is applicable to the work of progressive artists of any period. It is apparent in the drawings of Van Gogh, which in their late 19<sup>th</sup> century context are so different from the stylised romanticism of Ingres or the flowing elegance of Degas whose work fell within accepted norms of the day. Cy Twombly's use of line, in which a personal language of meaning-making is encoded, challenges the sensibilities

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<sup>25</sup> Modernism is as tricky to define as contemporary practice and postmodernism. However, for the purposes of this paper I broadly mean by modernism, 'the idea of progress' and the notion that 'culture and society have a progressive, evolutionary development' (Efland *et al*, p. 7). For more on this topic I would recommend Efland *et al* 1996.

of spectators whose aesthetic preferences may have been honed by a more conservative appreciation of the art of drawing. Through Van Gogh's and Twombly's art, therefore, the viewer engages new ways of seeing and interpreting experience.

This brief overview of contemporary practice demonstrates the futility, as Downing and Watson (2004) and Burgess and Addison (2000) assert, in attempting to give a firm definition to it. In a similar vein, pedagogies that draw on such art will test the conventions of creative engagement in classrooms and the traditional means of assessing good practice. Some contemporary schemes may be constructed within a politics in which the power of voice is delegated to each individual participant or group of collaborators. It is this democratisation of practice that promotes questioning, one that problematises previous givens regarding social and aesthetic values alongside notions of self and other, truth and untruth that is, in my view, central to postmodern approaches to teaching and learning.

Art and design educators in the UK committed to more inclusive pedagogies are adopting schemes akin to Chalmers fifth model 'decision-making and social action' (Efland *et al* 1996; Burgess and Addison 2000; Emery 2001; Addison and Dash, 2005; Rollins, 2005; Ward; 2005; Bayodi and Davies, 2005; Robinson and Binch 1994; Kennedy 1995). Their teaching inevitably embraces a political dimension. To quote Burgess and Addison (2000),

... the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being

based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics (Addison and Burgess pp. 18 – 19).

This political dimension is also central to the work of diasporic artists, in whose pieces the absence of a longstanding ancestral aura is substituted by the exploration of political themes, and the challenges attendant on their survival as black subjects. I think for example of Keith Piper's problematizing of the politics of the slave trade in *An English Queen* (1991), or Georgia Belfont's Re-Evaluating Olympia (1987 - 1988), which posits a re-positioning of the black presence in Manet's *Olympia* (1865). In Chambers' *Black Art: Plotting the course* (1989), a slide pack and essay on the work of Black and Asian artists<sup>26</sup>, the text accompanying each image asserts the artists' political intentions. Said Adrus's *Self Portrait* (1988), draws upon the passport and identity card image, Upjohn Aghaji's *Denial of Freedom* (1986) frames 'A map of Africa with the flags of two world super-powers tied together across South Africa', while Ray Povey's *Christian Aid* (1982), '... refers to the patronising help-support that the West gives to African and other 3<sup>rd</sup> World Countries, through so-called programmes which have a short life-span.'

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<sup>26</sup> The *Black Art* movement in the UK and much contemporary art involving African, African Caribbean, Chinese and Asian British artists share a similar politico/aesthetic rationale and engage issues of race, racism and oppression in the UK and Western society as a whole. This sharing of political ideals has emerged despite their very different historical, political and cultural backgrounds. Asian British, Chinese and African artists do have unbroken cultural histories to draw on in articulating a visual identity, unlike Caribbean British artists who are deprived of such continuities by the slave trade.

Chambers sees the polemics of the Black Power movement as the motivating force behind Black art (ibid. p.10). The notion that the Black Power movement 'facilitated the development of 'Black Art'' implies a political aesthetic that draws on a different means of valorising and analysing experience from traditional Western viewpoints. Margaret G. Burroughs, quoted in the same publication, is similarly dismissive of black artists that embrace the values of the mainstream,

Many black artists have felt that they can make it by being as non-black as possible. They are not black artists. They are not African-American artists. They do not handle "black" subject matter. They do not even paint or sculpt black people or anything of an ethnic nature. They are one hundred per cent American artists and their works are no different from the mainstream of white American art or non-art. They have become masters of the non-humanists techniques. In some cases they have surpassed their white counterparts and painted themselves into a corner away from their black soul people. They have carried this meaningless non-objectivism to a fine point and often are touted and lauded by the "establishment" for this nonsense (p. 12).

The paintings of Frank Bowling, the Guyana born British based artist, are in this regard of particular importance. His large abstracts draw on formalist concerns with colour, form and texture that apparently eschew Caribbean references or race politics. Veerle Poupeye-Rammelaere, in the catalogue *Frank Bowling* (1996), confirms that,

Bowling's commitment to formalist modernism is at odds with the dominant content-oriented trends in modern Caribbean art and its underlying ideology of cultural nationalism. His work therefore fails to conform to what Caribbean cultural arbiters normally define as legitimate Caribbean art (p.22).

She later quotes Rasheed Araeen who in the catalogue to *The Other Story* (1989) suggests that, '[Bowling's] importance lies not in what he has achieved but in what he has been struggling for.' Poupeye-Rammelaere then gives

definition to 'Bowling's 'struggle' which, '... has precisely been about the prerogative to be appraised for his artistic accomplishments rather than as a representative of a cause or a group (ibid. p. 20).'

Bowling's technique and personal exploration of materials offer new ways of manipulating the picture surface, particularly when working with acrylics. His contributions to debates about the representation of the black subject, however, are less pronounced. This brings into question the degree to which the diasporic artist can stand outside post-Columbian discourses and make work of significance. It also problematizes how we read visual texts and interrogate our preconceptions about what art is for. To this author, visual artwork oscillates between objects of contemplation, the representation of a notional 'truth', and an engagement with the 'new' that posits new insights on experience. For the diasporic artist, stripped by the trauma of the slave trade of a longstanding cultural heritage that could provide the seedbed for engaging new aesthetic forms, the embroilment in an aggressive politics with aesthetic activity mirrors their construction as subjects. As such, a black art that does not address the politics of blackness, arguably the single most important organisational 'truth' of the diasporic experience, may appear lacking in depth (Chambers 1989). Frank Bowling's art could be a rich resource in schemes where teaching content deals with formalist concerns, but if children are to use art as an 'agent for social reconstruction' then work with more overtly politically engaged content would arguably be more appropriate.

## **4.2 Summary**

This chapter engaged the issue of contemporary practices and their relevance to the learning of African Caribbean pupils. In doing so it underscored my assertion that issues-based pedagogies, which emerge from the fifth model listed by Chalmers, 'decision-making and social action' offer new possibilities for teaching African Caribbean pupils. The chapter highlighted difficulties in providing a definition of contemporary practice. In positing a broad definition of such activity, however, it presented a backdrop for pupil/teacher engagement in constructing pedagogies in contemporary art and design arenas. I argue that contemporary practices are particularly relevant to teaching African Caribbean students whose access to traditional artworks is informed by the positions that black subjects traditionally occupy in them. The range of media and approaches inherent to practices that explicate such skewed representations, offers possibilities for experimenting in new pedagogies that should enrich classroom practice at every level.

### **4.3 Summary of Section 1**

This long section started by presenting the scope of the research concern. Chapter 1 provided an outline of the intention of the three questions and indicated why they were chosen. The issue of diasporic invisibility and the lack of institutions available for representing the black figure were discussed. The second chapter, which was divided into four sections, outlined the central aspects of the argument through the theorising and practice of key thinkers and artists. Given the nature of the subject, its invisibility, I thought that a review that presented a range of viewpoints on the state of the diasporic subject in the West was more appropriate than a more traditional Literature Review. This framework provided an opportunity to explore a series of theoretical positions pertinent to the experience of diasporic subjects that frame their invisibility in art and design. As such a range of discursive positions were highlighted by voices that spoke through different media and subject positions, hence the notion of a multi-textured polo-mint. They all engaged notions of diasporic invisibility, explaining in the process how this state came about.

The first sub-section dealt with a revisiting of the African terrain of the diasporic subject. It then moved to capture and transportation. The intention here was not to discuss issues of hardship of exploitation but to identify points of resistance in the contexts in which the enslaved found themselves. To that end the achievements of diasporic craftspeople and artisans in different communities in the Diaspora were highlighted. The work

then focused on the key issues raised by Brathwaite and James, their oppositional views on diasporic cultural belonging. This key section dealt with issues impacting directly on concerns across the three research questions. The issue of boundary formation, the way in which those in the hegemony constructed lines of separation between non-African and African subjects was raised. It was followed by a sub-section that looked at epidermal variation and the way human physiological differences are used in boundary construction. The representation of the black subject in traditional works of art further problematised discourses of racial difference. This sub-section engaged pedagogic strategies in multicultural teaching. I posited the theory that contemporary practices, by their potential to promote teaching from experiential and historical subject positions, are an important resource for teaching African Caribbean students.

## **5. Section 2**

In the second section of this work I describe and analyse a small research project. It will present the research findings having in Section 1 given an account of the theoretical and pedagogical background to the study. There are three questions:

1. What strategies are teachers of art employing to make Caribbean cultures central to teaching and learning in multicultural pedagogies?
2. What resources are used in such teaching? Is the Caribbean regarded as part of a wider diasporic entity? Are connections made with Africa or are they instead looking to contemporary practice for philosophical and resourcing solutions to the issue of classroom diversity?
3. In their teaching, how are teachers more effectively acknowledging and celebrating Diaspora contributions to the Western mainstream?

First I describe my methodology then I present the research data and offer my interpretation of it.

## **5.1 Chapter 5**

### **Research Methodology**

The research is qualitative and centres on two groups of participants – a group of six educators - five from London secondary schools and one gallery educator - and six male youths from a London Gallery. The educators were interviewed separately. Four of the five teachers are women and the gallery educator is also a woman. Arrangements were made to interview a second male head of art on July 7 2006, but the interview was cancelled because of the terrorist atrocity that occurred that day in London. A second interview with the same head of art, arranged for July 21, had to be cancelled for similar reasons. It should be noted, however, that the gender bias reflects the high preponderance of women teachers in secondary school art departments in England. All six educators work in environments with high percentages of African Caribbean students. As indicated four are of African Caribbean origin and two are white – one with an Irish background and the other from the UK. Alert to the danger of compromising the anonymity of my participants, the profiles of contributors are limited to a few background details.

The rationale for the research was not driven merely by a desire to gather information regarding the experience of African Caribbean students in art and design education, but to seek examples of good practice that could be disseminated to teachers. Educators of African Caribbean background, given their insider view of how education works for African Caribbean learners, would, I assumed, have a vested interest in pushing for curriculum change.

However, it became apparent from the outset that my assumptions were based on a false premise; the differences in perception between black and white participants were not always as stark as I had anticipated. Though contributions by at least one African Caribbean educator were very insightful, teacher responses across the sample did not diverge significantly. Both white educators furnished rich material that was extraordinarily cogent and instructive.

Originally I intended to interview ten art educators. Rightly, however, perceiving that ten teacher participants would have been excessive, I was advised by my supervisor against this. I note also Alasuutari's (1995) assertion that 'In qualitative analysis a great number of observation units and statistical thinking are neither needed nor possible (p. 12). Indeed, analysis of the interviews with six educator participants became so intense that had I selected more for the study, several thousand words more would have been needed for the analysis.

Each participant or group of participants was interviewed once. I did not restrict the interviews to length though an hour was set aside. The interview with Alice, however, lasted one hour and forty minutes while those with Tony and Maria lasted fifty minutes. Similarly the interview with the group at Aspire Gallery was forty five minutes in length. All interviews were semi-structured, in that there were set questions. Where the interviews took unpredicted directions, I allowed this to occur if at the time I felt such

departures promised worthwhile research data. This occurred particularly in the interview with Betty at Brown School. In that interview the responses frequently settled on issues of discipline and pupil management.

All interviews were taped. However, the last five minutes of the interview with Maria was written in note form after the tape recorder broke down. The set questions for the teachers were:

- (a) Do you use material from the Caribbean when devising schemes of work?
- (b) What resources do you use when teaching from a Caribbean perspective?
- (c) Do pupils still have a sense of being from the Caribbean?
- (d) Do you make links with Africa when working with Africa Caribbean pupils?
- (e) How do you use African resources?
- (f) Do you make links to the UK when talking about the Caribbean?
- (g) Is there a problem in getting children of African Caribbean descent to relate to African work?
- (h) Do you engage contemporary practices in your teaching?

These questions were suitably modified when interviewing the young people at Aspire Gallery.

## **5.2 Brief profiles of the teacher/educator participants**

### **Alice – Yellow School**

Alice teaches at Yellow School, a co-educational, 11-18 school in London. The school is mixed but is more than fifty per cent black, the majority of African Caribbean origin. Alice has a position of responsibility for key stage three teaching in her department but is not a head of department. She has developed a pedagogy that draws on resources from Caribbean, African and other traditions. In her teaching the naming of artists is paramount. She also collects African artefacts that are used to inform practice.

### **Anna – Educator at Aspire Gallery**

Anna is an experienced, black gallery educator of many years standing. She is employed at what I will call Gallery Aspire, in south London. Anna works with youths from many communities, the majority being African Caribbean in origin. Some have troubled histories and may have been excluded from school either permanently or temporarily at some point during their compulsory education. The interview was useful in providing insights into practices from a gallery perspective that are free from the constraints placed on teachers in schools. Anna has worked with young people in the USA.

### **Betty – Brown School**

Betty, a black head of art, teaches at Brown School. At the time of the interview, she had been teaching at the school for four years but had recently

been appointed head of department. I knew Betty previously as a PGCE student. We therefore have a long-standing working relationship. Brown School has a reputation for poor discipline. In our interview, behaviour concerns permeated everything, including the way the curriculum is designed and managed. Brown School is some sixty per cent black of which the vast majority of these pupils are of African Caribbean background.

#### Maria – Blue School

Maria is an experienced white head of department at an 11-18 Catholic boys' comprehensive school. Maria has taught at the school for more than ten years. The art department, like the school as a whole, is very successful academically and the population is more than seventy percent black. As with Brown School the vast majority of the black students are of African Caribbean origin. Maria has worked throughout the ten years of her career at Blue School, as a school-based mentor in the Goldsmiths teacher training partnership.

#### Rebecca – Green School

Rebecca is the most experienced participant in the research. A white head of department, I have known Rebecca for twenty years in my capacity as GCSE moderator and as a colleague in the Goldsmiths PGCE partnership scheme. Green School is a successful 11- 18 Catholic girls' school in London. Like Blue School it has a high population of black African and African Caribbean students, some seventy per cent of the school population. Rebecca has an

Irish background. The value of her experience as an Irish woman working with African Caribbean students features prominently in the interview.

#### Tony – Grey School

Tony is a black head of art at Grey School, an 11-18 mixed comprehensive school in London. The school is more than fifty per cent black. He did his PGCE in the 1990s at the Institute of Education, when I was on the staff there. We have therefore known each other for seventeen years. Tony worked for more than ten years in a celebrated art department in London, where he gained experience in developing issues-based approaches to teaching.

#### The Aspire Group

Aspire in south London is a community-based gallery that has a growing reputation for its work with young offenders and disaffected youth. The gallery provides opportunities for young people to engage in art practices particularly in digital arts and photography. Six young people were selected by the gallery for the interview. Unfortunately an all male group was selected by the gallery for the interview, on the misunderstanding that my research was focusing on the experiences of African Caribbean boys in art education. Having previously arranged with the gallery to meet a group of young people, only to be disappointed when the people involved failed to turn up, I elected to continue with the interview despite the gender imbalance.

The young people I met were very reticent for much of the interview process, responding monosyllabically to questions. This I put down to shyness in front of a microphone. Some of these youths, given their histories, may be distrustful of people in authority or who represent educational institutions. Having said that, as the interview moved towards its close, and I indicated this, the young people opened up. Their inhibitions melted away and fruitful data was then contributed. Views shared by them on Black History Month were of particular significance.

The six Young People:

Senior – studying at a south London College. At 20 years of age, Senior was the eldest of the group.

Junior – the youngest of the group at 14.

Freddie – still at school

Eric – still at school

Cliff – has left school and is studying at a south London college

Thomas – is in the sixth form at a south London school

Freddie, Junior and Thomas attend or attended the same secondary school in south London.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> In April 2005 I participated as a speaker and facilitator at *I Can Do It*, a conference for secondary school students of African Caribbean background. Thirty-nine young people were involved from two different schools. The conference was designed to enable these young participants to identify concerns that were negatively affecting their performance at school, and where possible propose ways of moving their learning forward. I ran a workshop with a

The research is ethnographic, or an approach that is '... an attempt to understand the complex behaviour of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry' (Fontana and Frey 1994, p. 365). I tried not to predict the outcomes though I expected all participants to be sympathetic to notions of inclusion and interculturalism. However, as Stephen Ball (1991) states, there was an attempt 'to pass over as much control over the substance of the interview as possible to the respondent (p. 179).' I further resonate with Ball when he says that,

... the analysis is 'not quite finished', 'not quite adequate'. There is always the possibility of new, surprising data, and the context is always changing. But eventually perfection and closure must be measured against practicality (Ibid. p. 178).

Interviews, as Denzin and Lincoln (1994) state, are '... the favourite tool of the qualitative researcher (p. 353).' They further assert that 'The interview is a conversation, the art of asking questions and listening (ibid. p.353).' Later they reference Fontana and Frey who,

... identified a major contradiction between scientific, positivistic research, which requires objectivity and detachment, and feminist-based interviewing, which requires openness, emotional engagement, and the development of a potentially long-term, trusting relationship between the interviewer and the subject (ibid 353).

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group of the participants during which notes outlining key points were kept by the young people themselves. Notes from the conference are included in the *I Can Do It* report in Appendix 2.

The long-term relationship I have with all the participants had the advantage of empowering them, in that they felt free to speak candidly and openly during the interviews. In writing of a research project that was conducted in similar circumstance, Stephen Ball (1991) states that,

In the majority of cases the interviewees were known to me directly or were personally recommended to me. I believed that the sorts of questions I wanted to ask and the topics I wanted to address, what Eric Hoyle calls the 'organizational underworld' (Hoyle, 1982, p.87) could not be dealt with by a cold calling interview technique. I needed a degree of trust from my respondents. I needed them to take me into their confidence ... In some respects I was operating close to the level of gossip and personal criticism ... not surprisingly the better I knew my interviewee the more candid the disclosures tended to be... (p. 178 – 179).

The research could be described as participatory. Participatory research according to Adu-Poku (2002) is '... a methodology that facilitates the liberation of oppressed people (p. 125).' VioGrossi (1981), however, suggests that participatory research must attempt to 'initiate a process of dis-indoctrination to allow the people to detach from their own cultural elements, those elements that have been imposed on them and are functional to the status quo (ibid 125).' I take VioGrossi to mean that this methodology provides a space for participants to share perceptions on the way their interests are militated against by the society or the hegemony in which they have to operate, while suggesting strategies that could effect change. To better facilitate this approach, the research method is free-flowing and allows the educator participants to uninhibitedly contribute their viewpoints on action in the classroom. It proceeds on the basis that the interview material is never completely 'analysed' but is always open to further interpretation.

The study does not draw on evidence culled from observations of students or their teachers in the classroom. Neither does it depend on an analysis of schemes of work. Instead it considers evidence drawn from interviews with teachers and interviews with young people. The key point is, that the research is based upon my analysis of what teachers and students revealed in interviews about their understanding of the teaching and learning of African Caribbean students in London school environments.

In selecting the research questions I identified three key areas. These were determined by reading in the fields of African Caribbean and diasporic arts and culture, and the politics of diasporic marginalisation. The three areas were:

1. What strategies are teachers of art employing to make Caribbean cultures central to teaching and learning in multicultural pedagogies?
2. What resources are used in such teaching? Is the Caribbean regarded as part of a wider diasporic entity? Are connections made with Africa or are they instead looking to contemporary practice for philosophical and resourcing solutions to the issue of classroom diversity?
3. In their teaching, how are teachers more effectively acknowledging and celebrating Diaspora contributions to the Western mainstream?

The selection of questions was difficult. Just how can one justify seeking to establish the methods used by teachers to make links with the Caribbean, when there is no specific requirement from government or local education authorities for making such links? In reflecting on the issue of diasporic invisibility, however, these questions are a useful tool in determining the degree to which African Caribbean pupils' cultural and historical interests are catered for in the classroom. I therefore consider Badiou's notion of 'situation' critical to the research. The data is then analysed to see where the views of participants coincide with each other or are in tune with much that is presented in section 1, or indeed if new approaches and theories are posited.

How are teachers therefore seeking to make African Caribbean presences visible? Given the inability of the state and teaching authorities to 'see' them, what do teachers who are motivated to effect change actually do? Considering the lack of regulation in this area, I anticipated a raft of viewpoints. The research was designed therefore not to restrict teachers to narrow responses managed by me, but to offer them an opportunity to share their perceptions of need and good practice. In that regard the questions asked within the stated framework, were adapted to the circumstances of each interview and the philosophies that the participants held. This approach inevitably led to unevenness in teacher responses to the questions. In response to Question 1, for example, two teachers contributed a great deal while others said very little, preferring instead to elaborate responses to other issues.

I allowed the participants to engage concerns outside the strict focus of art and design. This method was adopted because I regard all aspects of performance and behaviour in schools to have a bearing on pupil performance in art and design. Pupil fights and inappropriate use of language could, as Willis (1990a; and 1990b) demonstrates, impact on learning. Similarly it was not my intention to give the impression that any participant's actions or observations were inadequate. Rigidly set questions about African Caribbean student inclusion could have embarrassed teachers and resulted in barren enquiry. My methodology is therefore almost journalistic and conversational. Much of it was designed to see how teachers, given the constraints of African Caribbean student invisibility and the concomitant lack of appropriate provision for them, are moulding their pedagogies. Ultimately I was looking for any meaningful trace or engagement with the discourse of diasporic student recognition in the art and design classroom environment. The three research questions provided a framework that allowed this to occur but were not intended to set rigid categories. Participant responses therefore oscillated at times between the questions. While creating an organisational challenge during the writing up phase, I think this was the right approach as it privileged the participant and not any predetermined intentions on my part, other than that of collecting useful data.

The conversation I had with the group of young people at Aspire Gallery was similarly open ended. In saying that, I was aware of Heath's (1997) assertion

that young people can 'engage several versions of themselves depending on circumstances, and call on multiple discourses according to need, motivation, and domains (p. 120).' As indicated above, data from the *I Can Do It* conference held in Oxford in 2006 is presented here in the appendices. At that conference I had opportunity to talk to a group of Year 10 (Age 15) African Caribbean students about their careers and the curricula they are exposed to. Though confined to the appendices, this material is useful for cross-checking outcomes from the interviews carried out with the group of young people at Aspire Gallery. As such the dangers signalled by Heath have, I believe, been averted.

Alasuutari speaks of the purification of observations and unriddling, explaining these as,

In the purification of observations we can distinguish two phases. First, the material is always only observed from *a particular theoretical and methodological point of view*. To find that particular viewpoint, it is often useful to thematize the material from as many angles as possible ... the second phase of purification of observations is to further reduce the amount of data by combining observations (ibid. p. 13).

As indicated, participants in this research process were invited to share their viewpoints on the issues framed by the questions. After the taped interviews were completed and the transcripts written up, I analysed the data by identifying similarities across the interviews. My participants' responses were then thematized and organised within the three question structure that provide the framework for the research. Where responses diverge from a

question and engaged other avenues of enquiry, the data was extracted and relocated in a category where it best suited.

What was forcibly communicated in the interviews with young people at the Aspire Gallery was a desire for the recognition of black achievement and the centrality of this to their self-esteem. Certainly students identified as African Caribbean may have little interest in the Caribbean and even less in Africa. Few will be interested in Haiti or Honduras. Cuba is as alien to many as Russia or Kurdistan. To the academic with an interest in Caribbean cultures the reality of this should be taken into account in writing schemes intended to engage African Caribbean student cultural identities, let alone those of mixed cultural or 'racial' heritage. What is apparent, however, is the importance in their world of popular culture.

The issue of critical and contextual studies, the learning environment in which concepts are located, is critical to an examination of African Caribbean learners in art. Traditional representations of the black diasporic figure, its distortion or invisibility, the values we impute to blackness, shape children's perceptions of schooling and learning (Parker 1992; Burgess-Macey 1992).

Analysing ramifications of such stereotyping, Robert Adler (2007) states that,

... the stereotypes that society applies to such groups ... can make individuals painfully aware of how critically they are viewed and can have a crippling impact on their performance. Any situation that reinforces the stereotype – even something as simple as checking off one's race or gender before a test – can threaten a person's sense of themselves as good, competent and valued, which in turn raises anxiety (P. 17).

To prove the point he shared the findings of research carried out by Geoff Cohen at the University of Colorado, which show how a group of African American students were empowered simply by requiring them to reference their identities and sense of themselves through friend and kinship ties:

Early in the school year, his team asked a group of African American 12 and 13-year-olds to spend a few minutes examining a list of values, based on things such as friendship and family, and to indicate which they felt were most important. The students then wrote a short paragraph explaining why they felt the values they had chosen were meaningful to them.

This self-affirming exercise took just 15 minutes, yet it had a remarkable impact. Compared to their peers, these students showed more resilience in the face of failures and earned higher grades throughout the term.

The exercise reduced the achievement gap between them and white students by 40 per cent (p. 17).

Appreciating the psychological effects of misrepresentation and exclusion on young people is, as Cohen demonstrates, of critical importance to the psychological wellbeing and ultimately the academic attainment of diasporic young people. For this reason I intend in this study to establish how teachers insert positive representations of the black subject in their planning, and make diasporic cultural material central to teaching and learning. In saying this, I am aware that teachers may not always have the awareness or training to identify and effectively use the resources needed for such teaching. Similarly, many may not appreciate the depth of economic integration between the Caribbean and the UK. In my experience of working with teachers in a wide range of contexts, rarely have teachers in running schemes with a relevance to African Caribbean identities, made such links. My intentions in framing this question were to establish what initiatives teachers

are employing to provide meaningful contexts for making that celebrate Caribbean cultural identities. This work therefore looks at teacher agency in the arena of African Caribbean cultural representation. In adopting this approach I think of Badiou's notion of the *birth* or *emergence* of the subject (Badiou 2003, p. 5). From his viewpoint, the 'question of agency is not so much a question of how a subject can initiate action in an autonomous manner but rather how a subject *emerges* through an autonomous chain of actions within a changing situation' (ibid. p.5). Teachers, therefore, in Badiou's theorising, dedicated to effecting change in the classroom, could be perceived as (actors)'who act in *fidelity* to a chance encounter with an event which disrupts the situation they find themselves in (ibid.p.5).' By their agency they emerge as subjects. This chance encounter can occur in different contexts which he calls 'situations.'

The term 'situation' is prior to any distinction between substances and/or relations and so covers both. Situations include all those flows, properties, aspects, concatenations of events, disparate collective phenomena, bodies, monstrous and virtual, that one might want to examine within an ontology. The concept of 'situation' is also designed to accommodate anything which *is*, regardless of its modality; that is, regardless of whether it is necessary, contingent, possible, actual, potential or virtual – a whim, a supermarket, a work of art, a dream, a playground fight, a fleet of trucks, a mine, a stock prediction, a game of chess, or a set of waves (ibid. p. 7).'

The theoretical method I have adopted draws on the concept of situation by welcoming those 'flows, properties, aspects, concatenations of events' that shape teacher pedagogies and perceptions of good practice, allowing them space in which to emerge as subjects. This applies also with suitably altered expectations, to the interview with the group of six young people at Aspire Gallery. The flow of thought, the conceptual positions teachers take up in

contexts where practice is curtailed by regulation and organisational challenges, the lack of training and even down-right hostility to change form much of the substance of this work. Their perceptual inclinations and attitudes are the loose matter, the debris that constitutes their 'situation'. That situation sheds light on their intentionality and theorising about African Caribbean cultural access. My intention, therefore, is to establish the way in which the educators in this work are emerging as subjects by the way they position themselves relative to their African Caribbean pupils. This state of emergence can occur by the adoption of pedagogic initiatives intended to reverse African Caribbean pupil exclusion and invisibility, or in the creation of a context for making that provides opportunities for such pupils to be confident and assertive learners.

Planning that celebrates diasporic presences in the Western mainstream could through deconstruction, enable learners to tease out hidden meanings located in works of art. Dabydeen's study of Hogarth's Blacks is an example of how this could be done in an art historical context. Planning that centres on the notion of Caribbean cultural objects as a key resource for teaching, however, could appear to contradict the concept that diasporic cultures are indivisible from the mainstream; yet the two can co-exist. As indicated, the research is intended to echo Badiou's notion of situation which draws on a theory of multiplicity, where the subject is constructed from multiple events in which they are a player.

## **Chapter 6 - The Research**

### **Research Question 1**

What strategies are teachers of art employing to make Caribbean cultures central to teaching and learning in multicultural pedagogies?

In the next three chapters I present the findings of the research derived from interviews I conducted with six teachers and a group of young people at the Aspire Gallery in South London. A chapter is devoted to each research question in turn.

I regard the removal of petty enmities generated by long-standing parochial allegiances in Caribbean island communities, critical to the appreciation of diasporic peoples' performance in key areas. As a result of the divisions created by dispersal, geographical separation and colonialist politics, many see themselves as separate and distinct (Carter 1986). Far from pooling meagre resources at the disposal of people in the region, there has been division. When I interviewed Rebecca at Green School, the issue of inter-island petty jealousies was raised. In response to my question 'Would you say there is tension between pupils whose parents are from different Caribbean island communities?' She opined that,

Rebecca - There does seem to be a little tension between the Caribbean islands.

Paul - Please expand on that.

Rebecca - Well children will actually think that one island is superior to another socially, in size and how they look on it culturally. I'm not quite sure, some of them used to have a rank order, and if I tried to explore this discussion they'd say 'you don't understand, just forget it.' You're not going to understand because how you'll be asking questions will be like how do you think it's better than this? Why would this country think it's better than that (p. 9 r)?

Rebecca then indicated that in her interactions with African Caribbean pupils, she draws on knowledge and experience of Irish politics and that island's historically difficult relationship with the UK,

Rebecca - So Ireland is small and it's not unknown for the bigger country on the other side, whatever, so we'll fight, the smaller one, for its cultural difference (P. 9 r).

In other words Rebecca is demonstrating to the children that she, as an Irish national, has also suffered the inequities of British colonialism. By this means she shows how her Irish heritage could be used as a means of sharing with the African Caribbean, the notion of cultural threat. I then asked,

Paul - So has there been a lot of 'dissing' between African Caribbean students in the school?

Rebecca - There has in the past, not so much now. (p.9 r)

Paul - Is there as much tension between pupils whose parents are from the different islands as there is between kids from the Caribbean and students from Africa?

Rebecca - Erm, yeah but I think having said that there would be that rivalry but I think that it's a friendly rivalry but there is that rivalry. I've never seen it illustrated through any kind of insults or anything. It's usually a banter element; it's more on a friendly banter kind of thing, whereas between African and Caribbean it would be a quiet, insidious resentment. With the others it's banter and you can joke the children out of it but with the others [African students], it's much more serious. It's very difficult to get a discussion going on what it is and it wouldn't be appropriate because you wouldn't have the time to resolve the issues that might come up (p. 9-10 r).

This passage in my interview with Rebecca highlights two key aspects of African Caribbean school-based identities. Firstly, the gap between Caribbean subjects and African peoples and secondly, while it may present itself as banter between pupils from different island and other communities in the Caribbean, there is a residual commitment to specific island or mainland [Caribbean] territorial identities. This further illustrates that teachers in planning projects even where they incorporate resources generated by diverse Anglophone Caribbean communities, should be cognizant of the importance of origins.

Rebecca then explained the part art can play in building bridges between pupils from Caribbean and African nations and those from different Caribbean communities,

Rebecca - I think that art plays a good role in resolving those issues, when we do look at art work and we talk about the beginning of man and the origins of early art and early civilisations and what they have to offer, like even exploring a discussion about Frida Khalo's work, her pride in her Mexican roots. So you're taking it away from the issue of being black and white and you're taking it away from issue of being African Caribbean and African and now bringing in other dimensions. You're bringing in a Mexican culture so you're widening the discussion and making the world a lot smaller and thinking no it isn't just black on black and black on white there's all these other races. And I think that bringing all that into it, talking about the melting pot, you are actually getting people to look at a much wider global picture ... well, I think my Irish roots do influence me, it does help me as well (p.10 r).

Far from drawing on the achievements of African and Caribbean artists and cultures as a means of inculcating in the children a sense of shared ownership, the resources employed by Rebecca to build bridges between them was generated by a Mexican artist. This is indicative, I feel, of the

invisibility of African Caribbean cultural material – its lack of presence in art education – that drives the need to look elsewhere in order to illustrate an issue with an African Caribbean focus. The data also demonstrates Rebecca’s sensitivity to the ‘mood’ of the classroom and her ability to adapt her pedagogic stance accordingly. I then questioned Rebecca about the different histories of African Caribbean and African students. She shared some remarkable insights,

Paul - Because of the slave trade African-Caribbean peoples have lost contact with their ancestral roots ...

Rebecca - And they [African peoples] do carry their original African names, whereas the Caribbean... has actually got the name that has been inherited from some landowner, or slave name

Paul - So how far back does one go in teaching about the Caribbean? As a Caribbean subject where do you go, if you don’t know which tribe you’re from?

Rebecca - Which is like a child that discovers it’s been adopted. Or doesn’t know who its parents are: this loss of identity.

Paul - It’s what I call cultural orphanage.

Rebecca - It is absolutely, it’s a bit like when you go to a country that’s like Canada or the States where there isn’t that deep historical going back, back.

Paul - There’s a degree of shallowness.

Rebecca - There is but there’s this tremendous search for people wanting to know where they come from (p. 10-11 r).

Rebecca clearly shows an awareness of the plight of African Caribbean students and their lack of connectivity with their ancient cultural heritages. She indicated how, as an Irish woman, she could relate to their search for identity,

Rebecca - Yes, there's no resolution to this ... But I think that what you have to do is, because I think a lot of Irish lost their identity and they anglicise their names, and those people again they got a dispossessed culture, they willingly either lost their Irish roots name or they chose to Anglicise it for financial reasons or for their life. The name became associated with their religion so there are people who have old traditional Celt names who look and think like they gave up their roots. Not as serious as the Caribbean issue but there is that side (p. 11 r).

This passage is a reminder that teaching outside government or local authority regulation is often dependent on teacher enthusiasm, talent and skills. The personal histories and sensitivities that shape teacher sensibilities when working with marginalised groups can have a profound impact on the way they work with children. It is apparent here for instance that some of Rebecca's insights are shaped by her familiarity with Anglo/Irish politics and the parallels that can be drawn with the plight of African Caribbean pupils. Rebecca's observation also echoes Badiou's (2001) notion of agency. Yet, appreciating the enormity of the task of providing African Caribbean learners with a sense of ownership of teaching and learning material, she shares her frustration by indicating that, 'there's no resolution to this'.

Rebecca - There comes a stage where we have to sort of say well we have to realise where we're at now. And you build and work on developing the confidence from then and there on, and ... you don't deny what has happened but you have the role models and you have education because education is a great peopleizer I think, and it helps people to come to an understanding as to what they are and where they are. And you build it up from there and see this is where I am now and this is my homeland wherever it happens to be ... (p. 11 r).

So we work with what we have because there is no real benefit in returning to points of origin to seek a resolution to what is an impossible conundrum. Rebecca indicates that we have the role models to make this happen in education, which is a great 'peopleizer', meaning, I think, a vehicle for

bringing people together to resolve issues. This suggests that in working with African Caribbean students there should not be a heavy emphasis on returning to roots but working with what we have now. The next statement adds to this,

When you go in and you're confronted by a piece of work that doesn't show any cultural connotations and you just look at it and you find out who the artist is, you rejoice in that piece. There is someone who is very much confident and at ease with themselves. I mean it's going to take a long time, it is, and getting to know and trusting. You see, it's all about trust as well (p.11 – 12 r).

I believe that Rebecca in highlighting 'work that doesn't show any cultural connotations' is positing the view that art from any culture has universal appeal and is not bound to a specific site, even its place of origin. In her theorising there is a universality of human experience that can be engaged in artworks produced by different people in different contexts.

In responding to my questions about teaching that references Caribbean cultures, Betty indicated from the outset that issues of discipline and classroom management made effective teaching and learning difficult at her Brown school. This reminded me of John's (2006) assertion that teachers often anticipate greater behavioural challenges from African Caribbean pupils than learners from other groups. Such perceptions can of course shape teaching styles. I asked her about pupil awareness of the Caribbean region,

Paul - Do they ever make reference to the Caribbean? How important is the region to the them?

Betty - I don't know the full story, but a lot of them don't have very positive things to say about their country [meaning the Caribbean]. You start touching on the subjects that they might know about such as their home life [and] they start acting up and being stupid, like they don't

want to accept what you might say. They just play about and joke about things (p. 8 b).

Black children are constantly exposed to images of apparent black dysfunction and violence (hooks 2001; Shohat and Stam 1994). The numerous aid appeals and adverts for people to contribute to black communities in Africa and elsewhere add to the sense of inadequacy and helplessness. This hurts their pride and undermines self-confidence. What is rarely explained are the underlying reasons for these tragic events. Black children, like their white colleagues, are enmeshed in constructs that project a picture of hopelessness.

Paul - So what you're saying is that if you start introducing Caribbean cultural materials they blank them out?

Betty - Yeah, they blank them out and I don't understand why, I don't know if they're embarrassed whereas on a one-to-one with a child, they're different (p. 8 b).

I then asked her about the kind of 'cultural' materials the children are exposed to when they learn about African Caribbean and other artists,

Betty - We want to incorporate that even more, I mean there are black artists I might include [somebody] Johnson ... but I don't know much (p.8 b).

Betty interestingly perceived a difference between 'multicultural' material generated by cultures outside the Caribbean and Africa, and resources from those areas,

... but I have a need myself [for my own INSET] if there is an INSET of some sort on black culture, black arts, black design. It would be really good if teachers got INSET specifically about Caribbean art ... not Aboriginal art. African art is so [pause] African art really does it but Caribbean art because it crosses over to African a bit as well, to some degree, it's difficult [to draw a distinction between them?] (p. 1a. b).

My participant's analysis of the difficulties posed to British born teachers of art in understanding the differences in character between Caribbean art and

African art was instructive. It was clear that in her art education no distinction had been drawn between the visual arts of the two regions. Betty's explanation of the need for in-service training was similarly insightful. She then went on to question the originality of Caribbean art,

When you look at Caribbean art some of it, the Expressionists ... Caribbean art it's like a European piece of work ... (p.6 b).

The issue of a Caribbean or diasporic aesthetic resurfaced very powerfully here (see also Chambers and Araeen, 1989). I think too of Edward Glissant's (1989) observation that,

The Caribbean in general suffers from the phenomenon of non-history. No collective memory, no sense of a chronology, the history of Martinique in particular is made up from a number of pseudo-events that have happened elsewhere. What is produced is a lack of any historical continuity or consciousness. Consequently, Martinique, as an example of an extreme case of historical dispossession in the Caribbean, is caught between the fallacy of the primitive paradise, the mirage of Africa, and the illusion of a metropolitan identity (p. xxxii).

Martinique is in this case a metaphor for the whole Caribbean region and not just the Francophone island. The notion of a 'caught between' ethos to Caribbean cultural identities is being identified here by Betty. Anne Walmsley's (2003) teachers' pack substantiates some of the observations made by Betty in this interview. But this statement also shows the dilemma of a people uprooted from their African heritages and placed in new environments where they are made to adopt new mores (see also Glissant 1989; Brathwaite 1974). Many of those new practices are, at least on the surface of things, closely allied to Western traditions. This insider/outsider binary further blurs the distinctiveness of Caribbean art.

In my experience of schools the work of artists regarded as leading figures in a movement or style are regularly used in schemes of work. As a result, the paintings of Cezanne and Monet are referenced in projects on Impressionism, while pieces by Sonia Boyce and Yinka Shonibare may be selected when running schemes on present-day Black art. Few take the trouble or see the relevance in using the work of lesser-known artists when teaching with a focus on Surrealism, Impressionism or any other celebrated movement in Western art. Consequently the art of Caribbean Surrealists such as Alfred Lam or Stanley Greaves are rarely used in school art projects. This applies even where there is a preponderance of African Caribbean students in the classroom. I argue that such learners should be acquainted with the work of lesser known but significant African Caribbean and other diasporic and African artists. What their work offers is an insider view of black worlds of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Teachers should also remember that even those recognised as great practitioners of the arts are often inspired by lesser known artists. Picasso and Braque for example, in resolving many of the practical and theoretical problems inherent to Cubism, borrowed heavily from the traditional practices of unknown African tribal artists.

Betty further elaborated on her observation by problematizing the lack of a clear distinction between Caribbean and African art,

Caribbean sculptures look like African pieces of work ... and to be honest I think that, erm, it's very difficult when you teach them [pause] if you've taught them a piece about African art, you've done some sculpture, you've done your papier mâché that, well this is the Caribbean one, oh, that's African. You know what I mean? So it's almost making

something specific to the Caribbean art which at the moment I have to admit I don't know what is more specific about Caribbean art ... (p.6 b).

Many Caribbean artists working in wood do make pieces that bear some resemblance to African carving. Certainly in the pieces produced by the Maroons of Surinam, I would say there are distinct features to their art that signal a possible link with African traditions, though Mintz and Price (1976) would say such similarities are superficial. Some Haitian artists and the Jamaican Rastafarian Father Everal Brown, do appear to have retained some African traits in their artistic practices. (Williams 1969) Jamaican sculptor Edna Manley, wife of the former Jamaican Prime Minister Michael Manley, also drew on African stylistic traditions in her art practices. These apparent palimpsest traits do not emerge from cultural 'norms', however, as Caribbean art is produced in different circumstances from African art and rarely serves the same purpose. Ronald Moody (1900-1985) was a Jamaican sculptor of enormous distinction. His carvings are arguably the equal of anything seen in the UK in the twentieth century (See Myron 2000). Moody's art though honed by a Caribbean sensibility could be said to retain some African traits in a Western aesthetic.

Betty's confusion over Caribbean and African artistic identities demonstrates the strangely ambivalent position in which diasporic peoples are positioned. Defining a sense of self in contexts of large-scale cultural loss and ontological syncretization poses issues of identity formation that can take time to resolve. Teaching school students about Caribbean cultural identities against a backdrop of modernist artistic practices, therefore, becomes problematic and

could make such cultures appear trite and even tawdry. Therein lay the seeds of diasporic invisibility. This participant, however, has attempted to positively address the issue by bringing in local black artists. John (2006) confirms the importance of such presences in schools in stating that,

Schools that are fully engaging black African and Caribbean children are actively seeking out successful black visiting speakers, poets and artists, scientists and business people to provide positive role models throughout the curriculum ... (p.xv).

The focus here is not so much on providing learners with an authentic experience of 'Caribbean art' by putting genuine Caribbean artists in front of them, as to confront them with the work of African Caribbean artists. Betty elaborated on her approach,

Another thing I am doing as well, I forgot to mention, is ... part of my department role is to try to make changes. I'm not changing I am bringing - I've brought in a Rasta. I am going to try to get him to come in and do paintings with the children. He's a very good artist, he's quite versatile ... he is also an artist that would [look at your face?] and do it very fast. He's a street artist as well ... a black man. (p.7)

The fact that he is a 'street' artist implies that he is rooted in a popular culture that the children can relate to. These comments are meant to show his authentic African Caribbean credentials, 'a black man'. By inviting Rastafarian and other African Caribbean artists to work alongside the children, Betty hopes to motivate and inspire them to produce work.

When I interviewed Rebecca I was curious to know if a conscious effort was made by the art department at Green School to link the children's art making practices with African Caribbean art.

Rebecca            No I don't consciously make a link, I don't, no. I don't make a link or I don't not make a link, do you know what I mean?

Paul - You don't feel that it's necessary to do so?

Rebecca - No I don't, no. And when you're looking at Caribbean art I suppose it comes more from, environmental factors and I talk about the country and how I visualise it to be and how these construe in the art work and the celebration of the colour and the food (p. 2. r).

The modest profile of Caribbean art, the lack of access teachers have to it, must make project planning with a focus on the Caribbean very difficult. As indicated by Betty, professional training opportunities with a focus on such art may be beneficial to teachers with a desire to incorporate Caribbean artistic material into their schemes of work. Certainly focusing on the perceived environment, colour and food of Caribbean nations presents a very specific way into the art and cultural heritage of the region. I continued,

Paul - So, would you draw a distinction between African artists and Caribbean artists, black Caribbean artists?

Rebecca - I probably think that it's not something I've thought a lot about, I have to admit that I very much look at the individual, so I don't actually look at the people as coming from a particular area. But I would imagine, I think that the African person seems to have had a greater confidence in their own identity. And they are and they've got a narrower influence on their work and I think that probably for Caribbean artists what has happened is they've got so many other cultures around them that have influenced them like geographical culture and history. So where their art actually emanates from is very difficult for them because they've got so many influences (p.2 r).

Rebecca is direct in stating that she has not 'thought a lot about' drawing a distinction between Caribbean art and African art. She beautifully articulates, however, a key aspect to being a diasporic subject, that of mixing, cross-fertilisation and the development of new ethnicities (Hall 2004; Gilroy 1993 and 2000). The comment that 'the African person seems to have a greater confidence in their own identity' is, in my view a particularly important

observation. Such confidence informs their attitudes to work which in turn influences performance including behaviour, pupil teacher interaction and academic attainment. I then asked her,

Paul - Do you have this sense of awareness when viewing the work of Caribbean or black artists?

Rebecca - I suppose the African artist has come from a particular culture, from a tribe or tribal culture and I think that the movement of the Caribbean individual from role and status has just completely...

Paul - When you say the movement of the Caribbean people what do you mean exactly? Do you mean from the Caribbean or from Africa or what?

Rebecca - No I mean from the Caribbean, I'm talking about the Caribbean artist. I'm talking about someone who's actually been born there and brought up and has then maybe moved, that's where their family roots in recent historical memory to them is, actually. And I just see that they are a multiplicity of influences, and I also think that they have had to be more of a trickster type character they've had to respond to the situation in which they find themselves. And so then again, getting back to this situation of just conforming with what the expectation is. Whereas the African artist hasn't had that because they haven't been moved, they've learnt in their own original environment or whatever. Therefore I think they've got the confidence deep in the ground whereas the Caribbean person hasn't: they've been uprooted. I think that this confidence is coming through in more recent times, and I see it in the children (p. 2. r).

Rebecca's observations about African Caribbean students and their socio-cultural experience of diasporisation are, in my view, of critical importance. Her identification of the differences of experience between diasporic people and those from settled communities in Africa, the effect such contrasting legacies can have on these two broad groups of children, is a vital contribution to our understanding of the impediments to African Caribbean pupils' learning. She is indirectly referencing Brathwaite's notion of cultural absence. The notion that African Caribbean young people need to be a

'trickster type', basically, living off their wits is an encapsulation of the lot of the diasporic subject who in order to survive in the West, has had to devise systems for operating in conditions of enormous, often life-threatening challenge. This manifests itself in classroom contexts where teachers, acculturated to different mores, have unrealistic expectations of such learners, the gap between these two ontological positions often leading to conflict. Trickster type could also be a reference to syncretization, the concept of being in-between great cultural forces. Similarly, Rebecca's observations that black artists of African origin were shaped by structures inherent to their traditional ways of life, is important to our appreciation of the differences between African Caribbean artists and those of African origin. As indicated above, Brathwaite's 'absence of ruins' and Harris's 'bareness' in respect to long-standing African Caribbean cultures, indicate the importance of this gap. Though making comparison between African Caribbean and African artists, Rebecca could have been relating the cultural contexts for making that children from these two communities bring to the classroom. The comment that African students, who have 'confidence deep in the ground' unlike Caribbean learners with their history of rupture and subjugation - the lack of ruins deep in the ground - articulates very well the psycho-cultural contexts in which these two groups of young people have to operate. In traditional cultures, each person has a clear and distinct position in the societal hierarchy where their way of operating in that environment is to some extent predetermined. Children as learners in such contexts are shaped by societal 'norms' or imperatives. This is apparent in Japanese

children's attitudes to academic learning as it is in learners from Kenya. It is also apparent in the Caribbean where children more easily locate themselves in communities that have more secure social structures. High attainment can improve a student's life chances and their social standing in the community. The African Caribbean child in the English classroom is a product of dual diasporisation (Hall 1995). Their parents' attitude to their own travelling experience may be one of similar confusion and challenge (John 2006). This coupled with the collective fight for identity on the part of black young people at street level, which offers a more coherent British-based sense of community, leads to negativity on the part of some learners (See John 2006).

When the group of six young people at the Aspire Gallery were interviewed, I adopted the strategy of questioning them about black art as opposed to Caribbean art. This approach was used because I felt that the distinction between black and African Caribbean, was far too nuanced for learners who had limited exposure to differences in artistic production between black people from different areas. My perception was confirmed by the responses of the young people during the interview. To gain an appreciation of their experience of art education to date, I asked them if they regularly did art,

Senior - I only did it for a certain amount of years. It wasn't that interesting, you got told to, like, do stuff from the board, do this do that. You didn't really learn anything in depth about art issues or artists or anything like that. Like, you didn't experiment with other stuff like pastels or charcoal and stuff like that, and basically colouring pencils and a piece of paper, A2, and do what the teacher tells you ... you might copy it from a book or just do what you want most of the time (p. 2 ag).

I then asked Senior if he copied the work of European artists like Van Gogh.

Senior - Yeah, 'cause you mean like, the main ones, the ones that everyone knows ... but you never went researching and learning about their background: how come they done art like they did. Like the work that's not well known, yeah you didn't learn anything about that you just learnt about the stuff that was out there in the public eye (p.2 ag).

Paul - You didn't learn anything about black artists?

Senior - Nothing about black artists at all

This question was then put to the whole group,

Paul - Do you think it's important that you learn about black people, black culture, by doing art?

Junior - Yeah, it's part of what you are, where you come from. You need to know your own background to know anything else (p. 2 ag).

The implications of Junior's response to this question are huge. It is as if he is saying that for the learner to achieve he/she needs to have a sense of who they are in history and in the world. By that yardstick the group's response indicates a total lack of a learning ethos that allowed such self-knowledge to take place. They went on to talk about other issues that impact on their learning, indicating early on that communication between teachers and black students was difficult because the teachers saw them as potential trouble. This applies even in contexts where students enquire about lesson content and the lack of black representation in it:

Paul - So you are saying that people get into trouble just for asking their teachers to include more black content?

Senior - Yeah, that's how I see it when I was at school, 'cause everything we try to bring up like a certain issue like about black history ... it used to be like, 'be quiet, this is what you are learning now, we'll do that another time.' But that 'other time' never came. So we kept on going on about it and the more we kept going on about it the more we used to be told we're disrupting the lesson and so we used to get sent outside. You get sent outside then you're told you're disrupting the

lesson, then you go up to like the headmaster, all this, and afterwards get into a detention for just asking a question.

Paul - You're a troublemaker?

Senior - Yeah, you're a troublemaker. That goes on your records and it just sees you, (pause) no one actually knows why you're doing as you're doing. See what I'm saying (p.4. ag)?

Senior seemed to be saying that black pupils in questioning lesson content or teachers' pedagogic approaches, can be regarded as trouble-makers and punished (see John 2006; Jones 1986). The frustration expressed by the young people at the Aspire Gallery therefore has an echo in the experiences of other black young people in other learning contexts. My intention in the questioning that followed was to establish what their feelings were about the slave trade, given its centrality to the historical experience of diasporic people. Importantly, it was also a masked strategy for accessing information on what they knew of the Caribbean as opposed to more generic 'black' cultures. I asked the group 'Are you embarrassed by the slave trade?

Freddie - It has happened – you can't hide it, 'cause it happened.

Paul - Should you know about it?

Senior - We did one lesson on the slave trade and that was the end of it. We turn to the Tudors, King Henry V111. We asked many a time because our school was, like, mostly black, and like Latinos like – we were just like asking like, we don't know anything about black history. They won't tell us anything. They just, like, say, ah! Be quiet and get on with the lesson. And from then most people just get into trouble from that, 'cause you're trying to find out more information about yourself, your background (p.4 ag).

These stories of educational repression have an echo in Burgess-Macey's (1992) account of Caribbean adults' experiences of schooling in earlier times in the UK.

## **6.1 Popular culture and the African Caribbean Learner**

A critical aspect of diasporic survivability in the West has been their ability to make use of street style and popular culture in asserting their presence in environments of exclusion and indeed cultural repression (Willis 1990; Hebdige 1979; Gilroy 1993). As indicated above, popular culture and more especially body culture remain central to African Caribbean and other diasporic group creativity. I was therefore interested in observations made by Betty about the way African Caribbean pupils at her school deal with body adornment. This links directly with what is stated above about differences in the ontological life-worlds of African and African Caribbean children, the notion of traditions buried deep in the ground of memory and culture, and the emergence of new stylistic practices and habits taken from their socio-cultural environment. African American style is very influential in African Caribbean communities (Tulloch 2004; Rose 1991). Regarding such practices as rich potential for project development, I asked Betty,

Paul – Do your pupils regard black American hairstyles and design, as opposed to traditional African design, as something to aspire to?

Betty - No I don't think they see it, I think that's too intelligent I think they see it as African American, they follow it. One thing I've found as well, they are not individuals: they follow. I haven't seen any black children who are totally individual that will do something different. One person breaks off everybody else has to follow. I find that they're not individual and so because of that I can't [pause] it's difficult to get through to them and see that because they're not individuals they can't think, think for themselves (p. 8 b).

Paul - So they operate as a group in the classroom. In order to get through to an individual, therefore, do you have to carry the whole group?

Betty - Yes that's it, the odd one will come out who is an individual, and they'll follow him eventually. But then it's good because I'll focus on

that person and say right, you know I have to tell the others to be quiet because I have to hear this person talk, as soon as they see one of their group talking they don't want him to carry on talking unless it's about something interesting ... I'm not putting them down but I don't think they're intelligent enough to see an American or African influences, they're seeing the influence of the person on the street that looks good. If he's doing it, I'm going to do it (p. 8 b).

Betty is clearly dismissing the need to educate African Caribbean children about their past. They certainly are into fashion and care little for issues of culture and heritage. There was no suggestion that she regards their interest in fashion as a cultural legacy with roots in an earlier time, when much diasporic creativity was embodied. Betty illustrated her point by sharing this observation,

I mean, it's low trousers, I said to a lot of them, because that really makes me sick, "pull your trousers up." "Why must we do that?" "If you can tell me why you've got them hanging down like that you can leave them like that." Because apparently the reasons why the trousers are that low [pause] they have a proper reason, they don't know. I say "pull your trousers up or I'm going to report you (p. 8 b)."

I have written (in Howard, P. 1996) of impoverished children in 1950s Barbados who wore thread-bare cast-offs including over-size trousers, which were tied at the waist with lengths of string or, failing that, allowed to find their own level on slender hips. These indices of poverty have, I feel sure, informed the present-day style that Betty finds abhorrent. She offered another example of a fashion statement adopted by her pupils,

There was this Che Guevara fashion. Have you seen the Che Guevara jackets they wear with Che Guevara? All the summer the blacks were wearing this Che Guevara jacket (p. 8 b).

Paul - That's the cool thing to do?

Betty - Ok it's identity but you know what the point was that frightened me? I said, "Who is he?" 'I don't know', when he said that I wished he didn't say it. I said to him, I had to speak to his mum as well, who kind

of had the attitude 'oh well, it's fashion.' I know she didn't see where I was coming from. I said to him ... I haven't seen any white boys wearing it, and I said who is he? 'I don't know.' "Take the jacket off, go on the internet now and go and find out, and I'm telling you now, I don't care what your mother says, I'll take that jacket from you until you can give me some information about this man. Because this is what's going to happen to you, if you don't start getting an education, you're going to be easily led." They don't know anything about Hitler. They're going to have Hitler all over their back, because it's fashion. They don't know, they're saying to themselves that it's fashion, you see this is where the ignorance comes into it and this is why I'm concerned [about what] they are following, and this is why I can't say yes, it's an African influence that they're following or American. They're not following, that's too intelligent for them to think about that, they're following trend, they're following that person. That's the in-thing now so they've got it on. They're not questioning things (p. 9 b).

Paul Willis (1990a and 1990b) demonstrates that young people are very sensitive to fashion trends. The pupils wearing the Che Guevara jackets may not be *au fait* with Guevara's historical importance, and indeed may have acquired the contentious items simply because they confer some 'street-cred' on the wearer. Nevertheless the style may have been created by a designer familiar with the significance of Guevara and his revolutionary politics. This representation of iconic figures in design has an echo in the mix-and-match aesthetic (Hebdige (1979) that features in other aspects of African and African diasporic cultures. I think of the way different, often disparate sounds are sampled (mixed) in popular music (Rose 1991). The fact that white pupils are not wearing it – yet - only serves to demonstrate the socio-cultural connotations of the look. Sharing and following trends could by this means be central to the perpetuation of traditions within diasporic communities.

In looking for resources from the Caribbean that could be used in the classroom, therefore, we need look no further than street-style. As I have

indicated in this work, it is on the street that much of our creativity has taken place. In body-style one engages a black aesthetic that has survived the test of enslavement and colonial repression (Tulloch 2004; Mercer 1994). That style thrives on a cut-and-mix aesthetic, one of borrowing and re-presenting. Progressive educators should take cognisance of the importance of popular culture to diasporic subjectivity, and see in dress-style the nurturing ground of much of our creativity.

Where diasporic needs are addressed in schools, issues of blackness are often engaged. Africans already have a reputation in the African Caribbean community for being academic, professional and successful in business. Though more Caribbean subjects are achieving success in these areas, greater African Caribbean pupil exposure to achievers with a similar background to themselves, may provide learners with the confidence to succeed. Alice spoke in her interview of her determination to place her pupils in front of 'black' professionals. I asked her why,

Alice - It's the rationale for everything that I do, the visibility and acknowledgement. It doesn't mean I don't use black artists and white artists in residence, it means that one of the things that I focus on making sure that I do is that the children experience working with black and Asian people and people from other cultures. Now they recognise, when I tell the kids they are artists, they recognise that they [themselves] can be artists. They wouldn't have believed that before (p. 11 a).

The use of 'black' professionals in this way can, therefore, lead to practices that draw on a breadth of origins. There is nothing here about placing them specifically in front of African Caribbean achievers.

Tony, too, emphasised the philosophy of drawing on the working practices of artists from different cultural backgrounds,

Tony - There are a lot of African and African Caribbean students here. We are doing something called *Artists Project* - the student independent research project - I say to them, you know, I want artists, craftspeople and designers on this particular theme and I give them the freedom to search ... Whether they are African Caribbean, Turkish artists; whether they are American artists. We throw some artists into the file for them and we then get them to select out of these and make connections with other artists as well (p. 5 hwn t).

This passage demonstrates the slippage from African Caribbean to African and even "black" identities that encompassed even Turkish children (Procter 2004). Conversations flowed from African Caribbean to multicultural concerns. Tony then elaborated on other KS3 projects in which this approach has been adopted,

... we break our necks to get those kids in years seven or nine doing a project on propaganda ... We try to get them working from the 17th, 18<sup>th</sup> or 19th century ... We try to get year nine doing things like the *Cloth of Gold* and looking at ... artists like Rauschenberg, Chris Ofili, Basquiat, because they are mostly American black artists, they also look at Keith Piper and they cut and paste collagy sorts of things (p. 5 t).

As with Alice at Yellow School, Tony has not made the inclusion of intercultural material central to lower school policy in his department. Similarly, too, there is no overt attempt to design projects that explicitly or implicitly celebrate the Caribbean. Multicultural schemes designed by most teachers in this sample, typically draw on good practice from a range of cultural backgrounds, with some black artists included. Rarely is a distinction drawn or a connection made between Africa and the Caribbean.

Maria opts for a process of working through materials and teaching technique as a means of liberating students in their art-making practices. The work of black artists is then introduced to the students as and when such exposure would support what they are doing. I did not get the impression that art practices are used as a vehicle for discussing issues of social justice. There is instead at her school, an acceptance that the children are working in the Western canon and she has a commitment to working in that tradition. It is a strategy that has an echo in much that is said later about the way the students are perceived at the school,

Maria - We teach about materials because the pupils want to learn about technique – some really enjoy painting and responding to things. And we go with that. Others want to take things further. We work through materials and respond to where the children are. We don't impose our will on them. We let things come from the pupils and follow their lead (p. 5 m).

Not imposing 'our will on them' presumably is a resistance to engage issues in their teaching, including concerns emanating from the students' African Caribbean and other heritages. I asked her how the department uses material that draws on Caribbean cultures,

Maria - I don't think that anybody aims to make that [culture], like the central point. The idea of cultural relativity might not make that the pivotal point in the lesson. The central point is always the process, the materials, erm, the ideas, the individual empowerment of the student through the materials. We would find opportunity to bring the cultural relativity of the art into the discussion – it's a way of looking ... because a lot of [the pupils] have incredibly able, very competent skills but they find it really difficult to translate those skills into the curriculum, what the curriculum requires of them. The curriculum requires understanding, cultural understanding of who they are within, largely speaking, a European tradition, isn't it (p. 1 m)?

A key function of much contemporary art is its engagement with issues emanating from our life-worlds. As such it offers each child a voice in which

to talk about concerns that impact on the way they live. Maria's statement would appear to eschew such concerns. It echoes instead Pascall's (1992) views on what should constitute an appropriate historical framework for making in art and design. Effectively this is an approach that is free of politics, except that it reinforces an anti-political stance, which is in itself political.

Anna spoke of African Caribbean young people and their identification as 'black' subjects. This issue arose when she made reference to an experience in the US at a Summer School where there were young white people from Puerto Rico. I asked her if in her view diasporic learners had a low regard for Caribbean cultural material,

Anna - It's not that they're not interested, it's just, where is the information? Where is it readily [available]? It's not in the library it's not in school it's not in the national curriculum. You don't hear that many positive things about the Caribbean all you hear on the news is when there are hurricanes.

Paul - What do you think the lack of positive information on the Caribbean means to the children? Here are the kids that we've been talking about who really aren't that interested in being black British, they're interested in being black American. They are really not interested in reflecting on the Caribbean and their roots. I think to myself, is all of this a waste of time? Will these kids be concerned about this stuff?

Anna - Well it's funny you say that. When I went to America what I did find quite interesting was that there was a small percentage of white Americans and they had as much information. In fact they had so much information that I had to come back and do my own research on Black History because I felt quite embarrassed.

Paul - White Americans had more information on the Caribbean than you did?

Anna – Yes, and they had more information on black history in the Caribbean than I did (p 15 a).

Anna demonstrated here that both black and white children can be stimulated by teaching and learning material with a focus on the Caribbean. The white young people at Camp America were even more knowledgeable about the Caribbean than she was, presumably because of the way material on the Caribbean was integrated into the curriculum. I questioned her about their access to such information,

Paul - Where did they get it from?

Anna - School.

Paul - In Puerto Rico?

Anna - No, America because they're taught about the Caribbean, they're taught about Black History. Their black history doesn't just mean black history in America (p. 15 a).

This statement is an important one. Learning about black history in the US was not restricted to learning about black history in America but elsewhere too, including the Caribbean.

Anna - Now we do stuff [in the UK] about Malcolm X and whatever, it's starting to get better. Certain schools are better than others. I'm not saying lets just flood it all with black history but I feel that it's not just an important thing for black young people but it's just as important for white people to understand, so they can respect them and they [black students] can feel proud of what they know. It's something to be proud of; it's not something to hide away. I remember being at school and thinking please don't make them talk about slavery today because I just thought it was negative. I went to a Catholic school, there weren't that many black kids in the school and I just sat there and went, please, I don't want to know about it. Not that I didn't want to know about it, I had no problem with my parents talking about it but when it was on the outside - it was just then (pp 15 – 16 a).

Anna is sharing the frustration at not having access to positive representations of 'black history' in the curriculum. The phrase 'it was just

then' is indicative of her disappointment at the way the outside world treats this history and under-represents black culture. It is also indicative of the sensitivity many African Caribbean students reveal when the issue of the slave trade is broached.

Anna expressed some reservation at the constant referencing of the slave trade in schools. It is likely that teachers, suspecting that for some children it can be a challenging issue, steer clear of any serious study of it, hence the lack of 'cultural material' that engages this critical period in diasporic history.

With this in mind I suggested that,

Paul - It depends on how they use the slave trade. It was an incredible moment in terms of what black people did. They did some wonderful things.

Anna - But it's like 'the slave trade happened in such and such a time and the white people did this to black people.' And also, that is just something that young black kids don't need, because right now they're either one way or another. And they're like white people did this to us or you know, any excuse to have that chip on their shoulder why they're not achieving. They can't take responsibility for why they're not achieving, they can't say because I'm not working hard enough I'm not doing well. A lot of the boys who come through here do have that chip on their shoulder they're like it's because I'm black ... So it's kind of like we're setting them up to fail. It's like what do you want to be? I want to be a DJ. What else do you want to be? Lets not study, Lets not do anything else, lets just be a DJ (p. 16 a).

African slavery in the Caribbean is seen by these young people as a moment of defeat and emasculation, one in which 'they' did things to 'us', a time when their dignity was raped. Certainly the imagery that one is exposed to in films and the media project the diasporic figure as broken and defeated, chained, bound, taken (Shohat and Stam 1994; Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1992). Anna is suggesting that this is a running sore of shame and embarrassment in the

minds of African Caribbean young people. Her observations are a reminder of the confidence many have in the world of music because of their familiarity with the culture of it, and the proven success of black music in the West and around the world. Aspiring to be a DJ, therefore, is like a young child with a comfort cloth that is held close to the chest. Motivating students to make meaningful artwork, on the other hand, requires more time because visual art practice is not so firmly engrained in the life-worlds of most diasporic communities. She elaborated on what it was like for her at school when the slave trade was mentioned in class,

Anna - There was no positive spin on it, nothing; it was like they couldn't even look at you. It was like they felt sorry for me. And that was it, and now I think you can talk about these subjects and there is so much more to black history than just slavery. But that's the only thing that they seem to go on about (p. 16 a).

This is confirmation again of the power of negative portrayals of black subjects by the white dominated media and the damage it can do to African Caribbean students' self-perception and their view of other blacks, particularly from Africa. The tensions that existed between African Caribbean and African students were largely created by the white hegemony doing its nefarious work in all areas of our existential experience.

Rebecca at Green School reflected on the changes that have occurred in the attitudes of black students to the representation of the black body, from the earlier days in her career at Green School to the present time. She started by highlighting African Caribbean pupils' lack of confidence in themselves as people,

Rebecca - My feelings about the children are not at all like when I originally came out here when I was a complete stranger to London, and to the multicultural dimension of London. And I came very much wide open eyed to observe with no preconceived ideas. So I was just looking and learning and not expecting or anticipating. I had no expectations of anything; I was just completely going to absorb whatever was there. And the first thing was the lack of confidence in the black children, black Caribbean children and there were more of them than the African children when I first came. And there was a lack of confidence ... I don't think there was an inner lack of confidence in themselves. I never ever thought that. And somehow the media talk about this lack of ambition, I don't think there is a lack of ambition there, and their expectations are very high, it's the system that let's them down, even (p. 3 r).

I think the lack of confidence 'deep in the ground', which in Rebecca's view characterises the performance of African Caribbean artists, and this elaboration on that statement in respect to African Caribbean pupils' learning, are highlighting different things. Previously when talking about Caribbean artists, she seemed to be highlighting differences in attitude brought about by divergent African Caribbean and African cultural histories. Here, however, she seems to be indicating that Caribbean children lack confidence in the system; it's a structural thing. If the previous quotation focuses on the content of learning, what goes into it, the last one addresses policy and teacher attitude to African Caribbean and possibly other students. Rebecca demonstrates that African Caribbean students have a great deal of confidence in themselves, but the system has let them down and has been found wanting. Certainly they do not lack ambition. Given a nurturing environment, such learners can show as much determination to succeed as members of any other group and will enjoy high attainment (Ofsted 2002).

Paul - When you say lack of confidence, and you talk about the system and everything, in what way did it manifest itself?

Rebecca - In art at that time, the visual imagery, the children would never ever respond to a painting or drawing exercise as black people. Even if you put a black child in to model as you do you just pick them you know.... tears, who wants to be the first model, second model, and even when a black child would model, another black child would not draw that child as a model (p. 3 r).

In this important passage Rebecca emphasised the ambition of black Caribbean students and their high expectations. The one area of concern, however, is the issue of the representation of other black people in practices that required them to work from the model. Black teacher parents have shared with me on numerous occasions their disquiet at their children taking home self-portraits painted at school in which they represent themselves with pale skin, blue eyes and straight hair (see also Coard 1997). Professor Winston's *Child of our Time*<sup>28</sup> series on television demonstrates that even today black children as young as four are disinclined to favour black people like themselves in preference for whites (See also hooks 1992). Having said that, as Rebecca indicates children of Caribbean origin certainly at secondary level are now more confident about representing blackness than before.

The reluctance by black children to celebrate the much-derided black body in their art practices has an echo in the work of many professional black artists.

Judith Wilson (1992) recognises this in stating,

The paucity of black nudes in U.S. black artistic production prior to 1960 has intrigued me ever since Dr. Boone first called my attention to it as an unexamined problem in the history of African-American art. To my knowledge, nineteenth century black artists produced no

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<sup>28</sup> Part 1, Channel 4; 2005

counterparts to works like Giacomo Ginotti's monument to black emancipation (p. 114).

Michelle Wallace (1992) elaborates this assertion in suggesting that,

As is well known, the white woman is objectified with great frequency and loving and lavish attention. But as Judith Wilson discussed ... black nudes are virtually nonexistent in the work of black artists of the nineteenth century, and in the twentieth century, they continue to be rare. Black artists were, no doubt, responding to the extraordinary contempt and loathing surrounding the black body in European and American eighteenth – and nineteenth – century thought and visual culture (p. 342).

Much of this contempt and loathing emanates from the low status of the black body and the lack of celebration of it in the mass media. Bell hooks writes elegantly about this in *Black Looks* (2002) and *Salvation* (2001). It was his determination to excise black self-hate that inspired Malcolm X's critique of black marginalisation in the American socio-political system (Malcolm X 1964). Diasporic artists, like members of the wider diasporic community in the Western world, therefore, reared in environments in which the black body was treated as a sign of ugliness and taint, steered clear of black representation. It is almost as if they themselves failed to see celebratory qualities inherent to it. Such thinking, as demonstrated in this work by Rebecca, is reproduced in children's attitudes to artistic representation, hence, the reluctance of African Caribbean pupils to sit as models in the life-drawing classroom. Rebecca at Green School, echoing Betty at Brown School, identified the presence of an African Caribbean member of staff as a turning point in raising the pupils' confidence when working from the black figure. She intimated that at her school change came about,

... quite slowly, and to be honest when we had a black member of staff she, I thought that was a big changing point because here we had someone who had status as a teacher, and then she actually helped. And I observed *Ms Constantine*<sup>29</sup>... for the first time, this confidence was coming through, and I don't think she was aware of what she was doing either (p. 3 r).

Rebecca's awareness of the effect the black member of staff was having on the children at the school is crucial. The teacher involved was also African Caribbean in origin, and the fact that she posed for all the children clearly had a galvanising effect on the school. Black pupils became less coy about posing and having their features explored in the art and design classroom. Effectively Ms Constantine posted a marker for black representation that consciously or subliminally influenced the self-perceptions of African Caribbean pupils in the school community. There can be no better rationale for employing black staff than this. Apart from the professional skills they bring to the classroom, their presence and self-confidence can have a huge impact on African Caribbean pupils' self-esteem. I further explored Ms Constantine's relationship with the pupils,

Paul - She posed for her classes?

Rebecca - Yeah ...but the difference was the fact that the imagery coming through represented the teacher as the figure that was actually posing for them. Now it's not even something the children think about, we actually enjoy the discussion about the culture, I'm talking about 15-20 years ago. Now say 10 years forward it's completely changed ... the engagement in portrait art really changed and discussing colour not in terms of colour and race but local colour, pigmentation, and coming in and talking about it as a technical exercise saying to children, how do we match your colours? And gradually seeing children having the confidence to paint their skin, and paint the colours that they actually are. And the teachers engaging in that whole discussion, so it didn't

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<sup>29</sup> Actual teacher name withheld.

become an issue of we're painting that person because they're black, it was just a colour exercise ... Finding artists that would relate to the colour issues that we have, and I'm talking about just pure pigmentation, was a very important thing as well (p. 3 r).

I applaud the sensitivity of the teachers in the art department at Green School in dealing so effectively with the representation of the black body. Black children in schools are used to seeing the white figure as the norm. Like the white children alongside them, they regularly make work that deals with the visual and oral language of the white body: its roses, yellows, pinks and other related hues. More importantly they are used to addressing a white figure as the 'normal' subject of study. They are not accustomed to seeing the black body scrutinised and celebrated for qualities inherent to it, and probably anticipated, in the process of modelling, a measure of rejection. Insertion of the African Caribbean teacher in that space, however, effectively placed a mirror in front of them: they were required to see themselves, a self which in white dominated public spaces they sought to avoid (Atkinson 2002; Brown *et al* 2006). Looking at another black subject showcased their blackness. Even articulating the language of tonal variation in flesh would have been difficult, because in doing so they engaged what was traditionally a subject of ridicule: their own bodily forms, their physiognomies. Positioning a black teacher in front of them, however, punctured their ego-suppression in a culture that constructed them as inferior. She, the teacher, who had insider knowledge of their world of deference and elision, predicted the strategies of denial they would engage. Yet, they had to meet her gaze, engage her presence.

Establishing a context for making work in front of the black body required patience and the presence of a suitably qualified teacher to effect change. The sensitivity employed by the school, combined with the quiet dignity and determination of Ms Constantine ultimately resulted in a breakthrough in practice. I was curious to know which artists were selected in running this scheme,

Rebecca - Well I must admit, Sonya Boyce was disappointing, in the sense that so much of her work is copyright, even the stuff that we brought the children to look at in the Tate Modern. We were bringing them to look at work and to see these artists, either black artists exhibiting in these prestigious galleries or vice versa, their work being on display, or going to the Whitechapel which is a fantastic gallery to use because it's local but it also takes in a complete range of artists like Mexican, unknown European artists, its just a wide range. [We were] globally opening the children to artwork rather than just specifically saying, right, we're going to look at a few black artists. It comes in incidentally, and I think forcing it is very wrong; I don't actually consciously force it (p. 4 r).

Rebecca is emphasising the importance of not making students feel that they are being shown work by black artists because they are black like themselves. Her statement also echoes Maria's notion of not imposing on them. Their exposure to such work, therefore, remained a hidden agenda so as not to make them self-conscious about the experience. So work by black artists is sandwiched between work by artists from other groups, both European and non-European. For the sake of clarity, then, I asked her if she avoids issues of race,

Paul – Do you engage issues of race?

Rebecca - No, I'm not interested in that at all. I would look and say, we're going to do portrait pictures today and these children need to have images to look at to see how artists actually paint, the range of colours they're going to create. So that's where I start, I start from my palette I don't start from any political issue; or it's purely technical and

then the other issues come on board in discussion. What's very funny is when a child said, I haven't got any pink on my face. And I said well you have at the moment because there's a pink piece of paper reflecting on your face, and then why we put colour in, all for compositional reasons... So the issue isn't deliberately something to do with them or their colour, but incidentally you take along that confidence, and we all have this discussion. (p. 4 r)

As with Maria and Tony, the principle of making work from materials is central to practice 'I start from my palette.' However, whereas Maria and Tony regard the manipulation of materials as the main focus in their pedagogy, which can sometimes lead to other enquiry, in the practice of Rebecca confidence in using materials is equated with engaging issues of representation that would otherwise be more difficult to broach. Central to her teaching is a concern for children being at ease with themselves and their physiognomies. The material component of her pedagogy masks a concern to get the children celebrating who they are in their diverse 'racial' and physiological types. In that regard, sensing the danger of pupil alienation, she steers clear of 'race' politics 'the issue isn't deliberately something to do with them or their colour.' Yet the politics of [mis]representation is at the heart of what she engages. Rebecca's observation that Caribbean children now 'actually enjoy the discussion about the culture' and noting how things have completely changed in that area, has an echo in the thirst for information in Black History Month shared by many young people in this study.

I spoke to Betty at Brown School about the way she used black models in her teaching,

Paul - When you do portraiture with the children, do you use black figures?

Betty - Oh yeah, absolutely, we do have black images and even then, we get them to draw from each other and then I will explain about black features and white features about how, because of the way our faces are, how much more tone we might have because of the shadow and the light, and they're fine. The white ones are fine with it and the black ones are fine with it as well. We think about, we're black there's black and there's white. I talk quite openly about black white. I'm a very open black/white teacher, so I wouldn't just be predominantly for the blacks or for the whites, I very much try to heap them all so they don't think [pause] ... I like to be as real as I can with all the projects and open up to say right, if you look at the shades here, you'll see white, I'll just talk openly in that way, I don't hear some of the other teachers talk like that or being so, how can I say ... (p. 11 b).

Paul - Direct?

Betty - Yeah, and I think that's what they need so they can see, oh, she's real (p.11 b).

Betty is more inclined to engage physiological and 'racial' differences between pupils. As with all teacher/educator participants in this research, there is, however, a concern in her practice not to alienate white children by requiring them to focus exclusively on the black image. She, like other participants, is concerned about the impact such subject matter could have on the perceptions of teachers in the school, white children in the classroom and their parents.

## **6.2 Black hair styling**

In the interview with Rebecca, there was an illuminating detail to her response about body culture that I found particularly significant. She raised the issue of the pupils' attitude to their hair,

Rebecca - Well they all love their hair, they all absolutely love their hair and their first problem is, they realise they've got very complicated

hairstyles, and how am I going to recreate that on a piece of paper as a drawing or a painting or whatever. How would you draw a plait or how would you draw the extension or something (p. 4 r)?

Paul - So would you say that the African Caribbean kids have on average more complicated hairstyles than other children? Do they put a lot more effort into styling it?

Rebecca - They do, they put a lot. And their confidence for the day can be totally undermined if it's a bad hair day and it just isn't right. Sometimes they start up little hair dressing salons. And because I usually have particular children with needs this room becomes almost like a hairdressing salon at lunch-time. We used to say you have to finish doing your hair by ten past one. And then they set themselves up in a local area like over in the gardens, but they'll do anyone's hair. It doesn't have to be a black person, they're just into hair, particularly the black girls, because they can have [pause] they do variations of dividing the hair into sections, and then building up patterns with the ringlets they make (p. 5 r).

Clearly girls everywhere like making themselves and each other up. But I got the impression from Rebecca that the phenomenon of focusing so intently on hair and beauty culture is a habit practised and enjoyed largely by the African Caribbean community at the school. As indicated in chapter 2, the black body has often been treated as a site of derision. Such attacks on the physiognomy of the diasporic black, has resulted in a lack of self-confidence in some diasporic subjects in celebrating their embodied characteristics. Yet within African Caribbean groups the black body can be a site of rejoicing and celebration. Black people like dressing up and creating new and innovative styles on the body. In that regard no other feature is more closely treated than black hair. Hair styling is for these children a symbol of sophistication and metropolitan elegance. It is also a vital medium that offers many creative possibilities in the art classroom. This is very different from the reluctance showed by children at the same school in making art work from

the black pupil model. The difference is that sitting as a model in front of a mixed community of artists, potentially exposes the whole body to scrutiny by individuals with hostile views on the black body. Engaging in hair-styling, however, though white and other children may be involved, is largely internal to the culture of the African Caribbean children and they have control of the activity. Importantly, too, there is a history of black hair styling that they carry with them into the classroom.

### **6.3 Summary**

This question sought to elicit responses about 'what strategies are teachers employing to make Caribbean cultural material central to teaching and learning in multicultural pedagogies' There was some steering by me but I wanted the teachers involved to talk about what they do. In their different ways all of them indicated that they do not work with Caribbean cultural resources. Maria for example was direct in stating that her projects are driven by an exploration of materials. Tony works within a scheme that deals with the environment and he brings in local artists; there was little mention of the Caribbean. Alice is concerned to get children dealing effectively with language and naming artists. Anna at the Aspire gallery is driven by present-day issues and black as opposed to African Caribbean identities. Maria was direct in stating that she works with materials and the issue of Caribbean cultural material *per se* was irrelevant to her practice.

My participants expressed differences in the way they identify and work with Caribbean art. Betty indicated that the pupils at her school show little interest in the Caribbean. She thought too that there was a lack of clarity between Caribbean and African cultural material. This possibly could be addressed in provision for professional training. But there was a similar challenge in separating Caribbean art from European pieces. Anna at the Aspire Gallery also expressed a desire for more information on the Caribbean, posing the question 'where is it?' Yet where such teaching is done successfully it can have a galvanising effect on the perceptions of all involved, both black and white. She gave an example of this from her experience of working at a Summer School in Puerto Rico. The responses indicated a heightened level of awareness to the topic by at least one participant. Rebecca thought that we should be looking to perceive art as universal and that cultural material should not be localised and placed in the ownership of one group. This should help us to move on and look to the future. She approaches learning about the Caribbean through familiar items such as colour and food. She had not thought a lot about separating Caribbean art from African art but African artists are more confident about who they are. Caribbean artists, however, are bombarded by many influences, but 'they have more of a 'trickster type character', an indication of their in-between status and the fact that they have had to live off their wits.

Responses from the young people at Aspire Gallery indicated total disenchantment with educational practices re-African Caribbean cultures. The

young people there communicated a message of neglect, under-representation and missed opportunities in respect to the celebration of Caribbean cultural identities. They expressed frustration at not learning much about 'black' cultures and people. The lack of meaningful black history content in the curriculum is a particular concern.

Betty was very negative about her pupils' interest in popular culture, in particular hair styling. She ridiculed their fondness for popular fads, clothes and body style. Rebecca, however, demonstrated sensitivity to the practices of many African Caribbean pupils: their love of their hair and an alertness to popular fashion. Betty was very confident when using black models in the classroom. She is, however, careful not to alienate white pupils when working in this way.

Rebecca spoke of African Caribbean pupils' fidelity to island-specific identities, often expressed in banter, and the downright hostility shown in their dealings with African students. This interview was revealing for Rebecca's insights and the way her evaluation of Africa Caribbean student experiences were predicated on her own history as an Irish woman. The challenges she faced in weaning the African Caribbean pupils at Green School into acceptance of a black sitter, was one of the most poignant moments in the research process.

## Chapter 7 - Connections with Africa

### Research Question 2

*What resources are used in such teaching? Is the Caribbean regarded as part of a wider diasporic entity? Are connections made with Africa or are they instead looking to contemporary practice for philosophical and resourcing solutions to the issue of classroom diversity?*

In this chapter I explore issues of African Caribbean cultural connectivity to Africa. It begs the question, how are teachers making connections between Africa and the African Diaspora? Is Africa regarded as part of the African Caribbean student's cultural inheritance? If so, given the separation from tribal mores of diasporic subjects, how are such pedagogies organised? It also seeks to establish whether teachers regard contemporary practices as an opportunity for engaging issues-based concerns, methods of deconstruction or other approaches that include the African Caribbean learner.

As I argue in this work, African Caribbean peoples have not been tutored to relate to Africa as part of their cultural prerogative. Yet it is precisely this connection with ancient African traditions that is bedrock to notions of an African Caribbean cultural past. Without such connectivity African Caribbean cultures lack the breadth and depth of traditions implicit to others. The chapter therefore begs the question, whose responsibility is it to make diasporic reconnections with Africa? Is such a task possible, realistic or even advisable? We lack the institutions in African Caribbean communities to make such connections happen. Can we therefore look to places of learning such

as schools to ensure this important work is carried out? If so, can we expect teachers who are not of Caribbean background to find the motivation or desire to do this work when other government imperatives hold sway? These are some of the issues this chapter is intended to probe.

Contemporary art practices offer opportunities to directly engage issues of representation, identity and exclusion. More especially, issues-based work could offer meaningful opportunities for exploratory work with a focus on reconnecting with Africa. In seeking to establish whether or not teachers turn to contemporary practices in project development with a Caribbean focus, I was keen to see how such pedagogies are developed and the way African Caribbean interests are represented.

### **7.1 Collecting using resources by named artists**

Alice at Yellow School devised an approach that draws on resources generated by artists from different cultural backgrounds including the Caribbean, Africa and the UK. On visiting her department, I was struck by the sheer range of African artefacts including carved totems and masks. This has come about through her determination to use African art objects in her pedagogy. Atkinson (2002) confirms the importance of the act of recognition by stating that, 'naming is an act of power that invokes inclusion and exclusion' (p. 119). Alice, in her pedagogy, prioritises the naming of artists. Pupils across year groups are made familiar with named African Caribbean,

black and other artists from the UK and elsewhere. She explained the philosophy behind her strategy,

One of the things about having named artists is that artefacts are one thing, yeah? But knowing the names of artists is another thing and teaching a level of respect is what you are doing, you are also teaching them social skills, and actually kind of dispelling the sense of racism, and separation and elitism because what you are doing is that you are teaching all children of different cultures to value themselves. You are also teaching children of the European and white culture to respect what everyone achieves. And so by naming someone, it's like if you, you know, you taught us when we were training to know children's names. Why? Because it teaches them you have a sense of value for them, it teaches them you have a level of respect for them and that they are important because if you don't remember someone's name you're saying they are not important (pp 1 – 2 a).

This participant has very clear principles that are applied through resources such as books and artefacts by named artists. Allied to carefully chosen schemes of work, they provide the background to intercultural teaching in what is a largely black though richly mixed cultural environment. Teaching children 'of different cultures to value themselves' is a statement of intent. Alice is effectively saying that the children, though from different cultural backgrounds, are involved in a learning culture that promotes mutual respect through art practice. The act of naming artists is a way of confirming their significance. It also lifts tribal art and pieces often generated by unschooled artists from the obscurity of ethnographic pieces to the status of high art.

Many artefacts from Africa are used in project development in school art departments. When using such materials, however, rarely in my experience, do teachers attempt to identify their 'signature' or place of origin. While accepting that cultural norms at the site of production and the questionable

means by which such pieces are sometimes purchased can militate against knowledge of work from some communities and artists, more could be done to make information about pieces from environments outside the West more accessible. Alice's resolve to name artists is a direct reversal of practices common to many educators. During the interview, Alice also indicated that her policy is constantly to challenge pupils on their use of inappropriate language,

What you have is children adopting language, behaviour and attitudes that reinforce the racist kind of perspective that we've had to battle against from the past without any understanding of the impact that it had on us back then. So a child walks down the corridor and walks up to another child and says "alright nigger", in other words 'you're alright brother'. [One is] trying to explain to the children or to young people that the use of the word nigger was a derogatory term used to demoralise black people and actually get into the details of that; getting children a couple of years ago not to call another child "bitch". One of the things that I say to them is this is somebody's daughter, this is somebody's sister. It doesn't matter what comes out of her mouth you shouldn't disrespect her. If that person chooses to disrespect herself that's one thing but it doesn't warrant you taking it upon yourself to go out and then reinforce what it is that that person feels. 'cause you can take the child and try to get them to look differently at themselves but if somebody actually feels that it's acceptable to go around and use that type of language without any thought for the impact that it has on another individual, what are we doing to ourselves (p. 3 a)?

It seems to me that the project of diasporic cultural recovery, the concerns so eloquently raised by bell hooks (2001) must engage the issue of black self-hate. Alice is instinctively and experientially aware of this and sees it as central to her work that pupils are alerted to the damage they do to themselves by abusive name-calling. Alerting children to this is, as Alice sees it, is part of her work as teacher and cannot be separated from the teaching of art. What is implied is the need for a holistic pedagogy in working with African Caribbean learners, one that eschews the subject-based

compartmentalisations that are a feature of secondary education in the UK. Alongside the textual and visual resources that are a feature of Alice's pedagogy, therefore, is the invisible curriculum critical to enhancing pupils' self-esteem and self-perception. Alice expanded on her views,

One of the things I talk to them about is internalised racism. And I keep going on about internalised racism in terms of youth culture and, you know ... I sat down and talked to some boys last week and I said internalised racism means that when in the seventies you would maybe have people call you a black bastard or black this or black that, internalised racism is where nobody has to tell you anything anymore. It's about that knowledge of self. Teaching children to have a sense of knowledge of self is about teaching them to value [themselves]. Without values how can they grow? I get passionate about that, it is what all of the stuff is about (p. 3 a).

Alice's insistence that African Caribbean students are made to be accountable in their use of language, is in some respects a verbal manifestation of the visual acceptance of the black figure emphasised by Rebecca at Green School. At both schools the children have been exposed to the teaching of a dedicated African Caribbean teacher, determined to engage aspects of their socialising and self-construction that have important pedagogic and learning implications. Whereas at Green School it was an issue of acceptance and love of the black body, at Yellow School the use of language as a means of expressing self-hatred is the issue. The "dissing" and foul language associated with 'black talk' in relation to black women and other black people is an indication of such self-hatred (hooks, 2001). Much of this talk has been celebrated in rap culture with which most African Caribbean young people are familiar. Attitudes inherent to rap and other forms of popular culture are mimicked by many black youngsters in the way they walk, talk, dress, and generally express themselves in 'street life.' Alice's intervention in this

behaviour inculcates in the children at Yellow School a greater sense of pride in themselves and in each other. Her work as art educator and KS3 coordinator is in harmony with the broad principles she brings to the profession. It is a pedagogy that forms a continuous stream of commitment across different teaching and learning boundaries.

This passage of the interview with Alice has parallels with Anna's comments on background as a social worker and art educator. In it she emphasises cognizance of the needs of the whole person in working with young people, the sensitivity to body language and other areas of a child's being,

Anna - The difference is, when someone's teaching you to become a teacher, it's very different from youth work because it [youth work] is all about the whole emotional development of a young person. And when you're learning about teaching somebody and you're actually doing a teaching course it's all about your resources and your structure, and meeting their needs, which is quite interesting. Its like you kind of need both of them to become a good teacher.

Paul - You need both of what?

Anna - Youth work training, and the resources and structure and development ... because when you've got a class, ok when you're doing youth work, the whole two years of that course was about how you deal with a young persons development, how you talk to a young person: the eye contact, body language, everything. But when you're doing teaching, it's all about assisting their needs in a different way. In youth work it was a part of it, not necessarily body language but that kind of thing; detail. You know like, when you're talking to a young person, you know you can say the same thing to a young person but in a different way and they will react differently. I can't think of an example, but you can say the same thing in a different way, depending on the person. You're talking about the individuals and even though on this course we're still talking about individual needs and everything, it's still about a group, and group dynamics and stuff like that. Which is a part of what you're doing in youth work but it is more about the individual. It is more about the individual and their feelings and how you talk to them and how that affects their life when you say certain things to them (p. 1 a).

Anna, too, emphasised the importance of challenging African Caribbean young people's use of inappropriate language,

For instance we've got a young boy who always turns round and says to his friends – "you're stupid." And he doesn't mean anything by it and I've called him up on it and he says he's only joking. Yes but, if you keep saying someone's stupid long enough, they're going to think they're stupid (p. 2 a).

While interviewing Alice at Yellow School, I was anxious to discover the degree to which practical artwork there embraces the philosophy she had shared with me. I therefore asked her to expand on their pedagogic approach. She started by talking about the teaching of textiles,

Textiles is culturally based, the children learn from research ... textiles based on multicultural in terms of art .. and, erm, they learn to abstract work and create designs and so what you have is this very diverse range of work that comes out from the students instead of emulating. There is no bias, there is no 'you have to', [pause] it's what you feed the children and what you suddenly find is that they will source it themselves, they would openly source that information so textiles is a culture base (p. 4 a).

My interpretation of this passage is that through the research process school pupils bring their particular cultural bias to bear on their making activities. This is a strategy for multicultural teaching in diverse classrooms, commonly employed Tony at Grey School and by teachers in many different school environments (Dash 2006). The insistence, too, that the students do not have to engage in her pedagogic approach, there is no 'you have to', also echoes Maria's reluctance to 'impose' a personal philosophy on the pupils. Alice continued,

We have a Kango project which is a wrap skirt, in which the children look at Aztec and Aboriginal and different types of, erm, different types of culture. They look at Japanese prints and things like that. So you know that is, erm, the year 9s, *Public Art Personal Places, Public Spaces*. The children look at people, Anish Kapoor and lots of different types of

artists where you are actually kind of feeding ... 'coz it's not just about cultural art, you got black and Asian artists who just produce art. It could be modern art it could be that they are producing public art. It's not that the art is identifiable to the culture of the artist. It's just that they are artists who belong to these cultures but there is also identifiably cultural art that you can use as well (pp 4 – 5 a).

Alice's pedagogy clearly draws on material from different traditions in different parts of the world. The insistence that her approach is not 'just about cultural art' but about making work for its own sake is a reminder of the responsibilities that she and all teachers have in making children familiar with the principles that enable them to 'just produce art'. She seemed to be saying, that the multicultural work they do in the department by celebrating world cultures in general is designed to be neutral, and not favour the artistic traditions of any one particular group. This philosophy has an echo in Rebecca's analysis of her department's approach. The artists selected are from different traditions but their art is involved with present-day visual art concerns and is not characterised by its relationship to a particular heritage, they 'just produce art'. I asked her whose idea that was,

Alice - That was mine, I changed all the schemes of work, when I came into the school. So all the schemes of work were re-written and the homework books introduced at the same time, which then kind of meant you totally changed the attitude of teachers. They fed information back to me but you changed their attitude because the resources were already there. One of the problems that you often get is that you ask people to resource cultural art and they go "well I don't know where to find it (p. 5 a)."

This statement seems to contradict what was stated before. There is no emphasis on cultural art yet artwork from different traditions is used and encouraged. More especially Alice has brought in artefacts from her own

collection that she protects fiercely, but 'the resources were already there.' I think what is significant is the changed attitudes of teachers.

Books provide the biographical and other documentary evidence needed for contextual study at Alice's school, but enabling children to see black artists as successful creative people is central to her approach. I asked Alice,

Paul - How are senior management taking to this change?

Alice - Rose<sup>30</sup>, the head teacher, has been behind me the whole time, I couldn't fault the support of the senior management at all.

Paul - Are your colleagues in the art department resistant to your ideas?

Alice - HOD is brilliant, he's fine ... he says to me have you a cultural worksheet that I can see for year 9? You know he's sifting, he's on the computer and he's sifting through the worksheets. Alfa Rome<sup>31</sup> has been here twenty five years. Tommy Peabody<sup>32</sup> is a lovely person and he is an older artist who is quite slick in his ways. You know he uses the resources, so I wouldn't say there is a great deal of resistance, I think it is more to get them to widen up what they are doing, sometimes it is difficult because it is how they are using it. Does that make sense (p. 5 a)?

Alice then volunteered greater clarity to this key point,

Alice - Say you are a non- smoker and I say to you 'well Paul, actually, I want you to teach the value of smoking, yeah? And you are saying to me, but I am not into smoking, Alice. It's like that level of resistance. It's like getting someone who hasn't really had a clear understanding, or doesn't necessarily commit in their own head or in their own mind to what it is that you are saying to actually kind of adopt your own belief. It's very difficult (p. 6 a).

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<sup>30</sup> Actual name of Head, withheld.

<sup>31</sup> True identity withheld.

<sup>32</sup> Teacher identity withheld.

I think that Alice is implying that teachers from backgrounds other than the Caribbean, particularly members of the majority white ethnic group, may not have the motivation to devise new pedagogies that would enhance the self-perception and learning of African Caribbean pupils. I asked Tony at Grey School if he has had similar concerns, 'Are you carrying the rest of the department with you?

Tony - I think it comes down to confidence, really. When I have student teachers or associate students, they're mostly art students who want to have a taste of what teaching is about, they will do things that are as adventurous as that, off the cuff kind of thing. I would say it takes time to have other members of staff within the department do things (that actually work) and still maintain control. And I think that if you are used to working in a particular way, erm, it is very difficult to adapt, as much as you would like to, it is very difficult to adapt (p. 8 t).

Paul – To new approaches?

Tony – To new approaches.

Paul - You were exposed to working like that at Prior Range School.<sup>33</sup>

Tony - Yeah.

Paul - Presumably, that's why it is ingrained in you.

Tony - Yeah (p. 8 t).

A strategy employed by most participants was that of employing black speakers, artists and professionals to contribute to their teaching programmes. Alice explained how she tried to enhance the children's confidence by exposing them to successful black professional people, often not involved in the arts. She told me she started this scheme by setting up,

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<sup>33</sup> Actual name of school withheld.

... a black professional talk, motivated for year eleven because they were so wayward. We had someone from the Law Society from Dixons and I can't remember what the company was, a big law firm up in the city that's run by black partners. And what I asked each of the people to do was to talk about what they have achieved, how they got there, what their experiences of school were like and what their level of understanding is now, in order to achieve (p. 10 a).

This strategy is intended to expose the students to successful black professionals in any field. The hope is that learners exposed to such success would be inspired to be similarly creative in their learning, including learning in art. A more focused scheme operated by Betty at Brown was to bring in a black hairdresser to work with the children. As demonstrated in Rebecca's earlier comments and elsewhere in this work (6.2) black hairdressing, as an embodied practice, has remained largely unmolested since the beginning of the slave trade. Whereas sculptors could be punished for making figures (Oliver 1969), the hairdresser could not be similarly penalised for tending hair. As a consequence hair styling traditions rooted in African practice have been passed on and remain vibrant in Caribbean cultural environments (Tulloch 2004; hooks 1992; Carpenter 2003; Mercer 1994). As such the barbershop in any diasporic community is a site of true black expressivity (Carpenter 2003). Betty spoke of the way she has used hair to engage students of different heritages and ethnicities around a common theme, while using a black hairdresser as a resident (artist) expert in the field. As with Alice's practice and the approaches of the other participants in this study, there is an emphasis on referencing exemplars, practices and artists from European, American and other traditions,

Betty - I have already brought in a hairdresser who is a black hairdresser ... I did a hair project based on hair designs the end result

[was that] they were making sculpture of a head. They would be making it out of papier-mâché and other materials and also doing clay work. Part of the process of that was looking at artists, you know we had Lichtenstein, about three or four artists looking at hair, looking at what blonds need, looking at all different things and incorporating black hair design and white hair design, so that project was really both ways. Erm, I also got a hairdresser to come in, a black hair dresser ... and she was actually, erm, hot pressing somebody's hair and explaining what she was doing, what the different hairstyles were and things like that, so again it's the culture thing, bringing in not just European hairdressers. I'm trying now to bring in different [pause] erm, like my friend, she's an art historian I'm going to get her to come in as well, she's black ... and it's not all just black people I'm bringing in. I want to incorporate. I've got my own business partner as well who's white. He's going to come in to do a talk about graphic design (p. 6 b).

Lacking a meaningful government regulated intercultural policy coupled with her own lack of knowledge of 'Caribbean' art, Betty, is experimenting with different methodologies and pushing pedagogic boundaries that should benefit students at her school. In the process the line between Caribbean art and black art is blurred. Inevitably Betty's practice may suffer from the 'haphazard' approach critiqued by Troyna (1992) but this is the sign of a concerned teacher facing up to the challenge of making her teaching relevant and more beneficial to all children in her care.

As with many initiatives intended to improve the lot of African Caribbean subjects, there were voices of dissent in the wings. Alice at Yellow School, speaking in her role as KS 3 coordinator demonstrated this in saying,

The funny thing was, anytime you do something to challenge the boundaries or the status quo – doesn't mean [pause] ... suddenly I had white people coming up to me saying why are there no white speakers, and I said why aren't you bringing in anyone for us. I said because you've seen white professionals all the time and don't think about it ... I said I wanted to bring in black and Asian professionals this time, but there is still that challenge (pp. 10 – 11 a).

Last time I was told why can't you bring in Irish people?' So what I did was, I wrote to the senior managers and I said why black professionals? And all I wrote was that, too few of our children are able to relate to the reality of positive black role models. As a result the notion of the black professional can often be overlooked through stereotyping and a lack of exposure, and in so doing when you tell children about career paths where do their limitations and aspirations come from? If they don't see that you can reach there, they won't believe they can (p. 11 a).

This passage in the interview with Alice is invaluable in opening up areas of discourse vis-à-vis the battles some teachers fight in order to place the needs of African Caribbean students at the centre of planning. Some staff are discomfited by this approach or perceive favouritism on the grounds that white, and possibly other children, are disadvantaged by such strategies. Their prejudices left unchallenged, can only confirm African Caribbean student invisibility.

There is in many of the interviews an emphasis on placing the students before 'black' as opposed to African Caribbean professionals. This demonstrates the slippage of identification that occurs when teachers talk about African Caribbean students in schools. The shift from being African Caribbean to being black British, often with its admixtures of African, Asian and other identities, is commented on by Judith Wilson (no date was provided on the paper in my possession; (see also Hylton 2007) in which she states that,

Unlike U.S. racial taxonomies in which "blackness" is defined exclusively in terms of African ancestry, in Britain the term "black" applies to populations that originally stem from two different continents – Africa and Asia. Only the "logic" of British colonialism make sense of this usage. For the development of the transatlantic slave trade and the emergence of the British raj are intimately entwined (p. 71).

Teachers often adopt this form of identification when speaking of African Caribbean pupils or in defining groups of children of African and African Caribbean origin. This stems from a perceived common struggle against the former coloniser (see also Gilroy 1987). While some of the business people that Alice invited into her department are African Caribbean in origin, their backgrounds seem incidental to the main issue, which is that they are black (or Asian) and successful. Tony at Grey School spoke of the rationale behind his invitations to artists and craftspeople to share their expertise with the pupils. He underscored the way this was done,

Tony: One way that I try teaching is that we do an awful lot of community-based projects. We try everything we can do in terms of getting children in contact with practising artists. I mean I try to make students believe that people who make that stuff believe in what they are making, and they do it for a living. These people are going to come in here to talk to you ... (p.3 t).

There is an apparent determination to open areas of enquiry around notional black British identities and black art practice often incorporating traditions and works by artists from outside these communities. Tony proceeded to make a direct link between contemporary art in the classroom and issues of diversity. He addressed the matter of African and African Caribbean artworks being used in the department, insisting that the pupils are not taught about African art until they reach year 12,

Tony - If you are asking me if I make explicit in terms of teaching about African artists, I would say at A' Level. A' Level, possibly GCSE, and we encourage the students to do issue-based work and through that issue-based work at GCSE they will find artists who are non-European artists or artists who have settled in Europe from Africa (p. 5 hwn t).

Tony explains how more focused issues-based projects occur at GCSE and post-16 levels. This is where students are more likely to engage issues that problematise 'black' subjectivities. He gave an example of how this works,

Erm, for example the GCSE paper this year was *Inside/Outside*, something like that, and one girl looked at, erm, the paintings of Manet. I think it was Manet's *Olympia*, with the cat. And she used that as a vehicle for expressing her concerns about people seeing you on the outside and not the inside. We don't stop students from exploring those themes, we encourage them; we actively encourage that. So it's looking at, you know, looking at western art and turning that on its head in a way (p. 5 LB. hwn t).

I asked about the way he encouraged the pupil to explore the representational strategies in Manet's *Olympia*,

Tony - First of all, we sat down and she talked about her ideas: she got a little stuck ... she had herself reclining in the painting and a member of staff posed for the figure in the background.

Paul - So there was a complete reversal

Tony - Yes ... that student has grown from doing that (p. 4 t).

While undoubtedly benefiting from working in the way Tony described, the pupil's exposure to the work of Manet and especially *The Olympia* (1863) seems isolated from the experiences of others in her group. From what Tony shared, there would appear at this centre to be no scheme of work to provide all the children with a planned and coherent exposure to work that deals with the black presence.

Anna at Aspire Gallery was very direct in proclaiming the 'black' identities of African Caribbean students. In response to my question 'What do they think of the African connection to black history?' she responded,

Anna - I think the gap is getting closer, maybe that's a sign that we're becoming black British. So it's not about Africa and Caribbean it's about becoming black British.

Paul So there was tension there before?

Anna Oh, yeah, there was a lot of tension. From when I was younger there was a lot of tension. Not even tension, totally divided, but now they're starting to realise there is a connection because black is black. Before as well the media used to suggest that whole Africa thing, but before it was just like hungry people: hungry children dying. Why would you want to be connected to that as a young person, because they don't think, oh, that's sad: it's failure, it's weakness it's the slave trade again. It's like this is what they do to us (p. 17 a).

This confirms, at least in the viewpoint of one participant, that many African Caribbean subjects identify with a wider black cultural community. Similarly it demonstrates that some tensions still remain between these groups and are an obstacle to African Caribbean subjects taking ownership of an African past, which should be their prerogative. Anna insists that though tensions may have existed in the past between African and African Caribbean peoples, they are today more united in their shared black identity. The research demonstrates that young people shift identities from one set of markers to another (Hall 1992).

Maria raised the issue of status and the way she engages pupils in conversations about the place of African art in the West,

Maria - I say that [African] art is called primitive and then there are so many easy ways of turning that on its head by saying didn't you know when African societies were carving out these amazing pieces of sculpture you know, we were still chiselling ... This is a tradition that influences you, you know, where your cultural tradition comes from. And erm, and the interesting thing is to look at how European artists have taken that cultural tradition and used it, and it has become a European thing (p. 2 m).

It was instructive hearing how Maria uses African art, often classified by the pejorative descriptor 'primitive', as a way of showing African Caribbean students where their traditions came from. She outlined the way in which art from Africa has influenced practice in the West,

When you bring the art into it, then I talk about Afro Caribbean traditions and then I will talk about the idea of primitivism, so I don't want them to kind of like, I want to get them out of the idea of the sort of racial stereotypes that they've got about people, really. To try and get them to think about the art and think about their identity and what relevance the art have for them ... and then I would say what do you think of the primitive? They say that it's basic and uncivilised people who can't do this and the other, people who live in huts (P. 2 m).

Maria expanded on this statement,

With older kids, the GCSE and A' Level students, I would then start to talk about the context of the image and its very sort of, like, primitive and African imagery, which is linked with the idea of [pause] it is used in a negative way or it can be seen to be used in the negative way. It is a way associated with, maybe, sexuality or violence or when you look at Picasso's imagery, like those women in *Les Femmes d'Alger*, they're prostitutes. They're there, their trade, they're ladies of the night. He didn't want to be derogatory about them, he celebrates their sexual freedom, I suppose and their physical freedom. But when he wanted to bring that across, he used the idea of the primitive masks, the African idea of bringing it back to life ... any art that's physical or sexual or to do with unrefined dimensions can be linked to primitivism (pps. 2-3 m).

Picasso and Braque highly rated the work of untrained artists because of the new approaches they brought to problem solving. But many still regard 'primitive' art as backward and lacking sophistication, perceiving it as visceral and instinctive rather than cerebral. Glissant (1989) interrogates these concepts in the coupling of Caliban and Prospero and the degrees of elevation from the primitive to the Western ideal associated with that (See also Parker 1992). The attachment of the appellation 'primitive' to artwork can therefore be seen as derogatory. From my viewpoint the notion of 'primitive' art,

particularly in respect to African practices, should be problematised in classroom contexts to disabuse learners of the notion that Caribbean and indeed African artists are indeed lacking in sophistication.

Rebecca resists using the work of untrained black artists, no matter how significant the pieces. Instead she adopts the strategy of placing work by Moses Joseph and others, alongside pieces by artists from other cultures who share similar technical solutions to creative challenges.

Paul - There is a pressure to do that isn't there?

Rebecca - Oh there definitely is, and I think that the black artist has to, just like any artist, recognise themselves as an individual artist. They have to start back with people. But I think that can happen with any cultural group, like you know the Eskimo culture; you must be carving polar bears (p. 2 r).

Rebecca was signalling here the danger of stereotyping cultures, including those of African Caribbean and other learners. Folk art as a genre may be associated with untrained black artists and some similarly untrained white working class artists, and this can have negative connotations. Rebecca was alert to this and did not want children in her care to get the impression that all "black" artists lack the technical skills associated with formal training.

Desirous to establish whether contemporary practices afford new opportunities for inclusion with an African Caribbean focus, I asked Betty at Brown School if she uses such material in her teaching,

Betty - I haven't looked at that many... I mean, we've looked at dancers, we've looked at other aspects not just art and design, and they are interested when it comes to dancing, African dancing, they're interested funnily enough, not so much the African painting, African style dancing

and movement because they relate that to their dancing and it's African (p. 11 b).

The conversation with Betty shifted to embrace the use of contemporary practices in the classroom. She stated that,

We do have identity projects and that would be a good time when we could introduce more contemporary art.

Paul - When you say identity projects, what are they like?

Betty - We literally have identity, we have projects where it's about themselves, I want them to talk about themselves, what they think about themselves.

Paul - Is this your idea?

Betty – Yeah ... (p. 3 b).

I asked Maria if she uses contemporary art by black artists in the classroom. She demonstrated how she combines present-day approaches with an analysis of African influences on Western art. Framing her response around a specific scheme, she stated that,

For that particular study, I would look at Picasso ... I would talk to them when we're dealing with Cubism. You would say, ok, well, Picasso, Picasso, you know, largely speaking, as this is the European tradition, most of the artists were European so, so that you actually look at the nature of the art and then I would introduce the idea of African art (p. 1 m).

Most of the participants in the study spoke of the centrality of Picasso's art to their teaching. Picasso's art in the Cubist period alongside the art of Georges Braque is effectively used as the critical interface between the African diaspora subject, African traditions and the Western mainstream. Maria suggested that,

I mean he was only trading on the Eurocentric idea of what African art was because at the time when African art was, erm, because of course, at the time when African art was rediscovered was during, empire, when

we were going around the world plundering all their treasures. And it was at that time that European artist said wow! Look at all this; I could use that in my work for a European audience. Stereotypes in art are very happily done because of Picasso in his attempts to move away from European traditions, because he was interested in black art (p. 2 m).

Maria then explained how pieces by other iconic European artists that worked from the black figure, are sometimes used in the classroom. The art of Gauguin is used in this context to demonstrate how an influential French artist represented and treated black women in Tahiti,

Maria - ... then we would talk about Gauguin, the relationship he had with Tahitian women, their depiction, I would say exploitation of that culture (p. 2 m).

Paul - How do the kids take to his work?

Maria - Well, quite shocked when they find out again the context to art, then art becomes a completely different thing, yeah? I think they're quite shocked that he was an older guy, he was a white guy ... They can see his appreciation of those women and of that culture; they can still see that (p. 2 – 3 m).

Maria, in inadvertently equating contemporary art with work by Gauguin and Picasso, was thinking of artistic activity at the beginning of the modernist period rather than work that is produced today.

Betty spoke to issues around contemporary practices at Brown School, where the pedagogic circumstances are very different from those in Maria's or Rebecca's teaching environments:

Betty - ... the difficulty in my school is that they don't even know much about the Picasso's and the artists who are the Renaissance artists. They don't know all of that so my problem I've got now as head of art is to balance it, not to suddenly go straight into the contemporary because when I go into that level, a lot of the contemporary is based on the past work, so they don't know anything, some of the kids don't know anything in Year 10 I'm really shocked, they don't know anything about hardly any artist. I think where do I go from here? Do I just go straight

into contemporary when there's no foundation at all? Or do I teach them a foundation but then go backwards? Well now is the time to teach them contemporary, but if you're literally in a school where they don't even know about the traditional, then you have to come to some kind of balance, and this is why I haven't done so many contemporary projects (p. 12. b).

Behavioural issues remain paramount at Brown School and are clearly inhibiting the types of approaches Betty and her staff feel they can adopt. Allied to this is the lack of grounding or preparedness for more experimental work in the department.

Rebecca had much to contribute to the debate on African Caribbean student identities. I invited her to talk about the way she uses work by African Caribbean and other black artists. Part of her response also dealt with Picasso's art and its significance in the multicultural classroom. She spoke of the pupils' reaction to the work of black artists,

Rebecca - ... you can actually see them physically change, you can actually see, they sit up when their confidence actually grows when Miss is talking about a [black] artist and she is showing them work, and yes we are proud to be associated with that.

Paul - But is there a problem in getting children of African Caribbean descent to relate to African work?

Rebecca - Not if you start by introducing Picasso to them. And you say what do you make of this? [He is] recognised as one of the greatest artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And what do you think of his work and then you go back from there. Do you know what influenced Picasso? And then talk about the African ... or the [unclear on the tape] of the time. And then you can see the difference (p. 7 r).

Like other participants, Rebecca is saying that by using the work of Picasso the children would be happy to look at and engage African art. This of course presupposes that a wide range of projects involving Africa art can be developed through Picasso's work. She continued,

So I come from there and then I find looking at African art, again it's sculptural and I might come at it from a religious ritual idea. I might look at actually look at how people have moved on from the imagery they have used: the textual designs, images of sewing machines stuff like this. I think the context is important and talking about the context in which people are working and the contemporary life in those countries (p. 8 r).

Rebecca is clearly concerned not to repeat the media generated stereotypes to which we are all exposed, and inadvertently present a negative picture of African culture and heritages (Shohat and Stam, 1994). That is why she takes care when contextualising the imagery placed in front of her pupils. Her concerns are made apparent by the next observation,

'You've got to be so careful that you're not putting kids back into looking at part of the historical Africa, we're not talking about the 21<sup>st</sup> century' (p. 8 r).

Much of that historical Africa is a myth traditionally presented as reality (Mintz and Price 1976; Davidson 1966; DuBois 1971; Glissant 1989). There is, therefore, in Rebecca's statement an implication that for many, this construct of Africa is totalising and not a culturally generated fiction. That is why we need to drive out the misperceptions and distortions that still lie at the heart of our perceptions of 'historical' Africa. Such distortions have a clear echo in representation, both scribal and visual. Without meaningful pedagogic interventions in schools, young people will grow into adults not having

experienced a meaningful challenge to such constructs. Notions of black inferiority are imbibed also by the diasporic subject and generates self-hatred in many (hooks 2001; Malcolm X 1964; Carter 1986). The notion that black people in Africa were a primitive and primeval people before the civilising hand of Europe transformed their prospects needs urgently, therefore, to be addressed in schools. This must surely be a prerequisite to effective teaching if African Caribbean student attainment is to be enhanced. The ongoing backwash of African degradation does impact on the self-confidence and self-esteem of such young people.

Rebecca then spoke about the difficulties in enabling African Caribbean students to take ownership of African cultures and traditions, in the context of ongoing tensions that still alienate them from a meaningful linkage to African heritages. I questioned her about the impact of media representations of Africa on African Caribbean student perceptions of the continent,

Paul - Unfortunately as a result of the awful problems in Africa, and in many black communities elsewhere, we are constantly bombarded by images of black dysfunction. Do such negative portrayals impact on the pupils here? Do they come into school talking about it? Is it beating their confidence down?

Rebecca - No, I don't think that it's beating them down. I think they're in denial to a certain extent. I think they see it as entirely different from their culture, they're embarrassed by it: they don't like the imagery. Yet again, when we were having our campaign here for South American children who were picking food and scraps from the dumps in Peru, they didn't really want to look at it, I think the imagery was so fearful and frightening to them. And again the African, they don't really want to look because it undermines their confidence. I think, although the majority of the children in this school, although I've never consciously sat and thought about it, I think as we're having this discussion, just from watching their faces that they feel they are ashamed of it. And I

think they try to move away from it so there is that rift between the African black community and the Caribbean (p. 8 r).

There is in this statement confirmation that Caribbean pupils are embarrassed by the media representations of Africa as dysfunctional and impoverished. The difficulties this can create are confirmed by Rebecca, not least the psychic and social distancing that can emerge between African Caribbean children and people from communities in which such problems are apparently endemic. It can in turn act as a barrier to the use of African resources in the practices of African Caribbean learners. I asked Rebecca if these concerns are discussed by the children,

Rebecca - I think there is a discussion amongst them yes. I think that they don't vocalise it loud so that the teachers are aware, but there is, yeah, not as much now, though. But a few years ago I was much more consciously aware of it, but again in this school it's different. The idea of the Christian value and the individual is promoted consistently. So it would be brought up that that was totally unacceptable that we're all individual unique beings and people are people and we're looking at people. But nonetheless, there would be little bits of snippets, you would pick up but I think that it's resolving itself more (p. 9 r).

Maria confirmed the presence of similar tensions. Speaking of the sensitivity required when introducing African themes to what is largely an African Caribbean school community, she shared this observation,

Maria - It's a funny sort of thing you know that once you bring any sort of idea of African identity you do get immediately a sort of jarring response because some of those boys would immediately want to distance themselves from that (p.1 hwt m).

Paul - That is still happening?

Maria - Yeah. In that case there is a real kind of African (thing) like you know it is still used as an insult. I still hear the boys saying to each other "you African", that still happens, and to black teachers as well.

Paul - Really? The African members of staff?

Maria - Well, erm, the black [members of staff], once they have an African accent, then, oh yeah, or an overtly African name (PPs. 1-2 m).

AB<sup>34</sup>, a former Goldsmiths PGCE student and a Ghanaian national, in contributing to the Staff Development training day at Goldsmiths in January 2007, spoke of the name calling that goes on between African Caribbean students and African pupils at his North London comprehensive school. Such verbal abuse extends even to African members of staff. The derogatory term 'blick' is also used as a form of abuse at the school. Alice spoke of a similar experience that she had at Yellow School,

Alice - Well basically, they would call me baldy because my hair is short, and they would call me a bald bitch, all this kind of internalised racism. You know like you'd go, like you know, if I was really dark I suppose I would have got called names because there was a period when they were calling each other 'blick'.

Paul - Blick?

Alice - Blick, a racist South African term for a black person – stark black, yeah? And they would go around calling each other blick because somebody was darker than the other one, and that was a joke to them, until I started to teach them what it was about and it stopped (pp 17 – 18 hwt a).

These responses clearly demonstrate that some African Caribbean students remain quite suspicious of African culture, civilisation and people. Discussions I have had with African Caribbean young people and teachers, coupled with my own experience of the classroom, also indicate that similar abuse is directed at African Caribbean young people by pupils of African origin.

I broached the issue of contemporary practices in the art and design

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<sup>34</sup> The name of this contributor has been withheld.

classroom with Rebecca to establish if such developments are important to the learning of African Caribbean students at her school,

Paul - Would you say that contemporary practice in art and design is helpful in breaking down racial barriers?

Rebecca - Oh, it's essential, it's absolutely essential because what you're basically doing is, introducing children to the potential that they have got and people from their culture have got. And they see fashion designers, painters, photographers; they see people in the art world just as they do in science, medicine and any particular area. But with art when you look at art you are looking into the soul of a person because [pause] and the children can discuss the beginnings of that person, and their journey to where they actually ended up and the thing that is so important is to take away the anger. There's this anger in children and you will get there, but you get there quietly and calmly without shouting, not being prone to getting aggressive because I think that sometimes that frustration can turn into aggression and then it's a downhill spiral (p. 6 r).

Rebecca seems to be saying that some African Caribbean pupils can react with anger and aggression to their sense of loss, dispossession and misrepresentation and she seeks in her teaching to avoid this. I wanted a bit more from her on the way she deals with contemporary practices at her school, so I rephrased the question: 'So you think that contemporary practice is useful then?'

Rebecca - I think it is very useful. But sometimes the children do get a little [pause] you have to measure how much you do and who you're discussing because you could over label it as well. I think that it has to be part of the programme of study, and it has to be relevant, to what you're actually doing and what you're actually teaching. And I think that you don't just introduce one particular area, you try to balance it so if I was looking at ... Alice Mae, and I used Sonya Boyce and Mike Hughes and maybe Jenny Saville so I'm looking at people from all different cultures and I'm talking about not dividing them through colour but looking at them nationally where they come from. Because quite honestly I don't like going down the route of dividing people through race. But then again that could be something to do with my political background. So I will be looking at where they come from, the context in which they were. I think the context is important. And I think it's important too because she's picking people who live in her context. And

you're looking at the Filipino, the South American and you're looking at the issue ... Puerto Rico all these immigrant groups have had. You're saying to one particular group you're no different in that sense, everybody has had this initiation (p. 6 r).

As with other participants, the issue of cultural relativity is paramount and good pedagogy for them, certainly where African Caribbean art is concerned, involves locating cultural material in a wide context that introduces children to a range of perspectives on the issue in focus.

Rebecca - I'm not saying it's right but let's look at what has made these people the way they are and these young boys like old men way before their time through their body language. And so widening it out is very important and then taking them back. But I'm fascinated when I discover, not fascinated but very interested when I discover someone who's contributed so much towards society or during the war or whatever that only gets revealed to us like one week ago or two weeks ago. And you pick up an article and read that somebody from India for example held a very high prestigious position in the foreign commission or was related to the royal family in some way. And I share that with the children... and then the other day quite coincidentally I was looking at on the internet and I was researching my husbands surname and found that there was a [name withheld by researcher]<sup>35</sup> who was actually very prominent in the fight for human rights, particularly black human rights, in America. And I thought how did she get interested in that and you go right through and you find connections and links to stuff (pp 6 – 7 r).

Rebecca is sharing her practice *vis-à-vis* the use of contemporary material and it is clear that work by Caribbean artists *per se* is not necessarily targeted. This only occurs when it is relevant to the activities the children are engaged in. She trawls over a wide area when working from contemporary material and this could be work generated anywhere. What is evident is the notion of cross-fertilisations and the desire to demonstrate, through this

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<sup>35</sup> At this point in the interview Rebecca shared the name of an historic figure whose surname is identical to her own, hence my decision not to include it in the text.

pedagogic approach, our common human bonds. Rebecca is saying that culture is not stand-alone but integrated with the actions, histories and achievements of other peoples and communities. African art is, in her pedagogic approach, another colour on the palette of choice at her disposal.

At Blue School, Maria told me that she uses the work of photographer Robert Mapplethorpe with the sixth form. I was keen to find out how they responded to his art,

Paul - How do they respond to Mapplethorpe?

Maria - They loved it, they were appalled by it and loved it at the same time. I think they found it difficult [because] he was pandering to racist stereotypes, whilst pointing out racial stereotypes. They also quite enjoyed the stereotypes that he was playing with, if you see what I mean, cause they really loved the notion of the black guys in the suits with all the bits hanging out ... so they thought that was funny and then they were saying, yeah, but it is undermining because what he is actually saying is that it doesn't matter if he's wearing a really smart suit. Underneath the suit you still got the same old [pause] So we have really interesting conversations about that (pp 1 – 2 m).

This I feel provides an excellent indication of how contemporary practices can open up fruitful areas of discussion and learning even when dealing with sensitive subject matter.

Paul - What about the lower school, what contemporary images do you use with them, what sorts of schemes do you set?

Maria - We might look at people like Chris Ofili. There is that guy Faisal Abdu' Allah.

Paul - How did he go down?

Maria - Oh, brilliant! I mean, we still use the ideas in his work quite often, the idea of substituting black images into traditional white paintings, erm, especially the people or themselves and their classmates. [For example] *The Last Supper* we sit them around the table and make images (p. 3 m).

This, as I suggests above, demonstrates the rich potential of contemporary art in the classroom. Abdu' Allah's art does problematise the notion of belonging, place and identity. The images he creates are accessible and children can relate to them. In *Last Supper 2* (Circa 1994), a take on Da Vinci's famous work, the disciples are positioned at a dining table where they dine with 'Jesus' but here the disciples are young black people who are attired in modern-day street gear and tote machine pistols. They engage the viewer in a gaze of confrontation and what I interpret as readiness for action. Abdu' Allah's oeuvre interrogates many issues with a bearing on youth culture and street style that could provide many openings for visual art practices among young people.

## **7.2 Summary**

The chapter highlights the need for a more holistic curriculum, one that enables teachers and learners to question from a range of perspectives, various concepts and issues of representation. Allied to these are concerns about the way we use cultural resources in art and design. In it, some teacher participants spoke of the way in which they get their pupils to interact with black professionals and artists. Alice demonstrated that language is central to her work with African Caribbean pupils. African art is often presented as ethnographic: specimens placed behind glass in museums, where the names of their creators is suppressed. By naming artists, a similar status is bestowed on artefacts generated by people from any background. But name-calling is rebuked. Dealing with black self-hate is central to Alice's

pedagogic approach. This holistic teaching style has an echo in Anna's work at the Aspire Gallery and Rebecca's at Green School. Alice also maintains a good collection of African and other artefacts that are used for teaching purposes. An extensive collection of books detailing artworks by contemporary black and other artists supports her teaching.

Anna at Aspire Gallery confirmed the tensions between young people of African ancestry and those from the Caribbean. Maria, too, corroborates this. Anna also emphasised communication through body language and the need for sensitivity to individual need. This awareness is driven by her social work background. She, too, bears down on name-calling and black self-hatred.

Tony at Grey indicated that some teachers lack the confidence to adopt the approaches he has instigated in his department. His pedagogy draws on the experiences and expertise of black professionals and artists. The issue of teacher confidence is paramount. He spoke of the challenge of adapting to new pedagogic approaches that could better accommodate African Caribbean student need.

Betty, like Alice and Tony, also stressed the need to work closely with black professionals. She spoke of hairdressers and designers contributing fruitfully to practice in her department. Tony, too, invites artists to assist in project development. Children at his school research pieces by artists from any cultural background, not necessarily those from the African Diaspora or Africa.

Both Tony and Alice indicated that issues-based material is not used in lower school teaching but is restricted instead to study in the upper school.

Maria engaged the issue of primitivism and the way this nomenclature can be used pejoratively in respect to African peoples. In a strategy to link African and Caribbean cultures, the art of Picasso plays a major role in her pedagogy. On a similar note, Rebecca, appreciating the sensitivities that go with being African in the eyes of some African Caribbean students, is chary of using the work of untrained black artists for fear that it might reinforce stereotypes. She is sensitive to traditional representations of Africa and the damage such depictions can do to the self-esteem of African Caribbean learners. She confirmed that media influences continue to impact on the self-perception of learners at her school. Maria also confirmed the distance African Caribbean students often place between themselves and African cultures: there is 'a sort of jarring response'. Being called an African is still an insult. Alice also spoke of black abuse in the use of the term 'blick'.

Contemporary art is problematic for some though others, in a limited number of projects, are at least tentatively engaging practices inspired by present-day work. Comments on such practices merge with references to modernist approaches. Rebecca confirmed the need for the use of contemporary material. Betty, at Brown School, indicated that she has not systematically explored the work of contemporary or even modernist artists in her

pedagogy. Classroom management issues at her school were an inhibiting factor in project planning.

The art of Picasso is a key resource in Rebecca's teaching. By engaging the work of Picasso, African art is given greater credibility. Maria works with the photographs of Mapplethorpe and Faisal Abdu' Allah. Others were reluctant to engage contemporary practices for various structural or experiential reasons. Modernist work by Picasso seems popular. Contemporary artists are used, however, to provide challenges.

## **Chapter 8 - Connections with Europe**

### **Research Question 3**

*In their teaching, how are teachers more effectively acknowledging and celebrating Diaspora contributions to the Western mainstream?*

We must return to the point from which we started or perish. Diversion is not a useful ploy unless it is nourished by reversion: not a return to the longing for origins, to some immutable state of Being, but a return to the point of entanglement, from which we were forcefully turned away; that is where we must ultimately put to work the forces of creolization or perish (Glissant, 1989, p. 26).

In this chapter I explore the discourse of African diasporic contributions to the mainstream. This I consider central to an appreciation of African Caribbean identities. I anticipated, however, that this would be the least productive of the three core questions in my research. Rarely in my experience has any Caribbean, white British or other educator, spoken of or made integral to their teaching notions of diasporic centrality to the Western mainstream. This seldom occurs simply because attention is rarely drawn to the significance of diasporic contributions to our current way of life (see Ash, 2004). I therefore thought it would be unrealistic to expect teachers even when devising progressive multicultural pedagogies, to take into account the discourse of African Caribbean cultures and the West. While an overt appreciation of the indivisibility of diasporic identities from the mainstream may not be articulated, aspects of practice may be revealed that could lay the foundations for the appreciation of diasporic presences. An example of the notion of diasporic centrality to the mainstream could lie in the approaches adopted by teachers to Black History Month. I wanted to see how teachers were coming

to terms with this and other issues with a bearing on African Caribbean and wider diasporic representation in Western mainstream culture.

### **8.1 History, identity and the Western mainstream**

I questioned Tony at Grey School about multicultural teaching in his department. He was invited to share his position on multicultural art education. Tony responded by outlining his rationale for including African Caribbean cultural material in the curriculum,

Tony - I think of Black History Month as an example. Multiculturalism is about celebrating other cultures in relation to each other, or in relation to the black experience whatever that might be. So I think we are looking at similarities and differences across cultures.

Paul - Black History Month, which you celebrate here in this school, is one that focuses just on black culture?

Tony - Just on the Caribbean.

Paul - Not on other cultures as well?

Tony - No. What, what I try to do is look at other cultures in relation to that.

Paul - In relation to what?

Tony - In relation to African and Afro-Caribbean culture.

Paul - what kind of things do you do?

Tony - For example as I said before I try to push the projects

Paul - Projects on Caribbean history?

Tony - Yeah, we might look at, erm, similarities in stories from the Caribbean, erm similar stories as they might appear in Bangladeshi culture or Hindi culture, you know Pakistan, Somali, these are big events.

Paul - How do you inform practice, if you are looking at Bangladeshi or Somali culture? Do you rely on the children to provide information?

Tony - Yeah, because, I mean teaching is a two-way thing, you know, I learn just as much, you know, I come in here with three or four ideas and I say this, I would like you to express yourselves in getting into it, you know. My expectation is that they will feed back to me. They've got to always feed back to me how they've responded and what they've found in working as a group or individually. I think teaching is a two-way thing rather than one way traffic.

Paul - You rely to some degree on the children actually inputting [cultural material] into the projects to make them work?

Tony - Yeah.

Paul - So they inform you about Bangladeshi culture if they've got that background.

Tony - An example could be, you know, for example what one question might be about, doing a cultural map of that character, where that character appears, talking about that.

Paul - What are the outcomes, what do they make?

Tony - Erm, something like the typical thing of making masks, it might be a mask, it might be a hat a might be a piece of, you know, clothing made out of paper so that it's just made there and then in response to the idea. They might end up wearing something they've completed ... other things could be like making things in boxes. You bring in things like the *Day of the Dead*, Shadow Puppets ... The thing you do is to allow them to look at graphic novels, erm, look at graphic stories or comics, erm then they try to sell those comics (p. 7 t).

Tony's is a relative model, one in which some Caribbean cultural material is engaged alongside those from other traditions. The children, not Tony or his staff, are responsible for introducing much of the learning content. He did not expand a great deal on how pupils of Caribbean origin deal with this approach; whether the choice of themes or starting point motivate them to bring in Caribbean cultural material. This relates to Rebecca's views on intercultural teaching and African Caribbean cultures. Close parallels could

also be drawn with Alice's approach and Betty's. Maria, however, was direct in rejecting any notion of working from a specific cultural base of any sort.

In my interview with Anna at Aspire Gallery, I was curious to see how she dealt with the issue of diasporic pupil location in the mainstream. More especially, if there was a correlation between her working methods at the gallery and the pedagogic practices of participants in the classroom. What follows is a lengthy extract from that interview. It is presented as a continuous flow of material because I consider the data relevant to the question. Having said that Anna as a gallery educator with a grounding in social work, approaches teaching and learning very differently from teachers who operate in schools. As a result, the emphasis she places on making psychological connections, working with the whole child - the relevance of an appreciation of body language and so on - makes it difficult to insert some of the following data across the three categories. This applies even where there are distinct similarities in what is said by her relative to other participants. As indicated, I think the data is best sited here because it meets the rationale for the identification of connections with the Western mainstream. Anna's response also engages contemporary practices.

Paul – Tell me about the things you do here, what you teach them, where do you get your ideas from?

Anna - Well sometimes from the exhibitions, sometimes we try to relate it to what's going on in the exhibitions, we try to takes bits from them. And sometimes it might be completely different for instance this one on South Bank, we'd develop it and turn it into a graphic project, an illustration project, web-design project and make them start to do research, pushing them out of their comfort zone. I don't get a group of boys in and get them to design a CD cover and "we're going to do music

and it's going to be Hip-Hop" ... I don't have a problem with that, I just think that this is too easy for them, lets push them out of their comfort zone, they can do more than this. Let's expose them to more than this. Whether they choose to follow it up, that's up to them (p. 4 a).

I should state that Aspire Gallery has a London-wide reputation for showing the work of emerging artists mainly from black, Asian and other marginalised communities. Faisal Abdu' Allah has exhibited at the gallery. I asked Anna to expand on how she 'pushes' the young people.

Anna - Things they wouldn't normally have access to, you know, like I wouldn't necessarily say we're going to do a project on Hip-Hop dance because I know they would know stuff about black music. You know that thing, get young people doing what they like, lets build studios everywhere; I'm not into that. We look at things that are of interest like black history and roots and politics and other things that they might know and still make it creative (p. 4 a).

Anna is demonstrating that it is not enough to work from the territory that the young people occupy, what she terms 'their comfort zone' but to engage them at a more cognitive and demanding level while still addressing issues with which they are familiar. This method of working should inspire them to explore issues and come up with their own solutions to problems. It is a learner-centred approach that locates making activities in territories the young people are familiar with, while engaging issues of wider concern. Importantly 'black history' as opposed to African Caribbean history was mentioned. I asked her how they react to this approach. She responded by sharing more information on her approach to album cover design,

Anna: It's how you deliver it. Sometimes they turn up their nose. For instance I'm not saying you can't design an album cover but this might be to do with Black History or Martin Luther King or one of his poems. OK I'll give you one of his poems and you create an album cover so you're still using the same tools, you're still using a camera you're still doing all the same things that you love doing and you can still make it very streetwise if you want. But by doing that research even though

you're still doing an album cover, you are learning something very different (pp 4 – 5 a).

Anna's pedagogy embraces the broad principles inherent to the fifth model listed in Chalmers (1996). She is happy to work with familiar forms from popular culture such as record sleeves but the images created must address issues beyond the merely sensual or emotive. Martin Luther King as an important 'black' activist known to the young people is an iconic subject who may be chosen. Importantly, too, for this gallery educator it is not enough to make work about things that stimulate young people's interest; they must be enabled to make more work that addresses life issues. As such, it is a classic model for learning through art (See Taylor 1986). I further questioned Anna on her making strategies,

Paul - So when you're talking about the political side of art practice do you show them slides or other resources?

Anna - Yeah, it depends. We use library books and we make them join the library; still use a book. Even though the Internet is great access and easy we still make them go to the library and use a book and scan stuff. Even though there's still stuff on the computer.... We have also done slides; it depends on what we're doing (p. 5 a).

She spoke of the reluctance of black British young people to celebrate their British identities.

Paul - So they have role models, male role models but they're distant, maybe American ones, is that right?

Anna - Yeah, but they're only rappers, and maybe footballers, English footballers yeah. But they're mainly rappers, their role models. I mean we were really horrified when we started talking about one young person, one guy, who had never heard of apartheid. I was like shocked, what does that mean? And he wasn't even that young. My god - son's 11 and he knew who his Martin Luther King is, his Malcolm X, when he was, like 6. This young person was like 14; no, doesn't know who they are. But he knows his 50 Cent and 2Pac, and the other people; he still knows who they are. We wanted them to take some

kind of ownership, like being black British, whether they like it or not, that's what they are. Don't try to be American, West Indian, African because they're not (p. 9 a).

Once again African Caribbean identities are seen as black British with allegiances to origins, at least in Anna's pedagogy, being much reduced in importance. This, as I indicate, must have important implications for teaching and the resources teachers use when planning.

Paul - So there is an issue there?

Anna - There is a major issue.

Paul - About being black British?

Anna - Yeah, well, for lots of reasons. Especially from working here I've noticed that, and filling in those forms for funders and each funder asks for different things. And sometimes we have to get the young people to fill out certain forms and they're going, 'but where do we fit, Black other?' Because some of them haven't got Black British on it. And they're going 'we've never been to the Caribbean we haven't been to Africa.' They've only got one parent ... and they don't even have any contact with that so they're not even allowed to be black British. You know, which I never really thought about that when I was growing up but it's true (p. 9 a).

Anna shows how easy it is to assume identities among African Caribbean and possibly other students. The statement also problematises the issue of British Caribbean identity. It is an important concern as many with a parent, who is English or Irish, may be perceived as African Caribbean but may have oppositional views on the appropriateness of such classification (see Sue Funge 2007). Indeed African Caribbean and other 'New Commonwealth' immigrants have only been in the UK in significant numbers for sixty years. We are now in the process of determining who we are, and this process of self-identification will take some time to resolve. It also demonstrates the importance of supporting African Caribbean young people in their search for

identity, through art practice and in other areas of the curriculum. I continued,

Paul - So, on the forms where it says African or Caribbean they can't relate to that?

Anna – No, they can and they can't. It's not allowing them to be what they are. I mean that's their ethnicity and they should be proud of that. You know, I'm very proud of my parents and they're Caribbean but my mum used to say if I was going back to Jamaica they would kick you out because you're not from Jamaica, they tell you you're an English girl. Well I'm not really because there's nothing on the form that tells me I'm black British, so it's not about taking ownership and we want them to take ownership (p. 9. a).

This exchange supports the theory that teachers should demonstrate to students that they have an investment in being British. The response from Anna also justifies my decision not to speak to the young people at the gallery about Caribbean art and culture; they simply have no realistic appreciation of those concepts. Anna then made a comparison with African American young people that she worked with on a Summer School project in the US.

Anna - I did Camp America twice and the young people there are really proud to be Black American. You would get people there wear it on their T shirt, but I can't imagine any young people here having England or 'London' or 'South London' written on their T shirt because they see it as a very English thing. They see it as a very National Front thing, or whatever, but in America they're proud to be Black American. They sing about it, yeah, they're very proud of it. They ... want to be black American because that's what they are.

Paul - So these kids who are here, even those who are born in this country...

Anna - They're ashamed of what they are.

Paul - They're ashamed of being British Black?

Anna – Yeah! Because I went to America and there were T shirts [presumably bearing the Stars and Stripes design]<sup>36</sup> and people who lived in that country will quite happily wear them, I was bringing back loads of T shirts from those places.

Paul - Of course they have Stars and Stripes everywhere. What about the British Kids here, do they wear the Union Jack?

Anna – No, never, I'm arguing that point, they wouldn't. It just wouldn't be done, it would be so un-cool and everyone would rip them apart and it just wouldn't be done (pp. 9 – 10 a).

How can teachers locate African Caribbean pupils in making activities that position them at the heart of British society when there is such resistance to symbolic representations of UK culture and society? Instead of tackling the issue head on by designing projects that interrogate the colours in the Union Jack and other features integral to it, would it be more profitable to construct schemes that deconstruct pieces in which there is a black presence? I am thinking both of traditional works by UK and other white painters, sculptors, etc., and contemporary pieces by black artists. Black British young people harvest key markers of identity from the Caribbean, usually Jamaica, and integrate them with American iconic imagery and new British formulations to form new trans-national cultural hybrids. Black young people in the UK are still peripheral to the mainstream society. They are in the process of negotiating their identities as black and British (see Gilroy 1987). Until that is resolved, the notion of wrapping themselves in the Union Jack, of which they are deeply suspicious, simply will not happen.

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<sup>36</sup> My parenthesis

Betty was invited to provide a background to the way African Caribbean pupils react to working with the Union Jack,

Paul - What about some of the issues that many of these black artists and some white are engaged with, you know the Union Jack and other markers of identity?

Betty - Yeah I would have opinions about things like that but I'm really in a school where they're not really [pause] it's difficult to explain but they don't think that deeply, I mean yeah, Union Jack. Me, personally, I don't like the Union Jack because of what it represents but that's me and I was like that when I was younger. But we're not talking about me but I would have an opinion about the Union Jack (p. 12 b).

This is further confirmation of the fact that many children of Caribbean background in the UK find it difficult to relate to or identify with British national symbols. As such they have yet to decide what it means to be black British.

Anna was aware of the many disadvantages that African Americans have had to deal with over the years. She spoke to these,

Anna - But you know at camp I worked with black young people from the ages of 5-15, under-privileged children for 4 months teaching art and it's very different, they come from the ghettos, they come from ... [pause] When young people turn round and say to me you don't know what it's like living on the streets, I say you don't understand what the streets are. You can live in a council estate in England and your parents can still have a BMW, you can still have a good education, go to the best colleges, even if your parents are unemployed. If you live in the ghetto in America, you're in a ghetto, and there's not much chance of getting out whether you want to or not. Those young people don't want to be in the ghetto they're not actually proud but they have no choice. I mean I worked for 2 summers in the same place, and it was quite horrible seeing some of the 14 year olds knowing they're going to be either dead or in prison by time they're 16 (p. 10 a).

She also spoke of the poor conditions and basic equipment with which the centre was equipped and made comparisons with what our young people can expect here,

Anna - When they're there [Camp America] it is so basic compared to here. I mean you don't get flash computers, or anything. It's, wooden cabins. The best thing about it was the art room. You just get felts, and markers and paints, and big sheets of artwork there's no computers, nothing like that. But those young people are really thankful because they've got those opportunities just to do art, to go swimming outside, to play cricket (p. 11 a).

Anna then made comparison with what young people are exposed to in the the UK,

Anna - These young people who're not in education they've got the opportunity to use the best equipment; we've got all state of the art, all this software. I know, a lot of my friends are designers, and they haven't even got that in their work environment and they work for big companies. And opportunities to work with people, I was really lucky at the college that I went to, my tutors were freelancers, and I felt that kept it real for me. I remember them being up all night and still wanting to come in and teach. And that kind of gives you the idea of what it is like out there (p. 11 a).

Anna expressed surprise at the apparent integration of black Americans into mainstream American life and their identification with the society, this despite a history of exploitation and brutal oppression. I suggested to Anna there was an issue with identity,

Anna - Well to be fair, black people have been in America a lot longer so they've had the opportunity to have that stand and put down those roots.

Paul - And what difference does that make?

Anna - Ownership. I think it gives you ownership, I mean I'm second generation, third generation maybe, in this country, we're still [pause] maybe if I have children they'll feel a bit different. You know if I meet someone who's black British as well because then the child can say well both my parents were born here. But then their grandparents will still

be Caribbean. It's down to that I think. And they glamorise it don't they (p 11 a)?

By 'glamorising' I think Anna is referencing the use of Jamaican patois by many African Caribbean young people in Britain, at least in some social settings. They may have been born in the UK and have parents who themselves are of British birth and who have not lived anywhere but in the United Kingdom yet they refuse, at least in public, to speak with an English accent. The myth of the Jamaican youth from 'the hood' is, I believe, the glamorising of Jamaican British identity that Anna is making reference to in this extract. Anna then made comparisons between black American and black British music. Though a different arts discipline, it demonstrates the primacy of music to the African diasporic subject,

When compared to English R&B and black music over here, it's always a bit of a joke. They don't seem to get the same kind of respect as the American artists amongst young people. It's starting to get better. When I was young a black group would come out and it's just a joke. They're trying to be this group or that group. Always comparing them to America, it's starting to get better because there are groups now coming out who are doing better and starting to make a stand (p. 11 a).

I suggested to Anna,

Paul - So my work which is to throw light on our shared Caribbean heritage is a waste of time, in terms of what the kids are interested in. They're not interested in the Caribbean but in other things.

Anna - No, it doesn't mean they are not interested, I just don't think they're given the choice. They're not taught that at school. You were taught only British white history, you were not even taught how important black people, what part black people played in [pause]. You know how important black people are ... to this country. That's not taught at school, that's not taught at school (pp. 14 – 15 a).

In this statement Anna confirmed that there is a real issue, *vis-à-vis* African Caribbean young people, their representation and learning. They are not

taught about their past or given a sense of being key players at the heart of the British mainstream, hence their apparent disinterest in the culture of schooling.

Much that is recorded above highlights areas that do not directly address the issue of teaching art in schools, particularly where African Caribbean students are involved. What it reveals that is relevant however, is the psychological gap that separates such young people from mainstream culture. In the U.S, at least in the opinion of Anna, African Americans have a very different relationship to the State. This implies that the context in which art-making is done in schools could differ, *vis-à-vis* art content relative to the way art is taught in the US. This could have implications for teaching that references state institutions, national symbols and broader discourses of identity.

Betty felt that if African Caribbean young people are to be more firmly located in the mainstream their parents should take responsibility for this. They, the parents, have a duty to expose their children to Western high culture, but few are actively doing so,

Betty - I don't think black parents take their kids out enough. Now don't get me wrong on what I'm going to say here, another reason why they could be underachieving is not all about the teachers and what we're teaching them it's about what we do as parents. You don't see many black parents taking their children out to learn about culture.

Paul - Learning about whose culture?

Betty – Look ... they don't really know about the English culture. There are a lot of black places down Brixton, lots of galleries, lots of exhibitions. One thing about black exhibitions they're not limited, they are out there, and they are definitely out there. [There is] this

exhibition going on in Brixton ... this artist, he exhibits his work in Brixton.

Paul - What is his name?

Betty - I've just met him you see so I don't know. But he's an artist who is able to come in and share his views (p. 13 b).

I have children now they're year 10's, black ones, most of my year 10's, one of my groups is mostly blacks; a lot of them are boys. I've got a couple of Indians in there as well; they're girls and I would like to go to a museum just to look at an artist's work. Now because... I can't take them to see it they don't want to see it. 'What do you mean you don't want to see it?' The black boys, they don't want to go, even if I say to them it's a black artist. I said to them I've got a Rasta guy coming in, "I don't care miss it's going to be rubbish anyway."

Paul - Isn't that a front they're putting up?

Betty - The keen ones might have been but they started saying, 'but miss, so what?' and I said but isn't that good? And they're just like 'yeah but we know all about it already so what's the point (pps 13 - 14)?'

Betty expresses frustration at the lack of parental and pupil motivation to explore British and Caribbean cultures, and locates the source of this malaise in the pupils and parents, their backgrounds and patterns of socialising.

When I spoke to Alice in her office, apart from what she told me of her strategy for naming black artists as a means of making them visible, I was similarly impressed by her collection of books on the work of contemporary black artists. I asked her,

Where did you buy them?

Alice - These are all from INIVA<sup>37</sup> and Autograph<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> INIVA is the Institute of International Visual Arts.

<sup>38</sup> Autograph Black Photographers Collective is an organisation loosely connected to INIVA that promotes the interest of black photographers in the UK and even overseas.

Alice elaborated on the significance of her collection of sculptures,

I go to great effort to get these resources. This stuff I am holding is very close to me at the moment. It might seem a bit, you know, kind of tight. They are kept in the office until I can get people to log stuff out properly, coz this to me is very precious, it is very hard to come by these kinds of resources, cultural resources and stuff (p. 1 a).

Caribbean cultural heritages are linked in Alice's mind and do not seem to feature as conceptually separate. Issues of Caribbean cultural identities were simply not raised as concerns in the interview. Alice seemed dedicated instead to a project of self-reclamation, a concern to make visible subjects pressed into obscurity by a tradition of non-acknowledgement and non-recognition. As she stated,

One of the things to me is that when you go to college you learn about white European males, you talk about it, white European males. It's like I teach the children, it's integral to what I teach in the classroom when you're saying how can I evidence that, it's actually something that we do within practice, I can't vouch for every single teaching department. The resources are here, it's in the schemes of work (p. 2 a.).

Indicating that she could not "vouch for every single teaching department", meaning, as I understand it, each department within the faculty of creative arts, Alice is speaking of the working practices of a faculty in which she has responsibility for co-ordinating teaching and learning at KS3. She then shared homework material generated by her that required the pupils to carry out research on artefacts as diverse as a painting by Kitaj, traditional homes in an African tribal community and Ndabele wall paintings. By juxtaposing teaching content in that way and insisting on naming artists from all backgrounds and traditions when their work is used in the department, Alice's intention is to

foster respect for different peoples and cultures in a multicultural pedagogic approach.

## **8.2 Aspire Gallery Group**

Some of the youths interviewed at the Aspire gallery have troubled histories and in many cases have been excluded from school either permanently or temporarily. Inexperienced in the interview process, and not having met me before the session, it was difficult to get them to relax and respond openly to questions. Many answers, therefore, were stilted and lacked substance. As indicated earlier, it was only later in the process, on being alerted of my intention to bring the session to an end that they opened up and the interview became much more productive. The time we spent together was useful in providing insights into practices engaged at the gallery that are free from the constraints placed on teachers in schools, and to which learners bring a very different attitude to making. These insights complement the socially focused pedagogy of the gallery itself. I asked the young people about their exposure to Black History Month. From the outset they responded to the concept with derision,

Junior - Black History Month there isn't much about black history.

Freddie traced it back to primary school indicating that,

Freddie - In primary school they do presentations but it's repetitive because they just do Martin Luther King every year. I'm not saying that's a bad thing but ...

Eric - When it comes to black history at my school they're only doing black history because they have to it's not like they want to. And why is it only for one month? Even though you get that one month ...

Senior - It's just a title.

Freddie –Just to get it out of the way.

Cliff -I haven't done anything about black history

Paul - You've been in your school for six years and you haven't done anything on Black History, it makes you want to scream.

Thomas - In my last year at school there was black history month and what they actually did was draw persons of each Caribbean country. That was it.

Junior - There was anti-bullying day

Thomas - Anti-bullying week.

Junior - We used to do posters and drawings – we spend a week of making posters and drawings and handing out leaflets and everything. And Black History Month you spend a day and then you don't really do anything anyway.

Freddie - Not even a day – twenty minutes and full time (pps. 5 -6 asp).

Changing tack, I mentioned to the group that that there is an imbalance of professions that African Caribbean young people go into. Many opt for athletics and music and not, say, medicine or law,

Thomas - They only get black people to choose other things as in sport and make music and drama. That's it. They don't stop and think, maybe they can be doctors. They just assume if you're black you're only going to be a rapper, an actor, a dancer.

Junior - One of the things you said before though is that we want to know about the achievements of black people (pps. 9-10 asp).

Freddie - And maybe that would inspire us (p. 6 Asp).

According to this group not much is done to integrate black history into the curriculum. There is a lack of credibility in the way black cultural issues are dealt with across departments, including the art classroom.

Paul - What do you think of the way black people are represented on television?

Eric - I think it's, erm, music programmes

Junior - They make out that black kids are silly most of the black kids are like portrayed as bad and stuff like that (p. 2 Asp).

The young people at Aspire Gallery were totally disillusioned with what went on in Black History month. Teachers in art and other subject areas do not treat the concept with any seriousness. Lessons taught under the theme of Black History Month are not properly planned. Learning content is derisory, the teachers presumably showing a lack of enthusiasm for the month.

### **8.3 Faith and African Caribbean students' learning**

The Christian faith can be mainstream or peripheral in the lives of many African Caribbean children. I wanted to gain insight into its importance in the lives of children at Blue School. It was in discussing this topic that I was confronted by arguably the most controversial responses in the whole research process. The issue of resources was addressed earlier in this work and what follows expands on this. I asked Maria, 'What resources do you collect?' Her response to this question was very surprising,

Maria - We're fortunate in this school that the ethos of the school is less to do with people's cultural identity. I mean I suppose, you could see it as the biggest success and maybe its biggest failing in that the Catholic overarches everybody. It's the thing that unifies the school, even though I don't think [that to] a lot of those boys faith is a big thing in their lives. But the routine and the lifestyle and the kind of, being Catholic as far back as they can remember, so prayer, the Mass, you know. I don't imagine for a minute that they would sit and think about Jesus when they're alone at all. But there is this notion of collective worship that becomes more important than the faith itself ... You're there with X hundred other people all sitting together on the same day, saying that you belong to the gang, you know. I think that's what is different here from maybe other schools that may have the same

cultural make up that we've got, that the Catholic thing tends to be a bit of a leveller (p.5 M).

The Catholic Church as a leveller that somehow diminishes cultural, 'racial' and other differences is a concept of profound importance. It is almost as if the participant is indicating that church in this context is the material from which a collective identity is formed, overriding everything else that the pupils bring to the school, including their cultural and ethnic differences. It is as if Maria is saying that being in the community of Catholics forecloses the need for analyses of different experiences. The other worlds that the children inhabit prior to the start of the school day are rendered almost redundant on crossing the threshold of the institution. What matters, while in school at least, is the brotherhood of the Catholic Community and the rituals that surround it.

I mentioned to Rebecca some of the key issues raised by Maria about the importance of faith as a means of creating social and cultural unity in school.

Paul - It was suggested by a participant who works in a Catholic school that the ritual of the Catholic faith was their chief way of overcoming socio-cultural differences in the school environment. The religious side of it is less important than the ritual of the faith (p. 12 R).

Rebecca - I'm not sure that is true. Maria is Catholic is she? 'cause from what you're saying I'd almost say she's an observer whereas I'm not, I'm very involved because I am Catholic ... everybody is integrated but because faith is the most important thing in your life. Illustrating it in terms of my being Irish, I went to a convent school and there was always a lot of strife going on. The Celtic people really love Ireland but we were always brought up thinking next to God I love you, it was always second because God is always the most important thing. Your faith, your religion, and the Catholic Church is a universal church, it is not a church.

Your colour is basically from where you were environmentally brought up. You are there because of the environmental factors; you change physically to cope with the time when you live. So if you're born in the Tundra you are pale white, if you're born in the South Tropics then your skin is a different colour, to cope with the sun not in a negative way just in a natural sense. But in your faith everyone is made in the likeness of god, we know god didn't have colour, Jesus Christ was North African. If anyone has made this misconception it is normally artists portraying them (p. 12 R).

Rebecca and Maria express very different yet similar views on the fundamental issue of faith. While from Maria's viewpoint religion is relatively insignificant in the day-to-day lives of the children she works with, from Rebecca's perspective it is at the centre of her practice and the learning of her pupils. There is in Rebecca's statement, however, a suggestion that cultural, ethnic and other differences are irrelevant in the eyes of God, the Catholic Church and the school. This is, I feel, if only obliquely, in line with Maria's stance. I then asked Rebecca,

Paul - Would you say that Catholicism helps to underpin the sense of unity in the school and pride in the individual?

Rebecca - Pride in the individual and uniqueness, I am a unique being, unique in the eyes of God.

Paul - And that comes through the faith?

Rebecca - Yes it does come through the faith ... I'm talking about a greater law and you do things because they are the right thing to do and ... it comes through in their artwork because we're talking about symbolism. And I think that children will actually have a hidden portrait, and they'll bring it in like they might draw it on their hand. A cross concealed here and colours there and its very important and that's what makes it easier for us I think, to bond (pps. 12 – 14 r).

Can the church substitute for differences? It is almost as if Rebecca is saying that in the Catholic Church your background and race are secondary to your

faith. Faith and a common bond with fellow Catholics, provide healing which override issues of identity and longing.

Betty, too, regularly made reference to the church but for different reasons,

Paul - You mention the church quite a lot.

Betty - Because it was two weeks ago before you asked me, we all sat down in a room and I began to notice all these children getting into trouble, black children, ...so I started asking the black ones, I said, do you go to church? 'Yeah,' [interruption] it was just that before you actually asked me to do this interview that was actually the discussion we had in the room. I said that's really strange, all of a sudden, that's why it was so strange when you asked me about black boys, and all the ones who were worst were all the ones who go to church ... I don't know what that's about because church is an institution ... I don't know why it's not working (pps. 14-15 b).

Betty is demonstrating here that from her perspective the children at Brown School change their behaviour according to the environment they are in – at church they conform to what is expected of them but in school their attitude is very different. It suggests that children will adapt behaviours to comply with perceived adult expectations, most especially when in religious environments. Importantly, in these discussions there was no suggestion that religion inferred social cohesiveness. The implication is that on a spiritual level, 'everyone is made in the likeness of god' but there was no material evidence to demonstrate equality in pupil expectations.

In my interview with the young people at Aspire Gallery the subject of faith and its importance to their learning was raised. I asked the group if they had learnt much about black culture in areas of the school outside the art department. One participant whose accent I did not recognise on the tape

said 'only in RE'. Junior responded with, 'In history and RE as well'. Eager to establish how much they learned about diasporic culture through RE, I asked 'do you learn about other peoples and religions in RE?' Junior responded with.

Yes, I think that RE is mainly Islamic and stuff like that. Since primary school, in RE lessons you learn about Islam and stuff like that (p. 1 asp).

The students indicated that in school art departments and in other subject areas they are not taught anything significant about black culture. Greater emphasis is placed by school authorities on learning about Islam. I then asked them,

What does that do to you mentally, when you are learning about other cultures but learning very little about black culture?

Freddie - When you're hearing about Christianity it's mainly about white Christianity, you're learning very little about black Christianity.

Junior - They make out that black kids are silly. Most of the black kids are portrayed as bad and stuff like that.

Paul - On television you mean, as in documentary programmes?

Junior - Not all the documentaries but, like, black kids like drawing, like, erm, gapping (?) on windows on the bus ... stuff like that (p. 2, asp).

I then tackled the group about black representation in art departments, posing the question, 'Have you learnt anything in art departments that make you feel good about being black?'

Junior - Only in RE; only Martin Luther King: in history and RE as well.

Paul - I am hearing that you haven't learnt a great deal about black culture in art departments and in other departments in school, so I was wondering if you learned about other cultures. For example you're saying that you've learned about Islamic culture and you've had that since primary school. And you are also saying that you are learning about white culture as well.

Justin - Yeah

Paul - So Christianity doesn't celebrate blackness?

Junior - I have a white teacher and he mostly talks about Muslims and stuff like that. But this year I have an Italian teacher and he talks about racism and 'stuff like that' (P. 4 asp).

Paul - So you're saying that the degree to which these things are broached is dependent on the individual teacher.

Group - Yeah

Paul - It's not written into the NC, so you're not finding people in their schemes of work celebrating black people apart from, say, Martin Luther King. But individual teachers sometimes do something about it.

Group – Yeah (p. 2 asp).

#### **8.4 Summary**

Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and Nelson Mandela are used as significant subjects of study during Black History Month. However, the young people at Aspire Gallery indicated that in their different school contexts, planning for Black History Month and the delivery of its learning content was a shambles; teachers were simply not motivated to work with such material. The content of art lessons during this month is derisory. Tony demonstrated how the school uses the month more positively to produce work that speaks of Caribbean cultures and backgrounds.

Anna spoke of the way she uses the Aspire Gallery as a resource. The children work from exhibitions that often deal with contemporary material. Some of that material engages issues of identity and origins. Here, however, there is an emphasis on black as opposed to African Caribbean issues and

identities. Anna shared her experience of working at Camp America. While in the US, she was surprised by the ease with which white Puerto Ricans took to learning about Caribbean cultural material. She regarded this as an example of what could occur in the UK. But there is severe reluctance on the part of African Caribbean pupils to celebrate any connection with symbols of UK national identity. The Union Jack was discussed in this context. While British African Caribbean young people would not be seen dead with that ensign, in the U.S. the Stars and Stripes is a symbol of pride. Black Americans, despite a history of repression in the US, still celebrate their American identity and show a pride in the national flag. The issue of the slave trade was raised by Anna who felt that it can be a difficult subject for some African Caribbean children to deal with as they regard it as a moment of defeat. Their interest in popular culture, music in particular, was also confirmed by her.

Betty indicated that African Caribbean parents should take more responsibility for educating their children about the UK and their stake in British society. Visits to galleries and museums would help. The issue of religion was raised by her. She felt that the church did not necessarily have a positive effect on the attitudes of African Caribbean children; it did not seem to provide a lasting moral example.

Alice has devised a pupil-centred pedagogic approach that celebrates the different cultural heritages in the classroom. To support her pedagogy, she has amassed an extensive library of books on contemporary black artists and

a fine collection of sculptures and other artefacts from Africa. This strategy sits firmly in her practice alongside a policy of naming artists from any culture.

Maria indicated that the church is a club in which the children at her school gain a collective sense of localised identity: this made them feel part of 'the gang'. This viewpoint was, however, challenged by Rebecca. Junior at the Aspire Gallery indicated that at school they learned about white Christianity. The Muslim faith seemed dominant in the school context. African Caribbean children were therefore lost in that religious fog.

Contemporary practices are rarely engaged in a meaningful way in the art and design departments of the participants in this study. Where such study is engaged it is haphazard and not integrated across a key stage or developed even within a year group. Some contemporary artwork is however used, however, and can draw on the practices of African Caribbean and other black artists. In that regard we have heard of Chris Ofili, Faisal Abdu' Allah and the work of Mapplethorpe being employed. Pieces by traditional or modernists artists are not used to interrogate issues but to engage representational concerns. As a consequence, there is limited analysis of the materiality of artistic production in schools with a high African Caribbean intake. Thus in relation to the question 'In their teaching, how are teachers more effectively acknowledging and celebrating Diaspora contributions to the Western mainstream' the evidence from the interviews suggests that very

little is being done constructively to provide a sense of meaningful diasporic input to the mainstream.

## **8.5 Summary of key research findings**

1. What strategies are teachers of art employing to make Caribbean cultures central to teaching and learning in multicultural pedagogies?
2. What resources are used in such teaching? Is the Caribbean regarded as part of a wider diasporic entity? Are connections made with Africa or are they instead looking to contemporary practice for philosophical and resourcing solutions to the issue of classroom diversity?
4. In their teaching, how are teachers more effectively acknowledging and celebrating Diaspora contributions to the Western mainstream?

Teachers of art and design do not seem to know where to start in providing material on the Caribbean. Many adopt the strategy of drawing on resources generated by black people from any environment and cultural origin without a connection being made between such people, their origins and the Caribbean. From my interpretation of the data, many African Caribbean teachers are themselves muddled by notions of Caribbean cultural identities and lack appropriate strategies for developing pedagogies that could celebrate the region. The invisibility of Caribbean cultural origins remains therefore a feature in the way we teach. Teacher participants involved in this work, have different strategies for dealing with this lack. Betty's call for INSET in this area is an honest appeal for support in providing some information on Caribbean art and cultural heritages. Anna works from displays at Aspire Gallery but draws little distinction between African Caribbean and other black identities. Betty, however, perceives discipline as an issue that sidelines risk-taking or more experimental approaches while Rebecca, like Alice and Tony, has adopted a multicultural option that fuses practices from different cultural

backgrounds. The issue of respect in the identification of black artists, is a cornerstone in Alice's approach. Maria works from materials. The young people at the Aspire Gallery, supported by findings from the student group in Oxford (see appendix 2), indicated poor teaching about the Caribbean. Opportunities for using popular culture generated by Caribbean peoples were simply not explored. The possibility of placing diasporic cultural material at the centre of learning by drawing on popular culture was therefore not being taken advantage of. Issues of identity and the resistance of some African Caribbean young people to full acceptance of the British nation as home were problematised. In this regard the relationship of African Caribbean young people to the British ensign featured as an important concern.

As with question one, responses to question two indicate that teachers generally do not make a direct link between the Caribbean and Africa. They speak of on-going tensions between African and African Caribbean young people. This was confirmed even at the Aspire Gallery where the regime is more relaxed and the young people interact more freely. Teachers have not indicated a direct historical or cultural linkage between the Caribbean and Africa. The curriculum does not require such connections and the teachers in this sample generally did not prioritise issues of this type. What came across instead was the use of Picasso's art in creating a link between Africa and the Caribbean. The naming of artist, a strategy employed by Alice, helps to provide an identity to some black artists but it does not furnish an understanding of their working methods. There was no indication that

anything was being systematically done by teachers to address this. Tony, however, in one-to-one teaching with a focus on Manet's *Olympia*, demonstrated an awareness of the value of deconstruction. Rebecca meanwhile shared her sensitivity to the entanglements inherent to Caribbean cultural identities.

Contemporary practices in art and design which in my theorising has the potential to address these concerns, is often muddled with modernist art, such as the work of Picasso. There was no clear indication of a systematic adaptation of pedagogies to enable learners to engage issues through such practices. Several of the respondents have used the work of present-day black artists in their teaching. Often their contributions are attached to traditional approaches and as such do not make the best of the potential for enquiry that is implicit to issues-based work. There was no clear indication, therefore, that teachers are allowing pupils opportunities to develop more politically engaged concerns.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Data from the Goldsmiths led NESTA (National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts) research project which is piloting contemporary approaches in schools, demonstrate how a properly structured pedagogy that engages issues-based approaches can lead to very fruitful enquiry. One of the schools in this sample is involved in that research. Teachers in the NESTA scheme confirm the great benefits that accrue to pupils from the adoption of such approaches.

Rebecca shared the experience of her department in getting pupils to work from black sitters. Their reluctance to engage the black body was, I felt, a significant moment in the research. I shall return to this issue in the next chapter. Suffice it to say that such coyness at addressing the black body reflects the negativity inherent to black representation in other arenas.

The third question focused on how teachers celebrate and make apparent black centrality and contributions to the western mainstream. This is a difficult area and I expected few positive responses. I regard involvement with Black History Month and the politics inherent to it, a potential pathway into the exploration of issues with a relevance to this question. Black History Month is not, however, properly utilised by schools for showcasing black achievement. Anna compared differences between British African Caribbean young people and youth in the US. According to her theorising, more needs to be done to give African Caribbean young people a sense of ownership of British culture and identity. Reference to such icons as Martin Luther King and Mandela is not enough to provide them with a sense of history and belonging. There are also concerns with the way Black History Month is handled: it is an opportunity missed. In areas of faith, too, there is an issue. The young people felt that schools focus too heavily on Islam. When issues involving Christianity were broached, African Caribbean learners felt excluded from them.

### **9. Section 3 An analysis of key research findings**

This section reflects on key issues from the research findings. It is intended to explore selected areas to provide an explanation for their causes. It starts with reflection on the discourse of history. This is driven by comments made by young people at Aspire Gallery, supported by attendees at the 2006 *I Can Do It* conference in Oxford. The importance of history to identity and belonging is explored in the first chapter. This is linked to the earlier discourse on history, on the basis that diasporic voices offer new interpretations of the past. Encouraging the voices of young people to emerge through deconstruction is perceived as a useful tool for empowering learners. The issue of the black body is revisited. I use an incident involving my granddaughter as a point of focus in this area of critical enquiry. The second chapter problematises the discourse of personal adornment and the black body. In it, I explore the way people in the African Diaspora have traditionally used their bodies as a medium of expressivity. This is followed by a more in-depth account of one key aspect of black body culture: hair styling.

## **Chapter 9.1 - Absence of Ruins: African Caribbean students in art education - history, representation, style and culture**

Our first argument is an historical one. No proper understanding of the contemporary world and of our society is possible without having some knowledge and understanding of the roots of the traditions and the institutions which we inherit. Our culture stands on the shoulders of all that has gone before. For this reason, we can only fully appreciate the meaning of the present and grasp the possibilities of the future by hooking into the frameworks of the past (Robinson, K. (ed) 1982, pps.20-21).

The next two chapters will develop themes from the research findings. I start by exploring the discourse of Black History Month, problematising the question of its significance. Why Black History? It was identified as an important concern by participants in this research and also by young people interviewed by me in Oxford. Comments from this group can be seen in Appendix 2. Black History Month as a season of curriculum activity driven by selected historical content is embroiled with identity. Choices made in determining black history traverse the three question areas. I explore in particular, the meshing of European history with African and African diasporic history: they are often deeply intertwined. As a consequence of this, I theorise the notion of multiple entanglements to demonstrate how history is not a linear unitary narrative but a constellation of threads. The presentation of material on key figures that have played a part in the black liberation movement should, I will argue, also be celebrated in such discourses.

The way we read the black body emerged as an important theme in the research. This resulted from the reluctance of children at Rebecca's school to

engage with the black sitter. The thesis posits a rationale for such behaviour. I use an account of an incident involving my four year old granddaughter as a tool for untangling the mesh of perceptions that give rise to the self-contempt seated at the heart of that observation. I argue that the way we construct the body is partly determined by the culture of the gaze that demotes it. The issue is addressed partly through the application of Lacanian theory of the 'Real' and Althusser's notion of interpellation.

## **9.2 The lack of African roots in diasporic historical origins**

The lack of knowledge of tribal origins in Africa provides a gap in the cultural memory of the African Caribbean subject that is filled by a yearning for connections with the past (Glissant 1989). Without that knowledge there is a missing link in the narrative chain in diasporic lives in history. This must be seen in the context of the above quotation, the perception that access to longstanding familial or tribal traditions is critical to 'knowledge and understanding' of self. Alongside the ongoing concern over lost origins, is the lack of acknowledgement of the critical contributions of diasporic peoples to Western economic, cultural and political life (Ash 2004). Diasporic peoples, as I argue in this work, are also integral to Western societies from which they have been shut out, or in Fanon's words 'rejected by a civilization which he has none the less assimilated' (Fanon 1986, p. 93). Appreciation of this unequal relationship is fundamental to an awareness of the manner in which our Western politics and civilisation have grown and evolved since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. If African Caribbean students, therefore, are to 'fully appreciate the

meaning of the present and grasp the possibilities of the future by hooking into the frameworks of the past' much needs to be done to satisfy their subliminal yearning for roots (in Africa). This must occur whilst exposing the discriminatory practices which exclude them from full access to information on their inheritance as Western subjects. Teachers, in this study, have been asked to address these two very different yet related aspects of diasporic cultural experience. Both are bonded by the discourse of history and its place in the lives of all of us. I have already briefly engaged this discursive area and its significance to the sense of lost roots and disconnectedness in the lives of diasporic peoples. Given the importance of Black History Month to the students interviewed at the Aspire Gallery and indeed those with whom I spoke in Oxford, I would like to revisit the notion of the broken historical narrative and disconnectedness of African Caribbean and wider diasporic experience.

### **9.3 The diasporic subject, socio-political history and identity**

History as we know it in the West is a linear reductive discourse in which the European subject is placed at the centre (Bhabha 1994; Njami, 2005; Glissant 1989). Hall (2005) in demonstrating the lack of presencing of the diasporic subject describes it thus,

... no definitive histories, no reference books, no comparative materials, no developing scholarship, no passing-on of a tradition of work to younger practitioners and curators, no recognition of achievement amongst the relevant communities ... Heritage-less (p. 33).

Glissant (1989) likens ownership of a single history to the acquisition of power,

One of the most disturbing consequences of colonization could well be this notion of a single History, and therefore of power, which has been imposed on us by the West ...

The struggle against a single History for the cross-fertilization of histories means repossessing both a true sense of one's time and identity: proposing in an unprecedented way a reevaluation of power (p. 93).

African Caribbean learners, as the historically dispossessed, instinctively yearn for reconnection with a history, a past that would ensure a more profound knowledge of self through the access to lost memory (John 2006). This yearning for knowledge of a lost heritage, which could be likened to the desire of an orphan to trace and identify a biological parent, unsettles the cultural memory of every diasporic subject. As Glissant (1989) puts it,

We clearly see that it is a question of a yearning (the knowledge of origins, of the origin) ... here man has lost his way and simply turns in circles. How could he fix himself in the center of things while his legitimacy seems uncertain? A community can so doubt itself, get lost in the swirl of time (p. 80).

While some *minority ethnic groups* in the UK can counterbalance this by their own teaching and records of the past, for the African Caribbean student the challenge is one of gaining a foothold on an historical framework in which they can attain a sense of value and self-worth. We should therefore develop pedagogic approaches that throw light on the many entanglements that define our shared communities in the West (Said 1993). In other words, rather than graft African mores onto the stump of the super-ordinate Western culture, diasporic cultural material should be perceived as so many strands in the weave of Western civilisation. As Njami (2005) elegantly puts it, 'The history of Europe in the past few centuries is an African history, whether one likes it or not. Just as African history is resolutely European (p. 18).' Without

our engagement in this process of recovery, we would only replicate the dubious ideologies and schisms of the past that would nurture, in Said's (1993) words, 'an uncritical alignment between intellectuals and institutions of power which reproduces the pattern of an earlier imperialist history (p. 45).'

This outsider/insider ontology positions African Caribbean learners outside frameworks of ownership. Gilroy (1988) suggests that 'we are obliged to find new ways of elaborating our critique of educational practices and of rethinking the relationship between race, nation and ethnic identities (p. 65).'

The way we conceptualise cultural belonging he contends is based on,

ethnic absolutism ... [and is] a reductive, essentialist understanding of ethnic and national difference which operates through an absolute sense of culture so powerful that it is capable of separating people off from each other and diverting them into social and historical locations that are understood to be mutually impermeable and incommensurable (p. 65).

Black History Month is the theoretical moment on the school calendar when issues of black exclusion from the curriculum could be addressed. The concept of 'Black History', however, is reductionist and serves only to pigeonhole diasporic contributions to our shared way of life by presenting them as delimited by parochial 'black' concerns, outside the flow of macro-cultural politics, histories and accumulated knowledges. The African American artist Carrie Mae Weems in conversation with bell hooks, (1995) in a cinematic referent, poignantly makes the point in stating that,

When we watch Hollywood movies, usually with white subjects, those images create a cultural terrain that we watch and walk on and move through. I wanted to create that same kind of experience with my subjects. Yet when I do that, it's not understood in that way. Folks refuse to identify with the concerns black people express which take us beyond race into previously undocumented emotional realms. Black images can only stand for themselves and nothing more (p.76).

Black History Month, which effectively stands for itself and nothing more, essentializes and isolates the black presence and presents it as stand-alone and peripheral – in other words, irrelevant. While appreciating that in running such schemes the under-girding rationale is to emphasise black success, in reality they reduce the significance of the black presence and its impact on the way we live. What happens often in Black History Month is that iconic diasporic figures such as Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela, are lionised and celebrated. Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King are, in my view, the acceptable face of black resistance because in their struggle against white oppression neither posed a physical threat to white people. Luther King's actions were predicated on a policy of non-violence while Nelson Mandela, though convicted of terrorism, was incarcerated in a South African jail for almost three decades. The way Mandela conducted himself during that period of imprisonment endeared him to whites, not the militant guerrilla action he took prior to his imprisonment. As such the white establishment mediate the black heroes who are used in schools.

Mandela and King are already household names in black communities. What African Caribbean students need is access to information on historic diasporic figures whose actions have contributed significantly to our present way of life. These must inevitably include those who took up arms against the British and other oppressors. Such information could go a long way towards making Black History Month more relevant to the need of African Caribbean school students and indeed the whole school community. Bussa, the enslaved

Barbadian who in the 1816 led what became known as the Bussa Rebellion against his enslavers in Barbados, is not familiar to many children. Neither is Nanny Town, 'The first Nanny'<sup>40</sup> (Robinson 1983; p. 215) from Jamaica who resisted enslavement and fought oppression alongside other brave Caribbean women and men. Most forfeited their lives in the struggle for dignity and freedom. Touissant L'Ouverture who led the successful rebellion against Napoleon that gave rise to the founding of the independent state of Haiti is a key historic figure who does not feature in many schemes of work (see James 1980). African Caribbean learners would benefit from exposure to such hidden histories (Jones 1986; Bygott 1992). While reiterating my objection to Black History Month in principle, it is the inclusion of material of the type mentioned here that could make activities surrounding this month of curriculum enhancement, more relevant to African Caribbean students. For this to happen, however, curriculum planners would be required to show courage, magnanimity and rare fidelity to truth.

#### **9.4 David Pascall's polemic on history, nation, culture and the curriculum**

David Pascall (1992), the then Chairman of the National Curriculum Council,<sup>41</sup> in a speech given at the Royal Society of Arts in 1992 acknowledged the

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<sup>40</sup> A Nanny is a female rebel runaway or Maroon slave who fought against their enslavement.

<sup>41</sup> The Education Reform Act 1988, introduced a National Curriculum which determined the content of learning for children in state schools in England and Wales.

importance of history and roots to children's growth and development, in saying that,

... we are not, as human beings, so much creatures of nature as inhabitants of a culture which consists of the many different ways in which successive generations have learned to think and talk about the world they inhabit, their history and roots, their feelings and experiences, their aesthetic contemplation of man-made and natural things' (p.7).

Referencing Iris Murdoch whom he quoted earlier in his speech, he asserts,

'Too often, as Iris Murdoch has argued, we 'picture man as a brave naked will surrounded by an easily comprehended empirical world'. This is to ignore the fact that this world is mediated for all of us through the culture we inherit, and, we need, as Murdoch puts it, 'to see man against a background of the values and realities which transcend him' (ibid. p. 3).

Our reading of the world is certainly mediated by cultural learning. As such we have a particular way of making sense of experience that is coloured by 'British' values and those practices that are rooted in ancient traditions that define our way of life. Unfortunately Pascall fails to give a definition of the pronoun *we* in the context of his theorising. It is almost as if for the sake of his assertion, he blinkers himself from the reality of our present-day cultural and ethnic diversity. His usage of 'we' is, therefore, in this context, confusing if not provocative. Far from describing a concept of nation and identity framed partly by tradition and partly by current imperatives, we have a reiteration of a mythical national identity that privileges a Eurocentric notion of a cohesive, unitary, mono-cultural and by inference mono-racial society. His position on learning, therefore, circumvents the changing demographic profile of the nation and its concomitant shifting historical and cultural perspectives. Instead, he opts for a dubious epistemology mired in the

skewed ideologies of the past. Pascall's paper in other words promotes a notion of a linear Western classical tradition that informs a sense of Britishness to which others are required to adhere, however uncomfortably, in building a sense of nation (Sarup 1996; Bolton 1979). Though much important work could be done even within his traditionalist model to effectively challenge the myth of European superiority, there is no clear indication in his speech that educationalists should adopt such approaches. I think of a model of teaching and learning that demonstrates how civilisations in, say, Africa and the Middle East impacted on ancient Greek culture (Gall 2002; Bernal 1988; Bronowski 1976; Kohn 1996).

Pascall deals with the issue of diversity in a manner that confirms an arrogant right to exclude those who do not fit his notion of Britishness,

Our society is certainly multi-cultural in that we have throughout our history welcomed many people with different cultural backgrounds and have been enriched and influenced in many profoundly important ways by their cultures. They have brought new perspectives and new insights into truth. But, as the Archbishop of York has recently argued, this does not mean that we live in a society which has no dominant culture. We do share a set of values and traditions which has been developed over centuries, which incorporates the changing face of society today, and which is passed from one generation to the next (ibid. p. 5).

While much of this may be true, all ethnic groups have traditions and ways of making sense of the world which are passed on generation by generation, what Zizek (2000) refers to as '... disconnected fragments of the way our community organize its feasts, its rituals of mating, its initiation ceremonies, in short, all the details by which is made visible the unique way a community *organizes its enjoyment* (P. 595).' It does not mean that the values to which

any group has been acculturated should be accepted on a basis of *a priori* deduction.

Ken Robinson (1998) writing as chair in *All Our Futures*, a report compiled by the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, acknowledges the importance of history to identity formation in saying that 'Collectively as well as individually, our sense of our own identity is bound up with memory and knowledge of the past (p. 51)'. In developing the point he quotes Sir Alan Bullock who in 'discussing the importance of the humanities in education',

... emphasises the necessity of historical understanding to a sense of cultural identity. He notes that any society that turns its back on the past and falls into a 'cultural and historical amnesia', weakens its sense of identity ( *ibid.* p. 51).

But Robinson draws attention to the way in which values change overtime, and the need to raise young people's awareness of the manifold influences that have shaped their world view,

... values and patterns of behaviour are shaped by many factors and ... they tend to change over time. Helping young people to understand the processes that have influenced their own and other cultures is an essential role of education (*ibid.* p. 51).

Historical knowledge and the way it is interpreted in the light of the new understandings we have of ourselves, is crucial in present-day education. It is the reluctance of those in positions of power to institute a new and more creative culture of enquiry into the past that is holding back the new readings and understandings many seek. To quote Barrow *et al*/2005,

An education system that encompasses African and Asian history and heritage increases the value of history for all young people. To achieve this, strategic and imaginative interventions of the National Curriculum are required. An education system that does not resonate with young people's backgrounds is a significant factor in a trend toward disillusionment and anti-intellectualism (p. 15).

Teaching in art that provide opportunities for students to affirm their subjectivity through practice, have an important part to play in such discourses.

### **9.5 Contemporary practices, the black body and art and design education**

My findings indicate that few teachers engage contemporary practices with enthusiasm or sense of purpose. Examination syllabi which favour traditionalist pedagogies, coupled with the requirements of a tough Ofsted inspection regime militate against experimental approaches that allow spaces for risk-taking (John 2006; Atkinson 2002). When questioned about their use of contemporary approaches, many in this study make reference to modernist practices, more especially Picasso's art and the Cubism. Picasso's art and Cubism, as a movement, are a chapter in the perceived linear development of Western art. Where African traditions are showcased, there is no attempt to explicate or celebrate them from within their own historical framework. As such the African art pieces that influenced Picasso and Braque are treated as an adjunct to Western art, a resource utilised by resourceful Western artists to better define the next wave in the progress of European thought. Contemporary practices, however, offer children opportunities to make sense

of the world from their own lived experience. A teacher participant in the (2007) Goldsmiths led NESTA sponsored Research scheme into *Contemporary Practices in Schools*, put it succinctly in talking about the experiences her year 3 pupils were having in developing responses to Susan Hiller's *From the Freud Museum 1991-1996*,

They have to take on a lot more responsibility and I think , yeah, what's really changed, they feel empowered there's so much coming from them, it's all about their own lives, their connections, you know, I am responding to them in terms of my planning and they know that. So they just think it's brilliant. So I think they do feel empowered and responsible for their own learning. It is really apparent in the way they are learning. (Teacher participant 2007, NESTA project)

Developing inclusive pedagogies through methods of deconstruction, possibly within a contemporary art framework, therefore, requires the development of new approaches (Atkinson 2002; Freire 1987) that would be of direct benefit to African Caribbean and other learners. Such pedagogies allow children space to find a voice through which they can articulate their subjectivity. This places greater responsibility on teachers in the use of resources and in the identification of appropriate themes or starting points for enquiry. One key theme is the body, and by implication for the African Caribbean student the black body.

To shed more light on the representation of the body with regard to the diasporic subject, I would like to reflect here on an incident involving my four year old granddaughter that was recently shared with me by my wife, Jean, her white grandmother. Jean relates the incident thus,

T. came rushing in to me – she had been to the nursery. T. asked me why I was pink. She started asking lots of questions I couldn't follow

but she had been in conversation with her dad. The gist of it, of these conversations is that she started referring to princesses not being brown and that she couldn't be a princess because she wasn't pink [T's words] with yellow hair. Though accepting of this, she was frustrated and hurt that as a result of being brown she couldn't be a princess because all princesses are pink.

I should add that my son, T's dad, and her mum (she has an African Caribbean mother and an Italian father) are of mixed heritage. T has a thing about being a princess and often dresses in gear appropriate to a fairy-tale princess. Her greatest compliment is to be referred to by this appellation. Clearly T is becoming very conscious of physiological differences between members of her family and indeed the impact that 'racial' differences can have on one's life opportunities. I am reminded of a pre-school participant in research carried out at the University of Kent at Canterbury for the BBC longitudinal study *Child of our Time* (2005). The four year old children were individually shown a group of four portraits of young people similar in age to themselves, and asked questions about them. In one of the questions the researcher, pointing at a white child and a Jewish one presumably as a follow up to a previous question dealing with abilities, asked the four year old, "Why do you think that these ones would be really smart and know all their letters and numbers?" The child responded "Because they've got a white face". In other words, the young respondent has been acculturated to notions of abilities being in the provenance of white peoples. Her perception of self-worth is therefore being shaped by coupling of ability with 'racial' origin. Similarly, in T's eyes, opportunity is linked to 'race.' Her dream of being accepted as a princess is thwarted by the fact that she is not 'pink'.

African Caribbean people are faced with images of others through which they negotiate their identities. Those constructs position whites as the inheritors of the highest models of beauty, moral, intellectual and cultural success (hooks). Black subjects, on the other hand, are perceived as lacking similar attributes. Brown *et al* elaborate the point in suggesting that,

Individuals immerse themselves in society by speaking a recognisable language and following similar practices and rituals to everyone else and so become guided by the dominant values and traditions of that society with which they identify. This sort of identification, however, could be delusional. Perhaps, for example, the individual's need to feel a part of things overrides any non-alignment between his actual self and the role required for the particular type of social participation (p. 34).

T. is coming up against the reality of her life chances, or the struggles she will have to establish equality in a world in which from birth her position in it has to some degree been preordained. Brown *et al* draw on Lacanian theory to explicate how such fantasy works,

... Lacan depicts the individual's formation as being caught between fantasy of his or her self and a fantasy of the world in which she or he is operating. But neither fantasy succeeds in offering a "full" picture ... In addressing these issues Lacan refers to the notions of the *Imaginary*, the *Symbolic* and the *Real* (p. 37).

The Imaginary is the space T. has constructed for herself as a black princess, a construct that is 'separate' from 'the external world' (ibid p. 37) that is the dominant cultural fantasy of the celluloid princess. Brown *et al* argue that 'the individual, looking in on his or her self, sees an image, (a fantasy) of his or her self, not the 'real me' as it were (ibid p.38).' The Symbolic in their theorising, 'relates in some respects to the Althusserian notion of interpellation' ... Althusser sees interpellation as akin to 'hailing' someone

(ibid. p. 38).’ The space of interpellation relates to the social spaces in which we receive identity and are positioned.

’By this mere one hundred and eighty degree physical conversion, he becomes a *’subject’* (quoted from Althusser with his emphasis; p. 39).

My granddaughter has been interpellated and is able to ‘see’ herself through the ideology of Western values inherent to the Hollywood construct of the princess. But there is a gap created when she perceives herself through her blackness, which makes it impossible for her to reach out and make real her fantasy. As Brown et al state ‘... it is this very gap that creates desire and for Lacan this gap is never closed (ibid. p. 38).’ Yet in the act of perceiving that gap T becomes a different subject. This is a move from one subjectivity into another that is lacking.

... interpellation brings the subject into being. He is defined by his positioning and by his mode of participation in the discourse (ibid. p.39).

Brown *et al* reference Zizek who declares that ‘As soon as we enter the symbolic order, the past is always presenting the form of historical tradition (but) the meaning of these traces is not given (p.39).’ T. is being acculturated to a value system that degrades the black subject but the meaning of that is not articulated in normal discourse. She, therefore, sensing a disparity in opportunities between subjects on the basis of colour, asks why. Brown *et al* suggests that ‘The Real’ might be seen as the space in which the Imaginary and Symbolic are enacted (p. 40).’ They declare that ‘the Real’ represents all abstract impossibilities to which the human aspires but can never reach; God, freedom, free choice, true love, happiness (ibid. p. 40).’ T. in assuming an imaginary point of cultural anchorage to which she

can attach herself as a subject, that of being a princess, is brought up short by 'the real' in her dawning awareness of the differences of opportunity determined by variations in colour [race] and origins. She aspires to be a princess but in order to realise this fantasy she needs to be white. *The real* relates to this sudden realisation of not being able to be a princess anymore. It, *the real*, realises the black presence in a white dominant world. T's experience has an echo in African Caribbean pupil uncertainties described by Rebecca at Green School. They, like 'T', were confronted by the Real of their blackness which was mirrored in the features of their peer sitters in the art and design classroom. The sitter in the classroom is a projected or disembodied representation of the self. Being so closely scrutinized by others, therefore, given the negative portrayals of black subjects which until then they may only have subliminally noted, would have been a moment of terror, hence their reluctance to pose, and resistance to work from the black model. Mirzoeff (1999) in raising the discourse of the gaze suggests that,

In later Freudian analysis, looking has been reconceptualized as the gaze ... The gaze is not just a look or glance. It is a means of constituting the identity of the gazer by distinguishing her or him from that which is gazed at. At the same time, the gaze makes us aware that we may be looked at, so that this awareness becomes a part of identity itself. In Jean Paul Sartre's example, one may look through a keyhole without an awareness of self, but if footsteps are heard in the hall: "I see *myself* because *somebody* sees me (p.164)."

The students in Rebecca's classroom in viewing the black sitter were like Sartre's viewer hearing footsteps in the hall. They gazed on themselves in the act of viewing the black figure. In other words, in working from other black children there was a sense of oneself being 'looked at', the sitter being a representation of a critical marker of themselves, their shared blackness.

Mirzoeff (ibid.) quotes Lacan who suggests that, "the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture (p. 164)." That picture that self perceived in the act of gazing at another black student subject confronted the sitters with the *real* of their own blackness in a world where the *real* of that physiological trait is delimited and vilified. It would have been similar to T's realisation of her blackness and the payload that it carried – the marginalisation of self, more especially, the perception that one's differences from the 'norm' of the dominant group indicate a taint or lack. The insertion of a black teacher into Rebecca's classroom punctured the defensive strategies of black students and their disinclination to celebrate their differences from the white European 'norm'. She as teacher was willing to pose and in that action, required the pupils to scrutinise her bodily presence; effectively, scrutinise their own presences. Regular exposure to her example gradually won the students over.

In 20<sup>th</sup> century critical theory a number of scholars have addressed the issue of representation of the black subject in western art, among them McEvilly (1992), Boime (1990); Vercoutter *et al* (1976); Dabydeen (1987); Adu-Poku (2001); Carpenter (2003); Doy (2000); hooks (1995); Powell (1997)<sup>42</sup>. Black

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<sup>42</sup> For an in-depth account of contemporary black art practices, see also the bilingual journal (French and English) *Revue Noire*, Autograph's<sup>42</sup> photographic journal *Ten 8* and the widely acclaimed arts journal *Third Text*. INIVA, Institute of International Visual Arts and DAF, Diaspora Arts Forum, both based in London can be accessed on-line and offer a range of support material on contemporary black arts in the UK and elsewhere.

photographers are today making work that contests black stereotyping, creating imagery in which the black figure, often defiled and depicted in a negative light, is celebrated. Of all exponents of this art, Rotimi Fani-Kayodi is arguably the most successful in projecting the new construct of the black physiognomy as icon. In his work inherent black physiological features such as pale palms and soles of feet, tangled hair, thick lips, black skin, prognathism of the mouth and chin are the substance of making (Figure 19). Children in our schools should gain access to this celebratory way of defining the black body and the characteristics specific to it. Without exposure to such re-positionings of the black subject, a secret shame inculcated in many by constant exposure to negative Western stereotypes, will continue to hinder their progress in re-conceptualising themselves as subjects in the modern world. As Carrie Mae Weems says:

We have to challenge simplistic, traditional, fixed notions of what criticism is and develop a new vocabulary and language. And until that happens we will continue to have little understanding of how to approach the black subject. We certainly don't have any understanding of how to talk about there being aesthetic variation, what that might mean in the construction of the ... image (Weems in conversation with hooks 1994, p. 91).



**Figure 22 Rotimi Fani-Kayodi (1987) *White Feet***

Like the black teacher/sitter at Green School, Fani-Kayodi's art, which celebrates black subjectivities in a direct and frank discourse, can offer a positive service to African Caribbean learners. In order to gain value from his art, however, diasporic pupils must be empowered to challenge the myths that have produced them as subjects. In viewing Fani-Kayodi's work, I am reminded of Fanon's (1986) assertion that,

The Black presence ruins the representative narrative of Western personhood: its past tethered to treacherous stereotypes of primitivism and degeneracy will not produce a history of civil progress, a space for the *socius*; its present, dismembered and dislocated, will not contain the image of identity that is questioned in the dialectic of mind/body and resolved in the epistemology of 'appearance and reality'. The White man's eyes break up the Black man's body and in that act of epistemic violence its own frame of reference is transgressed, its field of vision disturbed (p. xii Foreword).

Seen against a backdrop of stereotypical depictions, Fani-Kayode's images can still be challenging for some but I consider an appreciation of his art

important in the arena of body politics. Georgia Belfont's *'Re-evaluating Olympia (1987-88)'* has similar resonances though it engages issues around the gaze and the subservient roles apportioned black subjects in Western art. Keith Piper's video piece *The Fictions of Science (1996)* which deals with the transportation and attempted de-humanisation of the African subject, posits other avenues of enquiry into discourses of representation and the African diasporan (see Doy 2000). Through an analysis of politically engaged contemporary black art by artists such as these, black voices can be heard unfettered by restrictions imposed on them by a hostile white socio-historical environment. This treatment of the black body showcases the centrality of black looks, popular culture and style in black expressivity (hooks, 1992).

## **9.6 Summary**

This chapter problematised the discourse of history in Black History Month. It argued that by omitting serious study of black history diasporic students felt short-changed, marginalised and alienated, both from the curriculum and from the community. The paper highlighted the integrated nature of history as a discourse and called for change in the way teachers and schools teach the discipline. This has relevance for the way we conceptualise black history. Diasporic history, the paper argues is not separate and distinct but entangled with the life story of different peoples. Greater emphasis should be devoted to those entanglements. It must mean that history is perceived as multi-vocal and multi-focused, not seen from the viewpoint of one group. Such

adjustments would reveal the commitments to struggle by suppressed people against their exploitation.

The chapter demonstrated how the deconstruction of works of art could be a productive way of exploring our shared history. It could also be a means of taking ownership of works of art in which stereotypical representations of the black subject could alienate the diasporic learner. Such artefacts should be re-interpreted and made more relevant to the spread of learners in the classroom.

Black body politics was raised as a discursive field. Drawing on Lacanian theory, the chapter demonstrated that in children as young as four perceptions of 'racial' difference shape their self-image and place in society. The impact of negativity surrounding the black body can in this regard have a corrosive effect on the growth and confidence of African Caribbean learners. Many of these concerns could, the chapter argues, be addressed in contemporary practices that engage issues-based practices.

## Chapter 10 - African Caribbean Body-Style and the Classroom

I speak through my clothes (Eco 1973)<sup>43</sup>

Several prominent theorists in the field of African Diaspora studies have tackled the issue of black popular culture and its significance, among them: (Gilroy 1992; Dent 1992; Hebdige 1979; Burgess-Macey 2003; Hall 1992 (b) and (c); Tulloch 2004; Cheddie, J. 2004; Willis 1990; McRobbie 1994; Wallace 1992; Wilson 1992; Rose 1988; West 1993). Price and Mintz (1976) remind us how black resistance to oppression is indistinguishable from the emergence of black American popular culture. This came about in response to their enslavement and a desire to give expression to their creativity by any available means. The need to give vent to a sense of self by working in the margins of white hegemonic culture, on the streets and in the treatment of their own body is highlighted further when Mintz and Price (1976) say that,

Within the strict limits set by the conditions of slavery, African Americans learned to put a premium on innovation and individual creativity; there was always a place for fads and fashions; "something new" (within certain aesthetic limits, of course) became something to be celebrated, copied and elaborated (p. 51).

This chapter tackles the significance of black popular culture to African Caribbean young people. The issue emerged from concerns expressed by Betty about the attitude to dress by pupils at her school. The intention here is to show that dress has serious political undertones. Black style, apart from being an aesthetic concern, is enmeshed with the politics of resistance and

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<sup>43</sup> As quoted in Hebdige 1979

self-pride in environments where diasporic integrity has been under attack (Tulloch, 2004; Willis 1990; Hebdige, 1979). It also embodies critical African continuities in contexts where many traditional practices were lost and their ancestral values eroded. In style and dress, however, as in black music and diasporic use of language, African continuities persist and are the bedrock of diasporic resistance to systems of oppression. Such retentions ensure their ontological connection to an African past. As such issues of psychological good health in the determination of a people to protect their historical legacy in whatever form, is central to this concern. I will argue that the propensity of African peoples everywhere to improvise and emphasise their individuality is central to their expressivity. The significance of hairstyles, which also emerged from the research as a cornerstone of such embodied aesthetics, will be analysed in the next chapter.

This chapter therefore reflects on Betty's concern about black students wearing Che Guevara jackets, low-slung trousers and other non-conformist styling trends. It draws on observations by an educationalist that could throw light on the often misunderstood significance of diasporic styling. The chapter takes a broader look at the issue of diasporic 'street' culture that feeds and provides a backdrop to black expressivity. It problematises the notion of 'voice' and the way diasporic people emerge as subjects outside the mainstream by reinterpreting societal 'norms' to create something new that speaks of their experience.

## 10.1 The discourse of diasporic style

Mercer (1994) asserts that,

... the question of style can be seen as a medium for expressing the aspirations of black people historically excluded from access to official social institutions of representation and legitimation in urban, industrialized societies of the Capitalist First World. Here, black peoples of the African diaspora have developed distinct, if not unique, patterns of style across a range of cultural practices from music, speech, dance, dress and even cookery, which are politically intelligible as creative responses to the experience of repression and dispossession (Mercer 1994, p.100).

Betty's attitude to black students wearing the Che Guevara jacket demonstrates the difficulty African Caribbean people have in asserting their individuality in environments where the 'norm' is interpolated by the white hegemony (Brown *et al*, p. 33, 2006). Any deviation from that 'norm' is regarded as loopy or insurrectionary. As Hebdige (1979) states,

... 'maps of meaning' are charged with a potentially explosive significance because they are traced and re-traced along the lines laid down by the dominant discourses about reality, the dominant ideologies. They thus tend to represent, in however obscure and contradictory a fashion, the interests of the dominant groups in society (p. 15).

In discussing some of the issues pertinent to this discourse with an educator of whom I will refer to as Sandra, she immediately contributed the following observation,

Hoods were first worn up as a regular feature of street wear by black young people. In my view they did so to 'hide' their hair which may have been in some cases partially plaited or in some way not yet ready for full exposure to the public. In a similar way I would sometimes wear a scarf to 'hide' my hair when it has been washed and not combed and set. Overtime it became a fashion (the wearing of hoodies) and adopted as a trend style by many black and white youngsters. Many, however, regard the wearing of hoods as a threat because they are associated with the hiding of identity, often for criminal purposes. You therefore

get an association between the wearing of hoods and young people, usually black young people, and crime.

At my college, students are asked not to wear their hoods up, yet female Muslim students are allowed to wear their veils on the premises. I think there is an element of discrimination in that.

Many of those who wear hoods at the college in question are of African Caribbean background, though many are from South Asian, white and other groups, too. Their stylistic habits may have emerged from needs or responses to specific physiological traits and economic circumstances. The development of trends from such practices is to my mind a celebration of the ontological worlds they occupy. As such they carry with them an authenticity and street 'cred' that the wearers share and can identify with (Willis 1990; Hebdige 1979). That is why they are whole-heartedly adopted by young people in the 'hood' or the ghetto of inner city worlds where they 'know' where the markers of identity are 'coming from'. It shows the evolution of culture in the same way that new languages such as patois are formed, on the street or in the ghetto. As Walcott (1992) poignantly put it in his Nobel Acceptance Speech:

Deprived of their original language, the captured and indentured tribes create their own, accreting and secreting fragments from of an old, an epic vocabulary, from Asia and from Africa, but to an ancestral, an ecstatic rhythm in the blood that cannot be subdued by slavery or indenture, while nouns are renamed and the given name of places accepted like Felicity village or Choiseul. The original language dissolves from the exhaustion of distance like fog trying to cross an ocean, but this process of renaming, of finding new metaphors, is the same process that the poet faces every morning of his working day, making his own tools like Crusoe, assembling nouns from necessity, from Felicity, even renaming himself (p. 5).

Diasporic peoples, by the cut in their connection with ancestors, create new mores and define their subjectivities in this way. Their ancient past may have

been all but obliterated but rather than take whole-scale the mores, values and traditions of the West, they borrow and appropriate a palette of linguistic, clothing and styling possibilities and mix them to define their unique cultural and ontological particularities (Gilroy 1993; Hebdige 1979). But in the process of doing so they are subjected to hegemonic rejection and marginalisation. Seeing media which they regard as their own re-worked in this way the diasporic subject is stigmatised and projected as crude and lacking in sophistication (Willis 1990). Yet it is through such adaptations that the popular diasporic voice can be heard. Linton Kwesi Johnson (2006) in his poem *Yout Scene* shows how Jamaican patois re-works standard English with African rhythmic traces to form a new and powerful form that contains the grain (Barthes 1985) of a people's experience.

### ***Yout Scene***

last satdey  
I nevah deh pan no faam,  
so I decide fi tek a walk  
doun a Brixton  
an see wha gwaan.  
  
di bredrin dem stan-up

outside a Hip-City,<sup>44</sup>  
as usual, a look pretty;  
dem a lawf big lawf  
dem a talk dread talk  
dem a shuv a shuffle dem feet,  
soakin in di sweet musical beat.

but when nite come  
policeman run dem dung;  
beat dem dung a grung,  
kick dem ass,  
sen dem paas justice  
to prison walls of gloom.

but di breddah dem a scank;  
dem naw rab a bank;  
is pakit dem a pick  
an is woman dem a lick  
an is run dem a run when di wicked come  
(Selected poems 2006, p.3).

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<sup>44</sup> Kwesi Johnson explain, 'Desmond's Hip-City: a popular record shop in the 1960s and 1970s for Jamaican music, on Atlantic Road, Brixton.

The power of voice shaped by an experience specific to Jamaican people is inherent to Kwesi-Johnson's poetry. Suppression of such oral and stylistic languages in the school context can only stifle the voice of their users by denying them access to a form that allows true expression to take place. I think of the grain of the voice, which according to Barthes (1985) is 'the body in the singing voice, in the writing hand, in the performing limb (p. 276).' African Caribbean peoples in fashioning languages through which to give voice to their being, are compelled to do so in the spaces occupied by the dominant Other who recoils at their temerity in asserting their subjectivity. As such, they are vilified, or in the Jamaican vernacular, put under 'heavy manners.' Betty's concerns demonstrate the struggle diasporic people have in giving voice to their impulses in spaces where they are permanently under surveillance, and where they need to justify every action. Her perception of the styling choices of some of her African Caribbean students should be seen against a tradition of body style as art (Tulloch 2004; Rose 1991).

Few teachers have had the training to prepare them for this (Brown *et al*, 2006; John 2006). And it can have unfortunate effects most especially in the opportunities African Caribbean learners are presented with when giving expression to their creative potential. David Gillborn (1990) in the extensive research he carried out in a multicultural school in the midlands, provides a clear example of the types of behaviours endemic to black youth that can lead to misunderstanding and ultimately their rejection. He talks of his observation of one young person whom he called Charley. Charley was

upbraided for engaging in a style of walking popular among many African Caribbean young men - the introduction of a spring like step to their stride pattern.

When I asked Charley about the incident described above he told me:

I always walk – well, it's not my usual walk sir but you know that most black people *do* walk like that [smiles] don't they? Have you ever noticed that, you know with springs in their foot and things like that. [He laughs] I just can't help it, it's the way - it's the people I hang 'round with, and they walk like that, so you just pick it up ...(Gillborn, 1990, p. 28).

Gillborn continued,

This style of walking ... often reflected nothing more than a 'good feeling' – something which was usually lost in the face of staff responses to it. However, on rare occasions the style did have more symbolic importance. During one lesson which I observed, for instance, Charley was ordered out of the room as punishment for speaking with a friend ... Charley stood, slowly placed his pen on the desk and left the room in the same relaxed walking style described above. On this occasion his walk did not express a feeling of well-being, rather, it allowed Charley to salvage some dignity from the situation ... a strategy of resistance (ibid. p. 28).

The reworking of the familiar and commonplace, such as the hopping or swinging gait described above, is part of the assertion of independence and desire to celebrate one's individuality in difficult circumstances of dispossession and exclusion. It has become a traditional feature of popular black cultural expression (Gilroy 1993; Hebdige 1979; Njami 2005; Gillbourn 1990; Willis 1990). Such behaviour amongst African Caribbean young people can be jarring to the Western mind-set and is often perceived as insolence bordering on threat. What many who feel discomfited by such practices often fail to appreciate is the way subcultures grow and define themselves through

markers of identity that separate their participants from others (Willis 1990; Hebdige 1979).

In understanding diasporic cultural sensibilities, therefore, one has to take account of the turn in representation, the twists that black subjects engage in creating distinctive forms of expression and speaking. These often are adaptations of Western practices that are given a new distinctively black signature (Hall 1992). This intrinsically African ability to extemporise and elaborate conventional mores in new and surprising ways was made apparent in *Africa Remix*, (2005) the Simon Njami curated travelling exhibition of African contemporary art. Many of the qualities and concerns central to contemporary African art were showcased in that great exhibition. I think of the high levels of inventiveness, the use of found materials to create new meanings, the improvisational skills inherent to many exhibits. Romuald Hazoume's *Bidoun Arme* (2004) for example is a delightful sculpture, consisting of stacked and bound plastic containers, some with graffiti-like inscriptions on them, and in which the grain (Barthes 1985), mystery and mythology of African lifestyles are inscribed. Similarly, El Anatsui's *Sasa* (2004) is an extraordinarily original 'textile' piece made from strips of recycled aluminium cans, bottle caps and wire, that defies previous perceptions of what textile art can be. McRobbie (1994) encapsulates this black urban ability to improvise and use waste and throw away materials, in saying,

What else has black urban culture in the last few years been, but an assertive reassembling of bits and pieces, 'whatever comes to hand', noises, debris, technology, tape, image rapping, scratching, and other hand-me-downs? Black urban music has always thrived on fake, forged

identities, creating a façade of grand-sounding titles which reflect both the 'otherness' of black culture, the extent to which it is outside that which is legitimate, and the way in which society has condemned it to be nameless. Who, after all, is Grandmaster Flash or Melle Mel? Or who was Sly and the Family Stone? (p. 22)

The syncretism inherent to popular music and its attendant visual culture - skate board imagery, posters, flyers, record sleeves, etc. - is a rich resource in inner city working class lifestyles (Willis 1990; Rose 1991). Much of it forms the grain of popular African Caribbean expressivity. Such fusions are oppositional to traditions which draw on a monocultural notion of heritage and history. In a similar manner Willis (1990) in writing about the influence of African Caribbean music on youth sub-cultures states:

Far from being an insular culture, existing on the fringes of white society, black musical traditions have also had an important interpretive resource for the symbolic work of other social groups. Asian youth, for example have found a relevance in soul, funk, disco and hip-hop music, music out of which new, distinctly British, Asian youth cultural forms are being evolved (Willis 1990 P. 66).

New voices can be heard in music from Bhangra to Garage and hip-hop. These hybridic forms offer nodal points for growth in education because they come out of shared values and grounded working-class formations (Willis 1990). Record sleeve design and posters may not attract the interest of some teachers, but a great deal could be achieved through development in such popular, grounded aesthetics. These redefinitions have resonances for white children as well as black and could provide school students with the confidence to challenge deeply entrenched values, antithetical to their experience.

The young people in the study are signalling an allegiance to a suppressed past. We must be careful not to impose on them an aesthetic that stems from the prejudices of the super-ordinate group, but find the means instead to go-with-the-flow of black creativity and encourage ways of making that build on their aesthetic sense. That aesthetic sense knows no firm categories and cuts across divisions normally regarded as separate and discrete. Carnival aesthetics echo this. Diasporic body-style can reflect popular African Caribbean musical tastes and even the choice of jewellery and motor car (Hebdige 1979; Willis 1990; Tulloch 2004). Awareness of these preferences could enhance planning and make the experience of teaching and learning more rewarding for teachers and learners alike. Such pedagogies require teachers to look beyond conventions interpolated by Western hegemonic practices and take cognizance of grounded aesthetics generated by 'ordinary' people who appropriate, adapt and invent new stylistic and expressive forms in asserting their subjectivity.

African Caribbean students are inheritors of a fragmented culture, what Gilroy refers to as a 'travelling standpoint' (p. 71), a cultural view predicated on the notion of fusion and mobility as opposed to the moribund determinism often levelled at the black subject. Njami (2004) further elaborates this point in stating that,

... we have had ample time to learn that contemporaneity, African or not, cannot be restricted to a single, global definition. It inevitably passes through individual filters. It reveals itself as recognition of the other (p. 22).

The full revelation of that standpoint stirred by evaluations of crises of diasporic identity formation, and by extension the human condition, is arguably the greatest contribution diasporic peoples have made to present-day intellectual life. In other words it is, in my view, the driving force of postmodern theorising. McRobbie (1994) references Stuart Hall in positioning the black subject in the postmodern era. Hall's quotation at the bottom of the extract is telling,

... it is just this de-centring of consciousness which allows him, as a black person, to emerge, divided, yes, but now fully foregrounded on the postmodern stage. 'So one of the fascinating things about this discussion is to find myself centred at last. Now that, in the postmodern age, you all feel so dispersed I become centred. What I've thought of as fragmented comes, paradoxically, to be the representative modern condition! This is coming home with a vengeance (p. 27).

Secondary school environments are not organised to accommodate the free-flow of making activities across disciplines that would support more integrated multidisciplinary activity. The fear of Ofsted and concerns about Exam Board rejection of new approaches to making, are dual disincentives to change (John 2006). Given the evidence provided in the data presented in this work, it is apparent that many teachers shy away from experimental pedagogies and adopt instead more conventional ones. Some, however, in making changes within the constraints of the curriculum and broader political climate, have developed unusual approaches driven by their own perceptions of need and ability.

## 10.2 Summary

In this chapter concerns about styling trends amongst diasporic young people and what they imply in the school context, were raised and analysed. The chapter shows how popular black expressivity, in climates where diasporic means of articulating their cultural affiliations are not appreciated, can lead to misunderstanding, teacher/pupil conflict, disenfranchisement and disaffection. Observations by an experienced college lecturer highlighted the way black young people in their styling preferences, are treated differently from other young people who also wear distinctive gear. The chapter therefore emphasised the centrality of styling change and experimentation to the repertoire of the diasporic subject. A poem by Linton Kwesi Johnson illustrated the changes that can take place in the use of language to form a rich and versatile new idiom. The chapter also emphasised the African traces in language which have an echo in other expressive modes such as dress, style and even gait that are a carry-over from traditions rooted in African civilisations. It suggests that these could be seen as a starting point for enquiry. In the next section I shall look in some depth at the issue of black hair. This, too, was raised by Rebecca and is a cornerstone of black style. In it, a mass of socio/political entanglements are revealed that demonstrate the centrality of hair as a marker of difference and a site of contestation.

**Chapter 11 - Popular culture and black expressivity:  
hair, art practice and resistance**



**Figure 23 African Women's Hairstyles**

This chapter will look at the politics inherent to black hair culture. In doing so, it will highlight possibilities for using Black hair as a resource for teaching in art and design. As such the chapter uses this embodied marker as a means to demonstrate pedagogic possibilities for the classroom, whilst highlighting the importance of black bodily characteristics in Western social

and cultural discourses. The chapter starts by referencing the observations of a Dutch traveller to Surinam who witnessed an act of hair tending by a group of enslaved peoples, not yet disembarked from the slave ship on which they were transported to the Americas. This provides the background to the rest of the text. The writing then explores black hair culture in the period of diasporic enslavement, more especially the syncretizations that took place between the enslaved and those that they encountered in the Americas. The way these mixings influenced hair styling is seen as an encapsulation of the emergence of a new people with new possibilities. It then shifts to an analysis of the way difference in hair types was used as a sign of otherness, particularly in American popular culture. Against this backdrop of white disparagement emblematised in the negative treatment of black hair, emerged new sometimes controversial styling trends. Conking, in this context, became a feature of chic style in some black subjects. The chapter explores how this early twentieth century fad, while popular among entertainers and others, was criticised by some black academics as pandering to whiteness and an implied degrading of the black body. Rastafarianism emerged as an oppositional politics that sought radical solutions to diasporic marginalisation and humiliation in the West. This African fundamentalist movement, driven by the Jamaican activist Marcus Garvey was the seedbed of a new styling trend oppositional to conking aesthetics. Rastafarian style merged with Afro styling during the period of the Black Power movement in the 60s to offer a new and distinctive palette of styling possibilities. The mixing and matching that are features of our post-modern cultural

environment are, however, oblivious to notional 'racial,' cultural or ethnic frontiers. This is apparent in the way such styles are donned by youth irrespective of ethnicity or heritage. Adoption by some white youth of locking (Rastafarian styling) and plaiting and other 'black' hair styles coupled with the popularity among a growing number of black youth of a blond look, testify to this change. The paper ends by demonstrating how prominent present day artists use hair styling and hair politics as a resource for making in art that could have implications for teaching and learning in schools.

### **11.1 The discourse of Black hair culture**

Diasporic people have since the period of black enslavement in the Americas used their bodies as a canvas on which to articulate their presence as subjects (West 1993). This propensity to use the body as a key medium of creative and political expressivity emerged from an amalgam of African retentions and new, grounded syncretisms in the West. It was further influenced by their denial of access to the academies and cultural institutions such as music halls, galleries, theatres, museums and even clubs. But more than an embodied locus of creativity the black body has, since the period of black enslavement in the Americas, been a site of political struggle. Whether generated by an oppressor who sought to condition the black subject for labour by inflicting pain on her body or driven by conflicts within some black subjects for physiognomic valuation, the body of the diasporic subject has been and remains a key site of political contestation. Hair culture, therefore, continues to feature prominently in the lexicon of expressive possibilities

available to African Caribbean young people. Rebecca is alert to this and her description of African Caribbean students styling their hair in her classroom and elsewhere in the school environment is evidence of that awareness. Because of its significance as a cultural marker of pride and indeed politics in black and white cultural environments, I would like to devote space to this embodied signifier that is seen by some as a fetish of black inferiority or conversely an emblem of diasporic pride. In doing so, hair as a focus of political discourse is a reminder of the centrality of popular culture to diasporic expressivity and its potential as a critical resource for teaching and learning in schools. This chapter will therefore explore the centrality of hair to diasporic aesthetics and hair as a symbol of black resistance to oppression.

### **11.2 Black body aesthetics**

Mintz and Price (1976) quote a Dutch traveller to Surinam in the 17<sup>th</sup> century who witnessed the arrival of a slaver, "at the end of the nightmare of the Middle Passage", and recorded how,

"All the Slaves are led upon deck ... their hair shaved in different figures of Stars. Half-moons, &c, /which they generally do the one to the other (having no Razors) by the help of a broken bottle and without Soap/." It is hard to imagine a more impressive example of irrepressible cultural vitality than this image of slaves decorating one another's hair in the midst of one of the most dehumanising experiences in all history (S. Mintz and R. Price 1976, p. 48).

It is a humbling thought that after the nightmare of the middle-passage, these enslaved people had the pride and self-regard to tend their hair in the manner described by the European traveller. The determination to dress their hair even in such extreme conditions has an echo in the rebellious behaviour

of the enslaved on plantations and other sites of bondage. This simple act of cultural affirmation was an assertion of a people's adaptability and determination to transcend their humiliation in circumstances of enormous loss. Enslaved peoples, working collectively in this way, began the process of syncretization that is marker of diasporic experience (Cohen 1997; Hall 1995; Hall 1997; Bhabha 1994).

Diaspora people in those early days created a language of style that drew on their African past, the new creative initiatives that emerged from within their own communities on the plantations and elsewhere and from practices borrowed from their enslavers. They also absorbed new ideas from the indigenous peoples they encountered alongside those of other oppressed groups such as indentured labourers from South Asia. As such they functioned as "bricoleurs" (White and White 1998), by taking from different traditions and creating a new mode of expressiveness. White and White (ibid) in referencing Adair give an example of borrowing from European style in saying that,

What appears to have happened quite often, however, was that slaves styled their own hair to resemble the wigs worn by members of the dominant caste. Some runaway advertisements are quite specific on this point. John Van Dyke of New York noted that his slave Hamilton sometimes craped (that is, frizzed) his hair and that "when craped, it appears like a cut wig." Pompey, a Maryland runaway, was said to wear "his wool combed back on the top of his head, forming a toupee (p. 51)."

Arongundade (2003) controversially asserts that with emancipation,

... blacks throughout the colonies had the opportunity to be aesthetically self-determinant, but instead they chose white beauty values. Out of the ashes of black beauty a new look emerged. A mutation. A hybrid of

black and white – of Africa meets America. Blacks took the basic canvas of their Africanness and grafted on a new kit of components transplanted from white beauty values. And so *transracial* beauty was born. It was not black, it was not white, it was a brew of the two. It was category three (p. 162).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early years of the twentieth century depictions of the black as beady eyed and thick lipped with wild unkempt hair were popular in comic cartoons, in children's stories and in food, soap and other advertising<sup>45</sup> (Congdon-Martin, 1990). Often in these problematic constructs the hair of the black subjects was used as a symbol of their supposed degenerate, simple or savage presence (White and White 1998). The development of the film industry in the early twenties and thirties elaborated the genre and took it to new levels of popularity among white consumers. Black subjects in films were constructed within the prevailing myths of black savagery, simplicity and brute physicality (Bogle 1994; Mirzoeff 1999). The eager to serve spear-toting 'savages' who were the backdrop to many Tarzan movies were often suitably unkempt, simple and apparently eager to be led by a white man. More especially the popular character Farina in *Our Gang* his hair dressed with tightly twisted 'pickaninny pigtails (Bogle 1994, p.21)' was an encapsulation of the degradation of blackness. Though in many ways a character of 'heroic demeanour' with his 'husky voice and arrogantly pleasant way about him', who often came to the rescue of 'little white damsels in distress (ibid, p. 23)', through the treatment of his hair, he was depicted as 'a sexually ambiguous character (ibid. p. 21).' Farina's pigtails were so bizarrely

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<sup>45</sup> (See Douglas Congdon-Martin's *Images in Black: 150 years of Black Collectibles*;

styled that they served to foreground white constructs of his 'race' and culture in a particularly strident manner. It is almost as if the creators of the character were saying that this young person might have positive qualities but lest we misread his true position in life check out his hair.

Conking<sup>46</sup> as a trend style from the early to mid-years of the twentieth century was bitterly opposed by some members of the black community for the message it conveyed about internalised diasporic inferiority. This chemical means of straightening African hair became fashionable among black entertainers in the pre and post-War eras (Fig. 24). Nat King Cole, Fats Domino, Josephine Baker and many other black American entertainers treated their hair in this way. But the process is a painful one, the lye used in the treatment burning and even blistering the scalp. Adams quotes Malcolm X who in the 1950s conked his hair and said of the process,

The congolene just felt warm when Shorty started combing it in. But then my head caught fire.  
I gritted my teeth and tried to pull the sides of the kitchen table together. The comb felt as if it was raking my skin off.  
My eyes watered, my nose was running. I couldn't stand it any longer; I bolted to the washbasin. I was cursing Shorty with every name I could think of ... (Malcolm X 1968).

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<sup>46</sup> Conking is a form of styling in which the hair is treated with lye or other chemicals to artificially straighten it. The process is often painful and can damage the skin. When completed, a conk, properly maintained, can last for several weeks. Hair straightened in this way can acquire the temporary glossy sheen, favoured by many wearers.



Figure 24 Gerald Dash (circa 1968) in a conk hairstyle

In this climate of greater access and freer public communication, the Harlem Renaissance or the Negritude movement was formed in the USA in the 1920s. A key figure in the Harlem Renaissance was the Jamaican born activist Marcus Garvey. He formed the United Negro Improvement association (UNIA), making the 'reclamation of an African – based aesthetic a central tenet of his political platform (Byrd and Tharps 2001, P. 38).' Tony Martin (1983) asserts that,

Marcus Garvey is well known for having organized and led the Universal Negro Movement Association, the largest Pan-African organization of its kind ever. The U.N.I.A. flourished in the years after World War 1. ... He wanted to reach out to his brothers and sisters in suffering throughout the African world. Garvey more than anyone else, provided for the New Negro an avenue wherein he might vent his feelings and realize ambitions (African Fundamentalism, p. 1).

Garvey's Back to Africa strain of Negritude encapsulated a greater pride in our connections with an African past, and implored black people not to "... remove the kinks from your hair ... Remove them from your brain (Byrd and Tharps, p. 38)." He galvanised sections of the black community in Harlem

and elsewhere in the USA into a committed, politically aware group of activist. Through his work the Rastafarian movement was formed.

Rastafarian hairstyling came to prominence with the success of Bob Marley, a Rastafarian and wearer of dreadlocks. The Rastafarian's treatment of hair is one of the key signs of their pride in the natural qualities of African physical and cultural attributes (Fig. 25). Byrd and Tharps (2001) assert that 'The word *dreadlocks*,



**Figure 25 A student with locked hair**

signifies, "unholy people's fear of the dreadful power of the holy (p. 125)".

They further suggest that,

The name derives from the days of the slave trade. When Africans emerged from the slave ships after months spent in conditions adverse to any personal hygiene, Whites would declare the matted hair that had grown out of their kinky unattended locks to be "dreadful." (For that

reason' they continue, 'many today wearing the style choose to drop the *a* in *dreadlock* to remove all negative connotations. (p.125).

Importantly, though associated with Rastafarianism and seen by many as a unique feature of their culture, locking has been around for a long time and is associated with people from different continents and background. These include Kikuyu soldiers of the Mau Mau, who inspired the Rastafarian adoption of the hairdo, to 'Japan's Rasta-Buddhists' and Maori warriors in New Zealand (ibid. p. 129)'. They further state that, 'the style dates to before the fifth century, when Bahatowie priests of the Ethiopian Coptic church locked their hair (ibid. p. 129).'

Today people across continents wear long, often matted locks to create a distinctive Rastafarian look. However many diasporic people who would not countenance the adoption of values which go against universally accepted Western norms, regard the Rastafarian way of life as extreme. Even Bob Marley's mother, Cedella, is said to have eschewed the style when her son Bob adopted it. As Stephen Davis, Marley's biographer, is reported to have said, '... the Rastafarians ... were looked upon with revulsion and real dread by the masses of Jamaicans' and so 'The idea of her son wearing dreadlocks was almost too much for Cedella to bear (Arongundade 2003, p. 76).'

But dreadlocks were a key feature in the struggle against white oppression and the celebration of a renaissance in black pride, black physiologies and culture (Byrd and Tharps 2001). From this politics emerged the Black Power movement of the 1960s.

The Black Power movement brought articulate and focused leadership to the American and to a lesser degree the broader African Diaspora. It critiqued black popular culture and demonstrated how our lives in the West had been marked by the slave trade and the dehumanising effect of racism. Importantly, too, it exposed the manner in which black subjects sometimes are complicit in their own degradation as a people. Hair straightening was perceived to be emblematic of internalised self-hatred. The Afro, on the other hand, by its celebration of the materiality of African hair, emerged as a marker of black pride (Fig. 26).



**Figure 26 Jascinta Dash (circa 1968) in an Afro hairstyle**

This style first appeared in the 1950s as a chic black look. To quote Kelley (1997):

The Afro has partial roots in bourgeois high-fashion circles in the late 1950s and was seen by the black and white elite as a kind of new female exotica (p. 341).

Paul Willis (1990) puts it succinctly in saying that,

In the 1960s black liberation movements proposed the slogan 'Black is beautiful' to contest the hegemony of this white aesthetics with a grounded aesthetics of its own. Fully aware that such hegemony depended on the subjective internalisation of these norms and values, the Afro hairstyle was adopted by Afro-Americans as an outward affirmation of an empowering sense of black pride (p. 92 Common Culture).

The Afro is a style that draws on qualities intrinsic to curly African hair: the coil of the hair, its capacity to grow in a thick mass. 'Shaping the Afro was like sculpting a hedge or a piece of ice. You could cut styles into it and they would hold. They would stay frozen in the broccoli matrix like art (Arongundade 2003, p. 171).' By the 1960s, Afro or "*au natural*" was being 'sported by rock-throwing black males and black-leathered militants armed to the teeth (Kelley 1997, p.72). Angela Davis was of course arguably the most famous exponent of the 'fro. Arongundade theorises that,

Never had a hairstyle struck so much fear into white America as the Afro did during the late 1960s. News bulletins of angry-faced Afro-Americans, violent demonstrations and race riots threw the media into a tailspin of hysteria that succeeded in associating the style with hardcore militant behaviour (P. 72).

Young people are today borrowing and appropriating many of the styling features intrinsic to the coiffure of other groups. Techniques such as braiding, Plaiting and bleaching proliferate across continents and the result of them can be seen in Dakar, Chicago, Kingston and London (Figs. 23; 24). Traditional styles in Africa are merging with American and Caribbean looks to create a rich new strand of black expression (Biaya 1998). Styles on the streets of Dakar can be inspired by political events in Paris, the demise of an American rap artist or a new import from Kinshasa (Ibid p. 91). David Beckham's famous cornrowed hairdo with all its echoes of Bo Derek's plaited

style in the movie '10' is an example of white appropriation and commercialisation of black 'natural' hair looks (Byrd and Tharps 2001, p. 102). But today many black celebrities and members of the wider public dye their hair blonde, an act that would have met with derision in black communities in the 1960s. As Michael Vannoy Adams (1996) states,

What we are currently witnessing is a proliferation of hairstyles among both blacks and whites. No longer do blacks necessarily style their hair in an effort to look white, and whites now often style their hair in an effort to look black, which, to them, suddenly seems more stylish. The self, whether black or white, adopts, adapts – appropriates – the look of the other (p. 99).



Figure 27 Camilla Mussington in a cornrowed hairdo

Figure 28 A London youth with a plaited or braided hairstyle

The popularity of jet travel, and in many countries easy access to the Internet and the media, has brought about an unprecedented mingling of cultures, values and practices. What was once regarded as separate and in the unique ownership of, say, the Japanese is now donned in Senegal or sampled in New York City. Reggae rhythms of Kingston are as much a part of the experience

of the Tokyo teenager as the Brixton music fan. In this climate hair straightening, dyeing and curling are practised by young people everywhere as options on a palette of styling techniques. Such access contributes to a notion of heritage, which culls ideas and styling possibilities from traditions and peoples everywhere. As such it is an encapsulation of an emerging creolised notion of community, which draws on ideas and principles from people of like mind everywhere. While black hair styling has developed from its unique textural qualities, long-standing African heritages and the history of oppression, it is today located in an environment of mix and match that often shows little regard for such politics (Hebdige, 1979). Schemes based on the politics of hair styling could be the starting point for issues-based enquiry in art and design departments. Such foci need not deal solely with the black body as such but could engage wider forms of symbolic representation. The way we are manipulated by advertising to purchase particular products in the quest for a media constructed look, predicated on notions of the gaze, could inform issues-based practices.

Sonia Boyce the Black British artist has produced a wide range of work that deals with African hair. In her 1993 piece *'Do you want to touch?' African hair is problematised as specimens on display. As such the black figure is symbolically objectified for the scrutiny of the viewer. Certainly the arrangement of hairpieces in a museum-like setting suggests the type of scholarship normally associated with the display of ethnographic specimens. Different hairpieces are shown including synthetic and real hair types; some*

plaited others in a straight style, a few decorated with beads and shells. Thus in referencing our African past, while evoking memories of Jim Crow segregation and Darwinism, the piece signals an entanglement of relationships and histories. The title 'Do you want to touch?' is a reminder of the peculiar relationship white people have with 'black' hair, and the black body. Black hair is seen as alluring yet threatening, something *they* seek to touch, as a result of a fascination with difference. Maybe it symbolises a distant other world detachment and the perceived lower status of the black subject. The act of touching could indeed by this means be perceived as a peculiar form of *power-knowledge*<sup>47</sup> (Foucault 1980). The choice of hair materials - synthetic and real - also raises questions of authenticity. Clearly many black women wear synthetic hairpieces and at one level one could read the installation as making reference to that. Other questions of fake and real come into play that should lead to enquiry into other forms of representation.

Joy Gregory's *Blonde* (1998), problematises 'blondness' as a marker of beauty and good looks in the black British community. It consists of a number of photographs of black people with blond hair. The piece when displayed in

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<sup>47</sup> Atkinson (2000) postulates that 'Foucault's integration of power-knowledge invokes the idea that the acquisition, transmission or use of knowledge ... implicate different forms of power.' I am using this theory to reference the patronage implicit to some filmic and literary creations including the character Farino, in which the black subject is depicted in a less than complementary way by members of the white hegemony who think they *know* the 'Negro' and have, by this knowledge, the authority to represent them.

1998 consisted of a website and an exhibition, and according to according to Doy (2000), it investigated

... the reasons why non-Europeans go blonde. "Their reasons for being blonde were both political and personal, ranging from the serious to the superficial. The main aim was a personality change, be it temporary or permanent (p. 190)."

Activities driven by this history of resistance and play embedded in black hair culture could lead to other developments in the classroom. Some, involving research on headpieces from different cultures, could focus on sculptural projects in clay, mod-roc, papier-mâché, filmic or other media.

### **11.3 Summary**

Popular culture in diasporic arenas is a critical expressive medium. Shut out from mainstream institutions and acculturated to creative modes that privilege personal expressivity, they, often in collaboration with other oppressed groups, have created new popular languages that are today influential on the way people everywhere assert their subjectivity. This influence can be seen in communities in most modern cities and is driven largely by black music and black style. The aesthetics of black hair culture is integral to black popular music and body style. An appreciation of the lengths to which many black entertainers and celebrities have gone to style their hair would demonstrate this. But the aesthetics of black hair styling is also linked to a history of repression and resistance in African Diaspora communities. Through issues-based enquiry with a focus on hair culture, children could compare hairstyles from different times and social contexts to see how social values are encoded in them. Hair grooming could also be a starting point for

classroom research into other embodied forms of repression, be they Chinese foot-binding or the wearing of corsets in 19<sup>th</sup> century England. Different ways in which the body is shaped and honed for political and aesthetic reasons could by this means open up areas of enquiry that should broaden understanding.

Issues-based, conceptual and other contemporary approaches offer opportunities for fruitful exploration of the body as a political and aesthetic resource in art and design education. Such practices could draw on children's embodied markers of identity as a starting point for enquiry, providing by this means a space for their individual voices to be heard. Diaspora styling trends have a meaningful part to play in such artistic enquiry. It is for the resourceful teacher to engage such cultural material and, in the process, make the experience of doing art a more inclusive and rewarding activity.

## **12. Conclusion**

Diasporic subjects have, since the beginning of the trade in enslaved Africans, elaborated new syncretic practices in the various communities of which they have been a part. These hybridic forms, often given expression in the throw away and ephemeral, are integral to Western popular culture. Yet such popular expressive modes are often not seen or appreciated for the benefits they bring to the national community, or to the dignity of diasporic subjects themselves. As a consequence African Caribbean cultural traditions are often derided and not made central to pedagogic discourses. More especially, in schools the assertion of a diasporic grounded aesthetic is sometimes perceived as a threat to school life. Betty's critical response to the behaviour of African Caribbean pupils at her school is an example of such antagonism. Informed appreciation of how diasporic subjects have survived and maintained their dignity in the face of overwhelming humiliation may lead, therefore, to the adoption of more relevant pedagogic approaches and greater teacher forbearance.

From the findings in this study, it is apparent that teachers of art and design do not meaningfully research African Caribbean cultural material or Caribbean historical contributions to the way we live. Instead, in their pedagogies, many draw on hackneyed epistemologies already in the ownership of diasporic learners. Rather than find elements of experience in art that begins the process of recovery there is exposure to teaching that, by the denial of representation, buttresses the notion of African Caribbean cultural deprivation

and shallowness. Brathwaite's absence of ruins continues therefore to mark the experience of African Caribbean pupil learning in schools. This applies particularly in two different arenas, firstly, in our reluctance to demonstrate African Caribbean pupil right of access to traditions in Africa, and secondly in our ignorance of the fullness of Caribbean cultural contributions to the Western mainstream. In the face of such abject teacher ignorance about African Caribbean cultural experience, many pupils become even more disenchanted with the teaching and learning environment often, as a result, falling foul of school rules. The young people at Aspire Gallery communicated this sense of grievance. Their assertion that black children get into trouble for asking pertinent questions about their cultural history is a particularly disturbing revelation. Little wonder that many react with indignation and anger, regarding such issues as Islam and bullying to be dominant themes in the culture of schooling rather than concerns about their lack of representation - Black History Month is a sop to diasporic pupils' cultural recognition. Ultimately, therefore, to better accommodate diasporic learners, there would have to be greater appreciation of the imperatives that animate such young people and teachers should become acquainted with their ontological worlds. This could mean looking again at the way the black subject is represented in high art and popular culture. These concerns have implications for teacher education.

## **Teacher Education**

Teachers of art in the UK generally have a subject knowledge grounded in Western hegemonic notions of history and cultural excellence. As such, when constructing schemes of work the models on which they draw can marginalise and disenfranchise African Caribbean learners. Traditional pieces in galleries and museums used in classroom practices often portray the black figure as problematic or subservient to white subjects. Progressive teachers should be cognisant of such stereotypes. In this regard, they could familiarise themselves with the development of Black arts in the UK since the War. Prominent among these developments has been the emergence of *The Caribbean Artists Movement* (1966-1972).

Artists in CAM asserted their voice as a significant creative presence across a range of art forms, from dance to photography, painting to poetry. At its core was a group of talented writers, painters and sculptors, several of whom have in subsequent years gained international recognition. Distinguished writers Wilson Harris, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Kamua Brathwaite and Andrew Salkey were members of CAM. The visual artists Aubrey Williams, Althea McNish and Ronald Moody were also involved and achieved great distinction in subsequent years – *Johanaan* (1936), a carved piece by Moody featured in the Tate's Millennium exhibition, *Representing Britain 1500-2000: 100 works from Tate collections*. Tate Britain has an extensive collection of pieces by Aubrey Williams. Althea McNish has recently been awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in recognition of her

achievements as a designer. Other artists such as Gerry Craig, Paul Dash, Winston Branch and the painter, illustrator and writer Errol Lloyd were members of a movement that paved the way for the emergence of black art in the 1980s. While CAM may not attract the attention of course planners in mainstream schools of art, it was undoubtedly a vital moment in the emergence of a black voice in British art. African Caribbean pupils should be made familiar with their achievement if they are to place current developments in black art in their proper historical context. Anne Walmsley's *Caribbean Artists Movement* (1992) is a publication that offers an in-depth account of the movement that could support such classroom activity.

The *Black Art* movement that emerged in Wolverhampton in the 1980s was arguably an even more radical collection of artists with roots in the Caribbean. Formed by young black art students in the Midlands, the movement pushed the boundaries of African Caribbean and diasporic representation to allow new voices and positionalities to emerge. Sonia Boyce, David A Bailey, Eddie Chambers, Keith Piper, Val Brown, Tam Joseph and others created an art with an explicit focus on the politics of the black presence in the UK. Exhibitions in which they participated, generated catalogues and other literature that is in the public domain. This literature can be accessed at *INIVA*, *George Padmore Institute* and *New Beacon Bookshop*, *Diversity Arts Forum* and elsewhere.

Both CAM and the 1980s *Black Arts* Movement laid the foundation for Black art in the UK that has seen African and African Caribbean artists achieve

distinction. Steve McClean, Isaac Julien, Faisal Abdu' Allah, Sonia Boyce, Joyce Gregory, Chris Ofili, Ingrid Pollard, Yinka Shonibare and others have emerged from that history. Allied to their success has been the emergence of significant Caribbean-based artists whose work is internationally celebrated. Guyanese painter Stanley Greaves, the Barbadian Rastafarian painters Ras Ishi Butcher and Akem Ramsey, alongside Chris Cozier of Trinidad and Tobago are just a few of the artists whose work is making a huge impact on the art world in the Caribbean, in North America and in Europe.

Recent projects set up to mark the two hundredth anniversary of the ending of the slave trade in Britain, offer similar possibilities to teachers. Greenwich Maritime Museum, the Steven Lawrence Gallery University of Greenwich, 198 Gallery, the Victoria and Albert Museum, Tate Britain, the Horniman Museum and Jeffrey Museum, to name but a few London-based venues, have all mounted exhibitions that add to our understanding and knowledge of the African diasporic subject both in the present-day world and in history. These exhibitions have been recorded for posterity in a raft of publications, slides, videos and on line. Such resources could be utilised to provide a whole new slant on representation in teaching and learning that should bring benefits to African Caribbean and other children in the UK and elsewhere.

By drawing on resources of this type, teacher educators could promote pedagogies that challenge materials-based, Euro-centric notions of "good" art practice problematizing in the process, values imbibed while on fine art and

related degree courses. Such teaching should inspire trainees to explore historical frameworks and themes in new ways that take account of the presences and viewpoints of others in our communities. Alice's insistence that students should be *au fait* with named black artists provides another example of teacher agency that could be extended to other pedagogic interventions. If attached to MA study or appropriate in-service-training, such progressive theorising could offer valuable qualifications to many in schools.

### **Impressionism and Cubism: forecasts of globalisation trends**

The Impressionists in their representational strategies defined the world about them in a methodology that challenged notions of discreet areas of difference<sup>48</sup>. Picasso and Braque took this concept further in the development of Cubism by merging forms and dissolving boundary divisions. Far from presenting the spectator with aesthetics that merely challenged traditional notions of good practice in pictorial or three dimensional compositions, they confront the viewer with a concept that predicted 20<sup>th</sup> century demographic and cultural shifts. In other words, implicit to their approach is the notion that the world we inhabit is multifarious and multilayered. As such firm boundaries are hard to define and make permanent. Objects in space or, in extrapolation, the discourse of 'the subject' or the 'community,' far from being discrete entities could be

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<sup>48</sup> I refer to the technique originated by them of moving paint around the picture surface in a manner that symbolically challenged discreet shapes, forms and spaces, creating in the process a more harmonious and integrated image.

perceived as products of interpenetration and cross-fertilisation – an accretion of experiences. As indicated in this work, we are living in a state of travelling cultures in which identity is no longer thought by many theorists (Hall 1992; Foucault 1970; Clifford 1999; Wittgenstein 1995; Gilroy 2000), to be located within a cohesive, unitary community. This notion of multifarious and hybridic cultural fusion is embodied in Caribbean subjects. They are the living exemplars of our post-modern state. Yet such theorising is not impacting on practice in schools. As a result, many of African Caribbean heritage perceive themselves to be excluded from learning in the classroom, and reject notions of Britishness and being part of the mainstream community. This was made poignantly clear in my interview with Anna. The non-acceptance of the Union Jack as a symbol of national unity and cultural identification is partly driven by a sense of disappointment, and lack of acknowledgement, of their presence both in the classroom and in the wider community. Many may lack the skills to articulate precisely why this grievance exists but there is an instinct and in some cases, a clear perception of exclusion at the heart of learning. In looking to celebrate African Caribbean identities, therefore, teachers should engage in the issue of what it means to be British in the twenty-first century. This process should involve over-turning traditions of knowing that exclude or deride the black subject, whether in stereotypes or in narrow preconceptions of what the African Caribbean learner is or could be.

Such teaching would have implications not just for African Caribbean young people but also members of the majority ethnic group and other communities.

It is an attitude to teaching and learning that would require real teacher commitment and a degree of sharing and trust unprecedented in our educational history – we are after all proposing a concept of dissolution and reconstruction. Susan Brill (1995) in quoting Wittgenstein provides a powerful rationale for such root and branch change in stating that,

The problem must be solved “deep down” at the fundamental level of the rules: “If it is grasped near the surface it simply remains the difficulty it was. It has to be pulled out by the roots; and that involves our beginning to think about these things in a new way. (p. 12)”

Our ways of constructing the African Caribbean subject as learner is partly framed by traditional categorizations, what Brill (*ibid.* 1995), again drawing on Wittgenstein, terms, ‘logocentric discursive structures of an absolutist and anachronistic order (p. 8)’. Until we begin to see that the trauma of African enslavement in the Americas and Europe has its echo in the present-day lifestyles and perceptions of diasporic subjects, we will not remedy their marginalisation. Indeed, until those of us who have benefited from conditions of long-standing cultural stases appreciate that the attitudes we hold relative to African Caribbean young people can contribute to their exclusion, the echo of the slave trade will continue to wrack our lives too. If African Caribbean learners are to reach their full potential at the centre of the mainstream, therefore, it will require movement both on their part in the attitude they bring to the classroom, and equally importantly in teacher willingness to locate such learners at the centre of school-life. That must surely require us in art education to look again at the way we interpret works of art and the process of engaging in practice. It should also require us to reposition the boundaries of the subject to introduce exemplars and moments in history that

draw on the experiences of different communities. Until we begin to take on board the implications of our diverse classroom profiles by devising new and more representative pedagogies, our teaching methodologies will continue to disenfranchise many children. African Caribbean pupils as descendents of an aggressively marginalised group would benefit from the development of such teaching strategies. Other minorities and members of the majority ethnic group would also be liberated by a multivalent pedagogy that seeks to engage the Truth, in framing learning content and teaching styles. This work is dedicated to the advocacy and promotion of such pedagogies.

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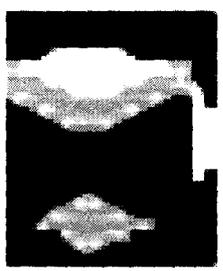
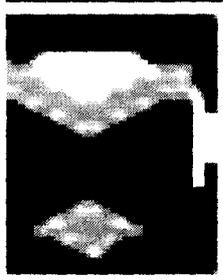
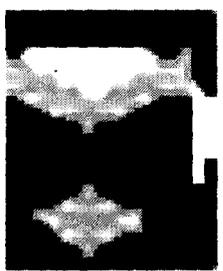
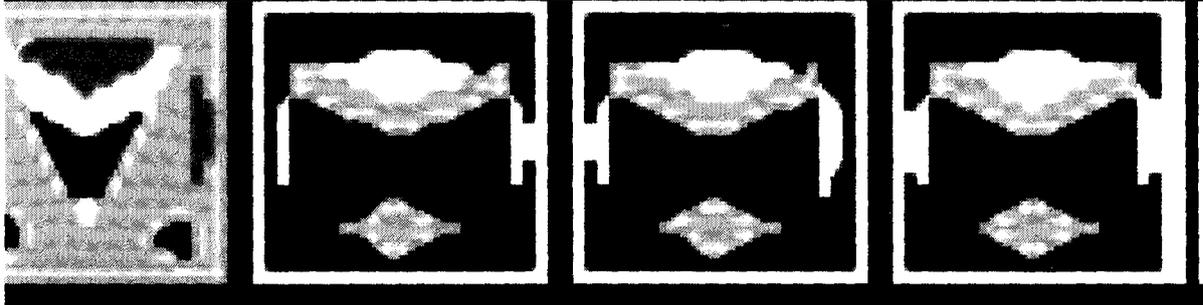
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## **Appendix 1 - Extended quote from Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man**

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allen Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fibre and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination – indeed, everything and anything except me.

Nor is my invisibility exactly a matter of bio-chemical accident to my epidermis. That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their *inner* eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality. I am not complaining, nor am I protesting either. It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen, although it is most often rather wearing on the nerves. Then, too, you're constantly being bumped against by those of poor vision. Or again, you often doubt if you really exist. You wonder whether you aren't simply a phantom in other people's minds. Say, a figure in a nightmare which the sleeper tries with all his strength to destroy. It's when you feel like this that, out of resentment, you begin to bump people back. And let me confess, you feel that way most of the time. You ache with the need to convince yourself that you do exist in the real world, that you're a part of all the sound and anguish, and you strike out with fists, you curse and you swear to make them recognise you. And, alas, it's seldom successful. (Page 7 Prologue) (Page 7 Prologue)

## **Appendix 2 - I Can Do It Conference Report**



Conference Report

Report compiled & written by

Sue Funge, achievement Officer

May 2005



## Acknowledgements

Our thanks are extended to both Paul Dash and Maureen Ojo who travelled from London and Birmingham respectively to provide an interesting and inspiring address to the students at the start of the day and who stayed and worked with the students throughout the day.

Sincere thanks is extended to all the local black professionals who were willing to give up their time to spend the day working with the students. Each person is listed at the end of this report and it is hoped that there will be an opportunity to work together again in the future as they helped to ensure that the day was extremely productive.

We would like to say a particular thanks to Geoff Jones for stepping in at such short notice to support the day and truly appreciated him cancelling other appointments so that he could listen and learn from the discussions the students engaged in throughout the day. We are certain he will be very supportive of future events that will help to take the findings of the day forward.

A special thanks is extended to Clare Davies for all her hard work in preparing the conference packs and other related administrative duties; her help was invaluable and contributed significantly to the smooth running of the day. The staff at the Kassam Stadium are also offered our thanks for their hospitality and the wonderful spread of food they provided for lunch.

Last, but not least, we would like to say a very BIG thank you to the students for working so hard throughout the day. They were willing to engage in the discussions and have offered some very honest and thought provoking suggestions for both what they think hinders their academic achievements as well as what they believe helps them to achieve.

We are keen to ensure that this valuable work is not lost and look forward to meeting the students again with the view to supporting them hosting their own conference. We hope that this conference will take place during Black History month in October 2005.

Sue Funge, Joanne Barrett and Eleanor Kercher  
The African Caribbean Achievement Team

## Introduction

The aim of this conference was to provide Year 9, 10 and 11 students of African Caribbean descent, attending schools in Oxfordshire, with an opportunity to discuss their experiences in education and what their aspirations are for their future.

The day provided them with the opportunity to discuss what they believe helps or hinders their academic achievements in school.

Maureen Ojo, a moving and inspirational black teacher from Birmingham, spoke to the young people about the importance of gaining a good education.

She was followed by Paul Dash, the PGCE Course Leader in Art and Design at Goldsmith College, London, who spoke of his experiences in Oxford as a school child and how important it is to strive to do well despite any negativity that may be experienced in school.

Following their keynote address and a short break, the young people were split into smaller groups to discuss their experiences in school.

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Paul Dash, Maureen Ojo, and Joanne Barrett, one of Oxfordshire's Achievement Officers, along with a number of local black professionals, worked as facilitators in these groups,

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The day ended with a plenary session with each group sharing the thoughts and ideas raised by the students throughout the day.

The results are presented in this report which will be distributed to all Oxfordshire schools and we would be pleased to work with any school who, having read the report, would like to discuss how to implement positive change within the whole school environment. By working together we hope that we can improve the number of students of African Caribbean descent obtaining grades A - C in their GCSEs as well as raising their aspirations and achievements.

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## Workshop Discussion

The workshops encouraged an honest debate that provided students with an opportunity to share, in small groups, what they believe helps or hinders their academic achievement in school. A set of Ground Rules was agreed before beginning the workshop discussion. The Workshops lasted for one hour before lunch and one hour after lunch.

To aid reporting back each workshop followed the same format. The students were asked to begin by sharing what they felt hinders their achievement in school and to continue by offering suggestions for the way to move things forward.

They were also asked to complete a questionnaire and these findings are included in the next section of the report. Their comments in the workshops were recorded on flipchart paper and a summary of these discussions is provided overleaf.

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## Summary of workshop discussion

The discussions are summarised using different headings that reflect the key themes which arose in each of the groups.

### School Environment/Curriculum

There are a number of comments that relate to the whole school environment and the curriculum failing to reflect or acknowledge anything about black history, culture or multiculturalism in general. The students feel that their culture is not recognised and that there is a division of cultures in their school. They feel that bullying can be an issue and that racism is still a part of their experience in school. They feel that teachers should be making more attempts to identify the bullying that is occurring in their school.

The comment made about Black History month is illuminating as they feel that, even during this special month, there is a resistance to celebrate the event even though the rest of the school year they have to learn about white history. Some have expressed their desire for more black teachers in school as well as wishing that there was more sensitivity shown when there is only one black student in a class.

They would like to have more opportunities within the school day to learn about black culture and history and would also like to see more events specifically for them. Some students also expressed an interest in after school activities and a support group for black students to learn skills that could help them to relate better to the teachers, especially some white teachers. Some students have expressed a specific interest in having a support group that specifically deals with black issues.

They feel that it is important to know more about their heritage to help them to be confident about themselves and that they would benefit from this opportunity. They would like to learn about black history in school, however they are aware that some white people in their school might resist this being taught as they already think it is unfair that they have had an opportunity to attend this conference and wonder how they might feel if they had to learn about black history. However, they rightly point out that black history is not just for black students it is of interest to others too.

They would like to have the opportunity to do a GCSE in Black Culture and would like trips to Africa and the West Indies instead of Austria, Germany etc so that they can learn more about their heritage. They also felt it should be compulsory for teacher training to include black culture as a part of their course. In general terms, they would like to have better facilities throughout the school with more sports facilities and more subject choices. They felt that having more opportunities to discuss their future aspirations with a Careers Officer would also be extremely helpful.

#### Attitudes/Behaviour of the Teachers

There were a number of comments related to the negative attitudes they feel some teachers have towards them. They feel it is unfair that they are treated differently from the white students. They would like to feel respected too. They commented that some teachers can be quite sarcastic and pick on the black students and may blame them for disruption in the class when in fact they have not been involved at all. They feel that some teachers can behave like a bully and can label them as stupid just because they haven't understood what has been said.

They acknowledge that some teachers are better than others but feel there is a lack of trust shown to them and that some teachers are rude and racist. They feel that teachers do not spend equal time with all of the students and that there isn't equality between boys and girls.

Some students commented that they feel they are not liked by the teacher and that they feel last in the line. They would like teachers to show more empathy for their position and be more helpful, particularly when there is only one black student in the class. They were quite forthcoming in their ideas about what a good teacher would offer in relation to being organised, being consistent, being able to control the class and offering different styles of teaching. They should be well prepared, explain things clearly and be willing to repeat instructions if a student doesn't understand without the student feeling that they are being judged as stupid.

They felt that teachers should be willing to offer encouragement, praise, incentives and awards. They should avoid destructive comments and make constructive comments instead that can help the student achieve. Some students felt that they need more black teachers in school although they felt that black teachers can sometimes be hard on them, having higher expectations of black students.

They would appreciate more one-to-one teaching. They would also like to be able to ask for help without being judged or having to face negative comments when they want to do well, for example, by saying they are 'too competitive' just because they want to get good grades.

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### Attitudes/Behaviour of the Students

The students were willing to admit that their own behaviour and attitude can sometimes aggravate the situation in school. They could see that if they have no focus this won't help them to learn and progress. They acknowledged that there are groups and individuals who mess around in class and can wind the teacher up. In this way they could see they were not helping themselves. They could also see that not doing their homework or revision is not going to help their progress.

They said that it is difficult having to do things that you don't want to do and it is sometimes easier to give up on challenges rather than persevere. They realised that not knowing your own strengths and lacking self-esteem or fearing failure can hold them back. Bullying from other pupils and some teachers also hinders their ability to achieve. They recognised that they need to develop self-respect and self-belief. They need to be self-disciplined and be less aggressive and have more self-control. With a positive attitude they could help themselves but they also feel it is important that they are not laughed at or put down and that teachers need to be more respectful towards them and help them. With hard work, determination and a positive attitude they felt they could do well. They acknowledged the importance of selecting the right subjects but they felt it was also important to be positive, well-mannered and to work to their strengths. Taking care of their appearance can also help develop self-confidence.

## Family/Personal Pressures

The students felt that there can sometimes be difficulties in coping with the school / home life balance especially when the student's home life is not involved in their education. There may be a lack of parental support or their parents may not believe them when they tell them something is wrong. Alternatively, families may have their own dreams and visions for the student which can add pressure when the student has different aspirations.

There may be other family issues that the school may not be aware of but which will have an impact on the student's ability to do well in school. For example, there may be a lot of conflict between the parents or there may be outside agencies involved such as Social Services. Some students commented they have to help manage the household and act as a carer without outside support. Death in the family was also mentioned and this would clearly impact on this student's ability to learn. Other issues identified by the students as hindering their ability to do well in school include coming from an unstable home, having a lack of role models within the family or having too much work at home to be responsible for. Past or negative family experiences are also likely to hinder their academic achievement..

The students identified a number of ways in which their families could help them to achieve. They recognised the importance of receiving parental support and how their parents can encourage them to achieve their goals, offering advice, support, helping them to get organised as well as being a role model in themselves.

## Peer Pressure

The students acknowledged that friends can be distracting in class by speaking during lessons or disrupting lessons. They acknowledged the pressure to experiment and be the same as others in their peer group. They can be labelled and this can cause arguments but there is also a fear of exclusion. They identified the types of students that can cause disruption by being attention seeking, acting as class clowns or being needy for affection.

On the positive, the students acknowledged how peers can help. They can be supportive, and offer honest feedback and they can help to keep them out of trouble.

## Other issues raised

- \* Drugs and/or alcohol. The students clearly recognised that drugs and alcohol can have a great impact; they are easily accessible and will clearly act as a de-motivator. The students solution to this potential problem is to simply say No!

- \* Career development. The students felt there was not enough information about future careers but they recognised that having an ambition or goal can open doors and will lead to a future life that will give them a sense of achievement. They felt it was important to research their career options and get work experience.

- \* Pressure/Stress. The students felt there were a number of areas that caused them to feel stressed or under pressure. They felt that being compared with others, high expectations from parents/teachers contribute to this pressure.

- \* Stereotyping. The students resent being stereotyped but feel it is always there; they can be labelled and put down. Their proposed solution was to go against the grain and challenge these stereotypes by doing well.

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\* **Rights & Responsibilities** The students recognised the balance between their rights as young people and their responsibility to behave appropriately. They feel that it is important to respect one another and that everyone needs to appreciate each other's culture. If someone has a lack of respect for themselves they won't respect others and then nothing gets done. They feel it is important to have their views listened to and that their concerns are heard. They recognise their responsibility to manage school work but there should be equal responsibility for pupils and staff. They feel it is important to treat others the way you would like to be treated yourself.

\* **Proposed development** Running their own conference / having a forum to present their views to teachers and develop a positive way forward that will facilitate the raising of black students academic achievements.

### The Way Forward

The students identified a number of strategies that would help them to achieve their potential. They felt it was important to be able to talk through any issues with a trusted adult. For some this was the Connexions worker in their school, for others it was their parents or a teacher they could trust. They recognised the importance of having a supportive family who believes in them. Supportive friends and help from a mentor, who has recently left school and is familiar with the issues they face, were also identified as support networks that would help.

They felt it would be helpful to have a discussion group to talk through issues and they also recognised the importance of positive role models, whether they are relatives or black people on the television. An After School Club was also suggested.

In terms of taking responsibility for their own achievement they identified the need to move away from disruptive friends. They recognised the need to develop self-confidence and to get over their fears which might require having someone to go to who could support them. They realised that it is important to work hard and remain focused and to have self-respect and self-belief. It is also about the realisation that they have to make their own way in the world and to be willing to get to know more people as individuals as well as in groups.

A part of this process is becoming more self aware and working on their self-esteem. To be willing to go beyond their 'comfort zone' and develop self love. It is important not to give up but to stay strong and if it helps it was suggested they write things down, exercise or listen to music, or take up a hobby. It is imperative to know their talents and recognise their limits and to stay calm. Be organised, plan and prioritise their work schedule and remember 'I Can Do It!'

#### Conclusion

The students' discussions have highlighted key issues that need to be addressed. Overleaf is a summary of the completed questionnaire and comments from the student evaluations. These evaluations are worth reading as they clearly demonstrate how useful the day was and how much the students benefited from the opportunity to discuss their experiences in school. It is now important that we build on this event and address the issues raised throughout the day and help our black students to achieve.

## The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was also completed by thirty students who attended the conference and their responses are outlined below.

Have you ever received additional support at school?

20 students have not received additional support and 10 students have. Included in the support these ten students have received the majority have received extra help in specific subjects at school, one receives after school support and Connexions have offered extra support to three,

Would you be interested in receiving additional support if it was available?

21 students would be interested in additional support, 6 specifically stated that they did not want any extra help and three left this question blank.

What form of additional support would you like?

Some students failed to list their preferences but in summarising their responses it is clear that the most popular choice, with thirteen students selecting this, is an alternative lesson to the timetabled lesson, offering support with coursework, homework etc, including sessions on black history and events. One student was interested in a Lunchtime Club – offering support with coursework, homework etc and sessions on black history and events. Six students were interested in an After School Club – offering support with coursework, homework etc and sessions on black history and events. Four also indicated they would like a one-to-one meeting every week and six wanted one-to-one support in specific lessons.

Other ideas/comments:

Not many students completed this section but there was a suggestion for a Careers Officer at their school, two students reiterated their wish for more black history. Other comments included the need for foods that black people eat, such as rice n peas and chicken, special clubs for black people including an After School club or Saturday school.

## Student Evaluations

The majority of students felt that the most useful part of the day was the group discussion and they would have liked more time working in their groups. A sample of their responses to the question 'What have you learnt that will be useful to you?' are listed below as they help to illustrate what they gained from participating in the day:

'Failing to plan is planning to fail.'

'That you have to have a dream and have a plan for life.'

'Self control, how to deal with other people.'

'Nothing can put you down if you work hard enough to get some thing.'

'That being black is a great thing.'

'To concentrate on school work and think what I want to do with my life.'

'I have learnt to do more work in class and less chatting.'

'Spend more time on work out of school and to never give up.'

'I have learnt different way of trying to achieve in school and that I can do it, even though I may not think it.'

'To do my homework at all times.'

'Never give up.'

'That support is available if you want it.'

'Setting goals. Not giving up. Achievement.'

'Never give up, plan your future. Don't be afraid to reach outside one's comfort zone.'

'To express my feelings more.'

'That 'I can do it!''

'To organise our life, and how to go about it effectively.'

'Ignoring whatever somebody says and get on with my work.'

'To think about my future carefully. Do my best in GCSEs. How to achieve the best life.'

'Never to think that I can't do anything.'

'Take responsibility for yourself.'

Equally, when they were asked 'What is the next step for you?' their responses reflect how the day helped them to realise the importance of concentrating on working hard in school, getting organised, studying hard, and focusing on doing well in their GCSEs.

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List of black professionals who attended the 'I Can Do It!' Conference

Jo Barrett  
Glen Berley  
Vanessa Berley  
Paul Dash  
Debbie Denton  
Sandra Downes  
Pat Green  
Sarah L'Otunnu  
Mary Maine  
Elishia Meade  
Helen Mukholi  
Patrick Mukholi  
Maureen Ojo  
Sharon Thomas  
Bernadine Spencer  
Patsy Spencer  
Pat Thomas  
Michelle Whittingham

White professionals who also attended and supported the day

Peter Brogan  
Peter Umney Gray  
Eleanor Kercher  
Geoff Jones  
Sue Funge  
Clare Davies

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List of Students who attended the 'I Can Do It! Conference

St Gregory the Great students

Deneisha Bailey Raquesia Lloyd  
Bianca Clayton Cassie Allen  
Chantelle McNichols Katie Bryan  
Toni Adenle George Nguvu  
Joe Nguma Andre Morrison  
Tyrone Moore Daniel Meade  
Theo Woods Dwayne John  
Tyrone Doyle Toyin Adenopo  
Kevin Ndirangu Adrian Read  
Shakera Williams Obi Eke  
Joe Allison Bisrat Solomon-Degefa  
Tanaka Mushangi Zahra Denny-Yearwood  
Rajka Quammie Sabrina Joseph

Oxford Community School

Odane Sinclair Ann-Marie Raphael  
Janine Lumley Abigail Mingle  
Hadijah Namirimu Juliet Bagaza  
Denise Rowell Krystal Whittaker  
Ajuanne Payne Courtney Hyde  
Anthony Njuguna Jerome Anderson  
Shaleema Brown

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