African Caribbean Pupils in Art Education

Paul Dash
Goldsmiths University of London

This book deals with the issue of African Caribbean pupil invisibility in the art and design classroom. As such it addresses African Caribbean pupil invisibility in almost any teaching and learning context. The book argues that the slave trade, which ruptured their continuities with an African past, continues to impact on the learning of such pupils relative to others. In seeking to explicate this matter, the book places African Caribbean pupils in the wider context of African, Caribbean and Western cultural identities. Just where do they belong? To address this matter, it calls on the theorising of thinkers with an interest in identity construction, learning and belonging particularly with reference to the Caribbean.

The book is organised in three sections, the first presents the rationale for the enquiry; the second outlines the outcome from a small research project with a focus on African Caribbean learners in the art and design classroom, and the third reflects on key issues that emerged from the research in relation to the rationale.

The book ends by offering possibilities for developing African Caribbean teaching and learning in art and design.

African Caribbean Pupils in Art Education is very erudite and the centre of a world of reference and allusion – Dash relates its arguments and insights to many different writers and contexts. These will lead ... readers to many other writers and their arguments in related fields of study ... personalised research – interviews with teachers and students, adds ... realism and close-to-the-bone insight to the points Dash makes.

These interviews are not ‘academised’ and made tedious or uninteresting, but real life and real classroom and curriculum issues come out clearly and undisguisedly in the subjects’ words. Many of their points are full of meaning and lucidity and add more power to Dash’s arguments. Thus the book will be of real value to prospective teachers and teacher educators too, as a tool of learning and a stimulus for discussion.

The book goes a long way beyond only being a text for Art Education students. Its arguments have salience for all Educationalists and trainee teachers, as well as for staffrooms in Britain and North America (Canada and the U.S., for example). It deals with vital questions, both for African-Caribbean students and their white and Asian classmates, canvassing issues of intellectual and cultural confidence for African-Caribbean students and historical and contemporary truth for others.

Chris Searle, Director of the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre at the University of Manchester
African Caribbean Pupils in Art Education
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Goldsmiths University of London
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INTRODUCTION

This book 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 study and includes an analysis of viewpoints on the African diasporic state. It asserts that children of African Caribbean and wider African diasporic backgrounds are disadvantaged by not being made familiar with material from their cultural heritages. This has come about 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 book contends, diasporic peoples are rendered invisible. African Caribbean learners, therefore, are disadvantaged and appear culturally impoverished relative to others. To substantiate this critical viewpoint, key texts by theorists on African diasporic studies are referenced. 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.

In section two six London-based art and design educationalists who 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 analysis of the meanings embedded in such unexpected material. 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. In the short time we were together critical viewpoints were elicited 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 book and provides a pointer to their significance for teachers and school pupils.
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 employed 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 identity.

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 in this work on the discourse of culture 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 book I use the term diasporic when referencing peoples who are the descendants of enslaved Africans in the Americas.

Mixed heritage
Many young people in the UK have a parent or relations who are 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 black, diasporic or 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.
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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

Race
It is generally accepted that humanity cannot be divided into discrete biological or physiological groups on the basis of ‘race’ – we are one human family. As such, I avoid use of the term ‘race’ whenever possible.
PREFACE

In the summer of 2006, the physicists George Smoot and John Mather were awarded the Nobel 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. One can only wonder at the brilliance of their achievement. But whilst marvelling at the genius of Smoot and Mather, it is humbling to think that fourteen billion years after the event, the boom from the singularly most important moment in Creation still resounds in the solar system. It is a unique reminder of how things can linger over time and continue to play a part in our lives. Britain’s involvement in the slave trade which ended just two hundred years ago, was in many respects a Big Bang in the 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.
SECTION 1
THE BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This section is divided into four chapters. The first is the introduction to the thesis. Here I talk about the origins of the research concern 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 that explore 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 ontologies 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

This is the space in which the key concerns are placed before the reader. Most especially the chapter problematises the discourse of the lack in African Caribbean and broader diasporic cultural histories that contribute to identity formation.

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 engages the discourse of contemporary art, proposing that such practices can offer a great deal to African Caribbean learners. It demonstrates how some present-day visual art approaches could comfortably operate within the pedagogic models 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, P. 7 prologue).

This book looks at the learning of African Caribbean pupils in art and design classrooms in the UK. It proceeds from the proposition that African Caribbean pupils, as the descendants of enslaved peoples, whose cultural lineage has been obscured by the skewed relationship with the white majority group, are uniquely disadvantaged in the classroom. British Imperial power engendered a culture of exclusion that has continued to this day in many areas, impacting even on the self-image of diasporic subjects (Shohat and Stam (1994); Fanon (1986); West (1993); Gilroy (1993) and (2000); Malcolm X (1964); Hooks (1990, 1992, 1994 and 2001); Parker (1992); Young (1993)). The study will therefore include an analysis of key historical influences 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 Caribbean student subjectivities will in this regard be central to the study. I advance 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)). In the process, the book argues that African enslaved peoples who were made to adopt alien practices that challenged Western frameworks of identification, 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); Mintz and Price (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 subjects, including the aesthetic valuation we place on our physiological attributes, are imbibed from the society to which we have been acculturated (Pascall 1992; Bogle 1994). As a consequence, African Caribbean learners in art and design education, historically located outside Western identificatory frame-works, are
faced with traditions of knowing and representing that often fail to recognise their presence and cultural histories. This study is intended to explain how this discourse of invisibility and alienation works.

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 teaching projects are shared that 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 art and design curriculum. This lack stimulated my investigation into the backgrounds 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 embedded in our society both at a psychic and material level, and perpetuate a system of white domination and black degradation. In other words black learners are required to succeed in environments that do not nurture their subjectivity with, inevitably, reduced opportunities 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 book interrogates.

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 always remember the sight that greeted me on my first day there. Walking down the main concourse 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.

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 influx of pupils from Asia, the Caribbean and elsewhere.
The intake of the school was therefore 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 expansion. The demographic
shift alerted me to the need for curriculum change and motivated the development
of an approach to teaching and learning 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 book
(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 included posters, pictures of jewellery, beads and other
bric-a-brac. When they were first displayed in the art room the atmosphere
immediately changed. Pupils of south Asian background showed a particular interest,
crowding round the exhibits at the beginning of lessons, whilst speaking animatedly
in their first languages to better express their feelings and share anecdotes about the
items on view. 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 students from these
institutions could contribute to the scheme. Both colleges sent a group of final year
undergraduates who worked with the pupils in two separate sessions (Figs. 1 and 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 pupils
CHAPTER 1

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.

responded to this stimulus by working in a variety of media, such as clay, 3D, print and paint. By utilising bric-a-brac found in the art classroom in combination with items that the pupils provided themselves, the possibilities for making incorporated the use of mixed-media resources alongside more conventional approaches. Several drew on the
display in the art room, particularly a 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 with jewellery fashioned by the pupil 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).

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 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. 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 effort into identifying resources from different cultures for classroom use. However, in planning for teaching with a Caribbean component, appropriate resources from the Caribbean could not easily be found. Those items that were accessible offered a limited range of pedagogic possibilities in art and design. It was this absence - the then inexplicable lack or inaccessibility of African Caribbean cultural heritages: their invisibility - that drove my interest in promoting 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 this concern (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 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 the world (Mintz and Price 1976). As such diasporic people live in a limbo of representation⁴ – 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 education and in other areas of Western cultural life (hooks 1994). Derogatory representation in high art and popular culture contribute to constructs of the black as inferior or lacking ‘higher’ qualities inherent to Europeans (see Boime (1990) for an account of black stereotyping in Western High arts. See also Vercoult et al. 1976). Hollywood movies, popular literature and broadcasting maintain traditions of ‘racial’ coding that position whites as the repositories of greater intellect, discipline and natural beauty relative to the black subject (Shohat and Stam, 1994; Morley 2000; Bhabha 1994, Fanon 1986; Trinh-T-Minh-ha 1992; Congdon-Martin 1990; Bogle 1994). Perhaps the racism with which black athletes are often confronted when practising their sport in Europe, is partly due to the popularisation of black degradation in different forms of popular and high culture⁵. This work will determine how such constructs, though often projected as deficiencies inherent to African Caribbean children themselves, continue to influence the attitudes of diasporic 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 key hypothesis in this study, therefore, is that African Caribbean children, as the descendants of enslaved peoples who were exposed to a coordinated attempt at cultural extinction, are disadvantaged in schools. Systematically written out of history, forced to adopt the mores of others, acculturated to value systems that privilege white European models and even physiological body types, they are effectively rendered invisible. This invisibility has taken various forms from a lack of acknowledgement of their presence to the systematic stripping away of 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 connectivity to a language of self-expression rooted in tradition, 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 (1992) theory of the black subject being ‘Exiled from his god, exiled from his nature, exiled from his own name (Quoted in Parker, 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 book that the echo of the slave trade still affects 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. In my experience of the classroom, many teachers when running multicultural projects, even where the majority of pupils are of African Caribbean ancestry, frequently design schemes located in traditions other than those with a direct bearing on the histories and cultural origins of such learners. The book will seek to establish to what degree teachers are addressing these concerns.

Many art and design teachers in devising multicultural pedagogies seek new ways of locating teaching material in the ownership of all children by referencing their cultures and mores (Grigsby 1997; Efland and Stuhr 1996; Mason 1995; Adu-Poku 2001). Such references to cultural traditions or practices provide the framework and organisational context for making. As indicated, African Caribbean students, as learners whose cultures have been rendered invisible, are by this means disadvantaged – they continually 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?

As indicated above, I 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 alongside 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 1989 and Homi Bhabha 1994).

*Figure 3. Map showing the extent of significant African American presences in North America*. 

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The research will therefore question others’ understanding of what constitutes the Caribbean advancing the question, 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)?

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 TEACHERS INSTEAD LOOKING TO CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES FOR PHILOSOPHICAL AND 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 1995; Pascall 1992). This is apparent in practices as diverse as Nigerian metal works and textile arts from Japan (Fig. 4). 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 Ofili 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 tribal 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 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, cites loss traditions in wooden carving as an example of cultural discontinuities in diasporic America,
CHAPTER 1

Figure 4. African tribal symbols.
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).

African Caribbean pupils do not benefit from the esteem exposure to traditional crafts could afford them in the classroom. As stated, they regularly engage the making practices and traditions of other heritages. Diasporic students move in and out of such worlds without 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.

As a corollary to the discourse of cultural loss and the re-forging of 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 this material? Are children being systematically exposed to the practices of artists engaged in issues-based work that problematise discourses of belonging and identity? Are educators 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? It is in contemporary practices that African Caribbean and other diasporic artists are making work that begins to reconfigure notions of historical representation and belonging in the West. This work will seek to explore to what degree teachers are au fait with these developments and to what extent such material is used in project design.

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 (see also Moura 1999; Hall 1992; Dash 2005). The manifold ways in which lives in the West have been enriched by the slave trade, have 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 define them. They are key contributors to the process of social and economic construction in the West (Cohen 1997). In other words diasporic presences in the West have impacted on the mainstream culture in ways that have
reshaped it (Moura 1999; Efland et al. 1996; Williams 1964). Bygott (1992) offers examples of the advantages to the United Kingdom that came into being as a result of the slave trade,

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).

I argue therefore 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 the UK’s cultural and economic history, the descendants of the African enslaved while toiling in a different geographical location, have similar, though still largely unacknowledged, 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 (1999) 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 has to see the way cultures shift, become amorphous and are constantly in the process of recreating themselves (Hall 1997; also Clifford 1999). 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 book. 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 ancestral root, normally emblematised in a network of codes, myths (Hall 1997; Barthes 2000) and iconic referents, places the African diasporic subject at a disadvantage relative to other groups in art and design classrooms. Teachers when designing schemes with a focus on Caribbean cultural identities are stymied by a lack of access to material that could enable recognition of the Caribbean ‘presence’ to take place. Yet such under-representation creates a gap in the curriculum that signals a lack in African diasporic cultural identities. To address the concerns and questions raised by this imbalance,
the research involved two clear dimensions. There was the need to explore theoretical issues relating to identity and pedagogy, and secondly a programme of empirical research was carried out to determine the attitudes and practices of art teachers, and the learning through art of African Caribbean pupils.

NOTES

1 For an extended extract from Ellison’s great work, please see appendix 1.
2 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? Almost all the children picked the black children for the bad things and identified the white children for the good ones. Most of the black children involved made similar choices.
3 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.
4 The notion of representation is intended here to mean the traditional ways in which the black subject has been constructed in the West.
5 The mocking of Lewis Hamilton by Spanish motor racing enthusiasts is a recent example of the type of blatant racism to which I refer in the text.
6 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.
7 The traditional tribal symbols in Figure 4 are frequently used in present-day African designs. They provide the visual language that informs the practices of artists from across the continent. Diasporic artists lack access to a similar spread of visual symbolism that could form the nurturing ground of their art.
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, their invisibility in representational discourses in art and design classrooms.

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 (1999), 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 architectural 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 particularity. It looks in particular at discourses of difference that justified the oppression of the enslaved. Such markers, described here as boundaries and lines of demarcation, are scrutinised 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 the discourse of history is also considered. Dennis Atkinson provides the theoretical framework for an exploration of cultural semiotics. Discourses of race and representation are engaged in this context. Marxism is problematised in respect to the representation of the black subject and this theme is further analysed through the writings of relevant theorists. To achieve this, the chapter, as indicated, is arranged in four sub-sections, namely,
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 settlement in the New World as forced labour and some of the traditional practices they retained 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 in the Americas 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. In providing an indication of the experience many of the enslaved would have been exposed to, the writing then draws on the writing of Olaudah Equiano, the former slave who, as a freed man, wrote of the ordeal of kidnap and enslavement. 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. Here, I make reference to Nigerian ironworks and briefly highlight the achievements of Benin and Ife artists in bronze and terracotta.

2.2.1 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, examples of which can be seen at the British Museum, alongside freestanding and sensitively worked sculpted heads. 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 range of other contexts from the production of suits of armour to the casting of jewellery and cutlery, and the forging of weapons of war (Spring 1993). Similarly impressive craft skills were used in weaving and related textile arts.

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 spun and woven 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. Indeed African skills in metalwork make nonsense of 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 about a millennium ago, or several centuries before their ancestors were taken as slaves to the Caribbean. As Adu-Poku (2001) asserts,
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 often shaped and worked entirely by hand. They were therefore crafted without recourse to tools or equipment such as potters’ wheels, wire cutters, knives or pug mills. Enslaved Africans were removed from environments that gave rise to the production of such crafts. 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 were played out in harrowing and often brutal circumstances (Mintz and Price 1976).

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. Shackled to people from different tribes and traditions, they were made to coexist with 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). The enslaved were as different from each other as the Germans are from the French, 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 longstanding, harmonious communities.

In the New World settings the skills of the enslaved 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). Though brutalised and dispossessed, some communities of enslaved peoples miraculously retained long-standing belief principles and making practices. These craft skills and long-standing relationships with the spiritual world remain in diasporic communities to the present day, more especially in nations and groups that have had a protracted history of isolation from the centre of Western hegemonic power and influence.

2.2.2 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 ceremonies, practise Obeah and worship spirits that have roots in African religions (see also Kahn, M. 1936a; Kahn 1936b; 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 formations (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 worked with interlocking snakes, crocodiles and other fauna. Others are fantastical, taking on the appearance of gargoyles and siren imagery. Treatment of form demonstrates sophisticated awareness of contrasting values: long teeth sit below heavier interlocking animal forms, which are in turn juxtaposed with well-considered 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 significant 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)
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(see also Wilson 1992; Barringer and Flynn 1998). One museum I visited held extensive displays of artwork from Indonesia that filled 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 critical studies in art and design education should critique museum and gallery curatorial practices to throw light on issues of display, and representation (see also Golding 1999; Barringer and Flynn 1998; Grigsby 1977; Mason 1995).

2.2.3 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 Vodoo3 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 artistic communities 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 painted at an easel in celebration of the power of a Loa4, 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 in that regard at one with creative practices in Africa, in which artistic production is generally in the ownership of the masses. 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.

2.2.4 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). 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).

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)

Figure 6. Carved combs from the Aucaner tribe in Surinam (circa 1930).
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 older children from scrap wood and metal - a practice that parallels toy-making activities in different parts of Africa today (Fig. 7). Many adults produced more elaborate and sophisticated models that were sold to supplement family incomes. Such homemade playthings were designed to carry cane, just like the Bedford trucks that plied the high road during harvest. Their bodywork was fashioned from recycled timber and flattened out tin cans. Wheels were constructed from boot polish tins and finished with bottle cap hubs. They were wonderful toys to play with. If such playthings demonstrated the ingenuity of children in Barbados of the 1950s and our distant connection to an African past, the invention of the steel pan in Trinidad is arguably the most celebrated example of the aesthetic of making from recycled artefacts in the West.

Figure 7. A South African boy plays with a homemade wire toy.
Allied to working with recycled materials, people in Africa have traditionally utilised natural, commonplace resources for building. Elaborately worked mud mosques, straw dwellings and even churches hewn from solid stone feature in African architectural production (Higgins 1994, Fig. 8). However the use of earth as a material for building has 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 justified 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 beautiful, effectively insulated, economical and environmentally friendly structures in the world (Higgins 1994; see also Denyer 1978).

2.2.5 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. As with their response to body culture, they demonstrate a practical resistance to enslavement, on the part of their creators, through refined creativity.

2.2.6 Summary

This sub-section gave an indication of the cultural, institutional and societal environments from which many African enslaved peoples were taken. Brief reference to 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 humanity in extraordinary ways. The sub-section also demonstrated the craft skills of
enslaved peoples from different communities in the Western world and the importance of their talents to the well-being of the slave masters. But rebel communities also functioned in the isolated worlds they inhabited. Their example offers new perspectives on civilisations in the West. The sub-section 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 architectural design.

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 of 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 polemics.

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 diasporic 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, confirms the importance and 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 artists by the transportation and 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 habit of tapping to ancient rhythmic patterns, 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 (2000) 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 made concrete. 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 African 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,
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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 effloresence’ (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), Pollard reveals how the images were taken ‘in the northern part of the Lee Valley, where fresh water streams 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 also, in the context of the series, 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 participate in hiking and 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: the story of the black presence in such 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, a marker in the semiotics of middle-class, white respectability, disrupts the socio/spatial division that connotes white power (Rogoff 2000). I reference here 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, arguably the most hallowed space of national 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 newspaper The Telegraph and in his left two lengths of sugar cane. On seeing this image I think of Clifford’s (1999) 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 1999, p. 246; see also Kondo, 1996; Sarup 1996).’

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. Our sense of the world was therefore managed or constrained by the British who occupied a geographic 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 others 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 that dealt with the subject 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 In the west country of the UK 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, arouse memories of distant power, wealth and social elegance. At the centre of the city is Bath Abbey, an impressive Medieval structure that appears to
have minimal association with Britain’s imperialist past. Yet on a visit there in the late 1990s, I was struck by the commemorative tablets embedded in its walls that powerfully evoke the scale of British imperial power and influence. Diplomats, Governors, sailors, explorers and soldiers who saw service in the American colonies, India, Ireland, Australia and elsewhere are by this means remembered and distinguished by their service to the nation. Nestled in amongst them, are tablets in memory of those who served the nation in Montserrat, St Croix, Jamaica, Antigua, Barbados and in other Caribbean territories (Figs. 10 and 11). Standing in the Abbey surrounded by these poignantly evocative stone slabs, there was the excitement of discovery, a sense of a clearly delineated history realised, a hidden identity rendered palpable. Yet, as a black subject, excluded from the Euro-centre, one resisted an emotive encroachment into the rarefied world of a celebrated British cultural icon. In other words my understanding of cultural origins precluded a feeling 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, who carved their presences on the identity of each other, ensured my right to ownership of a history inscribed on tablets in Bath Abbey.

Figure 10. Ingrid Pollard (1992), an image from Wordsworth’s Heritage.
THE PROCESS OF GAP

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 and emotionally 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 further cautions, ‘‘you’ are continually positioned in the space between a range of contradictory places that coexist (ibid. p. 48).’

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 more closely scrutinising the city’s relationship to British colonial rule, children would better appreciate the contributions made by subject peoples in the Caribbean and elsewhere to Britain’s growth and development as a great state. A notion of Caribbean cultural and historical identity, which lies beyond accepted geographic boundaries of identification, could by this means be defined and African Caribbean learners begin to be more meaningfully represented in the classroom. Bath as I have argued, and by extrapolation the whole of the UK, would not exist in its current state had there not been a 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. While locating his assertion in a wider colonial context, Stuart Hall (2005) makes a similar point,

The British Empire was the largest imperium of the modern world. The very notion of ‘greatness’ in Great Britain is inextricably bound up with its imperial destiny. For centuries, its wealth was underpinned, its urban development driven, its agriculture and industry revolutionised, its fortunes as a nation settled, its maritime and commercial hegemony secured, its thirst quenched, its teeth sweetened, its cloth spun, its food spiced, its carriages rubber-wheeled, its bodies adorned, through the imperial connection. Anyone who has been watching the Channel 4 series on The Slave Trade or the ‘hidden history’ of the West India Regiment or the BBC’s The Boer War will not need reminding how deeply intertwined were the facts of colonisation, slavery and empire with the everyday daily life of all classes and conditions of English men and women. (p. 27)

We have yet to find the means to acknowledge our debt to the African 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 asserting their positioning in Western civilisations. In mourning the disconnectedness with the aura 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 African diasporic 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). Teaching that work to these principles would show 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, religious or ethnic 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 emerge that should bring benefits to 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 have important implications for teaching and learning. An important challenge for teachers therefore is in interrogating different subject positions, more especially constructs of self as nation, ‘race’ culture, etc., and otherness. 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 subsection (4b), epidermal variation is scrutinised. Reference is made here to the representation of the black body in a range of contexts, including the bible. Marxist 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 achieved 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 (1992a), Trinh T. Minh-ha (1992) have questioned the frame of identity. They have also made the materiality of 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 Bhabha (1996); Hall (1992a); Foucault (1970); Gilroy (2000 and 1987); Hebdige (1979); Shohat and Stam *et al.* (1994). Morley (2000) cites Ignatieff who reflects on terminology commonly posited by theorists in this discourse. He lists, “hybridity, collage, melange, hotchpotch, synergy, bricollage, 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 borderzone, as space of contestation, is an arena where new solutions to problems can emerge. But by their newness they are perceived as hostile to ‘safe and trusted’ systems and ways of life (Sarup 1996). 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 2000). Our lack of acknowledgement of these contradictions, fuels the anger that occasionally erupts in street disturbances such as in the banlieus of Paris and Marseille in October and November 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 theory 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 easy 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 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. Yet in the minds of many, as black subjects they will always be strangers. As such in material, economic and social terms the diasporic subject blurs boundary lines of identity. In other words, through the binary relationship of slave other and historic source of British wealth, s/he is also a pharmakon, a membrane at the boundary of British constructs of self and other.

Atkinson (2002) alludes to the push and pull of this duality. 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 understanding of the black subject is mediated could be described as malicious tampering with the subject. Our absorption of such distortions perpetuates the myth of black inferiority/white superiority (Shohat and Stam 1994). Immersed in racist constructs of themselves, often without access to coherent, informed argument, black subjects themselves internalise these biased precepts and are shaped by their abrasive and wearing effects (Carter 1986; 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, too, tinctured by the racist environments in which they have been shaped as subjects, demonstrate similar attitudes that militate against the interest of black children (Searle 2001). Such skewed learning ethos inform the culture of learning to which children are exposed and can have implications for teacher expectations of them, the way children are taught and their perceptions of themselves.

Gay and feminists activism overlap with revolutionary black politics and the class antagonisms articulated in the theories of leftist or Marxist writers such as Berger (1972); George (2004); Steinberg et al. (1997); Butler (1990 and 1993); Hall (1992); Foucault (2000); Brill (1995). Their theorising 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 an understanding of English identity.

‘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 (p. 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 a Manger, Burger King, Rogerio’s Café, the Piccolo Bar – and that’s only up to the railway station (ibid. 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 expect full representation in new social regimes; women once press-ganged into the kitchen and positioned as ‘obedient wife’ and ‘doting mother’ under the assumed authority of the male head of the household, 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 perceived differences in our shared humanity are mythical, positing the theory that a system that promotes difference as a philosophical determinant is dangerously misguided. There is, however, an acknowledgement of superficial cultural differences between groups:

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).


… 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).”

The act of naming and categorising creates the structures we live by and the symbolic markers through which meaning is conveyed (Sarup 1996). Meaning making is therefore predicated on the bias of a group that assumed the authority to classify the world from their own ideological viewpoint. Shohat and Stam (1994) put the case 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; Shohat and Stam 1994). 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 (1993) in his 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 continue therefore to inform the self-perception of many. Even in an age where there is greater awareness of how prejudice and injustice work against marginalised members of our society, for those who sit outside hegemonic groups there is real threat. In education we can best effect change by constructing pedagogies that offer pupils opportunities to question long-standing givens and their own positionality in identity and belonging discourses. African Caribbean cultural ontologies, by their location in in-between spaces, 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 problematised national identities through the problematics of change in popular culture: the ontologies of the high street. I argue that these echo popular tastes 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 revisit this broad theme in an exploration 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 exclusion and belonging, to an exploration of ‘racial’ and epidermal markers of difference: the politics of the body. It starts with an analysis of key points from Sanders Gilman’s review of scholarly enquiry from the nineteenth century, which centres on appraisal of the physiognomy of Saarjtie Baartman, popularly known as the Hottentot Venus. Marxist theorising is briefly problematised for the lack of appreciation of racism as a category outside broad class-based concerns. The black body is therefore broached in the context of the power and control mechanisms integral to Western social and political organisational frameworks. An analysis of texts dealing with representations of the black subject in works of art is fundamental to the section. This is presented 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 raised.
2.6.1 Saartjie Baartman

Sanders Gilman (1985) demonstrates how in the 19th Century the theory of polygenetics, or multiple human genetic 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 (1985),

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 (p. 231).

Saartjie Baartman also known as Saat-Jee Bartman and more famously the Hottentot Venus was regarded as the embodiment of primitiveness. ‘Hottentot’ women were perceived as ‘the epitome of the sexual lasciviousness (Gilman 1985, p. 232) (see also Mirzoeff 1999).’ Saartjie Baartman, exhibited as an oddity in the great Paris exhibition of 1810, was by her exaggerated buttocks or steatopygia, seen as 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’ saw the emergence of stereotypical constructions of the diasporic subject. 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 degraded stereotypical or even fetish values to the African or African descended subject.

Pauline Tarnowsky, a Russian social anthropologists resident in Paris circa 1890, with others in her field, carried out research in support of genetic theories that positioned prostitutes, gays, lesbians, gypsies, the Irish and other ‘members of the lower orders’ in the same genetic grouping as ‘Hottentots’ or black Africans. Gilman (1985) details how Tarnowsky describes, ‘... the excessive weight of prostitutes, their hair and eye colour; she provides anthropometric measurements of skull size, a catalogue of their family background …’ She speaks of,

… abnormalities of the face: asymmetry of features, misshapen noses, over development of their parietal region of the skull, and the appearance of the so-called Darwin’s ear. All of these signs are the signs of the lower end of the scale of beauty, the end dominated by the Hottentot. (p. 243)

The genetic alignment of white working classes with ‘Hottentots’, a name that infers a slur on black subjectivities, was intended to confirm the perception that white people ‘of the lower orders’ were of inferior genetic origins relative to the
white middle classes. Effectively they were perceived as a genetically inferior sub-group of humanity. This theorising informed the eugenics movement at the start of the twentieth century that sought to create division between white and non-white and the white middle classes and Caucasians of humbler origins (Chitty 2007).

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 for instance of my father’s illustrated Bible (Circa 1950). In it 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 subjects. No incisive interrogation of such good/evil, god/devil, European/African, white/black binaries was tolerated in our household. God was The Word, The Word was the Holy Bible and you did not question ‘It’, nor the graphic imagery that rendered concrete its philosophical message. 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 depicted, 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 was a barrier to enquiry that subliminally undergirded the elevated status of whites relative to blacks. We, the black proletariat, 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 became a crucial weapon of oppression against the diasporic subject.

2.6.2 Marxist Theorising and the Black Subject

Cornel West (1993) argues that Marxism does not ‘see’ the black individual as a subject of racialised 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, even amongst the working classes. The challenges and distortions created by racist constructs in which black subjects are produced, are not interrogated or dealt with in such theorising. Without clear acknowledgement of this socio-cultural experience, a 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 portrayals 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 à 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 ‘Noon’ (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 presence of black subjects in eighteenth century art, 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 the use of the black subject in such works of art as an exposé of corrupt white morals. By positioning the African figure as a symbol of human debauchery and corruption Hogarth, too, draws on accepted notions of black inferiority without making any attempt to challenge popular racial stereotypes. 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 15. Anon., (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 presences 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 in the Olympia 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
CHAPTER 2

coming to this painting. She has meanings for them beyond Manet’s apparent erotic intentions, as sister or aunty, mother or granny. 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 and 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 Re-evaluating Olympia (1987–88), a piece that subtly re-positions the black servant in Manet’s racialised scheme, has much to offer educationalists when using the iconic 19th Century painting 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 Nooning 1836, p. 93 and Dawn of Day 1867, p. 99). In discussing the structure of Thomas Eakins’ Negro Boy Dancing, (1878), he focuses on the characterisation of black subjects, stating that ‘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. 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). In such works was created the myth of the happy-go-lucky, down-at-heel yet cheery black which gave rise to the lantern jawed, beady-eyed, thick-lipped grotesques that become synonymous with the representation of African subjects in early twentieth century popular media (Shohat and Stam 1994; Bogle 1994; Congdon-Martin 1990; Aguilar and Emanoel 2000). Nowhere in nineteenth and early twentieth century artistic activity is Ellison’s trope of invisibility more clearly articulated than in such phantasmic constructions.

Theodore Gericault’s Raft of the Medusa (1818–19) is a 19th Century painting which provokes very different responses. In 1816 an expedition of four ships, under a new commander Captain Hugues Doroys 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 positions 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 man who is held aloft by two white rafters 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 subverts the canon of white supremacy. This powerful artwork and the message it conveys opens up possibilities for development across a wide range of pedagogic applications.

![Image of the Raft of the Medusa](image)


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 the enslaved 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 messages implicit to public art in which there is a black presence, 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 celebration in the rendering of his physique. Yet, 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, 3rd Duke of Perth*. 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 savage. 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 the front. On the fringes of this group sits a black man with a girl who remain in the margins: detached. The black subject is similarly isolated 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 mere spectator at the event.

### 2.6.5 Marie-Guillelmine 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 wearing a turban, a traditional symbol of African origins in representations of black subjects of the period, which can also infer a chattel-like status on the wearer, it is not used here to belittle or mock the sitter. The whiteness of the turban and the length of fabric in which she is robed emphasise instead the beauty inherent to the siennas, umbers and ochres of her body. Similarly the exposure of the woman’s breast, while sexually suggestive to a degree, is more celebratory of her presence and bodily features.  

![Figure 17. Marie Benoist’s (1800) Portrait of a Negress.](image)

2.6.6 Summary

This section focused on the discourse of boundary formation in the construction of lines of demarcation between human groups. More especially it problematised the issue of the black body as a site of division and a marker of difference. The writing addressed 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 elevating the presence of Europeans at the expense of other groups. I will in the remaining chapters in this review explore these questions from the viewpoints 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 Caribbean students in our schools.

NOTES

1 More information is provided on this below.
2 As stated in the Concise Oxford Dictionary, Obeah is ‘a kind of sorcery practised especially in the Caribbean’.
3 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.’
4 The New Oxford Dictionary states that ‘a Loa is a god in the voodoo cult of Haiti.’
5 For a modern-day high-art elaboration of the genre, see also Douglas-Camp’s *O’goni Bus* project.
6 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.
7 I make reference to Walter Benjamin’s (1999) use of the word aura as the ‘authority of the object (p.215).’
8 First exhibited Pickett’s Lock, 1994
9 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 located on the inside of white hegemonic power and control, problematizes issues of nation and boundaries in a way not seen before in such symbolic spaces. Only the sight of a black army colonel leading the parade at trooping the colour would, for some, stimulate greater unease.
10 Channel 4 is a national television broadcaster in the UK
The Beninois artist Meschac Gaba has made an installation of an imagined world city that consists of iconic landmarks from around the world, particularly historic buildings such as the ‘Gherkin’ in central London, the Eiffel Tower in Paris and the Empire State Building in New York. The large installation, which took up several square meters of floor space, is made entirely of sugar. In the catalogue to Port City, the Bristol Arnolfini Gallery exhibition where I saw the piece in 2007, it states that ‘Meschac Gaba’s practice focuses on the cultural and economic codes of exchange between Africa and the West, in the post-colonial context (p.100).’

According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary Hotentot 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.’

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.’

For more on this work, see Eddie Chambers’ teachers’ pack Black Art: Plotting the Course.

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

Ingres’s Odalisque (1914), with which some parallels could be drawn, is a far more erotic and sexually titillating work than this fine painting was ever intended to be.