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Theorising African Caribbean Absences in Multicultural Art Education

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ABSTRACT This article looks at the learning of African Caribbean pupils in art and design classrooms in the United Kingdom. It proceeds from the proposition that African Caribbean pupils, as the descendants of enslaved peoples whose cultural lineage has been blurred by the skewed relationship with the white majority group, are uniquely disadvantaged in the classroom.

The enslavers of their ancestors engendered a culture of exclusion that has permeated to this day in all areas of black/white interaction, impacting even on their self-image (Shohat & Stam, 1994; Fanon, 1986; West, 1993; Gilroy, 1993, 2000; Malcolm X, 1964; hooks, 1990, 1992, 1994, 2001; Parker, 1992; Young, 1992). The study will therefore include an analysis of the historical constructs that have shaped black pupils' identities and the pedagogies in which they are produced as learners. I propose 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 & Young (2002); Gillborn (1990); Moore (1999); Barrow (2005); see also Adu-Poku (2002). Such concerns for identity and recognition shape the way students learn in all contexts including art and design classrooms (Atkinson, 2002; John, 2006; Moore, 1999; see also Harland et al, 2000). The way we see ourselves as people, and the aesthetic valuation we place on our own physical attributes are imbibed from the culture in which we live (Pascall, 1992; Bogle, 1994). As a consequence, African Caribbean learners in art and design education, being outside Western identificatory frame-works, are faced with traditions of knowing and representing that often fail to positively 'see' their presence and cultural histories.

A Background to Multicultural Teaching in Art

In the 1980s black and white working class youth in Brixton, Toxteth, Liverpool 8 and other inner city areas took to the streets in an orgy of violence that left many in fear of their lives (Bygott, 1992). The unrest highlighted issues of marginalisation and alienation. Parliament debated the concerns and a number of reports were commissioned among them the Rampton Report (1981), which looked into the education of 'West Indian' children in 'our' schools. Rampton was followed by the more wide ranging Swann Report (1985) that considered the education of children of nine ethnic minority groups. Tomlinson (1990) states that Swann,

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

Iain Macleod-Brudenell (1986) and Nick Stanley et al (1987) demonstrated in the 1980s a range of approaches to teaching in art and design that foreground cultural norms and practices from different cultures and traditions.[1] These were published as a series of booklets centring on themes such as Islamic calligraphy, Persian rugs, Aboriginal paintings and Benin bronzes (see Mason, 1995). Similar material could at this time be accessed by visits to museums and galleries and at a growing number of multicultural resource centres. Diasporic cultures, however, despite the call for change and the recognition that a more inclusive curriculum was needed, were not effectively represented. Apart from carnival and Anancy stories, few resources dealt with diasporic cultural material, the museums apparently not regarding such material as sufficiently worthy of display on ethnographic, educational or aesthetic grounds (Wilson, 1993). Len Garrison's London-based African Caribbean Educational Resource (ACER)[2] was one of the few resource bases that prioritised Caribbean cultures and peoples. Carnival studies, though popular in primary schools, often highlighted the colour and fun of the event without looking in depth at the political, sociological and historical connotations of mas' [3] (for more on the background to carnival see Burgess-Macey, 2003 and Harding, 2003). However, by focusing almost exclusively on the narrow colour/fun elements of carnival, teachers risked further stereotyping diasporic cultures as superficial and lacking complexity or depth (see Boime, 1990). African Caribbean cultural histories and events were therefore underrepresented or, when used, were projected from European hegemonic viewpoints that served to undermine learning about the region.

Many teachers particularly in primary schools had been for some years prior to the street disturbances of the 1980s developing multicultural pedagogies (Mason, 1988). Slight (1987) indicates that,

> From the late 1960s there was a shift towards cultural pluralism and integration and with this came a move from denial of culture to

> concern about culture. Two assumptions were made: these were that racial equality could be achieved through cultural diversity, and that negative self-images of ethnic minority children could be addressed by means of cultural compensation.
> (Changing Traditions Catalogue, p. 8)

Several experts in the field have since the 1960s listed categories of such teaching in art and design, among them (Grigsby, 1977; Mason, 1988, 1996; Troyna, 1992; Efland et al, 1996; McFee, 1998; Moore, 1999; Emery, 2002, Dash, 2005; Richardson, 2005). Chalmers (1996) posits a rationale for multicultural approaches in stating that,

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

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

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

These resonate with a list presented by Troyna & Carrington (1990) that, 'drew on concepts derived from the sociology of race relations and specify ideological and policy responses in terms of the following: assimilation, integration and cultural pluralism' (see also Moore, 1999, p. 20). Troyna (1992) further

elaborated on these concepts, asserting that 'crudely stated, assimilation refers to the process of becoming similar ... assimilationist ideas prompted the development of monocultural education (p. 68).' He then described the genesis of integrationism, saying in the process,

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

Teachers of art when running projects that build on approaches from other traditions often draw on the first two models listed by Chalmers, which correlate with Troyna's definition of assimilationist and integrationist policies (see also Swift, 1996). Evidence of this can be seen in schemes where cultural materials from the backgrounds of pupils in the classroom are used to foster goodwill (Efland et al. 1996, p. 79), a policy described by Troyna (1992) as 'the 3Ss interpretation of multicultural education (Saris, Samosas and Steel bands)' (see also Mirza, 2005). The third approach will often engage pupils in study that draws, in more in-depth enquiry, on practices from another tradition. Such approaches question long-standing views and assumptions by meaningful exposure to the work of others. Benin bronzes, Egyptian art, Indian Rickshaws, artefacts generated by the Mexican *Day of the Dead* and Aboriginal paintings are resources frequently used in such approaches, pedagogies described by Efland et al (1996) as 'a haphazard inclusion of various cultures (p. 43).' The fourth approach as I understand it will draw on materials from and be celebratory of different cultures and ethnicities without necessarily challenging societal structures and 'norms' that under-gird ethnic division. It is an approach that acknowledges diversity in the community and the classroom, placing ethnic and cultural plurality at the forefront of teaching and learning. Pedagogies in this category highlight differences in religious activity, cuisine and use of language alongside the literature and arts of a people. Such teaching approaches therefore offer more holistic approaches to 'multicultural' activity listed in the first three groups. The fifth approach, 'decision-making and social action', provides opportunities for learners to critique the world around them and their place in it. It therefore prepares, '… students to challenge social structural inequality and to promote the goal of social and cultural diversity' (ibid, p. 82). This approach, therefore, has at its core a notion of radical reconstruction that could have critical implications for teaching African Caribbean and other pupils. It shifts

from an exploration of difference or a celebration of it to an interrogation of how we live and the impact our actions have on the lifestyles of others. In this regard it goes beyond the scope of the first four models by questioning attitudes and long-standing prejudices. Seen in this light it could be described as anti-racist.

Barry Troyna beautifully describes the invidious nature of racist practices in stating that,

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

By interrogating mainstream practices to reveal discrepancies in provision in respect to African Caribbean learners, however, this paper proposes structural change to the curriculum that could identify it as antiracist. Antiracism, despite its more militant profile, is at times subsumed into multiculturalism. John (2005) in assessing antiracist strategies in education opines that,

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

He then argues critically that,

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

John contends further that the curriculum itself needs to be transformed if antiracism is not to be perceived as 'clinical sanitizing of existing nasties' and a useful tool 'of conflict management and little more (ibid, p. 107).' Redesigning the curriculum to better acknowledge the contributions of diasporic subjects to world civilisations and more especially to the West, therefore, would require a complete re-conceptualising of how teaching and learning is done. Inevitably it would require political activism at every level of provision. Erickson & Young (2002) acknowledge this in stating that 'What is more important is that contemporary students realize that history and curricular materials are highly selected and sometimes the selection process is more political than educational (p. 6).' Paulo Freire (1996) speaks of traditional approaches to teaching and learning being the 'banking' concept of education. This is where 'Education becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories (ibid, p. 53).' 'Knowledge', he suggests, 'emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human

beings pursue in the world, with the world and with each other' (ibid, p. 53). From Freire's viewpoint, therefore, social action in education should be transformative, or in hooks' (1994) word, transgressive. In proposing a pedagogy that emphasises 'wholeness, a union of mind, body, and spirit (ibid, p. 14)' she draws on the theorising of the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh, who 'always speaks of the teacher as a healer (ibid, p. 14).' Such a 'progressive, holistic education (ibid, p. 15),' she argues, 'emphasizes well-being. That means that teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students (ibid, p. 15).' Relating this more specifically to teaching diasporic learners, and given the lack of support for progressive pedagogies in the statutory curriculum, the taking of higher degree qualifications with a focus on diasporic student marginalization and disenfranchisement, could be perceived as a particularly productive mode of transformation through self-actualisation.

Postmodern Art and African Diasporic Learners

As an adjunct to developments in inclusive pedagogies that could be described as multicultural, the emergence of postmodern philosophies, which resonate with or are properly located in Chalmers' model five, shaped progressive viewpoints on classroom activities for the 21st Century. Efland et al (1996) divide present-day practices in art and design education into modern and postmodern conceptual frameworks. They state that,

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

In this theorising the history of art has evolved through developmental stages over several millennia starting with the Egyptians. The concept of the postmodern, however, '… is to call into question the philosophical assumptions of the Enlightenment, especially the idea of progress (ibid, p. 11).' Postmodern teaching therefore, in repudiating the notion of linear progress embraces theories of chaos and cultural collision. Pedagogies designed within this conceptual framework draw on a diversity of perceptions and experience, including those emerging from the learners' own subject positions. Figures 1, 2 and 3 offer a graphic illustration of how our ways of making sense of the world frame our perception of place in history our relationship to other civilisations and peoples.

Figures 1, 2 and 3 combine theories of the modern and the postmodern. Across and through them flow the five approaches posited by Chalmers. They model frameworks inclusive of long-standing concepts of cultural origins and epistemologies, over-layered with present-day concerns for diversity and representation. Figure 1 shows how in traditionalist or modernist theories of

knowing in the West, history is linear and moves through historical movements or developmental stages, along a preordained thread of cultural and social cohesion. In such theorising Greece is the well-head of Western cultural origins and by implication, the foremost cultural moment in world civilisations (Clark 1999; Pascall 1992). The notion implicit to this model of Western civilisation, evolving through different stages to the present time, fails to acknowledge the impact of other cultures on our present-day life-styles outside its linear developmental framework. This crucial blindness to the contributions of peoples outside Europe to our shared past implies a lack in other peoples and is to my mind disadvantageous to diasporic and other non-white learners.

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

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Figure 1. Eurocentric model

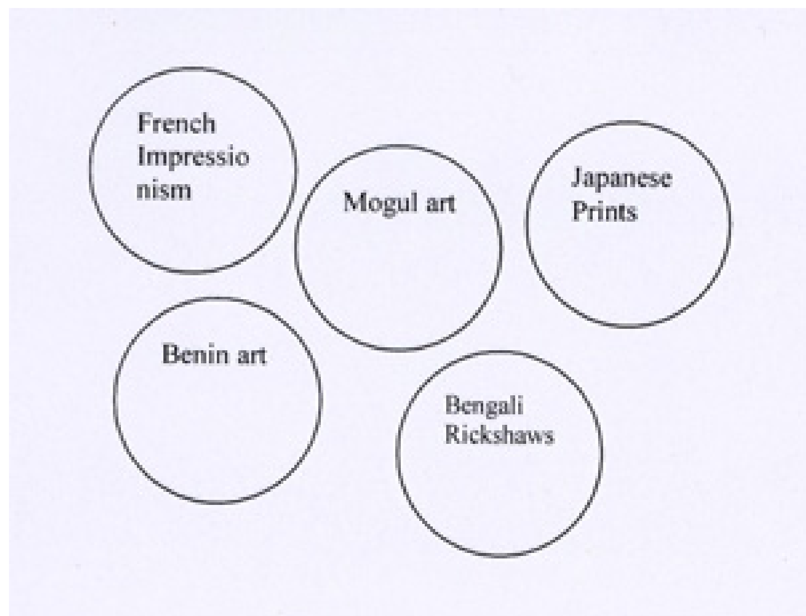

Figure 2. Multicultural model

Figure 2 is located between modernist and postmodern approaches to teaching and learning. It is a model that represents some approaches to multiculturalism probably akin to models one to four in Chalmers. Efland et al (1996) referencing Sleeter & Grant, assert that,

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

As indicated in such pedagogies the teaching of Aboriginal art could be followed by the study of Benin bronzes, leading to an analysis of Bengali rickshaw design. While pupils may in such approaches learn a great deal about the art practices of other nations, they fail to appreciate how cultures mix with and cross-fertilise one another. Importantly, too, they disregard the imperatives that give rise to specific cultural 'norms'. For the African Caribbean learner there is in such approaches limited opportunity to showcase Caribbean cultures. Multicultural teaching framed in this pedagogic model disadvantage African Caribbean learners by failing to acknowledge their relevance to our present way of life (Gall, 2002).

The third figure in challenging prevalent conceptions of cultural linearity encompasses much that is inherent to model five of Chalmers. It demonstrates that in post-modern conceptions of the world knowledges are contingent: nothing is freestanding or informed by its own notional unique past and cultural imperatives.

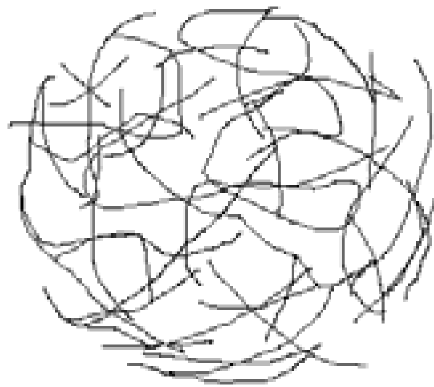

Figure 3. Chaos Model

Stuhr et al (1996) show how,

> Geography, as well as history, has been re-conceptualised. From this new perspective, culture is no longer viewed as contained within a certain land form. Cultures intermingle, mix, and impose on each other, the result of which are crises that change the face of maps (p. 23).

In such approaches teachers would initiate projects from almost any starting-point, possibly presenting in the process starter material from a diasporic viewpoint whilst also emphasising their interconnectedness with other traditions. Pedagogies that are contingent and offer a range of avenues of exploration are, however, dependent on teacher engagement or self actualisation. As a new way of conceptualising the world, new teaching styles predicated on teacher research is central to their success. In other words teachers must be prepared to put the work into redesigning curricula content in a manner that problematize longstanding givens and ways of making sense of the world.

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

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

Paulo Freire (1996) in theorising the distortions that can emerge from mutual estrangement cites the need for social action, '… true solidarity with the oppressed means fighting at their side to transform the objective reality which has made them these 'beings for another'" (p. 31). 'Beings for another' is the ontological state that characterised the life-world of the enslaved – they were literally living to serve another. Change has come about only sluggishly since that era. Freire opines that, 'The oppressor is solidary with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons who have been unjustly dealt with, deprived of their voices' (ibid, pp. 31-32). Teacher solidarity with marginalised African Caribbean subjects is essential if their cultural identities are to be acknowledged and suitable pedagogies formulated to accommodate their aspirations for social justice. In being disabused of the myth of white superiority/ black inferiority, the assault on injustice would also be beneficial to white children.

European hegemonies position the West as the anchor point to which all other traditions are tethered: the centrifugal source from which civilisation radiates. In such constructs the way we make sense of the world is mediated from Western hegemonic viewpoints. African Caribbean pupils are influenced by this and subliminally respond to it (Parker, 1992; see also Winston, 2005).

Postmodern pedagogies challenge this narrow construct and the Euro-centred perspectives on truth and reality it fosters. Inherent to such practices is the notion of deconstruction.

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

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

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

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

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

The way we relate to the past shifts according to the experiences we are exposed to in our day-to-day lives (Hall, 1992, 1997; Njami, 2005; Shohat & Stam, 1994). Present-day interpretations of works of art from the past, therefore, may be very different from the way they may have been perceived when first exhibited. Black spectators can bring new nuances of meaning to Western-generated texts. Such reanalyses of representational strategies in Western art, could help African diasporic learners to better appreciate the way in which subjects such as themselves are depicted in history (Chambers, 1989). The deconstruction of historical works could also shed light on inequalities that

have a bearing on the representation of other minorities (John, 2006). Reinterpretations of historical works, therefore, have significances for everyone. Pedagogies that allow such enquiry, by providing space for marginalised subjects to redefine their epistemic frameworks, look to the future by truly redrawing the contours of the past (Freire, 1987). For this to happen, teachers need to relinquish their control on how works are interpreted and allow children to find their own routes through them Said (1993) (see also Atkinson, 2002). By this means works of art by significant European artists from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries could be deconstructed to show how they contribute to the oppression of people from this country, the African Diaspora and elsewhere.

Research Methodology

What follows is data taken from a small-scale qualitative research project that looked at the degree of teacher awareness of Caribbean cultural marginalisation in art and the strategies employed by them to combat this lack. Initially six educator participants were involved but the data presented here is taken from interviews with three participants – Betty, Maria and Rebecca. Alert to the danger of compromising the anonymity of my participants, the profiles of contributors are limited to a few background details.

Each participant was interviewed once. I did not restrict the length of these encounters although an hour was set aside for each. All interviews were semi-structured, in that there were set questions. Where they took unpredicted directions, I allowed this to occur if at the time I felt such departures promised worthwhile research data.

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

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

The long-term relationship I have with all the participants had the advantage of empowering them, in that they felt free to speak candidly and openly during the interviews.

Betty – Brown School

Betty, a black head of art, teaches at Brown School. At the time of the interview, she had been teaching at the school for four years but had recently been appointed head of department. I knew Betty previously as a PGCE

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

Maria – Blue School

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

Rebecca – Green School

Rebecca is the most experienced participant in the research. A white head of department, I have known Rebecca for twenty years in my capacity as GCSE moderator and as a colleague in the Goldsmiths PGCE teacher training. Green School is a successful 11-18 Catholic girls' school in London. Like Blue School it has a high population of black African and African Caribbean students, some seventy per cent of the school population. Rebecca has an Irish background. The value of her experience as an Irish woman historically located in the margins of British social, political and cultural life and working with African Caribbean students who may sometimes perceive themselves to be similarly ostracised features prominently in the interview.

The rationale for the research and indeed for this study was not driven merely by a desire to gather information regarding the experience of African Caribbean students in art and design education, but to seek examples of good practice that could be disseminated to teachers. Educators of African Caribbean background, given their insider view of how education works for African Caribbean learners, would, I assumed, have a vested interest in pushing for curriculum change. However, it became apparent from the outset that my assumptions were based on a false premise; the differences in perception between black and white participants were not always as stark as I had anticipated. Though contributions by at least one African Caribbean educator were very insightful, teacher responses across the sample did not diverge significantly.

Interviews with Teachers

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

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

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

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

Maria then added,

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

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

derogatory. From my viewpoint the notion of 'primitive' art, particularly in respect to African practices, should be problematised in classroom contexts to disabuse learners of the notion that Caribbean and indeed African artists are indeed lacking in sophistication.

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

> Paul – Do they ever make reference to the Caribbean? How important is the region to them?
> Betty – I don't know the full story, but a lot of them don't have very positive things to say about their country [meaning the Caribbean][4] You start touching on the subjects that they might know about such as their home life [and] they start acting up and being stupid, like they don't want to accept what you might say. They just play about and joke about things (p. 8b).

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

> Paul – So what you're saying is that if you start introducing Caribbean cultural materials they blank them out?
> Betty – Yeah, they blank them out and I don't understand why, I don't know if they're embarrassed whereas on a one-to-one with a child, they're different (p. 8b).
> I then asked her about the kind of 'cultural' materials the children are exposed to when they learn about African Caribbean and other artists,
> Betty – We want to incorporate that even more, I mean there are black artists I might include [somebody] Johnson ... but I don't know much (p. 8b).

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

> … but I have a need myself [for my own INSET] if there is an INSET of some sort on black culture, black arts, black design. It would be really good if teachers got INSET specifically about Caribbean art ... not Aboriginal art. African art is so [pause] African

> art really does it but Caribbean art because it crosses over to African a bit as well, to some degree, it's difficult [to draw a distinction between them?][5] (p. 1a,b).

My participant's analysis of the difficulties posed to British born teachers of art in understanding the differences in character between Caribbean art and African art was instructive. It was clear that in her art education no distinction had been drawn between the visual arts of the two regions. Betty's explanation of the need for in-service training was similarly insightful. She then went on to question the originality of Caribbean art,

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

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

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

Martinique is in this case a metaphor for the whole Caribbean region and not just the name of the Francophone island. The notion of a 'caught between' ethos to Caribbean cultural identities is being identified here by Betty. Anne Walmsley's (2003) teachers' pack by the hybridic qualities inherent to many of the pieces shown in her postcards [6], substantiates some of the observations made by Betty in this interview. But this statement also shows the dilemma of a people uprooted from their African heritages and placed in new environments where they are made to adopt new mores (see also Glissant, 1989; Brathwaite, 1974). Many of those new practices are, at least on the surface of things, closely allied to Western traditions. This insider/outsider binary further blurs the distinctiveness of Caribbean art

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

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

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

Betty's confusion over Caribbean and African artistic identities demonstrates the strangely ambivalent position in which diasporic peoples are positioned. Defining a sense of self in contexts of large-scale cultural loss and ontological syncretization poses issues of identity formation that can take time to resolve. Teaching school students about Caribbean cultural identities against a backdrop of modernist artistic practices, therefore, becomes problematic and could make Caribbean cultural identities appear trite and even tawdry. Therein lay the seeds of diasporic invisibility. Betty, however, has attempted to positively address the issue by bringing in local black artists. John (2006) confirms the importance of such presences in schools in stating that,

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

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

I questioned Rebecca about the different histories of African Caribbean and African students. She shared some remarkable insights,

> Paul – Because of the slave trade African-Caribbean peoples have lost contact with their ancestral roots ...
> Rebecca – And they [African peoples][7] do carry their original African names, whereas the Caribbean… has actually got the name that has been inherited from some landowner, or slave name.
> Paul – So how far back does one go in teaching about the Caribbean? As a Caribbean subject where do you go, if you don't know which tribe you're from?
> Rebecca – Which is like a child that discovers it's been adopted. Or doesn't know who its parents are: this loss of identity.
> Paul – It's what I call cultural orphanage.
> Rebecca – It is absolutely, it's a bit like when you go to a country that's like Canada or the States where there isn't that deep historical going back, back.
> Paul – There's a degree of shallowness.
> Rebecca – There is but there's this tremendous search for people wanting to know where they come from. (p. 10-11 r)

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

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

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

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

So we work with what we have because there is no real benefit in returning to points of origin to seek a resolution to what is an impossible conundrum. Rebecca indicates that we have the role models to make this happen in education, which is a great 'peopleizer', meaning, I think, a vehicle for bringing people together to resolve issues. This suggests that in working with African Caribbean students there should not be a heavy emphasis on returning to roots but working with what we have now. I then asked her,

> Paul – Do you have this sense of awareness when viewing the work of Caribbean or black artists?
>
> Rebecca – I suppose the African artist has come from a particular culture, from a tribe or tribal culture and I think that the movement of the Caribbean individual from role and status has just completely…

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

Rebecca's observations about African Caribbean students and their socio-cultural experience of diasporisation are, in my view, of critical importance. Her identification of the differences of experience between diasporic people and those from settled communities in Africa, the effect such contrasting legacies can have on these two broad groups of children, is a vital contribution to our understanding of the impediments to African Caribbean pupils' learning. She is indirectly referencing Brathwaite's notion of cultural absence. Rebecca's perception that African Caribbean young people need to be a 'trickster type', basically, living off their wits is an encapsulation of the lot of the diasporic subject who in order to survive in the West, has had to devise systems for operating in conditions of enormous, often life-threatening challenge. This manifests itself in classroom contexts where teachers, acculturated to different mores, have unrealistic expectations of such learners, the gap between these two ontological positions often leading to conflict. Trickster type could also be a reference to syncretization, the concept of being in-between great cultural forces. Similarly, Rebecca's observations that black artists of African origin were shaped by structures inherent to their traditional ways of life, is central to our appreciation of the differences between African Caribbean artists and those of African origin.

Summary of Research Findings

The data presented here supports the notion that teachers of art and design do not seem to know where to start in providing material on the Caribbean. Many adopt the strategy of drawing on resources generated by black people from any environment and cultural origin without a connection being made between such

people, their origins and the Caribbean. From my interpretation of the data, many African Caribbean teachers are themselves muddled by notions of Caribbean cultural identities and lack appropriate strategies for developing pedagogies that could celebrate the region. The invisibility of Caribbean cultural origins remains therefore a feature in the way we teach. Teacher participants dedicated to such work, have different strategies for dealing with this lack. Betty's call for INSET in this area is an honest appeal for support in providing some information on Caribbean art and cultural heritages.

Teachers generally do not make a direct link between the Caribbean and Africa. The curriculum does not require such connections to be made and the teachers in this sample do not prioritise relationships of this sort. In the discourse of modernity teachers instead utilise Picasso's use of traditional African artefacts in the development of Cubism, as a means of celebrating the centrality of African art to Western practices.

The interview with Rebecca provided useful insights into the way African Caribbean student experiences were predicated on her own history as an Irish woman.

Conclusion

Teachers of art and design do not meaningfully research African Caribbean cultural material or Caribbean historical contributions to the way we live. Instead, in their pedagogies, many draw on epistemologies already in the ownership of diasporic learners. Rather than find elements of experience in art that begins the process of recovery there is exposure to teaching that, by the denial of representation, buttresses the notion of African Caribbean cultural deprivation and shallowness. As a result of teacher ignorance about African Caribbean cultural experience, many pupils become even more disenchanted with teaching and learning environments often, as a consequence, falling foul of school rules. Little wonder that many African Caribbean pupils react with indignation and anger, regarding concerns about their lack of representation to be of minimal importance in the culture of schooling.

Until we begin to see that the trauma of African enslavement in the Americas and Europe has its echo in the present-day life-styles and perceptions of diasporic subjects, we will not remedy their marginalisation. If African Caribbean learners are to reach their full potential at the centre of the mainstream, therefore, it will require movement both on their part in the attitude they bring to the classroom, and equally importantly in teacher willingness to locate such learners at the centre of school-life. That must surely require us in art education to look again at the way we interpret works of art and the process of engaging in practice. It should also require us to reposition the boundaries of the subject to introduce exemplars and moments in history that draw on the experiences of different communities. Until we begin to take on board the implications of our diverse classroom profiles by devising new and more representative pedagogies, our teaching methodologies will continue to

disenfranchise many children. African Caribbean pupils as descendents of an aggressively marginalised group would benefit from the development of such teaching strategies. Other minorities and members of the majority ethnic group would also be liberated by a multivalent pedagogy that seeks to engage the Truth, in framing learning content and teaching styles.

Notes

[1] See Ian Macleod Brudenell's series of Nottingham Supplies Cross-Cultural Art Booklets (1986) and Development Education Art in Action: Music, Drama, Visual Art (1984).

[2] ACER was set up by Len Garrison, an educator of African Caribbean origin, to provide resources to teachers and schools about Caribbean peoples and cultures.

[3] 'Mas' – an abbreviation of masquerade – is the term popularly used for carnival in Trinidad and Tobago and much of the English speaking Caribbean.

[4] My emphasis.

[5] Unclear on the tape.

[6] Ann Walmsley in her Caribbean Art pack presents a range of postcards of pieces by Caribbean artists that are designed for teaching purposes.

[7] My emphasis.

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