Third Text

Un-settling 'the heritage', re-imagining the post-nationWhose heritage?

Stuart Hall

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This conference on 'Whose Heritage?' provides an opportunity to look critically at the whole concept of 'British Heritage' from the perspective of the multicultural Britain which has been emerging since the end of World War II. How is it being — and how should it be — transformed by the 'Black British' presence and the explosion of cultural diversity and difference which is everywhere our lived daily reality?

In preparing to say something useful on this topic, I was struck again — as many of you may have been — by the quaintness of the very term, 'Heritage'. It has slipped so innocently into everyday speech! I take it to refer to the whole complex of organisations, institutions and practices devoted to the preservation and presentation of culture and the arts — art galleries, specialist collections, public and private, museums of all kinds (general, survey or themed, historical or scientific, national or local) and sites of special historical interest.

What is curious in the British usage is the emphasis given to preservation and conservation: to keeping what already exists — as opposed to the production and circulations of new work in different media, which takes a very definite second place. The British have always seen 'culture' as a vaguely disquieting idea as if to name it is to make self-conscious what well-bred folk absorb unconsciously with their mother's milk! Ministries of Culture are what those old, now discredited, eastern European regimes used to have, which is altogether the wrong associations! Culture has therefore entered the nomenclature of modern British government only when sandwiched alongside the more acceptably populist terms, 'Media' and 'Sport'.

This gives the British idea of 'Heritage' a peculiar inflection. The works and artefacts so conserved appear to be 'of value' primarily in relation to the past. To be validated, they must take their place alongside what has been authorised as 'valuable' on already established grounds in relation to the unfolding of a

'national story' whose terms we already know. The Heritage thus becomes the material embodiment of the spirit of the nation, a collective representation of the British version of *tradition*, a concept pivotal to the lexicon of English virtues.

This retrospective, nation-alised and tradition-alised conception of culture will return to haunt our subsequent thoughts at different points. However, it may also serve as a warning that *my* emphasis does include the active production of culture and the arts as a living activity, alongside the conservation of the past.

We spend an increasing proportion of the national wealth — especially since The Lottery — on 'The Heritage'. But what is it *for*? Obviously, to preserve for posterity things of value, whether on aesthetic or historical criteria. But that is only a start. From its earliest history in western societies — in the heterogeneous assemblages of the 'cabinets of curiosity and wonder' — collections have adorned the position of people of power and influence — kings, princes, popes, landowners and merchants — whose wealth and status they amplified. They have always been related to the exercise of 'power' in another sense — the symbolic power to order knowledge, to rank, classify and arrange, and thus to give meaning to objects and things through the imposition of interpretative schemas, scholarship and the authority of connoisseurship. As Foucault observed, 'there is no power relation without the relative constitution of a field of knowledge nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute... power relations'.[1]

Since the eighteenth century, collections of cultural artefacts and works of art have also been closely associated with informal public education. They have become part, not simply of 'governing', but of the broader practices of 'governmentality' — how the state indirectly and at a distance induces and solicits appropriate attitudes and forms of conduct from its citizens. The state is always, as Gramsci argued, 'educative'. Through its power to preserve and represent culture, the state has assumed some responsibility for educating the citizenry in those forms of 'really useful knowledge', as the Victorians put it, which would refine the sensibilities of the vulgar and enhance the capacities of the masses. This was the true test of their 'belongingness': culture as social incorporation.

It is important to remember that the nation-state is both a political and territorial entity, *and* what Benedict Anderson has called 'an imagined community'.[2] Though we are often strangers to one another, we form an 'imagined community' because we share an *idea* of the nation and what it stands for, which we can 'imagine' in our mind's eye. A shared national identity thus depends on the cultural meanings which bind each member individually into the larger national story. Even so-called 'civic' states, like Britain, are deeply embedded in specific 'ethnic' or cultural meanings which give the abstract idea of the nation its lived 'content'.

The National Heritage is a powerful source of such meanings. It follows that those who cannot see themselves reflected in its mirror cannot properly 'belong'. Even the museums and collections apparently devoted to surveying the universal, rather than the national, achievements of culture — like the British Museum, the Louvre, or the Metropolitan Museum in New York — are harnessed into the national story. Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach have argued that these institutions 'claim the heritage of the classical tradition for contemporary society and equate that tradition with the very notion of civilization itself'.[3] Much the same could be said about the museums of Modern or

1 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, Tavistock, London, 1977.

2 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Verso, London, 1983

3 Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, 'The Universal Survey Museum', *Art History*, no 4, December, 1980, p 451.

Contemporary Art in terms of the way they have colonised the very idea of 'the modern', 'modernity' and 'modernism' as exclusively 'western' inventions.

Heritage is bound into the meaning of the nation through a double inscription. What the nation means is essentialised: 'the English seem unaware that anything fundamental has changed since 1066'.[4] Its essential meaning appears to have emerged at the very moment of its origin — a moment always lost in the myths, as well as the mists, of time — and then successively embodied as a distilled essence in the various arts and artefacts of the nation for which the Heritage provides the archive. In fact, what the nation 'means' is an on-going project, under constant reconstruction. We come to know its meaning partly *through* the objects and artefacts which have been made to stand for and symbolise its essential values. Its meaning is constructed *within*, not above or outside representation. It is through identifying with these representations that come to be its 'subjects' — by 'subjecting' ourselves to its dominant meanings. What would 'England' *mean* without its cathedrals, churches, castles and country houses, its gardens, thatched cottages and hedgerowed landscapes, its Trafalgars, Dunkirks and Mafekings, its Nelsons and its Churchills, its Elgars and its Benjamin Brittens?

We should think of The Heritage as a discursive practice. It is one of the ways in which the nation slowly constructs for itself a sort of collective social memory. Just as individuals and families construct their identities in part by 'storying' the various random incidents and contingent turning points of their lives into a single, coherent, narrative, so nations construct identities by selectively binding their chosen high points and memorable achievements into an unfolding 'national story'. This story is what is called 'Tradition'. As the Jamaican anthropologist, David Scott, recently observed, 'A tradition... seeks to connect authoritatively, within the structure of its narrative, a relation among past, community, an identity'. He goes on to argue that,

> A tradition therefore is never neutral with respect to the values it embodies. Rather a tradition operates in and through the stakes it constructs — what is to count and what is not to count among its satisfactions, what the goods and excellences and virtues are that ought to be valued... On this view... if tradition presupposes 'a common possession' it does not presuppose uniformity or plain consensus. Rather it depends upon a play of conflict and contention. It is a space of dispute as much as of consensus, of discord as much as of accord.[5]

The Heritage is also a classic example of the operation of what Raymond Williams called the 'selective tradition':

> Theoretically a period is recorded; in practice, this record is absorbed into a selective tradition; and both are different from the culture as lived... To some extent the selection begins within the period itself... though that does not mean that the values and emphases will later be confirmed.[6]

Like personal memory, social memory is also highly selective, it highlights and foregrounds, imposes beginnings, middles and ends on the random and contingent. Equally, it foreshortens, silences, disavows, forgets and elides many episodes which — from another perspective — could be the start of a different narrative. This process of selective 'canonisation' confers authority and a material and institutional facticity on the selective tradition, making it extremely difficult to shift or revise. The institutions responsible for making the

4 Norman Davies, 'But We Never Stand Quite Alone', *The Guardian*, 13 November, 1999.

5 David Scott, *Re-fashioning Futures: Criticism After Post-Coloniality*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1999.

6 Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1963.

'selective tradition' work develop a deep investment in their own 'truth'.

The Heritage inevitably reflects the governing assumptions of its time and context. It is always inflected by the power and authority of those who have colonised the past, whose versions of history matter. These assumptions and co-ordinates of power are inhabited as natural — given, timeless, true and inevitable. But it takes only the passage of time, the shift of circumstances, or the reversals of history, to reveal those assumptions as time- and context-bound, historically specific, and thus open to contestation, re-negotiation, and revision.

This is therefore an appropriate moment to ask, then, who is the Heritage *for*? In the British case the answer is clear. It is intended for those who 'belong' — a society which is imagined as, in broad terms, culturally homogeneous and unified.

It is long past time to radically question this foundational assumption.

It is, of course, undeniable that Britain has been in recent times a relatively settled society and 'culture'. But as something approaching a nation-state, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (subsequently 'and Northern Ireland') is in fact a relatively recent historical construct, a product of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Britain itself was formed out of a series of earlier invasions, conquests and settlements — Celts, Romans, Saxons, Vikings, Normans, Angevins — whose 'traces' are evident in the palimpsest of the national language. The Act of Union linked Scotland, England and Wales into a united kingdom, but never on terms of cultural equality — a fact constantly obscured by the covert oscillations and surreptitious substitutions between the terms 'Britishness' and 'Englishness'.[7]

The Act of Settlement (1701) secured a Protestant ascendancy, drawing the critical symbolic boundary between the Celtic/Catholic and the Anglo-Saxon/Protestant traditions. Between 1801 (the date of the Act of Union which brokered Ireland into the Union) and Partition in 1922, the national story proved incapable of incorporation 'Irishness' into 'Britishness' or of integrating Irish Catholic migrants into an imagined 'Englishness'. Their culture and presence remains marginalised today.

Though relatively stable, English society has always contained within it profound differences. There were always different ways of being 'English'. It was always fissured along class, gender and regional lines. What came to be known, misleadingly, as '*the* British way of life' is really another name for a particular settlement of structured social inequalities. Many of the great achievements which have been retrospectively written into the national lexicon as primordial English virtues — the rule of law, free speech, a fully-representative franchise, the rights of combination, the National Health Service, the welfare state itself — were struggled for by some of the English and bitterly resisted by others. Where, one asks, is this deeply ruptured and fractured history, with its interweaving of stability and conflict, in the Heritage's version of the dominant national narrative?

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

7 On this whole question, see Norman Davies, *The Isles: A History*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1999.

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. The emblems of Empire do, of course, fitfully appear in the Heritage. However, in general, 'Empire' is increasingly subject to a widespread selective amnesia and disavowal. And when it does appear, it is largely narrated from the viewpoint of the colonisers. Its master narrative is sustained in the scenes, images and the artefacts which testify to Britain's success in imposing its will, culture and institutions, and inscribing its civilising mission across the world. This formative strand in the national culture is now re-presented as an external appendage, extrinsic and inorganic to the domestic history and culture of the English social formation.

Despite all this, the idea of Heritage *has* had to respond to at least two major challenges. The first we may call the democratisation process. Increasingly, the lives, artefacts, houses, work-places, tools, customs and oral memories of ordinary everyday British folk have slowly taken their subordinate place alongside the hegemonic presence of the great and the good. The inclusion of domestic vernacular architecture and the agrarian and industrial revolutions, together with the explosion of interest in 'history from below', the spread of local and family history, of personal memorabilia and the collection of oral histories — activities witnessed to in, for example, Raphael Samuel's memorable celebration of the 'popular heritage', *Theatres of Memory*,[8] — have shifted and democratised our conception of value, of what is and is not worth preserving. A few courageous if controversial steps have been taken in our direction — the Liverpool Museum on the Slave Trade, the Maritime Museum's re-hang. However, by and large, this process has so far stopped short at the frontier defined by that great unspoken British value — 'whiteness'.

The second 'revolution' arises from the critique of the Enlightenment ideal of dispassionate universal knowledge, which drove and inspired so much of Heritage activity in the past. This has to be coupled with a rising cultural relativism which is part of the growing de-centring of the West and western-oriented or Eurocentric grand-narratives. From the 'Magiciens de la Terre' exhibition at the Pompidou Centre in Paris in the 1980s, on through the 'Te Maori' exhibition from New Zealand at the Metropolitan Museum of New York, the 'Paradise' exhibition from New Guinea at the Museum of Mankind, 'The Spirit Sings' exhibition of Canada's 'first peoples' at Calgary, the 'Perspectives: Angles on African Art' at the Centre for African Art in New York, and on and on, the exhibiting of 'other cultures' — often performed with the best of liberal intentions has proved controversial. The questions — 'Who should control the power to represent?' 'Who has the authority to re-present the culture of others?' — have resounded through the museum corridors of the world, provoking a crisis of authority.

These two developments mark a major transformation in our relation to the activity of constructing a 'Heritage'. They in turn reflect a number of conceptual shifts in what we might loosely call the intellectual culture. A list of these shifts would have to include — a radical awareness by the marginalised of the symbolic power involved in the activity of representation; a growing sense of the centrality of culture and its relation to *identity*; the rise amongst the excluded of a 'politics of recognition' alongside the older politics of equality; a growing reflexivity about the constructed and thus contestable nature of the authority which some people acquire to 'write the culture' of others; a decline in the acceptance of the traditional authorities in authenticating the interpre-

8 Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, Routledge, London, 1997.

tative and analytic frameworks which classify, place, compare and evaluate culture; and the concomitant rise in the demand to re-appropriate control over the 'writing of one's own story' as part of a wider process of cultural liberation, or — as Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral once put it — 'the decolonization of the mind'. In short, a general relativisation of 'truth', 'reason' and other abstract Enlightenment values, and an increasingly perspectival and context-related conception of truth-as-interpretation — of 'truth' as an aspect of what Michel Foucault calls the 'will to power'...

Each of these developments would take a whole lecture on their own to elaborate. But I take them here as together marking an unsettling and subversion of the foundational ground on which the process of Heritage-construction has until very recently proceeded. We see it reflected in different ways: in how the texts supporting art works and framing exhibits are written by museums; in the attempts to make explicit the 'perspective' which has governed the selection and the interpretative contextualisation, so as to make it more open to challenge and re-interpretation; in the exposing of underlying assumptions of value, meaning and connection as part of a more dialogic relationship between the cultural institutions and their audiences; and in the tentative efforts to involve the 'subjects' themselves in the exhibiting process which objectifies them. These are only some of the manifest signs of a deep slow-motion revolution in progress in the practices of cultural representation.

They have taken hold, but are certainly not yet extensively or ubiquitously deployed in the institutional complex of the British Heritage 'industry' as a whole. Their appearance is at best patchy, more honoured in the breach — in profession of good intentions — than actual practice. Nevertheless, the question 'Whose Heritage?', posed in the context of the current 'drift' towards a more multicultural Britain, has to be mounted on the back of this emerging 'turn'. I take the appearance of 'cultural diversity' as a key policy priority of the newly restructured Arts Council, its greater visibility in statements of intent by the government and the Ministry of Culture, Media and Sport, the recent efforts by the British Council to project a more 'diverse' image of British culture abroad, and even the much-delayed declaration of a 'Year of cultural diversity' — two years after Amsterdam, but much to be welcomed nevertheless — as potential but uncertain harbingers of change.

Suppose this *were* to turn out to be a propitious moment. What would those new constituencies who feel themselves woefully inadequately represented in the mirror of culture which the Heritage holds up to British society want out of it?

It goes without saying that we would need more money specifically targeted at this objective. The corners of the government's mouth tend to droop significantly when the money and material resources required to meet objectives are mentioned, and the weary muttering about 'not simply throwing money at the problem' rises to a quiet crescendo. However, the idea that a major culture-change — nothing short of a cultural revolution — could take place in the way the nation represents the diversity of itself and its 'subject-citizens' without a major redirection of resources is to reveal oneself as vacantly trivial about the whole question.

In fact, however, money really *is* not enough. For if my arguments are correct, then an equally powerful obstacle to change is the deep institutional investment which the key organisations have in going on doing things in the ways in which they have always been done; and the operational inertia militating against key professionals re-examining their criteria of judgement

and their gate-keeping practices from scratch and trying to shift the habits of a professional lifetime. It will require a substantially enhanced programme of training and recruitment for curators, professionals and artists from the 'minority' communities, so that they can bring their knowledge and expertise to bear on transforming dominant curatorial and exhibitory habits. It also will take the massive leverage of a state and government committed to producing, *in reality rather than in name*, a more culturally diverse, socially just, equal and inclusive society and culture, and *holding its cultural institutions to account*. There are some straws in the wind and a lot of wordage, but so far no consistent sign of this.

Nevertheless, it seems to me that *we* have here an opportunity to clarify our own minds and to refine our agendas so that we can seize every opportunity to challenge institutions, shift resources, change priorities, move practices strategically in the right direction. The rest of my talk is devoted to this task of clarification.

First we need a better idea of who the 'we' are in whose name these changes are being articulated. Principally, we have in mind the so-called 'ethnic minority communities' from the Caribbean and Indian sub-continent, whose presence in large numbers since the 1950s have transformed Britain into a multicultural society, together with the smaller groups of non-European minorities from Africa, the Middle East, China and the Far East and Latin America. Their impact on diversifying British society and culture has been immediate and significant. It may therefore surprise you to hear me say that it is really very complex to understand how appropriately these communities should now be culturally represented in mainstream British cultural and artistic institutions. Our picture of them is defined primarily by their 'otherness' — their *minority* relationship to something vaguely identified as 'the majority', their cultural difference from European norms, their non-whiteness, their 'marking' by ethnicity, religion and 'race'. This is a negative figuration, reductive and simplistic.

These are people who have formed communities in Britain which are both distinctively marked, culturally, and yet have never been separatist or exclusive. Some traditional cultural practices are maintained — in varied ways — and carry respect. At the same time, the degrees and forms of attachment are fluid and changing — constantly negotiated, especially between men and women, within and across groups, and above all, across the generations. Traditions coexist with the emergence of new, hybrid and crossover cultural forms of tremendous vitality and innovation. These communities are in touch with their differences, without being saturated by tradition. They are actively involved with every aspect of life around them, without the illusion of assimilation and identity. This is a new kind of difference — the difference which is not binary (either-or) but whose '*differances*' (as Jacques Derrida has put it) will not be erased, or traded.[9]

Their lives and experiences have been shaped by traditions of thought, religious and moral values, very different from the Judeo-Christian and classical traditions whose 'traces' still shape 'western' culture; and by the historical experience of oppression and marginalisation. Many are in touch with cultures and languages which pre-date those of 'The West'. Nevertheless, colonisation long ago convened these cultural differences under the 'canopy' of a sort of imperial empty 'global' time, without ever effectively erasing the disjunctures and dislocations of time, place and culture by its ruptural intrusion into their 'worlds'. This is the palimpsest of the postcolonial world.

9 Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, Harvester, Brighton, 1982.

These communities are, as C. L. R. James once put it, 'in but not of Europe'[10]...
Nevertheless, they have known 'Europe' for three or four centuries as what
Ashis Nandy, in his unforgettable phrase, calls 'intimate enemies'.[11] They are
what David Scott has called 'conscripts of modernity'. They have dwelled for
many years, and long before migration, in the double or triple time of coloni-
sation, and now occupy the multiple frames, the in-between or 'third' spaces —
the homes-away-from-homes — of the postcolonial metropolis.

No single programme or agenda could adequately represent this cultural
complexity — especially their 'impossible' desire to be treated and represented
with justice (that is, as 'the same') simultaneously with the demand for the
recognition of 'difference'. The agenda will itself have to be open and diverse,
representing a situation which is already cross-cut by new and old lateral
connections and reciprocal global influences and which refuses to stand still or
stabilise. We ourselves should recognise that there will be many comple-
mentary but different ways of being represented, just as there are many
different ways of 'being black'.

Without becoming too specific, what would be the basic elements or
building blocks of such an agenda?

First, there is the demand that the majority, mainstream versions of the
Heritage should revise their own self-conceptions and rewrite the margins into
the centre, the outside into the inside. This is not so much a matter of
representing 'us' as of representing more adequately the degree to which 'their'
history entails and has always implicated 'us', across the centuries, and vice
versa. The African presence in Britain since the sixteenth century, the Asian
since the seventeenth and the Chinese, Jewish and Irish in the nineteenth have
long required to be made the subjects of their own dedicated heritage spaces as
well as integrated into a much more 'global' version of 'our island story'.
Across the great cities and ports, in the making of fortunes, in the construction
of great houses and estates, across the lineages of families, across the plunder
and display of the wealth of the world as an adjunct to the imperial enterprise,
across the hidden histories of statued heroes, in the secrecy of private diaries,
even at the centre of the great master-narratives of 'Englishness' like the Two
World Wars, falls the unscripted shadow of the forgotten 'Other'. The first task,
then, is re-defining the nation, re-imagining 'Britishness' or 'Englishness' itself
in a more profoundly inclusive manner. The Brits owe this, not to only us, but
to themselves: for to prepare their own people for success in a global and de-
centred world by continuing to misrepresent Britain as a closed, embattled,
self-sufficient, defensive, 'tight little island' would be fatally to disable them.

This is not only a matter of history. London and other major cities have
been, throughout this century, 'world cities', drawing to themselves the
creative talents of nations far and wide, and standing at the centre of tremen-
dously varied cross-cultural flows and lateral artistic influences. Many distin-
guished practitioners who chose to live and work in Britain — Ronald Moody,
Aubrey Williams, Francis Souza, Avinash Chandra, Anwar Jalal Shemza,
David Medalla, Li Yuan Chia, Frank Bowling, and many others — have been
quietly written out of the record. Not British enough for the Tate, not
International enough for Bankside, I guess. The ways in which the 'modernist'
impulse in western art drew inspiration from what it defined as 'primitive' is
now an art-historical cliché. But the numbers of non-European artists who
played a central part in European, and especially British, modernism, is far less
widely acknowledged. — what Rasheed Araeen called, in his historic
retrospective, 'The (Largely Untold) Other Story' (1989). The existence of major

10 C L R James, 'Popular Art
and The Cultural Tradition',
in *Third Text*, no 10, Spring
1990, pp 3–10.

11 Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate
Enemy*, Oxford, New Delhi,
1983.

'other modernisms', with their own indigenous roots elsewhere, passes without serious attention. The incontestable truth of the observation that 'The search for a new identity expressed in modern forms has been the common denominator of most contemporary art movements in Africa' is, for western curators and art-historians, still a well-kept secret.[12]

Then, secondly, there is the enormous, unprecedented, creative explosion by contemporary practitioners from the so-called 'minority' communities in all the arts (painting, visual arts, photography, film, theatre, literature, dance, music, multi-media) which has marked the last three decades. Unless this work is funded and exhibited, young talent and promise will simply dribble away. And it needs to be said loud and clear that this is not work which is likely immediately to appeal to the new culture-heroes of the art world — the corporate sponsors — who are already in search of their next Monet outing at some prestigious venue. For a time the work of contemporary artists from the minority communities was patronisingly secured within an 'ethnic' enclave, as if only non-European work reflected the cultural idioms in which they were composed — as if only 'we' had 'ethnicities'. However the movement has long ago breached its boundaries and flooded — but only when permitted by the cultural gate-keepers — into the mainstream. Its visibility has depended largely on a few pioneering figures and the efforts of a whole fleet of small, local and community based galleries.

Like the rainbow, this work comes and goes. Major practitioners surface and pass quietly from view into an early and undeserved obscurity. Their work occasionally surfaces in mainstream venues — and has an innovative vitality which much 'indigenous' work lacks. But they cannot be properly 'heritaged'. The critical records, catalogues and memorabilia of this great tide of creative work in the visual arts since the 1980s, for example — from which, one day the histories and critical studies of black diaspora visual culture will be written — existed for many years in boxes in a filing cabinet in Eddie Chambers' bedroom in Bristol before they found a resting place — in AAVAA, the Asian and African Visual Arts Archive, courtesy of The University of East London. No proper archive, no regular exhibitions, no critical apparatus (apart from a few key journals like *Third Text* and the now-defunct *Ten 8*), no definitive histories, no reference books, no comparative materials, no developing scholarship, no passing-on of a tradition of work to younger practitioners and curators, no recognition of achievement amongst the relevant communities... Heritage-less.

Thirdly, there is the record of the migrant experience itself. This is a precious record of the historical formation of a black diaspora in the heart of Europe — probably a once-in-a-life-time event — still *just* within living memory of its participants. Anyone who watched the *Windrush* programmes and listened to their moving and articulate interviews, or saw the images which Autograph (The Association of Black Photographers) helped to research and mount at the Pitshanger Gallery in Ealing or read the first-hand evidence of the political struggles of the period 1940–90 being put together by the unfunded George Padmore series edited by a veteran figure — John LaRose — whose autobiography we await, will know the rich evidence in visual imagery and oral testimonies which is waiting to be consolidated into a major archive.

It needs, of course, to be, supplemented by extensive oral histories, personal accounts, documents and artefacts, from which, alone, 'the black experience' in Britain since the 1950s could be recreated. We know, from a few bold efforts to build the everyday concerns of migrant people into 'daily life' local exhibitions (for example by the adventurous Walsall Museum and Art Gallery) of the rich

12 Salah Hassan, in *Reading The Contemporary: African Art From Theory to Market-Place*, (eds) Olu Oguibe and Okwui Enwezor, Institute of International Visual Arts (inIVA), London, 1999.

and complex details — customs, cuisine, daily habits, family photographs and records, household and religious objects — which remain to be documented in these domestic settings, poised as they are on the edge of and constantly negotiating between different 'worlds'. There is no such systematic work in progress though the Black Cultural Archives with its recent Lottery grant *may* at last be able to make a small start on oral histories. Some selective attempts have been made to do this for some Afro-Caribbean communities. So far as I know, there is very little comparable work as yet on the Asian experience(s). Heritage? *Which Heritage?*

Fourthly, there is the question of those 'traditions of origin', so often deployed to represent minority communities as immured in their 'ethnicity' or differentiated into another species altogether by their 'racialised difference'. These 'traditions' are occasionally on view in performances by visiting companies, framed as an exotic entertainment. But in general terms, the public is deeply uninformed about them. The complexities of practice, interpretation and belief of Hinduism or Islam as world systems of religious belief are virtually a closed book, even to the intelligentsia. The long, highly complex and refined traditions of Indian music or dance, the key texts, poets and novelists, of these great civilisations, the extraordinarily varied cultural history of the Indian sub-continent itself, are beyond the reach of even the well-educated. Equally obscure are the complexities of tribe, language and ethnicity in sub-Saharan Africa.

These basic building blocks of the new global universe we inhabit confront a blank and uncomprehending provincial 'Englishness' as if fitfully glimpsed from outer space. Beyond sea, sun, sand, reggae and ganja, the fantastic intricacies of the 'transculturation' of European, African and Indian elements over centuries, which have produced the variety and vibrancy of Caribbean 'creole' cultures , is another Great Unknown. Latin America with its highly evolved Hispanic and Amerindian cultures may well be less familiar than the surface of Mars. The 'peculiarity' of Afro-Caribbeans — that they are simultaneously deeply familiar because they have lived with the British for so long, and ineradicably different because they are black — is regarded by most of the British (who have never been asked by their 'Heritage' to spare it a thought) as culturally inexplicable. Here, the National Curriculum and the truncated remnant of History as a discipline which remains, with only its most simplistic relationship to notions of 'Heritage' intact, has done irreparable damage.

And yet many of the creative talents of these communities are still 'framed' within a familiarity with the practices of these richly-traditional arts, so deeply are they interwoven with the textures of a lived culture itself; and even new and experimental work draws on their repertoires, idioms and languages of representation. Unless the younger generation has access to these cultural repertoires and can understand and practice them, to some extent at least, from the inside, they will lack the resources — the cultural capital — of their own 'heritage', as a base from which to engage other traditions. They will in effect be culturally 'monolingual' if not silenced — literally, deprived of the capacity to speak — in a world which requires us all to be or become culturally bi- if not multi-lingual.

There is no intrinsic contradiction between the preservation and presentation of 'other cultures' and my fifth point — the engagement with the production of new diasporic forms. The popular culture of our society especially has been transformed by the rich profusion of contemporary hybrid or 'cross-over' cultural forms — in music, dance, street-style, fashion, film,

multi-media —which mark the production of 'the new' and the transgressive alongside the traditional and the 'preservation of the past'. Here, 'modernity' (or postmodernity) is not waiting on some authority to 'permit' or sanction this exploration of creativity in contemporary media and form. This is the leading-edge cultural phenomenon of our time — the 'multi' in multicultural, the 'Cool' in 'Cool Britannia'. For a time, black Afro-Caribbeans were in the vanguard of these avant-garde cultural practices, like cultural navigators crossing without passports between ragga, jungle, scratch, rap and electro-funk. In recent years, they have been decisively joined by the 'disorienting rhythms' of Asian youth. Perhaps this aspect of cultural production needs no 'archive' or 'heritage'. But it is proceeding unrecorded and unanalysed, consigned to the ephemera of its day — expendable. Yet it represents one of the most important cultural developments of our time: the stakes which 'the margins' have in modernity, the local-in-the-global, the pioneering of a new cosmopolitan, vernacular, post-national, global sensibility.

What I have offered is a wholly inadequate sketch — leaving out whole tracts of activity and countless examples aside. The account is inevitably skewed by my own interests and preoccupations. The detail does not matter. What matters is some greater clarity about 'the big picture' . I have tried to suggest not only *what* but *why* the question of 'The Heritage' is of such timely and critical importance for our folks at this time. 'British' most of us were, at one time, but that was long ago and, besides, as Shakespeare said, 'the wench is dead'. 'English' we cannot be. But tied in our fates and fortunes with 'the others' — while steadfastly refusing to have to *become* 'other' to belong — we do, after all, have a stake, an investment, in this phase of globalisation, in what I might call 'the post-nation'. But only if it can be re-imagined — re-invented to include us. That is the bet, the wager, the gamble we are here to discuss.