2. Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities

STUART HALL

IN MY PREVIOUS TALK, I TRIED TO OPEN OUT THE QUESTIONS about the local and the global from their somewhat closed, somewhat over-integrated, and somewhat over-systematized formulations. My argument was that we need to think about the processes which are now revealing themselves in terms of the local and the global, in those two spaces, but we also need to think of these as more contradictory formulations than we usually do. Unless we do, I was concerned that we are likely to be disabled in trying to think those ideas politically.

I was therefore attempting — certainly not to close out the questions of power and the questions of appropriation which I think are lodged at the very center of any notion of a shift between the dispositions of the local and the global in the emergence of a cultural politics on a world scale — but rather to conceptualize that within a more open-ended and contingent cultural politics.

At the end of the talk, however, I was obliged to ask if there is a politics, indeed, a counter-politics of the local. If there are new globals and new locals at work, who are the new subjects of this politics of position? What conceivable identities could they appear in? Can identity itself be re-thought and re-lived, in and through difference?

It is this question which is what I want to address here. I have called it "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities" and

what I am going to do first is to return to the question of identity and try to look at some of the ways in which we are beginning to re-conceptualize that within contemporary theoretical discourses. I shall then go back from that theoretical consideration to the ground of a cultural politics. Theory is always a detour on the way to something more important.

I return to the question of identity because the question of identity has returned to us; at any rate, it has returned to us in British politics and British cultural politics today. It has not returned in the same old place; it is not the traditional conception of identity. It is not going back to the old identity politics of the 1960s social movements. But it is, nevertheless, a kind of return to some of the ground which we used to think in that way. I will make a comment at the very end about what is the nature of this theoretical-political work which seems to lose things on the one side and then recover them in a different way from another side, and then have to think them out all over again just as soon as they get rid of them. What is this never-ending theoretical work which is constantly losing and regaining concepts? I talk about identity here as a point at which, on the one hand, a whole set of new theoretical discourses intersect and where, on the other, a whole new set of cultural practices emerge. I want to begin by trying, very briefly, to map some of those points of intersection theoretically, and then to look at some of their political consequences.

The old logics of identity are ones with which we are extremely familiar, either philosophically, or psychologically. Philosophically, the old logic of identity which many people have critiqued in the form of the old Cartesian subject was often thought in terms of the origin of being itself, the ground of action. Identity is the ground of action. And we have in more recent times a psychological discourse of the self which is very similar: a notion of the continuous, self-sufficient, developmental, unfolding, inner dialectic of selfhood. We are never quite there, but always on our way to it, and when we get there, we will at last know exactly who it is we are.

Now this logic of identity is very important in a whole range of political, theoretical and conceptual discourses. I am interested in it also as a kind of existential reality because I think the logic of the language of identity is extremely important to our own self-conceptions. It contains the notion of the true self, some real self inside there, hiding inside the husks of all the false selves that we present

to the rest of the world. It is a kind of guarantee of authenticity. Not until we get really inside and hear what the true self has to say do we know what we are "really saying."

There is something guaranteed about that logic or discourse of identity. It gives us a sense of depth, out there, and in here. It is spatially organized. Much of our discourse of the inside and the outside, of the self and other, of the individual and society, of the subject and the object, are grounded in that particular logic of identity. And it helps us, I would say, to sleep well at night.

Increasingly, I think one of the main functions of concepts is that they give us a good night's rest. Because what they tell us is that there is a kind of stable, only very slowly-changing ground inside the hectic upsets, discontinuities and ruptures of history. Around us history is constantly breaking in unpredictable ways but we, somehow, go on being the same.

That logic of identity is, for good or ill, finished. It's at an end for a whole range of reasons. It's at an end in the first instance because of some of the great de-centerings of modern thought. One could discuss this very elaborately — I could spend the rest of the time talking about it but I just want to slot the ideas into place very quickly by using some names as reference points.

It is not possible to hold to that logic of identity after Marx because although Marx does talk about man (he doesn't talk about women making history but perhaps they were slotted in, as the nineteenth century so often slotted women in under some other masculine title), about men and women making history but under conditions which are not of their own choosing. And having lodged either the individual or collective subject always within historical practices, we as individuals or as groups cannot be, and can never have been, the sole origin or authors of those practices. That is a profound historical de-centering in terms of social practice.

If that was not strong enough, knocking us sideways as it were, Freud came knocking from underneath, like Hamlet's ghost, and said, "While you're being decentered from left to right like that, let me decenter you from below a bit, and remind you that this stable language of identity is also set from the psychic life about which you don't know very much, and can't know very much. And which you can't know very much by simply taking thought about it: the great continent of the unconscious which speaks most clearly when it's slipping rather than when it's saying what it means." This makes the

self begin to seem a pretty fragile thing.

Now, buffeted on one side by Marx and upset from below by Freud, just as it opens its mouth to say, "Well, at least I speak so therefore I must *be* something," Saussure and linguistics comes along and says "That's not true either, you know. Language was there before you. You can only say something by positioning yourself in the discourse. The tale tells the teller, the myth tells the myth-maker, etc. The enunciation is always from some subject who is positioned by and in discourse." That upsets that. Philosophically, one comes to the end of any kind of notion of a perfect transparent continuity between our language and something out there which can be called the real, or the truth, without any quotation marks.

These various upsets, these disturbances in the continuity of the notion of the subject, and the stability of identity, are indeed, what modernity is like. It is not, incidentally, modernity itself. That has an older, and longer history. But this is the beginning of modernity as trouble. Not modernity as enlightenment and progress, but modernity as a problem.

It is also upset by other enormous historical transformations which do not have, and cannot be given, a single name, but without which the story could not be told. In addition to the three or four that I have quoted, we could mention the relativisation of the Western narrative itself, the Western episteme, by the rise of other cultures to prominence, and fifthly, the displacement of the masculine gaze.

Now, the question of trying to come to terms with the notion of identity in the wake of those theoretical decenterings is an extremely problematic enterprise. But that is not all that has been disturbing the settled logic of identity. Because as I was saying earlier when I was talking about the relative decline, or erosion, the instability of the nation-state, of the self-sufficiency of national economies and consequently, of national identities as points of reference, there has simultaneously been a fragmentation and erosion of collective social identity.

I mean here the great collective social identities which we thought of as large-scale, all-encompassing, homogenous, as unified collective identities, which could be spoken about almost as if they were singular actors in their own right but which, indeed, placed, positioned, stabilized, and allowed us to understand and read, almost as a code, the imperatives of the individual self: the great collective social identities of class, of race, of nation, of gender, and of the West.

These collective social identities were formed in, and stabilized by, the huge, long-range historical processes which have produced the modern world, just as the theories and conceptualizations that I just referred to very briefly are what constituted modernity as a form of self-reflection. They were staged and stabilized by industrialization, by capitalism, by urbanization, by the formation of the world market, by the social and the sexual division of labor, by the great punctuation of civil and social life into the public and the private; by the dominance of the nation state, and by the identification between Westernization and the notion of modernity itself.

I spoke in my previous talk about the importance, to any sense of where we are placed in the world, of the national economy, the nation-state and of national cultural identities. Let me say a word here about the great class identities which have stabilized so much of our understanding of the immediate and not-so-immediate past.

Class was the main locator of social position, that which organized our understanding of the main grid and group relations between social groups. They linked us to material life through the economy itself. They provided the code through which we read one another. They provided the codes through which we understood each others' languages. They provided, of course, the notions of collective action itself, that which would unlock politics. Now as I tried to say previously, the great collective social identities rise and fall and it is almost as difficult to know whether they are more dangerous when they are falling than when they are rising.

These great collective social identities have not disappeared. Their purchase and efficacy in the real world that we all occupy is ever present. But the fact is that none of them is, any longer, in either the social, historical or epistemological place where they were in our conceptualizations of the world in the recent past. They cannot any longer be thought in the same homogenous form. We are as attentive to their inner differences, their inner contradictions, their segmentations and their fragmentations as we are to their already-completed homogeneity, their unity and so on.

They are not already-produced stabilities and totalities in the world. They do not operate like totalities. If they have a relationship to our identities, cultural and individual, they do not any longer have that suturing, structuring, or stabilizing force, so that we can know what we are simply by adding up the sum of our positions in relation to them. They do not give us the code of identity as I think they

did in the past.

It is a moot point by anybody who takes this argument directly on the pulses, as to whether they ever functioned in that way. Perhaps they never functioned in that way. This may be, indeed, what the narrative of the West is like: the notion that we told of the story we told ourselves, about their functioning in that way. We know that the great homogenous function of the collective social class is extremely difficult for any good historian to actually lay his or her finger on. It keeps disappearing just over the horizon, like the organic community.

You know the story about the organic community? The organic community was just always in the childhood you have left behind. Raymond Williams has a wonderful essay on these people, a range of social critics who say you can measure the present in relation to the past, and you know the past because back then it was much more organic and integrated. When was "back then"? Well, when I was a child, there was always some adult saying, "When I was a child, it was much more integrated." And so, eventually, some of these great collectivities are rather like those people who have an activity of historical nostalgia going on in their retrospective reconstructions. We always reconstructed them more essentially, more homogenously, more unified, less contradictorily than they ever were, once you actually know anything about them.

That is one argument. Whatever the past was like, they may have all marched forth, unified and dictating history forward, for many decades in the past. They sure aren't doing it now.

Now as I have said, the question of how to begin to think questions of identity, either social or individual, not in the wake of their disappearance but in the wake of their erosion, of their fading, of their not having the kind of purchase and comprehensive explanatory power they had before, that is what it seems to me has gone. They used to be thought of — and it is a wonderfully gendered definition — as "master concepts," the "master concepts" of class.

It is not tolerable any longer to have a "master concept" like that. Once it loses its "master" status its explanatory reach weakens, becomes more problematic. We can think of some things in relation to questions of class, though always recognizing its real historical complexity. Yet there are certain other things it simply will not, or cannot, decipher or explain. And this brings us face to face with the increasing social diversity and plurality, the technologies of the self

which characterize the modern world in which we live.

Well, we might say, where does this leave any discourse on social identity at all? Haven't I now abolished it from about as many sides as I could think of? As has been true in theoretical work over the last twenty years, the moment a concept disappears through the left hand door, it returns through the right hand window, but not in quite the same place. There is a wonderful moment in Althusser's text where he says "I can now abolish the notion of ideas." And he actually writes the word "ideas" and draws a line through it to convince himself we need never use the word again.

In exactly the same way, the old discourse of the subject was abolished, put in a deep container, concrete poured over it, with a half-life of a million years. We will never look at it again, when, bloody hell, in about five minutes, we are talking about subjectivity, and the subject in discourse, and it has come roaring back in. So it is not, I think, surprising that, having lost one sense of identity, we find we need it. Where are we to find it?

One of the places that we have to go to is certainly in the contemporary languages which have rediscovered but repositioned the notion of the subject, of subjectivity. That is, principally, and preeminently, the languages of feminism and of psychoanalysis.

I do not want to go through that argument but I want to say something about how one might begin to think questions of identity from this new set of theoretical spaces. And I have to do this programmatically. I have to state what I think, from this position, identity is and is not as a sort of protocol, although each one could take me a very long time.

It makes us aware that identities are never completed, never finished; that they are always as subjectivity itself is, in process. That itself is a pretty difficult task. Though we have always known it a little bit, we have always thought about ourselves as getting more like ourselves everyday. But that is a sort of Hegelian notion, of going forward to meet that which we always were. I want to open that process up considerably. Identity is always in the process of formation.

Secondly, identity means, or connotes, the process of identification, of saying that this here is the same as that, or we are the same together, in this respect. But something we have learnt from the whole discussion of identification, in feminism and psychoanalysis, is the degree to which that structure of identification is always constructed through ambivalence. Always constructed through splitting.

Splitting between that which one is, and that which is the other. The attempt to expel the other to the other side of the universe is always compounded by the relationships of love and desire. This is a different language from the language of, as it were, the Others who are completely different from oneself.

This is the Other that belongs inside one. This is the Other that one can only know from the place from which one stands. This is the self as it is inscribed in the gaze of the Other. And this notion which breaks down the boundaries, between outside and inside, between those who belong and those who do not, between those whose histories have been written and those whose histories they have depended on but whose histories cannot be spoken. That the unspoken silence in between that which can be spoken is the only way to reach for the whole history. There is no other history except to take the absences and the silences along with what can be spoken. Everything that can be spoken is on the ground of the enormous voices that have not, or cannot yet be heard.

This doubleness of discourse, this necessity of the Other to the self, this inscription of identity in the look of the other finds its articulation profoundly in the ranges of a given text. And I want to cite one which I am sure you know but won't remember necessarily, though it is a wonderful, majestic moment in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, when he describes himself as a young Antillean, face to face with the white Parisian child and her mother. And the child pulls the hand of the mother and says, "Look, Mama, a black man." And he said, "For the first time, I knew who I was. For the first time, I felt as if I had been simultaneously exploded in the gaze, in the violent gaze of the other, and at the same time, recomposed as another."

The notion that identity in that sense could be told as two histories, one over here, one over there, never having spoken to one another, never having anything to do with one another, when translated from the psychoanalytic to the historical terrain, is simply not tenable any longer in an increasingly globalized world. It is just not tenable any longer.

People like me who came to England in the 1950s have been there for centuries; symbolically, we have been there for centuries. I was coming home. I am the sugar at the bottom of the English cup of tea. I am the sweet tooth, the sugar plantations that rotted generations of English children's teeth. There are thousands of others beside me that are, you know, the cup of tea itself. Because they don't grow it in

Lancashire, you know. Not a single tea plantation exists within the United Kingdom. This is the symbolization of English identity — I mean, what does anybody in the world know about an English person except that they can't get through the day without a cup of tea?

Where does it come from? Ceylon — Sri Lanka, India. That is the outside history that is inside the history of the English. There is no English history without that other history. The notion that identity has to do with people that look the same, feel the same, call themselves the same, is nonsense. As a process, as a narrative, as a discourse, it is always told from the position of the Other.

What is more is that identity is always in part a narrative, always in part a kind of representation. It is always within representation. Identity is not something which is formed outside and then we tell stories about it. It is that which is narrated in one's own self. I will say something about that in terms of my own narration of identity in a moment — you know, that wonderful moment where Richard II says, "Come let us sit down and tell stories about the death of kings." Well, I am going to tell you a story and ask you to tell one about yourself.

We have the notion of identity as contradictory, as composed of more than one discourse, as composed always across the silences of the other, as written in and through ambivalence and desire. These are extremely important ways of trying to think an identity which is not a sealed or closed totality.

Now we have within theory some interesting ways of trying to think difference in this way. We have learnt quite a lot about sexual difference in feminist writers. And we have learnt a lot about questions of difference from people like Derrida. I do think that there are some important ways in which Derrida's use of the notion of the difference between "difference" and "differance," spelt with an "a," is significant. The "a," the anomolous "a" in Derrida's spelling of differance, which he uses as a kind of marker that sets up a disturbance in our settled understanding of translation of our concept of difference is very important, because that little "a," disturbing as it is, which you can hardly hear when spoken, sets the word in motion to new meanings yet without obscuring the trace of its other meanings in its past.

His sense of "differance," as one writer has put it, remains suspended between the two French verbs "to differ" and "to defer,"

both of which contribute to its textual force, neither of which can fully capture its meaning. Language depends on difference, as Saussure has shown: the structure of distinctive propositions which make up its economy. But where Derrida breaks new ground is in the extent to which "differ" shades into "defer."

Now this notion of a differance is not simply a set of binary, reversible oppositions; thinking sexual difference not simply in terms of the fixed opposition of male and female, but of all those anomolous sliding positions ever in process, in between which opens up the continent of sexuality to increasing points of disturbance. That is what the odyssey of difference now means in the sense in which I am trying to use it.

That is about difference, and you might ask the question, where does identity come in to this infinite postponement of meaning that is lodged in Derrida's notion of the trace of something which still retains its roots in one meaning while it is, as it were, moving to another, encapsulating another, with endless shiftings, slidings, of that signifier?

The truth is that Derrida does not help us as much as he might here in thinking about the relationship between identity and difference. And the appropriators of Derrida in America, especially in American philosophical and literary thought, help us even less. By taking Derrida's notion of differance, precisely right out of the tension between the two textual connotations, "defer" and "differ," and lodging it only in the endless play of difference, Derrida's politics is in that very moment uncoupled.

From that moment unrolls that enormous proliferation of extremely sophisticated, playful deconstruction which is a kind of endless academic game. Anybody can do it, and on and on it rolls. No signifier ever stops; no-one is ever responsible for any meaning; all traces are effaced. The moment anything is lodged, it is immediately erased. Everybody has a great time; they go to conferences and do it, as it were. The very notion of the politics which requires the holding of the tension between that which is both placed and not stitched in place, by the word which is always in motion between positions, which requires us to think both positionality and movement, both together, not one and the other, not playing with difference, or "finding nights to rest under" identity, but living in the tension of identity and difference, is uncoupled.

We have then to go on thinking beyond that mere playfulness into

the really hard game which the play of difference actually means to us historically. For if signification depends upon the endless repositioning of its differential terms, meaning in any specific instance depends on the contingent and arbitrary stop, the necessary break. It is a very simple point.

Language is part of an infinite semiosis of meaning. To say anything, I have got to shut up. I have to construct a single sentence. I know that the next sentence will open the infinite semiosis of meaning again, so I will take it back. So each stop is not a natural break. It does not say, "I'm about to end a sentence and that will be the truth." It understands that it is contingent. It is a positioning. It is the cut of ideology which, across the semiosis of language, constitutes meaning. But you have to get into that game or you will never say anything at all.

You think I'm joking. I know graduate students of mine who got into this theoretical fix in the seventies, one enormous French theoretician after another, throwing them aside, until they could not commit a single word to paper at all because to say anything was to open oneself to the endless sliding of the signifier. So if they said, what I think Derrida really, in — really — ooh — start again, yes, start again.

Meaning is in that sense a wager. You take a bet. Not a bet on truth, but a bet on saying something. You have to be positioned somewhere in order to speak. Even if you are positioned in order to unposition yourself, even if you want to take it back, you have to come into language to get out of it. There is no other way. That is the paradox of meaning.

To think it only in terms of difference and not in terms of the relational position between the suturing, the arbitrary, overdetermined cut of language which says something which is instantly opened again to the play of meaning; not to think of meaning always, in supplement, that there is always something left over, always something which goes on escaping the precision; the attempt of language to code, to make precise, to fix, to halt, etc.; not to think it in that way is to lose hold of the two necessary ends of the chain to which the new notion of identity has to be conceptualized.

Now I can turn to questions of politics. In this conception of an identity which has to be thought through difference, is there a general politics of the local to bring to bear against the great, over-riding, powerful, technologically-based, massively-invested unrolling of global processes which I was trying to describe in my previous talk

which tend to mop up all differences, and occlude those differences? Which means, as it were, they are different — but it doesn't make any difference that they are different, they're just different.

No, there is no general politics. I have nothing in the kitbag. There is nothing I can pull out. But I have a little local politics to tell you about. It may be that all we have, in bringing the politics of the local to bear against the global, is a lot of little local politics. I do not know if that is true or not. But I would like to spend some time later talking about the cultural politics of the local, and of this new notion of identity. For it is in this new frame that identity has come back into cultural politics in Britain. The formation of the Black diasporas in the period of post-war migration in the fifties and sixties has transformed English social, economic and political life.

In the first generations, the majority of people had the same illusion that I did: that I was about to go back home. That may have been because everybody always asked me: when was I going back home? We did think that we were just going to get back on the boat; we were here for a temporary sojourn. By the seventies, it was perfectly clear that we were not there for a temporary sojourn. Some people were going to stay and then the politics of racism really emerged.

Now one of the main reactions against the politics of racism in Britain was what I would call "Identity Politics One," the first form of identity politics. It had to do with the constitution of some defensive collective identity against the practices of racist society. It had to do with the fact that people were being blocked out of and refused an identity and identification within the majority nation, having to find some other roots on which to stand. Because people have to find some ground, some place, some position on which to stand. Blocked out of any access to an English or British identity, people had to try to discover who they were. This is the moment I defined in my previous talk. It is the crucial moment of the rediscovery or the search for roots.

In the course of the search for roots, one discovered not only where one came from, one began to speak the language of that which is home in the genuine sense, that other crucial moment which is the recovery of lost histories. The histories that have never been told about ourselves that we could not learn in schools, that were not in any books, and that we had to recover.

This is an enormous act of what I want to call imaginary political

re-identification, re-territorialization and re-identification, without which a counter-politics could not have been constructed. I do not know an example of any group or category of the people of the margins, of the locals, who have been able to mobilize themselves, socially, culturally, economically, politically in the last twenty or twenty-five years who have not gone through some such series of moments in order to resist their exclusion, their marginalization. That is how and where the margins begin to speak. The margins begin to contest, the locals begin to come to representation.

The identity which that whole, enormous political space produced in Britain, as it did elsewhere, was the category Black. I want to say something about this category which we all now so take for granted. I will tell you some stories about it.

I was brought up in a lower middle class family in Jamaica. I left there in the early fifties to go and study in England. Until I left, though I suppose 98 per cent of the Jamaican population is either Black or colored in one way or another, I had never ever heard anybody either call themselves, or refer to anybody else as "Black." Never. I heard a thousand other words. My grandmother could differentiate about fifteen different shades between light brown and dark brown. When I left Jamaica, there was a beauty contest in which the different shades of women were graded according to different trees, so that there was Miss Mahogany, Miss Walnut, etc.

People think of Jamaica as a simple society. In fact, it had the most complicated color stratification system in the world. Talk about practical semioticians; anybody in my family could compute and calculate anybody's social status by grading the particular quality of their hair versus the particular quality of the family they came from and which street they lived in, including physiognomy, shading, etc. You could trade off one characteristic against another. Compared with that, the normal class stratification system is absolute child's play.

But the word "Black" was never uttered. Why? No Black people around? Lots of them, thousands and thousands of them. Black is not a question of pigmentation. The Black I'm talking about is a historical category, a political category, a cultural category. In our language, at certain historical moments, we have to use the signifier. We have to create an equivalence between how people look and what their histories are. Their histories are in the past, inscribed in their skins. But it is not because of their skins that they are Black in their heads.

I heard Black for the first time in the wake of the Civil Rights

movement, in the wake of the de-colonization and nationalistic struggles. Black was created as a political category in a certain historical moment. It was created as a consequence of certain symbolic and ideological struggles. We said, "You have spent five, six, seven hundred years elaborating the symbolism through which Black is a negative factor. Now I don't want another term. I want that term, that negative one, that's the one I want. I want a piece of that action. I want to take it out of the way in which it has been articulated in religious discourse, in ethnographic discourse, in literary discourse, in visual discourse. I want to pluck it out of its articulation and re-articulate it in a new way."

In that very struggle is a change of consciousness, a change of self-recognition, a new process of identification, the emergence into visibility of a new subject. A subject that was always there, but emerging, historically.

You know that story, but I do not know if you know the degree to which that story is true of other parts of the Americas. It happened in Jamaica in the 1970s. In the 1970s, for the first time, Black people recognized themselves as Black. It was the most profound cultural revolution in the Caribbean, much greater than any political revolution they have ever had. That cultural revolution in Jamaica has never been matched by anything as far-reaching as the politics. The politics has never caught up with it.

You probably know the moment when the leaders of both major political parties in Jamaica tried to grab hold of Bob Marley's hand. They were trying to put their hands on Black; Marley stood for Black, and they were trying to get a piece of the action. If only he would look in their direction he would have legitimated them. It was not politics legitimating culture, it was culture legitimating politics.

Indeed, the truth is I call myself all kinds of other things. When I went to England, I wouldn't have called myself an immigrant either, which is what we were all known as. It was not until I went back home in the early 1960s that my mother who, as a good middle-class colored Jamaican woman, hated all Black people, (you know, that is the truth) said to me, "I hope they don't think you're an immigrant over there."

And I said, "Well, I just migrated. I've just emigrated." At that very moment, I thought, that's exactly what I am. I've just left home — for good.

I went back to England and I became what I'd been named. I had

been hailed as an immigrant. I had discovered who I was. I started to tell myself the story of my migration.

Then Black erupted and people said, "Well, you're from the Caribbean, in the midst of this, identifying with what's going on, the Black population in England. You're Black."

At that very moment, my son, who was two and half, was learning the colors. I said to him, transmitting the message at last, "You're Black." And he said, "No. I'm brown." And I said, "Wrong referent. Mistaken concreteness, philosophical mistake. I'm not talking about your paintbox, I'm talking about your head." That is something different. The question of learning, learning to be Black. Learning to come into an identification.

What that moment allows to happen are things which were not there before. It is not that what one then does was hiding away inside as my true self. There wasn't any bit of that true self in there before that identity was learnt. Is that, then, the stable one, is that where we are? Is that where people are?

I will tell you something now about what has happened to that Black identity as a matter of cultural politics in Britain. That notion was extremely important in the anti-racist struggles of the 1970s: the notion that people of diverse societies and cultures would all come to Britain in the fifties and sixties as part of that huge wave of migration from the Caribbean, East Africa, the Asian subcontinent, Pakistan, Bangladesh, from different parts of India, and all identified themselves politically as Black.

What they said was, "We may be different actual color skins but vis-a-vis the social system, vis-a-vis the political system of racism, there is more that unites us than what divides us." People begin to ask "Are you from Jamaica, are you from Trinidad, are you from Barbados?" You can just see the process of divide and rule. "No. Just address me as I am. I know you can't tell the difference so just call me Black. Try using that. We all look the same, you know. Certainly can't tell the difference. Just call me Black. Black identity." Anti-racism in the seventies was only fought and only resisted in the community, in the localities, behind the slogan of a Black politics and the Black experience.

In that moment, the enemy was ethnicity. The enemy had to be what we called "multi-culturalism." Because multi-culturalism was precisely what I called previously "the exotic." The exotica of difference. Nobody would talk about racism but they were perfectly pre-

pared to have "International Evenings," when we would all come and cook our native dishes, sing our own native songs and appear in our own native costume. It is true that some people, some ethnic minorities in Britain, do have indigenous, very beautiful indigenous forms of dress. I didn't. I had to rummage in the dressing-up box to find mine. I have been de-racinated for four hundred years. The last thing I am going to do is to dress up in some native Jamaican costume and appear in the spectacle of multi-culturalism.

Has the moment of the struggle organized around this constructed Black identity gone away? It certainly has not. So long as that society remains in its economic, political, cultural, and social relations in a racist way to the variety of Black and Third World peoples in its midst, and it continues to do so, that struggle remains.

Why then don't I just talk about a collective Black identity replacing the other identities? I can't do that either and I'll tell you why.

The truth is that in relation to certain things, the question of Black, in Britain, also has its silences. It had a certain way of silencing the very specific experiences of Asian people. Because though Asian people could identify, politically, in the struggle against racism, when they came to using their own culture as the resources of resistance, when they wanted to write out of their own experience and reflect on their own position, when they wanted to create, they naturally created within the histories of the languages, the cultural tradition, the positions of people who came from a variety of different historical backgrounds. And just as Black was the cutting edge of a politics vis-a-vis one kind of enemy, it could also, if not understood properly, provide a kind of silencing in relation to another. These are the costs, as well as the strengths, of trying to think of the notion of Black as an essentialism.

What is more, there were not only Asian people of color, but also Black people who did not identify with that collective identity. So that one was aware of the fact that always, as one advanced to meet the enemy, with a solid front, the differences were raging behind. Just shut the doors, and conduct a raging argument to get the troops together, to actually hit the other side.

A third way in which Black was silencing was to silence some of the other dimensions that were positioning individuals and groups in exactly the same way. To operate exclusively through an unreconstructed conception of Black was to reconstitute the authority of Black masculinity over Black women, about which, as I am sure you

know, there was also, for a long time, an unbreakable silence about which the most militant Black men would not speak.

To organize across the discourses of Blackness and masculinity, of race and gender, and forget the way in which, at the same moment, Blacks in the under class were being positioned in class terms, in similar work situations, exposed to the same deprivations of poor jobs and lack of promotion that certain members of the white working class suffered, was to leave out the critical dimension of positioning.

What then does one do with the powerful mobilizing identity of the Black experience and of the Black community? Blackness as a political identity in the light of the understanding of any identity is always complexly composed, always historically constructed. It is never in the same place but always positional. One always has to think about the negative consequences of the positionality. You cannot, as it were, reverse the discourses of any identity simply by turning them upside down. What is it like to live, by attempting to valorise and defeat the marginalization of the variety of Black subjects and to really begin to recover the lost histories of a variety of Black experiences, while at the same time recognizing the end of any essential Black subject?

That is the politics of living identity through difference. It is the politics of recognizing that all of us are composed of multiple social identities, not of one. That we are all complexly constructed through different categories, of different antagonisms, and these may have the effect of locating us socially in multiple positions of marginality and subordination, but which do not yet operate on us in exactly the same way. It is also to recognize that any counter-politics of the local which attempts to organize people through their diversity of identifications has to be a struggle which is conducted positionally. It is the beginning of anti-racism, anti-sexism, and anti-classicism as a war of positions, as the Gramscian notion of the war of position.

The notion of the struggles of the local as a war of positions is a very difficult kind of politics to get one's head around; none of us knows how to conduct it. None of us even knows whether it can be conducted. Some of us have had to say there is no other political game so we must find a way of playing this one.

Why is it difficult? It has no guarantees. Because identifications change and shift, they can be worked on by political and economic forces outside of us and they can be articulated in different ways.

There is absolutely no political guarantee already inscribed in an identity. There is no reason on God's earth why the film is good because a Black person made it. There is absolutely no guarantee that all the politics will be right because a woman does it.

There are no political guarantees of that kind. It is not a free-floating open space because history has lodged on it the powerful, tendential organization of a past. We bear the traces of a past, the connections of the past. We cannot conduct this kind of cultural politics without returning to the past but it is never a return of a direct and literal kind. The past is not waiting for us back there to recoup our identities against. It is always retold, rediscovered, reinvented. It has to be narrativized. We go to our own pasts through history, through memory, through desire, not as a literal fact.

It is a very important example. Some work has been done, both in feminist history, in Black history, and in working class history recently, which recover the oral testimonies of people who, for a very long time, from the viewpoint of the canon, and the authority of the historian, have not been considered to be history-makers at all. That is a very important moment. But it is not possible to use oral histories and testimonies, as if they are just literally, the truth. They have also to be read. They are also stories, positionings, narratives. You are bringing new narratives into play but you cannot mistake them for some "real," back there, by which history can be measured.

There is no guarantee of authenticity like that in history. One is ever afterwards in the narrativization of the self and of one's histories. Just as in trying to conduct cultural politics as a war of positions, one is always in the strategy of hegemony. Hegemony is not the same thing as incorporating everybody, of making everybody the same, though nine-tenths of the people who have marginally read Gramsci think that that is what he means. Gramsci uses the notion of hegemony precisely to counteract the notion of incorporation.

Hegemony is not the disappearence or destruction of difference. It is the construction of a collective will through difference. It is the articulation of differences which do not disappear. The subaltern class does not mistake itself for people who were born with silver spoons in their mouths. They know they are still second on the ladder, somewhere near the bottom. People are not cultural dopes. They are not waiting for the moment when, like an overnight conversion, false consciousness will fall from their eyes, the scales will fall away, and they will suddenly discover who they are.

They know something about who they are. If they engage in another project it is because it has interpolated them, hailed them, and established some point of identification with them. It has brought them into the historical project. And that notion of a politics which, as it were, increasingly is able to address people through the multiple identities which they have — understanding that those identities do not remain the same, that they are frequently contradictory, that they cross-cut one another, that they tend to locate us differently at different moments, conducting politics in the light of the contingent, in the face of the contingent — is the only political game that the locals have left at their disposal, in my view.

If they are waiting for a politics of manoeuvre, when all the locals, in every part of the world, will all stand up at the same moment and go in the same direction, and roll back the tide of the global, in one great historical activity, it is not going to happen. I do not believe it any more; I think it is a dream. In order to conduct the politics really we have to live outside of the dream, to wake up, to grow up, to come into the world of contradiction. We have to come into the world of politics. There is no other space to stand in.

Out of that notion some of the most exciting cultural work is now being done in England. Third generation young Black men and women know they come from the Caribbean, know that they are Black, know that they are British. They want to speak from all three identities. They are not prepared to give up any one of them.They will contest the Thatcherite notion of Englishness, because they say this Englishness is Black. They will contest the notion of Blackness because they want to make a differentiation between people who are Black from one kind of society and people who are Black from another. Because they need to know that difference, that difference that makes a difference in how they write their poetry, make their films, how they paint. It makes a difference. It is inscribed in their creative work. They need it as a resource. They are all those identities together. They are making astonishing cultural work, the most important work in the visual arts. Some of the most important work in film and photography and nearly all the most important work in popular music is coming from this new recognition of identity that I am speaking about.

Very little of that work is visible elsewhere but some of you have seen, though you may not have recognized, the outer edge of it. Some of you, for example, may have seen a film made by Stephen

Freers and Hanif Kureishi, called *My Beautiful Laundrette*. This was originally made as a television film for local distribution only, and shown once at the Edinburgh Festival where it received an enormous reception. If you have seen *My Beautiful Laundrette* you will know that it is the most transgressive text there is. Anybody who is Black, who tries to identify it, runs across the fact that the central characters of this narrative are two gay men. What is more, anyone who wants to separate the identities into their two clearly separate points will discover that one of these Black gay men is white and one of these Black gay men is brown. Both of them are struggling in Thatcher's Britain. One of them has an uncle who is a Pakistani landlord who is throwing Black people out of the window.

This is a text that nobody likes. Everybody hates it. You go to it looking for what are called "positive images" and there are none. There aren't any positive images like that with whom one can, in a simple way, identify. Because as well as the politics — and there is certainly a politics in that and in Kureishi's other film, but it is not a politics which invites easy identification — it has a politics which is grounded on the complexity of identifications which are at work.

I will read you something which Hanif Kureishi said about the question of responding to his critics who said, "Why don't you tell us good stories about ourselves, as well as good/bad stories? Why are your stories mixed about ourselves?" He spoke about the difficult moral position of the writer from an oppressed or persecuted community and the relation of that writing to the rest of the society. He said it is a relatively new one in England but it will arise more and more as British writers with a colonial heritage and from a colonial or marginal past start to declare themselves.

"There is sometimes," he said, "too simple a demand for positive images. Positive images sometimes require cheering fictions — the writer as Public Relations Officer. And I'm glad to say that the more I looked at *My Beautiful Laundrette*, the less positive images I could see. If there is to be a serious attempt to understand present-day Britain with its mix of races and colors, its hysteria and despair, then writing about it has to be complex. It can't apologize, or idealize. It can't sentimentalize. It can't attempt to represent any one group as having the total, exclusive, essential monopoly on virtue.

A jejune protest or parochial literature, be it black, gay or feminist, is in the long run no more politically effective than works which are merely public relations. What we need now, in this position, at this

time, is imaginative writing that gives us a sense of the shifts and the difficulties within our society as a whole.

If contemporary writing which emerges from oppressed groups ignores the central concerns and major conflicts of the larger society, and if these are willing simply to accept themselves as marginal or enclave literatures, they will automatically designate themselves as permanently minor, as a sub-genre. They must not allow themselves now to be rendered invisible and marginalized in this way by stepping outside of the maelstrom of contemporary history."

(Following the lecture, questions were put from the audience.)

I have been asked to say more about why I speak about the politics of the local. I did not talk about other attempts to construct an alternative politics of the global principally because I have been trying to trace through the question of ethnicity; the question of positioning, of placing, which is what the term ethnicity connotes for me in relation to issues of the local and the global. And also, because in many respects, I don't think that those attempts to put together an alternative politics of the global are, at the moment, very successful.

But the second part of the question is the more important one. Why do I only talk about what is local when the questions I seem to be addressing are, of course, very universal, global phenomena?

I do not make that distinction between the local and the global. I think there is always an interpretation of the two. The question is, what are the locations at which struggles might develop? It seems to me that a counter-politics which is pitched precisely and predominantly at the level of confronting the global forces that are trying to remake and recapture the world at the moment, and which are conducted simply at that level, are not making very much headway.

Yet where there does seem the ability to develop counter-movements, resistances, counter-politics, are places that are localized. I do not mean that what they are about are "local" but the places where they emerge as a political scenario are localized because they are separated from one another; they are not easy to connect up or articulate into a larger struggle. So, I use the local and the global as prisms for looking at the same thing. But they have pertinent appearances, points of appearance, scenarios in the different locations.

There is, for instance, ecologically, an attempt to establish a counter-politics of the planet as a single place and that, of course, is

important. And if I had taken the question of ecology rather than ethnicity as the prism through which I spoke, the story would have been told very differently. I hinted at that in my first talk when I said that ecological consciousness was constituting the sense of the global, and this is not necessarily entirely in the keeping of the advanced West.

So there is more than one political game being played. This isn't the only game. But if you came at it through the question of where those who have moved into representation, into politics, as it were, through the political movements that have been very powerful and important in the post-war world, and especially in the last twenty years, it is precisely their inability to connect up into one global politics which seems to be their difficulty. But when you try to find whether they are able to resist, to mobilize, to say something different to globalism at a more local level, they seem to have more purchase on the historical present. That's the reason why I concentrated the story from that point of view. But it would be wrong to think that you either work at one or the other, that the two are not constantly interpenetrating each other.

What I tried to say in my first talk was that what we usually call the global, far from being something which, in a systematic fashion, rolls over everything, creating similarity, in fact works through particularity, negotiates particular spaces, particular ethnicities, works through mobilizing particular identities and so on. So there is always a dialectic, a continuous dialectic, between the local and the global.

I tried to identify those collective social identities in relation to certain historical processes. The other ones which have been talked about are very important structurings, such as inside/outside, normal/pathological, etc. But they seem to recur: there are ways in which the other identities are lived. You know if you are inside the class, then you belong. If you are outside, then there is something pathological, not normal or abnormal, or deviant about you.

So I think of those identities somewhat differently. I think of those as ways of categorizing who is inside and who is outside in any of the other social identities. I was trying to identify, historically, some of the major ones that I think exist. If you say who you are you could say where you came from; broadly speaking, what race you belong to, a nation state of which you are a citizen or subject; you have a class position, an established and relatively secure gender position. You knew where you fitted in the world. That is what I meant, whereas most of us now live with a sense of a much greater plural-

ity, a sense of the unfinished character of each of those. It is not that they have disappeared but they do not stitch us in place, locate us, in the way they did in the past.

Regarding a second question, as to what shifted on us: it was politics. What shifted was our attempt to understand why the scenario of the revolutionary class subject never appeared. What happened to it?

There were a few moments when it appeared. When were those? When you go back historically and look at those moments, they were not on stage as they ought to have been either. 1917 is not the subject of the unitary, already-identified Russian working class, making the future. It was not that! The Chinese Revolution is not that either. Nor is the seventeenth century, the history of the already formed bourgeoisie taking the stage. Actually, they do not take the political stage for another 200 years.

So if it is a bourgeois revolution in a larger sense, it cannot be specified in terms of actual historical actors. So, we had a way of living with that for a very long time. It is coming. Of course, it is more complex than that but the basic grid is still ok.

But then, one asks oneself, what politics flows from thinking it never really happened like that, but one day it will? After a time, if you are really trying to be politically active, in that setting you have to say to yourself: that may be the wrong question. It may be that I am not actually doing something now because I think that something in the works, some God in the machine, some law of history which I do not understand, is going to make it all right.

It is hard to describe this moment. It is a moment like waking up. You suddenly realize you are relying on history to do what you cannot do for yourself. You make a bungle of politics but "History," with a capital "H," is going to fly out of somebody's mouth at five minutes to midnight and make it all right. Or "the Economy" is going to march on the stage and say, "you have got it all wrong, you know. You ought to be over there: you are in the proletariat. You ought to be thinking that." Sort us all out, you know. And we are waiting for that moment; waiting, waiting, waiting 200 years for it.

Maybe you are waiting for the wrong thing. Not that the insights of that story, that theory, that narrative were wrong; I am not trying to throw that over. I am trying to throw over the moment of the political guarantee that is lodged in that, because then you do not conduct politics contingently; you do not conduct it positionally. You

think someone has prepared the positions for you.

This is a very practical issue. You go into the miners' strike, which the British went into in the early eighties, the only major industrial showdown with the Thatcher government, on the assumption that the industrial working class was unified behind you when it was not. And you did not conduct a politics which had the remotest chance of unifying it because you assumed it was already unified.

If you said it seven times, it would be unified. So the miners' leader said it seven times. "The might of the unified industrial working class is now in a head-to-head with Thatcher." It was not. It was the wrong politics. Not the wrong struggle, but the wrong politics, conducted in the wrong way, in the light of some hope that history was going to rescue this simpler story out of the more complex one.

If you lose enough battles that way, you just do not play that game any more. You have to play it differently. You have to try and make some politics out of people who insist on remaining different. You are waiting for them all to be the same. Before you get them inside the same political movement you will be here till doomsday.

You have to make them out of the folks in this room, not out of something else called socialism or whatever it is. We made history out of figments. Suddenly you see that it is a kind of way of sleeping at night: "I made a botch of that. I lost that one." You know, the way the left constantly told itself that all its losses were victories. You know, I just won that although I lost it. Heroically, I lost it.

Just let us win one. Leave the heroism out of it. And just win a few. The next time I will be in a little bit ahead. Not two steps behind but feeling good in myself. That is a moment I am trying to describe existentially. It did not happen like that. It happened in a complicated set of ways. But you realize at a certain moment, you go through a kind of transparent barrier that has kept you in a place, from doing and thinking seriously, what you should have been thinking about. That is what it is like.

Question: Could you then say something about winning one? Could you say something about what prospect you see for rebuilding another politics, other than the one Arthur Scargill headed in the miners' struggle. And what prospect that has for breaking down that exclusivist, solidified, ego-identified consciousness?

SH: The prospects for that are not very good because the left is still stuffed with the old notion of identity, which is why I am thinking about it. It is still waiting for the old identities to return to the stage.

It does not recognize that it is in a different political game which is required to articulate, precisely, differences that cannot be encapsulated any longer and represented in that unified body. So, we do not know whether we can shift enough of that old thinking to begin to ask the question. What would a politics like that be like?

We know a little bit about it. I do think, without being romantic about it, that the period of the GLC (Greater London Council) in London was very prefigurative, but that it cannot be repeated elsewhere. It was the bringing together of groups and movements which remained the same, and yet retained their differences. Nobody who came into the GLC said "I will forget I am an activist black group because I am now in the same room as a feminist group." What you heard there was the very opposite of what we now usually think of as the conversation of a collective political subject coming into existence.

We think of a nice, polite, consensual discussion; everybody agreeing. What you heard there was what democracy is really like: an absolutely, bloody-unending row. People hammering the table, insisting, "Do not ask me to line up behind your banner, because that just means forgetting who I am." That row, that sound of people actually negotiating their differences in the open, behind the collective program, is the sound I am waiting for.

I think it did something; it opened some possibilities. It showed that it was possible. It had exactly what politics always has, which is the test, that differences do not remain the same as a result of the articulation.

One group has to take on the agenda of the other. It has to transform itself in the course of coming into alliance, or some kind of formation with another. It has to learn something of the otherness which created the other constituency. It doesn't mistake itself that it becomes it but it has to take it on board. It has to struggle with it to establish some set of priorities.

That is the sound that one is waiting for but on the whole, that is not the sound one is hearing in the politics opposed to Thatcherism. One is hearing "Let us go back to the old constituencies. Line up behind us. The old parties will come again." I do not believe it. I think Thatcherism is more deep-seated than that; it is actually shaking the ground from underneath the possibility of a return to that old form of politics. So if you ask me what the possibilities are, then the first stage of it is in our own ranks. It is quarrelling among ourselves

about which direction to go before one begins to open that out.

But I do think that there are possibilities in that. I think the reason why, in spite of the fact that the GLC was never below 60–65 percent in the popularity ratings, Thatcherism nevertheless destroyed it, was because it understood its prefigurative role. It understood that if it could persist, and make some changes to the lives of a variety of different constituencies in that city, other peoples would begin to say, "Here is a different kind of model. Here is a different way to go." What would that mean on a more national scale? What would that mean in another part of the country where the constituencies are different?

I think Thatcherism understood that and it blew the GLC out of the water. It destroyed it by legislative fiat. That tells you how important they knew it actually was. Thatcherism's popularity and hegemonic reach precisely arises from the fact that it articulates differences. The numbers of people who are 100 percent with the project on all fronts are very small indeed. What Thatcherism is fantastic at is the skill of mobilizing the different minorities and playing one minority against another. It is in the game of articulating differences. It always tries to condense them within something it calls "the Thatcherite subject" but there is no such thing. That is a political representation. It is the condensation of a variety of different identities. It plays on difference, and through difference, all the time. It tries to represent that difference as the same. But do not be mistaken about it. I do not think that is so.

Conducting the counter-hegemonic politics which I have been trying to describe does not carry any guarantees that it will win. All that I am saying is that there is a difference between the politics of positionality I have been outlining and some unitary politics which is successful, which is Thatcherism. That is not the difference. The difference is between two politics of positionality; one well-conducted and one which is conducted very half-heartedly, and which is, indeed, not being conducted at all.

Thatcherism is hegemonic because it is able to address the identities of a variety of people who have never been in the same political camp before. It does that in a very complex way by always attending, through its political, social, moral and economic program, to the cultural and ideological questions. Always mobilizing that which it represents as already there. It says "the majority of English people." "The majority of the British people."

It does not have yet a majority. It is summoning up the majority and telling you that it is already a majority. And in the majority are a variety of people, people from different classes, people from different genders, people from different occupations, people from different parts of the country. That's what the Thatcherite majority is.

Next time round it will not be exactly the same. It cannot reproduce itself. It is not the essential class subject. That is not the politics of Thatcherism. Indeed, far from it; my own view is that no-one understands Gramsci better than Mrs. Thatcher. She has never read it but she does know that politics nowadays is conducted through the articulation of different instances. She knows that politics is conducted on different fronts. You have to have a variety of programs, that you are always trying to build a collective will because no socio-economic position will simply give it to you.

Those things she knows. We read Gramsci till the cows come home and we do not know how to do it. She cannot get a little bit of it off the ground. It is called "instinctive Gramsci-ism." "Instinctive Gramsci-ism" is what is beating us, not the old collective class subject.

Question: This idea of multiple identities, which you represented in some kind of "pie-chart." You gave an example of people who are Caribbean, British and Black. Is there five or ten percent or something which can be called "Humanity?"

SH: I do not think that there is. I think that what we call 'the global' is always composed of varieties of articulated particularities. I think the global is the self-presentation of the dominant particular. It is a way in which the dominant particular localizes and naturalizes itself and associates with it a variety of other minorities.

What I think it is dangerous to do is to identify the global with that sort of lowest common denominator stake which we all have in being human. In that sense, I am not a humanist. I do not think we can mobilize people simply through their common humanity. It may be that that day will come but I do not think we are there yet. Both the sources of the powerful, and the sources of the powerless, we both, always, go towards those universal moments through locating ourselves through some particularity. So I think of the global as something having more to do with the hegemonic sweep at which a certain configuration of local particularities try to dominate the whole scene, to mobilize the technology and to incorporate, in subaltern positions, a variety of more localized identities to construct the next historical project.

I am deliberately using Gramscian terms — construct the hegemonic project, the historical project, in which is lodged a variety of differences but which are all committed either in a dominant, or a subaltern position, to a single historical project, which is the project of globalization, of the kind I think you are talking about.

That is what is "universal." I think universal is always in quotation marks. It is the universalizing aspect, the universalizing project, the universalizing hope to be universal. It is like Mrs. Thatcher's "All the British people." It is a way of trying to say everybody is now inside this particular form of globalization. And at that very moment, there I am. I remain Marxist. At that very moment, whenever the discourse declares itself to be closed is the moment when you know it is contradictory. You know, when it says, "Everything is inside my knapsack. I have just got hold of all of you. I have a bit of all of you now. You are inside the bag. Can I close it?" No.

Something is just about to open that out and present a problem. Hegemony, in that sense, is never completed. It is always trying to enclose more differences within itself. Not within itself. It doesn't want the differences to look exactly like it. But it wants the projects of its individual and smaller identities to be only possible if the larger one becomes possible. That is how Thatcherism locates smaller identities within itself. You want to have the traditional family? You cannot do it for yourself because it depends on larger political and economic things. If you want to do that, you must come inside my larger project. You must identify yourself with the larger things inside my project. That is how you become part of history. You become a little cog in the larger part of history.

Now that is a different game from saying, "I want everybody to be exactly a replica of me." It is a more complicated game. But there is a moment when it always declares itself to be universal and closed, and that is the moment of naturalization. That's the moment when it wants its boundaries to be coterminous with the truth, with the reality of history. And that is always the moment which, I think, escapes it. That's my hope. Something had better be escaping it.