

ROUTLEDGE REVIVALS

Culture and Consensus

**England, Art and Politics
since 1940**

Robert Hewison



Culture and Consensus

Culture and Consensus, first published in 1995 with a revised edition in 1997, explores the history of the relationship between politics and the arts in Britain since 1940, and shows how the search for a secure sense of English identity has been reflected in official and unofficial attitudes to the arts, architecture, landscape and other emblems of national significance.

Illustrating his argument with a series of detailed case histories, Robert Hewison analyses how Britain's cultural life has reached its present enfeebled condition and suggests a way forward. This book will be of interest to students of art and cultural studies.

This page intentionally left blank

Culture and Consensus

England, Art and Politics since 1940

Robert Hewison



Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

First published in 1995
Revised edition published in 1997
by Methuen London

This edition first published in 2015 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN
and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 1995, 1997 Robert Hewison

The right of Robert Hewison to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Publisher's Note

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original copies may be apparent.

Disclaimer

The publisher has made every effort to trace copyright holders and welcomes correspondence from those they have been unable to contact.

A Library of Congress record exists under LC control number: 95236380

ISBN 13: 978-1-138-85793-3 (hbk)

ISBN 13: 978-1-315-71823-1 (ebk)

Robert Hewison

Culture and Consensus

England, art and politics
since 1940

Methuen

First published in Great Britain in 1995
by Methuen London
an imprint of Reed International Books Ltd
Michelin House, 81 Fulham Road, London SW3 6RB
and Auckland, Melbourne, Singapore and Toronto

Copyright © 1995 by Robert Hewison
The author has asserted his moral rights

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available at the British Library
ISBN 0 413 69060 1

Phototypeset by Intype, London
Printed and bound in Great Britain
by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

For Alexandra, Vita and Greta

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

	List of Illustrations	ix
	Acknowledgements	xi
	Introduction	xiii
I	Dis-United Kingdom: Britain in the 1990s	1
II	Deep England: Britain in the 1940s	22
III	New Britain: Britain in the early 1950s	50
IV	The Uses of Culture: Britain in the later 1950s	88
V	A Swinging Meritocracy: Britain in the 1960s	123
VI	The Uses of Sub-Culture: Britain in the 1970s	159
VII	The Enterprise Culture: Britain in the 1980s	209
VIII	Value for Money: The arts under Thatcherism	251
IX	The Public Culture: Britain in the future	295
	Source Notes	315
	Index	343

This page intentionally left blank

Illustrations

1. *Annus Horribilis*: St George's Hall, Windsor, after the fire, November 1992.
2. Royal romance: Windsor Castle after being Gothickised by Wyatville.
3. Deep England: 'The South Downs', Army Bureau of Current Affairs wartime poster.
4. Blitzed Britain: still from Humphrey Jennings's film, *Family Portrait*.
5. New Britain: The Skylon and the Dome of Discovery on the South Bank, 1951.
6. Old Britain: a page from the Festival of Britain's South Bank exhibition guidebook.
7. New Elizabethanism: Cecil Beaton's official Coronation photograph of Queen Elizabeth II, 1953.
8. The Englishness of English architecture: the interior of Coventry Cathedral, 1962.
9. Swinging London: Pop goes the Union Jack.
10. *Nouvelle vague*: The painter Peter Phillips in Ken Russell's 'Pop Goes the Easel' for the BBC's *Monitor* 1962.
11. Cultural struggle: demonstration outside the American Embassy, Grosvenor Square, 1968.
12. Racial struggle: Notting Hill Gate Carnival, 1977.
13. Punk Britannia: Derek Jarman's film *Jubilee*, 1977.
14. Mutilated monarchy: Jamie Reid's record sleeve for the Sex Pistols' 'God Save the Queen', 1977.
15. Radical collage: Photomontage from *Temporary Hoarding*, August 1981.
16. Iron Britannia: Margaret Thatcher test-driving a Challenger Tank, 1988.

x Culture and Consensus

17. The heritage industry: Castle Howard as backdrop for Granada Television's *Brideshead Revisited*.
18. Post-industrialism: City dealers after the Big Bang.
19. Post-modernism: Canary Wharf.
20. Cultural consensus: street party 1945.

Acknowledgements

As a journalist and critic, I have had access to many of the personalities and more recent events referred to in this book, and I am very grateful to the people and institutions that have made this possible. I would like to thank in particular three people who gave me information specifically in relation to this study: Boris Ford, the Earl of Harewood, and David Mellor MP. I should also like to thank David Mills, editor of 'The Culture' section of the *Sunday Times*, who has enabled me to follow my enthusiasms while earning a living, as well as giving me an outlet for my ideas. Between 1988 and 1992 I also presented more than a hundred editions of the 'Issues' strand of *Third Ear* on BBC Radio Three, the majority of them produced by Julian Hale, and I would like to thank him and my other producers for the access to people and events which the programme gave me. I have also much enjoyed my work as a Visiting Professor in the School of Arts and Humanities at De Montfort University since 1993.

I would like to thank my friends Chris Orr, Chris Barlas and Paddy O'Sullivan for the fruitful and enjoyable discussions I have had with them, and my agent Michael Sissons for his advice and encouragement. To the publisher and editor of now no fewer than eight of my books, Geoffrey Strachan, I owe a very special debt indeed, for his commitment to what I can only call "real publishing" during a period that has seen the book business go through an upheaval as thorough as anything experienced by official cultural institutions. I would also like to thank Mary O'Donovan for her work in preparing text and illustrations for the press. Lastly and most sincerely, I thank my wife Erica for her patience and good humour during a parturition of excessive length.

Earlier versions of some sections of the book have appeared in *Enterprise and Heritage*, edited by J. Corner and Sylvia Harvey (Routledge, 1991); *Britten's Gloriana: Essays and Sources*, edited by Paul Banks for

the Britten-Pears Library and Boydell Press (1993); *The Major Effect*, edited by Anthony Seldon and Dennis Kavanagh (Macmillan, 1994); *The Arts in the World Economy*, edited by Charles A. Riley (University of New England Press, 1994), and various editions of the *Sunday Times*. I would also like to acknowledge the stimulus of an annual invitation from Peter Catterall of the Institute of Contemporary British History to contribute an article on 'The Political Economy of the Arts' to the successive volumes of the ICBH's *Contemporary Britain* since it was launched in 1990.

The quotation from T. S. Eliot's 'Little Gidding' (p. 24) in his *Collected Poems 1909–1962* is by permission of the author's estate and Faber and Faber Ltd, as is the quotation from Philip Larkin's 'Going Going' (p. 10) in *High Windows* (1974).

The author and publishers would also like to thank the copyright holders for their kind permission to reproduce the illustrations in this book:

1 Camera Press London (ref. X 13175–1); **2** The Royal Collection/Her Majesty the Queen; **3** Frank Newbould/The Trustees of the Imperial War Museum, London (ref. MH 13415); **4** H. Usill/British Film Institute (ref. 177885); **5** Central Office of Information; **6** Page from *The South Bank Exhibition: A Guide to the Story It Tells* by Ian Cox, HMSO, 1951; **7** Cecil Beaton/Camera Press London (ref. 00135954); **8** Keystone/Hulton Deutsch Collection Ltd (ref. 04112112); **9** Keystone/Hulton Deutsch Collection Ltd (ref. 04120003); **10** Monitor/BBC/Hulton Deutsch (ref. 01012265); **11** John Minihan/Evening Standard Collection/Hulton Deutsch Collection Ltd (ref. 02812495); **12** Colin Davey/Hulton Deutsch Collection Ltd (ref. 04112102); **13** Jean Marc Prouveur/British Film Institute (ref. 193077); **16** Patrick Piel/Frank Spooner Pictures London; **17** Anthony Andrews/Jeremy Irons/Diana Quick/Granada Television; **18** Adam Woolfitt/Robert Harding Picture Library (ref. 508/17792); **19** Robin Barton/Blueprint Magazine; **20** Hulton Deutsch Collection Ltd

Introduction

‘Let it be no more said that States Encourage Arts,
for it is the Arts That Encourage States.’

William Blake

One of the many incentives to write this book was a conversation in October 1991 with an official of the British Council. The Council – Britain’s cultural representative overseas – was, like every institution with a liberal tradition of independence from government, undergoing the uncomfortable process of adjustment to the ideology of “value for money” that the Conservative administration had been forcing upon it. The British Council officer, a senior policy-maker, said in essence that the argument for the value of the arts was being allowed to go by default. Governments, bureaucrats and ordinary people had the right to ask why art was important, and more especially why it should be financially supported. Yet the “intelligentsia” replied that the arts were the arts, and no one had the right to question what artists were doing. The argument that the work of artists serves a purpose, not in banal material terms, but as part of the dialogue within and between nations, and that the arts were the best means of introducing new ideas into a society, was not being heard.

Instead, commercial arguments of the instrumental, “value for money”, job-creation-tourism-and-business-sponsorship kind were allowed to fill the gap. Yet, the official argued, institutions like the Treasury and the Foreign Office – as well as taxpayers, who might well want to know the reasons for the National Theatre getting money that would have been better spent on the National Health Service – were prepared to listen, if a case were made.

One of the themes of this book is the argument that culture, and cultural policy, have become increasingly important during the second half of the twentieth century, and that they will be even more important after the approaching millennium. This is not, however, for the economic reasons that have dominated public discussion since the early eighties. Far from the arts being part of the social superstructure built

xiv Culture and Consensus

upon a base of economic activity, they form the frame upon which all other activities depend, for culture – of which the work of artists is the most easily identifiable manifestation – is the shaping, moral medium for all society's activities, including the economic. Hence the quotation from William Blake as the epigraph to this introduction.

Ultimately, I argue that the culture of an individual, group or nation is not merely an expression of personal, collective or national identity, *it is* that identity. It follows that a nation's culture is not a purely private matter nor a marginal public responsibility, but vital to national existence. As I argue in my final chapter, this has become generally recognised over the past half century – belatedly in Britain by the creation of the Department of National Heritage in 1992. Yet the “public culture” that has emerged is in many ways unsatisfactory. As the British Council officer pointed out, economic considerations have outweighed the more important social and moral responsibilities that those who make public policy bear.

I believe that the state has a responsibility to nurture and protect the work of artists, and that may well call for subsidy and the calculation of economic return, but governments are equally influential in terms of shaping cultural attitudes in other ways, through education, information and encouragement. Beyond the acknowledgement of the state's responsibility for the quality of a nation's cultural life, we need to develop a value system which not only asserts, but guarantees, the existence of a common interest in the health of the arts. For too long those for whom art is important have indeed allowed the defence of culture to go by default. Whereas what is plainly needed is a new argument for the arts.

Throughout Europe, and indeed most of the developed world, there is a crisis of identity – national, regional, local, personal – which artists, writers and performers are uniquely qualified to address. This is a political question, but only in the arts can these issues be confronted at the level at which they arise, at the level of the individual imagination, at the level where consciousness of being part of a society is formed. If we understand art in these terms – which by no means ignore its purely aesthetic value and its frequently oppositional relationship to the society within which it is generated – then the case for the arts begins to be made.

To understand how the present status and condition of the arts were

arrived at in the British – or more specifically, English – context, it is necessary to go back to the point when a British government first took on a formal and general responsibility for the arts in January 1940. 1940 was a pivotal moment in British history, and it is not accidental that the decision to found the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts was taken in that year. There are many examples of government cultural patronage that precede that date, from the foundation of the British Museum in 1753 to the formation of the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1927, but 1940 marks the beginning of the modern period in official British cultural policy.

Some readers may know that the beginning of the Second World War is the starting date for a trilogy of books I have already published: *Under Siege: Literary Life in London 1939–45*; *In Anger: Culture in the Cold War 1945–60*, and *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties 1960–75*. I have also published two further studies, *The Heritage Industry* and *Future Tense*, which, though differently focused, continue the account of the arts in Britain into the nineties. While the three surveys and the two more polemical books have obviously prepared the ground for a history of the period, however, this new book is in no way the compendium volume that digests the previous titles.

In my earlier survey of the years 1939 to 1975 I tried to cover as many art forms as I could manage. Here, I have deliberately chosen to concentrate more narrowly on a number of key cases in succeeding decades which serve as exemplars for my argument. While the institutional history of the Arts Council of Great Britain (which, ironically, ceased to exist as I was completing my work in 1994) is a constant thread, the examples I have chosen come from very different art forms. That one of the earliest of these is a grand opera, and one of the later, the moment of punk, says something about the shifting nature of cultural activity, and the critical approaches taken to it, over the past fifty years.

The principal method of the book is to analyse three areas: firstly, the theoretical definition of culture at a particular moment and how it has continued to change since the heydays of T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis; secondly, the extent to which these definitions were translated across the decades into institutional practices – for instance the creation of the BBC Third Programme in the forties – and thirdly, the relationship between these ideas and institutions and the creativity they encouraged or neglected. Between 1940 and today at least three generations

have had their say in the cultural debate, and as the national situation has changed politically and economically, there has naturally been a shifting field of argument and practice.

The shape of the book is governed by this triple narrative on the development of intellectual, institutional and cultural history, but the narrative is both preceded and followed by two partially theoretical chapters. The first introduces my own theoretical approach; the last tries to draw some forward-looking conclusions. As the first chapter is in itself an introduction to what follows, I will only briefly summarise the argument here. The key concept is that of consensus: that is, the broad national political agreement that has kept Britain's social and economic institutions functioning throughout the shifts of power between Labour and Conservative governments since the war, once it had emerged in its particular modern form during the wartime National Coalition government of 1940 to 1945.

I draw a parallel between the distinctively British and empirical notion of "consensus" and the more theoretical concept, familiar across the Channel, of "hegemony". This is the means by which a state is governed by a ruling group or class which exercises power through a leadership based on compromises with, and concessions to, other interests and classes that are calculated to produce consent, without it being necessary to deploy the coercive powers which governments also have at their disposal.

The reality of all democratic government is that it is always a shifting balance of compromises both within the ruling group (be it a single party or a coalition) and between other political parties, economic interests and the various "estates" which influence public opinion. It follows that the consensus will always be partial and shifting. The shape of the national consensus is reflected in the results of periodic general elections, but it is in constant movement. British history since 1940 has seen several changes in the ruling consensus: a consensus in favour of revolutionary change led to the election of the Labour government in 1945, but this gave way to a more conservative and deferential consensus as pre-war social values were partially restored in the fifties. This in turn was gradually supplanted, from 1956 onwards, by a progressive consensus demanding liberalisation and reform. By the seventies, however, when profound changes began to affect most of the developed world – economically, the shift to a post-industrial order,

culturally, the shift from modernism to post-modernism – the broad post-war consensus began to break down entirely.

The result of the social and economic crises of the seventies was the election in 1979 of a Conservative government dedicated to halting Britain's economic decline, and determined to establish a new consensus around the ideas of economic individualism and enterprise. Paradoxically, the new Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, saw the very notion of consensus as an obstacle to progress, and through her policies undermined many of the civil institutions, such as the BBC, which had originally been developed to administer and create consensus. Three more Conservative election victories in a row are a measure of the extent to which the eighties saw a shift in the terms upon which Britain was governed; but the growth of the power of a centralising government has left the country in the hands of a hegemony prepared to use economic and legal coercion as well as seek consent. The dramatic increase in the number of non-government organisations nonetheless controlled by government appointees represents the alarming development of a parallel administration controlled by the party in power but outwith the democratic process.

The decline of consensus is one of the sources of the widespread dissatisfaction and anxiety that surfaced during the pivotal year of 1992, with which the book opens. It is a function of consensus to agree the terms in which a nation chooses to see itself. The breakdown of consensus leaves the nation with a weakened sense of its own identity, and therefore uncertain as to what the right course of action in any given situation should be. 1992 saw such a crisis, most specifically a crisis for the identity of the monarchy, which remains unresolved.

One of the reasons for the survival of the British monarchy into the late twentieth century has been that it supplies a convenient symbol of identity for a hybrid nation. It follows that a crisis in the monarchy is a crisis for national identity. The crisis is not only political and constitutional, it is profoundly cultural, for it is through such emblems as the Crown that the British make sense of the world, and of themselves.

A society's culture – which is an active process, not an inert collection of objects – supplies the medium for the interaction between the real and the imaginary, the historical and the mythical, the achieved and the desired, that constitutes the daily management of the social consensus. Culture shapes the context in which other social practices such as

xviii Culture and Consensus

economic activity, politics and litigation take place. A country's culture is the means both of expressing national identity and maintaining – or challenging – political consensus.

This explains why the coupling in my title, *Culture and Consensus*, is followed by the triad *England, art and politics*. 'England', in this instance, stands for identity, and specifically English identity, for it is the English on this island, traditionally dominant in the national consensus, who now appear most uncertain about their identity and place in the world as the twentieth century closes.

Art and politics, together with ideas of Englishness, have mediated the relationship between British culture and consensus in the period under review. There are many indications that 1992, in spite of the election of John Major in his own right as successor to Margaret Thatcher, marked the beginning of a new, though as yet ill-defined period. More recent changes in the leadership of the Labour Party and the swing of public opinion against the government, suggest that political change is imminent, with its necessary implications for both culture and consensus.

This book makes no predictions, but what does seem certain is that Britain is on the point of a change as significant as that of 1945, 1953, 1964 or 1979, if only because we are moving towards the fresh start symbolically presented by the year 2001. It is unlikely that, whatever the nature of the change, the transition will be smooth. The current crisis of national identity is one indication of the stresses that change brings, but a moment of crisis is also a moment of opportunity. In the field of cultural policy, it is an opportunity to examine critically what has been achieved in the more than fifty years since 1940, in order to prepare a fresh start. This book is intended as a contribution both to that process of examination, and to the argument that the arts have a value for society that places them at the top and not the bottom of the political agenda.

*College House Cottage
January 1995*

I

Dis-United Kingdom

Britain in the 1990s

‘Friday 20 November 1992 was a day of high drama that will not be soon forgotten by the Queen, by Windsor or the nation. The Sovereign spent her forty-fifth wedding anniversary, in the fortieth year of her reign, working alongside her staff and subjects rescuing priceless treasures from her much-loved home as the ruinous flames licked the Castle and dense smoke billowed across the town and down the Thames Valley. The blaze became visible for miles around and the smell of burning hung in the air.’¹

So begins an anonymous account of the fire that broke out in the north-east wing of Windsor Castle, destroying St George’s Hall, the Grand Reception Room, the Private Chapel, the Crimson Drawing Room and the State Drawing Room (illustration 1). (More banally, the fire also damaged or destroyed fifty-eight staff bedrooms, eighteen bathrooms and twenty-six ancillary rooms, and affected the Great Kitchen.) Because the wing was undergoing improvements at the time many treasures had been removed, and others were got out undamaged. Only one painting was lost to the flames.

Nonetheless, this was a disaster for ‘Britain’s proud symbol of Royalty and national heritage’, as the souvenir on sale at Windsor Castle records.² The symbolic significance of the event was recognised by witnesses of the fire interviewed on television, and by newspaper editorials in the following days. For the Queen, it was the latest blow to strike her during what she called, in a speech at the Guildhall in London four days later, her *Annus Horribilis*. This had begun with the divorce in April of her daughter Princess Anne, followed by the separation of her son, Prince Andrew, from the Duchess of York; the publication of a damaging biography of her daughter-in-law the Princess of Wales; topless pictures of the Duchess of York in the popular press; and public discontent about the Queen’s exemption from income

2 Culture and Consensus

tax. As if the burning of one of her homes were not enough, on 9 December the Palace had to announce the formal separation of Prince Charles and the Princess of Wales. To cap it all, on 23 December the *Sun* published a leaked copy of the Queen's Christmas message.

In Britain what happens to Royalty touches everybody. Shortly before the fire at Windsor Castle, Andrew Morton, author of *Diana: Her True Story*, the book which had done so much to publicise the breakdown in the marriage of the future King and Queen of England, declared on the front page of the *Sunday Express*: 'The Royal Family as a model of exemplary family life has collapsed. Essentially, people in Britain are coming to terms with the collapse of this strand of ideology of the monarchy in the same way the Russians are coming to terms with the collapse of communism.'³ But the *Annus Horribilis* of 1992 was not exclusively royal. The political editor of the *Sunday Times*, Michael Jones, quoted a (necessarily) anonymous government minister: 'We are losing our reference points. Everywhere you look, the country's institutions seem to be falling apart.'⁴ It was a fair comment. The anticipated divorce of the Prince and Princess of Wales would have constitutional repercussions on the Church of England: the established national church but no longer the largest, let alone the majority church in the land, declining in numbers and wealth, and still divided within itself over the ordination of women, a decision finally taken in November 1992.

In the same year a number of successful appeals against conviction had shown the judiciary to be fallible and policemen corrupt. A politicised Civil Service was known to be willing to be "economical with the truth", and had lost its reputation for probity and commitment to the continuity of impartial administration regardless of the politicians of the day. The Bank of England had been called into question as a result of the scandalous collapse of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, which went into liquidation in January 1992 as a result of the biggest banking fraud in history. The activities of Robert Maxwell, the newspaper owner and entrepreneur who had mysteriously drowned in November 1991, turned out to be a massive deception which had robbed the pension funds of the *Mirror* group. Lloyds of London appeared to be not much more than an incompetently managed gambling den run by untrustworthy croupiers who produced a loss of £1.5 billion in 1992, with further losses to follow.

Against the background of the longest economic recession since the

thirties and what appeared to be a permanently postponed recovery, on the 'Black Wednesday' of 16 September 1992, international speculators forced Britain's withdrawal from the European Exchange Rate mechanism, producing a *de facto* devaluation in sterling of thirteen per cent. The economic insecurity which had begun with the "restructuring" of the manufacturing industry in the seventies and the establishment of long-term, mass unemployment in the eighties had spread to all levels of society with the collapse of the housing market and the rising rate of redundancies in management and the professions. Collectively, the fundamental assumptions upon which British institutions had operated since the Second World War no longer seemed to be valid; daily the pretences that sustained them were exposed. The fire at Windsor, caused by an incautiously placed electric lamp, seemed to be just one more indication of national incompetence. As Ian Jack commented in the *Independent on Sunday* while the embers of St George's Hall still smouldered: 'Nothing seems to work as it used to: government, trains, banks, courts, the economy, the monarchy. Now even a royal palace blazes in the night. Fate frowns down.'⁵

At times of stress and apparent national breakdown, it is a characteristic response to seek refuge and reassurance in the past. The Prime Minister, John Major, took this course when he announced at the 1993 Conservative Party conference: 'It is time to return to core values, time to get back to basics, to self-discipline and the law.' The anonymous memorialist of the Windsor fire could not fail to strike tiny echoes of the social solidarity of the Blitz. The Queen was described as 'working alongside her staff and subjects', while a large malachite urn, a gift from Tsar Nicholas I of Russia to Queen Victoria, which stood out among the ruins of the Grand Reception Room, seemed 'to have survived as a symbol of endurance amid the awesome destruction', an image evoking the survival of St Paul's under enemy fire.⁶ Evocations of the past can also, however, serve to throw the present into an even gloomier light. Lord Goodman, former chairman of the Arts Council, a grand panjandrum at the nexus of cultural and political life from the fifties to the nineties, told an interviewer: 'You couldn't have been here during the war without developing an enormous respect for the British. They were at their very best when they were hardest tried. All that has, I'm sorry to say, evaporated. It's vanished. For instance, we have no leadership of any quality at the moment, political or moral.'⁷

Goodman's point was made when John Major's moralising 'Back to

4 Culture and Consensus

Basics' campaign collapsed in ignominy in 1994 in the face of ministerial resignations over sexual misconduct, allegations of corruption in local government and vicious in-fighting in the Conservative Party over Britain's relations with the European Union. After 1993 proved a further year of economic depression and political uncertainty, commentators both on the Left – Martin Jacques, former editor of *Marxism Today* – and on the Right – Lord Rees-Mogg, former editor of *The Times* – almost simultaneously detected signs of a national nervous breakdown. Jacques blamed the country's anxiety on a lack of political will to change and on 'the state of national depression. The latter induces a mood of hopelessness, of can't do rather than can do. National demoralisation is not so different in its effects from personal depression. It leads to introversion, resignation and privatism.'⁸ Rees-Mogg concurred: 'We have to understand the public mood. If one were dealing with an individual rather than a nation, the diagnosis would be only too obvious. The British are showing the symptoms of clinical depression. There is the feeling of futility, the feeling that no exertion is worth making. There is the feeling of irritability: we are quick to turn on each other . . . There is a lack of vitality, both in the Government and in the nation itself.'⁹

What both Jacques and Rees-Mogg recognised was that their country was going through a crisis of identity. Britain was not alone in suffering problems of adjustment to a rapidly changing world. The art critic Robert Hughes has made a similar point about the United States, commenting on 'the profoundly unsettled state of American culture, the crises of cultural identity that come with the dissolution of the binary world held in place for forty years by the left and right jaws of the Cold War's iron clamp'.¹⁰ The causes of Britain's discontent were internal as well as external, and the domestic crisis of the monarchy was a crisis articulating that discontent. As the critic Marina Warner argued in her 1994 *Reith Lectures*, 'the Queen symbolises the imaginary personality of the nation'. That the monarchy's political function appeared to be largely ceremonial only served to enhance its psychological authority: 'The monarchy's symbolic role in the country's sense of identity has grown as its political power has withered.'¹¹ But the *Annus Horribilis* of 1992 revealed a serious dysfunction between the image of the emblematic mother of the nation and the real-life head of an unhappy and wayward family. The symbolic order of the nation was disturbed.

This was revealed by an unexpected response to the damage to Windsor Castle as 'Britain's proud symbol of Royalty and national heritage'. According to the memorialist, 'the hearts of the nation went out to the Sovereign',¹² but when the Secretary of State for National Heritage, Peter Brooke, announced even before the fires were out that the Government would bear the entire cost of the repairs – then put at sixty million pounds – the nation seemed reluctant to put its hand in its pocket. There was a general feeling of resentment that the Queen, believed to be the wealthiest woman in the world, and paying no tax, should make no contribution, and both Labour and Conservative Members of Parliament argued that the Queen should meet the bill. The trust fund opened by Brooke to receive donations from the public towards the cost of repairs raised only twenty-five thousand pounds in three months. Six days after the fire it was announced that the Queen would, from the following April, pay tax on her private income and pay for the public duties of all members of the Royal Family except Prince Philip and the Queen Mother, who would continue to be financed through the civil list. The Queen would, however, continue to receive until 2001 £7.9 million a year from the civil list, plus all the services provided by government departments such as the royal yacht, the Queen's flight and the royal train. In 1991 the total cost of the monarchy was put at fifty-seven million pounds a year; the Queen's private fortune was estimated at anything between £1.2 and £6.5 billion.

The issue of who should pay for the cost of the Windsor fire exposed confusion about the actual ownership of the emblems of national identity and heritage. Peter Brooke was technically right to tell the House of Commons that, unlike Balmoral and Sandringham which were the personal property of the Queen, Windsor Castle, 'a major state building, and a unique asset and attraction of our national heritage' and 'a world-famous symbol of this country', was a government responsibility, for an act of 1831 had made it so.¹³ But it was also the Queen's 'home', and parts of it were decidedly off-limits, even to responsible officials of the government, such as English Heritage. One indirect cause of the fire was that, just as the Queen had been immune from taxation, the building, being Crown property, was immune from normal health and safety regulations. Fire prevention officers did not have the usual right of access, any more than the staff of English Heritage who had wanted to make surveys for conservation purposes while repair work

6 Culture and Consensus

was being carried out in the three years before the fire. (In 1992 the Royal Household had received £21.6 million from the Government for repairs and maintenance.) Windsor Castle was a Grade 1 listed building, but English Heritage, responsible for the listing, was not allowed to inspect it. How “national”, then, was the national heritage?

As the loyal memorialist of the fire pointed out, 1992 was the fortieth anniversary of the Queen’s accession to the throne on 6 February 1952, and she may have sensed that the anniversary might be an occasion which, if overemphasised, could prove counter-productive. A Buckingham Palace statement had asked that any public celebration in the manner of the 1977 Jubilee should be held back until her Golden Jubilee in 2002. A proposal for a commemorative fountain in Parliament Square was quietly squashed. The centre-piece of the anniversary, with which she co-operated (and over which she had total control), was the television documentary *Elizabeth R*. Significantly, this did not feature her family or private life. It was a return to regality, focused on the Sovereign herself, showing her as a *working* monarch – if not exactly the chief executive then the chairman of the firm, actively engaged in the enterprise of monarchy.

While British television had remained for the most part deferential, a key factor in the crisis of royal authority was the shift in attitude in the popular press, though less towards the Queen herself than to her family, including the couple who were expected to be King and Queen one day. This crisis had been a long time coming. As early as 1955 the journalist Malcolm Muggeridge had warned in the *New Statesman* that ‘the Royal Family ought to be properly advised on how to prevent themselves and their lives becoming a sort of royal soap opera’, which by the end of the eighties it had indeed become.¹⁴ In 1982 the Queen asked newspaper editors to show restraint in their coverage of the Royal Family, but by 1993 Prince Charles and the Princess of Wales had become figures in a circulation war between the *Sun* and the *Daily Mirror*, while their respective households appeared to be conducting their own civil war over public popularity.

By revealing the private weaknesses of the actual Royal Family, the press, responding to the curiosity of their readers, were also eroding the pillars that supported the symbolic monarchy. For nearly two hundred years, the British had found their collective sense of identity through their attachment to what was both a real and a symbolic object, the Crown. Writing at a time when the Queen appeared content to

allow the media to reinforce her allegorical power, the social critic Tom Nairn commented: 'Both the genesis of the contemporary monarchy and its apparently unstoppable popularity are quite clearly phenomena of *national* rather than merely social significance. They are elements in a drama of unresolved national identity.'¹⁵ The Crown and the metaphor of the Royal Family have given a sense of belonging that obscures questions of equality, rights and the distribution of power. With the emblematic family in disarray, an unresolved national identity becomes unstable.

In theory, the damage done to the monarchy's symbolic status should not affect its constitutional position, but when describing that position, even the Government's official handbook, issued by the Central Office of Information, begins by using symbolism that would not have been out of place among the courtiers of Elizabeth I: 'The Queen personifies the State.' In law, the handbook continues, 'she is head of the executive, an integral part of the legislature, head of the judiciary, the commander-in-chief of all the armed forces of the Crown and the "supreme governor" of the established Church of England'.¹⁶ In spite of the progressive limitation of the Crown's absolute power: 'The Queen still takes part in some important acts of government. These include summoning, proroguing . . . and dissolving Parliament; and giving Royal Assent to Bills passed by Parliament. The Queen also formally appoints many important office-holders, including government ministers, judges, officers in the armed forces, governors, British ambassadors and high commissioners and bishops of the Church of England. She is also involved in conferring peerages, knighthoods and other honours. One of the Queen's most important functions is appointing the Prime Minister.'¹⁷ The monarch therefore still has a measure of real power. As is well known, the Queen sees Cabinet papers and intelligence reports, and keeps a close eye on public affairs.

This constitutional reality reinforces the monarchy's symbolic force. The existence of the monarchy defines the British not as citizens, but as subjects, and from that flow the socially binding British virtues of discipline and deference to authority – of which the corresponding vices are conformism, snobbery and obsession with class. These characteristics of a subject people have been reinforced by the failure of either the execution of Charles I in 1649 or the Glorious Revolution of 1688 to register as breaks in a continuous royal, and so national, descent from the Norman invasion in 1066. In the absence of a written

8 Culture and Consensus

constitution, the monarchy is the institution that binds a lattice-work of convention, common law and specific Acts of Parliament together. More subtly, but equally important, the monarchy is the keystone in the arch of the class system which supports the structure of British society. It therefore exercises powerful political, social and cultural force.

The symbolism of royalty extends from the presence of a Royal Mace lying between Her Majesty's Government and Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition on the table of the House of Commons when Parliament is in session, to the use of the prefix "Royal" to signify the "national" status of an institution. Absurdly, and redundantly, the National Theatre, founded in 1962, became the Royal National Theatre in 1988. The monarch is the guarantee of Britishness, at home and abroad. 'People come here for our "heritage", our arts, our fashion and our countryside,' the Marketing Director of the English Tourist Board told the *Observer*. 'Royalty is a branding device that pulls those attractions together.'¹⁸

This device has performed an important function, as Tom Nairn has argued, in obscuring the unresolved issue of national identity. The United Kingdom, the official handbook tells us, consists of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and is referred to informally as Britain. Great Britain, however, is England, Scotland and Wales. It follows that inhabitants must have two national identities, as British, and as English or Scots or Welsh. (In Northern Ireland the position is more complicated.) The Scots and Welsh, as members of smaller countries gradually absorbed into the United Kingdom – though allowed a measure of separateness through language, customs and institutions – have had their difference from the English to reinforce their own sense of national, as opposed to British, identity. Until recently, the dominant nation, the English, did not have to worry. As Anthony Barnett wrote in the context of the Falklands War: 'Most English will be puzzled if not confounded by the question of identity. For them it is not a dual affiliation: they are both English and British, the latter is really the global expression of the former and completely "natural" to it. The more their Englishness comes into question, however, as it did with the *English* riots of 1981, the more many will welcome an assertion of their Great Britishness. The Falklands episode may not be the last of such demonstrations, even if it remains the clearest.'¹⁹ Even Great Britishness, however, has been thrown into question by ever closer

ties with the European Union, causing political difficulties for the Conservative government and provoking the anxieties revealed in John Major's promise at the 1992 Conservative Party conference: 'I will never, come hell or high water, let our distinctive British identity be lost in a Federal Europe.'

Britishness was thus to be negatively defined. It appears that the less conscious a group or nation is of having an identity, or of needing to protect it, the more secure it is in that identity. Since 1945, however, the British have become more and more conscious of their loss of status, and the insecurity of their identity. The English have felt this most acutely, and have therefore clung most tightly to the Union and to the monarchy that is the guarantee of the Union. But an empty space has opened up which demands to be filled by a secure sense of Englishness. One reason for this is the disappearance of an even greater union, which dissolved the issue of what it was to be English into a greater whole, the British Empire. The Empire not only exported the problem of Englishness by projecting it on to an imperial frame that covered one fifth of the globe, the opportunities of Empire also provided a compensatory worldwide context for the Welsh and Scots. It was Empire that provided the positive images that mere Englishness lacked – lacked, because they were unnecessary. But with the ending of Empire, there has been little to replace them except imperial echoes.

In a recent study of twentieth-century English writers, *Literary Englands*, David Gervais has pointed to the lack of such positive images. He traces an English literary tradition that has been at best elegiac since the Great War, though a pastoral nostalgia goes back farther than that. England is an 'absence' and writers 'fall back on their regional identity for lack of a clear national one'.²⁰ Gervais has worried whether there is an 'English' mainstream literary tradition at all: 'Viewed sceptically, the tradition from Hardy through Thomas to Larkin and his heirs begins to seem like a progressive retreat or exile from some lost England.'²¹ In fact, England was only lost because it was absorbed into the rhetoric of Empire, which received a powerful boost from the political demands of the Second World War. In wartime films English national identity can be seen to have been constructed around a quasi-imperial community of deference, with young English upper-class officers leading Welsh-Scots-Irish-Yorkshire-Cockney-White Dominion platoons, or commanding similarly crewed bombers, ships and submarines. The non-military rhetoric of Empire was constructed around

10 Culture and Consensus

“the family”, the extended Imperial Family of Queen Victoria that shrank after the Great War to a nuclear family, the Royal Family of the House of Windsor.

But though in the Second World War Britain was saved by her Empire, she forfeited that Empire as the price of survival. The Americans had not fought the Second World War to preserve the British Empire, any more than had the Russians, and Britain could no longer hold on to it. Britain was effectively bankrupt in 1945, and along with the Empire, other emblems of power and success went too: the fiscal power of sterling was effectively halved by the devaluation of 1947, industrial and technological supremacy was challenged by the Americans, and soon afterwards by countries Britain had helped to defeat. Finally, in 1956, Britain’s military and diplomatic power was humiliated at Suez. By 1972 it is not surprising that a conservative nationalist like Philip Larkin should write the poem (commissioned by the Department of the Environment) ‘Going, Going’:

For the first time I feel somehow
That it isn’t going to last,

That before I snuff it, the whole
Boiling will be bricked in
Except for the tourist parts – ²²

The attempts to shore up a sense of national identity (British/English, rather than Irish, Welsh or Scots), once it had become threatened by the possibility of invasion in 1940, is one of the themes of this book. As was argued earlier, with the loss of Empire, monarchy has become an even more important source of symbolic reassurance. But the void that appears to be opening up at the centre of English cultural identity is matched by an emptiness at the heart of the Royal Family. On a visit to Madame Tussauds early in 1993 Marina Warner noticed that the waxwork figures of the Royal Family had been rearranged, so that Prince Charles and Diana now stood apart. The Royals, she wrote, were ‘suffering the consequences of mythological breakdown’.²³

One way of expressing and reconfirming national identity is precisely through myth. Myth may at first be dismissed because it is taken to mean the opposite of truth. In fact, myths are simple ways of conveying complex truths, and it does not matter whether they are true or false,

so long as they are believed. The cultural critic Donald Horne has put it well:

I take "myth" to mean a belief held in common by a large group of people that gives events and actions a particular meaning. It is a particularly sharp form of "reality"-making. It covers a lot of ground, as it were, in a short space. And it is particularly effective in "legitimations" of power because a "myth" can appear to explain and justify power with high voltage clarity. . . . "Myths" have the magic quality of transforming complex affairs into simple but crystal-clear "realities" that explain and justify how things are now, or how we would like them to be. Whether altogether false, or partly true, they have the transforming effect of hiding actual contradictions, confusions and inadequacies. When we speak of "myths" we are not dealing with little things, but with the ways we simplify or deny the great contradictions of society.²⁴

Myth can be about a presence, or an absence, so that paradoxically the myth of a lost England has contributed to ideas of English identity. Myths sustain people, but as Horne points out, they also serve to legitimate institutions. The myth of continuity, legitimacy and authority that sustains the British monarchy is a classic mixture of the actual and the magical, the true and the believed. For all that the Queen does not govern the country on a day-to-day basis she is the head of state, the apex of political power and, it has been argued, her authority is enhanced by her actual distance from mundane government. The best way to describe how that kind of authority operates is in terms of a leadership which brings coherence to all the different, sometimes competing, sources of power in the state: in other words, it operates as a form of *hegemony*.

The term has been in existence since the Greeks. In the twentieth century it has been most closely associated with the writings of Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), a founder member of the Italian Communist Party who did most of his thinking in Mussolini's gaols. Gramsci developed a theory, recorded in his somewhat fragmentary prison notebooks, which argued that the dominant group in society exercised its power by leadership and consent, rather than command and coercion. To secure consent, it was necessary for the dominant group to make concessions to other groups or classes in society, though always stopping short of giving up their fundamental economic power.

This position of leadership, which could be held by any group in society so long as it achieved the right balance of consent and economic

12 Culture and Consensus

control, Gramsci termed hegemony. Contemporary Western society being in constant movement as a result of the restless drive of capitalism, the balance of interests which maintains a hegemony is also shifting, and requires constant adjustment: 'The life of the state is conceived of as a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria (on the juridical plane) between the interests of the fundamental group and those of subordinate groups – equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only up to a certain point.'²⁵ Hegemony, Gramsci further wrote, is achieved through 'a certain compromise equilibrium' between the leaders and the led.²⁶

This was a much more subtle understanding of the relationship between the economic base of all societies and their individual social superstructures than the mechanical "economism" of Marxists who assumed a direct and automatic link between economic causes and political effects, reducing all arguments to economic ones. Gramsci importantly also drew on non-Marxist sources to argue for the significance of moral and cultural factors in the functioning of society. To achieve and maintain hegemony, it was essential to recognise 'the cultural fact, of cultural activity, of a cultural front as necessary alongside the merely economic and political ones'.²⁷ It was the function of intellectuals both to secure 'the "spontaneous" consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group' within 'private', civil society, and to administer the coercive power of the public, political state.²⁸

As the chapters that follow will show, Gramsci's ideas began to filter into British political thinking during the sixties, firstly through articles by Tom Nairn and Perry Anderson in the *New Left Review*, becoming much more accessible when the collection *Selections from Prison Notebooks* was published in English in 1971.²⁹ During the seventies Stuart Hall, director of Birmingham University's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, applied Gramsci's ideas to the post-war situation in Britain, with particular emphasis on the role of cultural factors in maintaining, and on occasion challenging, the prevailing hegemony. In the eighties Andrew Gamble was among those who used the concept of an economic, political and cultural hegemony to analyse contemporary political history. A successful hegemony, Gamble has written, 'requires the economic dominance of a successful regime of accumulation to be combined with the winning of political, moral and intellectual leadership in civil society'.³⁰

As George Orwell wrote in 1940, 'the English are not intellectual. They have a horror of abstract thought,' and it is fair to say that "hegemony" is still a specialised term.³¹ Yet it is possible to see how across history the English monarchy has maintained its power (and wealth) by a series of concessions and adjustments that have gradually transferred its powers to an elected government. What it has lost in the public, political realm it has gained in what Gramsci called the private, civil realm, so that its symbolic power and importance have actually increased. While Gramsci was interested in promoting a proletarian revolution by achieving a working-class hegemony, he saw that his theory applied to all forms of government; so it has proved in the post-war period as successive Labour and Conservative governments have sought to establish and maintain their leadership through democratic consent.

In the British context, there is a word which offers a more familiar alternative to hegemony: "consensus". By maintaining a consensus of agreement on some key issues, opposing political parties have been able to adjust the equilibrium of power without provoking so much resistance that assent was withdrawn. In keeping with the empiricist slant of British thought, the concept took a practical form in the shape of the wartime and post-war policy agreements between Conservative and Labour parties and was a familiar feature of the political landscape long before it became the subject of academic theory. "Consensus" was given prominence by the publication of Paul Addison's account of wartime politics, *The Road to 1945*, in 1975, which argued that whereas there had been a general agreement between the parties in the twenties to do as little as possible, 'the new consensus of the war years was positive and purposeful. Naturally the parties displayed differences of emphasis, and they still disagreed strongly on the question of nationalisation. At the hustings the rhetorical debate between state socialism and laissez-faire capitalism was renewed with acrimony. In practice, the Conservative and Labour leaders had by-passed most of it in favour of "pragmatic" reform in a mixed economy.'³²

For a country to be governable at all, there must be a degree of mutual consent by both the governors and the governed to abide by its laws, and Britain with its long history of gradual rather than bloody revolutions can be said to have been governed by a form of consensus since William and Mary. However, the marked continuity of policy between rival parties in the immediate post-war period implies a

14 Culture and Consensus

consensus of a stricter kind, and brings it much closer to Gramsci's notion of a 'compromise equilibrium'. In February 1954 the *Economist* invented the word 'Butskellism' to describe the continuity between the economic policies of the previous Labour Chancellor, Hugh Gaitskell, and the Conservative R. A. Butler.³³ The participation of the trades unions in managing the economy from 1940 to the seventies is an example of a concession made to a subordinate group in the interests of maintaining economic power. As Gamble has written: 'The establishment of a durable hegemony requires the emergence of a *consensus* [*italics added*] both on the desirable shape of the society and the policy priorities of the government. True hegemony comes about when there is no longer serious conflict over the fundamentals of social organisation.'³⁴

Addison's comment on the 'pragmatic' agreement between Labour and Conservative which ignored the rhetoric of the hustings also points to another important link between consensus and hegemony. As Dennis Kavanagh and Peter Morris argue in their study, *Consensus Politics From Attlee to Major*: 'Consensus politics are inextricably linked with policy-making as an élite process (carried out by senior ministers, civil servants, producer interest groups and communicators) and with the existence of a government that possesses authority.'³⁵ Hegemony is the means by which those in the dominant group sustain their authority, and that authority is maintained by precisely the people that Kavanagh and Morris describe. They do so by control of the coercive power of the state (through the army, the police and the judiciary) but also by managing popular consent to the continuation of their authority. In a country without a written constitution, such as the United Kingdom, hegemony *is* the constitution, and consensus its popular expression.

As was established earlier, consensus is not the same as full agreement: party politics will continue and there will always be areas of society – in Northern Ireland for instance – where consensus is absent. The political historian Ben Pimlott has questioned whether the post-war consensus ever existed, such was the degree of political conflict between the parties throughout the whole period, but it is not necessary to have complete accord to maintain a working consensus.³⁶ It is a confluence, not a conformity of agreement, and within broad limits, a national consensus will remain fluid as social and economic forces dynamically interact. Being partial, it can also break down, as was the case during precisely the period when both hegemony and consensus

were being theorised in the seventies. The “compromise equilibrium” can lose its balance, and imperfect hegemonies are more likely to be encountered than perfect ones. This can be just as well. A consensus may be, as Addison has written of the wartime consensus, ‘positive and purposeful’, but it can equally be negative and undirected. Without the movement that produces shifts and adjustments to the consensus, dynamism gives way to stasis. Consensus can produce social harmony, but it can also hold the creative forces of society in check.

Consensus in Britain has tended to be conservative, and it is not difficult to see why. As an old country, which experienced religious reformation, civil war, constitutional change and industrial revolution early in its history, Britain – notwithstanding the execution of Charles I and the deposition of James II – adjusted to these upheavals without the eradication of a single class or dominant group. Gradualism, by which things change without appearing to do so, has been the characteristic British approach, and has left both the monarchy and the aristocracy constitutionally and economically intact. The tradition of “one nation” Conservatism, which seeks to temper the social depredations of capitalism, predates the Industrial Revolution. Andrew Gamble has argued: ‘The success of the British state in avoiding both internal overthrow and external defeat has ensured that most of the national myths are Tory myths, and most of the rituals and institutions of the state are Tory rituals and institutions . . . This makes the national culture a Tory culture.’³⁷ The monarchy is justified on the grounds of its ancient tradition *and* its contemporary usefulness; its preservation is common sense but, as Gramsci pointed out, one of the ways that a hegemony is maintained is to make its particular distribution of power appear natural and normal.³⁸ The claim in a Conservative Political Centre’s pamphlet, ‘The Right Approach’, in 1976 that ‘the facts of life invariably turn out to be Tory’ is a classic example of ascribing to a particular point of view the authority of common sense.³⁹

The most useful way to manufacture “common sense” – that is, a general acceptance that certain concepts or courses of action are right and natural – is through a society’s culture, through the ideas, images, and values which are embodied in its rituals and its historical memory – in its mythology. Culture puts the flesh on the bones of national identity, and a sense of national identity is one of the prerequisites of political consensus. As the sociologist Anthony Smith has written: ‘The most salient political function of national identity is its

16 Culture and Consensus

legitimation of common legal rights and duties of legal institutions, which define the peculiar values and character of the nation and reflect the age-old customs and mores of the people. The appeal to national identity has become the main legitimation for social order and solidarity today.⁴⁰ A secure national identity supports a successful hegemony: that hegemony reinforces national identity.

As Gramsci pointed out, society has both a public and political realm, and a private and social one. Similarly, national identity has both a political expression, through government, and a social expression, through culture. Both aspects are closely interrelated, but culture is important precisely because it does not appear to be directly connected with politics, in the same way that the authority of the modern British monarchy is supposed to derive from its *not* having political power. But just as there are competing interests in society seeking to shift the equilibrium on the political plane, so they are seeking to shift the equilibrium on the cultural. As Stuart Hall has written: 'The dominant culture represents itself as *the* culture. It tries to define and contain all other cultures within its inclusive range. *Its* views of the world, unless challenged, will stand as the most natural, all-embracing, universal culture. Other cultural configurations will not only be subordinate to this dominant order: they will enter into struggle with it, seek to modify, negotiate, resist or even overthrow its reign – its *hegemony*.'⁴¹

For the dominant group, culture will become a means of authority, and a source of authority for those who attach themselves to its values. It will be an expression of political authority, the basis of critical authority and an emblem of social aspiration. Control of the resources that support cultural activity will in itself be a form of authority. The intelligentsia will be employed in servicing and policing culture. It has the crucial task of disseminating it to those beyond the immediate group in power, for one way of maintaining consent is to ensure that the culture of the dominant class is not enjoyed exclusively by that class, but that its values permeate the whole of society. Thus the culture of the dominant class becomes identified with the culture of society as a whole. In the twentieth century Britain has developed institutions to ensure this, as will be shown. The decision to establish a 'national curriculum' in schools is an attempt to reassert a particular view of national identity through a prescribed history and literature. The manipulation of the idea of a 'national heritage' performs a similar

function in reuniting contemporary Britain with a particular version of its past and reconciling it to that past.

It is not surprising, then, that the very concept of culture has become dauntingly associated with ideas of authority. Examined more closely, it is the field in which the struggle for authority takes place. As Stuart Hall has argued: 'It is crucial to replace the notion of "culture" with the more concrete, historical concept of "cultures": a redefinition which brings out more clearly the fact that cultures always stand in relations of domination – and subordination – to one another, are always, in some sense, in struggle with one another.'⁴² This struggle between dominant cultures and sub-cultures will be expressed in cultural terms, but not necessarily in terms that the dominant culture will recognise. Dick Hebdige has argued: 'The challenge to hegemony which sub-cultures represent is not issued directly by them. Rather it is expressed obliquely, in style.'⁴³ Within this force field of daily contestation the shifting equilibrium is found. It follows that culture in its broadest sense, though expressed through objects, images and utterances, cannot be an object in itself. It is the process, the channel of transmission for the ideas, dreams and values which are given form by the specific media of the arts.

Within a cat's cradle of dynamic forces, between the counterbalances of solid and fluid, chaos and order, inner and outer, dark and light, physical and spiritual, national and emotional, abstract and concrete, idealist and realist, male and female, the symbolic elements that constitute the particularities of a culture are shaped. This process can equally be described as the emergence of myth, suspended as it is between objective truth and subjective belief. One of the most important myths is the myth of national identity, which is constructed, replicated and reshaped by the sense-making procedures of culture.

The relationship between national identity and political consensus turns out to be, not a simple dialogue, but a musical triad, in which the third element is culture. When culture, consensus and identity form a harmony, a successful hegemony can be established. More often than not, this complex equilibrium of forces is only partially established. At times of crisis, there is only dissonance. A truly exclusive study of any one of these elements will fail, because it will ignore the other forces that interact with it and shape it. That is why a study of culture must also look at politics, and why politics are better understood if cultural factors are taken into account. In the nineteenth century, English

18 Culture and Consensus

literature flourished as a consequence of the dialectic between politics and culture; literary criticism became a form of social criticism, with its own moral standpoint and values, which became attached to the subject they discussed. John Ruskin (1819–1900) saw no conflict or contradiction in discussing art, morality and politics at the same time, as his monthly public letters addressed to the ‘working-men of England’, *Fors Clavigera*, showed. When the proponents of “cultural studies”, whose development as a field of academic inquiry is another theme in this book, introduced an explicit (as opposed to implicit) political dimension into cultural criticism in the sixties and seventies, they were doing nothing new.

The subject of contestation, within culture, but also more importantly between culture, consensus and national identity, is that of values. What are the values that a society wishes to express? Does it even have any control or volition in the matter of values? The evidence suggests that it does, for values are one more of the dynamic forces that are active in the social process. As Anthony Smith has written: ‘If a nation, however modern, is to survive in this modern world, it must do so at two levels: the socio-political and the cultural-psychological. What, after all, is the *raison d’être* of any *nation* (as opposed to state), if it is not also the cultivation of its unique (or allegedly unique) culture values?’⁴⁴ Values, however, turn out to be contingent. They vary in relation to the equilibrium of forces within a society, although the dominant group will seek to reinforce its position by asserting the absolute nature of the values it holds. That all values are, ultimately, relative, does not however make them valueless, for they have a key role within the dynamic of society.

The enduring problem for the cultural historian is that he or she is not in the supposedly neutral position of an anthropologist observing from a distance the customs of a tribe, but is caught up in the web of cultural values that is the object of study. As one of the founding fathers of British – not English, for he was border-Welsh – cultural studies, Raymond Williams warned: ‘No community, no culture, can ever be fully conscious of itself, ever fully know itself.’⁴⁵

One of the ironies of the fire at Windsor was that the Castle, like the House of Windsor, was a pastiche. The place was real enough, and had been there since William the Conqueror but, just like the monarchy it housed, which had changed its name from Saxe-Coburg-Gotha as

late as 1917, its appearance was largely a nineteenth-century creation. At the end of the twentieth century, the issue became whether everything should be restored as it was supposed to have been, or whether this 'symbol of royalty and national heritage' might not be modernised in some way. In the symbolic "magical" realm of national identity, the manner in which a royal palace is restored could also convey something about the state of the nation, just as its near-destruction had done.

In 1824, following Britain's triumph in the Napoleonic wars, Parliament voted £150,000 for the restoration of Windsor Castle, to provide a suitable setting for the reception of crowned heads and foreign statesmen. The modern equivalent would be the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in Westminster. After a competition, George IV and his commissioners employed Jeffry Wyatt (who embellished his own name at the same time as the Castle by medievalising it to Wyatville) to make radical alterations. The grand banqueting hall, St George's Hall, was reconstructed in 1832 out of two earlier rooms, a royal chapel and a state reception room, which in turn had been remodelled for Charles II between 1675 and 1684 out of the original St George's Hall created for Edward III in 1363. The Waterloo Chamber was designed to celebrate a British (and Prussian) victory over the French. Overall, Wyatville gave the Castle a more chivalric and romantic appearance, in line with the nineteenth-century taste for medievalism. As the architectural historian Mark Girouard has explained: 'All windows were gothicised, crenellations and machicolations replaced plain battlements or flat parapets, bay and oriel windows were protruded, towers were heightened; and overall rose the dominating silhouette of the Round Tower, raised by an extra thirty-three feet (illustration 2).'⁴⁶ The Brunswick Tower, whose flaming outline in November 1992 made an ironic contrast to images of the dome of St Paul's untouched amid the smoke and flames of the Blitz in 1940, was a Wyatville confection. As with modern building projects such as the British Library, there was a severe cost overrun, and building continued into the reign of Queen Victoria.

Immediately after the fire in 1992 a debate started about how repairs should be carried out, alongside the debate about how they should be paid for. The editor of the *Architects' Journal*, Stephen Greenberg, argued that the country 'should not be refaking what are fakes anyway. Instead we should add another layer to an unfolding history in order to express the art and spirit of our times.'⁴⁷ The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) proposed a competition to find a new solution

20 Culture and Consensus

to the question of rebuilding, and held a seminar and exhibition in 1993. The magazine *Country Life* ran its own competition; Mark Girouard invited celebrity architects and designers to submit ideas for inclusion in his book on the Castle. It appeared, however, that a decision to restore St George's Hall to its previous appearance had been taken in principle before consultations with the RIBA, English Heritage and the Royal Fine Art Commission (RFAC) had been completed. At a meeting chaired by the Duke of Edinburgh on 22 April 1993 the chairman of the RFAC – and royal courtier – Lord St John of Fawsley (the former Conservative Arts Minister Norman St John-Stevas) concurred with English Heritage that Wyattville's work should be restored. This was not the view of the other commissioners of the RFAC, who later argued in May that full restoration would be wrong.

The final conclusion was a compromise: to restore St George's Hall as far as possible in the original style, to upgrade the kitchens for banquets and rebuild with modern materials within the Brunswick Tower. On 29 April 1993 it was announced that the work would be a blend of 'restoration and redesign', with 'the best of contemporary design and craftsmanship' in destroyed parts such as the Private Chapel. At the same time it was announced that in order for the Queen to implement her decision to contribute substantially to the cost of rebuilding, Buckingham Palace would be opened to the public for the first time, at a charge of eight pounds a head from August to September (when the Queen would not be in residence) for the next five years. It was calculated that this, plus the new charge to enter the precincts of Windsor Castle, would meet seventy per cent of the costs of the repairs, now put at thirty-five million pounds.

The Queen was almost certainly in a position to meet all the costs from her private fortune, but instead the public, while relieved of the charge as taxpayers, would pay for the repairs through royalty's greater commercial participation in the heritage industry of which it was already the 'branding device'. As a further move towards public "ownership", in April 1993 the seven thousand oil paintings and more than five hundred thousand prints and drawings in the Royal Collection were placed in the control of the newly created Royal Collection Trust, chaired by Prince Charles, with the intention of putting more of the collection on public display. Royal Collection Enterprises Ltd, the "trading arm" of the monarchy, in its first year received £4.8 million