

# COLONIALISM AND 'LAW AND ORDER' CRITICISM

BY TESHOME H GABRIEL

Among the Ewe people of Southern Ghana, the High God is an androgynous figure called Mawu-Lisa, 'Mawu' being the female principle and 'Lisa' the male. In translating the Bible into the Ewe language, the female component was severed from the androgynous name. The Ewe rejected this concept of a one-sided High God, and despite the most brutal acts of 'law and order' visited on them by the 'civilising mission', have to the present time remained predominantly animist.

The legacy of colonialism has not only defined the Third World as non-Western but it has also made the West non-Third World. This has given the Western person a world view and a readiness to regard his/her activities as the 'mainstream'. The 'Super Bowl' and the 'World Series' reinforce a world view governed by an obsession for superlatives in all spheres of life; one can easily characterise this era as the age of hyperbole. What is culturally specific is viewed as a phenomenon engulfing the globe. Even when noble causes with good intentions and positive results are involved, with implications far greater than cultural specificity, global annexation is obvious. Such is the case, for instance, with the all-star fund-raising hymn for hunger, 'We Are the World' where 'we are' functions as a determinant, thus turning into a borderland the very people that are being aided. The Third World continues to be viewed as 'dependent', 'peripheral' or 'marginal', *not because the Third World is marginal per se, but because it is marginalised in, and by, colonial discourse.*

In this era when even mosquitoes have adapted

to DDT it is understandable that the intellectual heirs of colonial ideology have readjusted their rhetoric too. Nowadays, First World intellectuals enthuse over their global focus, and this idea is not new. Ten years ago, Immanuel Wallerstein made it a mark of his 'World System Theory'. For Wallerstein there is only one World Capitalist System, whose principal categories are 'core' and 'periphery', where the 'core' is the determinant of relations of exchange. He quotes Karl Marx, trying to enlist him in his interpretation. But for Wallerstein, besides pre- and non-capitalism there is no post-capitalist formation. For him 'socialism' is subsumed under the general category of 'non-capitalisms'. Accordingly, no Third World country can become socialist.<sup>1</sup> Third World countries can move from one peripheral status to a semi-periphery within the capitalist mode; change can only be of degree rather than of kind.

In *Screen's* special issue, 'Other Cinemas, Other Criticisms', the lead article by Julianne Burton, 'Marginal Cinemas and Mainstream Critical Theory', proposes a most troubling example of critical theory along the lines of Wallerstein's core and periphery. There is a perfect fit here between Wallerstein's 'World System Theory' and Burton's 'Cinema-as-Spectacle':

*Third World film-makers can attempt to supplant the spectacle with a non- (or pre-) spectacular by*

<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, New York, Academic Press, 1974.

*substituting some indigenous/autonomous discourse whose 'otherness' is almost inevitably one of degree rather than kind.*<sup>2</sup>

Just as 'socialism' is not only non-capitalism but 'Socialism', so also is Third World cinema not only non-spectacle but Third World cinema. The 'otherness' is not only one of degree but also of kind. 'Third Cinema' attempts to draw attention to this fact. To hold on to the modes of operation and discourse of dominant cinema is counter to Third Cinema practice. The discourse strategy of Third Cinema has a more political and ideological social focus. This Julianne Burton seems unable to understand—not all Third World film texts qualify as 'Third Cinema'. The territory is *not* the map. Third Cinema in the Third World is anti-imperialist, militant and confrontational cinema. It is neither pre- nor non-Cinema as Spectacle; it is, as Fernando Birri in the same issue of *Screen* puts it, 'an active cinema for an active spectator'—*it is 'a cinema of and for liberation'*.<sup>3</sup>

## II

In her article in *Screen*, Burton argues that the 'claim to transparency and unity of meaning' of Third Cinema texts is not only unattainable but impossible. She denies this ideological transparency in Third Cinema practices not because they have any hidden or 'unconscious' agenda but precisely because, as she suggests, 'they are potentially intimidating in their resistance to assimilation.' Such arguments tend to obscure the proven resistance of the Third Cinema text.

The issue of transparency should be looked at within a specific cultural-historical context. What is not transparent for a Western viewer is transparent enough in its own context. For instance, Third World ethnographic films tend to be viewed as political in the country of their origin, while they are viewed as *exotica* outside it. Similarly, an American fiction film seen overseas may be regarded as a documentary on American life. First time visitors to the USA often have a strange nostalgic feeling about the New York skyline or the Statue of Liberty. They have never been there before but they have 'already seen it' in their past. Folks, it's the

movies! Obviously, the West is more than the Third World's *exotica*. Similarly, the Third World, is also 'already read', as a lack by the West.

A dialogue between the West and the Third World is always a welcome endeavour. But what blocks such efforts is the historical mishap they suffered and are locked into, namely colonialism and imperialism. This has made reciprocity and peaceful co-existence difficult to achieve. The Third World has always tried to incorporate the West in its culture and developmental schemes. The fact that more Third World people speak European languages than Westerners speak Third World languages is a case in point. But it is the conflictual one-sidedness of the West that defeats and frustrates meaningful communication, because of its unceasing desire for colonial enclaves as well as cultural synchronisation with itself. *The barrier to real dialogue is thus the terms of dialogue itself.* Consequently, in its desire to globalise and homogenise world cinema and cultures, critical theory is also implicated.

Burton's inability to understand the specific ideological predicaments of the Third World's cultural politics undermines the basis of her criticism of Third Cinema. If it is agreed that the Third World is characterised by underdevelopment and the 'lingering heritage' of colonial exploitation, cannot unequal economic exchange carry over into unequal symbolic exchange? For instance, Burton sets up proponents of 'cultural decolonisation' in the Third World as though their only desire is a return to 'pre-colonial innocence'. This, of course, denies them any awareness of their history. Burton uses a selective quotation from Eduardo Galeano to legitimate her assertion that 'cultural decolonisation' is 'a pervasive but illusory goal'. She would be fairer to the spirit of Galeano's article had she also quoted the following, which speaks the opposite of what she claimed:

<sup>2</sup> Julianne Burton, 'Marginal Cinemas and Mainstream Critical Theory', *Screen* May-August 1985, vol 26 nos 3-4, p 13. All other citations are included in the text.

<sup>3</sup> Fernando Birri, 'For a Nationalist Realist, Critical and Popular Cinema', *Screen* May-August 1985, vol 26 nos 3-4, p 90.

*In general, it can truly be said that many education centers and almost all the massive communication media radiate translated messages, fabricated outside and designed to drain the Latin American memory and prevent it from recognizing its own reality and capacity: they induce it to consume and passively reproduce the symbols of the very power that humbles it.*<sup>4</sup>

In the same issue of *Screen* Julio García Espinosa comments on a similar misunderstanding of his idea of an 'Imperfect Cinema'. 'Many people thought it was about making bad films'. According to Espinosa, this does not set up an either/or situation in terms of good and bad films, but judges from a cultural ideological perspective that encompasses the ideology of the work and the artistry of the maker.<sup>5</sup> As Glauber Rocha had intimated, 'technique is closer to ideology than to aesthetics.' A critic brought up in a tradition which extols artistry above all else would assume that 'an Imperfect Cinema' was about making bad films. And if the critic belonged to the so-called 'mainstream critical theory' group, he/she would try to support that assumption with selective quotations.

In her eagerness to explicate a 'critical theory' based on a vague form she calls 'psychodynamics', Burton misquotes and misrepresents *Third Cinema in the Third World*. Her appropriation and [mis]use of the original text is presented here:

*For Gabriel, the exploration of the psychodynamics of signification in Third World films is just as unnecessary as ideological interrogation, for Third Cinema 'does not function on a psychological or mythic level but rather takes up an explicit position with respect to an ideological or social topic'. (p 16)*

Here I provide the original text as it appeared in *Third Cinema in the Third World*:

*In Third Cinema point of view does not function on a psychological or mythic level per se but rather takes up an explicit position with respect to an ideological or social topic.*<sup>6</sup>

Burton then goes on to say that leading critics of socially-committed arts, 'posited the social-historical component of character *in addition to* rather than *in place of* the psychological' (p 16) – the very point that, but for her deletions, I made.

This misquotation/misrepresentation is not merely the result of a basic difference between the two texts shown above. The root cause is ideological and lies in the incompatibility of stated approaches to the 'aesthetics of social pleasure'. As Terry Lovell points out in the paragraphs subsequent to those quoted by Burton, 'aesthetic sensibilities are class- and sex-linked, and the politics of aesthetic pleasure will depend on the particular ways in which that sensibility has been appropriated and developed along lines of sex and class.'<sup>7</sup> The question then is: *Whose aesthetics? Whose pleasure?* It is not transhistorical or transcultural. Rather, it is a question of who develops it, for whom, under what conditions and along what lines? Burton would rather the West define it for the Third World. Third Cinema insists the people of the Third World do it for themselves.

More than 'the aesthetics of pleasure', therefore, the issue is one of activist aesthetics and the conditions for it. The question of social pleasure, for the Third World film-maker is not a theoretical question but a practical one; more than a condition of psychological alienation, it is a political issue of bread and butter.

To say, as Burton does, that 'oppositional cultural practices from the Third World bear the promise of unifying the presently polarised view of culture' by 'challenging cultural critics to recognise and articulate pleasure and desire as social rather than exclusively individual experiences' (p 21), is to credit Third World film language and practice with what it does not do. Third Cinema, presents 'another' film practice that cannot be adequately explicated by Western critical theory of 'pleasure' and 'desire'.<sup>8</sup> This Third World film-makers have said time and time again. As the Cuban director Jorge Fraga puts it, 'We are not in favor of firing merely for

<sup>4</sup> Eduardo Galeano, 'The Revolution as Revelation,' (trans by Walter I Bradbury), *Socialist Review*, no 65, September-October 1982, p 9.

<sup>5</sup> Julio García Espinosa, 'Meditations on an Imperfect Cinema', *Screen* May-August 1985, vol 26 nos 3-4, pp 93-94.

<sup>6</sup> Teshome Gabriel, *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation*, Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1982, p 7.

<sup>7</sup> Terry Lovell, *Pictures of Reality: Aesthetics, Politics, Pleasure*, London, BFI, 1980, p 95.

the pleasure of hearing the shot. We shoot in order to hit the target.<sup>9</sup>

### III

*As the honorary president of the Entro de Capacitacion Cinematografica in Mexico City, I once went to visit the school and was introduced to several professors, including a young man in a suit and tie who blushed a good deal. When I asked him what he taught, he replied, 'The Semiology of the Clonic Image.' I could have murdered him on the spot. By the way, when this kind of jargon (a typically Parisian phenomenon) works its way into the educational system, it wreaks absolute havoc in underdeveloped countries. It's the clearest sign, in my opinion, of cultural colonialism.<sup>10</sup>*

It is indeed a sad commentary, particularly coming from such a prominent director as Luis Bunuel, but it is precisely when Third World intellectual activity is solely European-flavoured that it runs the risk of being obtrusive, obscure and irrelevant. This kind of semiotic intellectual of the Third World is of course more at home in a European atmosphere than in his or her own. Bunuel's scepticism is shared by Third World film-makers, but it should be regarded as an opposition to 'Ivory Tower Semiotics' and not as a dismissal of semiotics. As Marshall Blonsky tartly observed, 'the reason the discourse has never "taken" – never become, itself . . . – is that action would be threatened by it.'<sup>11</sup>

This issue brings out in force the reason why Third World film-makers/scholars should not be forced always to think in a sign system that is not theirs. The question is whether the categories that inform Western semiotics are fully relevant to the analysis of non-Western sign systems. Western semiotics has presumed that its categories can travel across cultures and languages. But language is saturated with the values of its own culture. To think in a language other than one's own, is to experience a peculiar form of alienation – a kind of self-exile. Besides, Western semiotics has not developed a strategy to explain the specific mode of transformation required by the Third World context where semiotics should be an instrument of political action. This has been largely ignored and underdeveloped. It is now imperative to formulate Third Cinema semiotics in terms of its

relation between Third World concepts and its own artistic mode to develop forms of explanation that account for its specificity.

The position of the spectator in the Western cinema is different from the position of the spectator in Third Cinema. The theorisation of the Western spectator within the Althusserian framework views the subject as passive and mystified. This has been the cornerstone of the ideological critique of Western cinema. Western cinema represents and replays these mystified social relations. Third Cinema by contrast maintains that the relation between the Third World audience in Third Cinema is one of immediate ideological lucidity. As the exiled Chilean film-maker Miguel Littin states, 'We maintain that a cinema based upon our objectives necessarily implies a different kind of critical evaluation; and we affirm that the greatest critic of a revolutionary film is the people to whom it is directed, who have no need for mediators to defend and interpret for them.' Indeed, the politicised spectator of the Third World film who has an ideological and semiotic grip of the text does not need, as Burton suggested, 'a mediating agency, an advocate in the guise of a film critic . . . or other certified "expert"' (p 5), because this spectator, as an agent of the historical process, sees in films the concrete realisation of his/her political and material circumstances.

The issue at stake here is ideological – it disclaims value-free semiotics. Littin's statement should therefore be read as a call for ideological mediation which is sensitive to the cultural and ideological needs of both the film-maker and the

<sup>8</sup> The quest for 'pleasure' and 'desire' within the Lacanian rereading of Freud suggests the notion of sexual difference. There is, however, no cultural reading of either Freud or Lacan in film texts in the Third World. Here, the social paradigm stands for the sexual paradigm as the generator of excess. In Third Cinema 'pleasure' and 'desire' are set forth as revolutionary agencies. For further reading on this issue, see Richard Lichtman, *The Production of Desire*, New York, The Free Press, 1982, and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, New York, The Viking Press, 1977.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Peter Steven (ed) *Jump Cut: Hollywood, Politics and Counter-cinema, Between the Lines*, Toronto, 1985, p 351.

<sup>10</sup> Luis Bunuel, *My Last Sigh: The Autobiography of Luis Bunuel*, New York, Alfred A Knopf, Inc, 1983, p 222.

<sup>11</sup> Marshall Blonsky (ed), *On Signs*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1985, p 36.

audience. Third Cinema practices maintain that the Third World audience has an active and essentially constructive relation to the sign systems of Third World cinema. The spectator activates the sense of the text. When Julio García Espinosa quoting Marx entones, 'in the future there will no longer be painters but rather men who, among other things, dedicate themselves to painting'<sup>12</sup>, he is proposing the mission of Third Cinema – to make every spectator/reader ideologically astute.

Why is it that structurally, semiotics underplays history and everyday existence? Because, as Blonsky observed:

*Semiotics has been a futile gaze at the world's seeming pleasures, its drunken stupidities; and it may all the while have been imaginary, the way in which we, semiotic intellectuals, have wanted to be loved and respected. No, a critic will answer me, semiotics can also be unpolitical, unideological. It can yield up a renewed joy every time we see the functioning of the world's semantic organization. Studying poetry, painting, narrative and so on, we learn that the world is an immense message, we enjoy all the intelligence of everything that is intelligible. To which we can respond: but spying out the world's meanings, you have spied out its misery once more. Meaning is an instrument, a conduit of power.*<sup>13</sup>

Why is it that a cine-structuralist variant of the Semiotic Inquiry is a calculated affront to common sense? When meaning is readily accessible, it seeks answers elsewhere, and in the process the subject, the lives and struggles of human beings, gets lost in the shuffle. The issue is whether to regard structure or structuring absences as the meaning of a text or to consider the significance of the text by its place in the social context. Western semiotics, as a deciphering operation, not only dismisses the 'obvious' and the 'habitual' as false consciousness but also sets out to marginalise competing ideological interpretation. *The question is not whether one can escape semiotics, but rather to understand that all sign systems are implicated in ideology.*

What then is Third Cinema semiotics? The following, inasmuch as they can shed more light on the current debate, should be regarded as the main concern of Third Cinema semiotics.

1. To explicate and interrogate the kinds of intuitive knowledge spectators bring to the process.
2. To clear the ideological confusion that surrounds semiotic inquiry into cross-cultural studies.
3. To wed political economy of the signifier to critical theory of the text, and above all, To emphasise the 'ideological' as opposed to the 'psychological' spectator.

Here you have it: semiotics of everyday life, cross-cultural semiotics, the political economy of the social sign and, finally, a semiotics rooted in the dialectics of struggle. Semiotics can no longer afford to overlook these concerns of Third Cinema and alienate, or be alienated by, those who act in it.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to the realisation of the semiotic project is those texts of Third Cinema that are resistant to the absorption tendencies of 'mainstream' critical theory. Third Cinema texts exist within both ideology and history and thus need the application of a bonded historiography and semiotics for meaningful explication.

#### IV

The concept of 'Third World' has been strongly attacked by scholars both from the USSR<sup>14</sup> and the USA due to its non-differentiation between one super-power and the other in their relation to the Third World. Burton also dismissed the concept by calling it, 'a signifier without a signified, a term without a referent' (p 11). This is a neither/nor situation and is, at best, agnostic thinking. Once she has dismissed the term, she nevertheless continues to use it, equating it with 'less Westernised', 'dependent', 'non-Western' and 'marginal', as if all these terms of analysis are the same. If Burton does not acknowledge the concept exists, what then is her article about?

What is one to make of the Third World

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Michael Chanan (ed), *Twenty-five Years of Latin American Cinema*, London, BFI-Channel Four, 1983, p 29.

<sup>13</sup> Marshall Blonsky, op cit, p 35, emphasis added.

<sup>14</sup> See Y Zhukov, et al, *The Third World*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1970.

alliance within the United Nations in which these countries quite frequently take a unified stand on issues of mutual concern? So long as we recognise 'first world' and 'second world' there will always be a 'third world'. These labels are relational; they have an instrumental value, not an absolute one. The real reasons for denying the term legitimacy lie in its connotations of 'power' and 'united front' as the basis of global differentiation.<sup>15</sup>

Burton's dismissal of the concept of 'Third Cinema' is, therefore, quite understandable, because it too connotes power and united front. 'Third Cinema' challenges the hegemonic hold of Cinema-as-Spectacle. Indeed, the concept of Third Cinema is unified in its difference from Hollywood or mainstream cinema. For Burton to allege that the term has been 'widely questioned by many Third World film-makers and flatly rejected by others' (p 6), because of its Peronist associations, is guilt by association. It would have been useful to have had a relevant reference of her allegation at this point.

According to Burton, 'cultural impermeability between dominant and dependent cultures... does not exist' (p 9). Have you ever watched a Third World film with native viewers of that culture? To do so is to find the 'untranslatable' and 'unparaphraseable' nuances of culture foregrounded by two distinct responses: from those following the sub-titles and those following the direct address. While one group struggles to fashion a linear narrative, the other is engaged in intellectual and emotional involvement, be it in chuckles, choruses of laughter or other forms of response. Cultural impermeability cannot be simply wished away.

Mythical consciousness and folk narrative poetics are specific elements of Third World film texts. The specificities of each Third World culture are unities in their own settings, but they are also unities measured against differences within a Third World context. This relationship is a dialectical one; rather than oppositional it is a relationship marked by differences of strategies for development. The 'mainstream' paradigm, on the other hand, is measured by production values and the trajectory of technical brilliance. If, as it currently seems, mainstream cinema needs 40 million dollars plus for the sheer quality of its production, Third Cinema practices can live without it. The unifying impulse that originally

spurred Third Cinema was and is a need for the primacy of subject matter over material considerations. To know this is to acknowledge the energy of social commitment and vision concentrated or lodged within it. Consequently, as I've suggested elsewhere<sup>16</sup>, we need to attend to a new critical theory that takes into account cultural resistance to domination as its prime rhetorical strategy. A genuine cross-cultural system of exchange, a cross fertilisation of ideas, can only occur if the notion that there cannot be discourse without meta-discourse/message without meta-message is reconsidered in light of text and context.

To imply that mainstream critical theory should dominate and assimilate all others because of its position of power, is to speak only in economic terms and to collapse everything else, including social concerns into it. As Bunuel has observed:

*It seems clear to me that without the enormous influence of the canon of American culture, Steinbeck would be an unknown, as would Dos Passos and Hemingway. If they'd been born in Paraguay or Turkey, no one would ever have read them, which suggests the alarming fact that the greatness of a writer is in direct proportion to the power of his country.<sup>17</sup>*

In this period of world hunger, nuclear threat, ideologised racism, the Debt Trap and violent conflicts in Central America, natural disasters in Mexico and Colombia, the 'great' film directors of the West, would have been mere footnotes in history, had it not been for the economic power of their countries, and such notables as Nelson Pereira dos Santos of Brazil, Ousmane Sembène of Senegal, Thomas Gutiérrez Alea of Cuba, Mirinal Sen of India, Fernando Birri and Fernando Solanas of Argentina, Miguel Littin of Chile and several North American and European

<sup>15</sup> For an introduction to the term and concept of 'Third World', see SD Muine, 'The Third World: Concept and Controversy', *Third World Quarterly*, vol 1 no 3, 1979, pp 118-128.

<sup>16</sup> See my article, 'Towards Critical Theory of Third World Films', *Third World Affairs*, 1985, Third World Foundation for Social and Economic Studies, London, January 1985, pp 355-369.

<sup>17</sup> Luis Bunuel, op cit, p 222.

146 progressive film-makers, active in Nicaragua, El Salvador, the Middle East, South Africa, would have been the actual luminaries of this era.

Of course, mainstream critical theory operates under the 'myth of the monolith' and tends to forget that there is another West, whose main concern is also social and political and whose struggles to liberate cinema compares with that of the Third World. Too often these film-makers are also ghettoised in just the same way as the Third World film-makers. As Peter Steven has observed:

*Variety magazine and its rave reports of 'box office magic' represent the voice of dominant cinema.... But at the same time there are other, different voices – different languages – calling for radically new types of films, and for a new approach to cinema. These voices don't have the backing of Wall Street and Madison Avenue but they are present nevertheless and very active in parallel nooks and crannies in North America and beyond, and especially in the Third World.*<sup>18</sup>

If anyone should claim credit for ushering in, and popularising, Third World film in Western universities and cinemas, it is this progressive voice, and not, as Burton implies, the academic institutions *per se*. Progressive faculty, students and film journals in the US and Europe have played an important role. However, the claim to be allied with this movement is not in itself an indication of solidarity with the goal of cultural liberation. What is called for, above all else, is a more coherent and constructive understanding and practice than that espoused by Burton's concluding remarks:

*A view of culture in which the realm of ideological significance is not incompatible with the realm of personal enrichment (because personal enrichment is also viewed as a social phenomenon) would free Western critics from the onerous role of 'diagnostician of pathologies', reaffirming instead their function as guide and celebrant. (p 21)*

Progressive Western voices who have grasped the ideological agenda of decolonisation and liberation of Third Cinema have allied in co-productions and other forms of critical solidarity with Third World progressives to bring about, in the words of Glauber Rocha, the overthrow of 'the world cinematic language' under 'the

dictatorship of Coppola and Godard.'<sup>19</sup> In this spirit, Julio García Espinosa has said, 'Cinema can be constructed on the ashes of what already exists. Moreover, to make a new cinema is, in fact, to reveal the process of destruction of the spectacle.... We have to make a spectacle out of the destruction of the spectacle.'<sup>20</sup> When this is accomplished, it is then and only then that Burton's hopes would be realised and using her own words, Western critics, would be freed 'from the onerous role of 'diagnostician of pathologies', reaffirming not 'their function as guide' (*whose guide?*) but as co-celebrants of the social institution of cinema and the human arts.

## V

Critical theory is not an innocent discipline, nor is it an 'objective' phenomenon. Like any theory of social change, it has blind spots and limits. It is today a battleground. The pivotal question should rather be, to what end is 'mainstream' critical theory directed? Of what use are such analytic tools? To what degree are they in fact tools of oppression rather than liberation? Critical theory cannot be a method of perpetual alienation, but a guide and tool for liberation. Critical theory perhaps, as never before, is symbiotically linked to the propositions of political economy:

*In its concept of an ultimate goal, critical theory did not intend to replace the theological hereafter with a social one.... It only makes explicit what was always the foundation of its categories: the demand that through the abolition of previously existing material conditions of existence the totality of human relations be liberated.... In the theoretical reconstruction of the social process, the critique of current conditions and the analysis of their tendencies necessarily include future-oriented components.*<sup>21</sup>

This then is the theory-praxis nexus that the

<sup>18</sup> Peter Steven, *op cit*, p 15.

<sup>19</sup> Glauber Rocha, *Revolução do Cinema Novo*, Rio de Janeiro, Alhambra/Embrafilme, 1981, p 467.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Peter Steven, *op cit*, p 357.

<sup>21</sup> Herbert Marcuse, 'Philosophy and Critical Theory,' *Negations*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1968, p 145.

Third World film practice suggests. Today, it bears a clear signal of *power relations* within a given society. But it cannot, and should not, be opaque to that power, or it will cease to be. The expressed desire of the Western intellectual, touring in Third World discourse, is that the Third World abdicate or surrender its theoretical concerns and responsibilities to the West. This Third Cinema film-makers understand all too well. To them film-making has always been a political act. They have been incarcerated, exiled and killed not because of the lack of their own critical theory but, in fact, precisely because of it.<sup>22</sup>

To think of 'Other Cinemas' in terms of the spectacle only is disastrous. To dismiss the social and/or revolutionary functions of 'Other Criticisms' as 'defensive' is an even graver error. To belittle the efforts of Third Cinema practitioners, by design or default, leads too quickly to the temptation to speak for them by constructing one's own fictions. This cultural negation, this mechanism of confinement and totalisation, and this system of unequal cultural and symbolic exchange, are not evidence of a theory of liberation, but rather of 'law and order' criticism.

Marx's letter to Arnold Ruge, September 1843, remains the last word on the subject:

*Nothing prevents us therefore from starting our criticism with criticism of politics, with taking sides in politics hence with actual struggles, and identifying ourselves with them. Then we do not face the world in doctrinaire fashion with a new principle, declaring, Here is truth, kneel here! We develop new principles for the world out of the principles of the world. We do not tell the world, Cease your struggles, they are stupid; we want to give you the true watchword of the struggles. We merely show the world why it actually struggles, and the awareness of this is something which the world must acquire even if it does not want to.*

I would like to thank particularly, Martin Blythe, Scott Cooper, Ronnie Serr and Billy Woodbury for their critical comments on this paper. I have also appreciated the insightful remarks of the following: INC Aniebo, David Iyam, Naguib Ktiri, Hamid Naficy, Ramiah Shanker and Esther Yau.

Teshome Gabriel and Julianne Burton will be speaking at a conference on 'Third Cinema: Theories and Practices' at the Edinburgh Film Festival, August 11-13, 1986.

---

<sup>22</sup> For a partial list of Latin American film-makers, jailed, exiled or killed, see, 'In Latin America They Shoot Filmmakers', *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1976, pp 160-61.

---

40th  
EDINBURGH  
INTERNATIONAL  
FILM FESTIVAL  
9-24 AUG 86

**THIRD CINEMA: THEORIES AND PRACTICES**  
**11/12/13 August 1986**

A three-day conference addressing cultural theories and practices associated with the notion of Third Cinema. Critics, theorists, historians and film-makers from Africa, Latin America, India, Sri Lanka, and from the Black British and American independent sectors have been invited to discuss a range of issues concerning the development of Third Cinema theory and practice and its relationship to the dominant Euro-American traditions, and the strategies and ideological commitments underpinning oppositional forms of film/video practice.



Details from Paul Willemen/Jim Pines, British Film Institute, 127 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0EA; or Jim Hickey, Festival Director, Edinburgh International Film Festival, Filmhouse, 88 Lothian Road, Edinburgh EH3 9BZ. Tel: (031) 228-6382. Telex: 72165.

Registration fee: £20 (includes access to conference films).

Accommodation can be arranged through the EIFF Accommodation Service at the festival address.