Unspeakable Images
Ethnicity and the American Cinema

EDITED BY

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42. Pierre Bordieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

43. This imagistic association between Hollywood and Nazi spectacle in Brooks's films evokes Susan Sontag's similar point in "Fascinating Fascism," in *Movies and Methods*, ed. Nichols.

44. Here Mel Brooks ethnocentrically projects an Ashkenazi culture onto a Sephardic history.

45. The attempt to fuse the Jew with the cowboy was depicted previously in the silent dramas *The Yiddisher Cowboy* (1909, 1911).

46. In *Zelig*, similarly, the protagonist admits, under hypnosis to dialogically chameleonizing with a specific group of hyphenated Americans—the Irish. In *The Ordeal of Civility: Freud, Marx, Lévi-Strauss and the Jewish Struggle with Modernity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), John Murray Cuddihy explores the analogies between the Irish and the Jewish immigrant communities as "latecomers to modernity." While the Irish were products of the famines of the 1840s that killed a million Irish and drove their survivors into the world of Anglo-American protestantism, Jews were the products of Russian pogroms that killed thousands of East European Jews and drove them, too, into the world of the New World goyim. Both groups had a precarious grasp on political power, and both had a nostalgia for the Old World convivium. The Irish-Jewish affinity was cinematically engaged by such films as *Ireland and Israel* (1912) and the "Cohen and Kelly" series of the 1920s.

47. David Ignatow and Meyer Shtiker, for example, translated Native-American chants into Yiddish.

48. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Harper and Row, 1984).

49. Lenny Bruce, *The Essential Lenny Bruce*, ed. John Cohen (New York: Ballentine Books, 1967), pp. 27–28.

50. A promise in many ways delivered in *Spaceballs*.

51. One of Purim's rituals involves the eating of special triangular cookies, "the ears of Haman."

① -Focalization ② Norms of the text ③ Mark of the Phal

-Decentering whiteness.

Robert Stam

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Bakhtin, Polyphony, and Ethnic/Racial Representation

My project in this chapter will be to explore the relevance of Mikhail Bakhtin's conceptual categories for the theorization of ethnic representation in the cinema. This project might at first glance seem somewhat "suspect" in the sense that Bakhtin rarely spoke of ethnicity per se, and never, to my knowledge, spoke of the cinema. But perhaps this very "illegitimacy" prolongs the spirit and method of Bakhtin, for whom all texts, including his own, were susceptible to surprising "homecomings," open to reworking by a boundless context. I would like herein to imagine the question of ethnic and racial representation through specific Bakhtinian categories such as "dialogism," "polyphony," and "heteroglossia"—in order to envision the ways in which his thought might contribute to the partial reframing of debates which have often focussed too exclusively on narrowly conceived issues of character stereotypes and sociological accuracy. How might Bakhtinian conceptions, in short, help advance the common goal of formulating a more nuanced, dynamic and multidimensional model for the analysis of ethnic representation?

The Question of Realism

While many of the existing ethnic "image studies" have been productively angry or solidly informative, they have often lacked theoretical and methodological sophistication. While highlighting legitimate issues concerning narrative or characterological plausability, their preoccupation with "realism" has at times implied that the

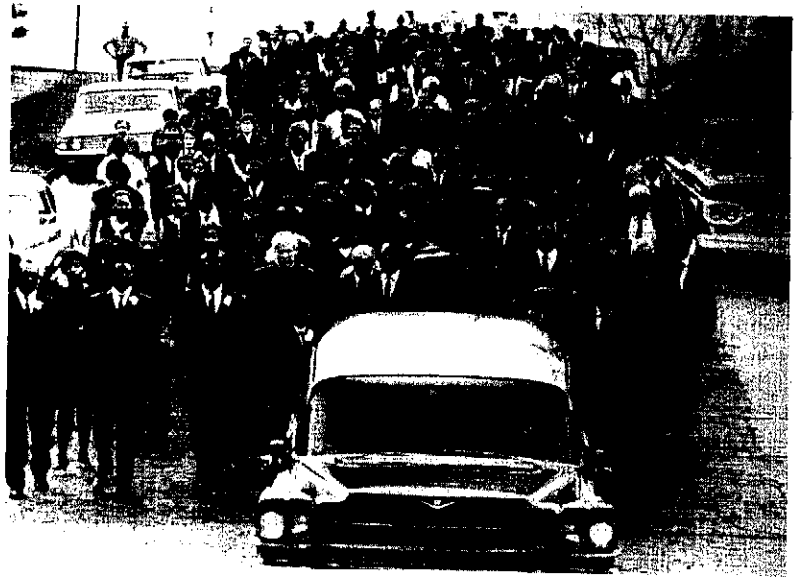
question was simply one of pointing to "errors" and "distortions," as if the truth of an ethnic group were unproblematic, transparent, and easily accessible, and the lies about that group easily unmasked. Much of ethnic image studies has been "corrective," devoted to demonstrating that certain films, in some respect or other, "got something wrong," whether on narrowly historical or biographical grounds, or on grounds of probability and verisimilitude. Debates about ethnic representation often break down on precisely this question of "realism" and "accuracy," at times leading to an impasse in which diverse spectators or critics passionately defend their version of the real.

In such texts as *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* and *The Dialogical Imagination*, Bakhtin reformulates the question of artistic representation to avoid this impasse, and in a manner strikingly relevant to issues of ethnic representation. Human consciousness and artistic practice, Bakhtin argues, do not come into contact with the "real" directly, but rather through the medium of the surrounding ideological world. Literature, and by extension cinema, do not so much refer to or call up the world as represent its languages and discourses. Artistic language, for Bakhtin, is not only the instrument and material of representation; it is also the object of representation. Rather than the direct reflection of the real, or even a refraction of the real, artistic discourse constitutes a refraction of a refraction, that is, a mediated version of an already textualized and discursivized socio-ideological world.

By bracketing the question of "the real" and instead emphasizing the artistic representation of languages and discourses, Bakhtin relocates the question to avoid what literary theorists have called the "referential illusion," that is, the notion that films refer back to some preexisting anecdotal nucleus against which a film's "truth" can be checked. Bakhtin's formulation has the advantage of transcending a naive verism without ever falling into a "hermeneutic nihilism" whereby all texts become nothing more than a meaningless play of signification open to an infinity of projections and interpretations. Bakhtin rejects naive formulations of realism while never abandoning the notion that artistic representations are at the same time thoroughly and irrevocably social, precisely because the discourses that art represents are themselves social and historical. An acknowledgment of the constructed, coded nature of artistic discourse does not preclude all reference to social existence. Indeed, for Bakhtin, art is incontrovertibly social, not because it represents the real, but because art constitutes a socially situated "utterance"—that is, a complex of signs addressed by socially constituted subjects to other socially constituted subjects—deeply immersed in historical circumstance.

The issue of realism requires, of course, that the film analyst perform a very delicate balancing act. On the one hand, we want to reserve the right to suggest that certain films are false or pernicious, that *Birth of a Nation* (1915), for example, is an "objectively" racist film. The desire to reserve a right to judgment on questions of realism is especially appropriate in cases in which there are historical antecedents or real-life prototypes for a film. The black musicians who performed at Harlem's Cotton Club have every right to point out that the Coppola film exaggerates both the presence and the violence of the mafiosos who partied there, or that it misleads by suggesting that all Harlem blacks were either criminals or entertainers.[1] Those familiar with Charlie Parker's career have every right to observe that Clint Eastwood's *Bird* (1988), although on one level a sincere homage to Charlie Parker and jazz, on another downplays the role of a supportive minoritarian community composed of such fellow musicians as Thelonius Monk, Miles Davis, Charles Mingus, and Max Roach in favor of the black-white buddy film evoked by the Bird-Rodney relationship. And the veterans of the civil rights struggle in the South in the 1960s have every right to critique *Mississippi Burning* (fig. 9.1) on the grounds that it turns the historical enemy in the 1960s—the racist FBI which devoted most of its energies to harassing and sabotaging the civil rights movement—into the heroes, while turning the historical heroes—the thousands of blacks who marched, suffered, and died—into passive victim-observors waiting for white official "rescue."[2]

But even in such cases a Bakhtinian approach would emphasize the role of choices, of representation, of mediation, defining the issue less as one of fidelity to a preexisting truth or reality than as one of a specific orchestration of discourses in relation to a theme. It makes more sense, within a Bakhtinian perspective, to say of *The Gods Must be Crazy* (1984) not that it is untrue to "reality," but rather that it relays the colonialist discourse of the white South African elite: a discourse which posits a Manichean binarism contrasting noble but impotent Bantustan savages with dangerous but incompetent mulatto-led revolutionaries, a discourse whose racism is hidden behind the facade of a superficial critique of white technological civilization. Such a formulation would see filmic characters, in Bakhtinian terms, not as "real" people, but rather as discursive constructions advanced by one group, in this case white South



9.1. Blacks are passive victims rather than active protestors in *Mississippi Burning*.

Africans, for the consumption of a variety of audiences around the world. A Bakhtinian approach to *Rambo* (1985), similarly, would not argue that it "falsifies" or "distorts" reality, but rather that it "really" represents a rightist and racist discourse designed to flatter and nourish masculine fantasies of omnipotence characteristic of an empire in crisis.

Although it is true that complete realism is an impossibility, it is also true that spectators themselves come equipped with a "sense of the real" rooted in their own social experience, on the basis of which they can accept, question, or even subvert a film's representations. For Bakhtin, all discourse exists in dialogue not only with prior discourses but also with the recipient of the discourse, with an "interlocutor" situated in time and space. Although films are on one level powerful machines which produce an "effet du reel," this effect cannot be separated from the desire, experience, and knowledge of the historically situated spectator. The cultural preparation of a particular audience, in this sense, can generate counterpressure to a racist or prejudicial discourse. Latin American audiences laughed Hollywood's know-nothing portrayals of Argentina and

Brazil off the screen because, for them, it was quite simply impossible to take such misinformed images seriously. Black Americans, similarly, never took Stepin Fetchit as a typical, synecdochic sample of black behavior or attitudes; they knew he was acting and intuitively understood the kinds of circumstances that led him to play subserviant roles. In an excellent article, Manthia Diawara demonstrates why black spectators find it impossible to buy into the racism of *Birth of a Nation*. The black spectator, Diawara argues, disrupts the functioning of Griffith's film, questioning its coherence and rebelling against the order imposed by its narrative. For black spectators, Diawara argues, the character Gus, as a phantasmatic incarnation of a putative black lust and violence, cannot represent blacks but only white prejudice toward blacks.[3] In Bakhtinian terms, Gus does not represent the "real," but only a racist and colonialist discourse generated by fear and prejudice to which the black spectator can respond with a counterdiscourse of liberation.

The Orchestration of Voices

"I hear voices everywhere," Bakhtin was fond of saying, "and the dialogical relations between them." In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin argues that Dostoevsky is not to be identified with one or another voice within his novels, but rather with the agency that orchestrates a multiplicity of distinct and even antithetical voices. This view of texts as a polyphonic play of voices is especially appropriate to postmodernist films (Yvonne Rainer's *The Man Who Envied Woman* would be an obvious example) which, rather than represent real humanly purposeful events within an illusionistic esthetic, simply stage the clash of socially generated languages and discourses. But it is also ultimately relevant to all films and artistic representations. A Bakhtinian approach to the issue of ethnic representation, in this sense, would shift attention from the question of realism and positive and negative characters to one of voices and discourses. What are the "accents" and "intonations," to use Bakhtinian language, discernible in a filmic voice? Which of the ambient ethnic voices are "heard" in a film, and which are elided or distorted?

The very term *image studies*, symptomatically, elides the oral and the voiced. Such cultural thinkers as Walter Ong, Johannes Fabian, and Frances Yates have argued, in different ways, that the Western imagination is strongly "visualist," positing cultural facts as things observed or seen rather than heard, transcribed, or invented in

dialogue.[4] A "Cartesian perspectivalism," Hal Foster argues, "subtends metaphysical thought, empirical science, and capitalist logic all at once."[5] The Bakhtinian predilection for aural and musical metaphors—voices, intonation, accent, and polyphony—argues an overall shift in priority from the visually predominant logical space of modernity (perspective, evidence in empirical science, domination of the gaze) to a postmodern space of the vocal (oral ethnography, people's history, slave narratives), all as ways of restoring voice to the silenced. The visual organization of space, George Yudice suggests, with its limits and boundaries and border police, is a metaphor of exclusions and hierarchical arrangements, while the concept of voice suggests a metaphor of seepage across boundaries which, as in the cinema, redefines spatiality itself.[6]

A Bakhtinian approach to ethnicity in the cinema, then, would emphasize less a kind of one-to-one mimetic adequacy to sociological or historical truth than the interplay of voices, discourses, and perspectives. Clyde Taylor's work on the defining characteristics of New Black Cinema is in this sense quite compatible with a Bakhtinian approach in that two of the traits he emphasizes are aural in nature; the link to the African-American oral tradition and the strong articulation of black musicality, both of which are indispensible in the effort of black cinema to find what Taylor himself calls "its voice."[7] Less important than a film's "accuracy" is that it relay the voices and the perspectives—I emphasize the plural—of the community or communities in question. If an identification with a community perspective occurs, the question of "positive" images falls back into its rightful place as a subordinate issue. That Spike Lee's *School Daze* (1987) foregrounds tensions within the black community and uses stylization and satire to lampoon the colonized ambitions of the "wannabee whites" at an all-black school whose motto is "Uplift the Race" is ultimately less significant than the fact that an audacious black perspective predominates throughout.

The task of the Bakhtinian critic, then, is to call attention to the voices at play in a text, not only those heard in aural "close-up," but also those voices distorted or drowned out by the text. Formulating the issue as one of voices helps us get beyond the lure of the visual. The question, quite literally, is not of the color of the face in the image, but rather of the literal or figurative voice speaking "through" the image. Television commercials, for example, are often crowded with black faces, but it is white advertisers who have placed the words in their mouths: black soul as white artifact. The work of the analyst, in such instances, would be analogous to that of a mixer in a sound studio, whose responsibility it is to perform a series of compensatory operations, of heightening the treble, deepening the bass, or amplifying the instrumentation, that is, in ethnic terms, of "bringing out" the voices which remain latent or displaced.

It might be objected, of course, that an analysis of textual "voices" would ultimately run into the same theoretical problems as an analysis centered on "images." Why would it be any easier to determine an "authentic voice" than it would be to determine an "authentic image"? The point is to abandon the language of "authenticity," with its implicit standard of appeal to the "real," in favor of a language of "discourses," with its implicit reference to intertextuality. Reformulating the question as one of "voices" and "discourses" has a number of advantages. First, an appeal to voice over image, or better in conjunction with image, disputes the hegemony of the visible and the image-track by calling attention to sound, voice, dialogue, and language. Second, the notion of voice is more likely to allow for plurality. A voice is never merely a voice; it also relays a discourse, because within a Bakhtinian perspective an individual voice is itself a discursive sum, a polyphony of voices. "Heteroglossia," after all, can be seen as another name for the socially generated contradictions that constitute the subject, like the media, as the site of conflicting discourses and competing voices. The same person, within a Bakhtinian perspective, can be traversed by a racist and by an antiracist discourse. The same person can have an antiracist discourse and a racist behavior, or vice versa, be antiracist on a cultural plane but racist on an economic plane, nonracist by day but racist by night. Racism can be visceral, expressed in the semiotics of body language, in open contradiction with verbally professed attitudes. Racial attitudes are multiform, contradictory, even schizophrenic. Ralph Ellison speaks of the white youngster, with transistor radio playing a Stevie Wonder tune, shouting racial epithets at black youngsters trying to swim at a public beach. In *Do the Right Thing*, Spike Lee makes the same point about racial schizophrenia by having the black-hating Pino, whose favorite word is "nigger," have celebrity blacks—Magic Johnson, Eddie Murphy, and Prince—as his "favorite people." In addition, the perpetual discussions between Sal (Danny Aiello) and Mookie (Spike Lee) highlight both interethnic tensions and affinities (fig. 9.2). Third, by highlighting the discursive dimension of artistic texts, a Bakhtinian approach sees characters, for example, not as unitary essences, as actor-character amalgams too easily phantasized as three-dimensional

9.2. Interethnic tensions and affinities in *Do the Right Thing*, as examplified by Sal (Danny Aiello) and Mookie (Spike Lee).

flesh-and-blood entities existing somewhere "behind" the diegesis, but rather as fictive-discursive constructs, thus placing the whole issue on a socio-ideological rather than on an individual-moralistic plane. Fourth, the privileging of the discursive allows comparison of a film's discourses not with an inaccessible "real," but rather with other socially circulated cognate discourses forming part of a discursive continuum such as journalism, novels, network news, television shows, political speeches, scholarly essays, and popular songs.

Ethnic Dialogism

Each cultural voice, for Bakhtin, exists in dialogue with other voices. In a preliminary way, we can define dialogism as the necessary relation of any utterance to other utterances, using "utterance" in Bakhtin's extremely inclusive sense as referring to communicative phenomena as diverse as bodily gestures, spoken phrases, or artistic texts. In "The Problem of Speech Genres," Bakhtin offers a clear formulation of what he calls the inherent dialogism of the utterance: "Utterances are not indifferent to one another, and are not

self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another. . . . Each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of speech communication. . . . Each utterance refutes, affirms, supplements, and relies on the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account."[8]

Social and ethnic diversity is for Bakhtin fundamental to every utterance, even to that utterance which on the surface ignores or excludes the groups with which it is in relation. Segregation can be temporarily imposed as a sociopolitical arrangement, but it cannot be absolute, especially on the level of culture. Southern whites, Ralph Ellison observed in the early 1960s, "cannot walk, talk, sing, conceive of laws or justice, think of sex, love, the family or freedom without responding to the presence of Negroes."[9] Even the most devout believer in apartheid, in this perspective, cannot ultimately separate himself or herself from the black response to white supremacism. All utterances inescapably take place against the background of the possible responding utterances of other social and ethnic points of view. Ethnicity is relational, an inscription of communicative processes within history, between subjects existing in relations of power.

It is this profoundly relational vision that differentiates Bakhtin's thought from an innocuous liberal pluralism in several senses. First, Bakhtin, in counterdistinction to a liberal discourse of tolerance, sees all utterance and discourse in relation to the deforming effects of social power. Second, Bakhtin does not preach a pseudo-equality of viewpoints; his sympathies, rather, go clearly to the nonofficial viewpoint, to the marginalized, the oppressed, the peripheralized. Third, whereas pluralism is grudgingly accretive—it benevolently allows another voice to add itself to the mainstream ("to those who have yet to share the benefits of the American dream" in the formulaic discourse of the politicians)—Bakhtin's view is polyphonic and celebratory. A Bakhtinian approach thinks "from the margins," seeing Native Americans, African Americans and Hispanics, for example, not as interest groups to be added on to a preexisting pluralism, but rather as being at the very core of the American experience from the beginning, each offering an invaluable "dialogical angle" on the national experience. Fourth, a Bakhtinian approach recognizes an epistemological advantage on the part of those who are oppressed and therefore bicultural. The oppressed, because they are obliged by circumstances and the imperatives of survival to know both the dominant and the marginal culture, are ideally

placed to deconstruct the mystifications of the dominant group. Fifth, Bakhtinian dialogism is reciprocal, not unilateral; any act of verbal or cultural exchange leaves both interlocutors changed.

The tension between an open-ended vision of an America as an ethnic polyphony versus a monological model of America as a unitary culture has always operated at the conflictual core of America's self-conception, its dreams and nightmares; it has been at the very kernel of its vision of itself. The political colloquy in the United States, from the first debates concerning slavery and the treatment of the indigenous peoples to the latest presidential campaigns, with their semi-coded language of patriotism and the fight against crime (read "black crime"), has often been expressed or "allegorized" in ethnic terms. The dream of a fuller democracy in a constitutively plural society has always been indissociable from the struggle for full participation by all of America's races and ethnicities. From the beginning, two discourses have been in conflict: one which saw America as a nation of nations, with all of America's peoples (especially its oppressed peoples) at the epicenter of the American experience, and another which saw one group as primary and central, in a position to show intermittent tolerance to others regarded as peripheral and dispensible.

American popular culture bears constant witness to the dialogue—sometimes violent, often shrill, at times communicative—between Anglo culture and its "Others." In film, this dialogue has often taken the alienated form of hero-and-sidekick (ethnicized latter-day avatars of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza) such as the Lone Ranger and Tonto; or of hero and valet, such as Jack Benny and Rochester; or of hero and entertainer, such as Rick and Sam in *Casablanca* (1942). Sidney Poitier and Tony Curtis in *The Defiant Ones* (1958) offer a chain-heavy allegory of racial interdependency, while the 1970s and 1980s offer more upbeat versions of the biracial buddy film: Richard Pryor and Gene Wilder in *Stir Crazy* (1980) and *See No Evil* (1989), Eddie Murphy and Nick Nolte in *48 Hours* (1982), and Billy Crystal and Gregory Hines in *Running Scared* (1986). The box-office appeal of such films suggests that they touch something within the American Unconscious, a kind of wish for an easy and low-cost racial harmony. And indeed one could easily trace images of ethnic utopia within American culture, from the perennial Thanksgiving celebrations through the latest music videos.

In *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Leslie Fiedler traces the epiphanies of racial harmony—Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook, Ishmael and Queequeeg, Huck and Jim—as they affect nineteenth-century American literature, but the same process, at a more advanced stage, also pervades contemporary mass culture. One detects images of ethnic utopia on the "Oprah Winfrey Show," in soft-drink commercials, in public service announcements, and in the happily integrated and multiethnic big-city Eyewitness News shows. The question, however, is not whether Americans enjoy consolatory images of ethnic harmony but rather whether they are willing to participate in the structural changes necessary for making ethnic harmony a living, quotidian reality.

At times, interracial dialogism inflects a film's textual strategies. Think, for example, of the alternating montage in Robert Altman's *Nashville* (1975) between the soporific entoning in one recording studio of Haven Hamilton's country-style bicentennial song "Two Hundred Years," and the rousing chant, in an adjacent studio, of a black handclapping gospel song (led, somewhat improbably, by an out-of-tune Lily Tomlin). Altman suggestively juxtaposes two musical styles, each redolent of what Bakhtin would call the "accents" and "intonations" of a "socio-ideological world." Rather than polyphony, we are given a contrastive diaphony or counterpoint: in one studio, the bland music of jingoistic complacency—"we must be doing something right to last two-hundred years"—presided over by an authoritarian (Hamilton) eager to expel long-hair dissidents from the studio. In the other studio is soulful participatory music forged during the same two hundred years, but in this case from the perspective of those whose historical memory includes slavery and segregation. The gospel scene is observed, furthermore, by an effusive BBC journalist (Geraldine Chaplin) who makes inane and ethnocentric comments about darkest Africa and missionaries converting natives. The revolution celebrated by the bicentennial, Altman reminds us, was fought against her ancestors, the British, who had in common with white North Americans an oppressive relation to black people.[10]

Emilio de Antonio's satirical documentary about Richard Nixon, *Milhouse: A White Comedy* (1971), offers a particularly striking instance of this ethnic counterpoint. One sound-image montage counterposes the voice of Nixon extolling "law and order" against a black voice giving an account of what really transpired in the Miami black community during the Republican convention in 1968. The ensuing images decode Nixon's grand phrases about "order" to reveal their subsurface signification—that is, intention to crush any outbreaks of black rebellion. Another sound-image montage plays off Nixon's innocuous "I See a Day" speech against Martin Luther

King's stirring "I Have a Dream" oration—a speech whose rhetoric and syntax the Nixon speech clearly borrows—showing transparent sympathy for the emotional force and political commitment of the latter while mocking the petit-bourgeois mediocrity of the former. Nixon's voice, promulgating the myth of "equal opportunity," gradually gives way to the resonant authority of the voice of King, who, in the powerful accents of the black Southern preacher, denounces the barriers to equality while articulating a distant yet imaginable promised land of racial harmony. The two voices, in Bakhtinian terminology, have been counterposed at a "dialogical" angle, generating a social message far transcending the individual content of the two discourses.

Polyphony

Another Bakhtinian formulation relevant to the conceptualization of ethnicity is his notion of "polyphony." This music-derived trope, originally formulated in reference to the complex play of ideological voices in the work of Dostoevsky, calls attention to the coexistence, the collaborative antagonism in any textual or extratextual situation: a plurality of voices which do not fuse into a single consciousness, but rather exist on different registers and thus generate dialogical dynamism. Polyphony does not point to mere heterogeneity per se, but rather to the "dialogical angle" at which voices are juxtaposed and counterposed to generate something beyond themselves. What might be termed the ethnic dimension of polyphony is relevant here. Although all cultures are polyphonic and include distinct genders, professions, and age groups, some cultures are striking in being ethnically polyphonic. Bakhtin's multiethnic Russian source culture, existing at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, provided innumerable exemplars of cultural polyphony. New World countries such as the United States, similarly, deploy myriad cultural voices (no matter how oppressed or muffled those voices might be)—that of the indigenous peoples, that of the Afro-American, along with the voices of the Jewish, Italian, Hispanic, Asiatic, and many other communities—each of which condenses, in turn, a multiplicity of social accents having to do with gender, class, and locale.

The potentially idealizing notion of polyphony, with its overtones of harmonious simultaneity, must be completed, then, by the notion of heteroglossia, the shifting stratifications of language into class and ethnic dialects, with its undertones of social conflict

rooted not in the random individual dissonances but in the deep structural cleavages of social life. A Bakhtinian analysis would also be aware of the dangers of "pseudo-polyphonic" discourse, one which marginalizes and disempowers certain voices, and then pretends to undertake a dialogue with a puppetlike entity that has already been forced to make crucial compromises. The film or television commercial in which every eighth face is black, for example, has more to do with the demographics of market research or the bad conscience of liberalism than with authentic polyphony, because the black voice, in such instances, is usually shorn of its soul, as well as deprived of its color and intonation. "Market-place heteroglossia," as John Fiske points out, merely exploits subcultural differences as a marketing strategy for incorporating ethnic and minority audiences.[11] Polyphony does not consist in the mere appearance of a representative of a given group but rather in the fostering of a textual setting where that group's voice can be heard with its full force and resonance. The question is not one of pluralism but one of multi-vocality, an approach which would strive to abolish social inequalities while heightening and even cultivating cultural difference.

One form of pseudo-polyphony consists of a superficial integrationism which simply inserts new heroes and heroines, this time drawn from the ranks of the subaltern, into old functional roles which are themselves oppressive, much as colonialism invited a few assimilated "natives" to join the club of the elite. A film like *Shaft* (1971) simply substitutes black heroes into the actantial slot normally filled by white ones, in order to flatter the fantasies of a certain (largely male) sector of the black audience. *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Stanley Kramer, 1967), as its title suggests, invites a superqualified black into the club of the elite, but always on white terms. Indeed, many Kramer-style "liberal" films tried to persuade the white audience not to be racist, and the audience was indeed so persuaded, at least as long as the black person encountered in real life conformed exactly to the superhuman "ebony saint" standards set by the characters played by Sidney Poitier or Harry Belafonte.

Other films, such as *In the Heat of the Night* (1967) and *Pressure Point* (1962), and such television series as "I Spy" or "Miami Vice" project blacks, within the generic framework of the black-white buddy film, into the role of law-enforcers, implying a black link to the power structure quite out of keeping with the actual configuration of social power. Countless films elide important differences by reducing the trajectory of oppressed racial groups to the mere

recapitulation of the melting-pot assimilations of European immigrants. *El Norte* (1983) begins by denouncing the oppression of Central Americans by dictatorial governments enjoying United States government support, but ultimately presents the move to Los Angeles as a kind of solution for the problems of immigrants. The television series "Roots," finally, exploited positive images in what was ultimately a cooptive version of African-American history. The series "subtitle" (the "saga of an American family") reflects an emphasis on the European-style nuclear family (retrospectively projected onto Kunta's life in Africa) in a film which casts blacks as just another immigrant group making its way toward freedom and prosperity in democratic America.

Urban Heteroglossia

Many North American cities provide privileged sites of heteroglossia and the ethnic interplay intrinsic to a heteroglot culture. New York, for example, has become a "minority-majority" city without any clear or overwhelming ethnic majority; each apparently unified community itself breaks down into numerous subcultures traversed by class, generation, and the nuances of ethnicity, thus making it a fractured and conflictual paradigm of heteroglossia rich in (often frustrated) polyphonic potential. The cinema has frequently "translated," reflected, refracted, or sublimated the ethnic diversity of New York into filmic sounds and images. Many New York-based films pivot around some sort of ethnic interplay as a key structuring strategy: black and white in *Brother from Another Planet* (1984); Anglo-Latino in *Crossover Dreams* (1985) and *Wild Style* (1984); Jewish, black, and Puerto Rican in *The Pawnbroker* (1965); and bohemian-polyphonic in *Next Stop Greenwich Village* (1976) and *Hair* (1979).

In such films as Alan Parker's *Fame* (1980), Paul Mazursky's *Moscow on the Hudson* (1984), and Woody Allen's *Zelig* (1983) a New York setting helps generate a rich weave of ethnic voices. A Bakhtinian analysis of such films would point both to their polyphonic potential and to the political myopia which undermines that potential. In *Fame*, youthful representatives of diverse communities—black, Puerto Rican, Jewish, and gay—collaborate within a kind of utopia of artistic expression (fig. 9.3). In *Moscow on the Hudson*, the Robin Williams character enters into dialogic interaction with an entire gallery of synecdochic ethnic figures—a black security guard, an

9.3. The artist's ethnic utopia in *Fame*.

Italian sales clerk, a Korean taxi-driver, a Cuban lawyer, and a Chinese anchorwoman. Each dialogue is inflected by the specific accents of a culturally defined interlocutor. And Zelig's capacity to take on the accent and ethnicity of those with whom he interacts turns him into a self-creating one-man polyphony of cultural voices.

At the same time that these films evoke the play of ethnic and cultural polyphony, they fail to reveal the political obstacles to true polyphony and equality, much as political liberalism speaks of dialogue but fails to address the ways in which hegemonic power conditions and limits dialogue. Rather than subvert the existing power relations between the diverse communities, the films tend to orchestrate superficially defined ethnic types. *Fame* ultimately subordinates polyphony to a "making it" ethos less dedicated to transpersonal community than to individual "Fame!" *Moscow on the Hudson* begins as critical both of political repression in the Soviet Union and of laissez-faire cruelty in the United States, but finally degenerates into just another sentimental immigrant saga. And *Zelig* ultimately retreats from the utopian implications of its fable by having its protagonist rediscover his "true self" and acquiesce in

suburban middle-class values, while the film offers precious little indication of the limitations of its protagonist's vision. A Bakhtinian approach to such films, in any case, would tease out, in an "anticipatory" reading, the latent multiethnic utopias stirring within such texts, while unmasking the ways in which they repress their utopian potential and fail to signal the real social and political impediments to community.

The self, in a context of polyphony, is necessarily syncretic, especially when that polyphony is amplified by the media. This syncretism is first of all linguistic; in cities like New York the language itself is hybrid, consisting of Yiddishized English, Anglicized Spanish, and so forth. When Rupert Pupkin, in Martin Scorcese's *King of Comedy* (1983), calls Masha "el schmucko supremo," he gives voice to the hybridized language of the city. The United States, speaking more generally, is a country, as Philip Roth puts it in *The Counterlife*, full of "Chicanos who want to look like Texans, and Texans who want to look like New Yorkers, and any number of Middle Western Wasps who, believe it or not, want to act and think like Jews."[12] The process of cultural syncretism began even before the American Revolution, as Euro-Americans appropriated not only the vocabulary but also the military and political wisdom of the indigenous Native American peoples. (I am referring, for example, to the indigenous influence on the Revolutionary Army's way of fighting the British, and to the contribution of the Iroquois Federation to the initial conceptualizations of the American "federal" government.) Cultural syncretism occurs at the margins and between the margins and a changing mainstream, resulting in a creative intermingling of cultures as part of a general movement of American history, by which indigenous, African-American, and local-immigrant experiences flow into a broader "nonfinalized" polyphony.

Countless American films stage the processes of ethnic syncretism, sometimes ponderously, sometimes comically, sometimes poignantly: Whites learning Native American ways in such films as *Hombre* (1967) and *A Man Called Horse* (1970); Eugene Martoni learning to play the blues from Willie Brown in *Crossroads* (1985); Appalachian whites, Italians, and black Americans collaborating musically and politically in *Matewan* (1987); young, white David learning Jamaican patois from Clara (Whoopie Goldberg) in *Clara's Heart* (1988, fig. 9.4); Woody Allen armed with Wonder Bread and a crucifix and ready for conversion in *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1985); and Charlie Parker in a yarmulke jazzing up a Hassidic wedding in *Bird* (1988). Indeed, any binary grid which pits Anglo whiteness

9.4. Ethnic syncretism—whites adopting native ways—in *Clara's Heart*, as Clara (Whoopie Goldberg) teaches her young charge to speak Jamaican patois.

against black, red, or yellow others inevitably fails to catch all the complex contradictions and gradations of the American experience. One of the merits of Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* is that it foregrounds both tensions and affinities between Italian Americans and African Americans. The film implicitly calls attention to the ways that some members of immigrant communities have used blacks as a kind of "welcome mat," as a way of affirming, through antiblack hostility, their own insecure sense of American identity. At the same time, the film highlights the more subtle interactions between the two communities by having the Italians act just a little black and the blacks just a little Italian. We learn from the published screenplay that Lee even thought of having Giancarlo Esposito, who is himself half black and half Italian, play a character called "Spaghetti Chitlins." The metaphor drawn from cuisine is highly apposite because American cuisine is now multicultural, having been soul-foodized, taco-ized, felafel-ized, and sushi-ized. A polyphonic historical process has in effect generated the rich peculiarities and syncretisms of North American culture. American music, to take an-

other example, now thoroughly melds European with African traditions. The majority of contemporary white popular singers work within a black-inflected musical idiom that ultimately traces its roots to Africa. Virtually all of the participants, black and white, in the music video "We Are the World" sing in a melismatic, soulful, improvisational gospel style which has everything to do with the spirit of black musicality.

Zelig allegorizes this syncretic process in the most hyperbolic and paradigmatic fashion, a feat somewhat surprising coming from a director who rarely shows sensitivity to the ethnic diversity of New York City. *Zelig* illustrates the pragmatic, opportunistic appropriations typical of a mobile, heteroglot culture. Zelig the chameleon literally becomes his ethnic neighbors. Each of the protagonist's metamorphoses is informed by a deep social, cultural, and historical logic; each carries its specific weight of historical association. Not only does Zelig the Jew chameleonize to other oppressed minorities—Native American, black, Mexican—but he also chameleonizes to his fellow swimmers in the immigrants' melting pot. Under hypnosis, Zelig admits to dialogically chameleonizing with another group of hyphenated Americans. Entering a bar on Saint Patrick's Day, he relates: "I told them I was Irish. My hair turned red. My nose turned up. I spoke about the great potato famine."

In *The Ordeal of Civility*, John Murray Cuddihy explores the analogies between the Irish and the Jewish immigrant communities as "latecomers to modernity."[13] While the Irish were the product of the famines of the 1840s which killed a million Irish and drove them into the world of Anglo-American protestantism, the Jews were the product of the Russian pogroms which killed thousands of East European Jews and drove them too into the cultural universe of the New World goyim. *Zelig* illustrates the process by which the streets of a city like New York become a kind of medium in which diverse ethnicities meet, clash, and interact. The dialogical encounter, according to Bakhtin, is never a complete merging, but rather a reciprocal interchange taking place within what he terms the in-between of two interlocutors. The result of this Creole-like situation is "hybridization" and "assimilation" of the other's word. *Zelig* renders syncretism visible by offering us a figure who is at once Woody Allen, and therefore white and Jewish, as well as black, Indian, Chinese, and Irish. Zelig's metamorphoses, in this sense, simply render visible and palpable what is usually invisible—the constant process of synchresis which occurs when ethnicities brush against

and rub off on one another in a context of cultural "many-languagedness."[14]

The Mutual Illumination of Cultures

Within dialogism, entire genres, languages, and cultures are susceptible to what Bakhtin terms "mutual illumination." His insight takes on special relevance in a contemporary world where communication is global, and where cultural circulation, if in many respects assymetrical, is still multi-vocal, and where it is becoming more and more inappropriate to corral human diversity into the confining categories of discrete cultures and independent nations. It is useful, in this respect, to regard the question of ethnic representation in North American culture in relation to the other multiethnic cultures of the Americas. Take, for example, the case of Brazil and the United States, two vast New World countries similar in historical formation and ethnic composition. Both countries began as European colonies, one of Portugal and the other of Great Britain, and in both, colonization was followed by the conquest of vast territories that entailed the near-genocidal subjugation of the indigenous peoples. Both countries massively imported blacks from Africa to form the two largest slave societies of modern times until slavery was abolished with the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 in the United States and the "Golden Law" of 1888 in Brazil. Both countries received successive waves of immigration, indeed often the same waves of immigration, from all over the world, ultimately forming pluri-ethnic societies with substantial Indian, black, Italian, German, Japanese, Slavic, Arab, and Jewish communities.

A Bakhtinian approach would emphasize mutual illumination both "within" and "between" cultures. A useful comparative analysis would stress the analogies not only within American cultural representations—for example, analogies between the representation of African-Americans and Native Americans—but also the analogies and disanalogies between the representations of both groups in relation to their representation within the other multiethnic cultures of the Americas. Such an analysis would juxtapose whole constellations of representional practices within a larger, cross-cultural, pan-American context. It is revelatory, for example, to compare the cinematic treatment of the indigenous peoples in Brazil as opposed to the United States, and the relation of that treatment to the representation of blacks. In both countries we find scores of

films, even in the silent period, devoted to the "Native American" or the "Native Brazilian." Both cinemas feature numerous adaptations of nineteenth-century "Indianist" novels, for example of Jose de Alencar's *Iracema* in Brazil, or of James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* in the United States. (In Brazil, there were four filmic adaptations of *O Guarani* and three of *Iracema* in the silent period alone.) In Brazil, however, there is no tradition of denigration of the Indian as a dangerous war-whooping savage, no "imagery of encirclement," as Tom Engelhardt calls it, pitting threatened whites against screaming hordes. Instead, the early Brazilian films recapitulate the values of the romantic Indianist movement whereby the Indian is portrayed as healthy, pure, heroic, and a nostalgic exemplar of a vanished golden age. The myths purveyed in these films and novels, moreover, are myths of racial syncretism, of the fusion of white European and Indian elements into a new entity—"the Brazilian." *O Guarani*, for example, concludes with the symbolic merging of two rivers, a figure for the fusion of the indigenous peoples with those of Europe. North American novelistic and filmic treatments of the Native American, in contrast, tend to emphasize apartness and otherness, and the doomed nature of love between white and Indian. The idea of racial miscegenation, then, is celebrated in Brazilian culture, while it has tended to generate fear and paranoia in North America, a paranoia encapsulated in an intertitle from William S. Hart's 1916 film *The Aryan*: "Oft written in letters of blood, deep carved in the face of destiny, that all men may read, runs the code of the Aryan race: our women shall be guarded."

But this difference in approach between the two cinemas does not, ultimately, indicate that Brazilian cinema is more "progressive" toward the Native Brazilian. Rather, the celebration, in Brazilian films, of the Indian as "brave warrior," the spiritual source and symbol of Brazil's nationhood, the mark of its difference from Europe, involved an element of bad faith toward both Indian and black. Because the behavior of white Europeans, in Brazil as in the United States, was fundamentally murderous, this exaltation of the disappearing Indian, dedicated as it was to the very group being victimized by literal and cultural genocide, involved a strong element of hyprocrisy. The ambiguous "compliment" to the Indians—compliments paid only much later in the history of the American cinema with such countercultural films as *Little Big Man* (1970)—was in Brazil a means of avoiding the vexed question of blacks and slavery. The proud history of black rebellion in Brazil—most dramatically manifested in the *quilombos* or fugitive slave communities—

was ignored; the brave Indian, it was subtly insinuated, resisted slavery, whereas blacks did not. The white literary and filmmaking elite in Brazil, in sum, chose the safely distant and mythically connoted Indian over the more problematically present black, victim of a slavery abolished just a decade before the inauguration of the cinema in Brazil.

A Bakhtinian analysis might then further complicate these multiple comparabilities by introducing a third intermediate group entering into a complex and shifting set of relationships—European immigrants. In both Brazil and the United States much early cinema was the product of immigrants, largely Italian in the case of Brazil, and largely Jewish-European in the case of the United States. In Brazil, this relationship meant that while the immigrant filmmakers bore no direct responsibility for the institution of slavery, and while Italians were often themselves the objects of exploitation by the Portuguese-based elite, collectively they were the winners, and blacks the losers, of this period of Brazilian history. Immigrant filmmakers, as a consequence, were not eager to explore filmically the oppressive situation of the very group that they themselves had economically displaced. (This displacement was quite literal because the Brazilian elite consciously opted to recruit European immigrants as workers rather than employ the newly freed slaves.)

In the case of the United States, the situation was quite different. First, the wave of immigration that contributed to the formation of Hollywood cinema came many decades after the abolition of slavery, not just one decade later as in Brazil. Blacks, furthermore, formed a clear minority in the United States, not the marginalized majority as in Brazil. That the Hollywood immigrants were Jewish, furthermore, a group not only European but also the victim of Europe—its "internal other" in Tzvetan Todorov's apt phrase—meant that a complex play of analogy and identification operated between Jews and blacks. The relationship was seen in the black appropriation of the historical perspective implicit in the images and myths of the Hebrew Bible, and in the Jewish appropriation of black voices and musicality (Gershwin, Jolson)—an intricate dynamic more or less absent from the relation between Italian immigrants and blacks in Brazil.

A comparative study of ethnic representation in the two countries reveals fundamental differences in perception and approach. Much of the literature on blacks in North American cinema revolves around the existence of the specific stereotypes dissected by Donald Bogle in his classic study: lazy Sambos, servile Toms, obese mam-

mies, libidinous bucks, and tragic mulattoes.[15] The temptation, for the North American critic, is to look for these same stereotypes in Brazilian cinema. But the congruencies are only partial. The *mae preta* (black mother) figure does have a good deal to do with the "Mammy," just as Pai Joao (Father John) has much to do with the "Uncle Tom." But the analogy breaks down when we come to the figure of the "Tragic Mulatto." Certain film characters, such as Tonio in *Bahia de Todos os Santos* (1960), would seem to recall the Tragic Mulatto figure common in North American cinema and literature, but the context is radically different. North American society, for historical reasons, has tended to divide along clear racial lines. Its vision inclines toward binarism: white or black.

The Brazilian system is more complex; its spectrum nuances shades from *preto retinto* (dark black) through *mulato escuro* (dark mulatto) and *mulato claro* (light mulatto) to *moreno* and *branco-de-bahia* (Bahia-style white). Brazilian racism consists not in a binary white-over-black but rather in the superimposition of an official integrationist ideology ("racial democracy") on a reality pervaded by assymetrical power relations and a subtle prejudice that "white is better." Brazil has always been a racist but never a segregated society; its racism does not take the form of virulent hatred and lynchings, but rather of quiet paternalism and role stereotyping. The notion of "passing for white," so crucial in films like *Pinky* (1949) and *Imitation of Life* (1934, 1959), has little resonance in Brazil, where it is often said with a laugh that all Brazilian families have "one foot in the kitchen," meaning a partial black ancestry, a point comically demonstrated in the film *Tent of Miracles* (1976) when it is revealed that Nilo Argilo, a rabid partisan of white supremacy and enemy of racial "mongrelization," is himself part black.

Orson Welles and Black Atlantic Civilization

This issue of the mutual illumination of diverse New World cultures, and the issue of racial definition, became live and practical issues in the case of Orson Welles's ill-fated efforts to make the pan-American documentary *It's All True* in Brazil in 1942. Welles filmed two sequences of the film: one highlighting the black contribution to the Rio de Janeiro carnival, the other celebrating four real-life mestizo fishermen who traveled more than a thousand miles by raft to present their social grievances to then President Vargas. When Orson Welles went to Brazil in 1942, it is important to remember, he was already well attuned to the power and intelligence of what Robert Farris Thompson calls "black Atlantic civilization" and therefore well prepared to appreciate the black contribution to Brazilian culture. More than a "tolerant liberal," Welles was a passionate opponent of racism and anti-Semitism. In a period of extreme antiblack racism, of Jim Crow laws and lynchings, of segregation in the South and discrimination in the North, Welles was attracted to black themes and black performers, as exemplified by his "Voodoo" *Macbeth* performed in Harlem with an all-black cast in 1936, by his 1940 theatrical adaptation of Richard Wright's *Native Son*, and by his involvement in the Duke Ellington "Jazz Story" project originally slated to form the fourth episode of *It's All True*. It was only when he realized that samba was the Brazilian counterpart to jazz, that both were expressions of African diaspora culture in the New World, that Welles abandoned the jazz project in favor of the story of carnival and the samba. Welles used his knowledge of pan-American "comparabilities" and "mutual illuminations" to conceptualize his film. Thus, New Orleans was replaced as setting by another Africanized New World carnival city—Rio de Janeiro; the African-American music called jazz was substituted by the African-Brazilian music called samba; such songs as "Didn't He Ramble" give way to Brazilian tunes like "Bahia" and "Praca Onze"; and performer-composers like Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong made way for Pixinguinha and Grande Otelo (fig. 9.5).

Welles's approach in *Its All True* sharply challenged the racial conventions of Hollywood filmmaking. Edgar Morel, hired by Welles to research the raftsmen story, describes Welles as an "anti-racist by formation" and attributed much of the hostility directed toward Welles to the fact that he enjoyed the company of blacks and that he was treating carnival as a "black" story. As a result, Welles was hounded by a racism which came both from the Brazilian elite who were not eager to expose the "secret" that Brazil was a very black country, from higher-ups in the RKO production hierarchy, and from the Rockefeller Committee of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. A memorandum from the Rockefeller Committee to RKO recommends that the film "avoid any reference to miscegnation" and suggests that the film should "omit sequences of the film in which mulattos or mesticos appear conspicuously."[16]

There were also complaints from RKO executives, and occasionally from members of the *It's All True* production crew, that Welles was overemphasizing the black element and showing too much "ordinary social intercourse" among blacks and whites in carnival, a feature that might offend some North American viewers. A July

9.5. Grande Otelo performs his Afro-Brazilian music for Orson Welles's cameras in *It's All True.*

1942 letter from William Gordon, of the production team of *It's All True,* to an RKO executive, complains about Welles "indiscriminate intermingling of blacks and whites."[17] Citing Goldwyn's deletion of two close shots of two black members of Gene Krupa's orchestra in *Ball of Fire,* Gordon argues for the deletion of all such shots. An RKO memorandum from studio head Charles Koerner to Gordon, meanwhile, notes that "the heroes on the raft are referred to as Indians," a perspective that "will be impossible to sell to audience, especially south of the Mason-Dixon line." But the democratic, antiracist spirit animating Welles's project was antithetical to such colonizing attitudes. Welles wanted to show Brazilian heroes, not North American stars against Brazilian backdrops. That Welles could see a black *sambista* from the *favelas* and a quartet of mestizo fisherman as authentic popular heroes speaks volumes about the distance that separated Welles from the ambiant racism of his time. By choosing to focalize such a subject, Welles chose the margins over the center, even to the detriment of his own career.[18]

Bakhtinian categories, for their part, tend to reject all binarisms, including racial binarisms, in favor of the in-between, the hybrid,

the oxymoronic, and the syncretic. I have not here explored the relevance for ethnic representation of all the Bakhtinian categories. I have downplayed, for example, his concepts of "chronotope" and "parodic carnivalization."[19] But I have tried to suggest that Bakhtinian thought demonstrates a consistent sympathy for all that has been marginalized, an intrinsic identification with difference and alterity that makes it especially suitable as a grid for the analysis of ethnic representation. Although Bakhtin did not address specifically the question of racial oppression, a conceptual space is staked out for it in advance. What is suspended in carnival, Bakhtin writes in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* is "hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety and etiquette connected with it—that is, everything resulting from sociohierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people. . . ."[20] Unlike many theoretical grids, Bakhtinian methodology does not have to be "stretched" to make room for the excluded; it is perfectly suited to them. Rather than "tolerate" difference in a condescending spirit, the Bakhtinian approach respects and celebrates difference. Rather than expand the center to include the margins, it interrogates and shifts the center from the margins.

NOTES

1. See Stanley Crouch, "The Rotton Club," *Village Voice,* February 5, 1985.

2. For more on FBI harassment of civil rights activists, see Kenneth O'Reilly, *"Racial Matters": The FBI's Secret File on Black America (1960–1972)* (New York: Free Press, 1989).

3. See Manthia Diawara, "Le spectateur noir face au cinema dominant: tours et detours de l'identification," *CinemAction* no. 46 (1988).

4. Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967) and *Interfaces of the Word* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977); Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); and Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

5. Hal Foster, ed., *Vision and Visuality* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988).

6. George Yudice, "Bakhtin and the Subject of Postmodernism," in *Bakhtin: Radical Perspectives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, in press).

7. Clyde Taylor, "Les grands axes et les sources africaines du nouveau cinéma noir," *CinemAction,* no. 46 (1988):

8. M. M. Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 91.

9. Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. 116.

10. Elsewhere this kind of racial exchange is more positive in nature, evoking a complex play of identifications between ethnicities. For example, in Haskel Wexler's *Medium Cool* (1969) there is a brief sequence in which Eileen, a poor Southern white woman migrated to Chicago, watches a television report concerning the assassination of Martin Luther King. The words and images of King's "I Have a Dream" speech trigger flashback memories of her own Southern Baptist upbringing, thus evoking black and white commonalities rooted in historical experience. For example, blacks historically were not only forced to learn Christianity, but they also "taught" preaching to admiring whites and thus black rhetorical style inflected the white preaching style. See Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

11. John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Methuen, 1987).

12. Philip Roth, *The Counterlife* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1987), p. 166.

13. John Murray Cuddihy, *The Ordeal of Civility: Freud, Marx, Levi-Strauss and the Jewish Struggle with Modernity.* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

14. For more on *Zelig*, see Robert Stam and Ella Shohat, "*Zelig* and Contemporary Theory: Meditation on the Chameleon Text," *Enclitic* 9 (Summer 1987): 176–94.

15. Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Film* (New York: Bantam, 1973).

16. Memorandum quoted by Servulo Siqueira in "Tudo e Verdade," *Folha de Sao Paulo*, December 2, 1984.

17. These documents and memoranda are to be found in the Welles collection at Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

18. For more on Welles and *It's All True*, see Robert Stam, "Orson Welles, Brazil, and the Power of Blackness," *Persistance of Vision*, no. 7 (1989): 93–112, a special issue devoted to Welles.

19. Paul Willemen explores the relevance of the concept of "chronotope" for "Third Cinema" in "The Third Cinema Question: Notes and Reflections," in *Questions of Third Cinema*, ed. Jim Pines and Paul Willemen (London: BFI, 1989). In terms of ethnic carnivalization, one might examine the ways that Mel Brooks, for example, plays against conventional expectations by having the whites in *Blazing Saddles*, sing "The Camptown Races," while the blacks sing "I get no kick from champagne," or the way that Robert Townsend, in *Hollywood Shuffle*, imagines a black "acting school" where middle-class black actors learn to jive, pimp, and shuffle.

20. M. M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

Gina Marchetti

10

Ethnicity, the Cinema and Cultural Studies

This film does not intend to demean or to ignore the many positive features of Asian-Americans and specifically Chinese-American communities. Any similarity between the depiction in this film and any associations, organizations, individuals or Chinatowns that exist in real life is accidental.

—disclaimer added to the beginning of *Year of the Dragon*.

Hollywood generally obscures the peculiar relationship it has to actual racial and ethnic communities. However, occasionally, ethnic and racial groups bring this very unbalanced relationship into question. When Michael Cimino's *Year of the Dragon* opened in August 1985, for example, a coalition of Asian-American associations and media groups picketed theaters and organized other types of protests against the film. After national media coverage of the protest, MGM-UA responded by tacking the preceding statement onto the film (ignoring the fact that the film is actually set in New York's Chinatown) and promising possible better roles for Asian-American actors in the future.[1]

As this grass-roots protest against *Year of the Dragon* indicates, ethnic and racial media representations are not simply passively accepted by the audience. Rather, these protests only point to an extreme moment of anger at media racism. Admittedly, vocal reactions occur relatively infrequently, although well-organized protests against specific filmic representations of racial and ethnic groups can be traced back at least to D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*. However, these visible protests only point to the most extreme form of what must occur on a quotidian basis, that is, a resistance to the