

QUESTIONS OF  
**THIRD CINEMA**

**Edited by Jim Pines and Paul Willemen**



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# Outside In Inside Out

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An objective constantly claimed by those who 'seek to reveal one society to another' is 'to grasp the native's point of view' and 'to realise *his* vision of *his* world'. Fomenting much discord, in terms of methodology and approach, among specialists in the directly concerned fields of anthropology and ethnographic film-making in the last decade, such a goal is also diversely taken to heart by many of us who consider it our mission to represent others, and to be their loyal interpreters. The injunction to see things from the native's point of view speaks for a definite ideology of truth and authenticity; it lies at the centre of every polemical discussion on 'reality' in its relation to 'beauty' and 'truth'. To raise the question of representing the Other is, therefore, to reopen endlessly the fundamental issue of science and art; documentary and fiction; universal and personal; objectivity and subjectivity; masculine and feminine; outsider and insider.

*Knowledge about often gives the illusion of knowledge*

Zora Neale Hurston wrote years ago how amazed she was by the Anglo-Saxon's lack of curiosity about the internal lives and emotions of the negroes, and more generally of any non-Anglo-Saxon peoples. Although this still largely holds true today, one is more inclined to restate this differently by saying that one is presently more amazed by the general claim of Western 'experts' to be interested just in that aspect of the Other's life and in not much else. The final aim now is 'to uncover the Javanese, Balinese or Moroccan sense of self', supposedly through the definitions they have of themselves. Things often look as though they have radically changed, whereas they may have just taken on opposite appearances, as they so often do, to shuffle the cards and set people on a side-track. The move from obnoxious exteriority to obtrusive interiority, the race for the so-called *hidden* values of a person or a culture, have given rise to a form of legitimised (but unacknow-

ledged as such) voyeurism and of subtle arrogance – namely, the pretence to see into or to *own* the others' *mind*, whose *knowledge* these others cannot, supposedly, have themselves; and the need to define, hence confine, providing them thereby with a standard of self-evaluation on which they necessarily depend. Psychological *conflicts*, among other idiosyncratic elements, are thus equated with *depth* (a keyword of Occidental metaphysics), while *inner* experience is reduced to subjectivity as *personal* feelings and views.

*'How it Feels to Be Colored Me'*<sup>1</sup>  
*How Does it Feel to Be White You?*

A good, serious film about the Other must show some kind of conflict, for this is how the West often defines identities and differences. To many scientifically oriented film-makers, seeing ironically continues to be believing. Showing is not showing how I can see you, how you can see me and how we are both being perceived – the encounter – but how you see yourself and represent your own kind (at best, through conflicts), the Fact by itself. Factual authenticity relies heavily on the Other's words and testimony. To authenticate a work, it becomes therefore most important to prove or make evident how this Other has participated in the making of his/her own image; hence, for example, the prominence of the string-of-interviews style and the talking-heads, oral-witnessing strategy in documentary film practices. This is often called 'giving voice', even though these 'given' voices never truly form the Voice of the film, being mostly used as devices of legitimation whose random, conveniently given-as and taken-for-granted authority often serves as compensation for a filmic Lack (the lack of imagination or of believability, for example). Power creates its very constraints, for the Powerful is also necessarily defined by the Powerless. Power therefore has to be shared ('shared anthropology' is a notion that has been tossed around for a try), so that its effect may continue to circulate; but it will be shared only partly, with much caution, and on the condition that the share is *given*, not taken. A famed anthropologist thus voiced the crisis existing in his field when he wrote: 'Where are we when we can no longer claim some unique form of psychological closeness, a sort of transcultural identification with our subjects?'<sup>2</sup> Surely, the man has to keep his role alive. And after all, there is always some truth in every error.

*the matter is one of degree, not polar opposition . . . Confinement to experience-near concepts leaves an ethnographer awash in immediacies, as well as entangled in vernacular. Confinement to experience-distant ones leaves him stranded in abstractions and*

*smothered in jargon. The real question, and the one . . . in the case of 'natives', you don't have to be one to know one, is what roles the two sorts of concepts play in anthropological analysis.*<sup>3</sup>

However, 'to put oneself into someone else's skin' is not without difficulty. The risk the man fears for himself as well as for his fellow men is that of 'going over the hill'. For this, he takes on the task of advising and training his followers for detachment in the field so that they may all remain on the winning side. Giving, in such a context, should always be determined 'with reference to what, by the light of Western knowledge and experience tempered by local considerations', *We think is best for them.*<sup>4</sup> Thus, make sure to take in Their secrets, but don't ever give up Ours.

*The trick is not to get yourself into some inner correspondence of spirit with your informants. Preferring, like the rest of us, to call their souls their own, they are not going to be altogether keen about such effort anyhow. The trick is to figure out what the devil they think they are up to.*<sup>5</sup>

The natural outcome of such a rationale is the arranged marriage between 'experience-distant' and 'experience-near', between scientist's objectivity and native's subjectivity, between outsider's input and insider's output. To get at the most intimate, hidden notions of the Other's self, the man has to rely on a form of (neo-)colonial interdependency. And since sharing in this framework always means giving little and taking more than little, the need for informants grows into a need for disciples. We have to train Insiders so that they may busy themselves with Our preoccupations, and make themselves useful by asking the right kind of Question and providing the right kind of Answer. Thus, the ideal Insider is the psychologically conflict-detecting and problem-solving subject who faithfully represents the Other for the Master, or comforts, more specifically, the Master's self-other relationship in its enactment of power relations, gathering serviceable data, minding his/her own business-territory, and yet offering the difference expected.

### THE 'PET' NEGRO SYSTEM (by Zora Neale Hurston)

*And every white man shall be allowed to pet himself a Negro. Yea, he shall take a black man unto himself to pet and to cherish, and this same Negro shall be perfect in his sight. Nor shall hatred*

*among the races of men, nor conditions of strife in the walled cities, cause his pride and pleasure in his own Negro to wane.*<sup>6</sup>

*when everything is discounted, it still remains true that white people North and South have promoted Negroes – usually in the capacity of ‘representing the Negro’ – with little thought of the ability of the person promoted but in line with the ‘pet’ system.*<sup>7</sup>

*Apartheid precludes any contact with people of different races which might undermine the assumption of essential difference.*<sup>8</sup>

An Insider’s view: the magic word that bears within itself a seal of approval. What can be more authentically ‘other’ than an otherness by the other him/herself? Yet every piece of the cake given by the Master comes with a double-edged blade. The Afrikaners are prompt in saying, ‘You can take a black man from the bush, but you can’t take the bush from the black man.’

The place of the native is always well-delimited. ‘Correct’ cultural film-making usually implies that Africans show Africa; Asians, Asia; and Euro-Americans . . . the World. Otherness has its laws and interdictions. Since ‘you can’t take the bush from the black man’, it is the bush that is consistently given back to him, and as things often turn out, it is also this very bush that the black man shall make his exclusive territory. And he may do so with the full awareness that barren land is hardly a gift, for, in the unfolding of power inequalities, changes frequently require that rules be reappropriated so that the Master be beaten at his own game. The conceited giver likes to give with the understanding that he is in a position to take back what he gives whenever he feels like it and whenever the accepter dares or happens to trespass on his preserves. The latter, however, sees no gift (can you imagine such a thing as a gift that takes?) but only debts that once given back should remain his property, although (land-)owning is a concept that has long been foreign to him and that he refused to assimilate.

Through audiences’ responses to and expectations of their works, non-white film-makers are thus often informed and reminded of the territorial boundaries in which they are to remain. An insider can speak with authority about his/her own culture, and s/he is referred to as a source of authority in this matter – not as a film-maker necessarily, but as an insider, merely. This automatic and arbitrary endowment of an insider with legitimised knowledge about his/her cultural heritage and environment only exerts its power when it is question of validating power. It is a paradoxical twist of the colonial mind: what the Outsider expects from the Insider is, in fact, a projection of an all-knowing subject that this Outsider usually attributes to himself and to his own

kind. In this unacknowledged self-other relation, however, the other would always remain the shadow of the self, hence *not-really-not-quite* 'all-knowing'. That a white person makes a film on the Goba of the Zambezi or on the Tasaday in the Philippine rain forest seems hardly surprising to anyone, but that a Third World member makes a film on other Third World peoples never fails to appear questionable to many. The question concerning the choice of subject matter immediately arises, sometimes out of curiosity, most often out of hostility. The marriage is not consumable, for the pair is no longer 'outside-inside' (objective versus subjective), but something between 'inside-inside' (subjective in what is already designated as subjective) and 'outside-outside' (objective in what is already claimed as objective). No real conflict.

*Difference, yes, but difference  
Within the borders of your homelands, they say  
White rule and the policy of ethnic divisions*

Any attempts at blurring the dividing line between outsider and insider would justifiably provoke anxiety, if not anger. Territorial rights are not being respected here. Violations of boundaries have always led to displacement, for the in-between zones are the shifting grounds on which the (doubly) exiled walk. Not You/like You. The Insider's subjectivity (understood as limited affective horizon – the personal) is that very area for which the objective (understood as unbiased limitless horizon – the universal) Outsider cannot claim full authority, but thanks to which he can continue to validate his indispensable role, claiming nooowhis due through 'interpretive' but still totalising scientific knowledge.

*Anthropology is the science of culture as seen from the outside  
(Claude Lévi-Strauss).<sup>9</sup>*

*Thus, if the natives were to study themselves, they were said to  
produce history or philology, not anthropology.<sup>10</sup>*

*it is only a representative of our civilisation who can, in adequate  
detail, document the difference, and help create an idea of the  
primitive which would not ordinarily be constructed by primi-  
tives themselves.<sup>11</sup>*

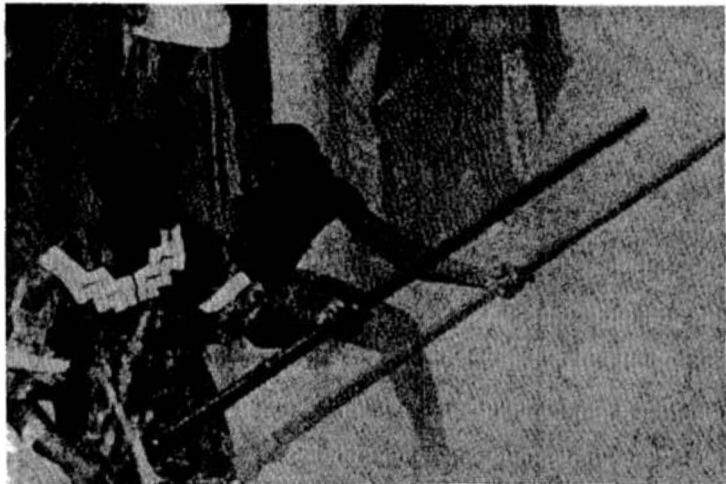
Interdependency cannot be reduced to a mere question of mutual enslavement. It also consists in creating a ground that belongs to no one, not even to the 'creator'. Otherness becomes empowering critical difference when it is not given, but re-created. Defined with the Other's newly



Stills from *Naked Spaces – Living is Round* by Trinh T. Minh-ha

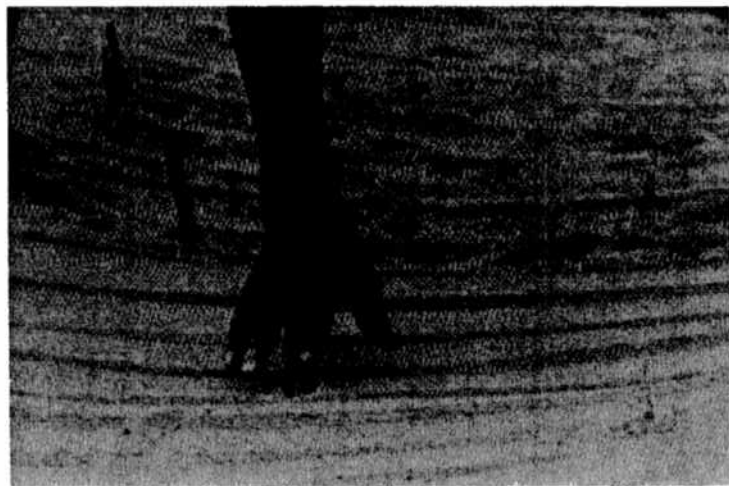
formed criteria. Imperfect cinema is subversive, not because science is contributing to the ‘purification’ of art as it ‘allows us to free ourselves from so many fraudulent films, concealed behind what has been called the world of poetry’;<sup>12</sup> not because ‘the larger the grain, the better the politics’; or because a shaky, blurry, badly framed shot is truer, more sincere and authentic than a ‘beautiful’, technically masterful shot (shaking the camera can also be a technique); but more, I would say, because there is no such thing as an (absolute) imperfection when perfection can only construct itself through the existence of its imperfect Other. In other words, perfection is produced, not merely given. The values that keep the dominant set of criteria in power are simply ineffective in a framework where one no longer abides by them.

Non-Westerners may or may not want to make film on their own societies. Whatever the choice, the question is certainly not that of setting an opposition to dominant practices, since ‘opposing’ in the one-dimensional context of modern societies usually means playing into the Master’s hand. For years, They have been saying with much patronising care: ‘Africa to Africans’; ‘We should encourage those from the Third World to make films on their own people’; ‘We would like to see Asians as told by Asians’; or We want ‘to *teach* people with a culture different from ours to make motion pictures depicting their culture and themselves as *they* see fit’ (so that We can collect data on the indigenous ethnographic film-making process, and show Navajos through Navajo eyes to our folks in the field).<sup>13</sup> Again, this is akin to saying that a non-white view is desirable because it would help to fill in a hole that whites













are now *willing* to leave more or less empty so as to lessen the critical pressure and to give the illusion of a certain incompleteness that needs the native's input to be more complete, but is ultimately dependent on white authority to attain any form of 'real' completion. Such a 'charity' mission is still held up with much righteousness by many; and despite the many changing appearances it has taken through the years, the image of the white colonial Saviour seems more pernicious than ever since it operates now via consent. Indigenous anthropology allows white anthropology to further anthropologise Man.

*Anthropology is today the foundation of every single discourse pronounced above the native's head.*

*The 'portraits' of a group produced by the observer as outsider and by the observer as insider will differ, as they will be relevant in different contexts. This awareness underlies the current cry 'You have to be one to understand one'.<sup>14</sup>*

The question is also not that of merely 'correcting' the images whites have of non-whites, nor of reacting to the colonial territorial mind by simply reversing the situation and setting up an opposition that at best will hold up a mirror to the Master's activities and preoccupations. (It has been, for example, the talk of some French anthropologists, not long ago, to train and bring in a few African anthropologists-disciples to study the cultural aspects of remote villages in France. Again, let Them – whom We taught – study Us, for this is also information, and this is how the anthropologising wheel is kept rotating.) The question rather is that of tracking down and exposing the Voice of Power and Censorship whenever and in whichever side it appears. Essential difference allows those who rely on it to rest reassuringly on its gamut of fixed notions. Any mutation in identity, in essence, in regularity, and even in physical place, poses a problem, if not a threat, in terms of classification and control. If you can't locate the other, how are you to locate your-self?

*One's sense of self is always mediated by the image one has of the other. (I have asked myself at times whether a superficial knowledge of the other, in terms of some stereotype, is not a way of preserving a superficial image of oneself.)<sup>15</sup>*

Furthermore, where should the dividing line between outsider and insider stop? How should it be defined? By skin colour (no Blacks should make films on Yellows)? By language (only Fulani can talk about Fulani, a Bassari is a foreigner here)? By nation (only Vietnamese can

produce works on Vietnam)? By geography (in the North-South setting, East is East and East can't meet West)? Or by political affinity (Third World on Third World counter First and Second Worlds)? What about those with hyphenated identities and hybrid realities? (It is worth noting here a journalist's report in a recent *Time* issue, which is entitled 'A Crazy Game of Musical Chairs'. In this brief but concise report, attention is drawn to the fact that people in South Africa who are classified by race and placed into one of the nine racial categories that determine where they can live and work can have their classification changed if they can prove they were put in a wrong group. Thus, in an announcement of racial reclassifications by the Home Affairs Minister, one learns that: '*nine whites became coloured, 506 coloureds became white, two whites became Malay, 14 Malay became white ... 40 coloureds became black, 666 blacks became coloured, 87 coloureds became Indian, 67 Indians became coloured, 26 coloureds became Malay, 50 Malays became Indian, 61 Indians became Malay ...*', and the list goes on. However, says the Minister, *no blacks applied to become white, and no whites became black.*)<sup>16</sup>

The moment the insider steps out from the inside, she is no longer a mere insider (and vice versa). She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Like the outsider, she steps back and records what never occurs to her—the insider as being worth or in need of recording. But unlike the outsider, she also resorts to non-explicative, non-totalising strategies that suspend meaning and resist closure. (This is often viewed by the outsiders as strategies of partial concealment and disclosure aimed at preserving secrets that should only be imparted to the initiates.) She refuses to reduce herself to an Other, and her reflections to a mere outsider's objective reasoning or insider's subjective feeling. She knows, probably as Zora Neale Hurston the insider-anthropologist knew, that she is not an outsider like the foreign outsider. She knows she is different while being Him. Not quite the Same, not quite the Other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. Undercutting the inside/outside opposition, her intervention is necessarily that of both a deceptive insider and a deceptive outsider. She is this Inappropriate Other/Same who moves about with always at least two/four gestures: that of affirming 'I am like you' while persisting in her difference; and that of reminding herself 'I am different' while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at.

*It is thrilling to think – to know that for any act of mine, I shall get twice as much praise or twice as much blame. It is quite exciting to hold the centre of the national stage, with the spectators not knowing whether to laugh or to weep. (Zora Neale Hurston)*<sup>17</sup>

*The coloured are a very emotional people, and you can't trust the Bantus. A farmer here asked his Bantu foreman once, 'Tell me, Johnny, would you shoot me?' 'No, baas, I wouldn't shoot you,' Johnny said. 'I'd go to the neighbour's place and shoot the baas there. And his man would shoot you.'* (An Afrikaner)<sup>18</sup>

*The theory behind our tactics: 'The white man is always trying to know into somebody else's business. All right, I'll set something outside the door of my mind for him to play with and handle. He can read my writing but he sho' can't read my mind. I'll put this play toy in his hand, and he will seize it and go away. Then I'll say my say and sing my song.'* (Zora Neale Hurston)<sup>19</sup>

*the only possible ethnology is the one that studies the anthropophagous behaviour of the White man.* (Stanislas S. Adotevi)<sup>20</sup>

Whether she turns the inside out or the outside in, she is, like the two sides of a coin, the same impure, both-in-one insider/outsider. For there can hardly be such a thing as an essential inside that can be homogeneously represented by all insiders; an authentic insider in here, an absolute reality out there, or an uncorrupted representative who cannot be questioned by another uncorrupted representative.

*The most powerful reason why Negroes do not do more about false 'representation' by pets is that they know from experience that the thing is too deep-rooted to be budged. The appointer has his reasons, personal or political. He can always point to the beneficiary and say, 'Look, Negroes, you have been taken care of. Didn't I give a member of your group a big job?' White officials assume that the Negro element is satisfied and they do not know what to make of it when later they find that so large a body of Negroes charge indifference and double-dealing. The white friend of the Negroes mumbles about ingratitude and decides that you simply can't understand Negroes . . . just like children.'*<sup>21</sup>

In the context of this Inappropriate Other, questions like 'How loyal a representative of his/her people is s/he?' (the film-maker as insider), or 'How authentic is his/her representation of the culture observed?' (the film-maker as outsider) are of little relevance. When the magic of essences ceases to impress and intimidate, there no longer is a position of authority from which one can definitely judge the verisimilitude value of the representation. In the first question, the questioning subject, even if s/he is an insider, is no more authentic and has no more authority on the subject matter than the subject whom the questions concern. This is not to say that the historical 'I' can be obscured or

ignored, and that differentiation cannot be made; but that 'I' is not unitary, culture has never been monolithic, and more or less is always more or less in relation to a judging subject. Differences do not only exist between outsider and insider – two entities – they are also at work within the outsider or the insider – a single entity. This leads us to the second question in which the film-maker is an outsider. As long as the film-maker takes up a positivistic attitude and chooses to bypass the inter-subjectivities and realities involved, factual truth remains the dominant criterion for evaluation and the question as to whether his/her work successfully represents the reality it claims would continue to exert its power. The more the representation leans on verisimilitude, the more it is subject to normative verification.

For the Inappropriate Other, however, the questions mentioned above seem inadequate; the criterion of authenticity no longer proves pertinent. It is like saying to an atheist: 'How faithful to the words of God are yours?' (with the understanding that the atheist is not opposed, but *in-different* to the believer). She who knows she cannot speak of them without speaking of herself, of history without involving her story, also knows that she cannot make a gesture without activating the to-and-fro movement of life. The subjectivity at work in the context of this Inappropriate Other can hardly be submitted to the old subjectivity/objectivity paradigm. Acute political subject-awareness cannot be reduced to a question of self-criticism toward self-improvement or of self-praise toward greater self-confidence. Such differentiation is useful, for a grasp of subjectivity as a 'science of the subject' makes the fear of ethnographic self-absorption look absurd. Awareness of the limits in which one works need not lead to any form of indulgence in personal partiality, nor to the narrow conclusion that it is impossible to understand anything about other peoples since the difference is one of 'essence'.

By refusing to naturalise the 'I', subjectivity uncovers the myth of essential core, of spontaneity, and of depth as inner vision. Subjectivity therefore does not merely consist of talking about oneself, be this talking indulgent or critical. Many who agree on the necessity of self-reflectivity and reflexivity in film-making think that it suffices to show oneself at work on the screen, or to point to one's role once in a while in the film, and to suggest some future improvement in order to convince the audience of one's 'honesty' and pay one's dues to liberal thinking. Thus there is now a growing body of films in which the spectators see the narrator narrating, the film-maker filming or directing, and quite expectably the natives – to whom a little camera (usually a Super-8) or tape-recorder is temporarily handed out – supposedly contributing to the production process. What is put forth as self-reflexivity here is no more than a small faction – the most conveniently visible one – of the



many possibilities of uncovering the work of ideology that this 'science of the subject' can open into. In short, what is at stake is a practice of subjectivity that is still unaware of its own constituted nature (hence the difficulty of exceeding the simplistic pair of subjectivity and objectivity); unaware of its continuous role in the production of meaning (as if things can 'make sense' by themselves, so that the interpreter's function consists only of *choosing* among the many existing readings); unaware of representation as representation (the cultural, sexual, political inter-realities involved in the making: that of the film-maker as subject; that of the subject filmed; and that of the cinematic apparatus); and, finally, unaware of the Inappropriate Other within every 'I'.

*My certainty of being excluded by the Blacks one day is not strong enough to prevent me from fighting on their sides. (a South African writer)<sup>22</sup>*

*What does present a challenge is an organisation that consists either in close association or in alliance of black, white, Indian, Coloured. Such a body constitutes a negation of the Afrikaans' theory of separateness, their medieval clannishness. (Ezekiel Mphahlele)<sup>23</sup>*

*the stereotyped quiet, obedient, conforming modes of Japanese behaviour clashed with white expectations of being a motivated, independent, ambitious thinker. When I was with whites, I worried about talking loud enough; when I was with Japanese, I worried about talking too loud. (Joanne Harumi Sechi)<sup>24</sup>*

*Walking erect and speaking in an inaudible voice, I have tried to turn myself American-feminine. Chinese communication was loud, public. Only sick people had to whisper. (Maxine Hong Kingston)<sup>25</sup>*

*When I hear my students say 'We're not against the Iranians here who are minding their own business. We're just against those ungrateful ones who overstep our hospitality by demonstrating and badmouthing our government,' I know they speak about me. (Mitsuye Yamada)<sup>26</sup>*

## Notes

1. An article by Zora Neale Hurston. It was most likely a response to a question Hurston felt her white acquaintances were always burning to ask her. In Alice Walker (ed.), *I Love Myself* (Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1979), pp. 152–5.
2. Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 56.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
4. Evelyn Baring, Lord Cromer, *Political and Literary Essays, 1908–1913* (1913; reprinted Freeport, New York: Books for Library Press, 1969).
5. Geertz, *Local Knowledge*, p. 58.
6. Hurston, *I Love Myself*, p. 156.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
8. Vincent Crapanzano, 'A Reporter at Large', *The New Yorker*, 18 March 1985.
9. Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'Anthropology: Its Achievements and Future', *Current Anthropology*, no. 7, 1966, p. 126.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Stanley Diamond, 'A Revolutionary Discipline', *Current Anthropology*, no. 5, 1964, p. 433.
12. Julio García Espinosa, 'For an Imperfect Cinema', in Michael Chanan (ed.), *Twenty-five Years of the New Latin American Cinema* (London: BFI/Channel 4 Television, 1983), pp. 28–33.
13. See Sol Worth and John Adair, *Through Navajo Eyes* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972).
14. Diane Lewis, 'Anthropology and Colonialism', *Current Anthropology*, no. 14, 1973, pp. 586–7.
15. Vincent Crapanzano, 'A Reporter at Large'.
16. *Time*, 9 March 1987, p. 54.
17. Hurston, *I Love Myself*, p. 153.
18. Dora Herzog, quoted in Vincent Crapanzano, 'A Reporter at Large: II', *The New Yorker*, 25 March 1985, p. 93.
19. Hurston, *I Love Myself*, p. 83.
20. *Négritude et négrologie* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1972), p. 182 (my translation).
21. Hurston, *I Love Myself*, p. 161.
22. Breyten Breytenbach, 'L'Aveuglement des Afrikaners', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 20–26 June 1986, p. 48 (my translation).
23. *The African Image* (1962; reprinted New York: Praeger, 1966), p. 73.
24. 'Being Japanese-American Doesn't Mean "Made in Japan"', in Dexter Fisher (ed.), *The Third Woman* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), p. 446.
25. *The Woman Warrior* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).
26. 'Asian Pacific American Women and Feminism', in Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back* (Watertown, Mass.: Persephone Press, 1981), p. 75.