

Printed in Illusions Magazine, NZ: July 2003

CELEBRATING FOURTH CINEMA

By Barry Barclay

A slightly abridged and amended version of a lecture given by Barclay at Auckland University Film and Media Studies Department; September 17, 2002

I am a film-maker, as you know. I have both a western and a Maori tribal background. My tribe is Ngati Apa from down Marton/Bulls way, Ratana territory. I am, then — by birth, at least — a person of two allegiances: one to the modern nation state of New Zealand; and one to the tribal world of Aotearoa — to the Maori tribal world, the Indigenous world. I am going to propose here this afternoon that there is a category which can legitimately be called "Fourth Cinema", by which I mean Indigenous Cinema — that's Indigenous with a capital "I". I made up the phrase "Fourth Cinema" for my own satisfaction. I have been using it here and abroad for some years now. But, outside my own head, there may be no such thing as Fourth Cinema.

The phrase Fourth Cinema comes as a late addition to the First-Second-Third Cinema framework with which you will be familiar, First Cinema being American cinema; Second Cinema Art House cinema; and Third Cinema the cinema of the so-called Third World. I met a wonderful Nigerian Ph.D. student, Tony Adah, at the documentary conference at this university two years ago. I asked him, "Tony, do you think there can be such a thing as a Fourth Cinema?" He laughed. He said, "Of course there can. And a fifth, and a sixth, and maybe a twentieth as well." I agreed at the time. It was a great vision. But today I am talking more fundamentally. I am talking major categories. I am talking genus. There may be a fifth and sixth category one day, but we are yet to find them.

There's a temptation (at least, I think it counts as a temptation) to analyze Fourth Cinema — to seek to legitimize and valorize it, to make a case for or against its very existence — by looking at the "accidents" rather than what Auckland Arts academic, Dr Rangihiroa Panoho, calls the "interiority"¹.

By accidents I mean the "exteriority", the surface features: the rituals, the language, the posturing, the décor, the use of elders, the presence of children,

¹ *Kei hea te ngakau Maori? Locating the heart, Shona Rapira—Davies and reading Maori art*, by Dr Rangihiroa Panoho, Department of Art History, Auckland University.

attitudes to land, the rituals of a spirit world. But I believe that in Fourth Cinema — at its best — something else is being asserted which is not easy to access. I'll take up some points on this a little later.

The dramatic feature films that have been made by Indigenous peoples are:

Bedeviled, by Aborigine film maker Tracey Moffit;

The Pathfinder, by Nils Gaup, the Saami director of Norway.

Smoke Signals has been out here fairly recently, directed by Chris Eyre of the Cheyenne and Arapaho peoples of Oregon in the USA;

From producer and director Zacharias Kunuk of the Inuit peoples, we have *Atanarjuat* (The Fast Runner).

There's the feature of young Aborigine director, Ivan Sen: *Beneath Clouds*.

And a film just completed and released, a feature titled *The Business of Fancy Dancing*, written and directed by Sherman Alexie of the Coeur d'Alene tribe of Indians.

Abroad, that's six completed features in total.

In post-production is a feature shot on Rotuma, which is part of the Fiji group of islands. The film is titled *Fire in the Womb* and is written and directed by Vilisoni Hereniko of Rotuma. Two Maori went to Rotuma to help in this shoot. Also, Saami director, Nils Gaup, has a second feature, *Misery Harbour*, in preparation.

In this country, we have *Mauri*, written and directed by Merata Mita; *Once Were Warriors*, director Lee Tamahori; and released this year, *Te Tangata Whai Rawa O Weneti* (the Maori Merchant of Venice), directed by Don Selwyn, and the first of them *Ngati*, written by Tama Poata and directed by myself, released in 1985. And *Te Rua* (1992) which I wrote and directed.

In total then, five Indigenous features completed in this country, and six completed abroad. Merata Mita, you will be pleased to hear, has a feature in advanced pre-production, *Cousins*, a screen adaptation of Patricia Grace's novel of the same name.

So far then, we are looking at a very slim body of work. In fact, we will always be looking at a relatively small body of work. How could such a body of work

deserve a special category? If we go by numbers, it can't. But I am interested in philosophical elementals. Also, we have done enough to know that what we've done does not fit in the previous categories. We know this from reflecting on what we were trying to do when we set out to make the films; we know this especially from screenings, both in our own country and abroad, and both to western and Indigenous audiences. We learn also from the reactions to our films, especially to details in the films.

We learn especially from the overall reaction to our films, how these may differ dramatically between Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences. According to this outlook, we are not "One People". The One People theory, the One People paradigm, equates to extinction for Indigenous Peoples. At least, this is the claim. So why am I talking to you? I mean, you are the foot-soldiers of the modern nation state — the Other. The simple answer is probably that while I do not think we are all One People, I do think we are all human, and while there is much we do not share, there is much we do.

We live in an age which is — for very good reasons — skeptical of talk of "essence"; of defining once and for all what is "of the essence" of something. Part and parcel of this mood is that we are less concerned, I think, with pursuing that elusive "interiority" that Dr Panaho talks of; rather we fix on the minutiae of exteriority. We are content to play with readings of texts, it being taken for granted that there will be a variety of readings and my reading at this time is as perceptive and useful as my neighbour's reading at this time. This climate makes it tricky when it comes to any discussion on what might and what might not be Fourth Cinema. Let me illustrate with a little tale.

The one and only time I was in Athens in Greece — it was in the late 1970s — I visited a museum in which were displayed soldier graveyard headstones from a period of high civilization flourishing some centuries before the birth of Christ. The headstones were lined up in chronological order to show developments over a period, as I recall, of a couple of centuries. Each had on it a bass relief depiction of the fallen soldier in fighting apparel. At the beginning on the period, the dead soldier is striding forward, hero fashion. The curator notes explain that the soldier is marching without fear into the afterlife.

Some way through the period, a second figure begins to appear, a young man, looking sadly after the departing soldier. The notes say the youngster is the soldier's personal servant, a trainee soldier himself. Further through the period, a series of poignant changes in the sculptures can be seen. The young man's hand begins to lift, to reach out for the disappearing figure. Then, the dead hero's trailing arm lifts and reaches back, as if to touch the fingers of the youngster. Finally, the head of the man turns back, the fingers touch and there

is one final departing look between the two, before, presumably, the dead soldier turns to disappear into that which is unknowable, except perhaps through faith.

The curator notes explained that the series coincided with a passage in Greek history during which the populace moved from a confident religious vision of what is right for man in this life and what awaits him beyond it to a humanistic vision, in which feelings of loss and fear and uncertainty are allowed. By the end of the headstone series, another deal had been struck with the gods. To read the story of the headstones, to have even a superficial appreciation of what might have been going on in them, I needed to have somebody who knew something of classical Greek culture, who could assemble a selection of headstones in both a chronological and a dramatic order, who could draw up credible notes for me to read in my first language. Without that, I would have been lost.

Imagine coming across a basement of such headstones with everything all over the place, with no way of knowing which headstone was carved first and which was carved last, with no background in Greek history whatsoever, with no appreciation of shifts in the balance of authority in the society amongst the military, the city fathers, the dramatists, the soothsayers, the temple priests, the philosophers. We wouldn't know which order to put the headstones in.

We might start with a headstone with the hero looking back, and end with him striding forward. But what the heck? For you can do with text what you like, can you not? You can make a personal story out of the parts of anything. We might even wind up proclaiming this is how the Greeks thought back then. We might even find the story unconvincing, confused, petering out, losing direction, and finally, without delivering the power that it promised. The most wonderful act of self-aggrandizement of all would be to stand on a high and windy hill and proclaim that the story told in the headstones — told, that is, in the story as we have now assembled it — is "universal".

I want to read you a poem I wrote. A good friend of mine died suddenly. She was in her mid-fifties. Nobody was expecting her to have a heart seizure followed by a serious of strokes and suddenly be dead. It happened right at the time Ruapehu was erupting down on the volcanic plateau. Night after night we saw on television images of the eruption and the hazard of the falling ash.

My friend's name was Amy Brown. She was a self-taught expert on cultivating earthworms, and she and I were working on a technical innovation together (how to get earthworms into your garden, of all things — it's not as easy as you might think.) I was told off for writing the poem the way I did. I was thought

strange. I wrote it a few hours after hearing of the death. The poem is headed up simply:

In Memory of Amy Brown,
died July 1, 1996

The volcano puts up its ash.
Winds beyond our touch
blow the grit shadow over
crouched towns.

Brush down the roof,
disconnect the water tanks,
flush out the guttering;
stay indoors,
daughter, toddler, wife.

Through toxic mist,
lights in halo
snoop along the curbs.
Those who must out
have faces masked
like displaced surgeons.

Poisoned in stomach,
animals stop eating
as the ash falls.

I was told off by a couple of friends because the poem is so bleak. We try not to have 'bleak' around death in our national culture. Public bleak, public despair, public blackness is alien. We have sorrow, of course, but, officially, it's managed sorry. By having unredeemed 'bleak' in a public document, in a public text, in a memorial text, I am out of step. I am upsetting the proper order; I am letting the team down.

As good citizens of the modern nation state of New Zealand, we have a national approach to gravestones. We don't think of this as any kind of spiritual orthodoxy. We think that's just the way it is, that's just the way it should be. Almost universally, I suggest, those near and dear to us who have passed on — our dead, in other words — are depicted in memorial stones as being "at peace".

The stones recall that the person lived from this date to this date, that their life, long or short, was a contribution in some way, that they were loved, perhaps by their parents, perhaps by a sorrowing spouse, perhaps by their surviving children, perhaps by the whole nation. The stones promise that they will not be forgotten. Sometimes there is a photograph; sometimes an embossed effigy. There is pain, there is sorrow. But there is, above all, peace. And I suggest that it has always been this way on the gravestones of the dead in this country, because that is the culture, the national outlook.

It does not matter that the superficials change — that the pictures are black & white, rather than tinted; that the memorial verses selected are Biblical, or New Age, or Victorian, or from a national poet; that the sculptured figures are in marble or bronze or a local stone. Such accidentals may shift, but the national "at peace" orthodoxy will be maintained, for we are a redeemed people, our dead move on to a better life, which may not be in the heaven of old, but at least it is a place of rest.

So to put up on a gravestone lines such as, "poisoned in stomach, animals stop eating as the ash falls", would be an obscenity, would be heresy. Imagine, in this country, having on a headstone some goddess of death, a hideous figure, her mouth pulled back open and filled with snakes. Such a vision is beyond our regular knowing.

Beyond our regular knowing also is the vision on the gravestones of the fallen soldiers of ancient Greece: the soldier walking bravely forward into any unknown world; the soldier turning back to his loved ones, reluctant to leave. Such visions are as far outside our national orthodoxy as my memorial poem to Amy Brown is: "the volcano puts up its ash; winds beyond our touch blow the grit shadow over crouched towns."

And once we are outside our own particular national orthodoxy, we have no real idea of what order the gravestones should go in. Neither would we even think to carve the human form in death in that way — the head turned back, the hand reaching out to the living. Of course, once shown, we could easily buy ourselves a set of chisels and do a straight copy or an imitation, but working off our own bat, it is most unlikely we would come up with that concept, with that image. Even if we did, it is even more unlikely that we would put it on public show, certainly not in memory of our own dead.

I may seem to have strayed completely off the topic of Fourth Cinema, of Indigenous Cinema. But perhaps we are close to the very heart of the subject. Indigenous cultures are outside the national orthodoxy. They are outside the national outlook. They are outside spiritually, for sure. And almost everywhere

on the planet, Indigenous Peoples, some 300 million if them in total, according to the statisticians — are outside materially also. They are outside the national outlook *by definition*, for Indigenous cultures are ancient remnant cultures persisting within the modern nation state.

I'm thinking of the cultures of peoples such Masai of Kenya and the Cree of North America, whose spiritual roots go back beyond, sometimes way beyond, the birth of Christ or the Buddha or the prophet Mohamed. I think of the Wanniyalaeto (or Vedda) people of Sri Lanka, who arrived on the island some 14,000 years at least, millennia before the Singhalese and the Tamils, and after them, the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English. I think of the Aborigine of Australia who may have arrived in north-west Australia 100,000 thousand years ago.

In some countries (and this is one of them) the Indigenous peoples have been converted to one of the world's major religions, at least, superficially. Their art forms may have changed somewhat, their diet, their work patterns, their instruments of governance. But in as much as the People and the culture survive at all, the ancient roots, the ancient outlook persist, an outlook with roots far back in time, an outlook — to a greater or lesser extent — outside the national outlook.

Meantime, almost every square meter of the land mass of the planet and much of the oceans as well is under the governance of one modern nation state or other, 193 of them in total, I learned from the TV recently. Their national outlook is modern. First, Second and Third cinema are all Cinemas of the Modern Nation State. From the Indigenous place of standing, these are all invader Cinemas.

I have been to a number of conferences in Hawaii. Last time I was there — December 2001 — I was put up in huge tourist hotel. At sunset, there were tropical palms below my window, a grand pool, and a band. The singer sang Chera Moana Marie. If this is kitsch, I thought, I love it.

At every Hawai'i conference I've been too, somebody — a white American male every time — refers to one or other version of *The Mutiny on the Bounty*, and perhaps screens a scene or two from it. I want to run for you the scene I saw on my last trip played in front of a largely Indigenous audience, many of them women. If any of the women present here today take offence, I apologize in advance.

VIDEO CLIP: A SCENE FROM *THE MUTINY ON THE BOUNTY*; Captain Bligh (Trevor Howard) orders Fletcher Christian (Marlon Brando) to go ashore and have sex with a native woman of rank.

Within the context of First Cinema, this is a very rich scene — imperial power, the white male hunk, the navy uniform, and sex in the tropics. But I've seen men like that, I have to say, in the red light districts of cities like Bangkok, moving through, going "that one, that one." Would the academic who screened the clip have been prepared to show this same scene in a women's refuge? So why show it to a gathering of Indigenous people?

The Bounty scene is from the camera of the ship's deck. The camera is owned and controlled by the people who own the ship. It takes pictures of those who sail the ship. What happens when the camera is shifted from the deck onto the shore? Will it matter whether it's in the hands of the officers from the ship, or in the hands of the Indigenous people there? The white man ashore (on the rare occasions he comes ashore and mingles with the natives) will say that it makes no difference. "We make films just the same as the natives would, were they given the chance." Please, give me a single example — just one — when the white man ashore has ever done that. He will always film from within the national orthodoxy from whence he came. There is no logical reason why he should act otherwise. The ship camera will always show the white man coming to find the native princess. Or something similar.

After returning home from the Chera Moana Marie conference, I wrote in a paper to friends back in Hawai'i: "The Bounty mythology only works if the Indigenous world is kept ashore and the camera does most of its work on the deck, where white imperial men scheme their schemes. The camera, cut loose from First Cinema constraints and in the hands of the natives, does not work anything like as well away from the ship's deck (as the ship men see it), because allowing the camera to operate ashore under God knows whose direction would defeat the purposes of those in control of the First Cinema camera, whose more or less exclusive intention has been, over one hundred years of cinema, to show actions and relationships within Western societies and Western ideological landscapes.

"Furthermore, the First Cinema enterprise is likely to be greatly deflated if there is a camera ashore, a camera outside First Cinema, a camera with a life of its own, watching — if it can be bothered to watch — who comes ashore; a camera which, when the ship men have gone back to the ship, provides images of the visitors and their doings on a big screen set up high in the Indigenous village. This would be unsettling, I imagine, to white men who came ashore to have sex and depart, noses in the air.

"The First Cinema Camera sits firmly on the deck of the ship. It sits there by definition. The Camera Ashore, the Fourth Cinema Camera, is the one held by the people for whom "ashore" is their ancestral home."Ashore" for Indigenous people is not usually an island. Not literally. Rather, it is an island within a modern nation state. We need to be crystal clear about this. Over the years, two people at least have said to me that the French are indigenous in France. They are not. They are no more indigenous to France than the sparrow and the Minor bird are indigenous to New Zealand. The kakapo is indigenous to New Zealand. The kea. The remnant prior Celtic culture of Brittany is indigenous to France. The Saami are Indigenous to Norway and on and on it goes — 300 million people.

I think of the Ainu people of Japan's Honshu and Hokkaido islands; the Samburu and Masai pastoralists of the Rift Valley in Africa; the Cayugas, and the Senecas of the Iroquois Confederacy in the United States. I think of the Mohawk of Montreal; the Arrente people from the Alice Springs region of Central Australia; the native Hawaiians of Oahu and Maui; the Gila River people of Phoenix, Arizona; the Tuhoe of the Urewera mountains of Aoteroa — all of whose lands I have been privileged to stand on.

December 16, 2000; a meeting of tribal people is held in the village of Kashipur in Orissa State, east India, to talk about how to protest the opening of a bauxite mine in the area; armed police appear and open fire. The people who are killed are Abhilas Jhodia (25 years of age), Raghu Jodhis (18) and Jamudhar Jhodia (43); eight others are seriously injured.

The tribal people of Orissa State in India who died in protest were members of an Indigenous people which comes from a far time and is now surrounded by the modern nation state of India. For the Indigenous people of Orissa State, the cinema camera is out in the surrounding populations, the camera of the First, Second and Third cinemas. One day, the tribesmen of Orissa State may hold the camera in their own hands. It will not be the camera of the ship's deck.

Throughout this talk, I have been using the word "Cinema" casually. We haven't picked the word up and had a good look at it, and I'm not the person with the skills to do that anyway. At the very least, the word "cinema" as we mostly know it implies venues and congregations of people and regular public screenings, a drama in the village square, as it were, roll up, roll up. In this respect, cinema showings are different from television showings in the home, or video tape rentals or screenings to select audiences.

Can there be said to be a Fourth Cinema in the sense of dedicated buildings and attendance's and box office takings? Perhaps there can, albeit it in a fledgling way, via a loyal festival following, or via an interested and regular faithful — Indigenous and non-Indigenous — who attend screenings of Indigenous features when they appear at downtown cinemas. In this sense, there is already a cinema of Indigenous features — very small, but significant.

It could be, though, that we will be led astray if we keep taking stock of the progress of this new cinema by using the definitions and expectations already so firmly fixed with respect to the other Cinema categories. One thing they all have in common is that features are expected to at least meet their costs and even make a profit. This is achieved, by and large, via a system of charging a fee to each person who sits in the cinema to watch the film. With First, Second and Third cinemas, it is unthinkable that the owners and the makers would actually pay people to come and watch the film, pay, for example, for their transport, pay for the venue and the print and the projectionist, and pay for a celebratory communal meal afterwards, at which speeches are made far into the night.

For such a radically new type of cinema to blossom, there would have to be some alternative base firmly set in the customs and laws of the community that conceived and manufactured the film. Such a base is not only possible but usual within Indigenous frameworks. In the Maori world, for example, commentators have identified core values which govern life in the Maori world, values such as whanaungatanga, mana, manaakitanga, aroha, tapu, mana tupuna, wairua.

Modern nation states regularly raise taxes, directly or indirectly, to subsidize feature film production in their own territories. Indigenous peoples can not raise their own taxes; rather, they are dependent on irregular allocations from the ship people. Modern nation states are confident about what cinema is and what it should achieve.

Imagine, though, that the makers of Fourth Cinema come to accent whanaungatanga or wairua or aroha in their productions. Indeed, there are glimpses of that already having happened — in the way, for example, Maori film makers have been insistent on occasion that their films be accompanied to a new venue and be presented to the people of the area with full ceremonial. My very strong hunch is — and it is an informed hunch — that if we as Maori look closely enough and through the right pair of spectacles, we will find examples at every turn of how the old principles have been reworked to give vitality and richness to the way we conceive, develop, manufacture and present our films.

It seems likely to me that some Indigenous film artists will be interested in shaping films that sit with confidence within the First Second and Third cinema framework. While not closing the door on that option, others may seek to rework the ancient core values to shape a growing Indigenous cinema outside the national orthodoxy. I hope that, in the not too distant future, some practitioner or academic will be able to stand up in a lecture room like this and begin a talk on Fourth Cinema which begins at this very point, rather than ends on it.

ends

Barry Barclay: June 2003