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Pressure

By Stewart Home

The recent release by the BFI of two of Horace Ové's films throws up the possibility not only of a reappraisal of black film-making, but also of the black power movement in the UK. Stewart Home raps on

[IMAGE]

Aside from *Pressure*'s obvious aesthetic merit, what makes this film important is the bold way it deals with institutional racism and police brutality without ever falling into the trap of treating such matters simplistically. Based on a script co-written by director Horace Ové and novelist Samuel Selvon (best known for *The Lonely Londoners*), the film is nevertheless partly improvised. *Pressure*'s plot centres on Tony, a young London born school-leaver whose parents and older brother come from Trinidad. Tony has good academic qualifications but can't find a job. His brother Colin, a black power activist, derides Tony's tastes in food and music as white and attempts to radicalise him. Tony's growing frustration with the institutional racism that prevents him finding employment that is commensurate with his academic accomplishments, leads to an increasing consciousness of his alienation from the bourgeois (i.e. also white) power structure, and he opens up to radical ideas. That said, Colin still can't get the black power message across to his brother, and it takes the sexual allure of a groovy soul sister called Louise to entice Tony into collective action against oppression. When bent coppers raid a black power benefit and fit Colin up as a drug dealer, Tony's commitment to the cause deepens, and this is reinforced by the fact that the filth have also smashed up his parents' home in a search for non-existent drugs. The film ends on a downbeat, with a demonstration in support of Colin outside the Old Bailey being washed out by heavy rain.

Ové has repeatedly stated that the scenes in *Pressure* shot in a black church and at a black power benefit were filmed without all those attending what appeared to be ordinary public events realising some of those present were acting out scripted roles. The problems this produced at the church were purely ethical, since the actor introduced as a preacher delivers prepared lines designed to show the way in which Christian discourse can act (often unconsciously on the part of those engaged with it) as vehicle for racism. For example: 'Drive all black thoughts from your head and replace them with good white holy thoughts.' With a black actor playing the minister delivering the sermon against pride, of which these lines form a part, and a black congregation listening to it, Ové underscores the way in which using black as a metaphor for sin, and making white synonymous with holiness, is historically neither accidental nor innocent. I don't know if anyone subsequently complained about having been duped and manipulated with regard to this, but Ové might well argue the stunning results justify the means by which they were achieved. Certainly, the sermon against pride was carefully drafted, and very consciously designed to contrast with another scene in which a political activist delivers a speech on the necessity of black pride. At which point I shall move on to the police raid on the black power benefit, since here Ové credits the realism of the sequence to some audience members not realising that the cameras present were there to record a drama rather than a documentary, and fought back as they would against genuine police oppression. The scene draws much of its tension from a combination of sound and tight shots. Given that it was staged on a shoe-string budget, it is a considerable achievement.

The speeches and discussions which pepper *Pressure* provide a running commentary on the film's unfolding plot without ever being didactic. It sounds perfectly natural when Colin, who is after all an activist, states that blackness consists of three things: colour, culture and consciousness. Likewise, from a stage, Sister Louise talks about the 'economically suppressed and economic elite', demanding an end to 'racist education, racist housing, bread, peace, dignity for all men, be he white or be he

black.’ One might question Sister Louise’s rhetorical use of terms such as ‘men’ and ‘he’, but this is not untypical of black power speeches at that time. What’s important is that Sister Louise is a strong female character and her speech is one of the ways in which Ové articulates Tony’s response to his recent experiences. Tony has a number of supportive friends who are white, but they are young and working class and can’t help him get a job, although they buy him food and drinks when he is broke. The first place we see Tony attempting to get a job is with a firm of accountants. Here the would-be polite and well mannered boss interviewing him makes gaffs like asking when he came to England, and expressing surprise that his hobbies don’t include cricket. The accountancy workforce is shown to be all white and the viewer is not surprised that Tony fails to secure employment with this company. The Labour Exchange then send Tony to a small sheet metal workshop. The owner or foreman is working class, he states he left school at fourteen and doesn’t have any use for someone with Tony’s good academic qualifications. Some of this individual’s views are ignorant but he employs black workers. Thus the semi-veiled racism of the ‘polite’ middle-classes is shown to be particularly pernicious, since these people occupy managerial positions and play a central role in propagating prejudice; institutional racism is after all the fetid bedrock from which so much casual racism springs. Tony ends up taking a job as a hospital porter. While the characters in *Pressure* adhere to a variety of political positions, Ové never loses sight of the inescapable fact that race and class are inextricably linked. Towards the end of the movie, Tony criticises a black militant who hates all whites. When Tony says, ‘I just can’t believe all white people are bad, a handful of people have all this power ...’, another activist observes: ‘White people in this country have been colonised. We can see the bars and the chains.’ Tony and his comrade are making the point that they and their brothers are conscious of their oppression, whereas working class whites aren’t.

What is particularly impressive about *Pressure* is the mix of cinematic influences evident within it and the way music forms such an integral part of the film, moving the plot along and underscoring the director’s intentions. The film owes a great deal to art house cinema and most obviously Italian neo-realism, with the non-professionals in the cast delivering lines in a slightly hesitant but nonetheless endearing manner. Despite the use of documentary conventions, the viewer is never allowed to forget that this is a work of fiction. There is an incredible sequence of scenes shot in and around Portobello Road, with passers-by deliberately stepping into frame and leering towards the camera. If there are echoes of Godard, then the influence of Bunuel is also evident. Ové presents one of Tony’s dreams, and moves seamlessly from the conscious to the unconscious. The dream begins with Tony and Sister Louise together in bed. Tony dresses, arms himself with a knife and makes his way past the Mangrove Café. Suddenly Tony is in the grounds of a country house. He enters a bedroom, strips off and stabs a sleeping figure, which after the killing we discover is a pig. This is a wonderfully chosen symbol, since it represents both the white establishment and their working class boot boys the Old Bill, who are still popularly reviled as the pigs; but it simultaneously harks back to the opening scene in which Colin criticises Tony’s liking for white English food, and specifically bacon. Likewise, to the many black power activists who embraced the Muslim faith, pork was impure and they refused to eat it. Among other things the sequence serves to reiterate what a long way Tony has come in a short space of time.

[IMAGE]

The dream scenes work incredibly well precisely because they are an integral part of the film, reinforcing and condensing a number of its messages and themes. Earlier, when Tony goes to the digs of a white girl and her racist landlady doesn’t want him in the house, the girl asks their tormentor if she’s: ‘frightened he’ll rape you?’ This elicits the response: ‘That’s just what happens to people like you.’ When Tony stabs the body beneath the sheet in the dream sequence, white racist ideology might lead some hypothetical viewers to imagine a white woman in the bed prior to the veiled form being revealed as belonging to a pig. This in its turn resonates with what Obi Egbuna wrote in his essay ‘The Little Boy of Brussels’ included in his book *Destroy This Temple: The Voice of Black Power in Britain*

(MacGibbon & Kee, London 1971, p. 57-9): 'When a Black man is in bed with a White woman, he is not looking for pleasure. He is seeking revenge. As a symbol of European motherhood, she deserves to be raped. This is why the Black man in bed with a White woman behaves like a destroyer. Consciously or unconsciously, he is out to blast the hell out of what he considers two fleshy slices of ever greedy colonialism. The Black man can only stop finding the White woman 'irresistible' the day he learns to find the gun more "attractive".' Incidentally, David Wilson in his review of *Pressure* from *Monthly Film Bulletin*, April 1978 writes: 'the film's only serious miscalculation is the tropical fantasy sequence, juxtaposed with the collapse of his mother's "white dream", in which Tony imagines himself stabbing a white man who metamorphoses into a pig.' This review is reproduced in the booklet accompanying the DVD, presumably as a historical curiosity and to illustrate the way in which *Pressure* was misunderstood and misrepresented by liberal critics at the time of its release. Contra Wilson, I would stress that Tony is not at any point shown stabbing a white man, this is a fantasy of the critic's own making.

Ové would probably not (or at least not now) agree with Egbuna on the issue of sexual relations between black men and white women, and there are many other points on which their opinions diverge, but the commitment each made to the black struggle is of greater importance. It is also important to recognise that those involved with the black power movement rarely held fixed positions, but rather were concerned with constantly developing and refining their politics in an increasingly revolutionary direction. Egbuna's political struggle forms an important part of the historical background to *Pressure*, since following on from his arrest on 25 July 1968, he was imprisoned and faced trial at the Old Bailey for inciting the murder of white policemen. After appearing on stage and speaking about Black Power alongside Stokely Carmichael at The Roundhouse in London in 1967, Egbuna found himself elected chairman of the Universal Coloured Peoples Association (UCPA). However, dissatisfied with the ideological disunity and faction fighting within the UCPA, Egbuna resigned both his position as chairman and his membership of the UCPA, and founded instead the Black Panther Movement in Britain. An activist speaking against racist education at a black power meeting in *Pressure* is introduced as writing for the Black Panther newspaper. Egbuna participated in the launch of the first Panther publication in the UK *Black Power Speaks*, and so this alongside the fitting up of black activists on trumped up charges in *Pressure*, make knowledge of his political activities important to a proper understanding the historical background from which the movie emerged.

While the history of the Black Power movement in the US, and its disruption and attempted suppression by the authorities, is reasonably well recorded in a plethora of readily accessible movies and books, its British counterpart has not been so well served. The selection of Ové's photographs in the extras section of this DVD does something to rectify this, since he documented many of the most significant events, but unfortunately the manner in which these are presented necessitates a prior knowledge of this history to really understand their significance both in general and more specifically in relation to *Pressure*. One picture probably depicts Egbuna, although the individual being led away from Hyde Park by police is identified in the caption as Obe Obuna. In the catalogue of Ové's touring show of photographs also entitled *Pressure* (on page 22) he is quoted as saying Obi Obuna was 'the only real African in Britain's Black Panther Party'. The most famous African in the British Black Panthers was Obi Egbuna. I would perhaps feel more confident stating that Obe Obuna and Obi Egbuna are the same person (since as I understand it, these are basically variant spellings for the same names in English transliteration) had the individual concerned not been further identified as Ghanaian in the photo caption on the DVD. Egbuna in *Destroy This Temple* identifies himself as an Ibo from Ozubulu, but being committed to Pan-Africanism he also happily calls himself a Nigerian. He was a huge admirer of Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah and stressed this Ghanaian leader's importance as a Pan-Africanist source of revolutionary pride and inspiration to oppressed black brothers everywhere. It is possible that as a result of this Ové may have misrecalled him as Ghanaian rather than Nigerian. The

BFI weren't able to clarify this matter for me, and Ové who the BFI told me supplied the caption for the photograph, hasn't yet replied to my email on this matter. All of which points to a need for a bit more explanatory material on the disk.

This DVD is a great starting point for a discussion of the black power movement in London, but a lot more work still needs to be done in terms of historical research in this area. Ové was an active participant in these struggles, having been at one time heavily involved with Michael X AKA Abdul Malik, although it should be stressed he distanced himself from his fellow Trinidadian activist towards the end of the sixties. Tony Gould in his book *Inside Outsider: The Life & Times of Colin MacInnes* (Allison & Busby, London 1993, p. 192 & 195) reports Ové as offering him the following observations about Malik: 'Michael was hope' and further that, 'people took Michael pretty seriously. He was a Jekyll and Hyde personality. He was very bright, but he had to kick down his castle after building it up. He got worse, angrier and angrier. He was always a hustler, but he got things done. Colin (MacInnes) was impressed by him, his ability to organise a demonstration, build a house, start a newspaper' Ové's active involvement with black power, which is central to a proper understanding of where Pressure is coming from, is missing from the contextualising material accompanying the DVD. Selection from the section on black power in Jonathon Green's interview book *Days In The Life: Voices from the English Underground 1961-1971* (William Heinemann, London 1988 – in which Ové numbers among those interviewed), would have made a welcome addition to the booklet accompanying the release. Ové doesn't talk about Malik in his director's interview on the disk, although there is a picture of Micheal X in the photograph selection found under the extras menu. Because of Malik's importance to both British black power and Ové personally, it is worth going over his story once again. Born Michael de Freitas in Trinidad in 1933, in the fifties Michael X relocated to Cardiff, from where he moved on to London. Among other things, de Freitas was a drug dealer and pimp who got interested in Maoism and black nationalism in the mid-sixties. He became a Black Muslim and changed his name to Michael Abdul Malik but was also widely known as Michael X. Malik's activities as a petty and not so petty criminal have been used to discredit the politics with which he is associated, but it is undoubtedly better to judge these on their own terms. Regardless of what one thinks of Malik as an individual, his commitment to black power and community politics was on certain levels self-evidently sincere, despite the fact that he simultaneously treated them as a hustle.

[IMAGE]

Malik fashioned connections to Malcolm X, Stokeley Carmichael, Muhammad Ali and the London countercultural scene including major luminaries such as John Lennon and Alex Trocchi, and with these as his starting points he had the singular misfortune to be built up by Fleet Street as the leading black power activist in the British Isles. That said his real base of media support was in the underground press and he made regular appearances in publications such as *International Times*. The RAAS black power group which Malik led was largely a paper creation, with the membership figures being massively exaggerated for the benefit of the press. Malik as a 'scare' figure provided good copy, stories about him sold newspapers and as a result exposing the fact that his organised following was in reality minuscule was not on the agenda of those journalists giving him column inches. Significantly, Malik's leading role in things such as the founding of Release (the drug charity) and organisation of demonstrations outside *The News Of The World* at the time of the Rolling Stones bust which that newspaper cheer-led is often overlooked, and Ové points this out in his contributions to *Days In The Life*. Right at the end of the sixties, Malik established his Black House in Holloway Road. Rather than being a single building the Black House was a complex of adjoining terraced housing and shops that was being converted into a Black Muslim centre, and since the work was undertaken by volunteers much of it was somewhat rough and ready. The Black House was always something of a shambles and closed up in the autumn of 1970. In February 1971 Malik left the UK to avoid legal hassles arising from his allegedly brutal treatment of a businessman called Marvin Brown from whom he was accused of extorting money. In what the media dubbed 'the slave collar affair', Brown was allegedly enticed to

the Black House where he was beaten up. Then a spiked collar was placed around his neck and he was paraded about the building. There were sharpened spikes on the inside of the collar and if Brown had moved suddenly they would have punctured the skin on his neck, potentially he could have been killed.

After fleeing London to avoid being tried over 'the slave collar affair', and because he was simultaneously fearful about his own personal safety and that of his family, Malik set up a commune in Trinidad, and it was there in 1972 that he was sentenced to death for murder. This was very much the culmination of a show trial with a confession from the star witness Adolphus Parmassar. Alongside Malik, Stanley Abbott was also convicted for the murder of Joe Skerrit. Parmassar who admitted his culpability was not tried. Since Malik was sentenced to death at the end of this first trial, he was not arraigned for the murder of Gale Benson. Stanley Abbott and Edward Chadee both received the death penalty at the end of the Benson trial. Chadee's sentence was later commuted to life-imprisonment. While forensic evidence shows that Gale Benson was forced into a shallow grave, hacked at with a cutlass and buried while still alive – with Malik's cousin Skerrit meeting a similar fate – the convictions are nevertheless unsound because they were based on a confession. Given this, it is impossible to say in retrospect exactly who was responsible for the murders. Although it appears likely that Malik and some of those working with him were involved in the killings, establishing precisely who played what part in these homicidal acts isn't possible on the basis of the available evidence. Confessions are always based on the person testifying telling those listening what they expect to hear. A tale will not be treated as a confession unless it meets certain narrative expectations, which is why confessions are notoriously unreliable despite their extensive use in so called courts of justice. A confession implies repentance, it is simultaneously a plea for clemency and as such it can never be disinterested or objective. Malik maintained he was innocent and at the very least his conviction gives rise to the impression that the cops framed a guilty man. He was sent to the gallows in Port of Spain on 16 May 1975, at the time Ové was making *Pressure*. Whatever one thinks of Malik, and there certainly appears to have been a considerable down side to his character, this doesn't alter in the least bit the fact that his trial and execution were a self-conscious travesty of justice on the part of the authorities. It is thus not unreasonable to state that both he and his right hand man Stanley Abbott, who went to the scaffold on 27 April 1979, were murdered.

To date Malik has not been well served by biographers. The most readily available pieces on him in the UK are V. S. Naipaul's *The Black Power Killings In Trinidad* (repackaged from a series of extended newspaper articles into book form by Andre Deutsch, who combined it with another example of Naipaul's lurid hack journalism *The Return Of Eva Peron*), and *False Messiah: The Story of Michael X* by the *Sunday Times* journalists David Humphry and David Tindall (Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, London 1977). Both these books, and others (such as *The Life and Death of Michael X* by James Sharp, Uni Books, Waterford 1981) rely so heavily on the police case against Malik that ultimately they amount to little more than a reiteration of Parmassar's confession with heavy dollops of unsavoury moralising added to this stew of confusion. Malik's autobiography *From Michael De Freitas to Michael X* was published in 1968 and while well worth a browse, it doesn't cover the latter part of his life. It seems likely that Ové finds it painful to speak about Malik, but his importance to both *Pressure* and the still contested history of the black power movement means that something about him would have proved a useful addition to the contextualising material on this DVD. Malik's judicial murder must number among the more significant of the many real life injustices that shaped the making of *Pressure*.

Of the eleven captioned photographs by Ové in the extras section of *Pressure*, four are devoted to the persecution by the police of Frank Critchlow and others associated with the Mangrove Restaurant. The ongoing nature of the Mangrove story is evident from the report about it in the *Kensington News* of 18 September 1970: 'Last Friday when Roy Hemmings walked out of Kensington Town Hall murmuring

"white man's justice" – it marked the end of a long battle between Kensington Council and the Mangrove Restaurant owned by West Indian Frank Critchlow – for the time being anyway. Critchlow, Hemmings and a third man, John Cabussel had received a total of £345 in fines and costs – for serving food at the Mangrove Restaurant after eleven o'clock at night.' There were unfortunately further raids on the Mangrove, which resulted in Frank Critchlow being charged with assaulting PC Frank Pulley, and headlines such 'Police Are Prejudiced', as sported by the Kensington Post of 29 January 1971: 'The call for an impartial inquiry into police-public relations in Notting Hill was renewed this week by North Kensington's M.P. Mr. Bruce Douglas-Mann – because he said, "there are indications that some of the police there are seriously prejudiced. I have seen a copy of the depositions of some of the police witnesses and I enclose a copy of the deposition of Police Constable Frank Pulley.'" The same issue of the *Kensington Post* reproduces part of Pulley's witness statement about the Mangrove 9: 'On Sunday August 9 1970, at about 2.15 pm I was on duty in plain clothes patrolling in a police nondescript vehicle in the vicinity of The Mangrove Restaurant, All Saints Road, W11, where a proposed demonstration was to take place. At that time there were only a few persons gathered outside the restaurant as the meeting had not started, but I recognised some of the group as coloured men in the black power movement. Suddenly, however, as they neared the (Notting Dale police) station the chanting changed to "WE WANT PULLER"! This chant was led by Owusu and Critchlow and eventually all the demonstrators joined in. "Puller" is a nickname given to me by a few local criminals, ponces and prostitutes who use the Mangrove Restaurant as their meeting place.'

The further unfolding of the story is summarised in the photograph captions on the extras section of this DVD, for example: 'Journalist and activist Darcus Howe in All Saints Road, Ladbroke Grove, addressing rally prior to a demonstration against police brutality after the arrest of Frank Critchlow owner of the Mangrove Restaurant. Darcus Howe and eight others were arrested for 'riot and affray', and were subsequently acquitted by an all-white jury.' In other words the court believed the defendants and not Pulley, who it would appear was viewed as having fabricated his evidence. Curiously, the *Kensington Post* of 29 October 1971 carried the following report about this court case under the headline 'Leave Court Constable is told after allegations of "prompting"': 'During the testimony of PC Graham Rogers, the second of the observation van's crew to give evidence, PC Pulley was accused by the defendants of signalling to the witness. Judge Clark immediately ordered PC Pulley out of the court, telling him not to return until after the other three officers in the van had finished giving their evidence. Asked about his attitude towards Critchlow and the Mangrove, PC Rogers said: 'my attitude is that I don't like the man.' PC Rogers told Howe he was not aware that he and PC Pulley with a few other Notting Hill policemen were known by many decent, hardworking people in the area as 'the heavy mob'. He also denied that during the week prior to the demonstration he had 'deliberately built up tensions between coloured people and police in North Kensington.' Denying that he had passed the Mangrove Restaurant in a police car together with a PC Rowntree, making rude signs at the people inside or that he had any responsibility for anything that happened subsequently during the demonstration, PC Rogers was told by Howe: 'If you do not accept responsibility now, history will bestow it on you.' Reiterating, the court found Darcus Howe and his fellow Mangrove 9 defendants not guilty, and so both the legal verdict and that of history went against Rowntree.

It is worth returning once more to Frank Pulley, since he had been the object of intense speculation prior to the Mangrove 9 arrests and trial. The main headline on the front page of the *Kensington News* dated 21 August 1970 was 'PC Pulley Transfer "Unlikely".' The extraordinary situation of a National Sunday newspaper *The People*, with a sale of around six million calling for the transfer of a local Notting Hill PC goes some way toward reflecting the extraordinary situation that exists between some local policemen and some members of the black community. A six-inch headline 'The Good Policeman Pulley' on the front page of last Sunday's issue led into a story that explained why *The People*, in the public interest felt that Police Constable Frank Pulley of Notting Dale's Vice Squad should be transferred from the West London area. Concerning PC Pulley, the paper said:

'He is the object of such widespread hostility that his effectiveness as an officer in this area with its special problems is gravely prejudiced. That the situation has arisen this week does not mean that the resentment and hostility directed toward PC Pulley and other officers in the Notting Hill area has not just sprung up in the last week. The area has been rife with rumours over the conduct of certain officers the last two years. These rumours reached a remarkable peak toward the end of 1969 when PC Pulley among others was the subject of wall graffiti in some North Kensington areas. But as a senior police officer pointed out this week there have been no official complaints or petitions about PC Pulley's conduct received at the local Police Stations. This is the trouble with the rumours and allegations made, some in court: they are uncorroborated. But the fact remains that they are held to be true by a substantial (although still a minority) proportion of the coloured population. The name that is most frequently mentioned is that of PC Frank Pulley.'

Pulley was not simply being denounced by so called 'coloured extremists' (this term can be found in the *Kensington News* 4 September 1970) as some of his bigoted supporters claimed, he was loathed by both white recreational drug users and white radicals; particularly those associated with the King Mob group, who were probably responsible for at least some of the graffiti about him as reported in the local press. Unsurprisingly, after the failed attempt to fit up the Mangrove 9, the 'rumours' about Pulley AKA 'the most unpopular policeman in London' (*Kensington News* 4 September 1970) didn't abate and they continue to circulate to this day, despite the fact that this state-sanctioned sadist retired from the police force twenty-five or so years ago. Pulley, who somehow managed to avoid the 'disgrace' of dismissal from the Metropolitan Police, must be placed in a broader context to be properly understood, one that is in part provided by Barry Cox, John Shirley and Martin Short in their book *The Fall Of Scotland Yard* (Penguin, Harmondsworth 1977): 'The 'fall' of Scotland Yard took place between 1969 and 1972. As a result of what happened in those years, a score of London detectives went to gaol, hundreds more left the force in disgrace and the old CID hierarchy was savagely restructured' Of greatest interest to us in relation to *Pressure* is Detective Sergeant Norman 'Nobby' Pilcher of the drug squad being sentenced to four years in jail, and other members of his team receiving eighteen months of porridge, since in the film Brother Colin is fitted up for drugs. The depiction of the police in *Pressure* is shaped by this still hotly contested history, the authorities distorted version of it can be found in the ridiculous 'memoirs' of top cops like Gilbert Kelland and Sir Robert Mark, and it is a pity that this matter isn't more directly addressed in the supporting material on this DVD. A working knowledge of this history helps us not only to understand Ové's film, but also why in 2005 someone like current Metropolitan Police Chief Sir Ian Blair still believes it is desirable and possible to get away with covering up barbaric acts of racism like the public execution of Jean Charles de Menezes by his officers on a London tube train (and even the right-wing press has now condemned him for this, see for example 'Law Unto Himself?' *Daily Mail*, 1 October 2005, page 5). As far as police oppression and institutional racism goes, things have not changed very much in the thirty years since *Pressure* was made, and for more on this see Decca Aitkenhead's interview with Darcus and Amiri Howe in *The Guardian* (15/10/05, Family section, page 3).

[IMAGE]

Although a greater amount of background material would make *Pressure* more comprehensible to those wanting a better understanding of its historical context, I am nonetheless very glad to see the BFI releasing the film on DVD. Better yet, the second film in the package, *Baldwin's Nigger* is Ové's documentary of James Baldwin speaking on black power at the West Indian Student Association in London in 1969. This is a fabulous and utterly compelling historical document that remains relevant to this day. For me its highlight comes after Baldwin's speech, when a dim-witted man who obviously didn't understand the words he had just heard asks: 'Do you think that there is any place for the white liberal in the black power movement?' Rather than telling this hapless twerp to go jump in a lake, Baldwin treats him with enormous patience and humanity by answering: '... you might as well say a white missionary because that's the association. From an historical point of view, I'm compelled to doubt my history, to examine it, I'm compelled to try to create it, that means I have to question

everything, whereas the white liberal is at precisely the opposite position of being in the main unwilling, as well as unable, to examine the forces that have brought him to where he is, that have created him in fact, that innocence can at crucial moments be a very great danger, it is not a matter of my liberation for example, it is also a matter of yours, and if we're working together its not a matter of doing something for the poor black people, we're going to do something for each other, to save this really rather frightening world.' Rap on brother, rap on.

Returning to *Pressure*, the BFI are promoting it as Britain's first black feature film. That said, it stands on its own merits, which greatly outweigh any historical claims that might be made for its importance. It's a wonderful film because despite a woeful lack of funding which resulted in many of those contributing to the project going unpaid, Ové's eye for composition produced mesmerising ocular results. He has a breathtaking sense of the visual with both his street scenes and interiors vividly evoking London in all of its post-war decrepitude, which was still much in evidence in the seventies; the city wasn't fully cleaned up and anaesthetised until the eighties. The youth club in *Pressure* is archetypal, and looks exactly the way I remember such institutions from when I was teenage. I was even more entranced by the beautiful shots of Carnaby Street with its sixties multi-coloured paving still intact, looking funky but gloriously chic, the way it was before the indoor market was replaced by a branch of the chain store Boots and the pavement was torn up. In this sequence the buildings and crowds are recorded in a documentary style and with a care that's rarely seen outside art house cinema. Likewise, the then fashionable threads worn by passing youth will have viewers of my age in raptures about the decade that taste forgot. What's special about Ové both as a director and as a stills photographer is the simultaneously intransigent and imaginative way he straddles the art/documentary divide. In many ways Ové transcends the division between art and popular culture, simultaneously producing both and neither. So despite a slight disappointment that the supporting material in this DVD package is somewhat lopsided, it is still fabulous to see these two films finding a new audience. At the moment there are no plans for further BFI releases by Ové, which is a shame because a double bill of *Reggae* and *Hole In Babylon* would make an excellent companion disk to *Pressure* and *Baldwin's Nigger*.

Pressure/Baldwin's Nigger: Two films by Horace Ové

Pressure: UK / 1975 / colour / 120 mins / Ratio 1.33:1

Baldwin's Nigger: UK / 1969 / black and white / 44 mins / Ratio 1.33:1

BFI DVD £19.99 / cert 15 / release date 24 October

Stewart Home's new novel *Tainted Love* (Virgin £7.99) thinly fictionalises his mother's life in Soho hostess clubs and Notting Hill bohemia during the 1960s and 1970s, and among other things details aspects of her long term involvement with Michael X, Colin MacInnes and Alex Trocchi

All photographs by Horace Ové