

Playing Indian

Constructing Native American Identity in Hollywood Cinema

Seminar Cultural Studies (USA), 5 CP
050703 M.A. Studium

Lecturer: PD Dr. Stefan L. Brandt

Room and time: GB 5/39 (Nord), Wednesdays 14-16

First session: April 22, 2009

Short description:

In aesthetic experience, Wolfgang Iser writes, we become »both ourselves and someone else at the same time.« This double structure of fictionality can be exemplified with regard to the portrayal of Native Americans in U.S. literature, film, and photography. The »Indian« has been constructed as an epitome of »the ultimate Other,« thus signifying a threat to civilization, but also as the personification of pivotal Western ideals like nobility and closeness to nature. Figures such as Sitting Bull and Geronimo have become symbols of a dying culture, both fought and admired by the dominant Western fiction. In literary works like Ernest Hemingway's »Indian Camp« (1925) as well as in Hollywood productions like *Broken Arrow* (1950), *The Searchers* (1956), and *Dances with Wolves* (1990), Native American identity is constructed in an ambiguous fashion. The 'Indian' is portrayed as a »noble savage,« yet also as an arch enemy of Western progress. This seminar will discuss a number of cultural representations of »Indianness« (including film, literature, and photography), paying special attention to the historical and social context under which these images were generated. Recommended reading: Angela Aleiss, *Making the White Man's Indian: Native Americans and Hollywood Movies* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2005).

Grading: Quality of class participation counts 1/3; expert session 1/3; final paper of ca. fifteen pages 1/3. Poor attendance or class participation will negatively affect your grade.

Deadline for Final Papers: Friday, October 30, 2009. Note: There is no (!) extension of this deadline.

Syllabus:

- 22. April** **Playing Indian – An Introduction**
- 29. April** **Indians in the Western Literary Imagination**
Ernest Hemingway, "Indian Camp" (1925) (available online)
- 06. May** **The Invented Indian – Native Americans in Iconic Photography**
Winfried Fluck, "Playing Indian: Media Reception as Transfer" (2007) (available online)
- 13. May** **Retelling the Indian Wars: A Balanced History?**
Broken Arrow (1950, dir. Delmer Daves)
- 20. May** **The American Indian as a Nonconformist**
Apache (1954, dir. Robert Aldrich)

- 27. May** **Double Identity: The American Dream and the Trauma of Captivity**
The Searchers (1956, dir. John Ford)
- 03. June** **Pentecost Holiday (Pfingsten)**
Relax and enjoy!
- 10. June** **Hollywood and the Civil Rights Movement**
Cheyenne Autumn (1964, dir. John Ford)
- 17. June** **Becoming Indian: Transformation and the Boundaries of Whiteness**
A Man Called Horse (1970, dir. Elliott Silverstein)
- 24. June** **The American Frontier as a Picaresque Comedy**
Little Big Man (1970, dir. Arthur Penn)
- 01. July** **Taking Revenge: Native Americans in Horror Movies**
Wolfen (1981, dir. Michael Wadleigh)
- 08. July** **Epic Symbolism**
Dances with Wolves (1990, dir. Kevin Costner)
- 15. July** **The 'Noble Savage' in Hollywood Cinema**
The Last of the Mohicans (1992, dir. Michael Mann)
- 22. July** **American Indians and Kitsch**
Pocahontas (1995, Disney Feature)

