

Duisburg- Essen University
Faculty: American Studies
Seminar: Cultural Hybridity
in the Am. Context
Lecturer: Dr. Martin Butler
Referee: Miriam Stadtfeld

Cultural Hybridity in Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man*

1. The director:

- born in Akron, Ohio (near Cleveland) in 1953
- enrolled at the NWU of Journalism
- later changed to Columbia University, where he studied film
- was later accepted at *Graduate Department of Film Studies* at NYU
- eventually became a filmmaker himself and a symbolic figure of the independent film (newest film: *The Limits of Control*, 2009)
- film genres: societal, social, psychological, and ethnical environment
- Jarmusch: "I have never been interested in mainstream, but what happened on the margins." [trans.]

2. The film:

- published in 1995
- cast: Johnny Depp as *William Blake*
- Gary Farmer as *Nobody*
- music by Neil Young
- one of few movies on Native Americans directed by a non-native (!)
- story: Western man travelling to the extreme Western frontiers of America
- motivation: he wants to take on a job as an accountant in

Machine, but there is no job for him

- he is wounded because of a misunderstanding
- found by Native American "Nobody" who accompanies him through the strange world
→ numerous situations which are partly violent and comical
- Blake is confronted with the *fragility of life*
- *Dead Man* not regarded as a typical Western
- character of W. Blake is not a "real Western" man
→ he is a foreigner to the wilderness

3. Hybridity in the Movie:

- Jarmusch combines Western elements with mythology of Indians → *hybrid* form
- *Dead Man* is considered a "postcolonial Western"
- selected characters experience colonization
- they, in a metaphorical sense, hint at contemporary notions of Bhabha's concept of *hybridity*
→ colonizer and colonized are concerned
→ binary oppositions in *Dead Man*
- phenomenon of 'otherness' on both sides Nobody and Blake
- *mimicry*: Blake develops Indian traits; Nobody mimics Blake
- *stereotypical image* of 'the Indian'
- untranslated passages which remain in the Indian language
cf. Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* → hybrid experience; authentic representation of nativeness
- inversion of traditionally assigned roles of civilized and uncivilized
- *Dead Man* gives Nobody a voice to express himself in front of Blake who represents the 'other'
→ which has not been the case in many pieces of popular culture every since (cf. *Wendy Rose's* or *Sherman Alexie's* poetry)
- Nobody is able to articulate his position