

# Dead Man

Jim Jarmusch

Referent: Miriam Stadtfeld

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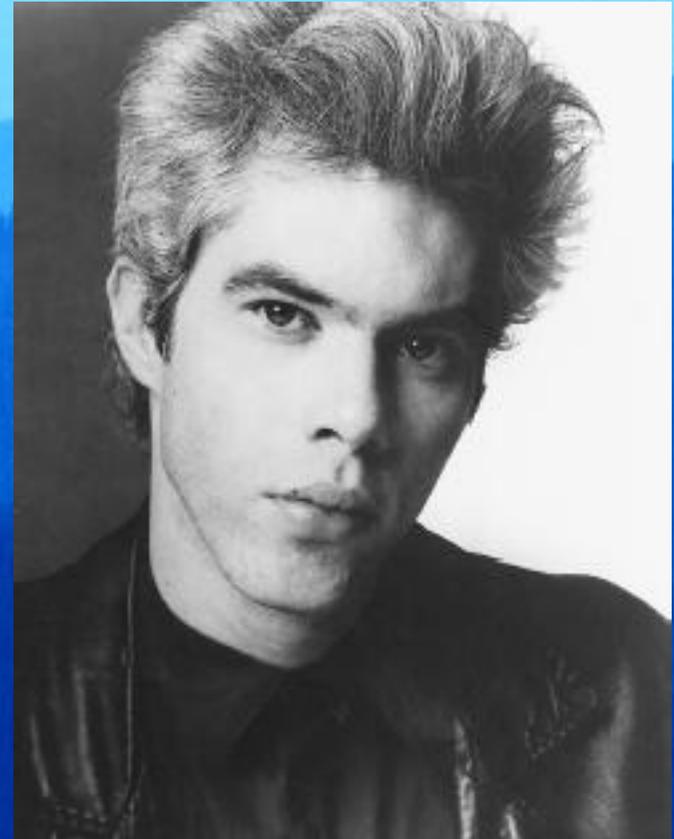
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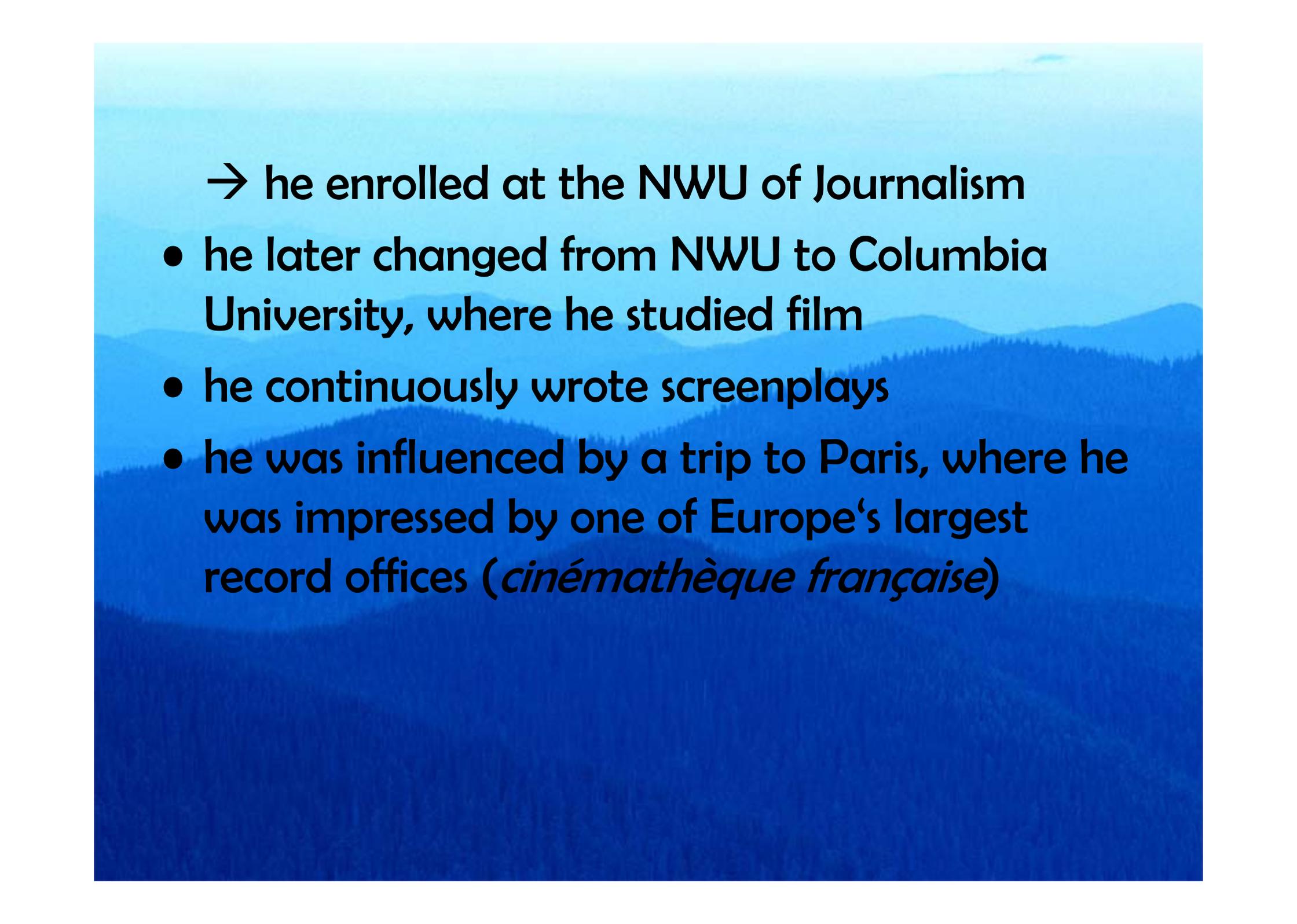
# 1. Introduction

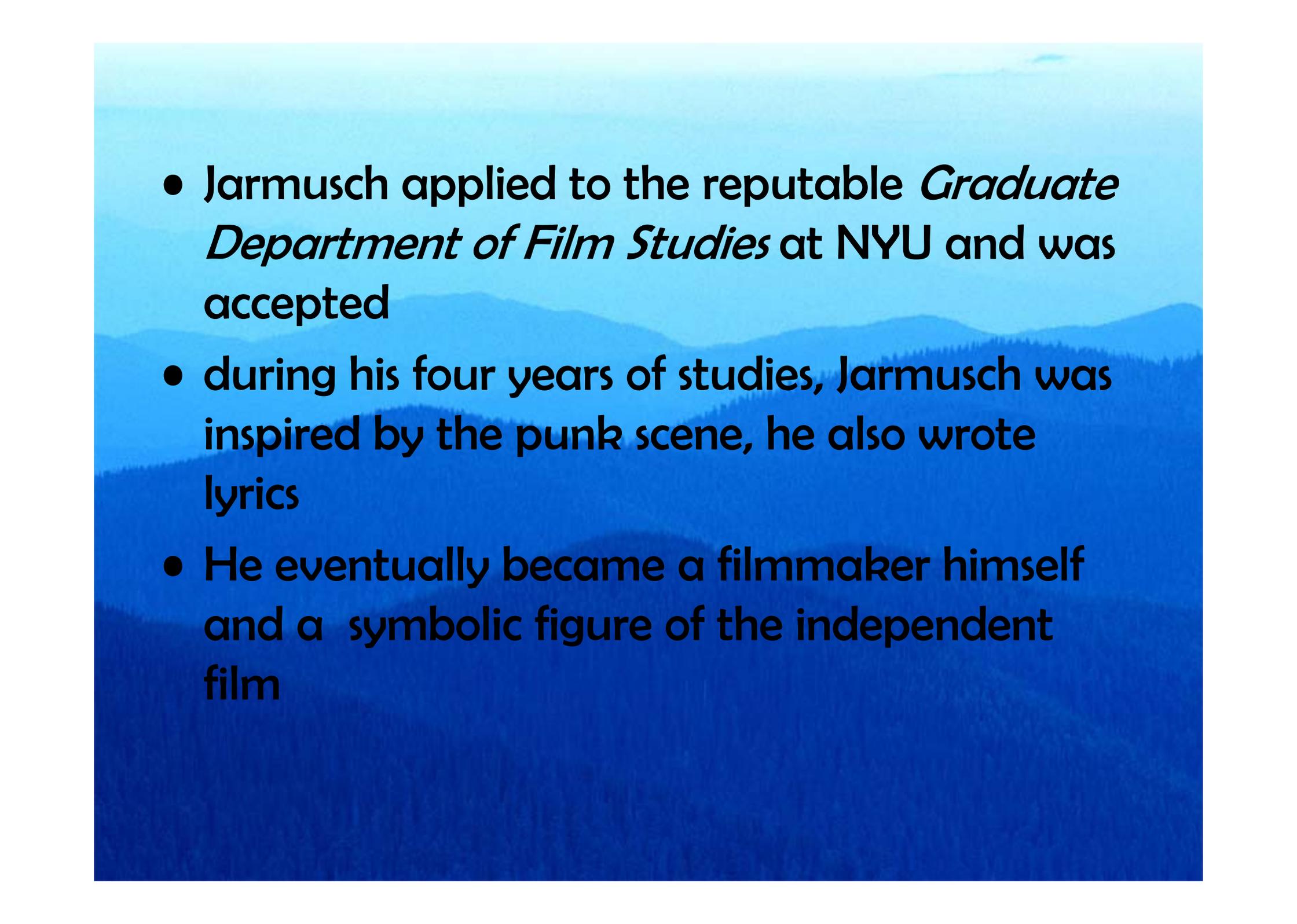
- this presentation intends to present the movie *Dead Man* as a medium showing the postcolonial concept of hybridity
  - by clarifying the film's genre
  - by looking at particular scenes from the film
  - by interpreting the protagonists' behavior and appearance

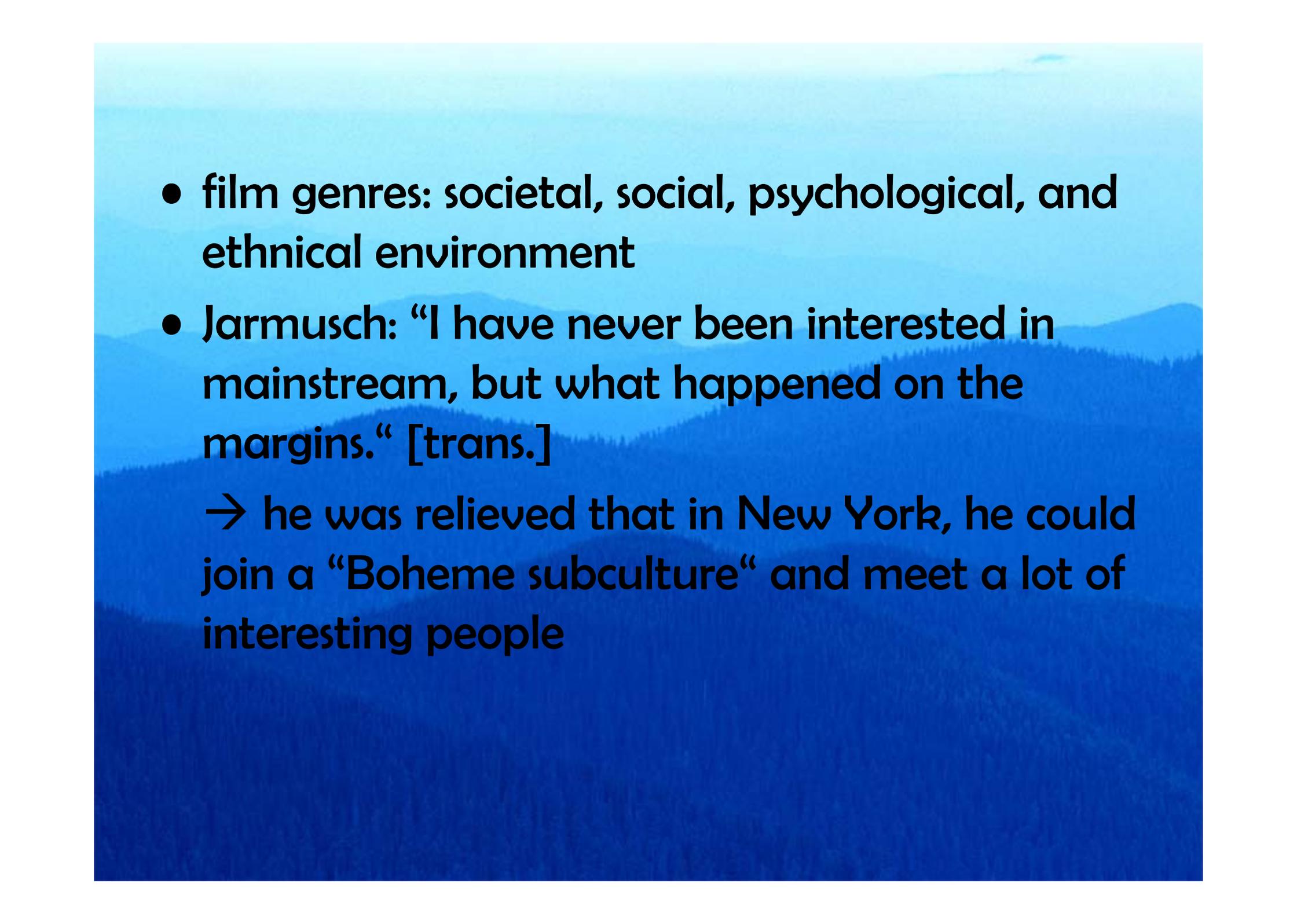
## 2. Who is Jim Jarmusch?

- 1953: birth in Akron, Ohio (near Cleveland)
- as a child, he was much interested in American black and white movies
- Jarmusch soon realized that he would not stay in Akron



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- he enrolled at the NWU of Journalism
  - he later changed from NWU to Columbia University, where he studied film
  - he continuously wrote screenplays
  - he was influenced by a trip to Paris, where he was impressed by one of Europe's largest record offices (*cinémathèque française*)

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- Jarmusch applied to the reputable *Graduate Department of Film Studies* at NYU and was accepted
  - during his four years of studies, Jarmusch was inspired by the punk scene, he also wrote lyrics
  - He eventually became a filmmaker himself and a symbolic figure of the independent film

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- film genres: societal, social, psychological, and ethnical environment
  - Jarmusch: “I have never been interested in mainstream, but what happened on the margins.” [trans.]
    - he was relieved that in New York, he could join a “Boheme subculture“ and meet a lot of interesting people



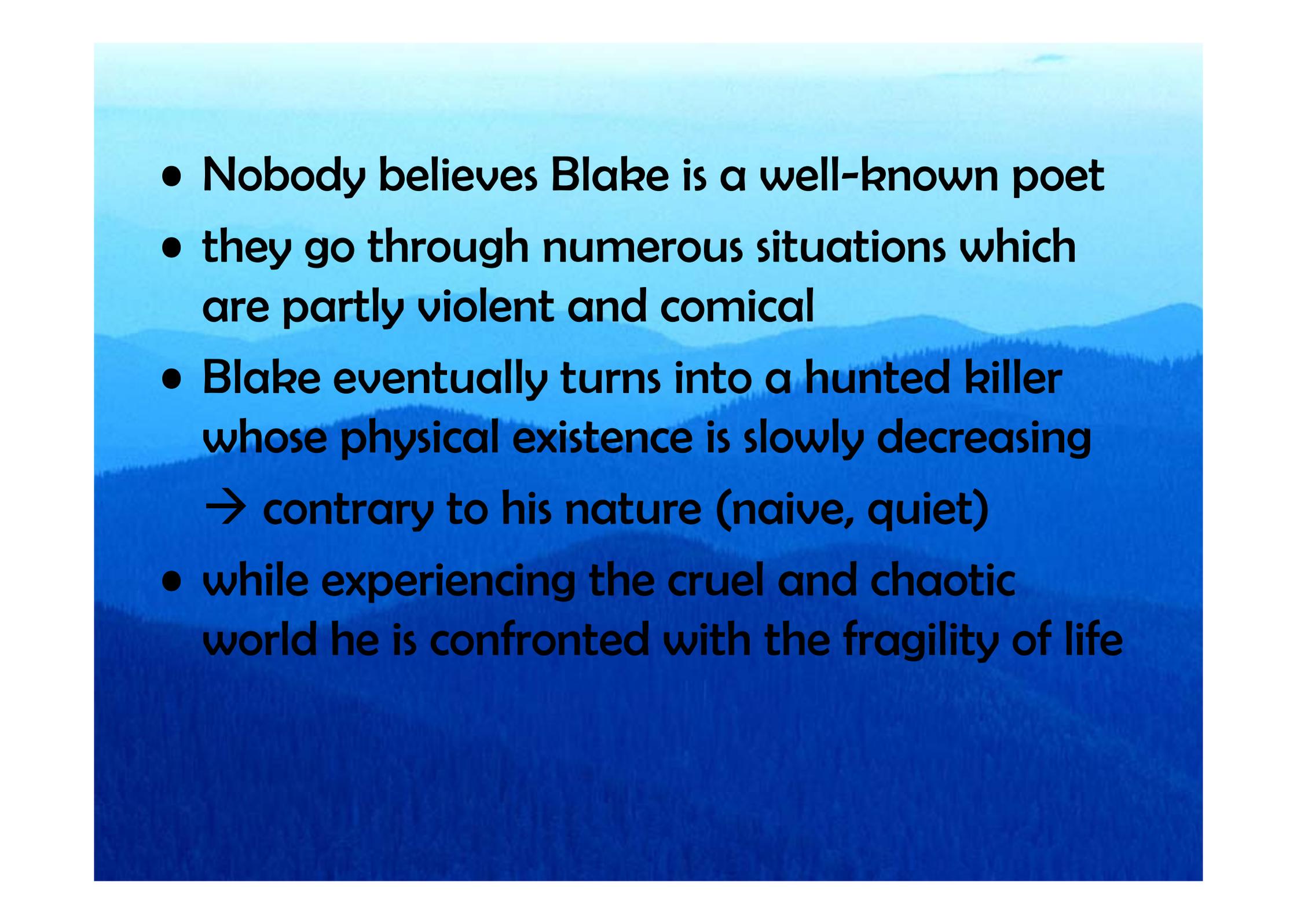
### **3. Watching the Movie's first Scene**

## 4. Short Summary of *Dead Man* – Idea of the “Anti-Western “

- published in 1995
- release: Film Festival in Cannes
- cast:  
Johnny Depp: William Blake  
Gary Farmer: Nobody
- one of few movies on Native Americans directed by a non-native (!)



- story of the Western man William Blake who travels to the extreme western frontiers of America (2nd half of the 19th century)
- his motivation: taking on a job as an accountant in *Machine*
- it turns out that there is no job for him
- Blake is wounded because of a misunderstanding
- Native American “Nobody” finds him and accompanies him through the strange world

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- Nobody believes Blake is a well-known poet
  - they go through numerous situations which are partly violent and comical
  - Blake eventually turns into a hunted killer whose physical existence is slowly decreasing  
→ contrary to his nature (naive, quiet)
  - while experiencing the cruel and chaotic world he is confronted with the fragility of life

- among critics *Dead Man* is not regarded as a typical Western
- as a man from the East Coast, Blake is not a “real Western” man → he is a foreigner to the wilderness
- he is a “dead man” from the very beginning (shot in his chest) → merely a matter of time until he dies
- Jarmusch combines Western elements with mythology of Indians → *hybrid* form

The background of the slide is a monochromatic blue-tinted landscape. It features several layers of rolling hills and mountains, each covered in dense evergreen forests. The hills in the foreground are darker blue, while the ones in the distance become progressively lighter and more hazy, creating a sense of depth and atmospheric perspective. The sky is a pale, clear blue with a few wispy clouds near the horizon.

**5. Watching two other Scenes from  
the Movie**

## 6. Hybridity in the Movie

- *Dead Man* is considered a “postcolonial Western”
- selected characters experience colonization
- these characters, in a metaphorical sense, hint at contemporary notions of Bhabha’s *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 the whites: “I imitated their ways” (e.g. scene in which he puts on Blake’s hat)

- *stereotypical image* of ‘the Indian’

→ in close communion with nature; interested in ‘Western goods’ (tobacco!); no intention of using weapons (cf. *Rose’s* and *Alexie’s* poems)

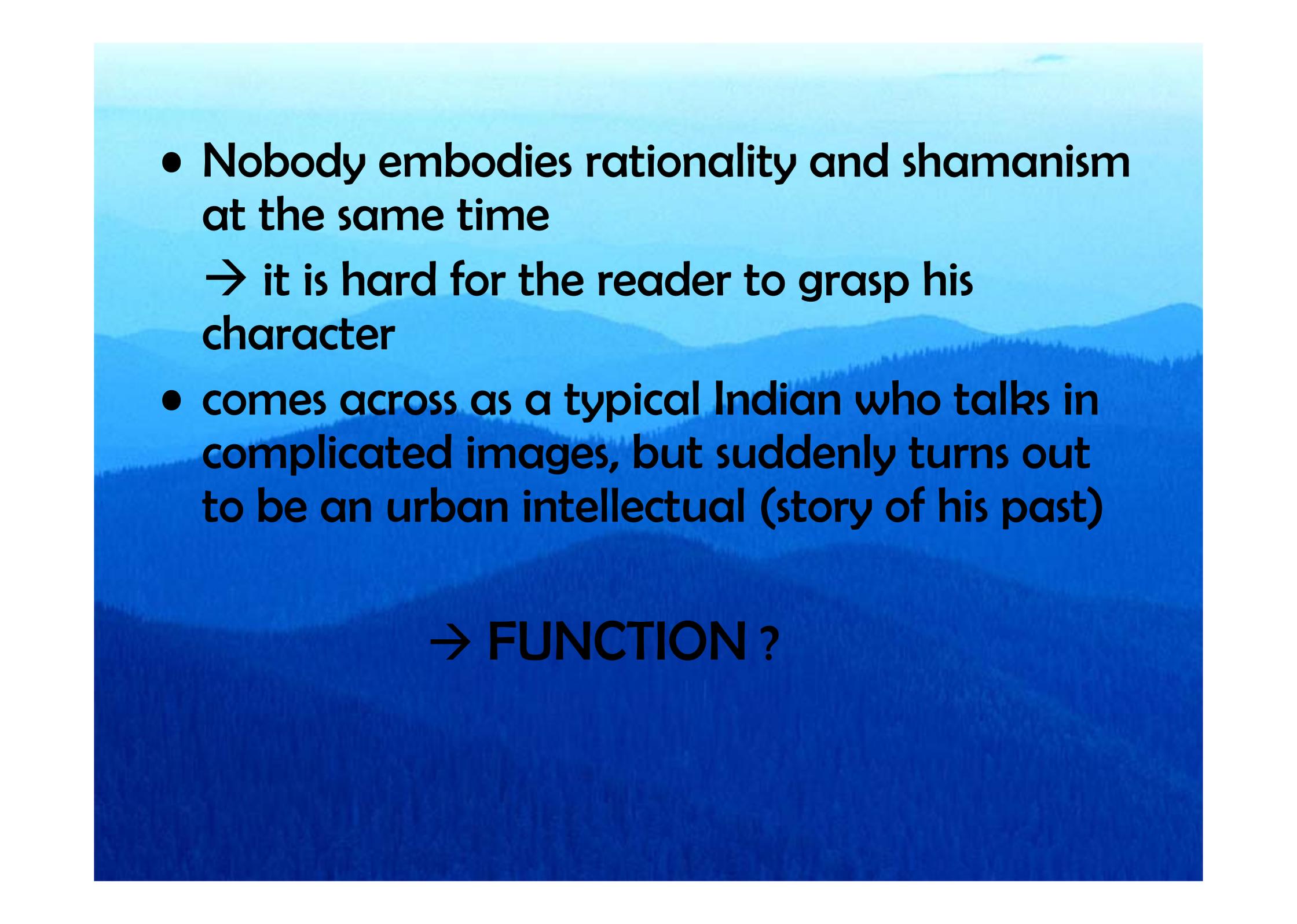
- untranslated passages which remain in the Indian language

→ cf. Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*

→ function: hybrid experience; authentic representation of nativeness

- inversion of traditionally assigned roles of civilized and uncivilized
  - Nobody in many parts appears as a cultivated and educated man
  - Blake comes across as naive and uneducated



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- Nobody embodies rationality and shamanism at the same time
    - it is hard for the reader to grasp his character
  - comes across as a typical Indian who talks in complicated images, but suddenly turns out to be an urban intellectual (story of his past)

→ FUNCTION ?

**Sherman Alexie on the *Cinematic Indian* (1998):**

**I watched the movies and saw the kind of Indian I was supposed to be.**

**A cinematic Indian is supposed to climb mountains. I am afraid of heights.**

**A cinematic Indian is supposed to wade into streams and sing songs. I don't know how to swim.**

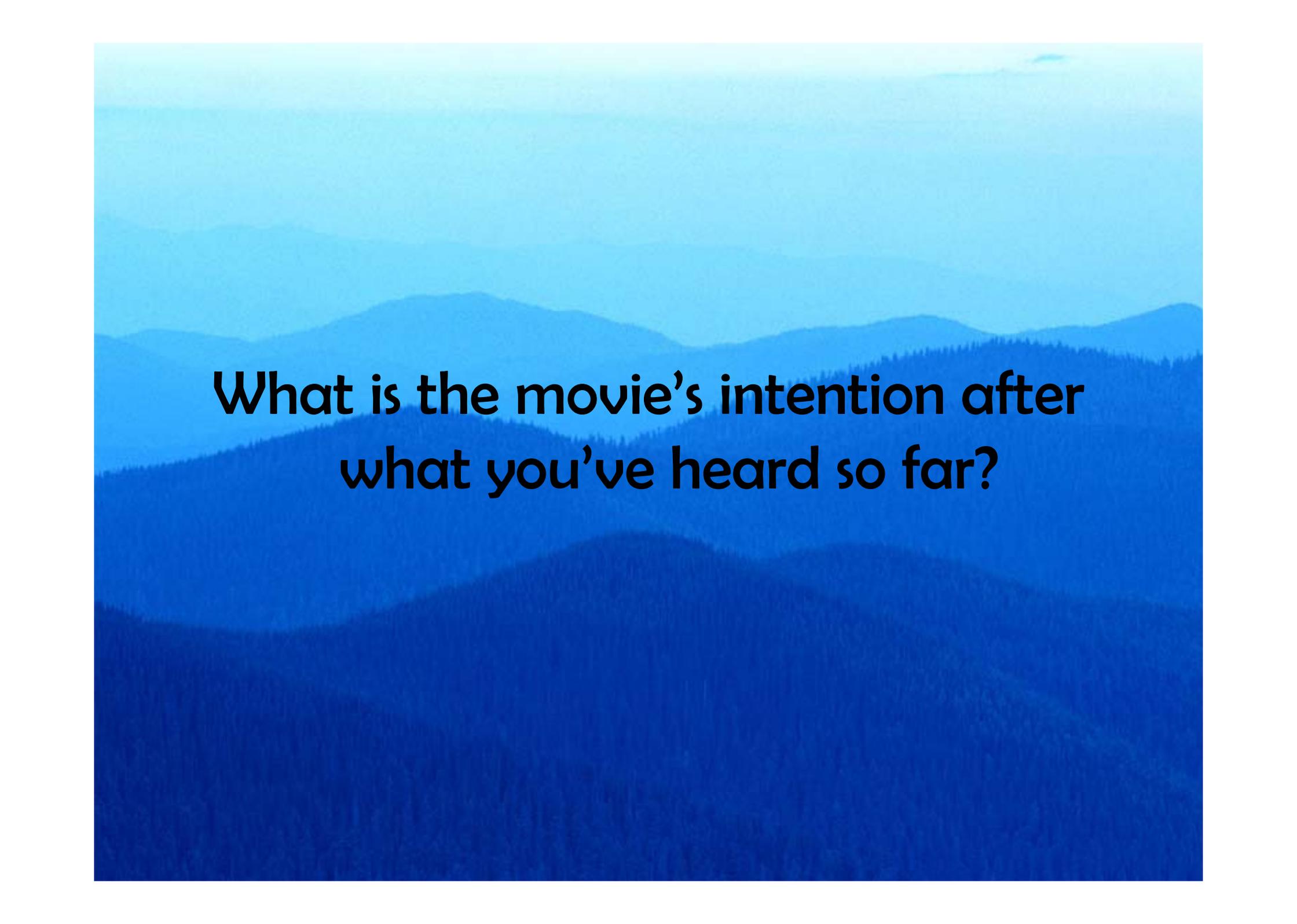
**A cinematic Indian is supposed to be a warrior. I haven't been in a fistfight since sixth grade and she beat the crap out of me.**

**I mean, I knew I could never be as brave, as strong, as wise or as visionary, as white as the Indians in the movies.**

- majority of underprivileged colonial populations have hardly ever had the chance to articulate their positions

e.g. as expressed in *Wendy Rose's* or *Sherman Alexie's* poetry

→ *Dead Man* gives Nobody a voice to express himself in front of Blake who represents the 'other'

The background of the slide is a monochromatic blue-tinted photograph of a vast landscape. It features multiple layers of rolling hills and mountains, with the foreground showing a dense forest of evergreen trees. The sky is a pale, hazy blue, and the overall effect is one of depth and tranquility.

**What is the movie's intention after  
what you've heard so far?**

## 5. References

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