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Stereotyping the Indian: Visual Misrepresentations in the City of Dreams/Nightmares²

Abstract: Filmic representations of Native Americans stem directly from the previous literary delineations of the original inhabitants of the American continent. Consequently, the stereotypes which dominated the delineation of Indianness in texts were translated to the new medium at the dawn of the century. The constitutive elements of the cinematic Indian (the Instant Indian Kit) will be extensively dealt with. The second aim of this essay is to analyze how various stereotypes permeated the filmic representations of Native Americans in different periods, from the silent films up to the contemporary blockbusters, such as: the Stoic Warrior, the Wise Elder and the Vanishing Indian. I will also attempt a close examination of the predominance or coexistence of the divergent stereotypes of the noble and ignoble savage in films released in different periods.

Key words: film, Native American, (mis)representation, dominant discourse

Film, as the latest and the most effective medium of conveying dominant discourse standpoint on issues as race, gender, class, etc., had a major contribution in disseminating the projection of the native as the absolute Other to the white civilizer not only in the United States, but also in the entire world. As a consequence of their pervasiveness in the twentieth century, motion pictures were instrumental in the naturalization of the stereotypes which delineate the Native Americans not only as exotically different from Euro-Americans (Bird 91), but also as the antithesis to civilization and progress, as the paramount value of American national identity. Instead of portraying contemporary Native Americans, Hollywood chose to depict “the readily identifiable nineteenth century Indian” (Leuthold 161), employing this image as means of formulating a national identity grounded in a mythical past. While the ethnic political movements in the 1970s increased the general public awareness towards the Native Americans, among other ethnic minorities, and the Hollywood productions proffered a fairer and more sympathetic representation of natives in the mainstream narratives, the clichés established at the beginning of cinema continue to persist even in the latest films.

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Since most whites have never actually met American Indians, their views on the continent's original inhabitants largely stem from the distorted images in popular culture. Hollywood reduced on-screen Indians to certain fixed elements which inscribe Nativeness to an immovable position within white imaginary. The Hollywood film industry "has perpetuated what can be best described as "The Instant Indian Kit", suitable for any and all Indians" (Friar and Friar, 223) which made the characters on screen easily identifiable for the viewers as "Indians". Since, in most cases, white actors were employed to portray Indians, a specific costume was gradually fabricated, borrowing elements from various tribes and rendering these elements as universal for all natives. For both men and women, this costume consisted of a black longhaired wig, full buckskin clothes, a headband, a necklace, and moccasins (Lutz 52). In addition, warriors and "chiefs" would display war bonnets, bone breastplates, shields, lances, knives, tomahawks or war clubs, bows and arrows or rifles, breechcloth, war paint and horses. The two critics also labeled this outfit as "The Plains Kit", since, on the one hand, it was a mixture of elements from the Plains tribes' culture, and, on the other hand, the natives belonging to the Plains tribes gradually turned to be the focus of Hollywood's productions.

There is also a variant of the Instant Indian Kit, though not as popular and, consequently, less reproduced on screen than the Plains kit, an outfit which brings together the aspect of the "savage" nakedness with easily identifiable elements as feathers, facial and bodily paint, as well as a partially shaved head, all in all alluding to the bloodthirstiness of their possessors. Labeled as "The Instant Woodland Indian Kit" (Friar and Friar 145), it consisted in a "Mohawk" hairstyle, loincloth, moccasins, gruesome facial and body paint, tomahawk and scalping knife. According to Hartmut Lutz, this outfit was used in films dealing with the colonial frontier east of Mississippi, such as *Pocahontas* (1908), *America* (1924), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1920, 1936, 1992), *Unconquered* (1947), *The Return of the Mohicans* (1948), *Seminole* (1953), etc. (Lutz 53)

Critics repeatedly noted that the dominant visual narratives often paid no attention to distinct native cultural traits and that aspects of various cultural regions were blended together in what Hartmut Lutz termed as the "Pan-Indian Mash". What looked "Indian" was sufficient, as long as it was easily identifiable: canoes, totem poles, teepees, drums, scalps, unsaddled horses, sweathouses, tomahawks, bows and arrows. While teepees abound, long-houses, dome-shaped wigwams, cabins or houses are very few. Buffalo hunting seemed to be a pan-Indian way of sustenance, while gathering, fishing, agriculture seem to have been considered un-Indian by the Hollywood filmmakers. In *The Pretend Indians: Images of Native Americans in the Movies*, John A. Price points out the ethnographic bias in the cinema's almost exclusive concentration on the Plains tribes: "Most American Indians did not depend upon large game as their primary source of food but were in fact agriculturalist. Most American Indians lived in permanent houses, not in temporary hide tents. Most American Indians did not wear tailored hide clothing, but woven robes" (165). In *The Only Good Indian: The Hollywood Gospel*, Ralph and Natasha Friar not only criticize Hollywood's obsessive reference mostly to the Plains Indians, but they also repeatedly accuse filmmakers of ignorantly confusing one tribe with another, and of ascribing the ceremonies of one Indian group to another.

Similarly, the language spoken by Indians in the films usually consisted in a specially invented "Indianlect" or "garble", which included grunted monosyllabic words and grammatically and idiomatically flawed English which characterized the speaker as stupid,

their lack of linguistic competence suggesting substandard intelligence. If the Indians on the screen were allowed, nevertheless, to speak in coherent sentences, their words were not translated into English, being therefore irrelevant in any given context. Only in the 1970s did the native languages on screen start to be translated. In the majority of cases, nevertheless, the Indians were mute and silent, uttering nothing but screaming war cries when preparing to attack. This linguistic simplicity opposes the real linguistic diversity of Native American languages. For example, there are almost three hundred distinct native languages spoken north of Rio Grande, languages grouped in over fifty families (Mithun 1). Even the “language” of the Indian drums was “standardized” for Hollywood purposes, the stereotypical “ump-dadada, ump-dadada” pattern of the war drums in the westerns becoming the laughing stock for Native Americans (Lutz 53).

While most films treat all Indians as being basically alike, some tribes are obviously “more Indian” than others; according to critics, the tribes that fought the hardest against white encroachment, for example the Sioux (Lakota) and the Apache are most present on the silver screen. According to Hartmut Lutz, the Little Bighorn battle had an important contribution in shaping the white popular culture imagination in the twentieth century in regard to the fierceness/docility of various native tribes. The Sioux, Apache, Cheyenne, Blackfoot and other allies defeated and annihilated Custer’s Seventh Cavalry at the Little Bighorn River on 26 June 1876. The result of the battle was a shock for the national self-esteem (taking into account the fact that it happened one week before the nation’s first centennial) and it caused a trauma that led to “the incessant Custer myth-making” (Lutz 54) afterwards in the popular culture narratives. For example, between 1909 and 1971 Hollywood studios financed twenty-two films on this topic (Friar and Friar 152). Similarly, the Apache wars (1850s to 1880s) turned Geronimo into a mythic hero for the natives, while, at the same time, invalidated U.S. military pride. As a result, the hostility of the Apache, Sioux, Cheyenne, Comanche, and Seminole and other nations that dared to resist white conquest during the nineteenth century became a recurrent motif in the Hollywood depiction of American Indians. Producing such films provided, according to Ralph and Natasha Friar, easily digestible explanations for military conflicts, celebrating the victory of the white civilizers and putting the blame on historical victims or on the evil character of a few white individuals.

In Friar and Friar’s count of westerns which include Indians, there are eighty-one films that deal with the Sioux, forty-three with the Apache, twenty-five with the Comanche and twenty with the Cheyenne, followed by the Navajo with sixteen, Seminole with fifteen and Blackfoot with ten films. In contrast, the Crow and the Pawnee, considered traditionally as “friendly Indians”, received less attention (these tribes are present only in four western movies); the tribes that offered less military resistance (tribes in California or in the North-West) are almost absent from the list. While the main role of Indians in films was “to serve backdrop and plot functions, the inclusion of certain tribes in preference to others tended to ideologically justify centuries of genocide and continued forms of ethnocide” (Lutz 54).

In *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), E. M. Forster analyzes the characters according to their delineation as “flat” and “round” (Forster 75). These two concept have become instrumental in categorizing characters in any fictional text as characters who are fully developed and developing individuals (round) and characters who remain static (flat), being characterized by only one or two distinctive traits which are easily identifiable (and sometimes stereotypical) and who serve as background for the evolution of the round

characters. If Forster's simplistic categorization is applied to the Indians portrayed in the western films, critics would agree that until the 1960s all the Indians on screen were flat characters. Even if an Indian was the protagonist, as, for instance, in pro-Indian films such as *The Vanishing American* (1925) or *Devil's Doorway* (1950), the hero didn't acquire more depth, remaining frozen in the stereotype of the "unblemished hero" (French 32). However, most Indian characters did not even attain such status; usually they remained anonymous parts of the attacking horde or made only a short, nevertheless exotic appearance as part of the frontier landscape (as, for instance, in *Stagecoach*).

When they were more than an element of the Wild West setting, the Indian characters were inscribed to a quite limited range of fixed parts: the honest hero longing for a white woman, but dying in the process, the honest friend of the white man, the last of his dying race, the debauched drunkard, the relentless and forceful avenger, the old wise man, the superstitious and treacherous medicine man. The range for the female Indians was even more limited, only three cast types being developed by the Hollywood industry: the "squaw", a household drudge and beast of burden; the seductive (mixed-blood) mistress; the Indian princess, a modest maiden, the chief's daughter (Pocahontas).

The Stoic Warrior

The cliché of the stoic warrior is one of the most employed by filmmakers in Hollywood, and one of the most recycled. It was and it still is largely disseminated within the media, from feature films and documentaries, to commercials and music videos. This is one of the most vicious images of the natives, since it propagates the myth that Native Americans are unemotional creatures born to fight and wage war against white people. Although the past white-native military conflicts were frequently instigated by the whites who needed more land and natural resources, Hollywood's version of history maintains that the indigenous peoples were solely responsible for any bloodshed, as Devon A. Mihesuah remarks: "While the history of Indian-Euro-American relations is filled with instances of European massacres of Indians, in movies and on television, it is always Indians who are portrayed as bloodthirsty villains" (42).

Due to the film industry's emphasis on showing armed confrontations between whites and natives, the warrior image is perceived as the Native American's true identity (Hauptman 109). Therefore, the white audience expects the "real" natives to look like the characters on screen and to behave accordingly. Besides being a testament to authenticity in the eyes of the whites, the Indian warlike quality is often regarded as one of the few native features which Euro-Americans think highly of. It is quite paradoxical (as all the contrasting descriptions of Indianness coexisting within the white imaginary are) that Indian warfare against the white army and settlers is perceived as savage cruelty, whereas, at the same time, there was a certain respect for native fighters in the eyes of white officers in the nineteenth century.

For example, in the politically-correct, revised version³ of the legendary Geronimo's story *Geronimo, An American Legend* (1993), there is an explicit respect and admiration for the leader of the Chiricahua Apache tribe, the mistreatment of natives being blamed merely on unfortunate historical circumstances. There are a few white characters in the film that greatly admire the brave Indian fighter and try their best to mediate with Washington for fair treatment for Geronimo and his fighters, but their individual endeavors prove ineffective in face of the commonly-held view of how the Indian problem should be dealt with. General George Crook, Lt. Charles Gatewood, Lt. Britton Davis are portrayed as compassionate towards natives, jeopardizing their careers in order to help the Apaches. In the much acclaimed *Dances With Wolves*, the honor, courage and self-sacrifice of the Lakota are qualities contrasted to the cowardice, narrow-mindedness and meanness of the white soldiers. In an earlier film, *Broken Arrow* (1950) ex-soldier Tom Jeffords gradually comes to understand and respect the Apaches led by Cochise, their honor and dignity surpassing that of the whites.

Furthermore, warring American Indians were noted for their sternness, which popular culture interpreted as a sign of stoicism and lack of emotion. Hollywood has depicted native warriors as silent, unsmiling and grim. Before the era of the motion pictures, a plethora of paintings and photographs had already shown unsmiling Native American historical figures. Their serious expressions can be explained by the fact that they were usually painted or photographed either after they were captured or during a treaty-signing (Bird 64).

Although the idea of the stoic warrior is based on a misconception, it has been unremittingly disseminated by mainstream culture and it contributed to the further dehumanization of Native Americans, who are regarded as fighting machines. As the Western genre has foregrounded this facet in its portrayal of the native enemy, the cliché of the stoic warrior has entrenched itself in the dominant discourse.

The Wise Elder

The elderly Indian (in most cases, the tribe chief, sometimes a medicine man) whose timeless wisdom transcends ethnic barriers has been a stock representative of the Noble Savage stereotype. Popular culture has turned to the myth of the grey-haired sage elder whenever white America has required simple medicine for its wounded soul. During the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, Hollywood's wise elder became an essential element of the anti-Westerns which stressed the need for indigenous antidotes against the political problems of the time, namely the Vietnam War. The counterculture embraced Native Americans as the keepers of the traditional knowledge, holding the key to a peaceful world in tune with nature (Bird 75). Instead of simply acknowledging and valuing native wisdom, popular culture perverted it by adapting it to their own needs.

³ In comparison, in John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939), Geronimo is just the savage who kills white people and tries to rob the stagecoach.

Hollywood's Indian wise man provides the audience with a certain kind of wisdom that cannot be obtained from white civilization. Accordingly, the image of the knowledgeable healer (which originated from the nineteenth century advertisements for herbal remedies and appropriated the native concept of healing governed by elderly medicine men), functions, on the one hand, as white society's source of natural wisdom (Prats 126) and, on the other hand, as an alternative to the corrupt and mercantile society. The native elder's wise insights are marketed as "reductions of the life's core issues to eloquent simplicity, to graceful, even spiritual truths [...] created for mass audiences of modernity" (Budd 193). Although the Hollywood's medicine man seems to hold some power owing to his wise remarks, his wisdom is valuable only because the white people who benefit from it and, eventually, appropriate it, grant it its value. There are numerous examples of films, *Dances With Wolves* for instance, which "intimate the American Indians demise as well as the white hero's continuation of native wisdom" (Budd 198). Despite witnessing the destruction of his kin at the hands of the greedy Euro-Americans, the filmic elder is always willing to share his knowledge with the white chosen one. The undertone of the dominant narrative is that, since the Native Americans are vanishing, they no longer have any use of their knowledge of the earth. Their wisdom can therefore be fully incorporated into the mainstream mindset. Thus, the stereotype of the wise elder shows once again how white America has capitalized on Native American cultures in order to further its own image.

The Vanishing Indian

The invention of the American cinema at the end of the nineteenth century coincided with the "closing of the frontier" (Frederick Jackson Turner's famous thesis) in 1893, a thesis that again implied "the Last of the Mohicans Syndrome: the belief that Native Americans were inevitably vanishing, like leaves blown by the autumn wind, before the power of white America's manifest destiny" (Jay 7). This pervading myth about the final days of the Indian permeated the American culture in these decades, prompting, for example, the photographic work of Edward Curtis, who thought of himself as documenting (in artificially staged scenes) the last images of a vanishing race. The review of Griffith's *The Redman's View* in the *New York Dramatic Mirror* stated that "this remarkable film is clearly intended to be symbolical of the fate of the helpless Indian race as it has been forced to recede before the advancing whites, and as such it is full of poetic sentiment and artistic beauty" (quoted in Jay 7). This process of estheticizing functioned as part of the narrative of legitimization of the white nationalism in the United States: genocide and dispossession could go on unsanctioned as long as the feeling produced by the films vis-à-vis the Indian's disappearance was a "poetic sentiment and artistic beauty". In other words, the films could depict the Native American as a victim of white greed and violence "as long as the manner of representation adhered to the aesthetics of poeticized sentiment, thus transforming the represented action into something felt to be ordered, harmonious, fixed, and even perversely delightful" (Jay 7).

The relationship between Euro-Americans and the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas has always been an ambivalent one. On the one hand, the white colonizers

orchestrated a systematic genocide in order to take control over the land and over the natural resources of the American continents. On the other hand, Euro-Americans needed the peoples that they deemed uncivilized to confirm their role as the elect in the New World. This contradictory attitude led to the conceptualization of the “Vanishing Indian” as an individual belonging to a culture that, even if it is acknowledged at times as being admirable, it is nevertheless inferior; therefore his death is an inevitable sacrifice on the altar of white progress and civilization (Bataille and Silet 37). By justifying their actions on the pretext of predestination (the Manifest Destiny ideology), this rhetoric has conveniently purged the whites from blame of genocide against America’s first inhabitants.

Additionally, the concept of the natives’ inevitable extinction permitted the white colonizers to appropriate whatever aspects of the Native Americans’ way of life they considered essential for setting themselves apart from the European continent (as Philip Deloria’s study *Playing Indian* suggests). But the acceptance of the native culture as an element of Americanness would be possible only after the indigenous population’s disappearance, as Armando Jose Prats explains:

The Indian was no “American” until he vanished. The Vanishing American – as image, symbol, and idea – is roughly contemporaneous with the birth of the Republic. He was “ours” only after the land was – a part, however marginal or misconceived, of the American “heritage”. However welcome at the time, his passing begot the nation’s exceptional status, the privileged identity wrought in the crucible of the wilderness and wars with wild men. (125)

The cliché of the dying race has been often employed in cinema because of its implications for the white hero. The supposedly “sympathetic” westerns in particular capitalized on this image. Heroic characters, such as John Dunbar in *Dances With Wolves*, fully absorb native values and become “white Indians”. Unlike their adopted tribes, though, the white heroes are not destined to vanish. They survive and keep American Indianness alive (Budd 200). Once the vanishing of their former enemies has occurred, the whites can finally embrace native values. Consequently, they can capitalize on native culture and claim it to be part of their heritage.

The notion of the Vanishing Indian has been instrumental in white America’s search for its own identity, as it is proved by Hollywood’s obsession with representing the Indian. Most films that thematically involve Native Americans, explicitly or implicitly postulate the vanishing race ideology. There are numerous films whose title suggests the tragic demise of a great race in face of progress and civilization, starting with the famous *The Vanishing American* (1925), continuing with 6 versions of *The Last of the Mohicans* (1911, 1920, 1932, 1936, 1968, 1992) on the silver screen and 6 versions for television (including two miniseries), complemented then with titles such as: *The Last of Her Tribe* (1912), *The Vanishing Race* (1912), *The Vanishing Tribe* (1914, 1959), *The Last of Her Clan* (1917), *The Last of His People* (1919), *Vanishing Men* (1932), *Last of the Comanches* (1953), *The Last Tomahawk* (1965), *Last of the Redmen* (1947), *Ishi: The Last of His Tribe* (1978, 1992), *Fall of the Mohicans* (1965), *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964), *Last of the Dogmen* (1995), *Tecumseh: The Last Warrior* (1995), *Stealing Mary: Last of the Red Indians* (2006), as well as the predicted *The Last of the Tribe* for 2013.

The only reason for listing all these titles here is to stress, once more, the obsession of the dominant discourse with dooming the original inhabitants of the continent into extinction. America thus acknowledges the natives' past without having to deal with Native Americans in the present. The Vanishing Indian's existence is inextricably connected to the country's past, a fictional time when he supposedly passed away. By depicting present-day Native Americans, native directors struggle to get the native characters unstuck from the frozen stasis of the nineteenth century. It is quite striking that the countless films dealing with Indianness which were released in the one hundred years of cinema are set in a fifty-year time frame, in the period after the Civil War till the end of the nineteenth century.

Hollywood's films which deal with Indianness abound with subtle allusions at the fact that the era when the first inhabitants (be them noble or ignoble) roamed freely on the American continent ended somewhere at the dawn of the twentieth century, after the Indian tribes were relocated on reservations. One of the most symbolic films about the withdrawal of the natives from reality into history and myth is John Ford's *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964). The beginning of the film introduces the Cheyenne survivors of the relocation as starving to death in the desert and wearing ragged Euro-American clothing (as a marker of conquest and successful colonization). At the end of the film, a visibly diminished tribe due to the difficult voyage back to their land, imprisonment and fighting their way out of Fort Robinson, is finally granted by treaty the right to reside on a fraction of what used to be their land. The final scenes seem quite optimistic at a first reading: the tribe is finally free, the rebellious element is eliminated (suggesting a period of prosperity and peace), a little girl is returned to the tribe and every single member of the tribe is wearing the easily recognizable Indian costume, brand new and in bright colors ("The Instant Indian Kit"). Suddenly the film takes the Indians out of specific moment when the event unfolded into some indiscernible past. The natives lose any claim to survival within the frame of the dominant discourse, becoming frozen into the mythic American past.

A less subtle approach to the Vanishing Indian theme is to render the native characters as speaking about their own demise as a race (fashion introduced first to the readers by James Fenimore Cooper who, in *The Last of the Mohicans*, engages Chingachgook into an elegiac monologue about his dying race). For instance, in *Little Big Man* (1970), labeled as a "revisionist" western and proffered by its creators to present a corrected, more truthful version of Indianness, Old Lodge Skins, the chief that adopted Jack Crab (Little Big Man by his Indian name) acknowledges the inevitable demise of his kind: "The human beings⁴ will soon walk a road that leads nowhere." Accompanied by Jack, he climbs a mountain and lies down to die, using the famous line "Today it's a good day to die"⁵, followed by a "spiritual" final scene Indian-style (from a white perspective, obviously) about his vanishing race:

'I want to die in my own land, where Human Beings are buried in the sky.'

'Why do you want to die, Grandfather?'

⁴ "Human being" is the English translation of the word the Cheyenne call themselves.

⁵ In *Smoke Signals*, Sherman Alexie will humorously deconstruct the stoic Indian stereotype endorsed by Hollywood for decades through Thomas Builds-the-Fire's witty remark: "Sometimes it's a good day to die, and sometimes it's a good day to have breakfast".

'Because there's no other way to deal with the white man, my son. Whatever else you can say about them, it must be admitted, you cannot get rid of them.'

'No, I suppose not, Grandfather.'

'There is an endless supply of white men, but there always has been a limited number of Human Beings.'

'We won today. We won't win tomorrow.'

Who gets to play the Indian?

Native American actors frequently obtained minor parts, but rarely starring roles in films which depicted Indians. When they received a salary, they earned lower pay than non-Indians and had little job security. Actual Native Americans featured in Hollywood westerns as warring Indians and became victims of exploitation by white filmmakers, who transported them from their reservations to work in Hollywood, paying them with alcohol and tobacco to appear in battle scenes. The history of Indian movie extras being financially exploited and mistreated by white filmmakers was consistent with the mass exploitation of Native Americans during the settling of the West.

In 1915, Dench wrote in an essay titled *The Dangers of Employing Redskins as Movie Actors* that white actors should portray Indians not only because they were better actors, but also because "to act as an Indian is the easiest thing possible for the Redskin is practically motionless"(quoted in Bataille and Silet 61). This stereotypical characterization of Indians on screen so early in the century paved the road for a long line of films which would employ white actors to play the native characters on screen. By putting on a costume (the Instant Indian Kit) and painting the face red, anyone could instantly become an "Indian".

All major Indian roles used to be played by Italian or Hispanic actors. Actor Iron Eyes Cody, the son of two first-generation immigrants from Italy, is one of the most notorious case. In 1924 he moved to California, changed his name and started working as an actor, presenting himself as a Native American. He played Indians in countless films from the late 1920s till the 1980s. Sal Mineo (Italian), Ricardo Montalban (Mexican) and Gilbert Roland (Mexican) in *Cheyenne Autumn* (the last two actors played Dull Knife and Little Wolf) were also cast in many films as Indians.

The Indians on screen were played according to very static images which have virtually nothing to do with real life. Michael Hilger points out that "generally, film-stereotyped Indian men and women have childlike, primitive emotions: if treated well they are capable of powerful love, loyalty and gratitude; if treated badly, of tenacious, fierce vengeance. Their goodness or badness is always measured by their reaction to whites, never by their intrinsic nature as American Indians, except in some recent films" (Hilger 34).

Up to the late 1970s, most of the Indian parts were played by white actors, native actors playing only as extras. It is only in the 1980s and the 1990s that native actors got the

chance to be more than a part of the setting. An exception is Chief Dan George who in 1970 was cast in the role of Old Lodge Skins in *Little Big Man*. And surprisingly enough, the first (and probably only) Hollywood film to cast native actors in all the native parts was *Dances With Wolves*.

Indians remain misrepresented in most films because they have no access to their content, direction, and control. Despite changes that have made representations of Indians more human, they are still often “treated as objects representing a dying, even if wonderful, culture” (Leuthold 32). As recently as 2009, Hollywood still opposes, through its blockbuster *Avatar*, the primitive, pagan indigenous community living in harmony with nature to the highly technological Euro-American civilization. Even if cloaked under the veil of an extraterrestrial life-form on the planet of Pandora, native stereotyping is still transparent in Hollywood. The Instant Indian Kit is still employed by the white filmmakers in order to delineate the Omaticaya clan of the Na’vi (the name of the indigenous population on Pandora). From bows and arrows, breastplates, long braided partially shaved hair, feathers and necklaces and war paint, to dramatic drumbeating and war cries, most of the Instant Indian Kit was fully used in this “fantasy” film. Within the tribal social structure of the Na’vis the viewer easily identifies the Stoic Warrior (Tsu’Tey), the Wise Elder (Mo’at) or the Vanishing Indian (Eytukan)⁶. These characters remain virtually unchanged throughout the film (they are “flat” characters), their role being merely to support the human (white) character. Even if their world is outlined as desirable to the mercantile and greedy corporatist human society on Earth, the dichotomy white-native remains as strong as ever in the city of nightmares.

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⁶ Eytukan has to die so that Jack Sally, the human (read white) protagonist, could become the leader of the clan.

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