

“Playing Indian” Revisited

American Indians in the Transatlantic Cultural Landscape

Archie Fire Lame Deer: So if you talk about the respect for our people in East Germany, when you walk there, I have to thank this man called Karl May, even though it was a world of fantasy that he had written about, never seen Lakotas, and made ridiculous things as Navajos with Mohawk haircuts [*Richard Erdoes:* I can tell you all about that!] but he still raised the consciousness of the people of the Indian people.

Erdoes: We were all born and raised pro-Indian, all the German, and Austrian, and the Swiss and French kids clapped when they see the Indian—going “Boo!” when the cavalry come. [. . .]¹

Painting, Playing, Printing: Karl Bodmer and George Catlin

The Central European forms and traditions of “playing Indian” were transatlantic in their production and circulation. In the long line of representations that spanned the previous centuries since European contact,² especially influential were the Indian paintings of Swiss artist Karl Bodmer, who in the early 1830s traveled to the Upper Missouri Valley with German Prince Maximilian of Wied-Neuwied. While wintering at Fort Clark, present-day North Dakota in 1833–34, Bodmer created many likenesses of the Mandan and Hidatsa people. After his return to Europe,

Bodmer used his sketches to make scores of paintings, which were then published in the prince's travel account in German in 1839, and subsequently in French and in abridged form in English.³ Among them were his most famous ones, the 1834 *Mató-Tópe (Four Bears)*, *Mandan Chief*, and his 1835 *Pehriska-Ruhpa of the Dog Society of the Hidatsa tribe*. Bodmer is usually credited with highly accurate ethnographic detail and is known as a visual artist who documented Plains Indians in the early stages of European contact.⁴ Over time these prints became so popular and ubiquitous that by the middle of the twentieth century they had been circulating in various reproductions on the Old Continent. Thus, Bodmer's visual representations of Plains Indians have become a part of the transatlantic cultural landscape, serving as "raw material" or "props" for playing Indian in Central Europe.

U.S. painter George Catlin spent much of the same decade visiting and painting some of the same Native communities in the same region. Catlin and Bodmer overlapped to the extent that, for example, both painted the Mandan leader Four Bears (who is credited with alternative spelling by Catlin in his 1832 *Máh-to-tóh-pa, Four Bears, Second Chief, in Full Dress*). Much more than Bodmer, Catlin's enterprise ran the gamut of "playing Indian" in its variety of media. After spending years on the Missouri River, Catlin published his travel account as *The Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians* in 1841, then lectured and exhibited his Indian Gallery in a variety of U.S. cities before he took it to Europe.⁵ There, Catlin complemented his collection with *tableau vivants* of Europeans dressed up as Indians, himself masqueraded as a Sac warrior, and he staged live performances with groups of Ojibwa and Iowa Indians, which drew large audiences. Complete with an open air encampment and horses,⁶ Catlin soon operated a veritable proto-Wild West Show, which he took to Brussels, Dublin, London, and Paris. In London in 1848, he published a companion book to his American West travel account, this one titled *Catlin's Notes of Eight Years' Travels and Residence in Europe, with his North American Indian Collection. With Anecdotes and Incidents of the Travels and Adventures of Three Different Parties of American Indians Whom He Introduced to the Courts of England, France and Belgium*.⁷

In his writings, Catlin deployed the figure of the American Indian as a foil for celebrating U.S. democracy and critiquing European Christian practice and industrial society. According to his account, the Iowa and Ojibwa in his service repeatedly wondered about the great wealth and dire poverty coexisting in European cities, and even berated Christian

missionaries for attempting to convert them instead of tending to the poor.⁸ At best, actual Native agency was buried in Catlin’s rendering of the cultural and literary trope of the *noble savage* of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. A report likely closer to the actual experience of these Indians was published in 1848 by Maungwudaus (The Great Hero), a member of Catlin’s second Ojibwa group, titled *An Account of the Chippewa Indians, Who Have Been Travelling Among the Whites, in the United States, England, Ireland, Scotland, France and Belgium*.⁹ Another Indian critique of European and American society is provided by the very context of these encounters: as observed by Christopher Mulvey, the Iowa and Ojibwa crossed the Atlantic because of white encroachment on their land and way of life—but during their European tour, some eleven of them died of smallpox and other causes.¹⁰

The “Wild West” Tours Europe: Buffalo Bill Cody

While Catlin’s Indian gallery met early success in Western Europe, the U.S. pioneer who turned playing Indian into a long-term show business on both continents was Buffalo Bill Cody. L. G. Moses documented how some of the members of the Great Plains ghost dance movement, deemed to be too rebellious to live on the reservations, were allowed by the U.S. government to be hired as performers for Buffalo Bill’s European tours.¹¹ This was a characteristic transfer between Indian revitalization movements, government policy, and playing Indian in popular culture. When a number of Native tribes engaged in the spiritual practice of ghost dancing, the U.S. government perceived this as a real threat to the status quo of Indian relations, and responded with repressive measures that culminated in the killing of Big Foot’s band at Wounded Knee. As part of the crackdown on the ghost dancers, the U.S. government then partnered with Buffalo Bill Cody to remove the troublemakers and channeled them into performing nostalgic and exotic reenactments of “the Indian Wars” in the United States and abroad. Moses argues that considering the circumstances, these Plains Sioux performers exercised some agency in representing their own history, and benefited financially from the arrangement.¹² As performances of colonial rule, Buffalo Bill’s successful tours of Europe were akin to the fin-de-siècle *Völkerschau* (live exhibitions of “exotic” Native people from far-flung European colonies) by Carl Hagenbeck, and they spawned imitators in content or form, among them the Sarrasani circus of early twentieth-century Germany.¹³

Pressed in Pulp: Dime Novels and the World of Karl May

While James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* were published in German as early as 1845,¹⁴ it was the advent of the dime novel that truly accelerated the diffusion of Indian imaginaries across the Atlantic. With advances in printing and transportation technology, publishers perfected the production and mass dissemination of popular literature at low prices. In the United States, the firm of Beadle and Adams are credited with publishing the first dime novel series in 1860. Their first dime story, *Malaeska, the Indian Wife of the White Hunter*, established a major theme in the genre: pioneer and Wild West stories that featured American Indian characters. With the onset of the Civil War, the publishers established their transatlantic arm, Beadle's American Library, which for five years reprinted some of their runs for the British market.¹⁵ This was one of the early instances of the transatlantic publishing of U.S. dime novels¹⁶—a practice that not only provided Europeans with a steady fare of Western fantasies but also inspired “native” European literature about American Indians, and thus helped provide the “script” for Europeans playing Indian.

The foremost and most influential example of homegrown Central European stories about American Indians remains the *Winnetou* cycle of novels written by German author Karl May around the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁷ Karl May's formula of positioning a German hero in an alliance with “noble” Natives against greedy and evil whites and “bloodthirsty” Indians proved to be immensely successful in Central Europe. Over time, the author's oeuvre developed into veritable “culture industry,” with between eighty and one hundred million copies sold in twenty-eight languages.¹⁸ May's works served as “script,” or at the least as inspiration, to whole generations of Central Europeans for playing Indian in a variety of cultural forms, from stage performances to feature films and hobbyist reenactment.

While his novels were set in the Southern Plains region of the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century,¹⁹ both scholars and ordinary Germans point out that Karl May's stories are purely fictional and not based on much (if any) personal experience with American Indians.²⁰ May was more likely influenced by the popular accounts of the Wild West and “the Indian Wars” of the late nineteenth century, and their renderings in the transatlantically circulating dime novels. This allowed him the liberty to “play Indian” as a German in more than one way. May deliberately blended his own personality with that of his narrator

and his protagonist when he masqueraded as the hero of his own Wild West adventure stories; he even commissioned replicas of the rifles that his hero wielded on the frontier and posed for photographs in costume as Karl/Sharlee/Old Shatterhand.²¹

In his stories, Karl May positions his German hero in a peculiar alliance with his fictional American Indian characters. The inherent skills, strong body, and character of Karl/Charlie, a German immigrant to the U.S. West, soon allow him to outperform the Americans in frontier skills, and his feat of knocking out a man with his bare fist earns him the nickname of “Old Shatterhand.” After his early encounters with good and evil frontiersmen and Indians, Shatterhand soon chooses sides and strikes up a friendship with the Apache warrior Winnetou. With his Indian “blood brother,” Old Shatterhand lives through a series of adventures in which he battles white bandits and the hostile Kiowa and Oglala Sioux.

May’s literary partnership between German frontiersmen and American Indians has a peculiar politics that I argue would later inform the transatlantic alliance for Native American sovereignty. Scholars have observed that in the process of Karl’s (almost overnight) transformation into Old Shatterhand, the frontiersmen who are key allies to him and the Apache all turn out to be German immigrants.²² In an especially emotional scene of the first story, the white Klekih-petra, who had spent decades with the Apache and had taught their chiefs the tenets of Christianity, is fatally wounded by the bullet of a drunken white surveyor. Dying in the arms of his beloved pupil Winnetou, Klekih-petra turns to Karl/Old Shatterhand, whom he had met only hours before, but whose German origins he shares. Speaking in German, which the Apache do not understand, Klekih-petra asks Karl/Shatterhand to take his place and be a friend and teacher to Winnetou. Karl vows to fulfill this role.²³ Through this and subsequent scenes,²⁴ May positions Germanness as a commitment to an alliance with American Indians, in particular with the Apache.²⁵ This, however, is not a commitment to mass and violent resistance: after the Apache warrior’s father and sister are shot dead by another white outlaw, Old Shatterhand successfully talks Winnetou out of convening all the Indian tribes and waging war on the whites.²⁶

At the core of Old Shatterhand’s alliance with the Apache is attraction. Karl is immediately drawn to the “noble” appearance and behavior of Winnetou, and he later finds that the feeling is mutual.²⁷ However, the fulfillment of the two men’s secret hopes for friendship is delayed for a long time by the fact that the Apache consider Karl an enemy not only because he surveys their land for the white railroad, but also because one

of his fellow surveyors has killed Klekih-petra. What follows is a series of adventures in which Karl and white hunter Sam Hawkens successfully manipulate the Apache and a band of Kiowa marauders in order to survive and punish the evildoers. These adventures are rich in reversals and successively feature Winnetou and Karl as each other's prisoner and jailor. Throughout, a combination of pride, cunning, and misperceptions keeps the two men from disclosing their strong sympathy for each other. Only after Karl/Old Shatterhand fights a series of duels—including one against Winnetou that leaves him severely wounded—is his allegiance adequately proven, and is he reconciled with the Apache leaders. Now Old Shatterhand and Winnetou swear blood brotherhood and, in the words of Apache chief Intshu-tshuna, become, "[a] single person and warrior with two bodies, howgh!"²⁸ Meanwhile, Old Shatterhand also admires the beauty of Winnetou's sister Nsho-tshi, whose love for the German hero is nipped in the bud by her untimely death of a white bandit's bullet.²⁹ Thus, May's German hero experiences attraction for and becomes the subject of desire by both an Indian man and an Indian woman. As I will show in subsequent chapters, this trope of attraction and desire would inform not only successive forms of Europeans playing Indian, but also the transatlantic alliance of the Indian sovereignty movement.

Staging Indians: The Karl May Festivals

Besides their mass marketing in dozens of languages, Karl May's novels have also been adapted in a variety of other media and cultural forms. One of the most remarkable of these is the dozen or so Karl May stage festivals scattered throughout Germany and Austria.³⁰ Mostly established in the post-World War Two period, these venues usually feature a Wild West theme park with vendors, merchandise, an Indian "village" or "reservation," and other attractions. The main event, however, is invariably the performances of the adaptations of the *Winnetou* stories on a "natural" stage, with horses, amplifiers, stuntmen, and pyrotechnics. Held in amphitheatres that can seat up to thousands, these performances are always carefully choreographed for spectacular visual effect and action. According to Katrin Sieg, over time the stage plays have used Karl May's novels to amplify or advocate a variety of successive and sometimes contradictory attitudes, which include imperialism and anti-imperialism, racism and multiculturalism, anti-materialism and commodity fetishism.³¹ Commodifying a peculiar German fantasy of American frontiersmen and

Indians, these stage performances and the surrounding industry³² have entertained and shaped the attitudes of generations of German-speaking Central Europeans toward the history of Native Americans.

Into the Woods: The Central European Reenactment Hobby

Parallel to the more business-oriented cultural forms, playing Indian in Central Europe³³ also developed into a “grassroots” movement. The fans of dime novels, Wild West shows, and Karl May books became cultural producers and authors/performers in their own right by organizing Western and Indian clubs, circulating newsletters and journals, and holding conventions and performances. While these societies ran the gamut from literary to social, the German and Central European hobbyist reenactment of American Indian cultures received some scholarly attention in the last twenty years.³⁴ Here I will use some of these sources and my own research to briefly sketch out the history and characteristics of these groups through the late Cold War.

Some of Central European Indian hobbyism dates back to the 1910s, but by the early twenty-first century their groups numbered in the hundreds.³⁵ One Central European tradition of reenacting Indian cultures initially existed within the German Wild West clubs: established in 1913, the members of the Cowboy-Club München Süd studied the history of the American West, collected books and artifacts, and learned Indian songs and dances, as well as the cowboy skills of riding and lassoing—to prepare for the Wild West shows staged by themselves and other clubs.³⁶ German clubs founded in the 1930s included one named *Manitou* (likely after *Winnetou’s* designation of the Great Spirit), and the *Indianerklub Frankfurt West*.³⁷ Inspired by the popular literature sent by his brother Raul from the United States, in the 1930s Hungarian Orientalist Ervin Baktay created a “saloon,” held “meetings” in cowboy regalia, annually reenacted the Battle of the Little Big Horn, camped out on the Danube near Budapest, and posed both as a sheriff and as Plains Indian “Chief Buffalo Lying Down.”³⁸ Another example of the transatlantic circulation of ideas and forms of performance, one of the influences of the Czech and Slovak hobbyist groups was the Woodcraft Indian movement launched by Ernest Thompson Seton’s books for boys published in the first two decades of the twentieth century.³⁹

After a hiatus imposed by World War Two (although the Hungarians held a camp as late as in 1943), Central European Indian hobbyism

picked up again. In the postwar period the Hungarian Danube group saw increased attendance at their events.⁴⁰ Old Manitou, the first Indianist club of East Germany, was founded near Radebeul in 1956; it was followed in 1958 by a group of Mandan reenactors who called themselves Hiawatha and lived near Leipzig. The town of Meißen saw the emergence of The Dakota in 1961; and the Sieben Ratsfeuer [Seven Council Fires] established their own club in Magdeburg in the year 1963.⁴¹ Inspired by the *Leatherstocking Tales* and the *Winnetou* stories, Hungarian singer-songwriter Tamás Cseh and his friends started playing Indian shortly after they graduated from high school, and by the mid- to late-1960s had launched the second Hungarian hobbyist group, known for their annual camps in the Bakony hills.⁴²

In his seminal treatment of embodied representations of Indians by white Americans, Philip Deloria explains how, as the result of a new discourse of cultural relativism and a crisis of individual identity, Cold War white hobbyists began engaging Native American cultures by dancing and singing with real Indians.⁴³ Here Deloria distinguished between two groups of hobbyists. “Object hobbyists” replicated Indian artifacts as their objects of desire without engaging living Indians, who they considered part of the past and racially other. “People hobbyists” engaged in intercultural contact with live Indians on the powwow circuit, and negotiated the differences between Native agency and Euro-American imagination.⁴⁴ It is important to point out that while postwar Germany underwent a suppression of racist discourse of identity that was more forceful than the one in the United States,⁴⁵ German hobbyists did not have access to living Native people the way Euro-Americans did. In other words, their desire for true cross-cultural interaction and experiences had very few venues, which were also highly mediated. One of these was the rare appearance of actual Indians at German Wild West festivals⁴⁶ and hobbyist encampments. Another venue would be the correspondence and eventual collaboration with Native Americans in the transatlantic sovereignty movement.

With the dearth of opportunities for interaction with live Indians, the Germans reenactors became “object hobbyists” by default. Like the Hungarians,⁴⁷ many German Indian hobbyist groups self-admittedly transitioned from rather crudely acting out popular culture fantasies of American Indians to a kind of Native impersonation that was based on what they regarded as rigorous research.⁴⁸ The Indianerklub Hunkpapa e.V. emphasized the authenticity they gleaned from scholarly publications and visits to museums and saw themselves as an “ethnological

club for the tradition and culture of the North American Indians [. . .] striving to preserve Indian customs, songs, and dances.”⁴⁹ In the early 1980s, Peter Bolz reported that German reenactors of the Hunkpapa Lakota “[would] use drawings and paintings by Karl Bodmer as reference and try to reproduce the articles depicted there as accurately as possible. Their productions are actual replicas consciously made as an effort to bring elements of a past culture back to life again.”⁵⁰ The Bakony group of Hungarian hobbyists were proud to be listed in the 1972–73 *Smithsonian Bulletin* as an organization that reenacted American Indian warfare.⁵¹ For the members of the four different groups who Katrin Sieg interviewed in the early 2000s, being “serious” about their hobby meant having respect for Native Americans, commitment to scholarly accuracy and hard work in handicrafts, and engagement with substance beyond the surface.⁵² The German hobbyists emphasized the authenticity and ethnographic detail⁵³ of their activities to set themselves apart both from their less rigorous fellow hobbyists and from the general public, who they aimed to educate about false stereotypes and the “real” cultures of American Indians.⁵⁴ These discursive and embodied practices of “authenticity” conferred authority and legitimacy, but they could also disrupt the hobbyist movement. As their chief measure of acceptance and esteem, the authenticity of hobbyists’ bead- and quillwork and dancing and singing were often subject to dispute, and such policing in the hobbyist movement sometimes led to the splintering of groups.⁵⁵

Among the venues of testing a group’s authenticity were the annual regional meetings of the hobbyists. In West Germany, where the first so-called “Indian Council” was held in 1951, the number of the Western and Indian hobbyists who gathered over the Pentecost weekend on a club’s property could reach the thousands. These conventions and encampments featured campfire activities, discussions and presentations, trading, contests, exhibitions, and historical reenactments such as the treaty ceremony between General Terry and Sitting Bull. By the mid-1980s, the West German clubs had bought some property near Koblenz specifically for annual meetings, which attracted up to 3,000 participants, and had up to 350 teepees.⁵⁶ Beginning in 1958, the hobbyists of East Germany also held an annual council of their clubs, which rotated from place to place.⁵⁷

In the Performance Studies terminology of Katrin Sieg, the West German Indian hobbyists progressed from self-admittedly amateurish play acting or *masquerade* to what they considered masterful and accurate replication, reenactment, or *mimesis*.⁵⁸ We have seen that this origin narrative

was professed by other Central European hobbyist groups as well. Their discourse and performances of authenticity made them an authority on historical Indian cultures to the extent that, in some cases, they fed back into the popular cultural representations of American Indians: the headband of the Sioux chief in the 1966 East German Western film *Die Söhne der Großen Bärin* [*The Sons of the Great Mother Bear*] was made by the Old Manitou Indianist club in Radebeul.⁵⁹ Thus, as Katrin Sieg observed, Central European hobbyists positioned themselves as *the* heirs and guardians of American Indian history and cultures. I agree with her assessment that this kind of positioning in effect supplanted live Indians and their living traditions with a German identification with and authority over the Native past.⁶⁰ This is indeed a colonialist practice. However, Sieg's theoretical conclusion needs to be qualified in the context of early Cold War Central Europe, where the Native American presence was small at best. To use Diana Taylor's analytical framework: without access to the embodied repertoire of living Native Americans, the Central European (object) hobbyists utilized white-made popular and artistic representations and ethnographic scholarship as the archive for their own performances of Indian authenticity. Without challenges to their practices by Native Americans, the Central European hobbyists of the early- to mid-Cold War did what they thought was a service to American Indians, the Western world, and their own societies. The emerging transatlantic alliance for American Indian sovereignty would increasingly challenge the often colonialist cultural practices of Central European Indianist hobbyism with the ethno-political repertoire of real American Indian activists.

As the Cold War intensified and expanded into the realm of cultural production and consumption, Wild West and Indian fandom first became subject to state control, then they were turned into a battleground of ideologies. The government-controlled *Kulturbund* association of the German Democratic Republic seized on the figure of the American Indian as a tool of anti-American propaganda.⁶¹ At the same time as it elevated American Indians, the East German state proceeded to "purge" Western fandom in the country. Cowboys, white pioneers, and frontier people were designated as the historical "henchmen" of U.S. imperialism. Originally opened in 1928, the Karl May Museum of Radebeul was renamed the "Indian Museum" in 1956, and references to Indians killing General George Custer or playing in Buffalo Bill's show were removed from the exhibits. Finally, the Museum was moved to Bamberg one year before the Berlin Wall was completed.⁶² As part of the

ideologically correct realignment of popular culture, East German and Hungarian authorities also made sure to remove any firearms from Wild West fan communities,⁶³ and the former also suppressed cowboy fandom. In response, some reenactors pretended to impersonate Indians in public and indulged in playing cowboys in private.⁶⁴ Clandestine cowboy life largely came to an end after some clubs were shut down and others reorganized into Indianist fan circles.⁶⁵

Indians as Ideology

The Cold War’s reevaluation of the ideological elements of culture extended to the realm of publishing. After the war, the *Winnetou* novels had become suspicious because Hitler and his Nazi youth movement had admired Karl May’s oeuvre; now people in East Germany were discouraged from reading them.⁶⁶ A potential candidate for elevation, Fritz Steuben’s 1930s cycle of novels about the life of early nineteenth-century Shawnee Confederacy leader Tecumseh, was likewise reviled for being proto-fascist.⁶⁷ The author who became East Germany’s literary spokesperson for the historical experience of American Indians was Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich, professor of ancient history at Humboldt University, Berlin, and subsequently a member of the German Academy of Sciences. Beginning in 1951, Welskopf-Henrich wrote a six-book series of historical novels titled *The Sons of the Great Mother Bear*⁶⁸ about the odyssey of the Teton Sioux during the gold rush in the Black Hills. Buttressed by her day-job as a scholar and professor, Welskopf-Henrich’s novels were regarded as “historically accurate”⁶⁹—for example, the Sioux chief at the beginning of her story bore the name *Mattotaupa* or “four bears”—obviously taken from Bodmer and Catlin’s 1830s paintings of the Mandan chief Mah-to-toh-pe/Mató-Tópe (Four Bears). With her books translated into several other Central European languages,⁷⁰ Welskopf-Henrich “self-consciously created a socialist tradition of Indian literature,”⁷¹ and distinguished it from the “ cliché ” stories of Karl May, J. F. Cooper, and Fritz Steuben.⁷² Starting in the early 1960s, Welskopf-Henrich also paid visits to reservations in the United States, and in the 1970s she became a node in the transatlantic alliance for American Indian sovereignty.

Katrin Sieg has observed that, in postwar Germany, Wild West fandom redefined the German position from conquered oppressor to a friend to the resistance to oppression.⁷³ At first, Karl May’s novels may have worked analogously, reflecting the new political and economic

alliance: Winnetou's blood brotherhood with Karl/Old Shatterhand may have recast official German–U.S. relations from an adversarial relationship into a new alliance sealed with pledges and in-kind assistance. This may have well been a reason why West Germany upheld the esteem of Karl May. With the East German state rejecting the same tradition, it was only a matter of time before the two sides would start using such popular culture for ideological propaganda.

Screen Indians: The *Winnetou* Movies and the *Indianerfilme*

With the increasing availability of audiovisual technology, by the early to mid-1960s the cultural front of the Cold War had moved into cinema and television. Beginning in 1962 and through most of the decade, West German studios produced a dozen or so movies based on Karl May's *Winnetou* stories.⁷⁴ Made in West German, Italian, and Yugoslav co-production, these movies starred an athletic, blond and blue-eyed Lex Barker as Old Shatterhand opposite a genteel and graceful Pierre Brice as *Winnetou*—both dressed in fringed buckskin.⁷⁵ From the mid-1960s through the early 1980s, East Germany's government-owned DEFA studios responded by releasing a dozen of their own so-called *Indianerfilme*, which they co-produced with fellow Communist and non-aligned countries like the Soviet Union and Romania.⁷⁶ The lead in these films was Serbian physical education student-turned actor Gojko Mitic.⁷⁷ Through partial nudity, Mitic's manly physique was emphasized in almost all of the *Indianerfilme*, and his physicality and facial features made for a more erotic and exotic Indian warrior than Brice's *Winnetou*.⁷⁸

These two sets of Central European Westerns competed over their shared German-based identification with American Indians. Many of both sets of movies were shot on location in Yugoslavia, thus both sharing and contesting the very landscape of their setting. In the person of Gojko Mitic, who had been an extra in some of the early *Winnetou* movies before becoming the perennial star of the *Indianerfilme*,⁷⁹ these movies also shared a technical expertise and screen presence that literally migrated across the iron curtain.

The lines of battle over the two Germanies' shared professional savvy and popular cultural heritage of playing Indian were now drawn with ideology. If the *Winnetou* movies rehearsed the cultural equivalent of the postwar West German–U.S. geopolitical alliance, the *Indianerfilme* were a socialist cultural assault on U.S. imperialism and capitalism,

including its product the cliché Western,⁸⁰ as well as a claim of a more “just” and “authentic” German identification with Indians. Through portraying the Indians’ heroic but ultimately doomed resistance to white Americans’ ruthless encroachment on their land for gold, the socialist Westerns used historical materialism to critique the genre of the classic American Western, and to condemn not only U.S. colonialism, but also to indict American capitalist expansion⁸¹ in the past, and, by implication, in the present. As Gerd Gemünden pointed out, these screen Indians stood in for contemporary East German and other socialist responses to American imperialism.⁸² In the 1973 East German movie *Apachen* [*The Apaches*], Indian resistance raises class consciousness: from the Native example, the Mexican miners gradually come to question the wisdom of the white American company, and the relations of production in which they participate. Likewise, in the 1971 *Osceola*, the Seminole leader negotiates decent wages for all plantation workers. As Gemünden observed, Osceola’s rallying cry “Indians of all countries, unite!” is at the same time a banner for socialist solidarity against American imperialism.⁸³ In the 1975 *Blood Brothers*, the interracial friendship of Winnetou and Old Shatterhand is replayed in the alliance between Gojko Mitić’s Indian warrior Hard Rock and disillusioned American soldier Harmonika, played by U.S. singer-turned-Marxist actor Dean Reed, himself recently repatriated to East Germany. Here, the historical call for an all-Indian ethnic coalition (espoused by other figures like the Shawnee leader Tecumseh and later by the actual sovereignty movement) is made “red” in a different sense—by a Marxist class-based movement. In the absence of Native critiques, the *Indianerfilme* assimilated historical American Indians into the struggle of the international working class against capitalist exploitation.⁸⁴ This ideologically motivated identification with Indians and the resulting openness for cooperation would in time become a component in the transatlantic alliance for American Indian sovereignty.

Conclusion

By the late 1960s, a longstanding Central European cultural fascination with American Indians had converged with a variety of commercialized forms of popular culture, and the use by national governments of the figure of the American Indian for ideological propaganda. Importantly, the above variety of transatlantic cultural forms and their consumption had made for a curious specificity in playing Indian in Central Europe.

The Indian tribes played for and by Central Europeans were overwhelmingly either the Apache of the Southern Plains or the Sioux peoples of the Northern Plains—in the middle and second half of the nineteenth century.⁸⁵ Whether it was Tecumseh, Mató-Tópe, Sitting Bull, Winnetou, Osceola, or Ulzana, the specific figure available for direct or indirect identification was invariably a male warrior or chief. Karl Bodmer's 1835 painting of *Pehriska-Ruhpa of the Dog Society of the Hidatsa tribe* was admired and reenacted by Central European hobbyists enamored with the Indian warrior ethos.⁸⁶ Different from most U.S. and British white representations, the Central European figure of “the” American Indian was stereotyped positively as an exotic noble savage⁸⁷ and a subject of desire and identification. In general, this figure came to stand for a “beleaguered yet defiant” heroic resistance to overwhelming forces, whatever they be.⁸⁸

The identification of Central Europeans with these historical Indians articulated the potential for a variety of alliances. Karl May's novels positioned their German-American hero in a latently Christian alliance with the Apache that he had earned through the performance of frontier feats, and which was based on mutual sympathy and a blood brotherhood that practically meant adoption into the tribe. This alliance, however, precluded mass, organized, ethnic, and violent resistance to colonialism. The Central European hobbyists asserted their guardianship and authority over North American Indian cultures (again, primarily the Plains Sioux in the late nineteenth century) through their “research-based” replication and performances of “authentic” representations of these societies. In their turn, the popular *Indianerfilme* portrayed American Indians as a group in a potential class-based international coalition against U.S. imperialism in the past and present. At the same time as they opened up possibilities for collaboration between live Indians and Central Europeans, these tropes of playing Indian made for attitudes that both enabled and frustrated the building of a transatlantic network for Native sovereignty.

By the late 1960s, the transatlantic cultural landscape had become fertile and ready for an alliance between Central Europeans and live American Indians. The next chapter investigates the actors on the North American side of this alliance and how the radical Indian sovereignty movement came to pose a transnational challenge to the U.S. nation-state.