

## Hollywood's Global Blockbusters

26-30 September 2022

Which films have been most successful in cinemas around the world in recent decades? Can we find similarities between these films; in other words: do they form patterns? And if so, do these patterns change over time?

This course attempts to give some answers to the above questions but it is also designed to enable students to carry out their own research and come up with their own answers, not only to do with hit patterns but also with the production histories, marketing and reception of individual hit movies.

The course is taught by Peter Krämer, who has been studying box office charts in the United States and around the world for over three decades. Students will read some of his publications and hear about some of his recent research results. This entails reflections on the Anglo-American and wider international academic context for such research, about sources and research procedures, and also about what Hollywood blockbusters may have to tell us about the present state and future of humanity, its unity and divisions, its dependence on both technology and the natural environment, and its (imagined) place in the universe.

Students will watch and discuss key hit movies since the 1960s: *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Jaws* (1975), *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), *Avatar* (2009), *Gravity* (2013) and *Interstellar* (2014). As is obvious from this list, the overall focus is on Science Fiction, which together with fantasy has been dominating global box office charts since the late 1970s.

Students will also carry out small group exercises, and for these it may be necessary to be able to access the internet in class (so everyone should bring along an appropriate device for doing so).

After completing this course, students should be able

- 1) to identify and describe changing hit patterns in US and global box office charts,
- 2) to discuss individual hit movies in relation to these changing patterns, and
- 3) to find and work with relevant primary sources concerning the production, marketing and reception of individual hit movies.

Please note that there is some overlap with the course "Hollywood Blockbusters and the Walt Disney Company" (autumn semester 2020/21).

Peter Krämer is a Senior Research Fellow in Cinema & TV in the Leicester Media School at De Montfort University (Leicester, UK). He also is a Senior Fellow in the School of Art, Media and American Studies at the University of East Anglia (Norwich, UK) and a regular guest lecturer at several other universities in the UK, Germany and the Czech Republic. He has been doing courses at Masaryk University for sixteen years. He is the author or editor of eleven academic books, mainly about Hollywood cinema, and co-wrote a book about American cinema for children.

## Schedule

Before the first screening on Monday, 26 September, students should read the following piece, which is available on the digital platform for this course:  
Peter Krämer, "A History of Hollywood Blockbusters", unpublished manuscript

It is assumed that everyone has seen *Star Wars* (1977), but it may be useful to watch this film again before 26 September. It would also be good if those who have never seen *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) watch it before Monday.

### Session 1

**26 September, 9-12, Screening** with short introductory lecture and, possibly, a brief discussion afterwards: *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968, 150 min including overture and exit music, plus 10 min intermission)

**Reading:** Peter Krämer, "'Dear Mr. Kubrick': Audience Responses to *2001: A Space Odyssey* in the Late 1960s", *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2 (November 2009), pp. 240-59,  
<https://www.participations.org/Volume%206/Issue%202/kramernew.pdf>; ideally this text should be read *after* the screening of *2001* and *before* the first lecture

**26 September, 18-19.50, Lecture:** Introduction to the Study of Hollywood's Global Blockbusters – Data, Companies, Filmmakers, Key Films

**Small Group Exercise** within the lecture slot: analysis of global box office charts 2019-2022; also perhaps discussion of *2001*

### Session 2

**27 September, 12-14.40, Screening** with brief introduction and a discussion afterwards: *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982, 115 min)

**27 September, 15-16.30, Lecture:** Steven Spielberg, George Lucas and the Family-Adventure Movie

**Small Group Exercise:** comparison between *E.T.* and *2001* (with a particular focus on audience address)

### Session 3

**27 September, 16.45-19.15, Screening** with brief introduction and a discussion afterwards: *Jaws* (1975, 125 min)

**27 September, 19.30-20.50, Lecture:** Human Hubris and Mother Nature in Global Breakthrough Hits from *Jaws* to *Jurassic Park* and *Avatar*

**Small Group Exercise:** comparison of the posters and/or trailers for *Jaws*, *Star Wars*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *E.T.* (with a particular focus on audience address)

**Reading:** Peter Krämer, "Hollywood and Its Global Audiences: A Comparative Study of the Biggest Box Office Hits in the United States and Outside the United States Since the 1970s", *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case*

*Studies*, ed. Richard Maltby, Daniel Biltereyst and Philippe Meers, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, pp. 171-84; ideally this text should be read *after* the lecture and *before* the screening of *Gravity*

#### Session 4

**Reading:** Peter Krämer, "'The Girl on Fire': Children's Fiction, Female Stars and Contemporary Hollywood Blockbusters" (Part 1), Women's Film and Television History Network (UK/Ireland) blog, 12 February 2016, <https://womensfilmandtelevisionhistory.wordpress.com/2016/02/12/the-girl-on-fire-childrens-fiction-female-stars-and-contemporary-hollywood-blockbusters/>, (Part 2), Women's Film and Television History Network (UK/Ireland) blog, 19 February 2016, <https://womensfilmandtelevisionhistory.wordpress.com/2016/02/19/the-girl-on-fire-part-ii/>; ideally these short texts should be read *before* the screening of *Gravity*

**29 September, 8-10, Screening** with a brief introduction and a discussion afterwards: *Gravity* (2013, 90 min)

**29 September, 10.15-11.45, Lecture:** Sandra Bullock, *Gravity* and Women in Science Fiction Blockbusters

**Small Group Exercise:** analysis of the poster and trailer for *Gravity*

#### Session 5

**Reading:** Peter Krämer, "From 2001: A Space Odyssey to Avatar: Reflections on Cultural Impact and Academic Research", *Screening the Past*, no. 42 (October 2017), <http://www.screeningthepast.com/2017/09/from-2001-space-odyssey-to-avatar-reflections-on-cultural-impact-and-academic-research/>; ideally this text should be read *after* the previous lecture and *before* the screening of *Avatar*

**29 September, 16-19, Screening** with a brief discussion afterwards: *Avatar* (2009, 160 min)

**29 September, 19.15-20.45, Lecture:** James Cameron, *Avatar* and the End of the World in Hollywood Blockbusters

**Small Group Exercise:** comparison of the *Avatar* treatment, script and film

#### Session 6

**Reading:** Peter Krämer, "'The Walt Disney Company, Family Entertainment, and Hollywood's Global Hits'", *The Oxford Handbook of Children's Films*, ed. Noel Brown, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022, pp. 569-90; ideally this text should be read *after* the previous lecture and *before* the screening of *Interstellar*

**30 September, 9-12.30, Screening** with a brief discussion afterwards: *Interstellar* (2014, 170 min)

**30 September, 13-14.30, Lecture:** Christopher Nolan and *Interstellar*

**Small Group Exercise:** tbc

If there is sufficient interest, there will also be a seminar on how to do research in this area after the final lecture. Here students may ask the tutor about his research but can also talk about projects that they are working on themselves.