

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, including *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Jaws* (1975), *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) or *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), *Avatar* (2009), *Gravity* (2013) and *Interstellar* (2014). As is obvious from this list, the 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.

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.

Draft schedule

Session 1

Reading in advance of the screening and lecture: Peter Krämer, “A History of Hollywood Blockbusters”, unpublished manuscript

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)

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

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>

Screening with discussion after the screening: *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977, 135 min) or *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982, 115 min)

Lecture: Steven Spielberg, George Lucas and the Family-Adventure Movie

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

Session 3

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

Screening with discussion after the screening: *Jaws* (1975, 125 min)

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* and/or *E.T.* (with a particular focus on audience address)

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/>

Screening with discussion after the screening: *Gravity* (2013, 90 min)

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/>

Screening possibly with brief discussion after the screening: *Avatar* (2009, 160 min)

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

Screening possibly with brief discussion afterwards: *Interstellar* (2014, 170 min)

Lecture: Christopher Nolan and *Interstellar*

Small Group Exercise: tbc