

Hollywood and the World

Lecture Series, 26-29 April 2011

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In recent years, there has been an ever intensifying public debate about the huge challenges confronting humanity, most notably the threat of global warming and demands for global justice. One of the preconditions for meeting these challenges, it has been argued, is what one might call global consciousness, that is the ability to conceive of, identify with and care for humanity as a whole. What role might Hollywood play in this?

Hollywood films are seen all around the world, and they also draw on resources (people, source material, locations, finance) from many countries. What is more, they often tell stories about events affecting all of humanity. How do such films, then, relate to public debates about global challenges and to the ideal of a global consciousness? Do they approach these debates and this ideal from a narrowly American perspective? What is known about the impact of Hollywood films within and outside the US? Is Hollywood storytelling conducive to the idea of personal, social and political change?

This lecture series begins to address these questions with reference to some of Hollywood's biggest international hits of recent decades, notably James Cameron's Avatar (2009). While taking the analysis of Hollywood's global operations and of the themes and reception of particular films as a starting point, the lecture series also goes beyond the disciplinary framework of Film Studies, in particular by raising the issue of global ethics: What are our ethical responsibilities as film scholars and as citizens with regards to the global challenges of today?

Tuesday

10.50-14.05 Session 1: "From 2001: A Space Odyssey to Avatar: Hollywood and the World"

90 minute lecture followed by a short break and a plenary discussion about Avatar:

1 What was your immediate (sensual, emotional, intellectual, ethical) response to the film the last time you saw it, or on previous occasions (especially when you saw it for the very first time)?

2 How does the film's protagonist Jake Sully change in the course of the story, and why? (You can use Vogler's model here as well as Read's essay.)

3 To what extent does the film explicitly foreground recognisable global issues; what are these issues; and what solutions does the film propose (especially through the way it ends)?

4 By conducting an internet search or a discussion with friends and family, explore audience responses to Avatar: To what extent do viewers make a connection between the film and real-life political issues; and is there any evidence that viewers' attitudes, opinions and beliefs about such issues were in any way influenced by Avatar?

5 How does Avatar fit into the overall trajectory of James Cameron's career?

Wednesday

12.30-14.05 Session 2: *"Before and After Star Wars: A Short History of Global Hollywood"*

One hour lecture followed by a plenary discussion about Star Wars:

- 1 Compare and contrast Star Wars and Avatar: What are the main similarities and differences?
- 2 Which of the similarities between the films can also be found in other top hits since 1977 (see the charts handout)?
- 2 How does Luke Skywalker change in the course of the story, and why? (Once again, you can use Vogler's model here.)

16.40-18.15 Session 3: *"A Very Special Relationship: Hollywood and the Germans"*

One hour lecture followed by plenary discussion about The Day After Tomorrow:

- 1 Compare and contrast The Day After Tomorrow and Avatar: What are the main similarities and differences?
- 2 How do the film's main characters change in the course of the story, and why?
- 3 To what extent does the film explicitly foreground recognisable global issues; what are these issues; and what solutions does the film propose?
- 4 How might this representation influence the film's audience? (You can use the essay by Lowe et al here.)

Thursday

9.10-10.45 Session 4: *"The Life You Can Save: Oskar Schindler and Hollywood's Global Imagination"*

One hour lecture followed by plenary discussion about Schindler's List:

- 1 Compare and contrast Schindler's List and Avatar: What are the main similarities and differences?
- 2 How does Schindler's List fit into the overall trajectory of Spielberg's career? (You can use my essay here.)
- 3 How does Oskar Schindler change in the course of the story, and why? (In answering this question, compare him with Amon Goeth.)
- 4 How does the film's ending balance the celebration of life and the recognition of mass slaughter?
- 5 What are the ethical implications of Oskar Schindler's deeds for us today? (Here you may want to compare Schindler's tearful declaration - 'I could have got one

more person and I didn't' - with the content of Peter Singer's chapter and the title of another book of his: The Life You Can Save.)

12.30-14.05 Session 5: "Global Hollywood, Film Studies and the World Today"

Friday

Afternoon Seminar: "Researching Hollywood and the World - Issues, Concepts, Sources"

Reading for each session:

1

Rupert Read, "Avatar: A Call to Save the Future", Radical Anthropology, November 2010, pp.35-41

2

Christopher Vogler, "Introduction" / "A Practical Guide", The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screenwriters, London: Boxtree, 1996, pp.3-31

3

Thomes Lowe, Katrina Brown, Suraje Dessai, Miguel de Franca Doria, Kat Haynes, and Katherine Vincent, "Does Tomorrow Ever Come? Disaster Narrative and Public Perceptions of Climate Change", Public Understanding of Science, vol.15, no.4, pp. 435-57

4

Peter Krämer, "'He's very good at work not involving little creatures, you know': Schindler's List, E.T. and the Shape of Steven Spielberg's Career", New Review of Film and Television Studies, vol.7, no.1 (March 2009), pp.23-32

5

Peter Singer, One World: The Ethics of Globalization, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004 (2nd edition), pp.150-95