

Stephen Rust

Course Syllabus

English 399: Cinema/Nature/Culture: Contemporary Hollywood and the Environment

This class is intended to introduce students to the complex relationship between Hollywood cinema and the broader social, scientific, and political implications of global environmental change. The class also provides an introduction to the basic concerns of contemporary film criticism and theory as well as the methodological approaches of cultural studies and environmental media criticism. The course is based on the argument that from 2004 to 2009 scientific, public, and government acceptance of human-caused climate change has increased and further, is reflected in a number of important contemporary blockbuster films distributed through Hollywood to American audiences. Understanding the basics of film history and conventions will be important in helping students analyze how the films function aesthetically and culturally.

150 pts: Week 3: Exam #1: discussion board short answer (2 pages) + in-class scantron

150 pts: Week 4: Film Analysis #1 (3-4 page close reading plus shot list)

150 pts: Week 7: Exam #2: discussion board short answer (2 pages) + in-class scantron

250 pts: Week 10: Film Analysis #2 (6-8 page analysis plus 10-12 item works cited)

200 pts: Finals: Exam #3: discussion board short answer (2 pages) + in-class exam questions

100 pts: Participation: Includes a group presentation once during the term

1000pts: Total Points Possible

Week 1: Introduction: Big Movies and Hollywood Culture

Readings: Carolyn Merchant, "Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative"
Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revised"

Screenings: Shorts: Edison, Lumieres, Meliere, *Intolerance* (1916), *Trader Horn* (W.S. Van Dyke, 1931), *Tabu* (Murnau & Flaherty, 1931), *Congorilla* (Martin Johnson, 1932)
Film: ***King Kong*** (Meriam Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack, 1933)

Week 2: Rethinking Genre

Readings: F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (excerpts)
Donald Worster, "Introduction to the Dust Bowl"
Rick Altman, "Introduction" to *The American Film Musical*

Screenings: Clips: *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (1936), *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), *Pittsburgh* (1942), Disney WWII animation
Film: *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933)

Week 3: Capitalism and the modern Environmental movement

Due: Exam #1: discussion board short answer due (2 pages) + in-class scantron

Readings: Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism"

Screenings: Clips: *Metropolis* (1927), *Silent Running* (1971) *Hellstrom Chronicle*

(1971), *King Kong* (1976), *Taxi Driver* (1976), *Star Wars*, (1977)
Film: *Soylent Green* (Richard Fleischer, 1973)

Week 4: The Cultural Logic of Ecology

Due: Film Analysis #1 (3-4 page close reading plus shot list – Due by Thursday)

Readings: Jon Lewis: “Following the Money in America’s Sunniest Company Town: Some Notes on the Political Economy of the Hollywood Blockbuster”
Mark Jancovich and Lucy Faire, “The Best Place to See a Film: The Blockbuster, the Multiplex, and the Contexts of Consumption.”

Screenings: Clips: *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951 & 2008), *Earthquake* (1974), *Jaws* (1975), *The Day After* (1983), *Waterworld* (1995) *Deep Impact* (1998), *Cloverfield* (2007)
Film: *The Day After Tomorrow* (Roland Emmerich, 2004)

Week 5: Performing Science

Readings: Ulrich Beck, “A Life of One’s Own in a Runaway World”
Peter Hughes, “The End of Life on Earth?: Discourses of Risk in Natural History Documentaries”

Screenings: Clips: *Cosmos* (1980), *Life on Earth* (1984), *Jacques Cousteau Odyssey* (1978-80), *Elegant Universe* (2003), *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004), *Planet Earth* (2006)
Film: *An Inconvenient Truth* (Davis Guggenheim, 2006)

Week 6: Penguins, Politics, and Performance

Readings: Scott Macdonald, “Three Short Ruminations on Ideology in the Nature Film”
Nicole Starosielski, “Environmental Animation and *Fern Gully*”

Screening: Clips: *Bambi* (1942), *True Life Adventures* (1950s), *March of the Penguins* (2005), *Over the Hedge*, *The Simpsons Movie* (2007), *Evan Almighty* (2007),
Film: *Happy Feet* (George Miller, 2006)

Week 7: Contemporary Authorship and Ethics

Due: Exam #2: discussion board short answer due + in-class scantron

Readings: Deborah Carmichael, “Introduction” to *The Landscape of Hollywood Westerns*
Stephen Pilzello, “Blood for Oil” in *American Cinematographer*

Screening: Clips: *Duel in the Sun* (1946), *Pale Rider* (1985), *Lessons of Darkness* (1992), *Everything’s Cool* (2007), *Crude* (2007), *Sludge* (2008), *Fuel* (2008)
Film: *There Will Be Blood* (P.T. Anderson, 2007)

Week 8: Melodrama and Masculinity

Due: Film Analysis #2 Proposal + initial works cited due

Readings: Mark Gallagher, “I Married Rambo: Spectacle and Melodrama in the

Hollywood Action Film”

Maude Barlow: *Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis* (excerpts)

Screening: Clips *Bicycle Thieves*, *La Terra Tremma*, Bond films, *Die Hard* (1988), *The Fast and the Furious* (2001-2008), *Transformers* (2007), *Watchmen* (2008), *Flow* (2008)

Film: *Quantum of Solace* (Marc Forster, 2008)

Week 9: Imagining India and Global Hollywood

Due: Film Analysis #2 Peer Draft (6-8 page analysis plus 10-12 item works cited)

Readings: Thomas Friedman, *Hot, Flat, and Crowded* (excerpts)

Robert Koelher, *Cineaste* review of *Slumdog Millionaire*

Screening: Clips: *Deewaar* (1975) *Gandhi* (1982), *Passage to India* (1983), *Temple of Doom* (1984), *DDLJ* (1996), *City of God* (2002), *28 Days Later* (2002) *Children of Men* (2006)

Film: *Slumdog Millionaire* (Danny Boyle, 2008)

Week 10: the paradox of the “i-future”

Due: Film Analysis #2 (6-8 page analysis plus 10-12 item works cited)

Readings: Thomas Elsaesser, “The Blockbuster: Everything Connects”

Patricia Yeager, “The Death of Nature and the Apotheosis of Trash; or, Rubbish Ecology”

Screening: Clips: *The Fountain* (2006), *Iron Man* (2008), *The Golden Compass* (2007), *Terminator* (1984-2009), *Star Trek IV* (1966-2009)

Film: *Wall-E* (Andrew Stanton, 2008)

Final Exam: Exam #3: discussion board short answer + in-class exam questions