

Course Description for ASCI 4020

We live in a world that is permeated everywhere by science and technology. In the 20th and 21st centuries one of the most common ways that people learn about science is through film. Even though popular science books sell relatively well, most people learn about science, past and present, through film—unless they require technical and scientific knowledge for their careers. Even so, films ‘fill in’ much of their scientific knowledge in many areas. These films exist in a very wide range of formats such as: documentaries, docu-dramas, feature films, television series, and YouTube videos. Some of these films remain close to existing scientific knowledge, some extrapolate into the future from this knowledge, and some move resolutely into the realm of fantasy, as is often the case in Science Fiction. Notably, Science Fiction plays a particularly significant role as a popular form of ‘science communication’ in our day: the best Sci Fi does this through the constant creation of ‘thought experiments’. But not all films that deal with science are Science Fiction. The visual rhetoric that films use is part of their imaginative power. We will study these techniques as well as the content of these films in relation to the time of their production. The films that we will study will be from both the 20th and 21st centuries and will be drawn from a wide variety of examples.