Film 305
CFILM Sophomore Colloquium
Silent Film: Universal Language of Cinema
Wednesday 1:20 – 4:30
Powell Family Cinema

Professor: Ben Model
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Office Hours: Weds. 11:15 – 12:15, as needed
Office: ### Center for Film Studies

Course Objectives
This course examines the storytelling language of the silent film era and its development from the simple one-reel dramas of the late-nickelodeon era to the visually expressive features of the late 1920s. The lack of synchronous sound and of color and the overlooked element of undercranking/overspeeding, seen as handicaps today, were creatively liberating to moviemakers of the pre-talkie era. These elements, as well as the live experience of silent cinema itself, will be mined for discussion and examination. In addition, the human aspects of these films will be considered: that these were movies made, accompanied and seen by people, and where relevant, socio-cultural historical context of the films will be addressed. We will screen both shorts and features from all genres, and will do so – significantly – with live piano or theatre organ accompaniment at all sessions.

Required Reading
Selected readings are available as PDFs on the course moodle page. (That's moodle...not Model, thank you.) Please complete each week's readings BEFORE class meetings.

Recommended Reading
Kevin Brownlow, *The Parade's Gone By*, available at Broad Street Books
William K. Everson, *American Silent Film*
Walter Kerr, *The Silent Clowns*
Jeanine Basinger, *Silent Stars*

Recommended Websites
Media History Digital Library: http://www.mediahist.org
MHDL's searchable “Lantern” edition: http://lantern.mediahist.org
Silent Film Online database: http://search.alexanderstreet.com.ezproxy.wesleyan.edu/silf

Screenings
Films will be shown at every class session. Do not talk, text, surf the web, use social media or otherwise disturb others during the screenings. Give yourself over to the silent screen. Note taking is strongly encouraged to jot down impressions and ideas; take general notes during the screening and fill in clarifying details as soon after the screening as possible. Bring a legal pad and pen or pencil (have you tried a Blackwing? They're great!).

COURSE SCHEDULE:
(This schedule may be adjusted to meet the day-to-day needs of the class. Screenings and readings may be subject to change)

September 9  
*Lecture:* one-reel dramas 1911-1915  
*Film:* shorts from Biograph, Thanhouser, Edison, Vitagraph and Solax  
*Recommended reading:* The Silent Clowns, chap 1, 2 and 3.

September 16  
*Lecture:* comedy shorts  
*Film:* shorts starring/dir. Max Linder, Marcel Perez, Sennett/Keystone, Charlie Chaplin, Roscoe Arbuckle, Harold Lloyd

syllabus as of 10/6/15
September 23  
Lecture: D.W. Griffith – epic-maker and champion of the poor  
Film: Orphans of the Storm (1921)  
Recommended viewing: Way Down East, Intolerance, or The Birth of a Nation.

September 30  
Lecture: Douglas Fairbanks and the action/comedy genre  
Film: The Gaucho (1927) – plus Charley Chase in Dog Shy (1926)  
Recommended viewing: The Mark of Zorro, Don Q Son of Zorro, or The Thief of Bagdad

October 7  
Lecture: serial queens and cowboys  
Film: chapter 13 of The Hazards of Helen, (1914) chapter 2 of Zudora (1914); William S. Hart in The Toll Gate (1920); plus, if you’re good, Alice Howell in Cinderella Cinders (1920)  
Recommended reading:  
Lecture: “Undercranking: The Magic Behind the Slapstick”  
Film: Keaton’s Sherlock, Jr. (1924) and The Goat (1921)  
Recommended viewing: The General, Seven Chances, or Our Hospitality, plus at least one other Keaton short

October 14  
MID-TERM: ESSAY DUE OCT 19 via TURNITIN  
Lecture: silent cinema as a live, shared group-experience  
Film: Harold Lloyd’s Safety Last (1923); Chaplin’s A Dog’s Life (1918)  
Reading/viewing: last two reels of Safety Last, sound muted

October 21  
Lecture: “Undercranking: The Magic Behind the Slapstick”  
Film: Keaton’s Sherlock, Jr. (1924) and The Goat (1921)  
Recommended viewing: The General, Seven Chances, or Our Hospitality, plus at least one other Keaton short

October 28  
Lecture: Other Voices of the Silent Era  
Film: Lois Weber’s Shoes (1916); Oscar Micheaux’s Within Our Gates (1920)  
Recommended viewing: Micheaux’s Body and Soul, and/or Dorothy Davenport’s Linda

November 4  
Lecture: German Silent Cinema  
Film: Arthur Robison’s Warning Shadows (1923), plus excerpt from The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920)  
Recommended viewing: Murnau’s Faust, Pabst’s Pandora’s Box or Secrets of a Soul, or Joe May’s Asphalt

November 11  
Lecture: Soviet Silents: using the edit as a storytelling tool  
Film: Pudovkin’s Mother, plus Odessa steps sequence from Eisenstein’s Battleship Potemkin; plus Buiñel’s Un Chien Andelou  
Recommended viewing: Eisenstein’s Strike or October, Pudovkin’s Earth, or Storm Over Asia

November 18  
Lecture: the Big Studio Picture: Stroheim, Gilbert, MGM/Thalberg  
Film: Stroheim’s The Merry Widow (1925)  
(warning: this may be the week I bring the theatre organ...)  
Recommended viewing: Stroheim’s Greed or Wedding March, or Vidor’s The Big Parade
December 2  

*Lecture:* inferred drama/comedy – storytelling rooted in reaction shots  
*Film:* Lubitsch’s (via Oscar Wilde) **Lady Windermere’s Fan** (1925) *in 16mm*, plus Laurel & Hardy in **Wrong Again** (1929)  

*(just in case I got lazy on Nov. 18, I’m bringing the organ for this)*  

*Recommended viewing:* Lubitsch’s **So This Is Paris?** or Chaplin’s **A Woman of Paris**; Harry Langdon in **Saturday Afternoon, Fiddlesticks** or **His Marriage Wow**

December 9  

*Lecture:* The End (of the silent era), and the feature film as “tone poem”  
*Film:* King Vidor’s **The Crowd** (1928)  

**FINAL:** short-answer in class; TAKE-HOME ESSAY ASSIGNED  

*(okay, no more foolin’ around…definitely theatre organ this week)*

**FINAL EXAM:**  

TAKE-HOME ESSAY DUE on **Weds December 16.**

### ASSESSMENT:

There will be two Take-Home Essays: one assigned at mid-term on October 14 due on the 19th, and a Final assigned on December 9 due on the 16th. Participation in class discussion/Q&A is both encouraged and expected, as is independent research and film viewing outside of class. Suggestions of film titles and directors to explore will be given at each class session, as well as books or periodicals for further research. The essays will demand that you demonstrate your understanding of the films and offer original observations based on class screening and discussion. Original thought and concepts are expected on top of demonstrating you’ve taken notes about facts and dates. Students who attend class, arrive on time, pay attention, participate in discussion and inject original observations, hand in satisfactory or better essays and hand them in on time (no extensions!) – the usual expectations of a student attending any class – will pass and receive credit. What earns the scarlet “U” of Unsatisfactory? Missing more than 2 classes (hard to make up, because you can’t stream the experience of silent cinema), turning in essays late (or not at all), not participating in class discussion or being a disruptive presence in class or during screenings.

### COURSE POLICIES:

- **Students with Disabilities:** It is the policy of Wesleyan University to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students, however, are responsible for registering with Disabilities Services, in addition to making requests known to me in a timely manner. If you require accommodations in this class, please meet with me **Before September 16** so that appropriate arrangements can be made. The procedures for registering with Disabilities Services can be found at [http://www.wesleyan.edu/deans/disability-students.html](http://www.wesleyan.edu/deans/disability-students.html). I cannot accommodate requests for flexibility in due dates.

- **Laptops and Personal Devices:** Leave your laptop/tablet/phone in your bag. All note-taking is to be done by hand with paper and writing implement of some sort, and the looking-up of things happens before or after class. Laptop and personal device use is a distraction to both you and others in the room, and it also disrupts the film viewing experience, especially to the accompanist (me). Silent cinema is a
unique bond between film and its viewers and anything that gets in the middle of it disrupts this. If you are spotted using your phone, laptop, tablet, Apple watch etc. – even to check the time – you will be asked to leave. No Recording of Lectures or of musical accompaniments.

- **Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory. It will be impossible to do well in this course if you miss class. You are responsible for material covered in your absence.

- **Participation:** You are expected to contribute thoughtful and relevant comments during class. Do not talk, text, or surf the net during movies.

- **Papers and Assignments:** I mark late papers down at the rate of one full grade per day. Late papers will not receive written comments. Papers must be submitted via TURNITIN, and they are due before lecture on the day indicated. **You are required to keep an additional copy of your paper on file.**

- **Return of Assignments:** I will retain your final test for my records. All other assignments will receive comments and be returned to you.

- **Test Dates:** I cannot schedule makeups. If you cannot attend the test screenings, do not enroll in this class.

- **Extra Credit:** There will be no extra credit in this course.

- **Completion of Course:** Students must complete all assignments in order to pass this course.

**COURSE WEBSITE**
Film ### has a moodle site that will be regularly updated with handouts, assignments and announcements. It will also give you an opportunity to discuss course material with your classmates.

**DEPARTMENT WEBSITE**
http://www.wesleyan.edu/filmstudies/
For information regarding the film major and its requirements, please consult the Film Studies Department Web Site. It can answer most, if not all, of your questions.
Journal Entries

Students are encouraged to keep a journal of silent films screened outside of class time. These journals will be collected at the end of the course. While these will not be considered in assigning a grade, they are a useful exercise in developing original thought, observations and opinions as the act of committing things swirling around in your head often helps develop these ideas and articulate them. *Trust me:* I've been interviewed for newspaper articles and blogs and on the radio countless times, and some of my best ideas have come out of my having to write down a couple sentences, for example, about why I enjoy playing for films made by German directors or prefer the theatre organ to the piano, etc.

Your journal entries should be at least a couple of thoughtful paragraphs.