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

Professor: Ben Model  
Email: bmodel@wesleyan.edu  
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)

January 27  
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.

February 3  
Lecture: comedy shorts  
Film: shorts starring/dir. Max Linder, Marcel Perez, Sennett/Keystone, Charlie Chaplin, Roscoe Arbuckle, Harold Lloyd

syllabus as of 1/26/16
February 10
Lecture: D.W. Griffith – epic-maker and champion of the poor
Film: Orphans of the Storm (1921)
Film: Hollywood: In the Beginning (1980)
Recommended viewing: Way Down East, Intolerance, or The Birth of a Nation,

February 17
Lecture: Douglas Fairbanks and the action/comedy genre
Film: The Mark of Zorro (1920) – plus Charley Chase in Dog Shy (1926)
Recommended viewing: The Gaucho, Don Q Son of Zorro, or The Thief of Bagdad

February 24
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);
Recommended reading: TBA

March 2
MID-TERM: ESSAY DUE MARCH 7 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

March 23
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

March 30
Lecture: Other Voices of the Silent Era
Film: Lois Weber’s The Blot (1921); Micheaux’s Body and Soul
Recommended viewing:, Lois Weber’s Where are My Children or Dorothy Davenport’s Linda

April 6
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

April 13
Lecture: Soviet Silents: using the edit as a storytelling tool
Film: Pudovkin’s Mother, plus Odessa steps sequence from Eisenstein’s Battleship Potemkin; plus Buñuel’s Un Chien Andelou
Recommended viewing: Eisenstein’s Strike or October, Pudovkin’s Earth, or Storm Over Asia

April 20
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

April 27
Lecture: inferred drama/comedy – storytelling rooted in reaction shots
Film: Lubitch’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

May 4
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 May 11.

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. 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.