CIN 3008F: Topics in Film & Media History: Issues in Silent Cinema

Course Description: This course will investigate relatively recent thought about silent cinema, concentrating on pertinent methodological frameworks, scholarly debates, and examination of notable tendencies and cultural practices specific to cinema before sound. The course will cover both the early cinema period and the years that follow, and take up issues both historiographical (e.g., periodization, institutionalization) and topical (e.g., gender and silent cinema). The course will also consider how practices that occurred during the period (including those related to exhibition, presentation, and reception) and those pertinent to the present day (such as restoration and preservation) affect our understanding of cinema’s earliest years.

Because no course can cover everything, I have made deliberate choices in restricting the scope and depth of the seminar. For example, you will note that I have focused on research devoted to the American cinema, that I have elected to stick with just three topics, and that I have concentrated on scholarship produced within the last twenty or so years. These foci forced near-total exclusion of entire areas of investigation (such as technological, industrial, and stylistic concerns) that I would normally make a priority. But any such exclusions could become the basis for your final papers; I encourage you to pursue topics that interest you, even if this leads you beyond the course’s self-consciously devised (and admittedly limiting) parameters.

Meeting Times & Locations:
Screenings --T: 3-5
Seminar --W: 1-3
[Please note that on occasion the screening slot may be used as a seminar session devoted to an appearance by a guest.]

Required Texts: The sole source of readings for this course will be a selection of essays specified on a weekly basis under “Reading Schedule.”

Assignments and Evaluation:

1) Assignment #1: 8-12 pages, due October 24 (15%)
   Methodological paper
2) Assignment #2: 20+ pages, due December 8 (35%)
   Final research essay
3) Class Facilitation and Reading Questions: Schedule to be drawn up early in the term (25%)
4) **Attendance and Participation:** These are considered essential, and any student expecting to miss a class must alert the instructor in advance of the class in question. (25%)

**READING & SCREENING SCHEDULE**

**UNIT ONE: Early Cinema: Debates and Paradigms**

**Week I / September 12 & 13: Historiographies of Early Cinema**

**Screening:** selection of early films


**Week II / September 19 & 20: When Was (Early) Cinema?: Periodizing the First Years**

**Screening:** selection of early films


**Week III /September 26 & 27: Narrative and the Cinema of Attractions**

**Screening:** selection of early films

**Readings:**


**Additional Session / Friday, September 29, 2-4pm:** Special Presentation by Ned Thanhouser

**Week IV /October 3 & 4: (Early) Cinema: Modernity’s Messenger?**

**Screening:** *Traffic in Souls* (U.S., 1913)

**Readings:**


UNIT TWO: Women and the Silent Screen

Week V /October 10 & 11: Women (Transformed) Onscreen
Screening: selection of early films
A Florida Enchantment (U.S., 1914)


Week VI /October 17 & 18: Serial Queens and Their Fans
episodes from Pearl White serials


Jennifer Bean, “Technologies of Early Stardom and the Extraordinary
Week VII /October 24 & 25: The Varieties of Female Silent Stardom

Screening: The New York Hat (U.S., 1912)
          Toll of the Sea (U.S. 1922; 54 mins.)
          Hotel Imperial (U.S., 1927; 80 mins.)


Week VIII /October 31 & November 1: Women’s Work in Early Hollywood

Screening: A Girl’s Folly (U.S.; 1917; 30 mins.)
          Ella Cinders (U.S., 1926; 51 mins.)


READING WEEK / November 6-10

UNIT THREE: Publics & Practices

Week IX /November 14 & 15: The Varied Exhibition Sites (and Sounds) of Silent Cinema
Screening: Guest: Tom Russell


Week X /November 21 & 22: Reading and Writing: Cinematic Paratexts, Then and Now
Screening: Guests: Paul Moore + Christina Stewart


**Week XI / November 28 & 29: Archives and Revivals**

**Screening:** *Hugo* (U.S., 2011; 126 mins.)


**Week XII / December 5: Connections and Reconsiderations**

**Screening:** NO SCREENING; seminar only

**Readings:** Thomas Elsaesser, “The New Film History as Media Archaeology,” *Cinémas* 14, 2-3 (Spring 2004), pp. 75-117.
