

# CINEMA & MODERNITY

## ENGLISH 695 – WINTER 2014

**Modernity** is a term used to describe the condition of being “Modern.” Since the term “Modern” is used to describe a wide range of periods, modernity must be taken in context.

Wikipedia, 2005

Seminar : Tuesdays 9 – 11:50am in 253 PLC

Dr. Michael Aronson

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Office hours: Thursdays 9-12 and by appointment.

### Required Books:

Leo Charney, Venessa Schwartz (editors) *Cinema & The Invention of Modern Life*

Jonathan Crary *The Techniques of the Observer*

Mary Anne Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*

Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*

Ben Singer *Melodrama & Modernity*

### Recommended Background Books:

Thomas Elsaesser *Early Cinema: Space--Frame--Narrative*

**Course Network site:** <http://lore.com/Cinema-&-Modernity.1>

Blackboard will not be utilized for this course, instead we will be using a commercial platform, Lore.com, for our regular online environment. This site is central to the seminar experience and I expect you to actively participate in its activity.

### Requirements:

#### Etiquette:

1. Full and complete attention, participation, listening, and reading. I expect the very best you can give.
2. Good faith and good humor towards your colleagues.
3. Encourage basic questions as well as advanced ones.

#### Product:

1. **Participation:** I expect everyone to actively and regularly participate in discussion. You should come every week ready to talk.
2. **Viewing:** In addition to what we watch in class or on screening nights, everyone is expected to view at least one, and ideally two or more, additional film(s) on their own each week. I will have a library of dvds available for you to check out and circulate among the seminar and I have the ability to purchase titles not currently held in our collection so let me know if there is something you'd like to see in relation to this course.

You should regularly contribute your personal viewing notes, recommendations, ideas, etc. to the discussion section of our site.

### 3. Annotated/Critical Bibliography:

Each week, everyone is responsible for a one-paragraph critical bibliography of the reading for the week. In the case of a week with multiple articles instead of a book, you may choose a single one of your own (dis)liking. In addition to writing the bib, you will also choose one sentence from the work in question to highlight that you feel is: A) good B) bad C) interesting. This may/should be about the ideas in the sentence, but its also very much about the sentence itself.

All of this will need to be posted to the discussion section of the course site by Monday lunchtime.

There are multiple goals for this product:

- 1) Getting to the point of the work. This will help us focus our discussions.
- 2) Developing a critical position on that point. This will help us stay awake during our discussions.
- 3) Developing a writing voice of your own. Work hard to make the paragraph sound the way you want it to, to make it sound like you. Make it interesting and good. This will help you get a job.

### 4. Term Writing Project (select one):

- A) Conference Paper (8-10 pages structured as a 15-20 minute talk) - Default
- B) The Well-Written Radical New Idea (4-5 pages) - High risk, high reward
- C) Large-scale (monograph-sized) Research Proposal - By permission only

All projects will include:

- Proposal and Bibliography
- Rough Draft
- Peer Review Sessions
- Final paper

Please note the following due dates. You may submit materials early:

**21 January:** a well thought-out and somewhat formal proposal posted to discussion section of site along with an emailed copy to me. See your option for details. I will give you detailed comments in response.

**11 February:** a significant update to your original post explaining what progress you've made or how your thoughts have changed. This may be fairly informal, but I do expect to see some progress in light of my comments and any other feedback you may have received from your cohort.

Rough drafts will be peer reviewed early in the week of **10 March**.

Final work will be due in my office **19 March**. Hard copies are (most likely) required. You are encouraged to meet with me throughout the term as you work on your project.

#### Option A: The Conference Paper

This paper will be the result of original, creative, and sustained thought applied to materials discussed in the course. Additional outside reading/viewing is emphatically encouraged, though it should not be a substitute for discussion of significant issues covered in the course. Advancement of a cogent thesis is also of paramount importance. As a conference paper your ideas and their prose should be designed - structurally and stylistically - to be read out loud and with a specific audience/conference in mind.

Proposals for this option should include a clearly stated hypothesis, a rationale for your object of inquiry, a discussion of approach, and a line of reading/screening that will facilitate further development and refinement of your ideas. Additionally you should provide information about the conference(s) you will submit the paper to.

#### Option B: The Radical New Idea

Not for the faint-of-heart. This option is for the scholar with a great (read: new and productive) idea that is at the formulation stage i.e. little or no evidence but lots of real promise. The product for this option is the first five pages of an article-length paper. Each page, each sentence, needs to do powerful work. There will be no half-attempts with this option. The idea(s) and the writing have to be good enough to be publishable in a peer-reviewed journal, and that's the minimum bar.

#### Option C: The research proposal

Much of our discussion during the term will revolve around how the history of modernity can be conceptualized and studied. This assignment will give you a chance to work on your research design skills.

Your task is to figure out everything you would need to do in order to carry out a research project on some concrete issue related to modernity, ideally to cinema and modernity. You will then write a proposal following the form listed below (this is modeled after the kinds of proposals you have to write for fellowships and other funding sources). The proposal will have the following components:

1. A description of your object of study, its significance, and the fundamental issues or questions you wish to address in your research. Do you have a novel approach or hypothesis? Is your object under-explored?
2. A review of the extant scholarly literature on your topic. This review should encompass your own field, but it should be cognizant of important research on your topic carried out in other academic fields. You should position your own research with respect to the other work you cite.
3. A research plan that includes a discussion of method and sources. What kind of research do you need to carry out in order to write up your project. What

kind of sources and materials will you need? How will you approach your source material?

4. A timetable for research and writing. How long will it take you to carry out this project and what are the stages you'll need to go through?
5. A statement discussing your qualifications to carry out this research or any further training you require to carry it out adequately.
6. A statement of costs. What kind of funding and resources will you need to carry out the research? Think about both ends of the spectrum: what do you minimally need to carry out the research, and what could you do if you had a real research budget?

The entire proposal should be written in clear and convincing prose aimed at faculty who aren't necessarily educated in your field. Use jargon only when absolutely unavoidable and explain it clearly. Keep in mind that in real life, you'd be under extreme space restrictions. But the extended space is for you to really reflect on what it would take to do a creative and intellectually significant project (and/or practice for a thesis prospectus).

#### Seminar Schedule:

##### Week 1

Jan 7<sup>th</sup> Apologia

On modernity, on the history of cinema, on modernism, on the course, on the relationship of history and theory, on research, on objects, films and documents.

##### Week 2

Jan 14<sup>th</sup> Before (Cinema)

Amusements & Optical Toys

Read: *The Techniques of the Observer*

##### Week 3

Jan 21<sup>st</sup> Before/During (Cinema)

Read: *The Culture of Time and Space*

##### Week 4

Jan 28<sup>th</sup> Cinema (Time)

Read: *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*

##### Week 5

Feb 4<sup>th</sup> Melodrama

Read: *Melodrama and Modernity*

##### Week 6

Feb 11<sup>th</sup> City Life

Read: "Urban Travels" *For The Love of Pleasure*, Rabinowitz

"The Shock of the New": Electrification, Illumination, Urbanization and the Cinema,"

Fischer

Selections from *How The Other Half Lives*, Jacob Riis

Week 7

Feb 18<sup>th</sup>          Spectacle

Read: Selections from *Cinema & The Invention of Modern Life*

“The Whole Town’s Gawking: Early Cinema and the Visual Experience of Modernity,  
“ Gunning.

Week 8

Feb 25<sup>th</sup>          Stuff

Read: “A New Era of Shopping,” Rappaport, *Invention*

*Captain Billy’s Whiz Bang* (1920) Media History Library

*Jim Jam Jems* (1921), Media History Library

Week 9

March 4<sup>th</sup> Slapstick

Read: “Buster Keaton or the Work of Comedy in The Age of Mechanical  
Reproduction,” Gunning

Week 10: Peer reviews