

# Silent Film

## ENGLISH 695 – Spring 2016

### “BANG !”

intertitle from *The Artist* (2011)

Dr. Michael Aronson

Seminar : Mondays 9 – 11:50am, 253 PLC

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### Requirements:

#### Etiquette:

1. Full and complete attention, participation, listening, and reading.
2. Good faith and good humor towards your colleagues. However, disagreements and debate are a required aspect of the seminar environment. While personal attacks are not acceptable under any circumstance argument is at the core of all intellectual work.
3. Encourage basic questions as well as advanced ones.

### Product:

1. **Participation:** I expect everyone to participate every week.
2. **Viewing:** In addition to the what we watch in class, everyone is expected to screen at least one, and ideally multiple, additional film(s) on their own each week. I will have a library of films (dvds) available for you to check out and circulate among the seminar and I have the (limited) 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. Online and streaming resources are available in the “Silent Films (to watch)” module on Canvas.
3. **Discussion Facilitation:** Each week, at least two seminar participants will facilitate discussion. Both discussion leaders should spend additional time and energy on the readings and be prepared to discuss them in depth. Depending on schedule and other factors, you may perform one role more than the other.

The *Instigator* will bring in questions and topics, and lead the seminar. With the *Curator* they should create a new “Content Page” in that week’s module on CANVAS and post the questions, topics and any related ephemera for the week in question. At the latest, this should happen **by 2AM on the Saturday** before that week’s class. You should aim to get at the most important issues in the readings. Your job is to instigate; to cause conversation, debate, query. Questions (or polemic statements) can be oriented around anything from really basic content questions (like “what does the passage on p.25 actually mean?”) all the way up to “big picture” issues that connect the week’s readings with other discussions we’ve had in the seminar.

Everyone else is responsible for bringing in a copy of your material to lecture. In addition, I expect the rest of the class to regularly respond/comment/add-to the initial inquisitor’s post that the inquisitor initially created.

The *Curator* will bring in at least one film for us to watch and discuss in relation to the reading. You may choose any film you wish as long as it adheres to the following criteria:

- 1) Produced and/or exhibited prior to 1930 but, by default, from the period that your week corresponds to.
- 2) No longer than 20 minutes total in length.

## Facilitation Continued:

Exceptions to criteria may be made with prior approval. You should post the title of the film and any production information you have about it to the week's module at least the night before class. See above for access to film archive. I will provide basic a/v equipment every week, anything unusual (like an actual film projector or a pipe organ) should be arranged in advance with me.

### 4. Term Project

Since it is all but impossible to take a seminar and immediately produce (from scratch) a fully-developed study of something in the same term, I have provided a range of alternative options and an escape hatch. Please note the following due dates. You may submit materials early:

**18 April (Week 4):** a well thought-out and somewhat formal proposal posted to "Term Project Proposals" discussion on CANVAS. See your option for details.

**23 May (Week 9):** Drafts of papers will be circulated to feedback groups, feedback sessions scheduled during late Week 9 and/or early Week 10

Final work will be due Wednesday, **June 8th**. .doc files are preferred.

You are encouraged to meet with me throughout the term as you work on your project.

#### Option 1: The Critical Revision

Revision is not a skill often emphasized in grad seminars, but it should be. This is your chance to take a piece of writing you've already begun (and perhaps put aside) and revise it towards a concrete end (for instance, for a publication in a journal), using materials from the course to refine your thinking about your project and develop your analysis. Use the course to refine your thinking about the material and develop your intellectual personality. Keep in mind that the work should (in some way) be relevant to the seminar and that the purpose of this option is to facilitate extended reflection upon research you have already undertaken; it is not simply to facilitate further research.

Proposals for this option should include a discussion of the project as it currently stands; why you want to rewrite this for this course; a substantive plan for further revision – especially in terms of how you want to make your argument, your vision of the paper's intellectual or political task, and your construction of context; and a discussion of other work that you need to do in order to be able to rewrite the paper (such as additional outside reading or revisiting of source materials). You should also append a copy of the current version of the paper to the proposal.

#### Option 2: 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 might submit the paper to.

## Grading:

- If your performance on any assignment is not satisfactory, I may ask you to do it again.
- Activities for which you must be present cannot be made up. If you know you'll be absent on a day for which you are obligated, trade with one your colleagues.
- Late papers may not receive written comments and will earn a reduced grade.
- I do not give incompletes except in truly extraordinary personal circumstances.

## Seminar Schedule:

### Week 1

March 28

#### Apologia

On "silent" cinema, on the history of a cinema; on the course; on the relationship of theory and history; on research; on objects, films and documents.

Screen: *Sadow* (1894) and *There It Is* (1928)

### Week 2

TBD

#### Before (Cinema)

Read: "The Techniques of the Observer" Crary  
"Camera Obscura" chapter from *Techniques*, Crary  
"Dark Rooms and Magic Mirrors" from *Light & Shadow*, Mannoni

### Week 3

April 11

#### 1890s: Arrivals

### Week 4

April 18

#### 1900s: Possibilities

### Week 5

April 25

#### 1905: Nickelodeons

### Week 6

May 2

#### 1910: Transitions

### Week 7

May 9

#### 1915: Features

### Week 8 1920: Studios

May 16

### Week 9 1925 Pinnacles

May 23

### Week 10

#### 1930 Departures

May 30

Papers Due Wed June, 8<sup>th</sup>.