

21L 011 The Film Experience
Suggested paper topics

FIRST ESSAY
DUE OCTOBER 4

You can write about a single film or about aspects of several films. Be sure to describe and analyze specific scenes or images to support your argument. These topic questions aim to help you to generate a focused, coherent essay. If you would like to write on another topic, you must discuss *it in advance* with your TA. Your essay should be 5-7 double-spaced pages long, with one-inch margins.

1. How are new technologies portrayed in films we've seen this semester? You can look at specific scenes in *Modern Times*, *The General*, "Lonely Villa," and "The Lonedale Operator." On a narrative and technical level what does the new technology/innovation allow the director to do? What is the director's attitude towards technological advances, and how does he express them? When, how, where, and why does the new technology appear? Are there particular characters associated with the technology, and is there significance to that association?
2. How do movies like "The Immigrant," "Easy Street," "A Beast at Bay," and *Modern Times* depict social ills and what is the director's attitude toward these problems? Keep in mind that many early moviegoers lived in urban areas and were immigrants.
3. How does the progression of gender roles in silent era films embody and/or contradict the Fred Ott principle? How do the silent directors incorporate or confront the social roles and limitations of the times? You can use any of D.W. Griffith shorts and Keaton's films, and Chaplin's *Modern Times*, acknowledging that this film produced in the sound era can be considered a culminating text of the silent cinema.
4. Analyze Tom Gunning's theory of a "cinema of attractions" from his article "An Aesthetic of Astonishment" in relation to two or three early films. Does his claim work perfectly, or is there something you would add, modify, complicate, or disagree with?
5. Subjectivity in *The Last Laugh*. Choose two or three representative scenes or passages from *The Last Laugh* and discuss Murnau's strategies for dramatizing the inner lives of characters and the reality of their environments?
6. Choose one short film by Chaplin or Keaton and discuss how several of its elements have been absorbed and transformed in *Modern Times* or *The General*.
7. Keaton and Chaplin were undoubtedly the masters of silent comedy. Develop a thesis that compares their work as performers and directors. You may also want to incorporate James Agee's essay.

SECOND PAPER
DUE NOVEMBER 6

1. The American family in *Shadow of a Doubt*.
2. Point of view in *Rear Window*.
3. Women in Hitchcock.
4. Social class in *It Happened One Night* and/or *The Last Laugh*.
5. Murnau's subjective camera.
6. The theme of voyeurism in Hitchcock.
7. The theme of performance in *Singin' in the Rain*: describe one or two songs and or dances and discuss the significance of these performances in the context of the film as a whole.
8. The theme of innocence in *Cabaret*.
9. History and politics in *Cabaret*.
10. Compare some key elements in *Singin' in the Rain* with similar elements in *Cabaret* in an essay that discusses differences between these films and speculates about how to explain them.
11. Dialogue as an expression of character in *His Girl Friday*.

THIRD ESSAY
DUE DECEMBER 6

1. Visual style in Renoir, De Sica, or Truffaut: a close reading of one or two representative sequences that discusses the relationship between visual strategies and the themes of the film.
2. Many good films conclude ambiguously, without decisively resolving central themes. Discuss this subject by describing and analyzing the final sequences of one of the following films: *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, *Grand Illusion*, *Bicycle Thieves*, *The 400 Blows*. Be sure to discuss how montage and mise en scene contribute to the ending.
3. Altman's use of sound in *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*.
4. Ethan and Scar as doubles in *The Searchers*.
5. Setting in *The Searchers* or *Rashomon*.
6. Comic elements in *Grand Illusion* or *The Searchers*.
7. Parents and children in *The 400 Blows*.
8. Father and son in *Bicycle Thieves* or *The 400 Blows*.
9. The city in Truffaut and/or DeSica.