
CINE 388: The Great Illusion

Spring 2011

Short Essay #1

Due: Monday, February 14, at 5:00pm



TOPIC

Write a 1000–1500 word essay on a topic of your choice that is pertinent to our course. You should base your analysis on an aspect of the films from class that you find particularly interesting and relevant. I encourage you to use specific clips and/or still images from the “Clip Archive” and “Still Image Archive” on The Great Illusion Course Site. **The topic you choose must be approved by me beforehand: email me a 2–3 sentence explanation before writing your essay.** Feel free to suggest alternative or creative approaches.

When writing your essay, do not simply repeat the ideas that we have discussed in class. Instead, consider how you can add something new to the themes and conversations from class through your own experience with the films/texts. Bear in mind the limited scope of a 1000–1500 word essay: be clear and concise when writing, and choose a realistic approach that will allow you to reasonably argue your ideas without exceeding the length and time constraints, and without simply summarizing the films or readings. Therefore, you should use any secondary sources wisely and limitedly (either from the readings from class, or readings and films that you find elsewhere).

If you prefer, you may use one of the following three prompts as models for your essay:

1. Tom Gunning’s notion of a “cinema of attractions” has gained wide acceptance among film scholars, and has been a key factor in re-thinking the “primitive” tag often tied to early cinematic productions. In what ways does Segundo de Chomón contest the notion that early cinema was “primitive?” How do his films demonstrate a cinema of attractions, and how do they prefigure future tendencies of cinema? How does Chomón stand apart from other contemporary filmmakers, such as Georges Méliès or the Lumière Brothers?
2. As we saw in our first week of classes, both “nation” and “identity” are very slippery signifiers that can be exploited through different modes of interested construction and appropriation. Choose a pair of clips to compare and contrast the ways that they assume a natural association with a static idea of “nation” or “Spanishness”, and simultaneously accept certain inconsistencies. How do the clips you chose promote or re-evaluate “Spanishness?”
3. Spanish “Neorealism,” in many ways, is a misnomer considering its conflicting and tangential connection with its supposed model, Italian Neorealism. What are some distinguishing characteristics of Spanish Neorealism as seen in *Death of a Cyclist*? How does this film paradoxically embrace and contest hegemonic ideas of the Francoist nation? If Italian Neorealism set out not only to “record the social problems but to express them in an entirely new way” (Ratner), in what way does Bardem approach social concerns?

FEATURE FILMS

Feel free to incorporate other films in your analysis, but remember that your essay should ultimately speak about one (or more) of the following films:

- *El espíritu de la colmena / The Spirit of the Beehive* (Victor Erice, 1973)
- *Tierra sin pan (or Las Hurdes) / Land without Bread* (Luis Buñuel, 1933)
- *Un chien andalou* (Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, 1929)
- Short films by Segundo de Chomón
- Cinema during Francoist Spain
- *Muerte de un ciclista / Death of a cyclist* (Juan Antonio Bardem, 1955)

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- Your short essay should be between 1000–1500 words. Use the standard Times New Roman, size 12, double-spaced, left-aligned, with 1-inch margins on all sides.
- Your essay should be about your own ideas and interpretations. While secondary bibliography may be useful, please do not cite external sources excessively or depend on others' ideas.
- If you do use secondary sources, cite them correctly and include a bibliography. I prefer that you use MLA style, but you may use any style you prefer as long as you are consistent throughout your paper. For examples and more information about MLA style, see the Purdue Online Writing Lab at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>
- Adhere to all university policies and procedures regarding academic integrity (cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, etc.). The work you submit in this class is expected to be your own. If you submit work that has been copied without attribution from any published or unpublished source including the Internet, or that has been prepared by someone other than you, or that in any way attributes somebody else's work as your own, you may face discipline by the university's Office of Student Conduct. For more information consult <http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/>
- A key objective to have in mind when approaching any analysis is to say as much as possible with the fewest of well-chosen words. As such, preparing short essays demands particular attention to revision and selection. You should **not begin** writing the night before the due date.
- Make sure that your approach is reasonable given the length of this essay. Argue your thesis strongly, and be careful not to try to take on too many ideas. If you want help organizing your ideas, please feel free to contact me.
- All papers must be turned in to me **via an email attachment by Monday, February 14, at 5:00pm**. Exceptions will be made only in extenuating circumstances assuming the student has contacted me **before** the deadline. Late papers will receive a half letter deduction (A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) for every 24 hours they are late.