



COMM 150 The Art of the Cinema

Lesson 2: The Development of Cinematic Language Study Guide

The lesson study guides provide a framework to use as you work through each lesson. Remember, this is just a framework, and the content will allow you to explore the lesson topics and films in much more depth. Consider the points and questions in the guide for each lesson as you work through the lesson content.

Previews Study Guide

The influence of Charles Chaplin on film cannot be overstated. He modeled one of the most recognizable characters in the history of film, the Tramp.

- Stock character in melodramatic and vaudeville theater as well as cartoons and pulp literature, that moved easily into early films.
- Touched on universal themes of the time, such as disdain for the rich, resistance to authority, and resentment of modern forms of alienating labor.
- Could be of any country or any age from 25 to 50.

Synchronized sound became viable in the mid-1920s. Chaplin through talking would destroy the universal language of cinema, which was, in his mind, the way it rendered emotion through motion.

The Jazz Singer (1927) was the first feature length film distributed with sound. By the 1930s synchronized sound technology was everywhere, impacting the way films were made.

What can sound do?

- Present reality and reconstruct a mirror of nature
- Change meaning of images
- Provides individuality of the performer
- Allows for emotion, tone sarcasm, etc

Critic's Corner Study Guide

Chaplin begins *Modern Times* with an ironic commentary on the constitutional ideal of the "pursuit of happiness" showing men as herds of sheep moving toward a factory that dominates their experience of time and in which the machines dominate over them.

Stock Characters

Reading Chaplin's film as an allegory makes sense because the characters are overtly allegorical types.

- The Tramp
- The Gamin



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- The Big Boss
- Big Bill
- The Sheriff

Chaplin's comedy is based on exaggerating characteristics so as to draw attention to them.

Modern Times argues that the free spirited human being is incompatible with modern industrial civilization. The two cannot mutually co-exist. Yet, here he offers a sentiment that seems to call for solidarity and companionship as the antidote. The equality, in spirit, of the two characters makes this ending onto the perpetual road of life analogous to a buddy film. For the last time, the Tramp's call for optimism and hope in the face of every problem that life can hurl his way touched audiences.

Comedy and tragedy are not far apart; it is merely the world view that separates them. Though many of the critiques of modern mass media society would be leveled again a couple of years later in *The Great Dictator* this was the last time the little Tramp would be seen. Chaplin seemed to know, that in a filmic universe now populated by talking stars, the Tramp could no longer exist.