

THE CHAPLIN CRAZE:
CHARLIE CHAPLIN AND THE EMERGENCE OF MASS-AMUSEMENT
CULTURE

JACK RUNDELL

PhD

UNIVERSITY OF YORK

ENGLISH AND RELATED LITERATURE

AUGUST 2014

Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between Charlie Chaplin's early career and films (1914-1916) and the emergent mass-amusement culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in America. It combines empirical research into mass-amusement history with close readings of Chaplin's early films in order to illuminate the close and previously minimally explored relationship between Chaplin's film-making and popularity on the one hand, and the broader early twentieth-century history of mass-amusement culture on the other.

The thesis approaches its subject through the specific phenomenon of amusement 'crazes'. It takes three selectively illustrative examples – roller skating, popular dance forms and moving pictures – through which to explore the specific debates and controversies these amusements generated and the social and cultural aspirations and concerns that drove them. This cultural-historical research is used to re-read Chaplin films, enabling topical allusions and cultural subtexts to come newly into focus. It also provides the context for a fresh interpretation of Chaplin's sensational rise to fame in the mid-1910s as a cultural phenomenon symptomatic of a wider landscape of contemporary frenetic and popular crazes.

The thesis challenges two principal assumptions that underlie prevailing critical approaches to Chaplin's early career, unquestioningly grounded, as they are, in the privileged status conventionally ascribed to his later, and better-known feature films. These assumptions are: (1) that Chaplin's early films are chiefly of interest for the ways in which they teleologically anticipate later developments in his film-making; and (2) that Chaplin's distinctive qualities and cultural value are always to be understood in qualitative contrast to the dominant imperatives of contemporary slapstick and the larger mass-amusement culture to which slapstick belonged. The thesis questions the accuracy and efficacy of critical approaches based on these assumptions, and argues, instead, for a more symbiotic, mutually dynamising relationship between early Chaplin and his cultural moment and milieu.

Contents

Abstract	2
Contents	3
List of Illustrations	6
Acknowledgements	10
Declaration	11
INTRODUCTION	12
Methodology and Keywords (Mass Culture, Emergence, Modernity)	21
Chaplin and the Transformational Culture of ‘Crazes’	26
The Field	29
Timeliness	34
Thesis Structure	37
PART I. CHAPLIN AND AMUSEMENT CRAZES	39
CHAPTER 1. CHAPLIN AND THE ROLLER-SKATING CRAZE	40
Cycles of the Craze	
i) Origins	44
ii) Boom	46
iii) Controversy	50
iv) Decline and Symbolic Legacy	60
Chaplin as Roller Skater	62
i) <i>The Rink</i> and the Roller-Skating Craze	63
ii) Chaplin’s Performance in <i>The Rink</i>	71
iii) From <i>The Rink</i> to <i>Modern Times</i>	74

CHAPTER 2. CHAPLIN AND THE DANCE CRAZE	80
Cycles of the Craze	
i) Origins	85
ii) Boom	88
iii) Controversy	91
Chaplin as Dancer	97
i) Topical Allusions in <i>Tango Tangles, His Prehistoric Romance</i> and <i>Shanghaied</i>	99
ii) Ballroom Dancing in <i>The Count</i>	105
iii) From <i>Caught in a Cabaret</i> to <i>City Lights</i>	113
CHAPTER 3. CHAPLIN AND THE MOVING-PICTURE CRAZE	121
Cycles of the Craze	
i) Origins	125
ii) Boom	127
iii) Controversy	131
Chaplin as Moviegoer, Studio Hand and Movie Star	135
i) <i>A Film Johnnie</i> and the ‘Nickel Madness’	137
ii) Movies and Vaudeville: <i>A Film Johnnie</i> and <i>A Night in the Show</i>	142
iii) Chaplin and the Movie Studio: <i>A Film Johnnie, His New Job</i> and <i>Behind the Screen</i>	147
iv) Chaplin Drops the Subject of Movies: From Shorts to Features	151

PART II. CHAPLIN AS AMUSEMENT CRAZE	155
CHAPTER 4. SLAPSTICK, CONTROVERSY AND THE CHAPLIN CRAZE	156
Cycles of the Craze	
i) Origins	156
ii) Boom	158
iii) Controversy	166
Rethinking the Chaplin Craze	
i) Chaplin and Keystone	187
ii) The Dynamics of Controversy	197
CHAPTER 5. ‘HERE TO-DAY’ (GONE TOMORROW): THE TEMPORALITY OF THE CHAPLIN CRAZE	203
i) Spontaneity in <i>His New Job</i>	207
ii) Serial Novelty in <i>The Pawnshop</i>	218
iii) ‘Awful Chance[s]’ and ‘Terrific Test[s]’: Serial Production at Essanay and Mutual	229
iv) Chaplin’s Temporality and Craze Culture	234
CONCLUSION	239
Bibliography	
Primary Sources	245
Secondary Sources	260
Filmography	272

List of Illustrations

0.1 – 0.2	Stills from <i>The Face on the Barroom Floor</i> (Keystone, 1914)	12
0.3	Google ‘Ngram viewer’ chart showing usage of the word ‘craze’ in Google-digitised books over time	22
1.1 – 1.2	Stills from <i>The Rink</i> (Mutual, 1916)	35
1.3 – 1.4	Cover image of <i>Charles Chaplin: My Life in Pictures</i> (1972) and still from title sequence of <i>Unknown Chaplin</i> (BBC, 1983) documentary	36
1.5 – 1.6	Stills from <i>The Rink</i> (Mutual, 1916)	59
1.7	Still from <i>The Rink</i> (Mutual, 1916)	60
1.8 – 1.9	Stills from <i>The Rink</i> (Mutual, 1916)	61
1.10 – 1.11	Stills from <i>The Rink</i> (Mutual, 1916)	62
1.12 – 1.13	Stills from <i>The Rink</i> (Mutual, 1916)	63
1.14 – 1.15	Stills from <i>The Rink</i> (Mutual, 1916)	67
1.16 – 1.17	Stills from <i>The Rink</i> (Mutual, 1916)	67
1.18 – 1.19	Stills from <i>The Rink</i> (Mutual, 1916)	68
1.20 – 1.21	Stills from <i>The Rink</i> (Mutual, 1916)	68
1.22 – 1.23	Stills From <i>Modern Times</i> (United Artists, 1936)	70
1.24 – 1.25	Stills from <i>The Rink</i> (Mutual, 1916) and <i>Modern Times</i> (United Artists, 1936)	71
1.26 – 1.27	Stills from <i>The Rink</i> (Mutual, 1916) and <i>Modern Times</i> (United Artists, 1936)	72
1.28 – 1.29	Stills from <i>Modern Times</i> (United Artists, 1936) and <i>The Rink</i> (Mutual, 1916)	73
2.1 – 2.2	Stills from <i>In the Park</i> (Essanay, 1915)	75
2.3 – 2.5	Illustration of dance step from Caroline Walker’s instructional guide <i>The Modern Dances: How to Dance Them</i> (1914); still from <i>His Prehistoric Romance</i> (Keystone, 1914); still from <i>The Count</i> (Mutual, 1916)	92
2.6	Comic strip on the subject of ‘the dance craze’ (<i>Kansas City Star</i> , 1914)	95
2.7 – 2.8	Stills from <i>Tango Tangles</i> (Keystone, 1914)	96

2.9 – 2.10	Stills from <i>Tango Tangles</i> (Keystone, 1914)	96
2.11 – 2.12	Stills from <i>Tango Tangles</i> (Keystone, 1914)	97
2.13 – 2.14	Stills from <i>His Prehistoric Romance</i> (Keystone, 1914)	98
2.15 – 2.16	Stills from <i>Shanghaied</i> (Essanay, 1915)	98
2.17 – 2.18	Stills from <i>Tango Tangles</i> (Keystone, 1914) and <i>The Count</i> (Mutual, 1916)	101
2.19 – 2.20	Stills from <i>Tango Tangles</i> (Keystone, 1914) and <i>The Count</i> (Mutual, 1916)	102
2.21 – 2.23	Stills from <i>The Count</i> (Mutual, 1916)	104
2.24 – 2.25	Stills from <i>The Count</i> (Mutual, 1916)	105
2.26 – 2.31	Stills from <i>The Count</i> (Mutual, 1916) and <i>In the Park</i> (Essanay, 1915)	107
2.32	Still from <i>Caught in a Cabaret</i> (Keystone, 1914)	110
2.33	Still from <i>Caught in a Cabaret</i> (Keystone, 1914)	110
2.34 – 2.35	Stills from <i>Caught in a Cabaret</i> (Keystone, 1914)	111
2.36 – 2.37	Stills from <i>The Rink</i> (Mutual, 1916)	111
2.38 – 2.39	Stills from <i>City Lights</i> (United Artists, 1931)	112
2.40 – 2.42	Stills from <i>Caught in a Cabaret</i> (Keystone, 1914), <i>The Rink</i> (Mutual, 1916) and <i>City Lights</i> (United Artists, 1931)	112
3.1	Google ‘Ngram viewer’ chart showing usage of the phrase ‘moving picture craze’ in Google-digitised books over time	119
3.2	Still from <i>A Film Johnnie</i> (Keystone, 1914)	132
3.3 – 3.5	Stills from <i>A Film Johnnie</i> (Keystone, 1914)	133
3.6 – 3.7	Stills from <i>A Film Johnnie</i> (Keystone, 1914)	134
3.8 – 3.9	Stills from <i>A Film Johnnie</i> (Keystone, 1914)	134
3.10 – 3.11	Stills from <i>A Film Johnnie</i> (Keystone, 1914)	136
3.12 – 3.13	Stills from <i>A Night in the Show</i> (Essanay, 1915)	137
3.14 – 3.15	Stills from <i>A Film Johnnie</i> (Keystone, 1914) and <i>A Night in the Show</i> (Essanay, 1915)	138
3.16 – 3.17	Stills from <i>A Film Johnnie</i> (Keystone, 1914) and <i>A Night in the Show</i> (Essanay, 1915)	139
3.18 – 3.19	Stills from <i>A Film Johnnie</i> (Keystone, 1914) and <i>A Night in the Show</i> (Essanay, 1915)	139

3.20 – 3.21	Stills from <i>A Film Johnnie</i> (Keystone, 1914) and <i>A Night in the Show</i> (Essanay, 1915)	139
3.22 – 3.23	Stills from <i>A Night in the Show</i> (Essanay, 1915)	141
3.24 – 3.25	Stills from <i>A Night in the Show</i> (Essanay, 1915)	141
3.26 – 3.27	Stills from <i>A Night in the Show</i> (Essanay, 1915)	142
3.28	Still from <i>A Film Johnnie</i> (Keystone, 1914)	143
3.29 – 3.31	Stills from <i>Behind the Screen</i> (Mutual, 1916)	144
3.32 – 3.33	Stills from <i>Behind the Screen</i> (Mutual, 1916)	144
3.34 – 3.36	Stills from <i>A Film Johnnie</i> (Keystone, 1914), <i>His New Job</i> (Essanay, 1915) and <i>Behind the Screen</i> (Mutual, 1916)	145
4.1 – 4.2	Stills from <i>Mabel's Strange Predicament</i> (Keystone, 1914)	156
4.3 – 4.4	Stills from <i>His Favorite Pastime</i> (Keystone, 1914)	156
4.5 – 4.7	Stills from <i>Caught in the Rain</i> (Keystone, 1914), <i>Tango Tangles</i> (Keystone, 1914) and <i>The Face on the Barroom Floor</i> (Keystone, 1914)	156
4.8 – 4.9	Stills from <i>Between Showers</i> (Keystone, 1914)	157
4.10 – 4.11	Stills from <i>Between Showers</i> (Keystone, 1914)	158
4.12 – 4.13	Stills from <i>The Fatal Mallet</i> (Keystone, 1914)	158
4.14 – 4.15	Stills from <i>Mabel's Married Life</i> (Keystone, 1914)	159
4.16 – 4.17	Trade advertisements for Essanay-Chaplin series (<i>Moving Picture World</i> , 1915)	164
4.18 – 4.20	Trade advertisement for Essanay-Chaplin series (<i>Moving Picture World</i> , 1915); advertisement for Charles Chaplin souvenir figures (<i>Moving Picture World</i> , 1915); photograph of exhibitor with Chaplin cut-out (<i>Moving Picture World</i> , 1915)	165
4.21	Photograph of moving-picture theatre with Chaplin advertising (<i>Moving Picture World</i> , 1915)	165
4.22 – 4.23	Stills from <i>Making and Living</i> (Keystone, 1914) and <i>The Rink</i> (Mutual, 1916)	171
4.24 – 4.25	Stills from <i>The Tramp</i> (Essanay, 1916)	173
4.26 – 4.27	Cartoon of Chaplin (<i>Photoplay</i> , 1915) and Still from <i>Gentlemen of Nerve</i> (Keystone, 1914)	187
4.28 – 4.29	Diagrams of the dynamics of the Chaplin craze	196

5.1 – 5.2	Stills from <i>His New Job</i> (Essanay, 1915)	204
5.3 – 5.4	Stills from <i>His New Job</i> (Essanay, 1915) and <i>The Rounders</i> (Keystone, 1914)	205
5.5 – 5.6	Stills from <i>His New Job</i> (Essanay, 1915) and <i>The New Janitor</i> (Keystone, 1914)	205
5.7 – 5.8	Stills from <i>His New Job</i> (Essanay, 1915) and <i>His Musical Career</i> (Keystone, 1914)	205
5.9 – 5.10	Stills from <i>His New Job</i> (Essanay, 1915)	207
5.11	Still from <i>The Pawnshop</i> (Mutual, 1916)	214
5.12 – 5.14	Stills from <i>The Pawnshop</i> (Mutual, 1916)	215
5.15 – 5.19	Stills from <i>Mabel's Strange Predicament</i> (Keystone, 1914)	218
5.20 – 5.24	Stills from <i>Caught in the Rain</i> (Keystone, 1914)	219
5.25 – 5.28	Stills from <i>Shanghaied</i> (Essanay, 1915)	220
5.29 – 5.34	Stills from <i>The Floorwalker</i> (Mutual, 1916)	220
5.35 – 5.40	Stills from <i>A Night Out</i> (Essanay, 1915)	222
5.41 – 5.42	Stills from <i>Caught in the Rain</i> (Keystone, 1914)	223
5.43 – 5.46	Stills from <i>The Floorwalker</i> (Mutual, 1916)	224
5.47 – 5.48	Stills from <i>The Pawnshop</i> (Mutual, 1916)	224
5.49	Trade advertisement for Essanay-Chaplin series (<i>Moving Picture World</i> , 1915)	227
6.1 – 6.2	Stills from <i>The Face on the Barroom Floor</i> (Keystone, 1914)	238

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge and thank the following:

For the doctoral award that funded this thesis, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). And for additional financial assistance, my parents and grandparents.

For awarding me the 2013 Domitor Student Essay Award and their accompanying feedback, Scott Curtis, Tami Williams, Teresa Castro and Philippe Gauthier.

For hosting me for three months on the AHRC International Placement Scheme, all the staff at John W. Kluge Center at the Library of Congress.

For archival assistance, Kathleen Dickson at the BFI and all the staff at the Motion Picture Television Reading Room, Library of Congress.

For suggestions and guidance, my Teacher Advisory and Upgrade Panel members Matt Bevis, Hugh Haughton and Lawrence Rainey, and above all my supervisor Judith Buchanan who has steered me through the process of writing this thesis with an expert hand.

For further ideas and inspiration, all those I studied with at the Kluge Center, especially Joel Frykholme, Ned Rangelife, Jen Morgan, Richard Morgan, Emma West and Adam Harper.

For proofreading, Chris Sunley and Florence Cox

For my upbringing, Chris, Sally and Ned Rundell.

And for her peace, love and understanding, Sylvia Rosemary Cox.

Declaration

I declare that all material in this thesis is original and my own work, except where otherwise identified, and that no material has previously been submitted for the award of a degree by this or any other university.

INTRODUCTION



Figs. 0.1 and 0.2. Charlie's attempt to locate his inner artist by sketching a portrait on the floor devolves into broad slapstick in *The Face on the Barroom Floor* (1914).

'I was a painter,' announces Chaplin's hopelessly inebriated 'vagabond', by intertitle, in *The Face on the Barroom Floor* (1914). 'Not one who daubed on bricks and wood,' he continues, addressing a motley audience of assembled drinkers, 'but an artist'. Chaplin's vagabond's proud but pathos-laden claim here resonates beyond the bounds of this particular cinema fiction; for in later years Chaplin himself was to be widely recognised not just as a jobbing filmmaker but as an artist.¹ Yet hindsight bestows a double irony upon this film scene. If, in his later films, Chaplin was to 'elevate[...] "lowly" slapstick to what some critics call "high" art', as Donald McCaffrey puts it, here the direction of travel moves the other way; for in *The Face on the Barroom Floor*, the respectable art of portraiture is transformed into broad slapstick.² Having recounted the tale of his alcoholic downfall, Chaplin's vagabond attempts to locate his inner artist by depicting the face of his lost love in chalk upon the barroom floor. He totters precariously on the spot, struggles even to reach the floor and collapses repeatedly, in the process projecting his rear end into the air. In performing this grotesque failure of artistic expression, however, Chaplin brilliantly showcases his talent for the not-so-fine art of slapstick. In terms of its cultural status, slapstick was certainly closer to 'daub[ing] on bricks and wood' than to portraiture. Yet if Chaplin's performance is taken on its own terms, as slapstick, it is

¹ For an illustrative assertion of this specific reputation as an 'artist', see: Andrew Sarris, "*You Ain't Heard Nothin' Yet*": *The American Talking Film History & Memory, 1927-1949* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 139.

² Donald McCaffrey, "Introduction," in *Focus on Chaplin*, ed. Donald McCaffrey (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 5.

undoubtedly virtuosic: with just a piece of chalk and a barroom floor he offers us a piquantly absurd stylisation of the bodily disarray of abject drunkenness, coupled with a tickling display of acrobatic contortionism. Certainly his performance lives up/down to the anarchic and often provocative reputation of contemporary slapstick, and in fact, of a newly emerging mass-amusement culture that wilfully and joyfully challenged the (articulated at least) preference for refinement and decorum.

This irreverent moment from one of Chaplin's earliest films certainly does not challenge the established critical claims about Chaplin's artistic and performative achievements as they pertain to his career as a whole. Nor is it the intention of this thesis to challenge those claims. Rather, I open with this particular moment to set the scene for a re-assessment of Chaplin's *early* films and career specifically. I offer it as a light-hearted illustration of a central contention of this thesis: whatever his later achievements, Chaplin's distinction as a performer, his audience appeal and his wider cultural significance in the mid-1910s were not necessarily established by transcending the codes and conventions of contemporary slapstick and mass-amusement culture; his early career might be more productively understood in terms of its energising and intimate engagement with these contexts.

To pursue this argument, as I will throughout this thesis, is to challenge a prevalent critical assumption about Chaplin's career. Richard Attenborough's assessment of Chaplin's film-historical significance provides a useful illustration of how this assumption operates: '[W]hat had been movies up to a short period before,' Attenborough explained in an interview about his 1992 biopic *Chaplin*, 'were custard pies and Keystone cop chases. [...] [S]uddenly here was this incredible man, this genius, who said: "Hey! There are no limitations on this. This isn't a peep show on the end of a seaside pier. This is an art form"'.³ Attenborough might be the first to admit that this cartoonish vignette of simple oppositions crudifies and condenses significant vistas of cinema history. Yet even in its cartoonishness, it reveals an underpinning logic that is still frequently detectable in both Chaplin's popular and critical reputations today. It is this logic, for example, that drives the analysis and commentary offered by influential monographs on Chaplin and silent comedy, notably Gerald Mast's *The Comic Mind: Comedy and the Movies* (1973), Walter

³ Richard Attenborough, interviewed by John A. Gallagher, *Directors Series*, 1992, accessed April 26, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=agunnHHLXkA>.

Kerr's *The Silent Clowns* (1975), John McCabe's *Charlie Chaplin* (1978), David Robinson's *Chaplin: His Life and Art* (1985), and, most recently, Peter Ackroyd's *Charlie Chaplin* (2014).⁴ The assumed opposition between mere mass amusement on the one hand and Chaplin's 'art' on the other has determined the way many critics have chosen to select, reject and order the events of Chaplin's career into a meaningful narrative, as well as how they have foregrounded certain aesthetic features of his films while passing over others. And it is this opposition that has crucially shaped the late twentieth and early twenty-first century sense of Chaplin's significance and his ongoing claim upon our attention.

This thesis will offer a counter narrative and a reconfiguration of the relationship between Chaplin and mass-amusement culture. What the canonical narrative fails to recognise, to the detriment of our understanding of Chaplin, is the inherent dynamism of mass-amusement culture around the turn of the century: the rapid succession of new cultural forms and styles it produced; the drastic expansion and diversification of its audience; the new social values and behaviours it implied; the fierce national controversies it generated. In 1885, the preacher and orator Dr. Thomas De Witt Talmage had registered a new era in American amusement culture when he proclaimed to his Brooklyn congregation that '[n]ever within my memory or yours has there been in this country such a wide, deep, high popular agitation on the subject of amusements.'⁵ Talmage was far from alone in observing this newly aroused 'agitation', which would intensify as the new century dawned. It would attach itself to the emerging medium of cinema in the early twentieth century and it would feed directly both into Chaplin's films and into the public excitement that drove his own rapid rise to fame in the mid-1910s. Critics have typically presented this amusement culture as the uninspiring backdrop against which Chaplin's inherent and timeless brilliance has been able to sparkle the more. By contrast, it is the contention of this thesis that a serious engagement with the amusement culture from

⁴ Gerald Mast, *The Comic Mind: Comedy and the Movies* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973); Walter Kerr, *The Silent Clowns* (New York: Knopf, 1975); John McCabe, *Charlie Chaplin* (London: Robson, 1978); David Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art* (1985; revised edition, London: Grafton, 1992); John Kimber, *The Art of Charlie Chaplin* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Jeffrey Vance, *Chaplin: Genius of the Cinema* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2003); Peter Ackroyd, *Charlie Chaplin* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2014).

⁵ "Roller Skating Craze. Dr. Talmage Preaches a Sermon on the Mania," *Wheeling Register*, April 13, 1885, 1.

which Chaplin emerged, and into which he played, reveals a significantly different relationship between Chaplin and his world, between the player and his context, from that which critics have identified thus far.

This thesis does not concentrate on Chaplin's critically acclaimed and better-known films of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s – such as *The Gold Rush* (1925), *City Lights* (1931), *Modern Times* (1936) or *The Great Dictator* (1940). Rather it focuses on his first three years in movies, from 1914 to 1916, during which he produced a multitude of short films for serial consumption. The films made in these crucial three years have suffered from a tendency in much influential Chaplin criticism since the early 1970s to classify and assess them principally as 'apprenticeship' work in relation to Chaplin's later films, thereby negating much of the significance they held in their own moment.⁶ Choosing to see them principally in terms of *the thing they are not yet* inevitably obscures some of the things that they interestingly already were in their own terms. Chaplin's 1914 to 1916 period was distinctively characterised, I will argue, by a particularly intense, reciprocal relationship with an emergent mass-amusement culture. As in no other period of his career, Chaplin's films fed off and fed into the excitement and controversies that surrounded both cinema itself and a range of other popular amusements. The years 1914 to 1916 were also crucially formative ones for Chaplin's iconic status in the American imagination: future developments would transform his reputation in various and often striking ways, but already by 1916 the fame that made those transformations meaningful was firmly established. Thus, close attention to these three years helps us to understand the specificity of a distinctive moment in Chaplin's career, as well as thereby developing a better understanding of Chaplin's career as a whole.

In summary, this thesis aims to bring a historical sense of early twentieth century mass-amusement culture into the frame within which Chaplin's films and career can be assessed, explored and enjoyed. It does so in order to consider and contextualise anew the formal aesthetic pleasures of Chaplin's earlier films. In doing so, it repositions Chaplin and the broader American mass-cultural scene of the early

⁶ The subservient role of Chaplin's early to his later films is suggested in the titles of recent publications on Chaplin's early films: Ted Okuda and David Maska, *Charlie Chaplin at Keystone and Essanay: The Dawn of the Tramp*, (Lincoln, Nebraska, iUniverse, 2005); James L. Neibaur, *Chaplin at Essanay: A Film Artist in Transition, 1915-16* (Jefferson, North Carolina, 2008); *Early Charlie Chaplin: The Artist as Apprentice at Keystone Studios* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2012).

twentieth century as mutually dynamising and mutually illuminating cultural nodes of contemporary experience.

Within three years of his first appearance on cinema screens in early 1914, Charlie Chaplin was not only one of the most prominent names in cinema but one of the most widely recognised public figures in American culture. He moved swiftly from working under direction at the Keystone Film Company in 1914 to being the director and star of his own films at Essanay in 1915 and Mutual in 1916, a progression which involved signing two extraordinary film contracts, each of which dramatically inflated his salary.⁷ This three-year period in Chaplin's career was characterised not only by Chaplin's transformed commercial fortunes, but also by an unusual energetic intensity, in terms of both the specifics of his film-making and the specifics of his fame. Chaplin was ferociously productive between 1914 and 1916, appearing in sixty one short films and one feature in rapid succession. He was also hyperactively experimental, innovating exuberantly from film to film, though, as we shall see in chapter 4, not necessarily in a linear, coherently developmental manner. The response of the American public, meanwhile, was similarly animated. Chaplin was not merely a popular screen performer but a national 'craze' – an intense obsession that spread rapidly across the country, eliciting a variety of often contradictory responses. As will become apparent in Part II of this thesis, excitement about Chaplin spilled out of the notional containment of the moving-picture theatres as relentless allusion across other media and heated discussion in other fora transformed him into an indisputably national figure.

'The Chaplin craze' has been accorded an important place in the canonical narrative of Chaplin's career.⁸ It has become routine, for example, for critics to

⁷ Chaplin's weekly salary climbed from \$150 at Keystone in 1914, \$1,250 at Essanay in 1915 and \$10,000 at Mutual in 1916 and 1917. In late 1917 he agreed to produce eight films for First National for \$1,000,000. On these early film contracts, see: Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art*, 103, 135, 156, 221.

⁸ Theodore Huff, *Charlie Chaplin* (New York: Schuman, 1951) 6; McCabe, *Charlie Chaplin*, 79; David Robinson, *Chaplin: The Mirror of Opinion* (London: Secker Warburg, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 35; Charles Maland, *Chaplin and American Culture: The Evolution of a Star Image* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 14; Simon Louvish, *Chaplin: The Tramp's Odyssey* (London: Faber, 2008), 74-84; Ackroyd, *Charlie Chaplin*, 80-91.

mention some of the more colourful manifestations of public enthusiasm: Chaplin imitation contests held at cinemas, amusement parks and charity events; popular songs about Chaplin and his ‘funny walk’; all manner of merchandising, from miniature Chaplin statues to Chaplin costumes; rival claimants to the Chaplin style, most notably Billie Ritchie; abundant topical references to Chaplin in newspapers and journals.⁹ All this seems to formalise the emergence of an enduring cultural icon with a suitably effervescent launch.

Yet the Chaplin craze has also posed a problem for many critics whose sense of Chaplin’s importance as a filmmaker derives from later moments in his career, from his acclaimed feature films. Walter Kerr offered an astute formulation of the problem in his oft-cited book, *The Silent Clowns* (1975):

Audiences loved Chaplin on sight, though he had given them nothing to love in a sentimental sense. Because we are so enamoured of the later Chaplin, because we know what he *did* become, we can read our affection and knowledge back into these often failing exercises and see more than is actually there. Or, conversely, we can throw up our hands in bewilderment and ask how anything so coarse, frantic, unconstructed, and comically incomplete can have been accepted as even mildly amusing, in which case we see less than is there.¹⁰

Chaplin’s early period thus pits two usually consonant goals of Kerr’s critical project against each other: the retrospective mapping of Chaplin’s artistic progress (always leading towards his classic and better-known feature films of the 1920s and 1930s, *The Gold Rush*, *City Lights*, *Modern Times* and so on) and the charting of Chaplin’s rise as a cultural phenomenon. According to Kerr, Chaplin’s major artistic achievement of the 1910s was to establish the ‘all-embracing, ultimate, and indivisible comic character’ which we now know as The Tramp.¹¹ Yet Kerr’s exploration of the detail and chronology of the early films offers Chaplin’s

⁹ The Bill Douglas Cinema Museum’s ‘Chaplinania’ collection houses an illustrative range of Chaplin ephemera. For a selection of written accounts of typical Chaplin merchandising ephemera, see: Roger Manvell, *Chaplin* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1975), 95; McCabe, *Charlie Chaplin*, 79-80; Raoul Sobel and David Francis, *Chaplin: Genesis of a Clown* (London; Melbourne; New York: Quartet Books, 1977), 142-144; Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art*, 152-153; Louvish, *Chaplin*, 78-82; Vance, *Chaplin*, 42; Ackroyd, *Charlie Chaplin*, 80-81.

¹⁰ Kerr, *The Silent Clowns*, 75.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

realisation of this character as slow and uneven. Even by the end of 1916, Kerr admits, ‘he had as yet arrived at no such identity; neither did he arrive at it simply by making an Essanay comedy called *The Tramp*.’¹² It was not until 1918 with *A Dog’s Life*, according to Kerr, that Chaplin was to make a clear ‘declaration of style’.¹³ The ‘indivisible comic character’ of the Tramp appears to Kerr only ‘fleetingly’ in the early films, and his first sighting does not come until ‘toward the end of his last film for Essanay, *Police*’.¹⁴ The Chaplin craze, it seems, really ought to have waited a few years.

The ‘bewilderment’ that Kerr, and undoubtedly others, have experienced when encountering Chaplin’s early films for the first time ought not to be seen as resulting from failings inherent in the films themselves. I contend that such bewilderment arises rather from the anachronistic expectations that Kerr brings to the films and his own insensitivity to the cultural distance between himself and the contemporary participants of the Chaplin craze. I argue, therefore, that it is crucial to develop a historical sense of this distance in order to understand and appreciate Chaplin’s early career and films on something approaching their own terms, as opposed to, Kerr-like, principally as anticipations but as yet unrealised intimations of later critical acclaim.

What we need to acknowledge, I argue, is that Chaplin’s rise to fame took place on the far side of a historical threshold in terms of both cinema and amusement history more generally. And having acknowledged this, we need then to work to accommodate that recognition in the way we view. In rethinking Chaplin’s early career in this way I am drawing upon the insight of film historian Tom Gunning, who argues that the 1910s represent a watershed moment in American amusement culture, beyond which historians need to question their assumptions:

The enormous development of the entertainment industry since the Teens and its growing acceptance by middle class culture (and the accommodation that made this acceptance possible), has made it

¹² Kerr, *The Silent Clowns*, 80.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

difficult to understand the liberation popular entertainment offered at the beginning of the century.¹⁵

To this I would add that the increasing acceptance of mass-amusement culture since ‘the Teens’ makes it difficult to understand not only the ‘liberation’, but also the anxiety and sense of disruption that the ‘development of the entertainment industry’ evoked in the late decades of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century. What prevailing accounts of Chaplin’s career persistently overlook is how Chaplin’s initial rise to fame and early films were implicated in a particularly dynamic and formative but also volatile moment in the history of mass entertainment. This was a time when the amusement world was establishing new forms and practices, rapidly expanding its market, diversifying its audience and engaging in the process of reconfiguring American culture, and, as a result, that of the wider world also.

Enfolded within the larger context of amusements is the rapid and multifaceted development of cinema itself during the 1910s, itself a defining context for Chaplin’s early career. For the cultural critic Gilbert Seldes, writing in 1924, the movies had come such a long way during the 1910s that Chaplin’s rise to fame a decade earlier seemed already to belong to some strange time before. ‘By the time the newspapers recognized the movie as a source of circulation,’ he wrote, ‘Charlie was already a known quantity in the composition of the American mind’.¹⁶ His rise to fame had preceded ‘the days of the great moving pictures’ – the more sophisticated American feature films of the late teens and early twenties that followed in the wake of Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and helped give cultural legitimacy to the moving-picture medium.¹⁷ By 1924, movies seemed an accepted and integrated part of American culture: they were held as ‘great’ and recognised as a ‘source of circulation’. And yet, Seldes reminded the reader, it was only recently that this had been the case.

¹⁵ Tom Gunning, “The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde,” *Wide Angle* 8, nos. 3 and 4 (Fall 1986), 66.

¹⁶ Gilbert Seldes, *The Seven Lively Arts* (1924; reprint, Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2001), 42-43.

¹⁷ Seldes, *The Seven Lively Arts*, 42. On the age of ‘great features’ see: William K. Everson, *American Silent Film* (1978; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 100-101.

In more recent film historical work, 1917 has been recognised as a crucial year for cinema. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson have influentially argued that 1917 marks the crystallisation of ‘classical Hollywood cinema’ as a historical institution (constituted by both a relatively stable film style and mode of production), one which occupied a central place in American cultural life, at least up until 1960.¹⁸ Chaplin’s early career stood on the other side of that 1917 threshold in an era in which cinema was only one of many new amusements whose popularity was growing rapidly and whose institutional structures and cultural statuses were very much in flux. As Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp rightly point out in the introduction to their collection *American Cinema’s Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices* (2004), ‘the years between 1908 and 1917 arguably witness the most profound transformation in American film history to date’.¹⁹ ‘It was during these years’, they continue, ‘that cinema initiated the visual grammar and industrial structures it would retain well into the post-World War 2 era’.²⁰ Yet the most salient characteristics of this transformational decade in film history were its ‘volatility’, ‘heterogeneity’ and ‘propensity for change’.²¹ In addition to the internal affairs of ‘visual grammar’ and ‘industrial structures’, this state of flux pertained to cinema’s ‘role within the cultural landscape’ and its impact on social life.²² The national debate about this engaged not only moviegoers and industry people but preachers, politicians, reformers, social scientists, journalists, artists and writers with a whole range of not necessarily confluent agendas.²³ Chaplin rose to fame in the later part of the transformational era of cinema, during which he came to function as a lightning rod, as I will argue, for some of its most inflammatory debates, regarding: cinema’s cultural status, the longevity of the medium, its effects upon social behaviour and aesthetic sensibilities and even its implications for a

¹⁸ This periodisation of classical Hollywood cinema was most influentially articulated in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kirsten Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1985).

¹⁹ Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp, “Introduction,” in *American Cinema’s Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2004), 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 2, 2, 3.

²² *Ibid.*, 1.

²³ *Ibid.*, 5.

concept with which America had become anxiously fascinated: modernity. It is the aim of this thesis, then, to locate the Chaplin craze – as both a lasting body of films and a historical event – in the wider scheme of disruption, transformation, anxiety and release bound up with the emergent amusement culture of the decades surrounding the turn of the century.

Methodology and Keywords (Mass Culture, Emergence, Modernity)

This thesis combines empirical research into mass-amusement history with close readings of Chaplin's early films in order to illuminate the close and previously minimally explored relationship between Chaplin's film-making and public reception on the one hand, and the broader early twentieth-century history of mass-amusement culture on the other. As such, it presents itself as a work both of cultural history and film criticism. On the one hand, cultural history is used to set the terms of an aesthetic appreciation of an important body of work in the medium of film. On the other hand, Chaplin's early career offers a case study in American amusement culture and is used to illuminate ways in which that culture was changing and developing at a specific historical moment.

The cultural historical dimension of my argument relies on three key terms: 'mass culture', 'emergence' and 'modernity'. Since these terms have various potential meanings it is necessary for me to pinpoint the sense in which I use them. This is most expediently done with reference to Rob King's book *The Fun Factory: The Keystone Film Company and Emergence of Mass Culture* (2009) to which my own thesis is indebted, as the similarity of our titles suggests. King distinguishes the 'mass culture' of his title from 'popular culture'. The latter refers to the idea (or perhaps ideal) of cultural forms and practices spontaneously produced by people for themselves without deference to the official culture of the socially or politically powerful.²⁴ 'Mass culture', on the other hand, may incorporate popular culture – the spontaneous cultural practices of class and ethnic communities, for example – but it is driven by distinct imperatives, whatever various wants it may serve in the

²⁴ Rob King, *The Fun Factory: The Keystone Film Company and the Emergence of Mass Culture* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California, 2009), 9.

process.²⁵ Drawing on the work of the sociologist Paul DiMaggio and the pioneering social theorist Max Weber, King summarises the driving imperatives of mass culture as the creation of ‘widely shared (hence widely profitable) cultural experiences’ – shared, that is, across social distinctions.²⁶ Its commercial logic is that of mass production: higher profits can be made from selling an identical product, reproduced in large quantities, to as many people as possible. It follows from this that the production points of mass-produced goods or culture tend to be few and centralised while distribution points are many and dispersed.²⁷

In itself the logic of mass production is merely a business logic, but around the turn of the century it arguably began to emerge as something more than that, a culture. ‘By the onset of World War I,’ King explains, ‘the outlines of a new mass culture had begun to take shape’ and to challenge Victorian-American assumptions about the proper ‘relationship between culture and social class’.²⁸ As King explains, whereas the Victorian era in America was characterised by a ‘hierarchal cultural order that reinforced social divisions,’ the new mass culture, in line with commercial imperatives and the logic of mass production, ‘sought to integrate, rather than to divide, audiences’.²⁹ This is the broad definition of ‘mass culture’ that this thesis shares with King’s book. It is a definition that distinguishes ‘mass’ from ‘popular’ culture and acknowledges the rise of mass culture as integrally bound up with ‘[t]he complex passage from Victorian culture to the modern era’.³⁰ My thesis title refers to ‘mass amusement culture’ rather than ‘mass culture’ in order to focus attention on a specific aspect of a potentially much wider field of cultural practices.

²⁵ Ibid., 8, 12.

²⁶ Ibid., 12. See also: Paul DiMaggio, ‘Cultural Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century Boston: The Creation of an Organizational Base for High Culture,’ *Media, Culture and Society* 1, no. 4 (January 1982): 33-50; Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, vol. 2, trans. Ephraim Fischoff (1924; reprint, New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), 937.

²⁷ On mass production see: David A. Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production, 1800-1932: The Development of Manufacturing Technology in the United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1984).

²⁸ King, *The Fun Factory*, 12, 8.

²⁹ King, *The Fun Factory*, 8, 12.

³⁰ Ibid., 8.

This study relies on the basic concept of ‘mass culture’ that I have just outlined. Yet the specific ‘mass cultural’ phenomena I describe in this thesis do not merely illustrate this concept. Crucial to my thesis, as to King’s book, is a historical view of mass culture as something emergent in the decades surrounding the turn of the century. Raymond Williams provides a useful framework for clarifying this idea of the ‘emergent’. Rightly conceiving of culture as a perpetually dynamic process rather than only a series of stages, Williams offers three categories for describing the forces at play at any one moment in shaping a whole culture: the ‘residual’, the ‘emergent’ and the ‘dominant’.³¹ For the purposes of this thesis it is enough to understand that the ‘emergent’ mass-amusement culture I will describe co-existed in an uneasy relationship with the ‘dominant’ cultural values and assumptions of Victorian-American culture and that these elements were involved in processes of conflict and accommodation from which the mass culture of the modern era would emerge. The mass-cultural forms and practices I describe in relation to Chaplin’s early film career rarely integrated a cross-class public in a smooth and uncontroversial way. In fact, the socially heterogeneous makeup of both the mass-cultural forms and the ‘mass’ audiences that consumed them was often accentuated rather than obscured or suppressed. Still, my use of the term ‘mass culture’ is necessary in this context to refer to cultural practices that were commercially driven and orientated to a large cross-class public.

My use of the term ‘mass culture’ needs to be considered in relation to the influential usage developed by the Frankfurt school, and specifically Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, in the 1930s and early 1940s. Developed against a background of an advanced and powerful mass-media industry in the United States and the rise of totalitarian political regimes in Germany and Russia, these theorists regarded mass-produced entertainment and culture with grave suspicion and eloquently expounded their sinister potential to pacify, homogenise and manipulate its ‘audience’ into conformity with the interests of the powerful.³² In some ways, this view of mass culture overlaps with the definition that I use in this thesis. If mass culture offers ‘widely shared (hence widely profitable) cultural experiences’, this, potentially at least, involves obscuring class differences, neutralising class meanings

³¹ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121-127.

³² Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944; reprint London: Verso, 1997).

and hence disabling class struggle even as social inequalities are perpetuated.³³ Yet the assumption of the Frankfurt school is that this culture is an established, dominant and effective order, which it certainly was not in the decades surrounding the turn of the century in America.

The final key term to discuss is ‘modernity’, which was closely bound up with emerging mass-cultural forms and practices. This close relationship will become clearer in the following section explaining the idea of an amusement ‘craze’. But first, two meanings of modernity must be considered. On the one hand, modernity describes specific features of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century life that distinguished it from the past, including the use of new technologies in communications and transport, new techniques of manufacture, the shift towards an urban society and the flowering of the metropolis. On the other hand, however, modernity has been understood as a social, cultural and sensory break with the past that is experienced as shock and disruption. In early film studies, an academic field which I will define further in this introduction, this conception of modernity has often been privileged to support a view of cinema as a crucial institution of modernity, as at once a technological and economic product of the wider circumstances of modernity and as producing forms with a special experiential affinity with modernity’s disruptive nature.³⁴ Gunning, a leading scholar in this field, posits ‘shock, surprise and trauma’ as common qualities of both early cinema and modernity and, drawing on Walter Benjamin, has suggested ways in which cinema-going may have helped acclimatise people to the rhythms and perceptual demands of modern life.³⁵ Other scholars, meanwhile, including David Bordwell and Charlie

³³ King, *The Fun Factory*, 12.

³⁴ See for example: Tom Gunning, ‘The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde,’ in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker (London: BFI, 1990), 56-62; Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Miriam Hansen, ‘The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism,’ *Modernism/Modernity* 6, no. 2 (1999): 59-77.

³⁵ Tom Gunning, “‘Now You See It, Now You Don’t’: The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions,’ *Velvet Light Trap* 32 (Fall 1993): 4-12; Walter Benjamin, ‘Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,’ *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Ardent (1936; reprint, London: Pimlico, 1999), 211-244.

Keil, have criticised such claims for over-emphasising a particular view of modernity and selectively focusing on only some aspects of early cinema.³⁶

Joe Kember suggests an approach that offers a way of moving beyond the restrictive polemic of this debate. He points out that modernity was a term in use at the turn of the century and that there were ‘a variety of perspectives concerning modernity’.³⁷ Within this variety there were perspectives that ‘sought to emphasise the disempowering and alienating aspects of modernity’ alongside those that concerned ‘the more familiar, cyclical, even-paced routines’ of modern life and its familiar and comforting continuities with tradition.³⁸ Representations of modern life from these various perspectives ‘were not neutral or natural renderings of the material conditions of everyday life’ but partial responses, all legitimate as such but only when considered amongst the variety of different and sometimes even contradictory responses.³⁹ Particularly relevant to my thesis is Kember’s claim that commercial entertainments around the turn of the century were involved in ‘marketing modernity’ and capitalising on ‘a perpetual sense of ongoing crisis’.⁴⁰ This was done in various ways, including presenting stylised versions of a particularly sensational perspective on modernity, in ways that both inflamed and contained anxieties about contemporary life. As a context for Chaplin’s early film career, my thesis focuses on how the perceived, promoted and contested rise of new mass-cultural amusements around the turn of the century dramatised the ‘ongoing crisis’ of modernity. This is, I acknowledge, a partial perspective on both modernity and Chaplin’s early career. Yet I locate the exaggerations and the bias towards a particular view of modernity as belonging to contemporary sources which I acknowledge to be partial. Further research on both early mass amusements and Chaplin’s early film career would certainly focus on the interplay between the familiar and traditional and the new and the surprising.

³⁶ David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1997); Charlie Keil, *Early American Cinema in Transition: Story, Style, and Filmmaking, 1907-1913* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001).

³⁷ Joe Kember, *Marketing Modernity: Victorian Popular Shows and Early Cinema* (Exeter University Press, 2009), 16.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 16, 19.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

Chaplin and the Transformational Culture of ‘Crazes’

My reinterpretation, or counter-narration, of Chaplin’s early career hinges on the concept of the amusement ‘craze’ as a larger cultural phenomenon of the period between approximately 1880 and 1920. During that time, this term had a particular meaning and function which was closely related to the revolution in amusement culture then taking place. It was during this period that many of the mass-cultural forms of amusement that would become important, and in some cases defining, aspects of twentieth-century American culture first emerged: roller skating, cycling, amusement parks, automobiles, pop hits, cinema, the star system. Many of these were to become stably integrated into mainstream culture in the twentieth century; when they first emerged, however, they were often mired in controversy. They were reported, condemned, promoted and, of course, fiercely enjoyed as crazes. My point is that ‘the Chaplin craze’ was not unique. In fact, it followed a pattern in line with recent precedents and, moreover, had plenty of contemporary parallels. It existed in a larger matrix of amusement crazes which was in turn an expression of cultural transformation. Viewing Chaplin’s early career in this context permits fresh insights into both Chaplin – how his early films were perceived and how he rose to fame – and the emergent mass-amusement culture of the period.

A close relationship between crazes and the context of emergent modernity is suggested by the history of the word ‘craze’ itself. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the earliest meaning of the noun, dating back to the sixteenth century, was ‘a crack, breach, cleft, flaw’ or ‘a flaw, defect, unsoundness; an infirmity of health or of brain.’⁴¹ It developed in a new direction in the early nineteenth century, becoming ‘an insane or irrational fancy; a mania’, thus transferring its emphasis from the general condition of unsoundness or infirmity to the particular fixation of the infirm mind.⁴² Concurrently with this shift it entered the semantic sphere of fashion: ‘Also in weakened sense: a capricious and usually temporary enthusiasm; the craze = (all) the rage’.⁴³ From the mid-1870s onwards, in America at least, it

⁴¹ *The Oxford English Dictionary, Volume III*, ed. James A. H. Murray, Henry Bradley, W. A. Craigie and C. T. Onions, 2nd ed. prepared by J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), “craze.”

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

begun to be applied to the ‘capricious and usually temporary enthusiasm’ of the American public for new amusements, and from this moment its usage surged (fig. 1).⁴⁴

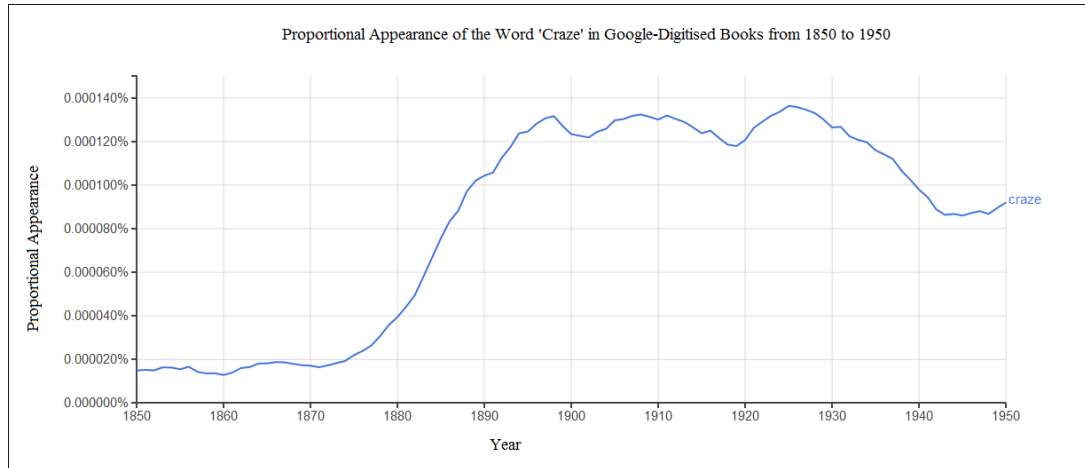


Fig. 0.3 The use of the term ‘craze’ in American English surged from around 1880 when it entered the semantic sphere of fashion. Graph created using Google Books’ Ngram Viewer.⁴⁵

While many things were casually referred to as ‘crazes’ during this period – from fancy buttons to gymnastics – in some instances the term took on a special status.⁴⁶ Certain crazes were more than amusement novelties, though they were also that: they were national controversies that divided opinion across the country and evoked fierce debates. The idea of a ‘craze’ became a genre of news event, as is selectively illustrated by a small sample of newspaper titles and subtitles from across the period that may be taken as indicative: “Blocking the Wheels. Common Council to Encounter the Roller Skating Craze”; “Roller Skating Craze. Dr. Talmage Preaches a Sermon on the Mania”; “The Bicycle Craze. Reformed Presbyterians Are Opposed to Riding on Sunday”; “Wife Has Bicycle Craze. Rode Away in May and

⁴⁴ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. ‘craze.’

⁴⁵ *Ngram Viewer*, Google Books, accessed January 27, 2014, <http://books.google.com/ngrams>. Ngram Viewer is an application for tracing the usage of words and phrases through time. It bases its results on a corpus of 5,195,769 works digitised by Google Inc. See: Jean-Baptiste Michel, Yuan Kui Shen, Aviva Presser Aiden, Adrian Veres, Matthew K. Gray, William Brockman, The Google Books Team, Joseph P. Pickett, Dale Hoiberg, Dan Clancy, Peter Norvig, Jon Orwant, Steven Pinker, Martin A. Nowak, and Erez Lieberman Aiden, “Quantitative Analysis of Culture Using Millions of Digitized Books,” *Science* 331, no. 6014 (January 14, 2011): 176-182.

⁴⁶ “The Button Craze,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 10, 1900, 11; “There’s a Craze for Gymnastics,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 26, 1900, 11.

Never Got Back. Husband Wants Divorce”; “Bear Dance Craze. New York Society’s Fondness for “Bunny Hug” Shocks”; “Modern Dance Craze Hits Puritan Capital”.⁴⁷ It is evident from titles such as these that major crazes of the period were about more than the merits of various amusements. They were often the staging ground for struggles between various factions and competing world views; they offered occasions to debate contentious issues including the status of religion, social hierarchy, gender roles, social mobility, personal and public morality and changing attitudes towards the ‘new’ in popular culture.

Commenting on the surge of interest in social dancing in 1914, for example — the same year that Chaplin entered the movies — the Harvard psychologist, philosopher and cultural commentator Hugo Münsterberg was convinced that:

[o]nly ten years ago such a dancing fever would have been impossible. People danced but they did not take it seriously. It was set off from life and not allowed to penetrate it. It had still essentially the role which belonged to it in a puritanic, hardworking society. But the last decade has swept away that New England temper which was so averse to the sensuous enjoyment of life, and which long kept an invisible control over the spirit of the whole nation.⁴⁸

For Münsterberg, the dance craze symbolised a profound historical development that ought not be taken lightly. ‘Can we deny’, he implored his reader, ‘that this recent craze which, like a dancing mania, has whirled over the country, is a significant expression of deep cultural changes which have come over America?’⁴⁹ The same questions also attended other new forms of mass amusement in the following decades, including amusement parks, cabarets, cinemas and, as I will explore in Part II of this thesis, Chaplin himself. According to one illustrative headline in September 1915 in the *Kansas City Star*, the city of Kansas was ‘in the throes of a movies

⁴⁷ “Blocking the Wheels. Common Council to Encounter the Roller Skating Craze,” *New York Herald*, March 10, 1885, 4; “Roller Skating Craze. Dr. Talmage Preaches a Sermon on the Mania,” *Wheeling Register*, 13 April 1885, 1; “The Bicycle Craze. Reformed Presbyterians Are Opposed to Riding on Sunday,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 25, 1898, 2; “Wife Has Bicycle Craze. Rode Away in May and Never Got Back Husband Wants Divorce,” *Wilkes-Barré Times*, August 30, 1899, 1; “Bear Dance Craze. New York Society’s Fondness for “Bunny Hug” Shocks,” *Morning Oregonian*, January 15, 1912, 3; “Modern Dance Craze Hits Puritan Capital,” *Boston Journal*, May 11, 1914, 7.

⁴⁸ Hugo Münsterberg, *Psychology and Social Sanity* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1914), 275.

⁴⁹ Münsterberg, 1914, 275.

mania epidemic' known as 'Chaplinoia'.⁵⁰ Though tonally flippant, the article delivers on the promise of sensational controversy implicit in the rhetoric of its title. 'Why', asked the reporter, 'should a comedian, whose work is of the broadest slapstick variety, attain such a vogue?'⁵¹ The question was not only about Chaplin, as this thesis will demonstrate, but about the 'deep cultural changes' which, in Münsterberg's words, had 'come over America' in the early twentieth century.

The Field

Chaplin scholars have struggled to find productive ways of accommodating Chaplin's early career within their larger Chaplin narratives. One reason for this, I argue, is that they have generally been unwilling to situate Chaplin in a sympathetic relation to contemporary mass-amusement culture, preferring to configure him as resistant to and apart from the time-bounded imperatives and preferences of his own moment. By contrast, the aim of this thesis is to explore how interestingly integrated into, responsive and contributory to that mass-cultural amusement scene, was Chaplin's extraordinary creativity. While running counter to the mainstream of Chaplin's critical legacy, this argument is consistent with two broader critical streams beyond Chaplin scholarship, which I will outline below: the surge of interest in, and revaluation of, early cinema (1895-1915) that began in the late 1970s; and the smaller scale but in some ways comparable reconsideration of comedy as a cinematic mode undertaken in the 1990s and 2000s by critics including R. L. Rutsky, Justin Wyatt and Frank Krutnik.

Early cinema studies constitute a diverse field of research but, as Thomas Elsaesser has argued in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative* (1990), it coalesces in a common aim: to counter teleological accounts of film history, often based on evaluating the 'aesthetic excellence and artistic value' of selected films and filmmakers, with an 'epistemological, anti-teleological and "materialist" history of the cinema', one that takes into account 'demographic, economic, industrial,

⁵⁰ "Have you the Chaplinoia? Kansas City in the Throes of a Movie Mania Epidemic," *Kansas City Star*, September 3, 1915, 6.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

technological' determinants, as well as social and cultural context.⁵² This is not to say that the filmic text is irrelevant to film history, only that it is not the only or sovereign evidence available and that an effort needs to be made to understand films in the wider terms of their time.

A revisionist approach to film comedy, meanwhile, is clearly articulated by Frank Krutnik in the introduction to his edited collection, *Hollywood Comedians: The Film Reader* (2003). As Krutnik explains, until at least the 1980s, academic critics had either ignored film comedy, or else their attempts to take it 'seriously' within an academic context had submerged its distinctive 'comic pleasures'.⁵³ 'Those comedians who have attained critical respectability', Krutnik pointed out, 'are generally considered to have 'transcended' the vulgarities of low comedy, as is the case with the canonical silent clowns of the 1920s.'⁵⁴ In response to this situation, Krutnik advocates scholarly approaches that can legitimise study of the otherwise marginalised aspects of film comedy.

What this thesis inherits from these revisionist approaches both to early cinema and film comedy is a resistance to overly teleological argumentation and, often related, to a critical paradigm which attempts to establish an evaluative opposition between art, on the one hand, and merely ephemeral amusement, on the other. In a broad sense, this thesis might be seen as part of a larger critical movement in which revisionist approaches to both early cinema and film comedy are encompassed. The rise of serious historical and aesthetic appreciations of cinema in the 1960s and 1970s had tended to relegate both early film and film comedy to a marginal status: early cinema was *temporally* marginal to the grand narrative of film history, while comedy was *modally* marginal to appreciations of film art. The

⁵² Thomas Elsaesser, "Early Cinema: From Linear History to Mass Media Archaeology," in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, Thomas Elsaesser ed. (London: BFI, 1990), 3. On early cinema studies in general see: Elsaesser, "Early Cinema," 1-8. For a more comprehensive discussion of changing historiographical approaches to cinema see Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practise*, (New York: Knopf, 1985).

⁵³ Frank Krutnik, "General Introduction," in *Hollywood Comedians: The Film Reader*, ed. Frank Krutnik (London: Routledge 2003), 2.

⁵⁴ Ibid. See also: R. L. Rutsky and Justin Wyatt, "Serious Pleasures: Cinematic Pleasure and the Notion of Fun," *Cinema Journal* 30, no. 1 (Autumn 1990): 3-19; Henry Jenkins, *What Made Pistachio Nuts? Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); Steve Neale, "Comedy," in *Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2000).

scholars that I have referred to, however, have made it their task to re-map the relationship between the margins and the centre on both scores.

Chaplin, I argue, provides a valuable yet, until now, unrealised opportunity for this project. While Chaplin has not been ignored by revisionist scholars of early cinema or film comedy, he has not featured as a major point of interest within either field.⁵⁵ This is not surprising, since both projects aim to look beyond cinema history as a canon of ‘great masters’ in order to bring other less conventionally heroic personnel in to the picture, as well as other, less conventionally celebrated areas of social, cultural and aesthetic experience.⁵⁶ From this point of view, Chaplin is potentially emblematic of the kind of cinema history that revisionist scholars seek to revise. As a result of this stance, however, it seems that Chaplin’s importance in film and cultural history, *despite* his later reputation, has not received the attention it is due.

The major scholarly work on Chaplin and his American cultural context is Charles Maland’s book *Chaplin and American Culture: The Evolution of a Star Image* (1989). Due to its central position in Chaplin scholarship, I will here briefly explain how my own thesis relates to and differs from it. Maland aims to ‘trace[...] the complex evolution of [Chaplin’s] star image in the United States and the dynamic relationship between Chaplin and American culture’ right through Chaplin’s career, relating it to historical developments including ‘internal advances in the film industry, like the transition to sound, and external political and social events, like the on-set of the Great Depression and the Cold War.’⁵⁷ While the book is very effective as an end-to-end cultural history of Chaplin’s career, Chaplin’s formative years in the mid-1910 suffer because Maland limits his contextual framework to ‘historical developments in the United States between World War I and the present’.⁵⁸ This temporal framing excludes the crucial developments of the

⁵⁵ This is exemplified by Chaplin’s absence from major edited collections on pre-classical cinema. Keil and Stamp’s *American Cinema’s Transitional Era* (2004), for example, focuses on the period of 1908 to 1917, precisely the moment of Chaplin’s rise to fame yet he receives only a single passing reference. Keil and Stamp, “Introduction,” 2.

⁵⁶ Elsaesser, “Early Cinema,” 3.

⁵⁷ Charles Maland, *Chaplin and American Culture: The Evolution of a Star Image* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), xiv.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

late-nineteenth and early twentieth century, outside of which, I argue, an understanding of Chaplin's film-making and rise to fame in the mid-1910s will always be circumscribed.

In the absence of this pre-World War I historical context, Maland's account of Chaplin's early years in film tends to fall back on the canonical teleological narrative of Chaplin's career and to historicise in the mode of an afterthought. He limits his attention to the better-known, but in many ways atypical, films whose critical acclaim is already assured: *The Tramp* and *The Bank* from 1915, *The Vagabond* from 1916 and *The Immigrant* and *Easy Street* from 1917.⁵⁹ He then attempts to explain Chaplin's growing popularity entirely in terms of his handling of romance in these films – something applicable to Chaplin's later features of the 1920s and 1930s but hardly a consistent characteristic of his early work. 'In a society that was becoming increasingly bureaucratized and hierarchical,' Maland explains, 'losing a woman to a man of higher status or wealth was not an uncommon experience for men'.⁶⁰ It being so, '[s]ome men in his audience could identify and empathize with his *failures* in love', while 'women could identify with Charlie's tenderness toward his beloved, even his renunciation.'⁶¹ Maland's historicising efforts here seem narrowly selective and, moreover, not specific to Chaplin. That Maland's understanding of Chaplin's early career is hampered by his post-World War I frame of reference is most evident in his anachronistic comparison of Chaplin's early popularity in 1915 to 'the Davy Crockett phenomenon of the mid-1950s.'⁶² There are, as I will show, important comparisons to be made that are both more temporally appropriate and more enlightening.

Aside from Maland's work, however, there have been less well-known, more dispersed studies conducted on Chaplin with which my own approach aligns more comfortably. In his essay "Work, Ideology, and Chaplin's Tramp" (1990), Charles Musser insists, as do I, that critics have overemphasised Chaplin's evolving 'artistic integrity' and status as an 'eternal clown' in their discussions of his early films, with

⁵⁹ Maland, *Chaplin and American Culture*, 22-23, 30-32.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Maland, *Chaplin and American Culture*, 10.

the result of ‘sever[ing] him not only from the very social, economic, and cultural context in which he worked but also from the context in which his films were initially seen’.⁶³ While Musser focuses almost exclusively on Chaplin’s appeal to ‘working-class audiences in particular’, Rob King has since built on and complicated Musser’s analysis in his book *The Fun Factory: The Keystone Film Company and the Emergence of Mass Culture* (2009).⁶⁴ Rather than focus on Chaplin’s appeal to a single social group, King situates his ‘meteoric rise to fame’ in relation to broader processes of cultural change, specifically in relation to an ‘emerging public sphere of mass culture’.⁶⁵ Developing on what were only hints in Musser’s essay, King examines the ways in which Chaplin’s early films negotiated between the vitality of nineteenth-century ‘working-class subcultures’ (associated with such social spaces as the concert saloon) and the commercial imperative of an emerging mass culture to ‘obscure[...] class differences by burying them within widely shared (hence widely profitable) cultural experiences.’⁶⁶ Meanwhile, Jennifer Bean has advanced a more theoretical understanding of the relation between early Chaplin and mass culture, exploring his early fame and films through the perspective of contemporary ideas about the nature of subjectivity as it was being reconceived by European and American intellectual figures including Gabriel Tarde, William James and James Mark Baldwin, among others.⁶⁷ Bean reads Chaplin’s films and the ‘historical phenomenon of Chaplin’s star status’ as symptomatic of ‘the shifting significance of selfhood in an age of mechanical reproducibility’, claiming that the centrality of

⁶³ Charles Musser, “Work, Ideology, and Chaplin’s Tramp,” in *Resisting Images: Essays on Cinema and History*, eds. Robert Sklar and Charles Musser (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990) 37, 43, 37.

⁶⁴ Musser, “Work,” 62.

⁶⁵ King, *The Fun Factory*, 66, 71.

⁶⁶ King, *The Fun Factory*, 71, 12.

⁶⁷ Jennifer Bean, “The Art of Imitation: The Originality of Charlie Chaplin and Other Moving-Image Myths,” in *Slapstick Comedy*, eds. Rob King and Tom Paulus (New York: Routledge, 2010), 240, 248. See also Jennifer Bean, “Charles Chaplin: The Object Life of Mass Culture,” in *Flickers of Desire: Movie Stars of the 1910s*, ed. Jennifer Bean (New Brunswick, New Jersey; London: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 242-263. Other scholars have also explored the possible relationships between Chaplin and contemporary theories of self-hood in other ways: Jonathan Auerbach, *Body Shots: Early Cinema’s Incarnations* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2007), 46-50; Lee Grieveson, “Cinema Studies and the Conduct of Conduct,” *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham: Duke University Press 2008), 6-11; David Trotter, *Cinema and Modernism* (Malden; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 181-201.

mimetic modes of behaviour to both Chaplin's screen persona and expressions of Chaplin fandom 'mark[...] a phenomenal surge in the ideation of mass culture.'⁶⁸

This thesis inherits and furthers the work of Musser, King and Bean in reassessing Chaplin. Like them it focuses on Chaplin's early rather than his later films, and on his aesthetic particularities as just one part of his broader significance. However, this thesis goes beyond this existing scholarship to bring into attentive focus for the first time the closely integrated relationship between Chaplin and the historical phenomenon of an emergent mass-*amusement* culture. Canonical and revisionist critics alike tend to analyse early Chaplin in terms of his distinction from contemporary mass amusement. I argue, by contrast, that far from being a question of distinction, Chaplin himself intensified and even personified an emergent mass-amusement culture, and that in doing so, he appropriated and emblematised both the controversies and the giddy liberation that attended those amusements.

Timeliness

2014 marks the centenary of Chaplin's first appearance on cinema screens, and festivities across Europe, America and beyond have demonstrated that Chaplin continues to inspire curiosity, fascination and saintly devotion.⁶⁹ Yet changes in our experience and understanding of Chaplin's career are afoot, in which the early films will undoubtedly play a central role. While Chaplin's reputation clearly still rests on his feature films, it seems his early career exerts a particular fascination today. Press reviews of Peter Ackroyd's timely biography *Charlie Chaplin* (2014) almost unanimously seized on the biographer's bold statement: 'In this year, 1915, Chaplin became the most famous man in the world.'⁷⁰ At the same time, the existing

⁶⁸ Bean, "The Art of Imitation," 238, 240.

⁶⁹ In 2014 a wealth of festivals and screenings have marked the centenary of Chaplin's first films in 1914, among them the "Slapstick Festival 2014" in Bristol, UK; "The San Francisco Silent Film Festival: The Little Tramp at 100"; Film Forum NYC's screening series, "The Tramp at 100". Most significantly perhaps, the l'Immagine Ritrovata festival in Bologna opened with a three-day Chaplin conference, "The 100: The Birth of the Tramp", bringing together international scholars and enthusiasts, as well as members of the Chaplin family.

narratives and critical accounts of Chaplin's early career seem increasingly insufficient to follow up the promise of this statement, or to assist viewers in sharing something of the excitement that these films must have offered in their original moment.

Fortunately, a reassessment of Chaplin's early career is possible now as never before. As of 2010 Chaplin's early films are commercially available on DVD thanks to large-scale restoration and release projects. Between 2003 and 2004, the Chaplin Essanay films of 1915 and his Mutual films of 1916 and 1917 were released as comprehensive DVD collections by the BFI.⁷¹ In 2010 an international collaboration between the British Film Institute in England, Progetto Chaplin in Italy and Lobster Films in France resulted in the DVD release of thirty six of Chaplin's Keystone films, almost his complete output of 1914. *A Thief Catcher* (1914), in which Chaplin plays a brief role as policeman, was discovered too late for the Keystone DVD release. *Her Friend the Bandit* now remains the only Chaplin film still presumed lost.⁷²

The implications of these acts of restoration and DVD release for critical engagement with Chaplin's work are significant. For one thing, scholars are now able to scrutinise these films more carefully, no longer having to work from memory in relation to films seen at internationally far-flung archives and festivals. A general audience, meanwhile, no longer needs to rely on written accounts provided by a minority of critics and scholars. The accessibility of the films opens new possibilities for dialogue and critical exchange. Furthermore, the availability of works from

⁷⁰ Ackroyd, *Charlie Chaplin*, 80. See also: John Carey, "From Tramp to Tyrant," *Sunday Times*, March 30, 2014, 29-30; Lucy Hughes-Hallett, "Book of the Week," *Sunday Telegraph*, March 30, 2014, 27; Peter Conrad, "A Superstar who Suffered in Silence," *The Observer*, April 6, 2014, 36; Peter Conrad, "Forget London: Charlie Chaplin Belongs to us All," *Sunday Independent*, April 20, 2014, 22; Simon Callow, "The Divine Comedy of a Very Difficult Man," *Guardian Weekly*, June 6, 2014, 36; Roger Lewis, "'Charlie Chaplin', by Peter Ackroyd," *The Spectator*, April 12, 2014, 22.

⁷¹ On Chaplin restoration, video and DVD releases, see: David Shepard interviewed by Tim Lussier, "The Search for the Chaplin Mutuals: An Interview with Renowned Film Preservationist David Shepard," *Silents Are Golden*, 2006, accessed July 15, 2014, <http://www.silentsaregolden.com/articles/davidshepardinterview.html>.

⁷² *Charlie Chaplin: The Essanay Films, Volume 1*, DVD, (BFI, 2003); *Charlie Chaplin: The Essanay Films, Volume 2*, DVD, (BFI, 2003); *Charlie Chaplin: The Mutual Films, Volume 1*, DVD, (BFI, 2003); *Charlie Chaplin: The Mutual Films, Volume 2*, DVD, (BFI, 2004); *Chaplin at Keystone*, DVD, (BFI, 2010). The missing film is a Keystone short, 'Her Friend the Bandit'. Another film that may be considered a lost Chaplin is 'A Woman of the Sea', an unreleased production of the Chaplin Film Company which Chaplin neither directed nor featured prominently in.

across the wide spectrum of Chaplin's corpus significantly destabilises the conventional routes through which his work has previously been encountered. For decades, scholars and film fans have by necessity entered the corpus through the grand archways of the 'classic' features of the 1920s and 1930s. It might now be both possible, and desirable, to begin elsewhere.⁷³ The teleological dilemma that beset Kerr – being unable to take the early film on their own terms '[b]ecause we are so enamoured of the later Chaplin, because we know what he *did* become' – may begin to ease.⁷⁴

Alongside recent film restoration projects, another precondition of this thesis must be mentioned: the rise of digital archives and archiving technology. Digital archives have allowed me to build up a picture of aspects of the Chaplin's contemporary reception, and of the amusement culture of which it was a part, that are by their nature and essence diffuse and ephemeral. Thus it has been possible, for example, to excavate the roller-skating craze of the mid-1880s, an event rarely mentioned in history books, yet, as it turns out, significant in the development of mass-amusement culture, and relevant to a reading of Chaplin's early films – *The Rink* (1916) being only the most obvious. In researching crazes for this thesis I have conducted extensive trawls of two major databases of historic American newspapers: the Readex Digital Collection's 'Archive of Americana' and the Library of Congress's 'Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers' collection.⁷⁵ In relation to Chaplin specifically I have made extensive use of the 'Media History Digital Library' online resource to search contemporary fan and trade publications.⁷⁶ The digital availability of these resources has made possible some of the detailed contextual research for this thesis that would have proved much more cumbersome at an earlier moment.

⁷³ This is an over-simplification of the reception history of Chaplin's films. During the late twentieth century many people's first experience of Chaplin would have been the Mutual shorts that were televised during the 1950s and 60s. However, the point holds that the classic features have long dominated as the basis of his critical reputation.

⁷⁴ Kerr, *The Silent Clowns*, 75.

⁷⁵ *Archive of Americana*, accessed July 15, 2014, <http://www.readex.com/readex/index.cfm?content=93>; *Chronicling America: American Historic Newspapers*, accessed July 15, 2014, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

⁷⁶ *Media History Digital Library*, accessed July 15, 2014, <http://mediahistoryproject.org/>.

Thesis Structure

Chaplin's involvement in the craze culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had two dimensions, which form the structuring principles of Parts I and II of this thesis respectively. Part I consists of three chapters which focus on how Chaplin used other amusement crazes in his films and thereby channelled their social energies into his comedy. Each chapter focuses on a different illustrative amusement that Chaplin uses in his films: roller skating, dance and moving pictures. I might equally have chosen other amusements: boxing, most notably, features in several Chaplin films, and was also an important part of the turbulent amusement scene of the period.⁷⁷ Part II consists of two chapters which explore how Chaplin himself became a craze. The first chapter examines the phenomenon of the Chaplin craze and demonstrates how Chaplin's fame was constituted by the same dynamics and via the same rhetoric of controversy that attended other new amusements. This chapter will address both the extra-textual commentary that surrounded Chaplin's films and the films themselves, exploring their capacity to incite and sustain critical debate, both individually and as series. The second chapter of Part II will examine the ways in which Chaplin's films and fame were both implicated in the temporal rhythms of an emerging mass culture.

Viewed through the dominant critical framework, early Chaplin can seem like an uncanny double of the Chaplin we know from the later features, familiar in appearance but strangely different from the beloved Tramp. Watching these early films we may find ourselves frustratingly locked out of the excitement that Chaplin apparently generated in the mid-1910s, unable to comprehend the peculiar idolatry that he attracted and the wider significance that was vested in him. But if so, it is the result of a particular framing of Chaplin, not a deficiency in the films themselves. By emphasising refinement and transcendence, the dominant critical frame tends to sublimate some of the delightful craziness, as it were, of Chaplin's films – the potent sense of disruption and release which they are still able to offer spectators today. By

⁷⁷ *The Knockout* (1914); *The Champion* (1915); *City Lights* (1936). See also: Kasia Body, *Boxing: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 110.

reframing those aspects of Chaplin's early films in the context of an emergent mass culture, this thesis aims to see Chaplin's early work recognised for its distinctive qualities, and revitalised in the service of a richer understanding not only of his own career but also of early twentieth-century American culture.

An editorial note: Following conventional practice for writing on Chaplin, I use 'Chaplin' to refer to the director and the man, and 'Charlie' to refer to his onscreen persona.

PART I. CHAPLIN AND THE AMUSEMENT CRAZES

Never within my memory or yours has there been in this country such a wide, deep, high popular agitation on the subject of amusements.

—Thomas De Witt Talmage, 1885

Part I comprises three chapters, each focused on a particular amusement craze: roller skating, social dance and moving pictures respectively. In the first part of each chapter, Chaplin is temporarily set aside while an account of an amusement craze is offered that narrates its trajectory and furnishes it with illuminating detail. In the second part of each chapter, specific Chaplin films become the focus of attention, and are explored in the light of the knowledge laid out in the first section. The purpose of the detailed accounts of individual crazes in each chapter is to provide the necessary background to appreciate topical allusions and subtexts within specific Chaplin films, as well as developmental trajectories across films between 1914 and 1916. However, they also serve another function to be activated belatedly in Part II, which explores Chaplin's reception and rising fame in the mid-1910s as a mass-cultural phenomenon. The three craze case studies of Part I prepare the ground for Part II by establishing (1) the cultural climate in which the Chaplin craze took place, one in which 'new' amusements emerged frequently and were taken seriously as signs of the times; and (2) the typical rhetoric and narrative trajectory that constituted the amusement craze in general as a public 'event', an archetypal news story into which various new amusements could be inserted and with which the American public were, by 1915, very familiar. Thus Parts I and II work together to link the cultural phenomenon of Chaplin's rise with other amusement crazes in the period between 1880 and 1920 during which American leisure underwent the dramatic transformations of commercialisation and mass-orientation.

CHAPTER 1

CHAPLIN AND THE ROLLER-SKATING CRAZE

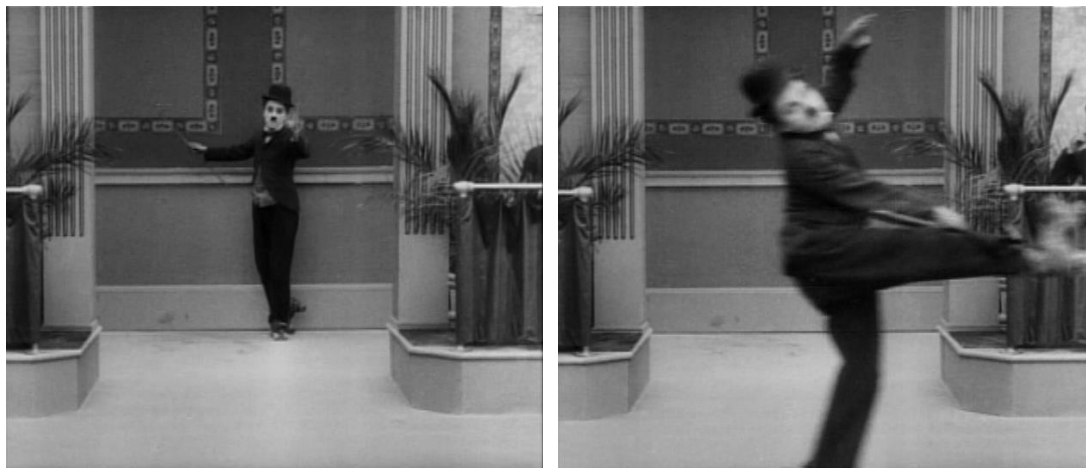


Fig. 1.1 and 1.2. Chaplin theatrically reveals an unexpected talent for roller skating in *The Rink* (1916).

With characteristic panache, Chaplin makes his onscreen skating debut in *The Rink* (1916). He reveals a mastery of the skates with a theatrical flourish, presenting himself between the Hellenic columns of the rink's entranceway (fig. 1.1), then gliding expertly across the floor (fig. 1.2), past the static camera which is left to linger momentarily on the empty frame as though stunned. An iconic image of Chaplin had arrived on screen. Its status as such was enhanced twenty years later when Chaplin exhibited his skating skills again in the feature film *Modern Times* (1936), a film which, as Michael North has suggested, plays a curatorial role in selecting and reframing routines from Chaplin's early career for posterity.¹ Though Chaplin skates in only two films, and those twenty years apart, the image of him doing so has undoubtedly registered in the popular conception of Chaplin. Not only is his skating frequently mentioned by film critics, but it is also visually conspicuous in Chaplin's material legacy. To take only two of the most obvious examples, a photograph of Chaplin on skates serves to iconise the comedian on the cover of his pictorial biography *My Life in Pictures: The Illustrated Story of a Comic Genius* (1972) (fig. 1.3), while elements of Chaplin's skating routine from *The Rink* feature

¹ Michael North, *Machine-Age Comedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 188.

prominently in the title sequence of Kevin Brownlow's and David Gill's influential BBC documentary, *Unknown Chaplin* (1983) (fig. 1.4).²



Figs. 1.3 and 1.4. The image of Chaplin on skates on the cover of *Charles Chaplin: My Life in Pictures* (1972) and the title sequence of the BBC documentary *Unknown Chaplin* (1983).

Chaplin on skates has been widely perceived as a poignantly appropriate image for Chaplin; a survey of the major critical monographs on Chaplin reveals why. According to John McCabe, *The Rink* was ‘the best chance yet in his career to exhibit his incredible grace of movement’.³ For David Robinson similarly, *The Rink* is ‘the most balletic of all Chaplin’s performances’.⁴ For Gerald Mast, ‘Chaplin on skates was like the Greek tragedian in buskins; the skates ennobled him, increased his stature, magnified his grace.’⁵ As the exalted language of these statements suggests, a roller-skating Chaplin appeals because it emblematises a larger claim about Chaplin’s career: that his films, as Donald McCaffrey puts it, ‘elevated the often labelled “lowly” slapstick to what some critics call “high art”’.⁶ *Modern Times* was to offer roller skating as a banal modern amusement (that belongs in the ‘toy

² Charles Chaplin, *My Life in Pictures* (London: Bodley Head, 1974); Kevin Brownlow and David Gill, *Unknown Chaplin* (London: Network, 1983), DVD.

³ John McCabe, *Charlie Chaplin* (London: Robson, 1978), 92.

⁴ David Robinson, *Chaplin: The Mirror of Opinion* (London: Secker & Warburg, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 30.

⁵ Gerald Mast, *The Comic Mind: Comedy and the Movies* (Indianapolis; New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1973), 79.

⁶ Donald McCaffrey, ‘Introduction,’ in *Focus on Chaplin*, ed. Donald McCaffrey (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 5.

department' of a department store). Taken on these terms, the transformation of a mere plaything for children into ennobling buskins when appropriated by Chaplin neatly provides a demonstration *in extremis* of Chaplin's famed artistic powers.

But Chaplin's skating, particularly in *The Rink*, might also be seen as emblematic of another side of Chaplin, which has tended to be neglected by a critical insistence on the classical virtues of gracefulness and artistic transcendence.⁷ As athletically impressive as it is, Charlie's mastery of the skates is also brazenly absurd, a crazy non-sequitur. To put it in the context of the film, Charlie's appearance at the rink follows his work as a waiter at a fancy restaurant where his indiscipline and physical incapacity for the role are prominently on show: he fails repeatedly to enter or exit the kitchen through the right door, leading invariably to messy collisions; he makes a great show over the preparation of a cocktail which he then accidentally tosses over his shoulder; he leaves a bar of soap and a scrubbing brush in a customer's meal. In moving from the restaurant to the rink, then, Charlie goes from an environment in which he seems improbably incompetent, to one in which he becomes improbably masterful. This same incongruous encounter of competence and incompetence is microcosmically reprised within the contained environment of the rink scenes. Here, Charlie vacillates between controlled elegance and explosions of riotous bodily disorder. There is more to say about the operations and effects of this vacillation, particularly in relation to its provocative social comedy. For now, however, my point is simply this: to consider Chaplin's roller skating in *The Rink* purely as an expression of elevated gracefulness is to look away from some of the defining dynamics of the performance and the scene as a whole. For Charlie's use of skating in *The Rink* may, I suggest, resist the classical coherence and exemplary grace imposed on it by later critics, offering us instead something less picturesque but more comically exciting; something crazier, and all the more compelling for it.

Those critical voices that might have spoken up for *The Rink* more on its own terms – the Chaplin myth-dispelling duo Raoul Sobel and David Francis or, more recently, the film critic Alan Dale – have not made enough of the film to counter the

⁷ For more recent examples, see: John Kimber, *The Art of Charlie Chaplin* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 2000); Jeffrey Vance, *Charlie Chaplin: Genius of the Cinema* (New York: Harry N. Abrams 2003).

prevailing critical emphasis on elevating grace.⁸ What critics across the board have failed to take into account – and what, I argue, provides strong grounds for a reassessment of *The Rink*'s effects – is the historically specific ways in which a contemporary audience in 1916 would have understood roller skating, and how the colourful history of this activity might have impinged upon an audience's experience of the film as first exhibited. Both Chaplin and his audience knew, and had at least partially lived through, this history, and Chaplin conjured and managed its connotations in stimulating ways in *The Rink*. In 1916 roller skating was far from being a neutral subject or a recreation without a culturally freighted history. That history presses on *The Rink*, and this contextual filter, thus far absent from critical work on Chaplin, adds an additional interpretive layer to the film in ways worthy of attention.

It is one of the contentions of this thesis that the force of Chaplin's early comedy comes less from an aspirational impulse to transcend the conditions of his own moment and cultural status, as critics have tended to argue, than from an intimate and specific engagement with those conditions. Knowing how Chaplin's films draw consciously on contemporary and historical debates about mass amusement culture enriches and deepens a sense of Chaplin's distinctive comic performance and an understanding of the social operations of the films' comedy. For this reason, I offer here an analytic history of roller skating and its attendant debates, drawing out the principal contentions and areas of socially revealing controversy associated with this amusement. I do this in order to demonstrate how Chaplin draws upon the specific associations of roller skating in collective memory, and how these feed Chaplin's engagement with the social politics of rinks and the social comedy of skating. Reframed in this way, the often-sidelined comic qualities of *The Rink* are licensed to come to the fore, and Chaplin's knowingly intimate engagement with the social history and material present of his own moment can be clarified. I conclude by comparing *The Rink* with the roller-skating scene in *Modern Times* (1936). Here my analysis focuses on the ways in which the significance of Charlie on skates is reconfigured in line with the development of the Tramp character beyond the formative moment of the 1910s, and on how the reappearance of Charlie on skates at

⁸ Raoul Sobel and David Francis, *Chaplin: Genesis of a Clown* (London: Quartet Books 1977); Alan Dale, *Comedy is a Man in Trouble: Slapstick in American Movies* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 36, 42.

a distance of twenty years offers a lens through which we can view the relationship of the early and later Chaplin work. But first, we need to back up to understand what rich cultural vein Chaplin was tapping when, in 1916, he memorably stepped out onto the rink.

Cycles of the Craze

i) Origins

In 1863, James Leonard Plimpton of New York patented the ‘parlor skate’ and launched a new amusement. On the one hand, his invention transformed the experience of skating on rollers by requiring that a skater only need ‘incline his body in the direction he desires to move, and the rollers [...] will be “cramped” in proper position to describe the proper curve.’⁹ On the other hand, Plimpton’s carefully conducted marketing and organisational efforts gave roller skating the coherence of a recognisable leisure pursuit for the first time.¹⁰ In the same year that he patented the parlor skate, Plimpton opened the first roller-skating rink, the Plimpton Building, on Stuyvesant Street in New York, and established the New York Roller Skating Association to promote and regulate the new sport. For the next twenty years, he was able to use his strong patent position to monopolise roller-skate production and, by leasing out rather than selling his skates, to control the development of the sport.¹¹

Under Plimpton’s reign, roller skating emerged as a socially exclusive leisure pursuit, primarily for the enjoyment of the country’s fashionable elite. Plimpton’s Roller Skating Association had its headquarters at the Atlantic Hotel in Newport, Rhode Island, a favoured destination for high-society New Yorkers during

⁹ James Leonard Plimpton, improvement in skates, U.S Patent 37305, January 6, 1863.

¹⁰ On the early history of roller skating, see: Morris Traub, *Roller Skating Through the Years: The Story of Roller Skates, Rinks and Skaters* (New York: William-Frederick Press, 1944), 3-14; James Turner, *The History of Roller Skating* (Lincoln, Nebraska: National Museum of Roller Skating, 1997), 6-17.

¹¹ [Advertisement for Barwise and Wayne, proprietors of Plimpton’s Patent Roller Skates], *Houston Daily Union*, December, 14 1871, 3. For more on Plimpton’s litigation against other roller skating manufacturers see: ‘The Roller Skate Imbroglio,’ *Evening Bulletin (San Francisco)*, September 25, 1871, 1; ‘Court Record,’ *Boston Journal*, July 31, 1880, 2; ‘The History of Roller Skating,’ *Wheeling Register*, March 24, 1885, 3. Also published as: ‘The History of Roller Skating,’ *Kansas City Evening Star*, April 15, 1885, 1.

the summer season, and drew its core membership from prominent local visitors and residents.¹² Plimpton was personally involved, meanwhile, in organising roller-skating clubs in other cities. Amongst these was the Orleans Roller Skating Club whose activities were reverentially reported by the *New Orleans Times* in 1875. In a statement that might have been given on behalf of roller-skating clubs across the country, a spokesperson informed the paper that: ‘The object was, and is, to form a social Club of ladies and gentlemen for the practice of the pleasant, graceful and healthful exercise of roller skating, with other exercises and entertainments.’¹³ The social, as well as healthful, aspirations of the clubs were clear.

Larger commercial rinks were also established during the 1860s and 1870s, opening up the pursuit to a larger spectrum of the population. However, these did not proliferate as widely as they might have due to Plimpton’s patent monopoly and his control over where and how his roller skates were used.¹⁴ Roller skating remained, for the time being, mostly restricted to the private clubs, which, like other elite cultural institutions of the late-nineteenth century, functioned as social enclaves: self-contained spaces that could effectively exclude the physically and socially unsettling forces of the fast-growing and socially diversifying cities within which they were established.¹⁵ To ensure the exclusivity of their membership, the roller-skating clubs used rigorous institutionalising practices, such as membership conditions, elected club Presidents and committees, rink regulations and systems for instruction.¹⁶ Meanwhile, they cultivated an elegant and graceful style of skating that reiterated the social and cultural imperviousness of the rink space, evoking an ideal

¹² Traub, *Roller Skating Through the Years*, 17. For detailed and more contemporary discussions of Plimpton and the early history of roller skating see ‘The History of Roller Skating,’ *Wheeling Register*, 3; ‘Roller Skates Again,’ *Idaho Daily Statesman*, July 4, 1895, 5.

¹³ ‘Roller Skating,’ *New Orleans Times*, August 29, 1875, 1.

¹⁴ For a reference to an early example of a large commercial rink, see: ‘The Rink. Experiences with Roller Skates,’ *Hartford Daily Courant*, November 15, 1869, 2.

¹⁵ On other elite cultural institutions, see: Allen Havig, ‘The Commercial Amusement Audience in Early 20th Century American Cities,’ *Journal of American Culture* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 1-19. For a brief outline of immigration, urbanisation and industrialisation and their effects in the period, see: Godfrey Hodgson, ‘The American Century,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern American Culture*, ed. John King (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004), 34-35.

¹⁶ On the institutionalisation of early roller-skating clubs see: ‘Roller Skating,’ *New Orleans Times*, 1; ‘The History of Roller Skating,’ *Wheeling Register*, 3.

of the body as a self-contained whole, controlled and regulated by the inner will and uninflected by external forces.

ii) Boom

In 1883 Plimpton's most crucial patent expired and roller skating underwent a profound transformation.¹⁷ Between 1883 and 1885, roller-skate production was taken up by new companies eager to exploit the existing demand, while amusement entrepreneurs ventured out into the uncharted commercial possibilities of marketing the amusement to a larger mass audience. Soon roller skates could be owned for as little as thirty cents and hired for much less at the large commercial rinks that started opening all over the country.¹⁸ In 1884 the press began to report a 'roller skating craze' and to follow the story of how public participation in roller skating was spreading. In March 1885, the *New York Herald* ran two extensive features on the story, reporting that there were 'more than five hundred manufacturers of roller skates in the United States' and 'about thirty thousand rinks'. These rinks varied widely, from 'little rinks over stables, in the rear of candy stores and in dingy basements', to colossal skate halls such as the Manhattan, the Coney Island Olympian and the Knickerbocker in New York attracting as many as three thousand skaters each night.¹⁹ In contrast to the more exclusive nature of roller skating in the prior decades, roller skating now seemed almost dangerously inclusive, as press accounts stressed in emotive, sensationalising language: 'More than ten thousand people are sliding around on wheels in this city every day and night,' proclaimed a reporter for the *New York Herald* in March 1885; '[l]ack of room is all that keeps the great whirling sea of rollerdom from engulfing the legs of the whole metropolis.'²⁰

¹⁷ Reporting on a local court decision against Plimpton in February 1883, the *Worcester Daily Spy* proclaimed: 'Mr. Plimpton's monopoly of the roller skate business is finally broken and the field is open to general competition.' 'Roller Skates An Important Decision in Favor of a Worcester Manufactures,' *Worcester Daily Spy*, February 5, 1883, 4.

¹⁸ 'The Roller Skating Craze. Rinks Springing Up All Over the City and More Wanted,' *New York Herald*, March 15, 1885, 8.

¹⁹ 'The Roller Skating Craze. Rinks Springing Up All Over the City and More Wanted,' 8. The *New York Times* placed the number of rinks even higher: 'probably not less than 45,000 to 50,000.' 'The Roller Skate Industry. Manufacturers Making Hay While the Sun Shines,' *New York Times*, March 18, 1885, 3.

²⁰ 'The Roller Skating Craze. Rinks Springing Up All Over the City and More Wanted,' 8.

In transforming from a minority to a mass amusement, roller skating was also inevitably transformed in other ways. Its prime location shifted from the social club to the commercial rink, and these differed crucially from the earlier clubs in their outlook and priorities. The leadership of the clubs had striven to create the best conditions for the cultivation of gracefulness and good health in the respectable, homogenous company of other ‘ladies and gentlemen’. This had meant restricting the number of skaters on the floor, enforcing rules and regulations of conduct, hiring instructors and so forth.²¹ Managers of the new rinks found such measures incompatible with expanding the market for roller skating and maximising profits at the same time, and so they dispensed with them. The result, unsurprisingly, was that the new rinks were often crowded, chaotic and socially heterogeneous environments. One contemporary reporter observed this change, looking back ruefully in March 1885 to a time when ‘the rinks were rigidly conducted, so as to interest the most conservative and orderly persons’, and when ‘[t]he rules and regulations of the floor were such that would obviate many of the objections to the modern skating rinks.’²²

The reorientation of roller skating to a larger and less differentiated market was evident in the way people skated, and the aesthetic qualities that were now associated with the activity. What struck contemporary observers of roller skating was no longer the grace and self-possession of individual skaters, as in Plimpton’s day, but rather the impressive effect of the crowd as a ‘maelstrom of moving figures’ in which ‘a thousand people swirled and eddied and roared around the floor’.²³ Meanwhile, commentators also perceived the pleasures of roller skating differently to Plimpton and his followers, emphasising the more hedonistic, and less refined, delights stemming from the immediate physical exhilaration of skating and the excitement of the crowded rink. ‘You must remember,’ boasted one rink manager to the *New York Herald* in 1885, ‘that skating cultivates energetic habits of the body, for if you attempt to be lazy in the rink you are likely to be knocked down.’²⁴ Despite

²¹ ‘The History of Roller Skating,’ *Wheeling Register*, 3; ‘Roller Skates Again,’ 5.

²² ‘The History of Roller Skating,’ *Wheeling Register*, 3.

²³ Rollin Lynde Hartt, *The People at Play: Excursions into the Humor and Philosophy of Popular Amusements* (1909; reprint, Memphis: General Books, 2010), 65. See also: ‘The Roller Skating Craze. Rinks Springing Up All Over the City and More Wanted,’ 8.

²⁴ ‘The Roller Skating Craze,’ *New York Herald*, 8.

his emphasis on ‘cultivation’, the rink manager’s words playfully advertised what they ostensibly warned against: the exciting possibility of unexpected collisions and accidental indelicacies in a mixed public environment.

One of the defining features of this new world of roller skating was the theatricality of the activity as an event that could be viewed, on the one hand, and easily participated in, on the other. The rinks offered fluid relations between spectatorship and participation. They were surrounded by benches for both spectators and, as the journalist Rollin Lynde Hartt would note some years later, ‘skaters out of breath’.²⁵ ‘It is no disgrace’, Hartt explained in his account of the rinks, for a skater ‘to turn wall-flower’ and watch the show in which they were performing moments before, or, conversely, to join the show they had previously been watching.²⁶ In the permissive fluidity of this dynamic, roller-skating rinks prefigured other new amusements that would come to constitute an emergent mass culture around the turn of the century. Social historian John F. Kasson has described the way in which the amusement parks that emerged in the late 1890s and early 1900s allowed ‘customers [to] participate[...] intimately in the spectacle about them’.²⁷

[T]hey became actors in a vast, collective comedy. The flamboyantly expressive surroundings had the effect of grabbing customers in costumes and eliciting their own theatricality. At various moments on rides they might briefly grab the spotlight and attract the attention of the multitude; at other times they might sit in the balconies and watch their fellow revelers. The lines between spectator and performer, between professional entertainer and seeker of amusement, blurred [...].²⁸

Thus Coney Island combined spectacles of individual eccentricity with mass participation: individuals were able to ‘briefly grab the spotlight and attract the attention of the multitude’ before dissolving back into the multitude from which they had come.

²⁵ Hartt, *The People at Play*, 65.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill & Wang 1978), 7.

²⁸ Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 65.

Written reports of roller skating from the earlier moment of the mid-1880s testify to a similar fluidity in the spectacular environment of the rink. The *New York Times* provides one example, a report on the opening of a new, large-scale rink in the American Institute Hall in 1884:

3,000 young people were present for the occasion. Half of these were on the rollers when Conterno's Band struck up the opening march at 8 o'clock, and the long procession at once began to revolve about the great floor [...]. Now a fat man gracefully circling about the observed and admired of all [sic] turned the soles of his feet to the roof and jarred the building, or a swiftly gliding dude ran into a pretty girl and subsided on to the floor. Here two gallant young men on either side of a timid young woman were teaching her to skate, while the attendants in uniform circled bewilderingly along, now on the right foot with the other skilfully poised aloft, and then gracefully changing to the left and cutting various figures and diagrams upon the floor, all swept along by the big procession behind them.²⁹

The reporter lists a series of mini-spectacles that momentarily emerge from the 'the big procession': 'now' an amusing fall or inter-gender collision; 'here' the titillating image of an unstable young woman and the 'bewildering' stunts performed by the uniformed attendants. Notably, it is not always through preeminent skill that one becomes a spectacle: in the case of the fat man, it is an accidental slip that brings him to attention; and in that of the young woman, it is her hesitant incompetence. As with the amusement parks, anyone could achieve five seconds of fame; the rinks were, if not calculated, then nevertheless conveniently configured to facilitate mass participation and to democratise spectacle.

This mass ethos was more sharply expressed in accounts of bungled distinction at the rinks, scenes in which attempts to assert social superiority were rewarded with humiliation, as in this observational vignette from a report in the *New York Herald* in 1885:

A tall, slim, young person, who wore kid gloves and canary colored trousers of close clinging design, announced to his friends that he was a daisy on ice skates, and that he would show them what he could do for the first time on roller skates.

Would they like to see the double-twisted grapevine step? They would.

²⁹ 'Gliding about on Roller Skates,' *New York Times*, December 16, 1884, 3.

With a long gliding motion the canary colored trousers sailed off into the untried ocean of extemporaneous skating. The slim young man rocked in the crowd, grabbed at the air, turned around two or three times and was swept into the middle of the floor, from where he looked appealingly to his friends as if he wanted to swim ashore.³⁰

The young man's deliberate attempt to impress his distinction upon the crowd leads to a spectacular performance, but one far less dignified than that intended: 'The slim young man rocked in the crowd, grabbed at the air, turned around two or three times'. His performance quickly over, he is 'swept' out into the 'ocean' of anonymity that is the mass of skaters. In contrast to the flimsy efforts of the individual, the mass powerfully 'sweeps' on, countering and overpowering individual attempts to transcend it. What Kasson writes of the tone and values of amusement parks at the turn of the century might also be said to neatly sum up the pleasures offered by those large, commercial roller-skating rinks that emerged in the mid-1880s: 'Instead of games of competitive skill, which demand self-control, [they] emphasised games of theatricality and of vertigo, which encouraged participants to shed self-consciousness and surrender to a spirit of reckless, exuberant play.'³¹

iii) Controversy

The rise of the commercial roller-skating rinks in the mid-1880s encountered fierce opposition and became the occasion of a national controversy. The rise was identified as a danger to society and denounced from the pulpit, in newspaper editorials and by prominent reformers.³² These declamatory voices held the rinks responsible for a wide range of topical misfortunes, from a poor theatrical season to 'the prevalence of pneumonia in New York'.³³ This opposition to the rinks sometimes translated into a conflict over physical public space as local authorities

³⁰ 'The Roller Skating Craze. Rinks Springing Up All Over the City and More Wanted,' 8.

³¹ Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 59.

³² 'The Roller Skating Craze. Bishop Huntington on the Attractions and Dangers of the Rink,' *New York Herald*, April 16, 1885, 4; 'The Skating Mania,' *New York Times*, May 18, 1885, 4; 'Crying Evils Of The Roller Skating Craze,' *Times Picayune (New Orleans)*, March 25, 1885, 6.

³³ 'Those Terrible Rinks. Roller Skating Ruins the Hudson River Theatrical Business,' *New York Times*, March 11, 1885, 2; 'The Roller-Seating Craze,' *Sun (Baltimore)*, March 26, 1885, 1.

responded to anti-rink pressure and acted to close or curtail the spread of rinks through ordinance and regulation.³⁴

The rise of the rinks sparked what sociologist Stanley Cohen has since termed a ‘moral panic’, the profile of which he traces in his influential book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (1972):

A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnosis and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition disappears, submerges or deteriorates [...].³⁵

The sensation caused by the rinks during the mid-1880s followed this pattern: claims about the dangers of rinks and tales of their ‘social transgressions’ proliferated widely in the press in a ‘stylized and stereotypical fashion’, while the wide and rapid spread of the rinks was reified rhetorically as a ‘threat to societal values and interests.’³⁶ Also like Cohen’s moral panics, the idea of a roller-skating craze had found a sympathetic ‘point of resonance with wider anxieties’.³⁷ The nature of these particular anxieties was signaled in a usefully illustrative manner by an editorial in the *New York Times* outlining the case against the rinks in May 1885. ‘During last Winter’, the editorial reported,

there came from the West almost every day stories in which the dangers that beset the young in the rinks were shown. Elopements, betrayals, bigamous marriages, and other social transgressions were traced to the association of the innocent with the vicious upon the skating floor. There may be in this city rinks that are managed more carefully than those of

³⁴ ‘Blocking the Wheels. Common Council to Encounter the Roller Skating Craze,’ *New York Herald*, March 10, 1885, 4; ‘Moral Skating Rinks. Chicago Rink Managers a Board of Censors on Moral Conduct,’ *New York Times*, March 22, 1885, 7; ‘Roller Rink Reform. Mayor Smith Requested by Managers to Investigate Their Establishments,’ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 28, 1885, 2; ‘Evils of Roller Skating. The Providence Rinks To Be Closed on Grounds of Immorality,’ *New York Times*, December 5, 1885, 2.

³⁵ Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (1972; reprint, 3rd ed., London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 9.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

which we have spoken, but it is plain that in the best of them the mingling of boys and girls and young men and young women for the most part strangers to each other, is dangerous.³⁸

What evidently exercised the author, along with a legion of like-minded commentators and observers, was the idea that the rinks permitted, and perhaps even stimulated, the unrestrained and often emphatically physical mixing of young men and woman of varying social classes. The rise of the rinks evidently triggered existing anxieties to do with class hierarchy and gender roles, particularly in the public sphere of commercial amusements. Although this trigger may have been slight, the conspicuousness of roller skating's sudden popularity offered a symbolic placeholder for wider concerns. By taking a strong stance on this topical matter, public voices found an opportunity to champion and stir up support for other, ongoing causes, and to model a particular view of social order by construing it as under attack.

A variety of rhetorical tropes emerged in public discourse to construe roller skating as, in Cohen's terms, a 'threat to societal values and interests'.³⁹ Most obvious perhaps was the metaphor of insanity, implicit in the labelling of the event a 'craze'. The roller-skating craze was also figuratively discussed as an addiction or a disease. According to the *Duluth News Tribune*, for example, the roller-skating craze was a 'vice' and 'a habit that takes hold of people like the habits of card playing, smoking or drinking, and with a grip as strong as some of these'.⁴⁰ According to another article, meanwhile, it was an 'epidemic' by which '[w]hole communities are infected'.⁴¹ The language of 'craze', 'vice' and 'epidemic' formed a coherent cluster of interchangeable metaphors which conveyed the rise of the rinks and the popularity of roller skating as a pathological condition which self-evidently needed curing.

One of the most salient tropes of the roller-skating craze, and one of the most commonly cited manifestations of its insanity, was the roller-skating crowd: a large and socially heterogeneous crowd 'mingled' by the perpetual whirl that it

³⁸ 'The Skating Mania,' 4.

³⁹ Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, 9.

⁴⁰ 'The Roller Skating Craze,' *Duluth News Tribune*, March 19, 1885, 4.

⁴¹ 'Crazes,' *Grand Forks Herald*, January 12, 1886, 4.

collectively generated.⁴² Summarising the case against the rinks, the *Duluth Tribune* explained that they were seen to ‘encourage[...] the promiscuous and frequent mixing of large numbers of men and women’ and that ‘scandal and attendant misery’ were the ‘natural results of any custom’ that encouraged such behaviour.⁴³ In a sermon reproduced in several newspapers, the Bishop Huntingdon of the Episcopal Diocese of Central New York, claimed:

If it had been proposed a few years ago to open in each of our cities and villages large and attractive places of amusement where, at night, any number of persons of both sexes could come together for an exciting kind of sensual pleasure, with the freest possible latitude as to acquaintanceship and intercourse, with no possibility of excluding the worst elements of society therefrom, the whole moral and religious sense of the community would have been shocked and outraged.⁴⁴

In such accounts the skating crowd represents a threatening inversion of social custom, primarily the separation of the sexes and the distinct ‘elements’ – or classes – of society. It also inverts proper cultural values, encouraging ‘com[ing] together’ rather than individual striving and ‘sensual pleasure’ rather than self-sacrifice.⁴⁵

Alongside the ominous image of the chaotically mixed skating crowd was a small cast of stereotyped rink characters who individually reified the anxieties underlying opposition to the rinks. Central to this cast was the typified figure of the innocent and well-bred young girl whose ‘obvious helplessness’ on the skating floor, as one roller skating guide put it, made her vulnerable to involvement in unseemly situations or, worse, the machinations of sexual predators.⁴⁶ Her outline recurred widely throughout contemporary discourse on roller skating, in newspaper editorials,

⁴² ‘The Skating Mania,’ 4; ‘Blocking the Wheels,’ 4.

⁴³ ‘The Roller Skating Craze,’ *Duluth News Tribune*, 4.

⁴⁴ ‘The Roller Skating Craze. Bishop Huntingdon on the Attractions and Dangers of the Rink,’ 4. See also: ‘Bishop Huntingdon on Roller Skates,’ *New Haven Evening Register*, April 16, 1885, 3.

⁴⁵ For a relevant discussion of competing cultural values, see: Warren Susman, “‘Personality’ and the Making of Twentieth Century Culture,” in *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 271-285. For a relevant discussion of nightlife, see: Lewis Erenberg, *Steppin’ Out: New York Night Life and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

⁴⁶ H. P. Burchell, *Spalding’s Roller Skating Guide* (New York: American Sports Publishing Company, 1906), 13.

press reports of elopement scandals, reform propaganda, sermons and roller-skating guides.⁴⁷ An exemplary sighting of the stereotype occurred during an undercover police investigation of the rinks in Providence, Rhode Island, presented to Board of Aldermen in December 1885:

In one rink a week ago the officer detailed saw a young girl come in who had just begun to learn to skate and was unable to go about alone on the rollers. He questioned one of the regular male patrons as to who and what she was. The young fellow remarked that he didn't know who she was, but unless she was made of different stuff than the rest of the young girls who came to the rink she would be some one's [sic] prey in less than two months. Nearly all the girls who were followed belonged to good families, and some were very respectably connected.⁴⁸

The emotive combination of the girl's innocence, her physical vulnerability and her good breeding evidently proved persuasive for the Board of Aldermen, as it did more broadly to the American public, for they elected to grant no more rink licenses in Providence.

The stereotype of the vulnerable young girl had its direct counterpart in the figure of the male fancy skater of lower class origins who beguiled young women with his elegant appearance and 'lured' them, as one staunchly anti-rink reformer put it, 'into the downward path'.⁴⁹ This figure – which Cohen's moral panic theory would term a 'folk devil' – caught the excitable imaginations of many newspaper readers and was invoked, for example, at a meeting of the New York Common Council in March 1885: '[P]arents referred anxiously to the fascinations of the conniving roller skater,' reported the *New York Herald*, 'which had transcended the happiest devices of the coachman and were whirling eligible misses into clandestine matrimony with frightful rapidity.'⁵⁰ Looking back on the roller-skating craze from 1895, an article in the *Idaho Statesmen* painted a particularly vivid picture of this 'conniving' figure:

⁴⁷ For respective examples, see: 'The Skating Mania,' 4; 'Preferred to a Coachman. Roller Skating "Professor" Elopes with an Heiress,' *New York Times*, February 14, 1885, 1; 'Crying Evils Of The Roller Skating Craze,' 6; 'Roller Skating Craze. Dr. Talmage Preaches a Sermon on the Mania,' *Wheeling Register*, 1; Burchell, *Spalding's Roller Skating Guide*, 13.

⁴⁸ 'Evils of Roller Skating,' 2.

⁴⁹ 'Crying Evils Of The Roller Skating Craze,' 6.

⁵⁰ 'Blocking the Wheels,' 4.

If in any town there was a young man who permitted his mother to do plain sewing in order to support him, who knew enough about card tricks to win some money at crooked poker now and then, who loafed around saloons and did jig steps, who posed as Lothario before the factory girls and who tried to be sporty and eccentric in his dress, it seemed to follow that he would inevitably be the best roller skater in town.⁵¹

As a result, the journalist explained:

There sprung up throughout the country a breed of experts and “professors” who exhibited their graces at the rink and led captive all the feather-brained girls of the community. These “professors” were worshipped as matinee favorites are worshipped, except that the lady killing actor of the matinee is worshipped at a distance, while the “professors” at the rinks met the fascinated creatures, talked to them and skated with them.⁵²

The anxiety underlying this ‘professor’ type was plainly one about class distinctions, sexual compromise and dynastic aspiration. The fancy skater’s dissimulations coupled with his alarming proximity enabled him to pose an impertinent threat in all respects.

Perhaps most illustrative of the hyperbolic drama in which the two stereotypes of the well-bred girl and the ne’er-do-well rogue took part was the high-profile scandal of ‘Professor’ Osborne and his elopement with a wealthy heiress, Miss Rebecca Kearsley.⁵³ According to the *New York Times*, which eagerly followed the story, Osborne was working as a private skating instructor, and in this role had wooed Miss Kearsley and succeeded in detaching her from her family, only to be tracked down and brought to justice by detectives in the family’s employment. The *New York Times*’ description of ‘Miss Kearsley’ elaborates on her character within the familiar parameters of innocent-girl-skater stereotype:

⁵¹ ‘Roller Skating Craze. Prospective Revival of a Once Popular Pastime,’ *Idaho Statesman*, January 20, 1898, 5.

⁵² ‘Roller Skating Craze,’ *Idaho Statesman*, 5.

⁵³ ‘Preferred to a Coachman,’ 1. For examples of similar scandals, see: ‘Eloped with a Roller Skater,’ *New York Times*, February 21, 1885, 1; ‘They Met in a Skating Rink,’ *New York Times*, March 10, 1885, 3; ‘Ruined by Roller Skating,’ *New York Times*, July 18, 1885, 8.

Miss Kearsley is an only child and had never been restrained in anyway. She was very fond of society and still more pleased with the attention of gentlemen. She is well educated, has been abroad, and just before the skating rink episode was preparing to leave for Boston, where she intended entering a college for the cultivation of her voice, which is unusually fine.⁵⁴

The details of her upbringing and of her refined and cultivated talents all serve to enhance an image of innocence and purity, and to pique the reader's outrage at her exploitation. The description of the duplicitous 'Professor' Osborne, meanwhile, offered the perfect corollary to this innocent and well-bred young woman:

He is a very inoffensive appearing young man, about 20 years old. The general impression is that he is either a fool or a knave. Col. Sterling states that Osborne has no money, and that his wardrobe consists of just what he has on his back, and nothing more.⁵⁵

Add to this his 'unenviable record as a professional gambler', and the 'more serious charge to the effect that he married a rich young woman at Coldwater, Mich.' and Osborne could not have offered a more convincing incarnation of the morally repugnant fancy skater to complete the character line-up of this well-played drama.⁵⁶

Having outlined the tropes of roller-skating craze rhetoric – metaphors of insanity and disease, the trope of the 'promiscuously mingled' crowd, the narrative and cast of the symbolic skating-rink elopement – we are now in a position to comment on its underlying mechanism for generating moral panic. All of the tropes I have explored here might be understood in terms of what anthropologists have called 'symbolic inversion'. To quote Barbara Babcock's definition:

"Symbolic inversion" may be broadly defined as any act of expressive behaviour which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values, and norms, be they linguistic, literary or artistic, religious, or social and political.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ 'Preferred to a Coachman,' 1.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Barbara A. Babcock, 'Introduction,' in *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, ed. Barbara A. Babcock (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1978), 14.

Attacks on roller skating frequently presented the craze as just such an inversion of ‘commonly held cultural codes, values, and norms’. The Osborne-Kearsley scandal is illustrative: a penniless ‘fool’, Osborne, becomes a ‘professor’ of roller skating and elopes with an heiress.⁵⁸ Such inversions functioned symbolically in the anti-rink rhetoric to construe the rise of roller skating as self-evidently unnatural and wrong, and ultimately to affirm the sovereignty of existing ‘codes, values, and norms’. In the case of the *New York Times*, as elsewhere, this was evidently a defensive response to the social and cultural changes that the rise of the roller-skating rinks seemed to manifest, conveying the unexpected popularity of roller skating as a case of national insanity. By employing such logic, vocal opponents of the rinks sought to resist change and to inspire and energise further resistance.

However, the full force of the roller-skating craze cannot only be understood in relation to its ability to focus and generate moral outrage. For the moral panic interlocked with another alternative public response: an outburst of irreverent humour. ‘A literature ephemeral but voluminous, has sprung up to give voice to the pastime’, reported the *New York Tribune* in 1885.⁵⁹ ‘[T]he funny men of the comic papers have stopped joking about spring poets and mother-in-law’, the *Tribune* continued, ‘while they illustrate in prose and poetry the humors of “rinking.”’⁶⁰ This ‘voluminous literature’ delighted in the same hyperbolic inversions of normal behaviour and social interactions that characterised declamations against the rinks, and used them to generate not panic, but laughter.⁶¹ ‘Rinking’ humour was fascinated with the idea of ‘promiscuous assemblages’ and the unexpected accidents and collisions that they produced – just as anti-rink campaigners were.⁶² But in rinking humour, the ominous sexual overtones of sensationalising anti-rink rhetoric were replaced by exuberant innuendo, mock outrage or feigned innocence that knowingly acknowledged the fun of it all. The commentary of the humorist Bill Nye

⁵⁸ ‘Preferred to a Coachman,’ 1.

⁵⁹ ‘The Roller-Skating Craze,’ *New York Tribune*, February 8, 1885, 6.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ For a discussion of the role of symbolic inversion in comedy and specifically in relation to the comic theories of Sigmund Freud and Henri Bergson, see: Babcock, ‘Introduction,’ 17.

⁶² ‘The History of Roller Skating,’ *Wheeling Register*, 3.

(whose comic talents were often compared to his contemporary Mark Twain), can be taken as an exemplary, and well-turned, example of this ‘rinking’ humour:

There are different kinds of falls in vogue at the rink. There are the rear falls, the front falls, the Cardinal Wolsey fall, the fall one across the other, three in a pile, and so on. There are some of the falls [sic] I would like to be excused from describing.⁶³

While the joke is arguably on the skaters here, directing satirical laughter at their misguided attempt to be ‘in vogue’, Nye’s comedy resonates with the sense of festive fun found in many contemporary accounts, conveying the rinks as places of ‘wild tumultuous joy’, in Nye’s own words, rather than nightmares of moral depravity.⁶⁴

While the moral-panic rhetoric of the roller-skating craze used the technique of symbolic inversion to stimulate outrage, rinking humour used it to stimulate laughter. It took pleasure in representing the roller-skating craze as an outbreak of topsy-turvy behaviour, in which ‘commonly held cultural codes, values, and norms’ were, at least temporarily, overthrown.⁶⁵ But as Babcock has noted, among others, symbolic inversion is never bound to one master. It may play a conservative role, insisting on existing norms and castigating deviations as forms of insanity. It may also serve to ‘question the usefulness and absoluteness’ of these existing norms.⁶⁶ And indeed the comedy of the roller-skating craze characteristically deployed its inversions as a social critique. Bill Nye celebrated roller skates, and the roller-skating craze more generally, as ‘a wonderful leveler of mankind’, pointing out the tendency of the roller skates to ‘interfer[e] with one’s upright attitude in the community’.⁶⁷ Comic commentary on the roller-skating craze generally conveyed

⁶³ Edgar Wilson Nye, ‘An Essay on Roller Skates,’ *Telegraph and Messenger (Macon, Georgia)*, March 25, 1883, 1. On Nye see: David B. Kesterton, *Bill Nye* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981).

⁶⁴ ‘With a Yoicks, Tally-Ho! Bill Nye Relates His Experiences While Enjoying the Pleasures of the Chase,’ *Daily Inter Ocean (Chicago)*, October 19, 1887, 7. For an comparable example of ‘rinking’ humour see: ‘The Roller Skating Craze,’ *New York Herald*, 8.

⁶⁵ Babcock, ‘Introduction,’ 14.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Nye, ‘An Essay on Roller Skates,’ 1; Edgar Wilson Nye, ‘Roller Skating,’ *Remarks* (1888; reprint, Chicago: Thompson and Thomas, 1891), 464.

this levelling effect through depictions of socially elevated figures brought low by roller skating. Comic writers offered humorous accounts of Senators, Secretaries of State and even Presidents failing disastrously to master the skates.⁶⁸ These distinguished figures usually made the error of assuming their social distinction would naturally translate into skating ability, and learnt the hard way that, as the *New York Herald* mischievously concluded in March 1885, ‘there is no royal road to roller skating.’⁶⁹

The rhetoric of the roller-skating craze did not belong to either the outraged moralists or the comedians. Rather it gained its considerable cultural charge from the dialogical frisson between the two. The two responses often rubbed up against each other in the pages of the same newspaper, and even the same article. The *New York Herald*, for example, frequently took an irreverent approach to reporting the craze, but it also printed the fiercest anti-rink diatribes that could be found, such as the Bishop Huntingdon’s condemnation of the rinks quoted above.⁷⁰ While the Bishop’s words were obviously intended to shock and outrage, in the context of the *Herald*, and under the misleadingly balanced title ‘Bishop Huntingdon on the Attractions and Dangers of the Rink’, they could produce other responses: amusement, titillation, curiosity. Equally, reports that seemed irreverent might be taken as shocking and outrageous. The two poles thereby interlocked in a mutually provocative arrangement that intensified debates about roller skating, drew in more and more participants and exerted a powerful hold upon the public imagination. The craze became an opportunity for commentators to assert their concerns about other matters, such as class, gender, use of leisure time and public and private space. In this way, it brought together and dramatised, in a boldly hyperbolic manner, some of the social and cultural tensions inherent in its specific historical moment.

⁶⁸ ‘Never Another Skate,’ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 30, 1902, 13; ‘Bacon’s Skating Mishap. Incident That Depletes Character of New Assistant Secretary of State,’ *Aberdeen Daily News*, September 25, 1905, 5; ‘A Fall in Indianapolis,’ *Idaho Daily Statesman*, December 10, 1892, 7.

⁶⁹ ‘The Roller Skating Craze,’ *New York Herald*, 8.

⁷⁰ See p. 48 above.

iv) Decline and Symbolic Legacy

In 1885, roller skating seemed to many to be taking over the bodies and the minds of the American people. The contagious activity was variously described as a ‘national vice’, an issue for ‘national politics’ and ‘a matter that directly concerns and interests so many thousands of people all over the country’.⁷¹ According to one announcement by the *New York Tribune*, ‘a good percentage of the public have foresworn all other forms of amusement and cleave to roller skating only’.⁷² But this extreme condition was short lived. The following year attendance at rinks slackened and many of the large commercial rinks, built to accommodate crowds of thousands, went out of business.⁷³ At the same time, the media spotlight, that had briefly isolated the rinks from the larger sphere of commercial amusements, moved on. Reformers and preachers turned their attention to other amusements and urban problems and the controversy over roller skating dissipated. The sport did not disappear: many rinks continued to operate and roller skating underwent a widely noted revival around 1906.⁷⁴ But roller skating had lost its craze status. It no longer seemed to be the vanquishing competitor of all other American recreations, nor a volcanically volatile focal point for wider debates about society and culture.⁷⁵

Following the craze, roller skating’s decline was then yet more conspicuously rapid and striking than its sensational rise had been. This decline was at least as important in ensuring the ongoing symbolic legacy of the roller-skating craze. ‘In nearly every town of importance there is a skating rink left over from the former craze’ reported the *Idaho Statement* in 1898, left ‘standing as a melancholy

⁷¹ Respectively: ‘The Roller-Skating Craze,’ *New York Tribune*, 6; ‘The Roller Skating Craze,’ *New York Herald*, 8; ‘The Roller Skating Craze,’ *Duluth News Tribune*, 4.

⁷² ‘The Roller-Skating Craze,’ *New York Tribune*, 6.

⁷³ ‘The Craze Coming to an End,’ *New York Times*, May 3, 1885, 1.

⁷⁴ On revivals, see: ‘Roller Skates Again,’ 5; ‘Roller Skating Craze,’ *Idaho Statesman*, 5; ‘Roller-Skating Craze,’ *Salt Lake Telegram* [published as *The Evening Telegram*], April 25, 1906, 3; ‘Our Principle Excitement,’ *Duluth News Tribune*, February 20, 1911, 3. According to Traub, roller skating remained reasonably popular until after the First World War, when it lost out to newer forms of amusement, ‘[m]ovies, dancing, and automobiles, among other diversions.’ Traub, *Roller Skating Through the Years*, 38.

⁷⁵ ‘The Roller Skating Craze,’ *New York Herald*, 8.

monument to misguided confidence.⁷⁶ During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many of these ‘melancholy monuments’ were converted to new purposes or demolished; the fate of these buildings served as further reminders of the earlier craze. ‘The old skating rink at Fergus Falls, a relic of the roller skating craze, is being torn down’, reported the *Grand Forks Herald* in 1900, for example. ‘The building cost \$8,000 to build and the frenzy died out a month after the building was completed.’⁷⁷

For many commentators, the roller-skating craze symbolised the inevitable misguidedness and ephemerality of new cultural forms and activities. It was invoked, for example, by the nationally famous band leader, John Philip Sousa in his 1906 essay protesting against the rise of the phonograph: ‘The Menace of Mechanical Music’.⁷⁸ In the early 1910s, journalists invoked the craze to put the rapidly expanding new medium of cinema in its place. Responding to the widespread idea that movies were drastically reconfiguring the American amusement scene, a reporter for the New York *Sun* countered that:

The high grade entertainments of drama and music have always existed and weathered many “crazes” before the motion picture was ever dreamed of. At one period the roller skating fad was the excuse for all bad theatre business, and then it was the bicycle. The really great “hits” in the first class houses are drawing just as big audiences as ever, and the readjustment is bound to come.⁷⁹

Thus the roller-skating craze became, as this passage suggests, a token of reassurance. If new things – like phonographs and movies – could be categorised as ‘crazes’ alongside other known, historical examples, then people could be reassured that the status quo would be preserved. At the same time, however, identifying new amusements as crazes was also to designate them as threats, as implied by titles such as ‘The Menace of Mechanical Music’ and ‘Moving Pictures Menace the Regular Drama.’ Thus the roller-skating craze took on a symbolic value in the cultural

⁷⁶ ‘Roller Skating Craze.’ *Idaho Statesman*, 5.

⁷⁷ ‘Nubs of News,’ *Grand Forks Herald*, December 7, 1900, 4.

⁷⁸ John Philip Sousa, ‘The Menace of Mechanical Music,’ *Appleton's Magazine* 8, no. 1 (1906): 278.

⁷⁹ ‘Moving Pictures Menace the Regular Drama,’ *The Sun (New York)*, April 7, 1912, 5. See also: ‘The Motion Picture Problem,’ *Washington Herald*, December 13, 1920, 6.

imagination of the nation and this could be activated in various ways. In keeping with Cohen's theory of moral panics, the craze lived on 'in folklore and collective memory', retroactively taking on meaning as a symbolic point of reference to which 'current horrors [could] be compared.'⁸⁰

Chaplin as Roller Skater

Chaplin's 1916 Mutual short, *The Rink*, played knowingly with the rich and controversial history of roller rinks, recycling its tropes and stereotypes and replaying, in a potently comic mode, the same interrelated concerns about class, gender and public and private space that had energised the historical controversy of the roller-skating craze. This has not, however, featured in previous readings of the film. Here I offer a reading that takes into account the film's intricate connectedness to popular understandings of what a rink was and the specific social energies to which it played host. I do so as a first key element in illuminating Chaplin's close engagement with the emergent mass-amusement culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, of which the boom and transformation of roller skating in the mid-1880s was an early and especially illustrative example.

This reading has two interrelated aims: first, to bring into focus previously neglected aspects of *The Rink* as an individual work; and, second, to reconsider the contemporary cultural resonances of the Charlie persona, a textual object constituted across a series of films of which *The Rink* is one. In consequence, the reading proceeds in two parts. The first will examine the film's knowing engagement with rink history and rink-related debates through its narrative structure, its determined cast of character types and its specific use of space. This part will explore how the film processes this historically freighted material into comedy for a contemporary audience. The second part of my analysis will explore how the film channels its historically charged material into or around Charlie's performance, and how the roller-skating craze might function as the historical subtext of Charlie's apparently singular antics, activating in a contemporary audience a particularly intense response to Charlie's onscreen persona. I will finish this account by comparing the representations of roller skating in *The Rink* and Chaplin's later feature film *Modern*

⁸⁰ Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, 1, 2.

Times (1936) in order to illustrate the distinctive nature of Chaplin's engagement with the mass-amusement culture in his early films, and to suggest developments in his film-making that have tended to obscure this engagement.

i) *The Rink* and the Roller-Skating Craze

On one level, *The Rink* is an effusion of intricately choreographed comic business that happens to be organised around two semi-public environments: a restaurant, where Charlie works, and a roller-skating rink, where he takes his leisure. Yet the film's choice of environments is not arbitrary and Chaplin presses the cultural charge of his chosen spaces into useful service as part of the film's comic operations. Specifically, the film invokes shared knowledge about skating rinks and anchors the film's comedy in a matrix of contemporary social and cultural concerns about public amusement. *The Rink*'s basic narrative concerns an impressionable young society girl (Edna Purviance) – introduced in the opening scene, before Charlie makes his first appearance – who is deceived, albeit temporarily, into a romance by a waiter (Charlie) passing himself off as an upper-class gentleman at the roller-skating rink. It is, in fact, the familiar narrative of the rink elopement scandal that pervaded commentary on the roller-skating craze in the mid-1880s, and that was widely dramatised through cases such as the Osborne-Kearsley scandal.

Edna and Charlie fall into the familiar stereotypes prescribed by this narrative. Edna is impressed by Charlie's movements on the skates and accepts his offer to escort her about the rink (figs. 1.5 and 1.6). In the process, she becomes one of those 'ladies' imagined by *Spalding's Roller Skating Guide* (1906), 'who under ordinary circumstances would resent the proffered assistance of a stranger as an impertinence, [but] in their desire to attain the swan-like movement, accept it with gratitude; and hence undesirable acquaintances are sometimes formed'.⁸¹ Charlie, meanwhile, exemplifies the 'breed of experts and "professors" who', according to the *Idaho Statesman*, 'exhibited their graces at the rink and led captive all the feather-brained girls of the community.' Chaplin plays the role perfectly, using the roller skates, like the historical figures he apes, to 'get out of [his] class'.⁸²

⁸¹ Burchell, *Spalding's Roller Skating Guide*, 12-13.

⁸² 'Roller Skating Craze,' *Idaho Statesman*, 5.



Figs. 1.5 and 1.6. Charlie becomes Edna's skating instructor in *The Rink* (1916), invoking a cliché associated with the roller-skating craze of the mid-1880s.

It could be argued that the skating rink elopement narrative is merely a convenient occasion for Chaplin's talent, a readymade scenario for imaginatively choreographed slapstick routines. It could be added that the social connotations of these clichés would have lost both their referential specificity (to the roller-skating controversy of the mid-1880s), and their social edge by this time; that they are merely a neutral background for Chaplin to concentrate on pure physical comedy. But *The Rink's* engagement with skating history goes beyond merely recycling its by-now tired stories; rather the film's construction works to activate and make relevant the dormant connotations of the tropes it deploys.

The Rink's opening scene frames the rest of the film within the act of leaving the private domestic sphere and entering the less regulated world of public amusements – 'steppin' out', to borrow the historian Lewis Erenberg's phrase.⁸³ The opening scene finds Edna and her father in their drawing room, getting ready to go out (fig. 1.7). Edna, we will shortly discover, is going to a rink, while her father is going to a restaurant. During the roller-skating craze, commentators had frequently drawn explicit comparisons between the private sphere of domesticity (safe, well-governed, exclusive) and the public sphere of amusement (less regulated, more exposing and troublingly mixed in the encounters it makes possible). Choosing to

⁸³ Erenberg, *Steppin' Out*.

open *The Rink* in the safely domestic space of Edna's fine home ties the film directly into these concerns.⁸⁴



Fig. 1.7. *The Rink's* (1916) opening scene frames the film as one about going out. Edna and her father put on their hats, Edna with visible excitement, and leave the private space of the home for public spaces of amusement.

As Edna and her father move from private to public space their story finds expression for other widely discussed concerns about public amusement. The first time we see Edna since leaving her drawing room with her father, she is sitting conspicuously alone at the rink (fig. 1.8). Almost immediately the lascivious Mr. Stout moves in and begins to pursue her. Later, Charlie will take up this pursuit of the girl in a manner both more insidious and more effective. Meanwhile, in a tangle of interconnected characters all the film's own, Edna's father is also making new and improper acquaintances in the restaurant, ensnaring the attention of 'the flirty Mrs. Stout' (fig. 1.9). Just as Edna is released from parental observation at the rink, so her father is freed from the obligation to set a good example to his daughter, and so the moral fibre of the father-daughter relationship begins to unravel. Later, the boundary between public and private space again becomes an issue when Edna invites Charlie to her skate party, a private, high-society affair in which the rink becomes, in effect, an annexed extension of the home. Here, Edna's free and easy involvement in the public world of amusements leads to the contamination of the private sphere, as Chaplin is able to insinuate himself, via the rink, into Edna's elevated social circle,

⁸⁴ A *New York Times* editorial offered an explicit example of the comparison between the domestic space of the home and the public spaces of the rinks: 'Young girls who go to these places without the protection of their parents become acquainted with persons of whom they know little or nothing. They are not governed by the conditions that exist when they attend social gatherings at the houses of their parents' friends.' 'The Skating Mania,' 4.

an intrusion whose impropriety will manifest explosively in the film's madcap climax.



Figs. 1.8 and 1.9. Having watched Edna and her father leave the house together in the opening scene of *The Rink* (1916), we next see them separated, alone and susceptible to the disruptive influences attendant upon public amusements. Edna sits forlorn at the rink, soon to be approached by Mr. Stout, while her father is tempted by a woman in the restaurant.

Like much of the 'rinking' humour of the roller-skating craze, *The Rink* humorously deploys the tropes associated with the controversial image of roller skating, as the basis for some seemingly nonchalant social critique. This becomes particularly visible in two key comic scenes: the surprising revelation of Charlie's roller skating abilities at the rink, and the suggestive meeting of Edna and Charlie when she falls into his arms. Prior to the moment Charlie skates on to the rink, at roughly the midpoint of the film, he has displayed mainly spectacular physical incompetence in his role as a waiter. Not only does he get things wrong (going through the wrong doors, serving the wrong dishes), but his general manner speaks incompetence: slow, ambling and awkward. This is emphasised, pointedly, in the first shot in which Charlie appears, emerging from the kitchen at the back of the restaurant and shuffling slowly down the aisle between the tables to serve the impatient Mr. Stout in the foreground (figs. 1.10 and 1.11). The moment Charlie skates onto the rink, however, this seeming incompetence is revealed to be a sham: it is not an inherent feature of his low quality, but rather an unwillingness to use his talents with any grace in the hierarchically organised environment of the restaurant. This might already have been suspected from his momentary outbreaks of self-serving dexterity at the restaurant, but the explicit theatrical demonstration of this at the rink satisfyingly confirms the impression.

Charlie's transformation from shuffling, temperamental waiter into gracefully gliding master of the rink serves, as comic inversions often do, to unmask social contradictions. It functions to reveal what *Moving Picture World* journalist Louis Reeves Harrison had called, in a review of a Keystone film the previous year, 'those inherited artificialities of custom which are responsible for injustice to men who deserve better treatment.'⁸⁵



Figs. 1.10 and 1.11. Chaplin's initial entrance into the restaurant (fig. 1.10) compared with his initial entrance into the rink (fig. 1.11). The former emphasises Chaplin's slow ambling gait, the latter his graceful speediness. The impressions of slow or fast movement are enhanced by set, blocking and camera placement. The former shot gives a greater depth of field, the full extent of which Charlie arduously traverses to reach his customer in the foreground. The latter shot has a much shallower depth of field which Charlie quickly crosses before zooming past the camera and out of the frame.

The Rink renders comic another skating-craze trope when Edna stumbles and tries to steady herself on the nearest object, which happens to be Charlie. Not only do the couple circumvent 'the formality of an introduction', as commentators feared of interactions at the rinks, but their relationship advances hectically towards the sexual.⁸⁶ With her arms round Charlie's neck, Edna stumbles on the spot, gyrating against him in an inadvertently, but suggestively sexual manner (fig. 1.12). Charlie brashly highlights the risqué resemblance of the accident by smiling knowingly into the camera, and then devilishly at Edna, for which intimations the film cuts from a full shot encompassing their whole bodies to a close-up of their faces (fig. 1.13). The

⁸⁵ Louis Reeves Harrison, 'A Comedy to Those Who Think,' *Moving Picture World* 25, no. 5 (July 31, 1915): 788.

⁸⁶ 'Crying Evils Of The Roller Skating Craze,' 6.

joke here seems to be on the moral-panic cliché of the vulnerable female skater falling into the arms of the predatory skating ‘professor’: it translates the hushed sexual undertones that usually accompanied the cliché into a frank and brassy statement of the facts, tearing from these tropes their cloak of portentous mystique and leaving them exposed and comically underwhelming. The comic business thus acts as light critique of a sexually anxious society, alerting us both to the recognisable prevalence and the absurdity of contemporary norms. It offers an example of how comedy can function, as *Moving Picture World*’s Harrison put it, to ‘laugh away the cobwebs in our brains’ so that we can ‘recognise the truth when it is placed before our eyes’.⁸⁷



Figs. 1.12 and 1.13. Chaplin and Edna become acquainted in *The Rink* (1916).

Comedy is, of course, often built upon contradictions and tensions. As Frank Krutnik has written: ‘comedy is a notoriously double-edged sword that can simultaneously hack away at conformism while whittling down voicings of dissent and transgression.’⁸⁸ Sophisticated discussions of comedy tend to acknowledge this paradox in order to avoid oscillating claims and counterclaims in either direction. In the case of *The Rink*, there are specific ways in which the social critique is arguably contained or even negated. Significant in this regard is the film’s generic narrative structure. The narrative follows a pattern common across a range of comic forms, whereby the transgression of a social law triggers automatically the punishment,

⁸⁷ Harrison, ‘A Comedy to Those Who Think,’ 101.

⁸⁸ Frank Krutnik, ‘General Introduction,’ in *Hollywood Comedians: The Film Reader* (London: Routledge 2003), 8.

exclusion or expulsion of the transgressor that ultimately affirms the rightness of the rules transgressed.⁸⁹ Having intruded into the socially exclusive domain of Edna's private, parentally endorsed skating party, Charlie's outsider status makes itself felt as he gets into increasingly physical altercations with Mr. and Mrs. Stout. His eventual expulsion from the rink seamlessly emerges out of this disorder, as though already contained immanently within it. A chase arises and Chaplin is pursued from the rink by a crowd of his prior victims, soon joined by a gaggle of policemen. Thus the threat posed by the fancy skater is defused at the level of narrative through his ritualistic kind of expulsion dramatised through a set of stock comic characters and situational codes.

Rob King places the double effect of comedy at the centre of his argument about the widespread appeal and commercial success of Chaplin's early films in 1914, as well as those of the Keystone Film Company around the same time. He argues that these films achieved 'a remarkable feat of double address' – a Janus-faced comedy that superimposed two 'contradictory ideological positions' from which to laugh.⁹⁰ On the one hand they offered 'fantasies of social mobility, appealing to discontented, lower-class elements through scenarios of class inversion and emancipation'; on the other, 'derisory depictions of working-class buffoonery.'⁹¹ The most widely appealing, and therefore most successful films, according to King's argument, must have been those that struck a balance between the two positions, allowing 'different readings according to social attitudes.'⁹² Films balanced in this way were particularly effective in exploiting the social divisions of their moment, and reflected, as well as contributed to, the emergence of 'a hybridizing mass culture in which diverse groups could find genuine, if partial, representations of their own experiences and outlooks.'⁹³ *The Rink* with its meshing of socially encoded

⁸⁹ See: Tom Gunning, 'Crazy Machines in the Garden of Forking Paths: Mischief Gags and the Origins of American Film Comedy,' in *Classical Hollywood Comedy*, eds. Kristine Brunovska Karnick and Henry Jenkins (New York; London: Routledge, 1995): 87-105.

⁹⁰ King, *The Fun Factory*, 90, 100.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 99, 101.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ King, *The Fun Factory*, 104.

transgressions and ‘quasi-ritualistic punishment’ – King’s phrase – of the ‘working-class buffoon’ would certainly be a illustrative case in point for King’s argument.⁹⁴

However, *The Rink*’s engagement with the history of roller skating suggests another way in which the film might appeal to a contemporary audience, not by smoothly integrating divided social outlooks, but by exploiting the social and cultural *tensions* of its moment for comic effect. While the roller-skating craze provides source material for Chaplin’s film, it also provides a powerful comic dynamic: the dialogical interplay between outrage and laughter. Just as this dialogue powered the controversy of the roller-skating craze, so it powers the comedy of *The Rink*. The film adopts tropes that bring with them the historical connotation of moral indignation. They invoke the idea of someone else being outraged by them, which spurs the (target) audience to laugh even harder. Charlie’s sudden gracefulness on the rink and his awkward rescuing of Edna are key moments where the recognisably and stereotypically outrageous becomes comic. As I shall discuss in more detail in Part II of this thesis, the fact that Chaplin’s early films did genuinely cause offence and declamatory opposition reminds us that outrage was not merely an imagined response to his films.

John Kasson has argued in his landmark study of Coney Island’s amusement parks, that around the turn of the century, the middle class, the working class and elements of ‘high society’ were united, notionally at least, by an ‘eager[ness] to respond to amusement in a less earnest cultural mood: more vigorous, exuberant, daring, sensual, uninhibited, and irreverent’.⁹⁵ The new amusements of that period – amusement parks, roller skating, new types of social dance, cinema, for example – catered to that widely shared desire. By tying itself into the richly connotative and controversially charged popular understanding of roller skating, *The Rink* advertises itself as an intensely vivid example of the new world of amusement, and a laboratory space in which the social opportunities and social tensions it makes possible can be scrutinised as entertaining spectacle.

⁹⁴ King, *The Fun Factory*, 89, 99.

⁹⁵ Kasson, *Amusing the Millions*, 6.

ii) Chaplin's Performance in *The Rink*

Having demonstrated the close relationship between *The Rink* and the enlighteningly fraught history of roller skating, I want now to focus on what I take to be the film's crucial twist upon its historical material: the displacement of the skating crowd – the central trope of the roller-skating craze – by a singular, comic individual, Charlie. My aim here is to describe this displacement and show how Chaplin's performance acquires its comic force by taking ownership of the familiar and socially loaded clichés of the historical roller-skating craze and claiming them as distinctively his own.

The rink in the film is a peculiar historical hybrid, designed, I will argue, to accentuate Chaplin's performance. On the one hand, it appears to be a public, commercial venue with its large 'skating' sign outside and its 'check room' window – which Chaplin ducks under, presumably to avoid paying (figs 1.14 and 1.15). Yet, inside, the rink is very different from the typical rink of the popular contemporary imagination. It is not, for example, the rink described by Hartt in *The People at Play*, in which '[t]housands of figures [...] extremely varied [in] the grades of society they represent' swirled around in a threatening 'maelstrom of moving figures'.⁹⁶ The rink in the film is smaller, sparser and smarter and the skaters look uniformly well-to-do (figs. 1.16 and 1.17). The ease with which the rink is appropriated for Edna's skate party – an exclusive society affair – affirms its difference from the popular image. This rink is recognisable, however, as a rink of the Plimpton era of roller skating, when, as one commentator lamented nostalgically in the mid-1880s, 'the rinks were rigidly conducted, so as to interest the most conservative and orderly persons'.⁹⁷ In a more up-to-date rink, Charlie's comic singularity would have run the risk of merging more into the background. Instead, in this more exclusive rink that resummons the private clubs more characteristic of a prior moment, Charlie can assume centre stage unchallenged in an environment ripe for disruption.

⁹⁶ Hartt, *The People at Play*, 65.

⁹⁷ 'The History of Roller Skating,' *Wheeling Register*, 3.



Figs. 1.14 and 1.15. With its inviting exterior and check room, the rink in *The Rink* (1916) appears to be one of the public, commercial kind.



Figs. 1.16 and 1.17. Inside, the rink in *The Rink* (1916) resembles the plush socially exclusive skating clubs of an earlier moment. The film's first shot of the rink (fig. 1.16) shows a relatively sparse and well-dressed clientele. Two well-dressed gentlemen are floundering in the foreground, but are immediately attended to by a uniformed attendant. Later, when a skater is suspected of troublemaking he is immediately ejected by the attendant (fig. 1.17), exemplifying levels of regulation that the large commercial rinks were said to lack.

In terms of its aesthetics, Charlie's performance displaces aspects of spectacle that had been associated historically with the large crowds of the roller-skating craze. As discussed, the skating crowd was specifically remarked upon as a thrilling spectacle.⁹⁸ Commentators frequently drew attention to the abundant variety of attention-grabbing events that spontaneously emerged from the mass before quickly dissolving back into it: spectacular falls and collisions, graceful manoeuvres, titillating exchanges, intriguing juxtapositions of socially disparate characters.⁹⁹ In

⁹⁸ See pp. 43-44 above.

⁹⁹ 'Gliding about on Roller Skates,' 3; 'The Roller Skating Craze,' *New York Herald*, 8.

The Rink, Chaplin's solo performance absorbs all of this spectacular dynamism into his own person. Like the popular idea of the skating crowd, Charlie is perpetually in motion and continually breaking out into unexpected, even incongruous stunts. One moment he is gliding masterfully about the rink; the next he is in a spectacular condition of disarray, whirling his arms and legs manically to prevent himself from falling (figs. 1.18 and 1.19). One moment he is graciously and proficiently assisting Edna; the next he is falling into the arms of shocked bystanders (figs. 1.20 and 1.21).



Figs. 1.18 and 1.19. Charlie oscillates between spectacular extremes of graceful composure and explosive disorder in *The Rink* (1916).



Figs. 1.20 and 1.21. Scenes of order alternate with scenes of chaos in *The Rink* (1916), always with Charlie as centre and focus of the action.

Like the skating crowd, Chaplin's performance is almost bewildering in its variety and seems on the verge of incoherence. Yet it is kept teetering on that verge as it is rooted firmly in the dynamism of Charlie's persona. The micro-spectacles of

the rinks seemed to be the momentary displacements of the kinetic energy of the ‘whirling sea’ of the crowd into individual protagonists; similarly Charlie’s crazy comic antics seem the momentary displacements of his inherent will-to-motion. It is worth reiterating that during the roller-skating craze the ‘mighty whirlwind’ of the rinks had often been figured as a democratising force that swept aside social distinctions in ‘a spirit of reckless, exuberant play’ – to borrow John Kasson’s phrase.¹⁰⁰ Paradoxically, Chaplin manages to embody this collective ethos in the figure of a rebellious individual who is pitched against everyone else in the film.

The historical roller-skating craze of the mid-1880s, and its social and rhetorical legacy thereafter, is the displaced but pressing subtext of *The Rink*. By replaying this historical event with himself in the leading role, Chaplin situates himself in relation to social and cultural debates and contentions that were crucially of the film’s moment. Historically, the roller-skating craze had dramatised a challenge to dominant late-nineteenth-century values, standards and expectations. The rise of the large commercial rinks and their mass popularity in the mid-1880s had overturned the genteel image of roller skating and exemplified an emerging mass-amusement culture, and this had been dramatised – as a news event, and later as a collective memory – in terms of cultural conflict and crisis. The impact of Chaplin’s performance in *The Rink*, I have aimed to show, comes from his ability to reconstitute the dynamics of the roller-skating craze, and, by extension, of emergent mass culture more generally, in his own image. He does so by inserting that figure into a particular instantiation of the actual space of the rink that, although less prevalent than the public rinks by 1916, better allows the vigorously disruptive dynamics famously characteristic of the public rink to be entertainingly showcased in the person of one brilliantly maverick figure.

iii) From *The Rink* to *Modern Times*

If Chaplin’s use of roller skating in *The Rink* is characteristic of his relationship to mass amusement in his early films, then his reprised, but transformed, use of roller skating twenty years later in *Modern Times* (1936) illustrates a development that

¹⁰⁰ Hartt, *The People at Play*, 65; Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 59.

helpfully throws this relationship into relief. The latter film is explicitly concerned with questions of modernity and nostalgia, of the relationship of the present to the past. In its dramatisation of these interests, it also enacts a reflection on Chaplin's own earlier work, notably including *The Rink*.

In keeping with the declining status of roller skating in the intervening period since *The Rink*, roller skating in *Modern Times* is juvenilised.¹⁰¹ Chaplin finds a pair of roller skates in the 'toy department' of the department store and rushes to put them on with child-like excitement. Whereas Chaplin's ability to skate in *The Rink* was charged with erotic and subversive potential, here it represents the child-like innocence of his character (figs. 1.22 and 1.23). For each point at which the roller skating-sequence recalls *The Rink*, this crucial difference in inspiration asserts itself, as I shall explain.



Figs. 1.22 and 1.23. Charlie skips childishly into the toy department and gleefully spies the roller skates in *Modern Times* (1936).

In both films Chaplin's ability to roller skate is framed as a surprising revelation, but for different effects. In *The Rink* this revelation is a moment of triumphant impudence, revealing that his apparently inherent incompetence as a waiter is in fact a choice (fig. 1.24). And though other characters are momentarily excluded from the frame, it is a confrontational public act that initiates his attack on the genteel world represented by the rink that the film depicts. In *Modern Times*, by contrast, Charlie reveals his skills to the gamine only, not as a public act of aggression but as an act of personal pleasures and private endearment (fig. 1.25). Their privacy is in fact the premise of the scene: Charlie's job as a night watchman allows them to run free in the store, enjoying luxury goods usually denied them by

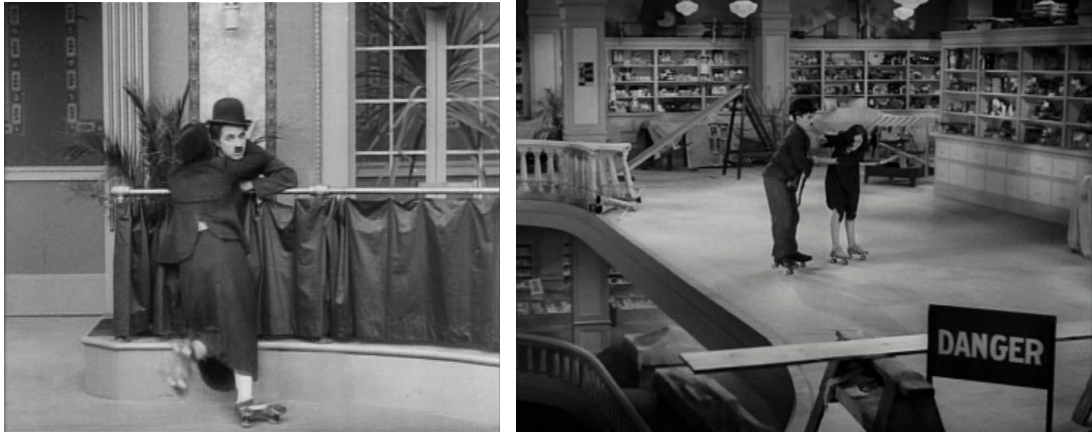
¹⁰¹ Traub, *Roller Skating Through the Years*, 40-41.

their poverty. The gamine responds to Charlie's skating in a correspondingly innocent and childlike fashion, clapping her hands excitedly as he skates around her. Whereas *The Rink* invites the audience to enjoy Charlie's risqué social transgressions, *Modern Times* elicits pathos and sympathy for its unfortunate characters, implying that they are still capable of graceful motion and innocent joy despite the hardships they have faced, and perhaps more capable of enjoying the goods on offer at the department store than those actually able to afford them.



Fig. 1.24 and 1.25. Chaplin reveals his skating skills to different effects in *The Rink* (1916) and *Modern Times* (1936).

The transition from aggressive social comedy in *The Rink* to pathos and subtle social commentary in *Modern Times* can also be seen in the very different types of physical interaction between Charlie and his leading lady while on skates. In *The Rink*, the two meet when Charlie saves Edna from a fall and this forms the basis of a sexually charged joke. In *Modern Times*, by contrast, Charlie has himself to be saved by the gamine, who takes him in her arms but holds him at an arm's length in a far more chaste arrangement which dispenses with the libidinal underpinning of the earlier scene (figs. 1.26 and 1.27). Thus what we see across the two scenes is the sexually charged disruption of propriety in *The Rink* being replaced by an innocent image of a touching, and childlike, friendship in *Modern Times*.



Figs. 1.26 and 1.27. Both *The Rink* and *Modern Times* feature an awkward roller-skating embrace between Chaplin and his female lead, only the sexual connotations are purged from this in the later film.

The central revision of Chaplin's use of roller skating from *The Rink* to *Modern Times* is the different ways it is used to position Charlie in relation to the disruptive forces of modernity. In *The Rink*, Charlie intrudes into the old-fashioned genteel world of the rink to disrupt it with something more spontaneous, irreverent and sexual. As I showed in the previous section, the historical subtext for this disruption is the emergence of a new mass-amusement culture, of which the rise of roller skating was a part. In *The Rink*, Charlie's roller skating poses a threat to those around him, to the exclusive social sphere represented by the rink and also to Edna's honour as defined by her moment and context. In *Modern Times*, by contrast, Charlie himself is imperilled by symbols of modernity, specifically the multi-story department store, as I shall now elaborate.

To impress his companion, Charlie skates blindfolded, and though he skates very well he fails to observe the 'danger' sign and precipitous drop in the middle of the room (fig. 1.28 and 1.29). The many floors of the department store (which continue below the frame as if into infinity) represent the great distance Chaplin has to fall, at the same time as they index the historical expansion of industrial consumer culture. Whereas Chaplin embodies the disruptive forces of modernity in *The Rink* by inserting himself into the social architecture of a prior moment, in *Modern Times* Chaplin distances himself from modernity by presenting himself as a gleeful but unthinking innocent who is imperiled from without by its (literal) architecture.



Fig. 1.28 and 1.29. Charlie puts on a blindfold, oblivious to the danger sign (bottom right) and the drop behind him (fig. 1.28) in *Modern Times* (1936). In *The Rink* (1916), it is Charlie who is a danger to others (fig. 1.29). Here he nearly topples Mr. Stout by skating too close.

Mapping the differences between these situationally related scenes should not be taken as downplaying the pleasures of *Modern Times*. It might, however, legitimately be taken as a bid to enhance an appreciation of *The Rink*. A widespread critical preference for the later feature films has meant that the distinctive qualities of the earlier films have been overlooked. Film critic Gerald Mast's comparison of these two films specifically exemplifies this. He writes that the scenario of imperilment that frames Chaplin's skating performance in *Modern Times*:

lifts the sequence out of the mere physical exhilaration and hypnotic motion of the skating in *The Rink* and suggests a metaphor that uniquely applies to the tramp character Charlie has created. Even when Charlie seems to be in complete control, he is merely one step from disaster.¹⁰²

While Mast is right to point out the metaphorical depth of the image in *Modern Times*, the comparison he makes with *The Rink* is unhelpfully reductive. In being so, it misses the historical lexicon through which the earlier film speaks, and the range of significances that specifically channeled the turbulent energies of the film's cultural moment. It is only by ignoring these aspects of the film that *The Rink* can be delimited to showing 'the mere physical exhilaration and hypnotic motion of the skating'. Reinserting it into the specific titillations and specific anxieties of that moment from which it emerged, and which it showcases with such comic and

¹⁰² Mast, *The Comic Mind*, 86.

knowing nimbleness, should rescue it from the unhelpful retrospective judgment of 'mere'.

CHAPTER 2

CHAPLIN AND THE DANCE CRAZE



Figs. 2.1 and 2.2. Charlie celebrates a hug from Edna with danced exuberance in *In the Park* (1915).

For Chaplin scholar David Robinson, there is little to recommend *In the Park* (1915), Chaplin's fourth film for Essanay, a park comedy in one reel. According to Robinson, the film was 'dashed off [...] within a week' and 'reverted to the reliable old Keystone formula' (crude slapstick, in other words) of lecherous flirtations and knock-about retaliations in a public park.¹ But there is one detail that catches Robinson's attention for the way it 'looks forward to the gallant Charlie of mature years.'² He refers to the sequence in which Charlie receives a girlish hug from Edna Purviance, and expresses his jubilation in an outburst of crazed bodily motion: spinning around, swinging on a branch, jousting his cane into the air (figs. 2.1 and 2.2). Robin interprets these movements as 'a satyr dance that anticipates *Sunnyside* [1919] and *Modern Times* [1936]'.³ He thus projects onto the sequence what has become a key motif in Chaplin commentary and criticism: Chaplin as a dancer. Indeed, many of Chaplin's most well-known and iconic scenes include dances: his delicately disembodied 'Dance of the Rolls' in *The Gold Rush* (1925), his danced breakdown at the assembly line in *Modern Times* (1936), or his absurd, yet mesmerising, global balloon play as Adenoid Hynkel in *The Great Dictator* (1940).

¹ Robinson, *Chaplin: Life and Art* (1985; revised edition, London: Grafton, 1992), 141.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

Furthermore, it has become conventional to describe Chaplin's distinctive performance style more generally in terms of its dance-like qualities.⁴ Dance is both an activity and an idea so intimately associated with the Chaplinesque that, for Robinson, it is sufficient to elevate *In the Park*, if momentarily, above what is otherwise perceived as formulaic, undistinguished slapstick.

What is interesting about Robinson's reading of *In the Park*, however, is that while he picks out a resemblance to a satyr dance which Chaplin only performed explicitly in later films (*Sunnyside* and *Modern Times*), he passes over another potential dance connection that ties the film to its *own* cultural moment. In his autobiography, Chaplin recalls how he often used music on the film set to inspire his performance, and how at Keystone this contributed to his personal inflection of the formulaic park-based comedy:

In one called *Twenty Minutes of Love* [1914], full of rough stuff and nonsense in parks, with policemen and nursemaids, I weaved in and out of situations to the tune of *Too Much Mustard*, a popular two-step in 1914.⁵

The song *Too Much Mustard* is significant here for it suggests affinities between Chaplin's performance style and the music of the day. *Too Much Mustard* was, in fact, a favourite song of the leading dance band of the era, James Reese Europe's Society Orchestra, who played it on their tours with the famous dance instructors Vernon and Irene Castle in 1914, the same year in which Chaplin claimed to have employed it on set.⁶ It was a song that emblematised, for many, a recent surge of interest in social dancing and a perceived, and much proclaimed, revolution in national musical tastes (which I shall outline in due course).⁷

⁴ Peter Ackroyd, *Charlie Chaplin* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2014), 44, 54, 57, 59, 90.

⁵ Charlie Chaplin, *My Autobiography* (1964; reprint, London: Penguin Classics, 2003), 209. Elsewhere in the book Chaplin recalls the film fondly: 'A Keystone Comedy rarely took more than a week to make, in fact I had made one in an afternoon, a picture called *Twenty Minutes of Love*, and it was a continuous laugh throughout.' Chaplin, *My Autobiography*, 157.

⁶ See: Eve Golden, *Vernon and Irene Castle's Ragtime Revolution* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 54, 69.

⁷ For an example of *Too Much Mustard* referred to as emblematic of the contemporary dance craze, see: Caroline Walker, *The Modern Dances: How to Dance Them* (Chicago: Saul Brothers, 1914), 13. Contrary to Chaplin's recollection, *Too Much Mustard* was not a two-step but a one-step dance, the step specifically associated with the boom in social dancing in the mid-1910s. See: Walker, *Modern Dances*, 11, 13.

Seen in this context, we might read Charlie's crazed dance in *In the Park* not as an allusion to the figure of a satyr, which he would play in later films, but as a physical expression of the exuberant, reckless, crazy mood of of-the-moment popular tunes like *Too Much Mustard*. Such a reading differs significantly from Robinson's in terms of cultural connotations. Chaplin in the role of a satyr unavoidably connotes the elevated cultural form of ballet: the satyr was a role most famously played by the Polish ballet dancer Vaslav Nijinsky in his ground-breaking *Afternoon of a Faun* (Robinson is of course aware that Chaplin met Nijinsky and saw *Afternoon of a Faun*, though not until 1916). *Too Much Mustard*, on the other hand, connotes ephemeral, mass-orientated amusement. In re-reading this scene as rooted in the connotations of the latter, I here re-invoke the idea, outlined in my introduction to this thesis and partially explored in Chapter 1, of Chaplin's contemporary appeal not in terms of his *difference* from contemporary mass-amusement culture, but rather in his distinctive ability to capture, reflect playfully upon, and, of course, himself become part of that culture.

Robinson's perception of the satyr dance in *In the Park* is illustrative of the general selectivity of many critics and commentators in discussing Chaplin as dancer, always focusing on types of dance that distinguish him from his moment and milieu. Peter Ackroyd exhibits the same selective vision when he describes *Twenty Minutes of Love* as a 'balletic performance [...] before a natural landscape', as if it had been transplanted in from the stage, or from some ethereal artistic region. Meanwhile, he neglects to explore affinities with the popular two step that allegedly imbued the film's creation and that social history tells us was much more integrated into the quotidian than the more rarefied forms of ballet.⁸ Ultimately, this selectivity functions to divorce Chaplin's films from the context of popular amusements which crucially shaped their creation and reception. Robinson, Ackroyd and others insist on the 'balletic' partly because it would seem to put Charlie's early park comedies on a higher cultural plane, the assumption being that Chaplin's value and appeal is best located where he transcends the low cultural level of popular amusements. This chapter will aim to counter this critical tendency, and to put Chaplin's early films back in touch with contemporary social dance and dance music. Thus I use the significant example of social dance to bolster the central contention of this thesis:

⁸ Ackroyd, *Charlie Chaplin*, 57.

that the value and appeal of Chaplin's early films owes much to their symbiotic relationship with contemporary amusement culture.

The exigency of this reassessment of dance in Chaplin's films becomes apparent when we consider the intense topicality of social dancing, and its associated music, in the mid-1910s. Between 1912 and 1915, newspapers abounded with sensational accounts of a spreading dance craze with headlines such as: 'Bear Dance Craze. New York Society's Fondness for "Bunny Hug" Shocks'; 'Modern Dance Craze Hits Puritan Capital'; 'Escape is Impossible! When All the World is Mad over the Dance Craze, How Can Duluth Get Away?'⁹ The accompanying articles staged fierce debates over the propriety of emerging dance styles and associated behaviours. In 1914, Hugo Münsterberg opined that social dancing was one of the most 'characteristic topics of social discussion'.¹⁰ He devoted a chapter to it in his influential book *Psychology and Social Sanity* (1914), noting that '[t]he dance seems [...] the centre of public interest; it is cultivated from luncheon to breakfast; it is debated in every newspaper and every pulpit.'¹¹ Münsterberg was far from alone, moreover, in expressing the belief that this level of prominence was a recent phenomenon and '[o]nly ten years ago such a dancing fever would have been impossible'.¹² For him, as for others, its occurrence was 'a significant expression of deep cultural changes which have come over America' – and not necessarily for the better.¹³ Chaplin's early films engage not only with the new dances that were sweeping the nation, but also with the topical subject of social dance and the debates that surrounded them. This chapter will inquire into the hitherto unexplored effects of this engagement.

It is worth pointing out that the critical view of ballet as an appropriate interpretive filter from Chaplin's early work is not entirely monolithic. Walter Kerr,

⁹ 'Bear Dance Craze. New York Society's Fondness for "Bunny Hug" Shocks,' *Morning Oregonian*, January 15, 1912, 3. 'Modern Dance Craze Hits Puritan Capital,' *The Boston Journal*, May 11, 1914, 7; 'Escape is Impossible! When All the World is Mad over the Dance Craze, How Can Duluth Get Away?' *Duluth News Tribune*, February 8, 1914, 3.

¹⁰ Hugo Münsterberg, *Psychology and Social Sanity* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1914), vii.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 274-275.

¹² *Ibid.*, *Psychology and Social Sanity*, 275.

¹³ *Ibid.*, *Psychology and Social Sanity*, 275.

a significant figure in Chaplin's critical legacy, expresses scepticism toward the Chaplin/faun/ballet association: 'We think quite casually of Chaplin as part-dancer now – having heard so endlessly about the Pan in him – but we rarely ask where it came from.'¹⁴ While Kerr is himself engaged in the critical project of elevating Chaplin's early films above those of his slapstick contemporaries in the mid-1910s, he argues that ballet is not the way to go; that the label is anachronistic when applied to 1914 and 1915, and, moreover, distracts from the actual dance-like qualities of the films.¹⁵ Kerr presents these films in more formalist terms, as 'rhythmic exercise[s]' which 'compress' typical slapstick action into something more formally satisfying, inviting the audience 'to see the patterning, its repetitions and variations, all at once, rather than spread out over the landscape and the rooftops in slapstick's conventional manner.'¹⁶ Thus Kerr elevates Chaplin above 'conventional' slapstick, as the ballet association is intended to do, but by close attention to the formal organisation of the films rather than mere association with an elevated cultural form. I would argue, however, that by limiting his focus to the formal aspects of the films, Kerr excludes cultural connotations that are temporarily appropriate and illuminating along with those that are not. More recently, scholars including Amy Sargeant and Paul B. Franklin have elaborated the dance motif in Chaplin's early films and enlarged its frame of reference. But they have passed over the quite specific debates of the dance craze that impinge significantly on Chaplin's early films.¹⁷

This chapter will argue that Chaplin's mid-1910s career not only coincided with a high-profile public debate specifically about social dancing, but that there was a close symbiotic relationship between the two, a relationship which had both aesthetic and cultural facets. My point is that the iconic dance motif in Chaplin criticism has tended to obscure a relation to popular dance that would otherwise help

¹⁴ Walter Kerr, *The Silent Clowns* (New York: Knopf, 1975), 92.

¹⁵ Kerr, *The Silent Clowns*, 93.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 96, 95, 95.

¹⁷ Amy Sargeant, 'Dancing on Fire and Water: Charlot and *l'esprit nouveau*,' in *Slapstick Comedy*, ed. Rob King and Tom Paulus (New York: Routledge, 2010), 193-206; Paul B. Franklin, 'The Terpsichorean Tramp: Unmanly Movement in the Early Films of Charlie Chaplin,' in *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities on and Off the Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 35-72.

to preserve the original lustre and specific timbre of his early films, and a sense of the excitement they offered contemporary audiences.

Following the same structural rhythms as Chapter 1, this chapter will begin with an analytic investigation of the dance craze in which I aim to demonstrate the craze's inherent dynamism and some of the characteristics of its controversial reputation, covering its styles, cultural dynamics and way of inadvertently focusing wider debates. This newly energised conception of contemporary social dance will then directly inform a reassessment of the Chaplin-as-dancer motif as it plays out between 1914 and 1916 across a selection of Chaplin's early films, including *Tango Tangles* (Keystone, 1914), *His Prehistoric Past* (Keystone, 1914); *Shanghaied* (Essanay, 1915) and *The Count* (1916). As with Chapter 1, the present chapter will conclude by examining how Chaplin choreographs his relationship to social dance differently in a scene in a later feature film, in this case the nightclub scene in *City Lights* (1931). I use this comparison with a later film to bring into relief the distinctive nature of Chaplin's relationship with mass-amusement culture in his early films, and to suggest developments in his film-making that have tended to obscure the intimacy and significance of this relationship for later audiences of his films.

Cycles of the Dance Craze

i) Origins

In 1896 a so-called new music caused a sensation in vaudeville. 'So odd is this music', wrote one witness, 'that it is impossible to write it, and few musicians can master it.'¹⁸ Those that could toured the vaudeville circuits and made names for themselves with piano demonstrations of the exotic style for curious audiences.¹⁹ One such entertainer, Edith Kingsley, performed on an upright piano 'with its vitals bared to view' to prove to audiences that the extraordinary sounds they heard were

¹⁸ 'The Play,' *St. Louis Republic*, November 1, 1896, 32.

¹⁹ [Advertisement for vaudeville programme at Keith's Theatre], *Boston Sunday Journal*, December 5, 1897, 15; 'At the Theatres,' *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 27, 1897, 19; 'Plays Next Week,' *Boston Daily Advertiser*, May 22, 1897, 8.

no trick.²⁰ Still, according to a report in the *Boston Advertiser*, the astounded audience demanded several encores ‘to see if [she] could do it again.’²¹ The new music was ‘ragtime’ and it was remarkable for its joyful exuberance and beguiling rhythmic intensity. Persistent syncopation counterpoised with a steady 2/4 march rhythm was its musical basis, and it was said to have, in Scott Joplin’s words, a ‘weird and intoxicating effect’ upon its listener.²²

Ragtime was soon to become a widely popular style of music that would be central to the rise of an organised industry for popular music in the early twentieth century. Yet its public debut between 1896 and 1897 took a more particular form. It was performed by trained white musicians upon the vaudeville stage who claimed that it was the characteristic music of ‘the Southern negroes’.²³ In keeping with the established presentational strategies of vaudeville, ragtime performers, and composers, presented the music as an ethnographic curio and an amazing new discovery for the amusement and edification of a fashionable and in-the-know audience.

It was claimed that the informal black music of the South had eluded the understanding of trained musicians, up until now. The composer Ned Wayburn was not the only early purveyor of ragtime to attempt to take credit for this supposed feat. He told journalists how on a trip through the South he had been ‘struck by the melody of the Southern negroes and the time in which it was sung’.²⁴ Subjecting it to learned scrutiny, he ‘recognized wherein it differed from any written music he had

²⁰ ‘Keith’s New Theatre,’ *Boston Daily Advertiser*, March 2, 1897, 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

²² Scott Joplin, *School of Ragtime: Six Exercises for Piano* (New York: Scott Joplin, 1908), 1, in *Scott Joplin Collected Piano Works, Vol. 1*, ed. Vera Brodsky Lawrence (New York: New York Public Library, 1971), 284. For a useful explanation of the basic musical components associated with ragtime, see: Peter Gammond, *Scott Joplin and the Ragtime Era* (London: Abacus, 1975), 20-21. Berlin has argued that an exclusively musicological definition of ragtime distorts the sense in which the term was originally used between 1896 and 1920, and that the term was applied to a variety of musical forms united by a general tone. According to music historian Charles Hamm, ragtime, ‘wasn’t judged by how it looked on paper, in musical notation, but how it sounded in performance. [...] [It] was as much a matter of spirit, attitude, and even stage deportment as of rhythmic patterns [...]’ Charles Hamm, *Irving Berlin: Songs from the Melting Pot, The Formative Years, 1907-1914* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 105.

²³ ‘Originator of “Ragtime” Ned Wayburn’s Claims to Authorship Disputed,’ *Evening Standard (San Jose, California)*, December 13, 1899, 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

ever seen, and he set himself to work to catch and reduce to writing its peculiar characteristics.’²⁵ Thus ragtime was presented as a demonstration of the skill and ingenuity of trained white musicians to master this ‘peculiar’ music.

In fact, such claims disguised an unscrupulous cultural theft: so far as music and cultural historians have been able to clarify, ragtime was the creation of black musicians in the late-nineteenth century, whose talents were ghettoised to brothels and saloons.²⁶ And far from being an untrained musical expression, it was a sophisticated musical hybrid that combined elements of European march music and vernacular African-American forms. Yet it was the perceived novelty and exoticism of the music in the very different context of vaudeville that brought it into fashion – into ‘the drawing rooms and the parlors of culture’, as Scott Joplin’s publisher put it – and paved the way for its entry into mainstream American culture.²⁷

Though ragtime performers and publicists stressed the edifying and ethnographic qualities of the music, its rambunctious and irreverent spirit was equally significant to its allure. Unlike the sentimental ballads that dominated the popular music of the day, ragtime appealed not to the emotions but to the body.²⁸ It was claimed that the rhythm was physically irresistible to the listener. ‘It has a powerfully stimulating effect,’ one commentator summarised in 1898, ‘setting the nerves and muscles tingling with excitement.’²⁹ The idea of ragtime’s visceral appeal swiftly became conventionalised in the trope of the out-of-control body. ‘Suddenly I

²⁵ ‘Originator of “Ragtime”,’ 3.

²⁶ The musical origins of ragtime music are notoriously difficult to trace and histories remain in large part conjectural. See: Berlin, *Ragtime*, 21-31; Edward A. Berlin, *King of Ragtime: Scott Joplin and his Era* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Prior to Berlin’s work, landmark studies of ragtime include: Rudi Blesh and Janis Harriet, *They all Played Ragtime: The True Story of an American Music* (New York: Knopf, 1950) and William Schafer and Johannes Riedel, *The Art of Ragtime: Form and Meaning of An Original Black American Art* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973).

²⁷ Berlin, *King of Ragtime*, 71. Ragtime’s allure to high society is illustratively dramatised in a chapter in: James Weldon Johnson, *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912; reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 80-91.

²⁸ David Ewen, *Tin Pan Alley* (New York: Funk and Wagnall’s, 1964), 37-54; Alex Wilder, *American Popular Song* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 6; Lewis Erenberg, *Steppin’ Out: New York Night Life and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 72-73.

²⁹ ‘Questions and Answers,’ *Etude* 16 (October 1898): 285. For further contemporary examples, see: Berlin, *Ragtime*, 46.

discovered that my legs were in a condition of great excitement', recounted one typical commentator in 1902:

They twitched as though charged with electricity and betrayed a considerable and rather dangerous desire to jerk me from my seat. The rhythm of the music, which had seemed so unnatural at first, was beginning to exert its influence over me. It wasn't that feeling of ease in the joints of the feet and toes which might be caused by a Strauss waltz, no, much more energetic, material, independent as though one encountered a balking horse, which it is absolutely impossible to master.³⁰

The ragtime effect, hyperbolically stylised in such accounts, conveys the more hedonistic and sensual qualities that coexisted within ragtime's early reputation for refinement and edification. Thus ragtime offered an irreverent and bodily exciting style of amusement framed within an ethnographic discourse that allowed audiences to enjoy its pleasures vicariously while, if they chose, maintaining their distance from, and sense of decorous superiority to, their object.³¹ So long as this balance was maintained, and so long as its popularity was confined to a socially select audience, ragtime was relatively undisruptive.

In the decade following its initial emergence, ragtime became more widespread and its exotic lustre faded. Already by 1899 one press reporter lamented on behalf of those who had formerly enjoyed ragtime, that it was 'now lending itself to low vaudeville' and becoming increasingly vulgarised.³² Rhetorically, though, it retained its status as a 'new' music and its much-proclaimed topoi of overpowering visceral appeal. These aspects were to be renewed, and even enhanced with ragtime's intensified cultural prominence in the early to mid-1910s.

ii) Boom

The 1910s witnessed an explosion of ragtime which eclipsed its earlier vaudeville debut and played out on a much larger public stage. Looking back from 1923,

³⁰ Gustav Kühl, 'Rag Time,' *Die Musik* 1 (August 1902): 1973, translated by Gustav Saenger, 'The Musical Possibilities of Rag-Time,' *Metronome* 19 (March 1903): 11.

³¹ On this dynamic, see: Erenberg, *Steppin' Out*, 73.

³² 'Samples of Rag Time Music Found in Works of Great Composers,' *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 30, 1899, 13.

Gilbert Seldes attributed the ragtime boom to its belated articulation in song, which finally focused something that had been in the air for years:

How much ragtime had been sung and played before, no man may calculate; it had been heard in every minstrel show, and its musical elements were thoroughly familiar. What was needed was a crystallization, was one song which should take the whole dash and energy of ragtime and carry it to its apotheosis.³³

And exactly this, according to Seldes, was achieved in 1911 by Irving Berlin's hit *Alexander's Ragtime Band*, 'a song which had no other topic than ragtime itself' and that made 'the whole country respond[...] to its masterful cry, *Come on and hear!*'³⁴ While there was certainly more to it than that, Seldes' account captures the sense of ragtime's dramatic rebirth in the early 1910s as a music to which 'the whole country responded'. Ragtime songs and ragtime music now flooded the popular music market, noticeably displacing the sentimental ballad and the Sousa march as the most popular forms of music and song.³⁵ 'Probably in the history of American manias', reflected one journalist in 1915, 'it will be recorded that rag-time music as a musical diversion—the critics would probably declare that it is not even musical—succeeded the age of Sousa'.³⁶ Thus a musical idea that had emerged nearly two decades earlier as an amusing eccentricity, safely contained within the existing structures of commercial amusement (vaudeville and sheet music publishing), now erupted as a widespread cultural phenomenon.

Crucially to this movement, was the coupling of ragtime music with social dancing and the popularisation of new dances uniquely suited to dancing to ragtime in a social context. Most notoriously was a trio of dances with animal names: the

³³ Gilbert Seldes, *The Seven Lively Arts* (1924; reprint, Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2001), 70, 71.

³⁴ Seldes, *Seven Lively Arts*, 71. According to music historian Charles Hamm, *Alexander's Ragtime Band* 'attract[ed] more public and media attention than any other song of its decade, [and] it quickly became an icon for the ragtime era'. Hamm, *Irving Berlin*: 102.

³⁵ On this important transition, see: Ewen, *Tin Pan Alley*, 37-54; Wilder, *American Popular Song*, 6; Erenberg, *Steppin' Out*, 72-73.

³⁶ 'Lure of Syncopation. Ragtime Period in the Annals of Music in the United States,' *Times Picayune* [New Orleans] March 4, 1915, 2.

Turkey Trot, the Grizzly Bear and the Bunny Hug.³⁷ Just as the defining song of the ragtime age, *Alexander's Ragtime Band*, extended a universal invitation to its listeners to 'come on and hear', the new dances invited them to come on and dance. As cultural historian Kathy Peiss points out in *Cheap Amusements: Working Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (1986), they 'were simple to learn, requiring little training or skill,' while they also allowed for 'endless variations on the basic easy steps' – a combination that made them adaptable to a variety of social contexts and allowed them to spread widely.³⁸

Indeed, the dances achieved something unusual for the time: simultaneous popularity across the social spectrum, in the ballrooms and summer resorts of high society and the commercial dance halls that catered to a largely working class patronage. Reporting in 1912 on the rise of social dancing in the summer resort of Seaside in Oregon, a local newspaper described the striking phenomenon:

Those who have furnished the most delightful shocks to spectators, eager to learn, have not been the ordinary run of chauffeurs and peelers of potatoes who furnish the new sensation in the San Francisco dance halls, but the entertainment is principally furnished by society people who have dared look no further than looking on in San Francisco, but who have eagerly sought a place to exhibit the new wiggles and ripples of the shoulder absorbed thus.³⁹

Curiously, other commentators saw the social trajectory of the new dances flowing in the opposite direction. According to a *New York Times* journalist, for example, also in 1912, when 'it is noised abroad that at a "coming out" party of a daughter of good society the "slow rag" or the "tango argentino" were danced, these grotesque posturings must, perforce, be imitated in the Saturday night dance of the poor girls [...].'⁴⁰ Probably, both trickle-up and trickle-down models of cultural contagion were true: the craze was a circular, self-intensifying phenomenon.

³⁷ On the origins of the new dances, see: Marshal Stearns and Jean Stearns, *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* (1968; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 96; Erenberg, *Steppin' Out*, 151-152.

³⁸ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 102.

³⁹ 'Wiggle Dance Craze Seizes upon Seaside,' *Morning Oregonian*, September 1, 1912, 8.

⁴⁰ 'Influence of Social Follies,' *New York Times*, January 5, 1912, 12.

Between 1912 and 1915, the idea of a dance craze sweeping the nation emerged as a familiar trope, popular in written commentary and song lyrics. In this context, the established trope of ragtime's irresistible visceral appeal was re-inscribed as a democratising motif. 'I remember hearing a negro quartet singing "Waiting for the Robert E. Lee,"' wrote Hiram K. Moderwell in 1915, referring to a characteristic ragtime tune, 'and I felt my blood thumping in tune [sic], my muscles twitching to the rhythm. I wanted to paraphrase Shakespeare: "The man who hath no ragtime in his soul, who is not moved by syncopated sounds".'⁴¹ Ragtime was widely popular, Moderwell suggested, because it appealed on a physiological level that undercut social distinctions. The invoking of Shakespeare, of course, incidentally helped to confirm ragtime as an apparently universal phenomenon with a mixed cultural register. Similarly, song lyrics of the time celebrated syncopation as a triumphant social leveller. In *Follow the Crowd* (1914), Irving Berlin's lyrics invited one and all to:

[...] hear a jew'l of an orchestra!
 Best of the rest in America!
 Each syncopated beat
 Just goes right to your feet.
 Heirs, millionaires, all the best of them,
 Glide side by side with the rest of them.⁴²

The image was one of a whole nation being swept up and brought together by a new music which somehow released the euphoric spirit of an idealised new age of American culture: perpetually kinetic, boundlessly energetic, optimistically democratic.

iii) Controversy

While enthusiasts ascribed the national dance craze to the irresistible lure of ragtime syncopation, even more powerful for drawing America into the ragtime era was the whirl of controversy that it generated. It was on the level of debate that the dance craze seemed to elicit the most widespread participation. 'Verily, all Gaul is divided

⁴¹ Hiram K. Moderwell, 'Ragtime,' *New Republic* 9, no. 50 (October 16, 1915), 285.

⁴² Irving Berlin, *Follow the Crowd* (New York: Waterson, Berlin & Snyder Co., 1914), 2-3.

into two parts,' proclaimed the *Duluth News Tribune* in 1914, 'i.e., persons who tango and persons who do not.'⁴³ And the divisions went further:

Each of its parts has its subdivisions, too: The first, those who tango properly and those who "just tango." The second part is divided into those who merely pay no attention or look on with amusement and say sarcastic, cynical things as they watch the dancers cavort about; and those who say, "Alas, the world is becoming wicked. This thing must be stopped!"⁴⁴

Encoded in these various stances were positions in debates on larger issues including gender roles, social hierarchy and national culture. These underlying issues are perhaps best teased out here with reference to the stance of outraged opposition – 'Alas, the world is becoming wicked. This thing must be stopped.'

The words and actions of one particular New York reform organisation, the Committee on Amusements and Vacation Resources of Working Girls (CAVRWG), is usefully illustrative of the organised opposition to the dance craze. The Committee took an active stance against the craze between 1912 and 1915, specifically opposing 'the dances of questionable origin which have lately been made fashionable.'⁴⁵ CAVRWG's spokesperson Belle Isreals (later Moskowitz) argued that the 'widespread diffusion of certain forms of dancing' was making a strong 'contribution to delinquency' among working girls.⁴⁶ In the typically euphemistic rhetoric of contemporary reformers, Isreals explained that '[t]he positions and movements of the dance, no matter how slight they may be, are pernicious' and exert a 'demoralizing influence' upon the dancer. While the dances might be very amusing for the members of high society, who danced 'pretty adaptations' of the original dances among friends in their ballrooms, they were dangerous for girls 'whose lives are not so well guarded and are ever subject to innumerable temptations'.⁴⁷

⁴³ 'Escape is Impossible!,' 3. By 1914, 'tango' had emerged as the catch-all term for the new one-step dances. See: Walker, *The Modern Dances*, 11; Vernon and Irene Castle, *Modern Dancing* (New York: The World Syndicate Company, 1914); 'Orpheum,' *Duluth News Tribune*, January 24, 1914, 3.

⁴⁴ 'Escape is Impossible!,' 3.

⁴⁵ 'Influence of Social Follies,' 12. This article, reporting on the Committee's activities, cites the Turkey Trot and Grizzly Bear specifically.

⁴⁶ 'Welfare Inspector at Society Dance,' *New York Times*, January 4, 1912, 1.

⁴⁷ 'Influence of Social Follies,' 12.

Isreals' Committee was not only concerned for working girls, however. It also stressed the dangers of the dance mania for the daughters of the well-to-do. Not satisfied with the opportunities for dancing at the usual social occasions, these young women were turning to other occasions and institutions of a more public and unpredictable nature. 'Afternoon dances', or *dansants*, were the key problem here.⁴⁸

[T]o these flock the young women whom parental care would ordinarily keep at home at night. It is easy for such a one to accompany a companion to an afternoon dance, there to meet those young men who while they dance well would not be tolerated in the home. Then they can go again and again, and they can say at home that they are going shopping or to visit a friend. So they fall under the spell of the dance and their companions.⁴⁹

And from thence they were as vulnerable to being led astray as the working girl. The problem of the dance craze was thus not confined to working girls, but had become a society-wide 'problem'. It resulted from a profound transformation of the public sphere, whereby commercial amusements played an increasingly important role in the social life of all classes and challenged traditional modes of social regulation.

Like the roller-skating craze three decades earlier, the dance craze was what sociologist Stanley Cohen has described as a 'moral panic': a 'stylised' and narrativised news event representing a 'threat to societal values'.⁵⁰ CAVRWG was just one of many organisations of 'right-thinking people', to use Cohen's term, who spoke of the dance craze as a unified threat and urged concerted opposition, a 'countermovement', as the *New York Times* put it, to 'the spread of this [dancing] contagion through all ranks of society'.⁵¹ In this context, the sensationalising rhetoric of 'contagion' functioned as both a threat and a reassurance: it suggested that no one was safe from the profoundly disruptive effects of the dance craze, but also that the perceived threat to social values was locatable and could be contained, treated and eradicated like a germ.

⁴⁸ 'To extend the hours of dance even into the afternoons,' Lewis Erenberg explains, 'cabarets and then hotels inaugurated tea dances, or as they were known in fashionable circles, thé dansants, in 1913.' Erenberg, *Steppin' Out*, 147.

⁴⁹ 'Women Aroused by Dance Evils,' *New York Times*, May 27, 1915, 11.

⁵⁰ Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (1972; reprint, 3rd ed. London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 9.

⁵¹ 'Welfare Inspector at Society Dance,' 1.

Also like the earlier roller-skating craze, the anxieties triggered by the dance craze were publicly played out in press reportage of dance-related elopement scandals through which the same basic narrative and same stereotypical characters recurred. Where the roller-skating craze in 1885 had the salutary tale of Professor Osborne and Rebecca Kearsely, the dance craze in 1915 had the well-connected nineteen year old, Eugenia Kelly, and a predatory dancer named Al Davis.⁵² Like ‘Professor’ Osborne before him, Al Davis was alleged to be ‘an ignorant, ill-born fellow having acquired a mere veneer of good manners and small talk’.⁵³ The couple were forcibly broken up by detectives employed by the girl’s mother, and the girl was let off on the condition that she lay off dancing and return home.⁵⁴ Reporting on the case, the *New York Times* included comments from leading experts, including Belle Isreal of the CAVRWG, who linked the individual case to the ‘evil condition’ of the dance craze in general.⁵⁵ ‘[T]he Kelly case has done good,’ she told the *Times*, ‘if it has called attention to the danger that lurks in the path of the young woman of today’. Such engaging mini-dramas thus tapped widespread social anxieties and excited public emotion over the dance craze, transforming it thereby into a public interest news event.

Speaking directly back to the opponents of the dance craze were ‘those who tango properly’ (returning here to the *Duluth News Tribune*’s factional breakdown of the debate).⁵⁶ That is, those who insisted the new dances were both aesthetically and morally commendable so long as they were danced in a decent manner. The most famous exponents of this view were Irene and Vernon Castle, two dancers who taught and demonstrated refined versions of the controversial ‘tough dancers’, initially to high-society, but also to the masses through newspaper articles, movies

⁵² Lewis Erenberg describes this case in some detail. Erenberg, *Steppin’ Out*, 77-80.

⁵³ Richard Barry, ‘Tango Pirates Infest Broadway Afternoon Dances,’ *New York Times*, May 30, 1915, sec. V, 16.

⁵⁴ Erenberg, *Steppin’ Out*, 78.

⁵⁵ ‘Women Aroused by Dance Evils,’ 11.

⁵⁶ ‘Escape is Impossible!’, 3.

and a book called *Modern Dancing* (1915).⁵⁷ *Modern Dancing* responds to criticism of the dance-craze throughout, and directly in its brief foreword:

Our aim is to uplift dancing, purify it, and place it before the public in its proper light. When this is done, we feel convinced that no objection can possibly be urged against it on the grounds of impropriety, but rather that social reformers will join the medical profession in the view that dancing is not only a rejuvenator of good health and spirits but a means of preserving youth, prolonging life, and acquiring grace, elegance, and beauty.⁵⁸

But the opponents of modern dance had already expressed their dissatisfaction with this argument. Isreals had insisted in 1912 that the modern dance ‘does not in the process of modification lose one whit of its disreputable identity and demoralizing influence’.⁵⁹ She claimed that the difference between the refined versions of the modern dances ‘and that which can be witnessed in the rowdy dance halls is only one of degree’, adding that ‘innocent participants can slip almost unconsciously from one extreme to the other’.⁶⁰ The issue underlying this debate seems to have been the acceptable level of hybridity for new cultural forms. For Isreals, and those on her side, ‘a dance which had its origins in questionable places’ and that was ‘originally intended to be suggestive’ could never shed its ‘disreputable identity’. For others such as the Castles, meanwhile, the dances could be extracted and remade in line with acceptable middle-class values, retaining certain elements and dispensing with others.⁶¹

With a different outlook again were ‘[t]hose who [...] look on with amusement and say sarcastic, irreverent things as they watch the dancers cavort about’.⁶² Many comic responses, in the press, on the stage and elsewhere, evidently took delight in the more controversial aspects of the craze and enjoyed the outrage of cultural-custodian-type figures and their floundering helplessness to control the

⁵⁷ Golden, *Vernon and Irene Castle's Ragtime Revolution*.

⁵⁸ Castle and Castle, *Modern Dancing*, 18.

⁵⁹ ‘Welfare Inspector at Society Dance,’ 1.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*; ‘Influence of Social Follies,’ 12; ‘Welfare Inspector at Society Dance,’ 1.

⁶² ‘Orpheum,’ *Duluth News Tribune*, January 24, 1914, 3.

situation. They depicted scenes like this comical vignette from a newspaper article of 1912:

“Oh, you beautiful Doll, you great big bee-ootiful doll,” sings society in the mazes of the seductive “Texas Tommy” and “Bunny Hug” dances, while Mayor Gaynor and all the reputable dancing masters in the town look on, shocked beyond measure.⁶³

The article continues in an irreverent tone, even as it reports the warnings of the Mayor and others about ‘menaces to the morals of the dancers and those who witness those dances’.⁶⁴ This position on the dance craze tended to emphasise the same salacious aspects as those who opposed it, except that they were evidently less concerned about the threat and more fascinated by its power to unsettle conventional authority.

Between the outraged and the cynical commentators, a mutually intensifying circularity emerged. The more outraged the opponents, the more the cynics mocked their gravity; and the more opponents were mocked, the more insistent they became. Illustrative of this, a *New York Times* editorial in January 1912 couched its condemnation of the dance craze as a response to the irreverent tendency:

The matter is one which would lend itself easily to light-hearted treatment. The dances have already stirred the jesters, and we understand that their drollery is irresistible to persons in a state of semi-intoxication. But this is a grave subject [...].⁶⁵

Thus the outraged, the sincere and the ‘jesters’ engaged in a dance of their own, pitching themselves against one another and mutually intensifying their positions, motivated, all the while, by an underlying struggle over behavioural and cultural standards in a drastically changing public sphere.

Unlike the roller-skating craze thirty years earlier, the popularity of social dancing in ragtime-influenced styles did not decline so drastically. ‘Everybody has been kept busy trying to fix the exact date on which the rapidly passing dancing

⁶³ ‘Bear Dance Craze,’ 3.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ ‘Influence of Social Follies,’ 12.

craze would really have expired’, wrote one journalist in 1914, reflecting a widespread scepticism about the continued popularity of the new dances. But the reporter had to admit that ‘if there be any marked abatement in the dance craze just at the present, it is not reflected in the programs presented day after day in our dancing palaces and show houses’.⁶⁶ Its resilience, he suggested, lay in its perpetual dynamism: ‘the craze is not passing, only changing’.⁶⁷ New dances continued to displace the old, though all within the stylistic parameters set by the original ‘tough dance’: easy to learn, lively, rhythm-driven and flexibly suggestive. If there was a particular trend in the evolution of ragtime dancing it was toward more modest and refined steps. In their *Modern Dancing* (1914), for example, Irene and Vernon Castle offered as one of their ‘Castle House Suggestions for Correct Dancing’: ‘Drop the Turkey Trot, the Grizzly Bear, the Bunny Hug, etc. These dances are ugly, ungraceful, and out of fashion.’⁶⁸ Though social dance would remain a contentious issue over the ensuing decades, its sensational edge was tempered and, in the way of these things, the moral panic that had contributed to its high visibility in the press moved on.

Chaplin as Dancer



Figs. 2.3 - 2.5. Illustration of a modern dance step from Caroline Walker’s instructional guide, *The Modern Dances: How to Dance Them* (Chicago: Saul Brothers, 1914), 37; Chaplin deploys this fashionable tango step in *His Prehistoric Past* (1914) and *The Count* (1916) for comic effect.

⁶⁶ ‘Gossip from Gay Gotham Day by Day,’ *Miami Herald Record* [published as the *Miami Herald*] August 8, 1914, 2.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Castle and Castle, *Modern Dancing*, 177.

The dance craze of the mid-1910s coincided closely with Chaplin's rise to fame. It emerged as a sensational event of national scope around 1911, just one year before the Keystone Film Company was formed in 1912. The dance craze intensified and evolved over the course of the mid-1910s, in which time Keystone found a large and enthusiastic audience, launched Chaplin's film career in 1914 and saw the English comedian go on to become a national figure with *Essanay* in 1915. According to Walter Kerr, it was not until Chaplin's Mutual films of 1916 that he would 'finally begin to dance' in an explicit way.⁶⁹ Not so. In 1914 and 1915, Chaplin's screen persona explicitly partook in the contemporary craze (figs. 2.3 - 2.5). It is simply that the steps are just not those that critics conventionally think of when they imagine Chaplin as, in Kerr's words, 'part-dancer'.⁷⁰ My contention is that the dance craze and Chaplin's rise, related as they both were to a changing mass amusement culture, were bound by important affinities. The symbioses in their relationship have tended to be obscured by the now-conventional, and more restrictive, critical approaches to dance in Chaplin's films thus far posited.

In what follows I will explore the ways in which Chaplin's films engaged with the dance craze during the mid-1910s, proceeding through three stages. The first addresses direct allusions to the modern dances in *Tango Tangles* (1914), *His Prehistoric Past* (1914) and *Shanghaied* (1915). The first of these films, *Tango Tangles*, was a Keystone film directed not by Chaplin, but Mack Sennett. Nevertheless, it provides a starting point for tracing the trajectory of Chaplin's engagement with the dance craze in his early films. Since the film was not directed by Chaplin – his directorial debut for Keystone, *Twenty Minutes of Love* (1914) was a number of weeks off yet – it represents what was already being done with the dance craze in his line of film comedy, thus allowing us to trace his development from this point. The second stage of my analysis examines the sustained deployment of dance craze tropes in Chaplin's Mutual film, *The Count* (1916). The third stage compares *The Count* with other Chaplin films, precedent and antecedent, that combine amusement subject matter with the same formulaic plot – *Caught in a Cabaret* (1914), *The Rink* (1916) and *City Lights* (1931).

⁶⁹ Kerr, *The Silent Clowns*, 92.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

In all of this analysis I want to stress the evolving trajectory of Chaplin's engagement with the dance craze, especially between 1914 and 1916. Critics and commentators have tended to treat Chaplin's films across this period as becoming increasingly independent of contemporary amusement culture, offering 'something different' and more artistic as Chaplin himself became increasingly independent as a filmmaker.⁷¹ I want to counter that reading by drawing attention to the ways in which, through Chaplin's films of 1914 to 1916, an engagement with the contemporary dance craze evolved.

i) Topical Allusions in *Tango Tangles*, *His Prehistoric Romance* and *Shanghaied*.

When, in early 1914, Mack Sennett directed and released *Tango Tangles*, starring three of his most popular players (Ford Sterling, Roscoe 'Fatty' Arbuckle and Chaplin) he was making a topical joke: so pervasive was the current dance craze that even the Keystone comedians, the most unlikely dancers, were taking part. As is often the case with topical humour, the joke was not original: vaudevillians, cartoonists and columnists were all busy inserting the dance craze into unlikely situations for comic effect (fig. 2.6). In *Tango Tangles*, the comedians actually do very little dancing, but the setting highlights the ironically dance-like qualities of their characteristic knock-about performance, with its punch-drunk one-steps and reeling pirouettes (figs. 2.7 and 2.8). In this way the dance gets into even the unlikely activity of broad slapstick knockabout. Whether audiences laughed at the absurd extremes of the dance craze, or at the hyperbolised inability of the Keystone comedians to fit it in with current trends (and indeed these responses might not be mutually exclusive), the film undoubtedly makes topical reference its main attraction.

⁷¹ John Kimber, *The Art of Charlie Chaplin* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 54.



Fig. 2.6. One of many examples of jokes about the all-pervading nature of the dance craze in 1914. 'Getting Away from the Dance Craze,' *Kansas City Star*, August 15, 1914, 10.



Figs. 2.7 and 2.8. In the setting of a dance hall Charlie and Sterling's knockabout performance ironically resembles dance in *Tango Tangles* (1914).

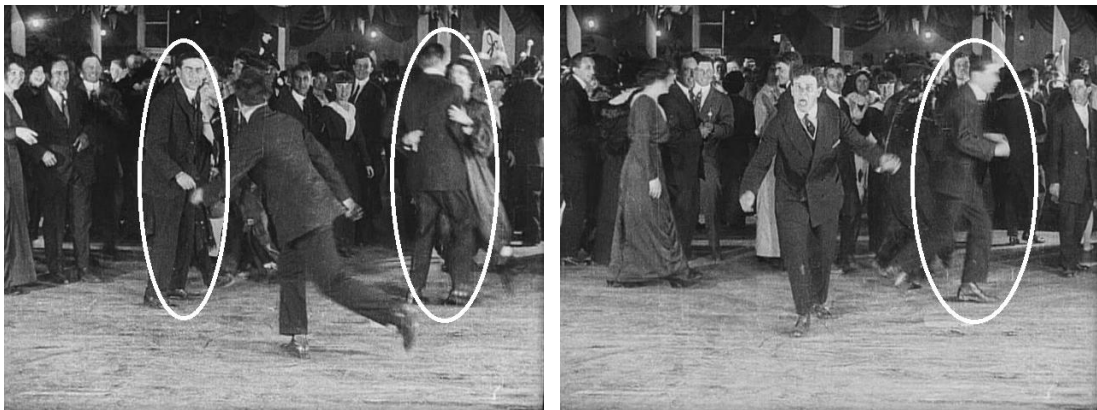
While the film was itself a topical joke about the dance craze, it also had specific topical jokes embedded into the incidental drama of the dance hall crowd. Audiences familiar with the cultural landscape of the dance craze and the social dynamics of the dance floor would have easily recognised the figure of a dance-hall manager, who is visible in the background of the dance-floor shots striding about the floor, intently inspecting the dancing couples for improper behaviour and physically directing the crowd where necessary (figs. 2.9 and 2.10). For contemporary audiences this authoritarian figure would have brought to mind the concern that was frequently expressed, in the press and elsewhere, with the behavioural standards of dance halls and the issue of their regulation. The visibility of the hall manager would also, we can imagine, have excited expectations of troublemaking.



Figs. 2.9 and 2.10. The dance-hall manager regulating the dancing crowd in *Tango Tangles* (1914): inspecting and directing the crowd (fig. 2.9); ushering a child off the floor (fig. 2.10).

At one point, the floor manager is the subject of a pointedly topical satire of contemporary attitudes toward the new dances. A fight breaks out between Charlie

and Sterling, and at the same moment a couple briskly turkey trot across the frame (fig. 2.11). The manager hesitates, unable to attend to both transgressions at once. Clearly the fight presents the greater disruption, but the manager dashes out of the frame after the turkey trotters (fig. 2.12), thus lampooning how opposition to particular dances often exceeded common sense.⁷² The gag undoubtedly relies on an audience's knowledge of contemporary responses to social dancing and the public controversies over its regulation. It is also worth noting the way in which the film appeals to different planes of attention, with the hall manager's antics taking place in the background of shots shared with the antics of star comedians in the foreground. The film is in this way imbued with topical reference to the contemporary dance craze, harnessing the sense of social disruption generated by a contemporary news scandal to predispose the viewer to the generally anarchic comedy of the Keystone players.



Figs. 2.11 and 2.12. The dance-hall manager opts to chase a couple performing a unauthorised Turkey Trot rather than tend to the disorderly Ford Sterling in *Tango Tangles* (1914).

Chaplin would use something of *Tango Tangles'* topical humour in his brief dance scenes in *His Prehistoric Romance* (Keystone, 1914) and *Shanghaied* (Essanay, 1915) both of which he directed himself. In *His Prehistoric Romance*, Chaplin anachronistically inserts a recognisably 'modern' dance into a 'prehistoric' setting, making it part of a courting ritual between bearskin-wearing, club-carrying cave people (figs. 2.13 and 2.14). Similarly, in *Shanghaied*, Charlie inserts a step that resembles a modern dance unexpectedly into a sailor's Hornpipe jig, danced upon the eponymously 'shanghaied' ship (figs. 2.15 and 2.16). Thus, by

⁷² See pp. 87-89 above.

incorporating modern dances into some incongruous space or place, Chaplin riffs inventively upon the all-pervasiveness of the dance craze, developing the topical joke implicit in *Tango Tangles* by bringing the modern dances into even more far-out scenarios – the temporally distant prehistoric age in the former film, the culturally distant nautical folk dance in the latter.



Figs. 2.13 and 2.14. Chaplin inserts a modern dance into a prehistoric courting ritual in *His Prehistoric Romance* (1914).



Figs. 2.15 and 2.16. To stave off his assailant, Chaplin baffles him with a crazily jumbled dance revue that switches from nautical jig steps to modern dance in *Shanghaied* (1915).

The modern-dance jokes in *His Prehistoric Romance* and *Shanghaied* differ from those in *Tango Tangles*, however, in one important respect. In *Tango Tangles* the topicality of the modern dances is the main source of humour; in the latter two films, topicality is secondary to the comic eccentricity of Charlie's persona. In his book *Comedy is a Man in Trouble: Slapstick in American Movies* (2000), Alan Dale makes an insightful case for Chaplin's 'early style' in his films between 1914 and

1916.⁷³ He writes that the Charlie of these films is so fascinating because his character is ‘incoherent, unresolvable, but in a productive way.’⁷⁴ Dale elaborates that ‘Chaplin always defers his ultimate definition of the figure by adding something out of the blue that doesn’t add up but is unforgettable—because it doesn’t compute.’⁷⁵ Paradoxically, then, ‘[t]his managed incoherence produces a readily recognizable comic character’.⁷⁶ This account is very apt, I suggest, for Charlie’s incongruous, ‘out-of-the-blue’ deployment of modern dances in *His Prehistoric Past* and *Shanghaied*. While the irreverent references to the all-pervading modern dance would undoubtedly have been funny in themselves, the greatest pleasure of the sequence is recognising Charlie’s crazed intelligence at work in these exhilarating moments of ‘incomputable’ nonsense, or ‘managed incoherence’.⁷⁷

Charlie’s crazed eccentricity is particularly evident in the *Shanghaied* dance sequence. If this were a more straightforward case of topical humour, it might be that Charlie accidentally, by a lapse of attention, falls into modern dance steps simply because they are on everyone’s mind. Instead, however, Charlie deploys the dance strategically to baffle the chef (Charlie has provoked the ire of the chef, and as soon as Charlie stops dancing the chef will resume a violent tirade). Rather than buffoonishly and accidentally dancing a modern dance in the wrong context, he deliberately deploys the modern dance for its incongruity in order to disarm the chef. It is an example of Charlie’s turning whatever is to hand to his own purposes, just as he turns a wig into a hand towel to dry his face in *Caught in the Rain* (1914), a palm leaf into a toothbrush in *A Night Out* (1915) or a ladle into a guitar to amuse Edna in *The Pawnshop* (1916).⁷⁸ In *His Prehistoric Romance* audiences were also encouraged to associate the out-of-place modern dance with Charlie’s

⁷³ Alan Dale, *Comedy is a Man in Trouble: Slapstick in American Movies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 39.

⁷⁴ Dale, *Comedy is a Man in Trouble*, 37-38.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 39; 37.

⁷⁸ Many critics have mentioned Chaplin’s striking resourcefulness and transformative power with objects. See, for example: Walter Kerr, *The Silent Clowns*, 75, 92; Robinson, *Chaplin: The Mirror of Opinion* (London: Secker Warburg, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 171.

characteristically zany imagination, since the whole prehistoric fantasy is framed, by the opening and closing shots, as a modern-day Charlie's dream.

I do not mean to argue that Chaplin's use of modern dance in *His Prehistoric Past* and *Shanghai'd* is not topical, or that topicality is not an important component of the humour. Instead I argue that there are two overlapping jokes at play: (1) the joke that *the dance craze* is so all-pervading that it can reach anachronistically and incongruously into the most improbable spaces; and (2) that *Charlie* is so quirky and spontaneous that he incorporates the dance craze into the most absurd circumstances. For a contemporary audience there was an available pleasure in the resonance between the two jokes: Charlie might embody the disruptive energy of the craze, and through his performance audiences could reflect, in a light-hearted way, upon the profound social and cultural transformations that were felt through the public sensation of the modern ragtime dance.

ii) Ballroom Dancing in *The Count*

In *The Count* (1916), his fourth film for Mutual, Chaplin returned to the dance floor for the first time since Keystone's *Tango Tangles* (1914). Both films concern Charlie's pursuit of a girl, much of which takes place on a dance floor among a crowd of dancers. Yet there are also several differences between the films which reflect developments in his film-making taking place across these three years. The recent phenomenon of the dance craze and its attendant debates are at least as relevant, if not more so, to a reading of the later as to the earlier film. In what follows I explore how differences of setting, character types and choreography between the two films invoke the contemporary dance craze, and its attendant debates, in different ways.

To outline the plot and comic gist of *The Count*, its major action is Charlie's impersonation of a count at a high-society dance held by the 'Moneybags' family, at which he makes it his business to court the young 'Miss Moneybags'. This scenario is framed within a quite intricate narrative about a rivalry between Charlie and his boss, a tailor played by Eric Campbell. The major part of the first reel follows a series of interlocking incidents which bring both Charlie and Eric to Edna's house, while establishing the men's socially and morally dubious characters. Once they are at the party, much of the comedy revolves around the incongruity of Charlie's count

guise and his very un-countly behaviour, which includes tugging people's beards, playing with his food, stealing silverware and drinking uninhibitedly. This comedy is enhanced and complicated by the dramatic irony of the situation: we know Charlie is an imposter; the guests believe he is a count. Thus, the more outrageous Charlie's behaviour, the more laughable are the guests in accepting it under the mistaken belief he is a count. The scenario also introduces a dramatic tension, as we wonder how far Charlie's antics can stretch the credulity of his hosts before it snaps.

Perhaps the most obvious difference from *Tango Tangles* is the setting. *Tango Tangles* takes place in a large commercial dance hall with a large and heterogeneous crowd in attendance (fig. 2.17). The dance in *The Count* by contrast takes place in the private ballroom of a high-society household (fig. 2.18). Interestingly, while the social status of the setting is elevated in *The Count*, Charlie's social status stays approximately the same. Thus while, Charlie seems relatively at home in his surroundings in *Tango Tangles*, in *The Count* he is socially incongruous. The result of this is to emphasise Charlie as the central source of comedy. In *Tango Tangles* the dance hall is a rowdy environment, in which Charlie, as well as Sterling and Arbuckle, are hyperbolised intensifications of the general tone of the venue. In *The Count*, on the other hand, the guests are much more refined and polite in their behaviour and Charlie's antics stand out in contrast.



Figs. 2.17 and 2.18. Two different settings for dancing in *Tango Tangles* (1914) and *The Count* (1916), one resembling the commercial dance halls of the day, the other a high society ball room.

This different relationship between protagonist and setting in *Tango Tangles* and *The Count* can be illustrated by comparing scenes in which Chaplin makes a spectacle of himself before an onscreen audience. In the Keystone film, Charlie and

Sterling decide to fight for the girl and the dancers cease dancing to crowd around the combatants. A comparable scene occurs in *The Count* when Charlie and Edna give an exhibition dance for the assembled dancers, and in both cases there is an onscreen performance that richly showcases Chaplin's acrobatic style of slapstick. But the scenes set up very different relationships between the onscreen performers and onscreen audience. In *Tango Tangles* the audience crowd closely around the fighters. They evidently relish the show, laughing and cheering, and they get involved in the action, shouting encouragement and catching the comedians when they fall (fig. 2.19). The comedians on their part, occasionally disappear into the crowd as they reel from their blows. In *The Count*, by contrast, there is a much clearer spatial separation of performers and audience. Their reaction is also different, alternating between polite appreciation and anxious concern when Chaplin falls over, the latter expressed by a collective flurry of raised hands and gasping faces (fig. 2.20).



Figs. 2.19 and 2.20. Scenes from *Tango Tangles* (1914) and *The Count* (1916) respectively, in which Charlie performs for an audience. The former audience relish the fight, crowd round and push the actors back onto the floor when they fall; the latter stand further back and look on aghast when Charlie falls or does something unusual.

There is a very different relationship between the performers and audience in these two scenes. In the fight scene Charlie and Sterling function as ring leaders for an unruly crowd, creating a generally anarchic scene in which they are only the foremost elements. In the dance scene in *The Count*, by contrast, the onscreen audience draw very little attention to themselves, while their movements are carefully choreographed in relation to Chaplin's performance. For the most part the crowd holds quite still, then when Chaplin performs one of his pratfalls a ripple of

agitation passes through it like a visual exclamation alerting us to Charlie's antics. This compositional foregrounding of Chaplin's eccentric performance in *The Count* accentuates his status as an outsider around which the comedy hinges. The effect of these developments upon the fight scene in *Tango Tangles*, is that Charlie's performance becomes the concentrated source of disruption in the scene, rather than one element in a generally unruly scene.

This development could be read as a move away from the overtly topical comedy of *Tango Tangles*. The Keystone film calls on audiences' knowledge of the dance craze and the understanding that it was a current movement causing widespread public outrage. Presumably this would have enhanced audiences' enjoyment of its anarchic representation of a typical dance hall. *The Count*, by contrast, includes an outraged audience within the film, and so relies less on the direct invocation of extra-textual knowledge of the dance craze (it is perhaps partly for this reason that *The Count* might seem the more appealing film for audiences today). I maintain that *The Count* replaces the topical dance-floor humour of *Tango Tangles* with a seemingly more self-sufficient, Charlie-centric comedy. Yet this is not to cancel out the topical resonances of the film. Rather, Chaplin's virtuoso one-man performance as an eccentric and disruptive individual at a staid society dance, was all the more enjoyable for its pertinence at a time when the country was still reeling (and rocking) from a revolution in social dance.

If pre-1910 dance practices were, as one commentator claimed, '[h]edged in by an intolerable propriety', and the dance craze represented, by contrast, an explosion of repressed energy and joyful spontaneity, Chaplin's performance in *The Count* seemed to reflect the liberation of that moment.⁷⁹ Charlie's formal dance with Edna is most illustrative of this. He is surrounded by a crowd of expectant onlookers, but repeatedly refuses to dance 'properly', getting his hip stuck out of joint, slipping to the floor, improvising tricks with his hat – all to the surprise and bewilderment of his audience (figs. 2.21 - 2.23). Here he exhibits the same qualities of exuberance,

⁷⁹ H. R. Wakefield, 'Reply To "A Peeress",' *London Times*, May 21, 1913, 11. Though published in a London newspaper this article was from an author familiar with both the American and English dance scenes and explicitly addresses both.

spontaneity, movement and playfulness that were attributed to the new music and dance. He seems the embodiment of ragtime syncopation, dancing mischievously around the expectations of regularity with spontaneous, off-beat gestures. The recollection of a former Chaplin employee that a band was employed to play the contemporary ragtime hit *And They Called it Dixieland* (1916) repeatedly while Chaplin worked out his routines, seems entirely plausible here.⁸⁰



Figs. 2.21 - 2.23. Charlie's unconventional antics on the dance floor in *The Count* (1916).

But as well as putting Chaplin forward as a vivid embodiment of the kind of spontaneity and hilarity associated with the dance craze, *The Count* also entangles Charlie with the social anxieties that underlay the controversy of the craze. For while the comedy of *The Count* may not rely on topical references as much as *Tango Tangles*, there is a strong resemblance in the film between Charlie and the contemporary dance-craze stereotype of 'the tango pirate'. To quote one contemporary description this was any 'ignorant, ill-born fellow having acquired a mere veneer of good manners and small talk', who haunted public dances, or ingratiated himself into private ones, in order to dance young and respectable women off their feet.⁸¹ Indeed, Charlie cunningly imitates the trappings of politeness to ingratiate himself with Edna, for example ceremoniously taking her arm to lead her in to the dining room, and commencing their dance with a formal bow (figs. 2.24 and 2.25).

⁸⁰ David Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art* (1985; revised edition, London: Grafton, 1992), 174. Raymond Egan and Richard A. Whiting, *And They Called it Dixieland (They Made it Twice as Nice as Paradise)* (New York: Jerome H. Remick & Co, 1916).

⁸¹ Barry, 'Tango Pirates Infest Broadway Afternoon Dances,' 16.



Figs. 2.24 and 2.25. Charlie affects the trappings of politeness in *The Count* (1916).

In having Charlie duplicitously pursue a woman who is his social superior by a considerable margin, *The Count* introduces a contemporarily relevant social drama, absent from *Tango Tangles*, in which he pursues a hat-check girl with unguarded lecherousness. Importantly this is a drama that would have resonated powerfully with the debates about the dance craze. Indeed, this drama parallels the drama of the dance craze itself as it was imagined by reformers such as Isreals, in which dances and dancers of ‘disreputable identity’ invaded ‘respectable society’ using the disguise of alluring new fashions.⁸² Chaplin may not have consciously assumed the stereotype of the tango pirate in *The Count* – in fact, it is so consistent with his general persona as it was at that time that it hardly required any assuming at all. Yet given the prominence of the tango pirate in the rogues gallery of the contemporary public imagination, it seems likely that audiences would have perceived correspondences.⁸³

In Chapter 1, I explored how Chaplin’s comic representation in *The Rink* (1916) of a character resembling the social stereotype of the roller-skating professor might reflect contemporary concerns about class and gender relations in different, even contradictory ways. The same applies to *The Count* (1916). On the one hand, a contemporary audience might vicariously enjoy the challenge that Charlie poses, if temporarily, to social and sexual behavioural standards as he courts Edna with often unconventional methods, such as playing with his food and dancing eccentrically.

⁸² ‘Influence of Social Follies,’ 12.

⁸³ Stanley Cohen describes how a society may develop a ‘gallery of types’ to ‘show its members which roles should be avoided and which should be emulated.’ Moral panics, he argues, help to generate types for such a gallery. Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, 1, 2.

On the other hand, the same audience might enjoy seeing a figure with many of the familiar characteristics of a supposedly dangerous tango pirate rendered risible. He is small and shuffling and a patent imposter; his disguise may fool Miss Moneybags but not us. Furthermore, an audience might take pleasure in his being punished for his attempted sins when he is finally chased from the ballroom at gunpoint. Probably both responses could co-exist. In either case, the controversy that surrounded social dancing might well have served to enhance the comic potency of Chaplin's performance.

Finally, I would like to address one scene in *The Count* which returns us conveniently to the image with which this chapter began: Charlie performing a series of madly exuberant dance-like movements under a tree in *In the Park* (1915). In the *Count* there is a pivotal scene that recalls that earlier moment. Charlie has removed himself from the dance floor to escape the notice of the maid who might reveal his true identity. He helps himself to a glass of punch at the buffet table, where he also meets a young woman in an Egyptian belly-dance costume, who gives him an alluring glance. His reaction is the same as when he receives a hug from Edna in the park: he begins a kind of crazed dance, spinning round and jousting with his cane, this time to skewer a roast turkey (figs. 2.26 - 2.31). His exuberance escalates rapidly into aggression. In *In the Park*, Charlie's episode culminates in him throwing a brick at a bystander and instigating a fight; here he attacks a large, finely-iced cake. He swings at it with his cane like a mad golfer, dispatching sticky portions into the face of the guests, and thereby initiating a manic chase that climaxes in his expulsion from the party.



Figs. 2.26 - 2.31. Frames from *In the Park* (1915) and *The Count* (1916) alternately illustrating a sexually-charged dance-like routine: Charlie swings his body and twitches his eyebrows suggestively, jousts with his cane and launches a vicious attack on some nearby object.

This dance outburst of pent-up and emphatically sexual aggression can now be seen as, in effect, a Chaplin set piece. In *The Count*, there is no doubt that this is a dance of disruption, not, as Robinson would have it, a display of ‘gallant[ry]’ such as the one that he offers to the blind flower girl in *City Lights* (1931).⁸⁴ It is the means by which Charlie finally blows his count disguise and aggressively reveals his social

⁸⁴ Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art*, 141.

alterity. Charlie's fascinatingly bizarre movements here seem aligned not with an aspirational impulse towards ballet, but with the spontaneity, excitement and disruptive force so systematically attributed to contemporary popular music and social dance. These were a set of energies that Chaplin and the dance craze shared, and that, perhaps were increasingly mutually enhancing. Indeed, a circularity of this sort is suggested by the use of Chaplin in ragtime songs around this time, a subject I will take up in Chapter 4.

iii) From *Caught in a Cabaret* to *City Lights*

The Count is an important film in the development of Chaplin's filmic relationship with contemporary mass-amusement culture, as we can see by briefly comparing it to *Caught in a Cabaret* (1914), which preceded it, and *The Rink* (1916) which followed three months and as many films after. All three films deploy the formulaic 'fake count plot', as Robinson has usefully termed it. And all three incorporate some aspect of contemporary or recent amusement culture (roller skating in *The Rink* and dance in the other films).⁸⁵ Yet the manner in which these two aspects of the films are integrated changes in illuminating ways. Having compared these films I will then turn to Chaplin's later feature film *City Lights* (1931), which also uses a variation on the fake-count plot and uses amusement culture as subject matter. By tracing the relation of this film to the earlier fake-count films of the mid-1910s, we may observe a change in how the Charlie persona relates to popular culture, thereby clarifying the special nature of this relation in Chaplin's films of the mid-1910s.

Across *Caught in a Cabaret*, *The Count* and *The Rink* the use of an amusement activity becomes increasingly central to the narrative and to Chaplin's performance. In *Caught in a Cabaret*, the cabaret amusement is only a background for the fake-count plot; in *The Count*, dance becomes a major device by which Charlie attempts to pass himself off as a count, as well as an opportunity for Chaplin to demonstrate his virtuoso performance skills; in *The Rink* roller skating is even more emphatically the central device by which Charlie deceives Edna, as well as the occasion for Chaplin's spectacular performance. The integration of an amusement activity into the fake-count formula in *The Count* and *The Rink* expands enormously

⁸⁵ Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art*, 141.

the comic potential of the formula: the amusements allow ample opportunities for the improvisation of physical comedy upon a theme, and they come pre-loaded with provocative social connotations. By making dance or roller skating integral to the narrative as Charlie's means of duping a society girl, these films channel anxieties (and fantasies) associated with these amusements into the film, and specifically into Charlie's singular comic persona.

Another significant development across Charlie's fake-count films – *Caught in a Cabaret*, *The Count*, *The Rink* – is the move toward high-society settings for Charlie's disruptive comic business. In *Caught in a Cabaret*, the eponymous cabaret is a dive bar where Charlie works. The general behaviour there is already chaotic and raucous, and Charlie seems at home in such surroundings (fig. 2.32). Though the film takes an excursion into the life of high society as Charlie goes on a stroll as a gentleman, befriends a society girl (Mabel Normand) and attends her party, it returns to the cabaret for its climactic melee. Charlie manages to dupe Mabel as to his social status, but in the process he acquires a jealous rival from the girl's social set. The rival arranges a 'slumming' party with Mabel and her family to visit Charlie's place of work, and thereby exposes Charlie's trick. In this climactic 'slumming' scene it is the society ladies and gentlemen who are out of place in the rambunctious world of cheap amusements to which Charlie belongs (fig. 2.33). After *Caught in a Cabaret*, that world would disappear to be displaced by high-society settings such as the ballroom in *The Count* and the private rink party in *The Rink*, in which Charlie would always be the sole individual out of place, and the sole source of turbulence. While the tailor's shop in *The Count* functions to signal Charlie's low social status, it does not associate Chaplin with the popular energies of urban amusement as does the cabaret in *Caught in a Cabaret*. Similarly, the restaurant in which Charlie works in *The Rink* is an upmarket environment in which Charlie is as out of place as he is at the rink.



Fig. 2.32. Charlie, seen here drinking the dregs of his customers' drinks, seems at home in the seedy and raucous environment of the cabaret in *Caught in a Cabaret* (1914).



Fig. 2.33. A high-society party goes slumming to Charlie's place of work in *Caught in a Cabaret* (1914) and is both shocked (seated women, foreground; older man, far right) and delighted (man in the top hat, top left) by the goings on there.

With *The Count* Chaplin had arrived at a sturdy formula that he closely followed in *The Rink*. Yet *The Rink* makes notable adjustments to its predecessor, which serve, I argue, to appeal more conspicuously to contemporary concerns about the governance of public and private space in relation to new amusements. The opening scene of *The Rink* establishes the film as a narrative about Edna and her father stepping out of the safe, regulated space of domesticity into the more unpredictable world of public amusements. This expands the playing space of *The Count*, in which Edna never steps out of her domestic space, consolidating Chaplin's interest in the changing configurations of public and private space in social life in this period, and the comic potential released by these changing configurations.

Chaplin's classic feature film *City Lights* (1931) represents a further development on the fake-count plot. This film concerns the romance between Charlie and a blind flower girl who mistakenly believes him to be, if not a count specifically, then certainly a rich man. Traces of the fake-count plot are most evident in Charlie's

use of a lunch break to carry out his deception. In *Caught in a Cabaret* (1914), *The Rink* (1916) and *City Lights* (1931), Charlie exchanges his work clothes for a cane, short coat and derby and leaves his place of work (figs. 2.34 - 2.39) with a gruff instruction of his employer to be back on time. And in each film he returns to irate censure from his employer for being late. This cycle of leaving and returning to work provides, in each case, a delightfully ironic framing to his impersonation of a wealthy man of leisure (figs. 2.40 - 2.42).

Formulaic transformations across films:



Figs. 2.34 - 2.35. Charlie transforms from working man to man of leisure for his lunch break in *Caught in a Cabaret* (1914).



Figs. 2.36 - 2.37. Charlie's lunch-time transformation in *The Rink* (1916).



Figs. 2.38 - 2.39. Charlie's lunch-time transformation in *City Lights* (1916).

Formulaic plot structuring devices across films:



Figs. 2.40 - 2.42. Charlie's employers see him off before his lunch break, gesturing to their watches and insisting on a prompt return in *Caught in a Cabaret* (1914), *The Rink* (1916) and *City Lights* (1931).

The crucial variation on the fake-count plot in *City Lights* is that it is no longer a calculated attempt to trespass on elevated social territory (the work of a skating 'professor' or 'tango pirate'). Instead it is an innocent case of mistaken identity, and one from which, unlike in the earlier films, Charlie does not stand to gain anything in terms of material or social advancement. His impersonation of elevated status is not performed upon a rich society girl, as in the earlier films, but a poor and blind girl selling flowers. Charlie's character has been transformed and redeemed since the early films. The near-accidental way in which Charlie assumes his false identity in *City Lights* illustrates this transformation. He has just purchased a flower from the girl and is awaiting his change when a rich man gets into a car on the sidewalk, slams the door and is driven away. The girl mistakenly attributes the sound to the departure of her customer, generously overpaying for his flower. In an act of uncharacteristic selflessness, as seen through the lens of the fake-count films of the mid-1910, Charlie decides that rather than disabuse her of her notion he will let her keep his change, despite his own poverty. Later in the film, Charlie then segues into deliberately perpetuating the deception that he is a rich man, but with the

noble intention of helping her out of financial difficulties. His imposture provides the occasion for another touching display of selflessness as Charlie tries to raise money for the girl by any means possible and at great cost to himself. Illustratively, the lunch break sequence in *City Lights* has a very different effect from that in the earlier fake-count films: The early films invite us to take delight in Charlie's intractable rebelliousness; when Charlie is sacked in *City Lights*, by contrast, pity is likely to underpin our response.

In *Caught in a Cabaret*, *The Count* and *The Rink* Chaplin had increasingly integrated amusement activities into the films' narrative and spectacular operations. The social controversies that came with the amusements had fed conveniently into Chaplin's role in these films as a socially disruptive figure. Having moved away from that earlier characterisation with *City Lights*, however, Chaplin sets amusements to the side, no longer relying upon them as a central narrative device. Although amusement culture is no longer central in this film, however, Chaplin still draws on this element for comic effect in one key scene. In fact, it provides the basis for what is perhaps one of the most memorable, funny and visually brilliant scenes in the film: the nightclub scene.

In this scene we find many gags that might have appeared in a film of the mid-1910s, though now reconfigured to suit the context of Chaplin's altered persona. In stepping onto the dance floor in *The Count*, the rink in *The Rink* and into the nightclub in *City Lights*, Charlie enters an elevated social space in which he does not belong. But in the former two films, Charlie takes this step deliberately and mischievously, using comic guile to pass among his supposed superiors. In *City Lights*, by contrast, Charlie is taken to the nightclub by his millionaire friend, and the comedy of the scene stems not from Charlie's cunningly deceptive performance, but from his utter guilelessness and childlike naiveté in his attempts to navigate the protocols of the space. Thus, when Charlie apparently loses control of the skates in *The Rink* and collides with Mr. and Mrs. Stout, there is an obvious malicious intent behind his supposed mistake, whereas when similar kinds of disruption occur on the dance floor in *City Lights* there is no threat to social order during the action. Rather, it is an illustration of Charlie's unfamiliarity with the codes that govern this elite space. In *The Count* Charlie rebuilt the dance craze in his own image, embodying its controversial connotations and channelling its turbulent social energies. In *City*

Lights, by contrast, Chaplin extricates himself from those forces and is shown attempting to navigate the scene as a clear outsider.

In fact, the gags of the nightclub scene in *City Lights* position Charlie in *opposition* to the modern world of amusement. Rather than being an aggressive and disruptive influence, Charlie is himself repeatedly imperilled by the unfamiliar aspects of the nightclub, which metonymically stand in for an idea of urban modernity in general as threatening and dehumanising. Charlie thus represents an innocent figure, whose simple nature is at odds with the vigorous vacillations of fashions and fashionable pursuits that characterised city life. An oppositional relation between Charlie and modernity – which would become even more pronounced in *Modern Times* – is integral to the thematic structure of the *City Lights*, yet it represents an ironic reversal of Chaplin's screen persona, as well as his cultural status, in the mid-1920s. For, as discussed, Charlie's early films had been intricately structured in order for Charlie to personify both the disruptive and liberating forces of contemporary amusement culture. And Chaplin himself, as I will discuss in Chapter 4, had been construed by popular songs and show tunes as a comic incarnation of the ragtime revolution, and as an emblem of a newly invigorated culture of American modernity.

Critics have tended to miss this crucial reversal in Chaplin's self-configuration in relation to amusement culture that distinguishes his early films of the mid-1910s from his later features. The result is that critics also miss how the early films offer distinct, but equally valid, pleasures from those of his feature films. Walter Kerr's assessment of *City Lights* exemplifies this. Kerr claims that *City Lights* does everything that Chaplin's early films did and more, in terms of their effective exploitation of the silent medium and its comic potency. Not only are several exquisitely funny routines from the earlier films 'joyously improved' in *City Lights* – Kerr cites the prize-fighting sequence which originally appeared in *The Champion* (1915), along with 'incidental sight-gags' such as the nonchalantly dignified back-kicking of cigarettes – but they are also enriched through their neat incorporation into a meaningful narrative and thematic framework:⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Kerr, *The Silent Clowns*, 346, 347.

[*City Lights*] is the most ingeniously formed, immaculately interlocked of Chaplin's experiments in combining comedy and pathos. The comedy and the love story depend utterly on each other; neither can move until the other requires it to do so. If there is a prizefight sequence, it is only because Charlie *must* attempt these things in order to find money for the blind girl he loves. No gag is gratuitous; it grows directly out of the need of a helpless girl and her knight unvaliant.⁸⁷

Thus, according to Kerr, *City Lights* is not merely 'a record of past tactics', but a masterful 'structural exercise'.⁸⁸ And he is right. However, he misrepresents the earlier films upon which *City Lights* draws when he claims that Chaplin achieves this structural perfection '[w]ithout the least loss of laughter', as though it was the *same kind* of laughter that is being measured.⁸⁹ My contention, however, as illustrated in the comparison explored between the nightclub scene and the dance floor and rink scenes in *The Count* and *The Rink*, is that different comic effects are being pursued. Charlie's comical floundering upon the dance floor in *The Count* and in *City Lights* may, that is, be equally funny, but the jokes are not the same.

In this chapter I have tried to bring into focus the synergies between Chaplin's early films – particularly *The Count* – and the sights and sounds of the near-contemporary craze for ragtime and social dancing. By the time of the making of *City Lights*, these synergies had been muted and have been almost silenced by the major trends of Chaplin commentary and criticism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Through his engagement with the contemporary dance craze, Chaplin found another mechanism through which to link his film and comic persona with the profound social and cultural tensions of the moment. By placing his films in relation to the dynamic and volatile context of the dance craze, and by attending to the strategic operations by which Chaplin engaged with that sensational event, a distinctive figure emerges in and through whom the cyclonic excitement of a newly emerging culture of amusement is vividly reflected.

⁸⁷ Kerr, *The Silent Clowns*, 346.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 346.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 352.

CHAPTER 3.

CHAPLIN AND THE MOVING-PICTURE CRAZE

Of all the mass-amusements that feature in Chaplin's films of the mid-1910s, it is the movies that appear most. At Keystone, movies and movie-making were already popular subjects, and Chaplin appeared in four such films for the company. *Kid Auto Races at Venice* (1914), *A Film Johnnie* (1914), *The Masquerader* (1914) and *Tillie's Punctured Romance* (1914) were either about movie-making or at least featured a significant movie-related scene. After leaving Keystone at the end of 1914, Chaplin went on to make two significant movie-themed films under his own steam. These were *His New Job* (1915), his debut for Essanay, and *Behind the Screen* (1916), for Mutual, and they bore notable similarities to the earlier Keystone effort *A Film Johnnie*. Taken together, these three films – *A Film Johnnie*, *His New Job* and *Behind the Screen* – are particularly interesting for Chaplin scholars: thanks to their clear lineage, they offer an interpretive filter to chart Chaplin's development across his crucially formative years as a filmmaker in the mid-1910s, from 1914 to 1916. David Robinson has made the point that continual '[r]eworkings of the same subjects [during this period] reveal how fast was Chaplin's progress', and he offers the three aforementioned movie-themed films as the best example:¹ 'The development from Keystone's *A Film Johnnie* to Essanay's *His New Job* and thence to Mutual's *Behind the Screen*', he remarks, 'is astonishing.'²

So far, however, the three films have not yielded the critical insights into Chaplin's development they seem to promise. When Robinson actually takes the series film by film, his initial astonishment drains away. Of the first two films he writes: '*His New Job*, like his fourth Keystone, *A Film Johnnie*, was set in a film studio, with Charlie's presence causing predictable havoc'.³ *Behind the Screen*, meanwhile, 'is in fact merely a refinement of the same business'. Moreover, '[m]ost of the business is unremarkable, some of it lifted almost directly from *His New*

¹ David Robinson, *Chaplin: The Mirror of Opinion* (London: Secker & Warburg; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 30.

² Robinson, *Chaplin: The Mirror of Opinion*, 30.

³ David Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art* (1985; revised edition, London: Grafton, 1992), 176.

Job.⁴ Robinson does not find here any of the significant ‘leap[s] forward’ he detects in other, more famous early Chaplin films, such as *The Bank* (1915), *The Tramp* (1915) or *The Vagabond* (1916). Critics have since only reiterated Robinson’s interpretation of this trio of films, if they mention them at all.⁵ Simon Louvish, for example, sees Charlie ‘[s]reamlining the old mayhem-in-the-film-studio act’, but no more.⁶

The problem with these critical assessments is that the critics are looking for a particular kind of development, leading always away from the ‘predictable havoc’ of the Keystone style, and towards the ‘mature’ feature films of the 1920s and 1930s – *The Gold Rush* (1925) or *City Lights* (1931), for example.⁷ In limiting their attention in this way, critics miss the kind of development that this chapter brings into focus, that which involves Charlie’s engagement with the recent history of, and debates surrounding, moving pictures as a new and, in many ways, controversial amusement.

In the previous chapters I have explored how Chaplin used ‘craze’ amusements – mass-orientated amusements that came to public consciousness as the subject of high-profile national controversies – as appropriate subject matter through which to dramatise his own comic persona in socially and culturally resonant ways. This relationship was crucial, I have been arguing, to the comic potency of his early persona and to shaping his film-making between 1914 and 1916. Having developed these arguments in relation to roller skating and social dance – illustrative cases as these are, drawn from a larger pool of possible candidates including, for example, amusement parks, boxing and baseball – I now turn to Chaplin’s use of cinema itself as subject matter. Cinema emerged as an amusement in its own right with the rapid spread of the ‘nickelodeons’ between 1906 and 1908, and continued to grow and

⁴ Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art*, 176

⁵ Robinson reserves the phrase ‘leap forward’ for praising those early shorts conventionally regarded as anticipating Chaplin’s classic features: *The Tramp* (1915), *The Vagabond* (1916) and the cluster of films in 1917, *Easy Street*, *The Cure* and *The Immigrant*. See: Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art* (1985, revised edition, London: Grafton, 1992), 142, 171; Robinson, *Chaplin: The Mirror of Opinion*, 30.

⁶ Simon Louvish, *Chaplin: The Tramp’s Odyssey* (London: Faber, 2008), 119.

⁷ Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art*, 176; 141.

gain cultural prominence into the mid-1910s.⁸ During this time it was discussed and dramatised in the press in much the same way as other new amusements had been, and would be: as a controversial ‘craze’ whose subtext was the profound social and cultural changes that were driving an emerging mass-amusement culture.

By 1914, when Chaplin entered the movies, cinema was culturally and economically entrenched in American life. It was evidently not going to go the way of roller skating, whose rapid decline in the mid-1880s was still held up to exemplify the fate of amusement crazes.⁹ However, America was still coming to terms with moving pictures and the turbulent history of the medium loomed large in the minds of the film industry, cinema audiences and cultural commentators. Meanwhile, old controversies gave way to new ones. The rhetoric of the moving-picture ‘craze’ lived on in debates about, among other things, film censorship, movies absorbing theatre audiences and an emerging star-loving fan culture (fig. 3.1).¹⁰ Film scholars Shelley Stamp and Charlie Keil make the important point that, even as cinema became more culturally entrenched and widely accepted, its ‘new prominence invited concern about its role within the cultural landscape’.¹¹ Thus scrutiny of, and scepticism towards, cinema in fact intensified in some quarters.

Chaplin engaged knowingly with the recent history and contemporary debates of the moving-picture craze in his early films, and this engagement informed the development of his comic persona and contributed to its powerful cultural resonance in its specific historical moment. Yet this engagement has not featured in previous readings of his early films. In their eagerness to highlight the forward-looking aspects of Chaplin’s early work (how they anticipate his classic features),

⁸ For a broad introduction to this period, see: Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915* (New York: Scribner; Toronto: Collier Macmillan Canada; New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1990).

⁹ See pp. 55-57 above.

¹⁰ On these debates, see respectively: Lee Grieveson, ‘Not Harmless Entertainment: State Censorship and Cinema in the Transitional Era,’ in *American Cinema’s Transitional Era*, Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp eds. (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2004), 265-284; Roberta E. Pearson, ‘The Menace of the Movies: Cinema’s Challenge to the Theater in the Transitional Period,’ in *American Cinema’s Transitional Era*, 315-321; Shelley Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000).

¹¹ Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp, ‘Introduction,’ in *American Cinema’s Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices*, ed. Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2004), 1.

critics have neglected to explore how Chaplin developed a distinctive comic persona through an engagement with the past, and, specifically, through an engagement with the recent history of mass-amusement culture.

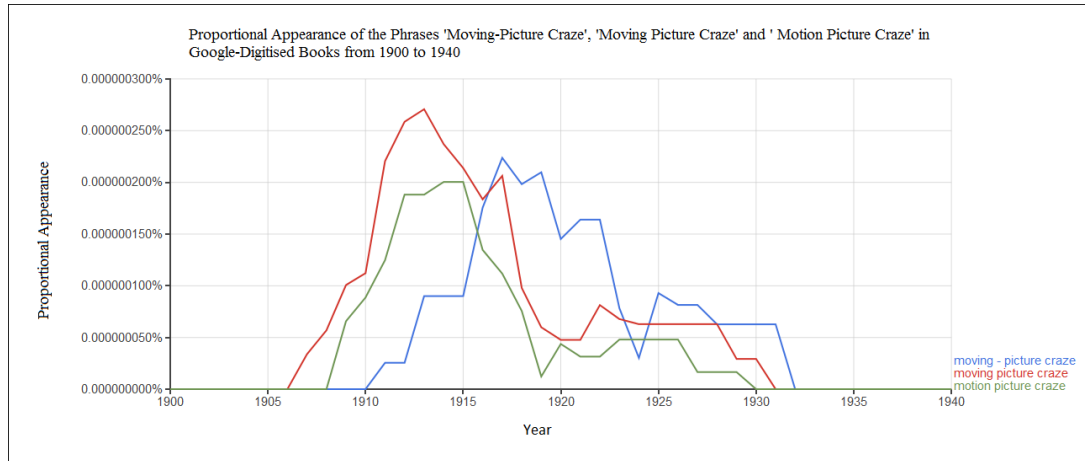


Fig. 3.1. The use of the phrase ‘moving-picture craze’ in American English surged around 1910. It was used throughout the 1910s but declined thereafter. Graph created using Google Books’ Ngram Viewer.¹²

Chaplin’s engagement with moving pictures in his early films was rich and complex in ways that have not so far been recognised. This engagement only becomes comprehensible, however, when we are aware of the then-recent history and debates that impinged upon Chaplin’s films in the mid-1910s.

This chapter will once again follow the structural rhythms of the previous two chapters to explore Chaplin’s relationship to moving pictures. I will offer an account of the moving-picture craze in three stages: origins, boom and controversy. I will then trace Chaplin’s engagement with moving pictures through four films: *A Film Johnnie*, *His New Job*, *A Night in the Show* (1915) and *Behind the Screen*. Of these, *A Night in the Show* is a new addition to the conventional movie-themed series. I argue for its inclusion on grounds of its evident similarities to *A Film Johnnie* (1914) and the historical relevance of its vaudeville setting to the early history of cinema with which Chaplin engages. In the previous chapters I have been able to trace Chaplin’s engagement with a particular amusement into a feature film – *Modern Times* (1936) in Chapter 1; *City Lights* in Chapter 2 – to show how his engagement with that amusement form changed after the mid-1910s. In the case of

¹² Ngram Viewer, Google Books, accessed January 27, 2014, <http://books.google.com/ngrams>.

moving pictures, however, this is not possible: after *Behind the Screen* (1916) Chaplin dropped the subject from his films. The absence of film-making from Chaplin's later work will, in itself, form the basis of my concluding remarks.

Cycles of the Craze

i) Origins

Like ragtime music at the same moment, moving pictures made their sensational American debut in 1896 in the theatrical context of vaudeville. And like ragtime, moving pictures were presented as an extraordinary novelty that was in equal parts amusing and edifying, and that was also invited to confer a sense of fashionable exclusivity upon its audiences. The history of early American cinema has been more exhaustively documented, and is in general better known, than that of either roller skating or ragtime. I am therefore able to economise in my account of it. Nevertheless, the specifics of its history are so relevant to my account of Chaplin's films about film-making, that a summary of this history and the particular ways in which it presses on Chaplin's work is still needful in this context.

The vaudeville sensation of moving pictures owed its initial impact to the extravagantly orchestrated revelation of 'Edison's vitascope' at Koster & Bial's Music Hall on April 23, 1896.¹³ Though the larger-than-life inventor Thomas Edison was only minimally involved in the development of the machine, the marketing of the vitascope as an Edison product did the work of bringing it to public attention by framing it within the public drama of the career of a national hero. The vitascope was Edison's 'latest marvel', as promotional material put it, the latest in a series of marvellous inventions, 'each of which in turn, has excited the wonder and amazement of the public.'¹⁴ Thus the marketing of the vitascope implicitly invited patrons to join a privileged audience who were one step ahead of the crowd in witnessing the machine in its pioneering moment.

¹³ Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York: Maxell Macmillan, 1990), 122.

¹⁴ Page from Vitascope Company's promotional brochure, reproduced in Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 113.

As has been well documented, following the vitascope debut in 1896, other film companies entered the American film market, and, according to Charles Musser, they too appealed to the aspirational sentiments of a predominantly middle-class vaudeville audience.¹⁵ Two months after the Koster and Bial event, the vaudeville impresario B. F. Keith secured the exclusive rights to exhibit the Lumière brothers' *cinématographe* in his American theatres. He advertised the *cinématographe* as 'the greatest fashionable and scientific fad of London, Paris, Vienna, Berlin and the entire continent'.¹⁶ Thus Keith aroused interest in the machine by culturally placing it within a series of European fashions whose tasteful refinement was fully implicit. Of course, as has been widely discussed, the moving image also possessed its own inherent fascinations and visual pleasures, as registered in a range of contemporary reports.¹⁷ Yet in 1896, cinema was not recognised as an amusement with its own distinctive pleasures and functions. It was part of the vaudeville show, and the pleasures it offered were constituted within the established presentational strategies of that form. It was, then, primarily a spectacular technological novelty.

Following cinema's novelty year, 1896, excitement about the new machine subsided as its perceived technological novelty and fashionable allure faded. Moving pictures settled down, for the moment, as a secure and flexible, but non-revolutionary, element within the vaudeville repertoire.¹⁸ Meanwhile, it also dispersed into other, often less reputable formats including medicine shows and amusement arcades, where, as in vaudeville, it was exhibited alongside other forms

¹⁵ Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 133-157. As Musser has shown, vaudeville theatres held 'a virtual monopoly on exhibition during the first month of public exhibition and continued to dominate the industry' up until 1905. Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 184. During this period theatre chains contracted with moving-picture companies for exclusive rights to use their equipment and exhibit their films within certain territories. Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 133-157. On the social constitution of vaudeville audiences, see: Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994), 59.

¹⁶ [Advertisement for *cinématographe* exhibitions at B. F. Keith's vaudeville theatres], *New York World*, June 28, 1896, 14, quoted in Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 137.

¹⁷ For examples, see: Stephen Neale, *Cinema and Technology: Image, Sound, Colour* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), 50.

¹⁸ On cinema's novelty year, see: Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 187-189. On the historiographical debates about the use and reputation of moving pictures in this period, see: Robert C. Allen, 'Contra the Chaser Theory,' in *Film Before Griffith*, ed. John L. Fell (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press; London: University of California Press, Ltd., 1983), 105-115.

of spectacle.¹⁹ Film historians have demonstrated that between 1896 and 1905 important developments in film-making techniques and the formal language of cinema did take place. But these did not radically transform cinema's cultural status or significance.²⁰ That was to come with the rise of the 'nickelodeon' in 1906.

ii) Boom

'There was nothing singularly novel in the idea,' Barton W. Currie wrote of the nickelodeons in *Harper's Weekly* in 1907, 'only the individualizing of the motion-picture machine'.²¹ Yet this 'idea', which originated in 1905 in Pittsburgh with amusement entrepreneur Harry Davis, spread widely.²² By 1907 the nickelodeon was making its mark on the urban landscape and moving pictures registered once again as a newsworthy event.²³ This time, however, it was not the astonishing novelty of the technology that stirred the imagination of the public, but the audience that fed this new boom. 'The nickelodeon', summarised journalist, editor and sometime Mayor of Chicago, Joseph Mendill Patterson in 1908, 'is tapping an entirely new substratum of people, is developing into theatregoers a section of the population that knew and cared little about drama as a fact in life.'²⁴ This audience included elements of the working class, whose low wages and long hours prohibited them from attending theatrical entertainments regularly, if at all.²⁵ It also included expanding immigrant communities from southern and eastern Europe who, as

¹⁹ Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 298.

²⁰ On the development of cinema prior to the nickelodeon, see: Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 297-413.

²¹ Barton W. Currie, 'The Nickel Madness,' *Harper's Weekly* 51 (August 1907): 1246.

²² On Harry Davis's Pittsburgh nickelodeon, see: Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 418-421.

²³ On the spread of nickelodeons, see: Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 421-428.

²⁴ Joseph Mendill Patterson, 'The Nickelodeons: The Poor Man's Elementary Course in Drama,' *The Saturday Evening Post*, November 23, 1907, 11. For an informative discussion of this 'often-cited article', see: Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema*, 2-3.

²⁵ Roy Rosenzweig, 'From Rum Shop to Rialto,' in *Moviegoing in America: A Sourcebook in the History of Film Exhibition*, Gregory A. Waller, ed. (Malden, Mass; Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2002), 29-32.

Patterson observed, ‘shut out as they are by their alien tongues from much of the life about them, can yet perfectly understand the pantomime of the moving pictures.’²⁶

From Pittsburgh, nickelodeons spread widely and rapidly. Soon the industry found itself unable to cope with demand and insufficiently prepared to protect its long-term interests, from, for example, bad business practices and civic opposition. In response to these problems, the major film production companies organised themselves, forming the Moving Picture Patents Company (MPPC) in December 1908.²⁷ Thus ended the first phase of the moving-picture boom – a period of largely haphazard and unregulated growth – and so began another. Film production soared under the new arrangement, which allowed film producers not only to meet demand, but also, as Eileen Bowser points out, ‘to lead the industry in the directions they thought best, for the industry and for themselves.’²⁸ And that meant expanding its audience to include the lucrative middle-class market.

During the initial nickelodeon boom, commentators had noted with alarm the presence of the lower orders within the public sphere of commercial amusements; what surprised them now was the presence of the middle classes at the moving-picture shows. ‘Any man who spends a few hours visiting the picture houses in the better sections of New York or any other city’ reported the *New York Sun* in 1912, ‘will be astonished to see many “two dollar people” in the audiences.’²⁹ The increasingly cross-class appeal of moving pictures was striking for the period, and evidently bewildering to many. It would take some years before America would become accustomed to it, accepting it as, in Shelley Stamp’s words, ‘a respectable form of entertainment for people of all backgrounds’ and ‘the nation’s favourite entertainment pastime’.³⁰

²⁶ Patterson, ‘The Nickelodeons,’ 11. Rosenzweig makes the point that ‘for many [...] immigrants – circumscribed by their language to social institutions of their own ethnic communities – movies offered their first nonwork contact with the larger American society.’ Rosenzweig, ‘From Rum Shop to Rialto,’ 30. Rosenzweig is referring specifically to his case study of Worcester here, but his point applies more generally.

²⁷ Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema*, 21-36.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

²⁹ ‘Moving Pictures Menace the Regular Drama,’ *The Sun (New York)*, April 7, 1912, 5. Two dollars was the normal price for the best seats in the vaudeville theatre, thus implying the top tier of the amusement crowd. See: David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 186-187.

³⁰ Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*, 3.

Several overlapping factors led to the drastic rise of moving pictures in the early 1910s. Undoubtedly, the film industry was making self-conscious efforts to appeal to new markets, which included reforming both the film product and the film-viewing experience to appeal to middle-class tastes and values.³¹ But the booming popularity of moving pictures must also be understood in relation to profound shifts in social behaviour and aesthetic sensibilities taking place around the turn of the century. At this time, Americans were remapping the boundaries of the public and private in social life. As Lewis Erenberg has described, there was a ‘shift from entertainment in a private, formal setting to a more informal, public arena’.³² This was taking place across the social spectrum, with people of all classes beginning to expect to conduct more of their social life in public.

At the same time, tastes in amusement were also changing across the social spectrum, as John F. Kasson, among others, has described:

By the turn of the century the managers of mass culture sensed new markets both within the urban middle class and spilling beyond its borders to “high society” and the largely untapped working class, all eager to respond to amusement in a less earnest cultural mood: more vigorous, exuberant, daring, sensual, uninhibited, and irreverent.³³

One of the ways in which moving pictures appealed to the emerging sensibility which Kasson describes was by offering sensations of enhanced mobility. In this, moving pictures had much in common with other new amusements that emerged around the turn of the century. Roller skating, amusement parks and ragtime dance, for example, were all celebrated as well as condemned for putting the bodies of their participants into accelerated motion and socially unconventional postures. Like the rollercoaster rides described by Lauren Rabinovitz in her recent research, they

³¹ William Uricchio and Roberta E. Pearson, *Reframing Culture: The Case of the Vitagraph Quality Films* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University, 1993), 41-64.

³² Lewis Erenberg, *Steppin’ Out: New York Night Life and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), viii.

³³ John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978), 6.

promised to ‘liberate[...] the body from its normal limitations of placement and movement in daily life’ by animating it in new and unexpected ways.³⁴

Enhanced mobility was certainly the quality that most struck Currie when he penned one of the earliest accounts of moving picture aesthetics for *Harper’s Weekly* in 1907. ‘The variety of skipping, dancing, flashing and marching pictures was without limit’, he remarked; the films proceeded ‘at a pace the Bowery theaters can never follow’; in the chase films, ‘[t]he speed with which pursuer and pursued run is marvellous’.³⁵ The kinetic qualities of the chase film fascinated Currie above all, and he described them thus:

You are taken over every sort of jump and obstacle, led out into tangled underbrush, through a dense forest, up the face of a jagged cliff – evidently traversing an entire country – whirled through a maze of wild scenery, and then brought back to the city.³⁶

In this way the cinema too could seemingly ‘liberate[...] the body from its normal limitations of placement and movement in daily life’, perhaps in even more drastic ways than skating or dancing.³⁷ The formula of the nickelodeon films would be considerably developed and refined in the following years, however their exciting and spectacular movement remained, as it remains today, a central feature of commercial cinema.³⁸

As the film industry and movie culture evolved in the early 1910s, it also became linked with another kind of mobility: social mobility. It was at this time that Hollywood emerged as the geographical hub of the film industry, and, more significantly, as a semi-mythical city in the public imagination which offered unique

³⁴ Lauren Rabinovitz, ‘The Coney Island Comedies: Bodies and Slapstick at the Amusement Park and the Movies,’ in *American Cinema’s Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices*, ed. Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2004), 179. See also: Lauren Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland: Amusement Parks, Movies, and American Modernity* (New York; Chichester, West Sussex, 2012).

³⁵ Currie, ‘The Nickel Madness,’ 1246.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Rabinovitz, ‘The Coney Island Comedies,’ 179.

³⁸ Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema*, 53-72.

possibilities for social advancement and fluid self-transformation.³⁹ Press, magazines, books and films presented Hollywood as a world of mutable appearances, where one's success depended not on one's social origins but on one's ability to look the part. Stamp's research documents how contemporary fan magazines were intensely preoccupied with advising their predominantly female readers on 'how to dress, how to style their hair, how to pose' in order to advance in Hollywood.⁴⁰ Even if most readers did not go as far as to leave their homes to seek fame and fortune in Hollywood (though, as Stamp's research shows, many did), such stories made for compelling reading. Movie fans could also participate vicariously as tourists. In 1915, Universal Studios was one of several production companies to open its doors to tourists.⁴¹ Its advertising slogan might be taken as a summary of the alluring promise of Hollywood as it was emerging in the public imagination: 'a fairyland where the craziest things in the world happen.'⁴²

iii) Controversy

As with other new amusements, the rapid rise of moving pictures scandalised a portion of the American public and excited widespread controversy. During the nickelodeon boom cinema audiences were at the heart of this controversy. While Joseph Patterson and progressives of a similar mind-set may have imagined the masses emerging from the moving-picture shows as enlightened 'theatregoers', a contrary vision saw them spiralling into a 'moral sinkhole' and re-emerging debased and dangerous.⁴³

The earliest formally articulated concerns about the nickelodeons focused on sanitary conditions. This was after all, as *Harper's Weekly* had declared in 1893, 'the age of the microbe', and in this climate of anxiety, the nickelodeons could hardly

³⁹ Shelley Stamp, 'It's a Long Way to Filmland: Starlets, Screen Hopefuls, and Extras in Early Hollywood,' in *American Cinema's Transitional Era*, 333-337.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 333.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 335-336.

⁴² Universal Studios promotional material, quoted in I. G. Edmonds, *The Big U: Universal in the Silent Days* (South Brunswick, New Jersey: A.S. Barnes, 1977), 52-53.

⁴³ 'Cheap Shows Peril to Children,' *New York Herald*, December 24, 1908, quoted in Uricchio and Pearson, *Reframing Culture*, 32.

have avoided attention.⁴⁴ '[B]ad air, floors uncleaned, no provision of spittoons, and the people crowded closely together,' concluded one typical nickelodeon investigation in 1908, 'all make contagion more likely.'⁴⁵

But sanitation was only one aspect of the reaction against the nickelodeons. Opponents of the nickelodeon boom moved with disturbing discursive ease from microbial to moral issues. One clergyman, for example, described the nickelodeon boom as an outbreak of 'moral malaria'.⁴⁶ Darkened screening rooms were suspected of encouraging immoral behaviour, while the potency of the cinematic illusion was supposed to have a dangerously strong influence upon vulnerable minds: '[T]he darkened rooms combined with the influence of pictures projected on the screen', summarised a spokesperson for the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 'have given opportunities for a new form of degeneracy.'⁴⁷ Thus reformers found in moving pictures a comparable set of physiologically and morally destabilising effects to those they had attributed to roller skating in the mid-1880, but under a 'new' guise. In the mid-1910s, the same pernicious effects would be attributed to the syncopated rhythms of the latest popular music.

As with the roller-skating and dance crazes discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the drama of the moving-picture craze had its own cast of stereotyped characters who reified contemporary social anxieties. Perhaps the most frequently evoked was the movie-mad youngster whose addiction to the screen led him (or her) into deviant behaviour. In her book *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* (1909), Jane Addams, an influential reformer, reported a variety of illustrative cases, plundered from the Juvenile Court records: a shop keeper's daughters were caught stealing from their father's till to fund an out-of-control movie habit; three boys planned to ambush a

⁴⁴ 'The Mercenary Microbe,' *Harper's Weekly* 38 (December 1893): 1243. According to Neil Harris, the germ theory of disease had taken hold of the popular imagination in America around 1870, and escalated into a national obsession around the turn of the century as '[p]ostage stamps, doorknobs, theater audiences, even money became suspect as spreaders of saliva, dust, and morbid germs.' See: Neil Harris, *Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Taste in Modern America* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 169-170.

⁴⁵ People's Institute and Women's Municipal League, *Cheap Amusement Shows in Manhattan: Preliminary Report of Investigation* (New York: People's Institute and Women's Municipal League, 1908), 4.

⁴⁶ 'Police Permit Only Tame Vaudeville,' *New York Times*, December 28, 1908, 1.

⁴⁷ 'Wage War On Shows. Mayor Hears Evidence,' *New York Tribune*, December 24, 1908, 4. On the threat of darkness in the cinema see: Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema*, 39.

milkman using frontier methods learned from the screen; a host of ‘neurotic children whose emotional natures have been so over-wrought by the crude appeal to which they had been so constantly subjected in the theaters, [had] become victims of hallucination and mental disorder.’⁴⁸ Meanwhile, one newspaper described how a fourteen-year-old boy ‘walked out from these pictures of murder and robbery, which he gazed at for hours, with his eyes popping and his mouth open in wonderment, went home, secured his father’s revolver and walked on the street [sic] ready to kill.’⁴⁹ Such images gave a sensational face to broader concerns with how to regulate social behaviour in an increasingly diverse public sphere, one which now included women, children and immigrants thanks to the expansion of the market for commercial amusements.

As the nickelodeons spread across the country, the controversy around them intensified. ‘Those who are “interested in the poor”,’ commented Patterson scathingly, ‘are wondering whether the five-cent theatre is a good influence, and asking themselves gravely whether it should be encouraged or checked (with the help of the police).’⁵⁰ Many influential groups, including clergy, reformers and civic officials, opted for the latter view and took a stand against the moving-picture shows.⁵¹ Their opposition was public in nature and often used sensational rhetoric from press and pulpit to generate a sense of a threat from without. It insisted on the need for authorities to ‘regulate’ the ‘obnoxious’ moving pictures, to ‘combat the evil’ represented by this form of amusement and to offer ‘protection’ from its contagious effects.⁵² The rhetoric of crisis and conflict was occasionally dramatised by the bold regulatory actions of authorities. Most significant among these was New

⁴⁸ Jane Addams, *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* (1909; reprint: New York: MacMillan Company, 1930), 91-92; 93; 92

⁴⁹ ‘Traces Crime to Nickel Theater. Judge Cleland say Juvenile Offenders Owe Downfall to This Cause,’ *Chicago Tribune*, April 14, 1907, sec. I, 5.

⁵⁰ Patterson, ‘The Nickelodeons,’ 11.

⁵¹ Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2004), 11-12. See also: Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), xxvii.

⁵² These were words and phrases typically used against moving pictures since the nickelodeon boom according to the editor of *Motion Picture News*. William A. Johnston, ‘The Public and the Other Side,’ *Motion Picture News* 11, no. 16 (April 10, 1915): 33.

York Mayor George McClellan's closure of all New York City nickelodeons on Christmas Eve 1908 (to be overturned the following day).⁵³ Such events were in turn widely reported, helping to feed a national controversy about moving pictures.

It was partly in response to McClellan's Christmas-day closures in 1908 that the moving-picture industry underwent drastic reforms at this moment; reforms that secured its continued growth. The recently formed MPPC were spurred in into action, as Tom Gunning describes:

Mayor McClellan's attack on motion pictures had supplied the MPPC with a specific program for the uplift of motion pictures: the campaign for lighted theaters addressed reformers' fears of the dark; the MPPC pledged to produce films that would not be harmful to children; and the formation of a Board of Censorship would guarantee that no immoral or indecent films were released.⁵⁴

Over the next few years these reforms would do much to achieve social respectability for the industry, protect it from the attacks of its opponents and therefore to assist its continued growth. Yet in the early-to-mid-1910s, the controversy about the new medium – it continued to be discussed as a 'new' medium – evolved rather than went away. Cinema's increasing cultural prominence gave renewed urgency to questions about cinema's social function and effects upon its audiences. Moral considerations were foremost in the minds of most reformers, but other concerns were raised too. 'What the film needs is an *aesthetic* censorship', declared the prominent journalist William Marion Reedy in 1915:

It is a bad thing that the press should say of bad presentation of life in the films, 'It doesn't matter; it's only in the movies.' The movies are of immense importance. They are making the taste of millions. They are making it bad, execrable taste, because it is based solely on sensation, and is to that extent wholly animalistic.⁵⁵

⁵³ Tom Gunning, *D. W. Griffith: and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 151-153.

⁵⁴ Gunning, *D. W. Griffith*, 155.

⁵⁵ William A. Johnston, 'An Editor's Impatience With Present-Day Photoplays,' *Motion Picture News* 12, no. 11 (September 18, 1915): 40.

For commentators like Reedy, cinema was still behaving as a craze even if it had become more entrenched than that: providing an irrational and over-stimulating kind of amusement which owed its widespread popularity to its appeal to base impulses.

Meanwhile, the new fan culture to which movies gave rise in the early 1910s attracted similar consternation and comment. The glamorisation of film actors as ‘stars’ and the mythologising of Hollywood as a magical land of opportunity were symptomatic developments of this emerging culture, and were often associated with excessive audience behaviours: unhealthy obsessions with figures of the film world; deluded and sometimes disastrous attempts to live the Hollywood dream. Such behaviours inherited the pejorative rhetoric of pathology that had been applied to nickelodeon audiences in the previous decade – ‘filmitis’, for example, was the term used in 1916 by *McClure’s* magazine to denote excessive fandom and the delusional desire to be a star.⁵⁶ The behaviours of movie-mad fans in the nickelodeon era and the mid-1910s were quite distinct, yet underlying concerns about suggestibility and self-control united them. Thus the old controversies continued to impinge upon cinema’s reputation as different factions competed to portray the new medium in line with a differentiated set of interests.

Chaplin as Moviegoer, Studio Hand and Movie Star

Chaplin’s films about film-making engage with the recent history of moving pictures, alluding to recognisable tropes and stereotypes and replaying, in a potently comic mode, the interrelated controversies about class, gender and public and private space. The following analysis aims to illuminate this engagement, and to chart the course of its evolution in Chaplin’s film between 1914 and 1916. I will proceed in three subsections.

The first will highlight explicit allusions to the moving-picture controversies and stereotypes in *A Film Johnnie* (1914), and explore their specific comic effects. The second section introduces *A Night in the Show* (1915) into Chaplin’s series of movie-themed films. I examine how *A Night in the Show* reworks *A Film Johnnie*, transforming a film about movies into a film about an older, more established format: vaudeville. Here I aim to further extend arguments made in regards to *The*

⁵⁶ Anna Steese Richardson, “‘Filmitis,’ the Modern Malady,” *McClure’s Magazine* 46, no. 3 (January 1916): 12.

Rink (1916) in Chapter 1 and *The Count* (1916) in Chapter 2 about Chaplin's tendency to create fantastical, historically hybrid scenarios from the recent history of amusement culture, in which he casts *himself* in disruptive roles that were historically occupied by amusement crazes – and can be read, thereby, as an anthropomorphosised embodiment of craze phenomena. The third subsection will trace developments across *A Film Johnnie* (1914), *His New Job* (1915) and *Behind the Screen* (1915) to illuminate the way in which Chaplin developed his comic persona in relation to contemporary ideas about Hollywood as a mythical place of excitement and self-transformation.

In the previous chapter, focusing on Chaplin's dance-craze themed films, I traced a development whereby direct topical reference to the extra-filmic world gave way to a more subtly allusive style that prioritised Chaplin's own singularity as a comic persona and performer. This reading was offered in contradistinction to the dominant critical account which recognises patterns of development in Chaplin's early films only in so far as those films depart from contemporary slapstick and anticipate his later features. To reinforce my counter argument, this chapter offers a further example of the development traced in Chapter 2. I aim to illuminate the specific effects of this development in relation to Chaplin's use of moving pictures as subject matter, while demonstrating its broader typicality with regards to Chaplin's evolving engagement with contemporary mass-amusement culture. I aim to show, then, that Chaplin's immensely productive period between 1914 and 1916 exhibits developmental trajectories of its own, specifically in relation to Chaplin's engagement with the history of an emerging mass-amusement culture. My brief concluding remarks will concern the telling fact that after 1916, Chaplin was to drop the movie theme entirely.

i) *A Film Johnnie* and the ‘Nickel Madness’⁵⁷



Fig. 3.2. Charlie, enthralled by a scene being acted out at the Keystone studios, performs the symptoms of ‘nickel madness’ in *A Film Johnnie* (1914).

In *A Film Johnnie* (1914) Chaplin performs the recognisable symptoms of ‘the nickel madness’.⁵⁸ He does so in a comically hyperbolised manner that alludes knowingly to the extra-textual discourse of the moving-picture craze while at the same time showcasing his distinctive performance style and emerging comic persona (fig. 3.2). In what follows I want to briefly highlight the points of allusive contact between Chaplin’s performance and the extra-textual discourse of the moving-picture craze, and then to comment on the comic function of these allusions.

The film consists of two main parts, the first set in a nickelodeon-style exhibition space, the second at the Keystone studios. The movement between the two is significant as it dramatises, in comic form, the social dangers attributed to the nickelodeon boom. The first section establishes Charlie as a lower-class citizen, as fitting with the reputation of nickelodeon audiences. His poverty is signalled moments into the film when we see him rooting around in the bottom of a dirty sock to find the nickel required to enter the theatre. Inside, Charlie misjudges the distance to his seat and falls into a woman’s lap, acting out reformers’ concerns about the darkness of movie theatres leading to unrestrained physical contact between men and woman. Here is a comic twist on the familiar complaint made by reformers, however, since the accident is evidently a piece of comic mischief that Charlie enjoys. Reform discourse about cinema is thus both invoked and ironised by the

⁵⁷ Currie, ‘The Nickel Madness.’

⁵⁸ See pp. 128 above.

accident. Having found his seat Charlie shows himself excessively susceptible to the appeals of the screen and unable to control his emotions, exhibiting limitations associated with the most lowly image of nickelodeon audiences. When an emotional civil war-film is shown he blubbers uncontrollably; when a pretty girl appears he goes into transports of ecstasy; when the girl is threatened he leaps out of his seat and threatens the screen (figs. 3.3 - 3.5). These various emotions are evidently superficial and follow each other in quick succession. As the movie-mad fan, Charlie is easily moved and easily over-excited.



Figs. 3.3 - 3.5. Charlie performs the stereotype of the over-susceptible nickelodeon patron, exhibiting extreme emotional and physiological reactions in quick succession in *A Film Johnnie* (1914).

In the second half of the film, the more dangerous elements of movie-mania are accentuated. Having transported himself to the Keystone studios, Charlie continues to display the ‘mimetic tendencies’ characteristically associated with nickelodeon audiences, but now in a more destructive mode.⁵⁹ He walks about the studio space like a man in a trance. His eyes are wide, his jaw hangs and he shuffles slowly forward as though propelled by an external force (figs. 3.6 and 3.7). When he finds a gun in the prop room he begins to play the role of the trigger-happy bad man of nickelodeon crime films.⁶⁰ He poses for the camera in his newly assumed role (fig. 3.8), struts commandingly up and down and clears the room with a volley of indiscriminate gunfire. The mimetic quality of the performance is comically highlighted when Charlie recoils from the belated realisation that he has a gun in his hand (fig. 3.9). Thus the joke is partly on the earnestness of anti-nickelodeon

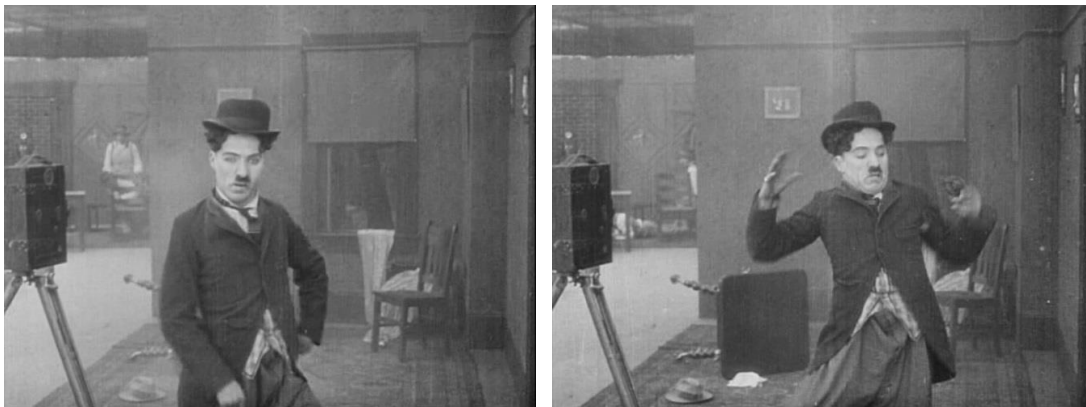
⁵⁹ Lee Grieveson, ‘Cinema Studies and the Conduct of Conduct,’ in *Inventing Film Studies* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2008), 11. See also Grieveson, *Policing Cinema*, 11-36.

⁶⁰ On the significance of the crime-film genre in early cinema, see: Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 351-360.

discourse which is undermined when Charlie's supposedly dangerous behaviour is shown to be benignly ludicrous.



Figs. 3.6 and 3.7. Charlie moves through the Keystone studio space as though hypnotised in *A Film Johnnie* (1914). His overawed fascination contrasts with the casual matter-of-fact grouping of staff in the background, enhancing by contrast his cartoonishly overblown naiveté.



Figs. 3.8 and 3.9. Charlie poses as the stock bad-man from Western and crime films in *A Film Johnnie* (1914). He is evidently carried away by his imitation for moments later he is shocked to discover the gun in his hand.

In assessing the comic effect of these allusions to moving-picture stereotypes, the first thing to consider is that they are predominately anachronistic: Charlie's behaviour invokes a stereotype and a set of associated clichés that were the products of the 'moral panic' about nickelodeon audiences that had peaked around 1908.⁶¹ This anachronism has two potential implications for the comedy of Chaplin's performance. On the one hand, it invites a contemporary audience to enjoy their own comparable sophistication and superiority to Charlie's abject and backward

⁶¹ See p. 128 above.

behaviour.⁶² In laughing at Charlie they could also put distance between themselves and the past reputation of movie audiences. Given that this past was actually not so distant, and the dubious reputation of the nickelodeons far from conquered, this may have been a particularly appealing response for aspirational elements of the audience and those needing to justify their enjoyment of the new medium.

On the other hand, Charlie's recognisably anachronistic behaviour invites the audience to identify with, and take vicarious pleasure in, what may not, in fact, be a failure, but a *refusal* to accept the standards of the day. One moment in particular makes explicit that Charlie is not merely a figure to be laughed *at*. When Charlie has soaked his trousers by wringing out his sodden handkerchief, his situation ought to be humiliating. Yet as he pulls an exaggerated face of discomfort and executes an eccentric crab-like walk in front of the screen, he is clearly enjoying his disruption of the show. He belies this enjoyment by breaking his act (fig. 3.10) with a knowing laugh to the camera (fig. 3.11), inviting us to share his pleasure in interrupting the show and aggravating the audience. Charlie continues his nuisance making in this vein throughout the scene: clapping loudly, throwing out his arms into his neighbours' faces, popping his hat up in the air, all the while eliciting the disapproval of those around him. The off-screen cinema audience, meanwhile, are invited to take pleasure in the wilful perversity of his role.

⁶² Film scholar Nicholas Hiley makes a comparable argument about earlier films which stage comic encounters between moving-picture technology and naive and laughable 'rubes'. According to Hiley, mockery of these figures in films such as *Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show* (Edison, 1902) functioned as 'an important device for binding together the early film audience, by showing that it was united by an understanding of the new technology.' Nicholas Hiley, personal communication quoted in Stephen Bottomore, 'The Panicking Audience? Early Cinema and the "Train Effect",' *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 19, no. 2 (June 1999): 184.



Fig. 3.10 and 3.11. Charlie draws attention to the artificial and stereotyped nature of his performance by breaking his role and turning to the camera with a knowing laugh in *A Film Johnnie* (1914).

To more fully understand the potential appeal of Chaplin's embodiment of an anachronistic nickelodeon-era stereotype, the film needs to be situated in the context of contemporary developments in the film industry, and specifically the role of Keystone slapstick in those developments. Following the formation of the MPPC in December 1908, influential elements of the film industry turned against slapstick in their attempt to overturn the *declass e* reputation of the nickelodeons. Slapstick comedy, as Bowser has written, was 'the favoured genre before 1908' and for this reason it became strongly associated in the public imagination with the dubious aspects of the nickelodeon boom.⁶³ As a result, many aspirational filmmakers, exhibitors and even audiences became convinced that, as Bowser puts it, 'slapstick comedies were to be deplored as vulgar, tasteless, and not for refined audiences', and they sought to disassociate themselves from the genre.⁶⁴ Yet there was still a market for slapstick among moving picture audiences.⁶⁵ And, what is more, the moralistic opposition to the genre served to increase its allure, as moralistic opposition often does, thus creating the conditions for a revival. Making a revival even more likely was the fact that the reorientation of the film industry towards middle-class values created the necessary stability for comic inversions of the dominant order to become more widely acceptable, provided they were generically contained. Both the appeal and the potential subject matter, therefore, were in place to fuel the revival.

⁶³ Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema*, 179.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 179-180; Rob King, *The Fun Factory: The Keystone Film Company and the Emergence of Mass Culture* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2009), 19.

As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 4, Keystone were the pioneers of the slapstick boom of the early and mid-1910s, and their aesthetic represented a joyful, while self-conscious and sophisticated, return to the palpably outdated stylistic features of nickelodeon slapstick, including chases, pie-fights, knockabout violence, camera tricks and full-body framing.⁶⁶ As Rob King argues in *The Fun Factory: The Keystone Film Company and the Emergence of Mass Culture* (2009), this revival was not only for the benefit of the predominantly working-class audience who had enjoyed the first wave of slapstick. It also catered to an expanded, cross-class audience of moviegoers all seeking novelty and excitement in the public sphere of commercial amusements. In *A Film Johnnie*, Charlie could be said to personify Keystone's larger aesthetic strategy. He allusively and knowingly performs the anachronistic stereotype of the nickelodeon-mad fan, literally winking at the audience while he does so, inviting them to enjoy his comic overturning of the gentrified ideals of an increasingly respectable film industry declaring itself committed to 'uplift'.

A Film Johnnie was an important film for Chaplin. Though he did not direct it himself, it supplied him with a bank of ideas on which he was to draw in later films of his own. In tracing Chaplin's developing engagement with moving pictures in his early films, *A Film Johnnie* therefore stands as an important starting point.

ii) Chaplin, Movies and Vaudeville: *A Film Johnnie* and *A Night in the Show*



Figs. 3.12 and 3.13. Charlie delights a high-society vaudeville audience with his disruptive interventions into the staged vaudeville acts in *A Night in the Show* (1915).

⁶⁶ King, *The Fun Factory*, 183.

A Night in the Show (1915) is, I maintain, Chaplin's most direct reworking of *A Film Johnnie* (1914). Though we switch from one type of theatre to another, nickelodeon to vaudeville, the film is legibly about cinema's status as a new amusement and Chaplin's own place within the changing cultural landscape. Chaplin was, by this moment, a nationally famous star of the moving pictures, and by inserting himself into a setting that, by the mid-1910s, was thought to be under threat from moving pictures, Chaplin's film arguably dramatises his own significant role in the rapidly shifting contemporary amusement scene (3.12 and 3.13).⁶⁷

A Night in the Show's cannibalistic relationship to its predecessor is most clearly illustrated by comparing two strikingly similar set ups. In both, Chaplin's character is ushered into the theatre by an attendant and then makes his way to his seat, either down the aisle (*A Film Johnnie*) or across the row (*A Night in the Show*), causing maximum bother to those around him (figs. 3.14 and 3.15). In both cases the placement of the camera beyond the trajectory of Charlie's own direction of travel serves to emphasise the distance (through depth of field) he must cross and the trouble he will inevitably cause in doing so. In both films, he accidentally falls into a woman's lap on the way up or down the aisle (figs. 3.16 and 3.17). After this he aggravates those around him in different ways until his behaviour is challenged, at which point he swings a wild punch at his assailant and hits a bystander (figs. 3.18 and 3.19) before falling into the arms of the surrounding audience (figs. 3.20 and 3.21). There are close correspondences in the choreography of the two films and one is clearly the legatee of the other in these respects.



Figs. 3.14 and 3.15. Chaplin about to make his way down the aisle causing maximum discomfort to those around him in *A Film Johnnie* (1914) and *A Night in the Show* (1915).

⁶⁷ On the contemporary perception of cinema as a threat to the theatre, see: Pearson, 'The Menace of the Movies,' 315-331.



Figs. 3.16 and 3.17. Charlie falls into women's laps as he navigates the seating in *A Film Johnnie* (1914) and *A Night in the Show* (1915).



Figs. 3.18 and 3.19. Charlie initiating a melee with wild punches in *A Film Johnnie* (1914) and *A Night in the Show* (1915).



Figs. 3.20 and 3.21. Charlie collapses into the audience in *A Film Johnnie* (1914) and *A Night in the Show* (1915).

What has changed between these two scenes is that in one Charlie is a scruffy and impecunious lover of cheap amusements, in the other a rich and supremely arrogant pleasure seeker. And yet the comic business remains the same, and, I would suggest, just as funny. This seems to illustrate Alan Dale's observant point that by late 1915 'we recognize the Tramp at which ever end of the social xylophone

Chaplin is plonking: lumpenprole, laborer, waiter, clerk, yeoman or drunken toff.⁶⁸ His comic style was now sufficiently recognisable that it cuts through any particular role he happened to be playing. In *A Film Johnnie*, Chaplin had played the stereotype of the movie-mad nickelodeon patron, and this had functioned as a conveniently familiar role to showcase Chaplin's comic talents at an early stage in his career. Since then, however, audiences had become very familiar with his performance style from other Chaplin films. And not only Chaplin films, but films in which other actors imitated Chaplin, vaudeville acts in which Chaplin was impersonated, songs which described Chaplin's characteristic movements and character traits. As I shall discuss more fully in Chapter 4, Chaplin had by this time become as universally recognised and as much a part of the cultural landscape as any of the cultural stereotypes he might choose to represent. Thus when Charlie falls into a woman's lap trying to find his seat in the darkness of the theatre in *A Film Johnnie* (fig. 3.16), contemporary audiences would have recognised this as the kind of behaviour germane to the movie-fan stereotype being performed (as well as comical reference to widely trumpeted fears about the dangers of darkened screening rooms). When he does the same thing in *A Night in the Show*, however, being more familiar with Charlie's antics from earlier films, contemporary audiences would have recognised this first as typical Charlie.

In *A Night in the Show*, Chaplin stages himself, in effect, as a 'craze'. Whereas the other vaudeville stage acts receive either lukewarm or negative receptions from the audience (fig. 3.22 and 3.23), Charlie's stage invasion invigorates the scene and prompts a unanimously ecstatic reaction from the audience (figs. 3.24 and 3.25). Just as cinema was said to be aggressively displacing vaudeville in the early 1910s, so Charlie usurps the spotlight from the vaudeville acts in this film by offering something more exciting, more spontaneous and more widely appealing.⁶⁹ The self-reflexive quality of this dramatisation is particularly evident in the fact that Charlie's well-received performance on stage pointedly showcases the comic repertoires of Keystone-style slapstick. According to one quite sympathetic *Moving Picture Magazine* journalist in April 1915, the major 'Keystone hallmarks'

⁶⁸ Alan Dale, *Comedy is a Man in Trouble: Slapstick in American Movies* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 37.

⁶⁹ Pearson, 'The Menace of the Movies,' 315-331.

were ‘the throwing of pies into people’s faces and the kicking and throwing of persons into every ludicrous position conceivable’. Chaplin delivers precisely on this front, splatting a pie in a singer’s face and then elaborately kicking him off the stage (figs. 3.26 and 3.27).⁷⁰ He gives these moves a distinctive Chaplinesque inflection, particularly in the familiar way he aims his kick.⁷¹ Thus Charlie wins over the on-screen audience with movements that were by this moment already associated specifically with moving pictures and, more specifically yet, with his own signature moves as a film star.



Figs. 3.22 and 3.23. A vaudeville act receives a negative reception in *A Night in the Show* (1915).



Figs. 3.24 and 3.25. Charlie receives a universally ecstatic reception for his spontaneous stage invasion in *A Night in the Show* (1915).

⁷⁰ ‘Musings of “The Photoplay Philosopher”’, *Motion Picture Magazine* 9, no. 3 (April 1915): 107.

⁷¹ Chaplin runs on the spot in this distinctive manner in several other films of the mid-1910s, including *His Musical Career* (1914), *Work* (1915) and *The Count* (1916).



Figs. 3.26 and 3.27. Charlie's stage invasion consists of hallmarks of Keystone slapstick given a distinctively Chaplinesque inflection in *A Night in the Show* (1915).

iii) Chaplin and the Movie Studio: *A Film Johnnie*, *His New Job* and *Behind the Screen*

One of the most revealing developments running through *A Film Johnnie* (1914), *His New Job* (1915) and *Behind the Screen* (1916) is Chaplin's changing representation of the movie studio – the enchanting place where, according to Universal Studios' publicity material in 1915, 'the Craziest Things in the World Happen.'⁷² There are continuity and change across Chaplin's various representations of the studio which, I will argue, imply a development in the way Chaplin attempts to position himself in relation to the larger reputation of moving pictures. Specifically, I want to argue that Chaplin strategically arranged his films to assimilate the excitement surrounding moving pictures at that time, and channel it into the comic force of his own persona.

There is a tendency, growing stronger across these films, for Chaplin to bathetically deflate the supposed glamour and excitement of the movie studio and to throw into greater relief the comic brilliance of his own performances in the process. In *A Film Johnnie* (1914), however, this particular set of possibilities had not yet come into effect. The movie studio is presented as a genuinely exciting environment. The film exhibits the Keystone studio in a non-narrative, documentary-style panning shot that functions as an attraction in itself, offering a privileged view into the usually concealed world behind the screen (fig. 3.28). Moreover, the shot presents the studio as a dynamic and appealing scene of collective activity. No obvious hierarchy exists in the space and work and play seem to mingle easily, with some of

⁷² Universal Studios promotional material, quoted in Edmonds, *The Big U*, 52-53.

the men playing cards, others watching and others preparing sets and camera equipment. Charlie enters the space wide-eyed as if hypnotised (figs. 3.12 and 3.13 above), and while this is a comically hyperbolised performance of a movie-fan's awe, it is arguably justified by the film's own representation of the studio space.

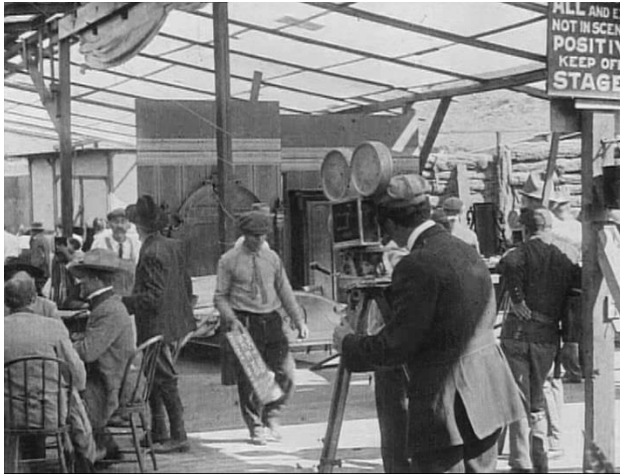


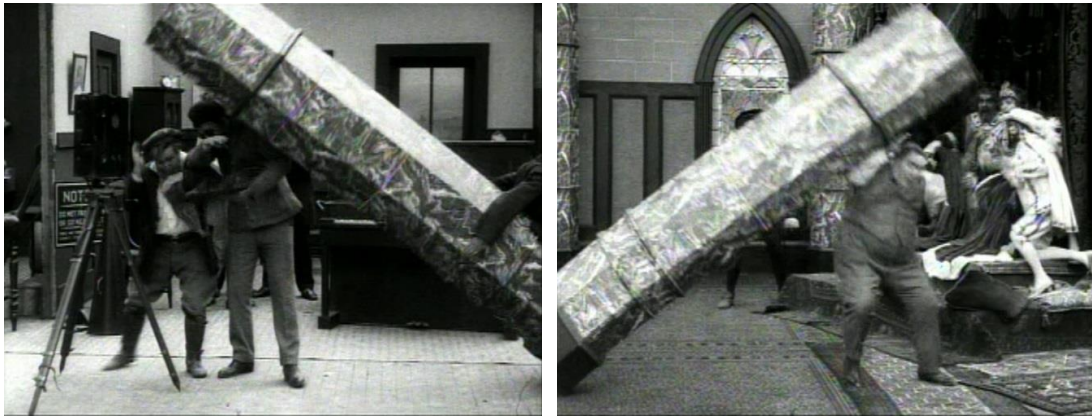
Fig. 3.28. A panning shot reveals the lively environment of the Keystone Studios in *A Film Johnnie* (1914). Film-making would look much less fun and exciting in future Chaplin films about film-making in which Charlie was to be the sole source of fun and excitement.

In *His New Job* (1915) and *Behind the Screen* (1916), by contrast, there are no documentary-style studio shots. Everything is staged. Moreover, the representation of film-making in these films focuses on controlling directors and their stifling insistence that the actors do precisely as they are told. It is a far cry from the appealing scene of collective activity we briefly witness in *A Film Johnnie*. *Behind the Screen* (1916) goes furthest in deflating the magic of movie land. In both the dramatic and comedy departments of the studio depicted, the actors are shown lounging around and yawning, perpetually waiting for scenes to be prepared and cameras to be set up (figs. 3.29 and 3.30). Chaplin's boss in the property department also spends much of his time asleep or yawning and stretching ostentatiously (fig. 3.31). Against this background of tedium and lethargy, Charlie seems especially awake. And whenever there is any action on the set, it is the result of Charlie's accidents. Indeed, the studio staff are most animated when they are defending themselves from Charlie's trouble making, as when his attempt to move a stage column results in the near destruction of the studio (figs. 3.32 and 3.33). The trend across Chaplin's movie-making films, then, is for all excitement to be increasingly directed through Charlie. Chaplin slows down and stultifies the surroundings in order to make Charlie the exclusive source of animation and excitement. Thus the broader scene of production and company endeavour at the 'fun factory' – glimpsed

in *A Film Johnnie* – is concentrated into the performance and profile of one actor at its heart.⁷³



Figs. 3.29 - 3.31. Lethargic staff at the movie studio in *Behind the Screen* (1916). In the comedy department the chef character yawns while the others rest their heads; on the dramatic set the king (seated, right) yawns and stretches; Charlie's boss in the property department rouses himself after a nap.



Figs. 3.32 and 3.33. In the world of *Behind the Screen* (1916) the comedy department is no more fun than the dramatic department. They are equally dull and lifeless and provide equally appropriate backgrounds for Charlie's invigorating comic disruptions.

Another telling development across *A Film Johnnie*, *His New Job* and *Behind the Screen* is the reworking of the basic narrative-framing concept of an ordinary person being excluded from the supposedly marvellous goings on of the moving-picture studio, and then working their way in. In the first two films it is Charlie who is excluded, and his exclusion is marked by a visual gag, repeated almost identically: Charlie casually follows an established actor or actors as they enter the studio, only to have the door slammed abruptly in his face (figs. 3.34 and 3.35). He has his revenge in both cases by insinuating himself into the studio space and causing havoc. Thus the initial act of exclusion serves to enhance our enjoyment of what follows. In *Behind the Screen* an act of exclusion is again an important framing device, but this

⁷³ 'The fun factory' was a phrase used to describe the Keystone Film Company. See: Clifford H. Pangburn, 'Tillie's Punctured Romance,' *Motion Picture News* 10, no. 19 (November 14, 1914): 40.

time it is Edna who suffers rather than Charlie – who is in fact already employed as a property man. Edna does not bang her nose on the studio door, but she receives the emotional equivalent when she is mockingly rejected by a director after she asks, innocently and optimistically: ‘Can I be an actress, please?’ (fig. 3.36). It is now Edna who sneaks into the studio, disguising herself as a man in a flat cap and workman’s overalls and offering her services as a stagehand.



Figs. 3.34 - 3.36. Excluded from the studio: Charlie has the door slammed in his face in *A Film Johnnie* (1914) and *His New Job* (1915). Edna is rejected by the studio manager in *Behind the Screen* (1916).

This reworking of the same idea might well be interpreted in terms of Chaplin’s increasing ‘emotional range’ and ‘narrative skill’ – criteria with which Robinson, among others, conventionally measure Chaplin’s development across the 1910s.⁷⁴ It could be argued, following this line, that what starts off as a laughable bit of rough and tumble in *A Film Johnnie* (1914) and *His New Job* (1915) becomes a sympathy-inducing story in *Behind the Screen* (1916). Indeed, this is certainly evident. Yet there is another development taking place here in the way that Chaplin positions himself in relation to contemporary movie culture, a development that was perhaps more integral to the social and cultural resonance of Charlie’s distinctive persona in the mid-1910s than the mere polishing of his narrative skills.

In regards to *Behind the Screen*, I have argued that in visual terms, Charlie’s performance assimilates the reputed excitement of the movie studio. A similar assimilation takes place on the level of narrative. The film is framed by Edna’s quest to become a movie star, a quest that invokes all the clichés about Hollywood as a magical place of mobility and self-transformation. But what Edna wants and what she gets are quite different: she wants to be an actress; she gets Charlie. Though the film has hardly been a romance, it ends as if it had been, iris-ing out on a close-up of

⁷⁴ Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art*, 141.

a kiss between her and Charlie. This resolution may be justified by the fact that Charlie has just saved Edna from a murderous striker in the final minute of the film. But Charlie has substituted himself for Edna's goal of becoming an actress which she has been pursuing from the film's opening shot. In substituting himself for this goal Charlie both ensures the happy ending for the girl, as conventionally understood, and, in the process, performs an act of symbolical substitution: himself for the qualities of excitement and liberation associated with moving pictures more generally.

The development I have traced across Chaplin's three films about film-making tells a counter narrative to that which is heard so often from Chaplin criticism and commentary: that in his early films Chaplin was incrementally transcending contemporary amusement culture and severing ties with it. Rather, as this specific grouping of films illustrates, his relation to it becomes more intricate in his films as he himself became an integral part of the culture beyond them. The development of his movie-themed films show Chaplin tapping the controversies of contemporary amusement culture with increasing dexterity, in ways that allow his apparently singular persona to take on and himself channel in comically expressive form, the disruptive and liberating forces of a larger amusement revolution.

iv) Chaplin Drops the Subject of Movies: From Shorts to Features

After 1916, as Chaplin slowed his production of shorts and geared up for features, he turned away from the self-reflexive movie-making theme. Further exploration of this development may, I suggest, reveal something about his changing relationship with, and attitude towards, movies and mass-amusement culture more generally. Buster Keaton provides an interesting counterpoint here. He too made the transition from shorts to features in the early 1920s, in line with the industry's movement in comedies more generally, but whereas Chaplin dropped the use of movies when he crossed this line, Keaton picked it up. In all his shorts Keaton had never played the movie card, yet he was to deploy it to great effect in one of his major feature films of the early 1920s, *Sherlock Jr* (1924).

The contrasting actions of these two comedians can be understood in the light of contemporary trends in film comedy, specifically the trend towards what Edmund

Wilson, prominent cultural critic of the 1920s, described as ‘spectacular farce’.⁷⁵ Writing in the *New Republic* following the release of *The Gold Rush* in 1925, Wilson suggested that comedy producers and their ‘popular audience’ had developed a taste for evermore elaborate gags that thrilled the spectator by pushing the boundaries of the cinematic illusion.⁷⁶ On this front, Chaplin was falling behind his ‘imitators and rivals’, most obviously Keaton and Harold Lloyd.⁷⁷

Their films have more smartness and speed; they cultivate more frightening mechanical devices. With their motorcars, their motorcycles, their motorboats, their airplanes, their railroad trains, their vertiginous scaling of skyscrapers and their shattering cataclysmic collisions, they have progressed a long way beyond Chaplin, who has made no attempt to keep up with them, but continues with the cheap trappings and relatively simple tricks of the old custard-pie comedy.⁷⁸

Wilson himself was sceptical of the fad for spectacular farce, believing that it resulted in impersonal performances and ‘stereotyped humour’, while Chaplin was consistently able to convey ‘an unmistakable quality of personal fancy’ in his films that set him apart from ‘even the best of his competitors’.⁷⁹ But Wilson was right to point out that Chaplin was no longer at the cutting edge of movie-making. As he put it: ‘All the photographic, the plastic development of the movies, which is at present, making such remarkable advances, seems not to interest Chaplin.’⁸⁰ By contrast, scenes such as Lloyd’s skyscraper scaling in *Safety Last!* (1923), or Keaton’s death-defying railway stunts in *Our Hospitality* (1923) represented the latest phase of cinema’s thrilling novelty. Chaplin, while still pre-eminently popular, had lost the connection with the exhilarating possibility of cinema as a new medium, a connection that, as this chapter has explored, he had made so successfully in the mid-1910s.

⁷⁵ Edmund Wilson, ‘Some Recent Films,’ *New Republic* 45, no. 576 (December 16, 1925): 109.

⁷⁶ Edmund Wilson, ‘The New Charlie Chaplin Comedy,’ *New Republic* 44, no. 561 (September 2, 1925): 45.

⁷⁷ Wilson, ‘The New Charlie Chaplin Comedy,’ 45.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 45-46.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

Keaton was well positioned in 1924 to use movies as subject matter to identify himself with the latest trend in comic film-making. In one famous sequence in *Sherlock Jr.*, for example, Keaton's character apparently leaves the projection box, where he works as a projectionist, and climbs into the film he is screening, only to be bewildered by a series of 'cuts' placing him in a series of incongruous settings as the scene shifts repeatedly. The sequence highlights the ability of the film medium to manipulate space and time in perceptually exhilarating ways for thrilling effects, something which Keaton's elaborate chases consistently do. Had Chaplin attempted a movie-making scene at this point, using his own preferred techniques, it might well only have highlighted what was by now perceived as the old-fashioned aspects of his style.

While Chaplin's feature films of the 1920s avoid explicit self-reference to his status as a movie actor, they do, however, reflect on the extraordinary rise to fame that had constituted the public drama of 'the Chaplin craze' during the mid-1910s (as will be examined in Chapter 4). *The Gold Rush* (1925) and *The Circus* (1928) both follow Charlie through unlikely narratives that echo Chaplin's own rags-to-riches story. The first film concludes with Charlie returning from the Klondike as a tramp turned millionaire and being assailed at every turn by journalists and photographers. In the latter film Charlie unknowingly becomes 'the hit of the show' at a circus. In both films Charlie becomes a star, echoing Chaplin's real life, even though, in these partial cinematic analogues, it is not specifically a *movie* star. Instead, Chaplin replaces movies with more historic settings: the near-legendary Klondike gold rush of the late 1890s, and the circus, an institution with a more extensive heritage than cinema. Thus *The Gold Rush* and *The Circus* both court and thwart a biographical resemblance to Chaplin's own rise to fame. If anything, though, replaying that rise in alternative settings imagines Chaplin as larger than the recently emerged medium which had brought him to fame: his fame can cross realms and the cadences of his story be recognisable even in a translated field of experience. But this coyness specifically about his own field of endeavour was new. From *A Film Johnnie* in early 1914, to *Behind the Screen* in late 1916, Chaplin had embraced movies as good subject matter for his films and discovered therein auspicious opportunities for defining his own comic persona, as this chapter has explored. It was only with the waning of Chaplin's status as himself the latest craze in movies that the subject was

to drop from view in his films. It is to that heady earlier period, however, that Part II turns in more detail.

PART II. THE CHARLIE CHAPLIN CRAZE

Why should a comedian, whose work is of the broadest slapstick variety, attain such a vogue?

—*Kansas City Star*, 1915.

Part I offered accounts of three amusement crazes and explored the evolving ways in which Chaplin used those amusements, and their culturally freighted histories, as subject matter and subtexts in his films. It illuminated a specific trajectory whereby, between 1914 and 1916, Chaplin manipulated these amusements in increasingly clever ways to make himself the sole and central source of performance spectacle and anarchic comedy in his films. Without leaving the films behind, Part II shifts its focus to the cultural phenomenon of Chaplin's rise to fame in the same period, drawing on our knowledge of amusement crazes established in Part I to inform an understanding of its detail and trajectory. The aim is to allow an appreciation of Chaplin's early films that is more informed by and responsive to some of the driving imperatives of their historical moment than has been the case.

Part II consists of two chapters. The first offers an account of Chaplin's rise to fame between 1914 and 1915, and addresses the question in the epigraph at the top of this page with reference to both the cultural dynamics of the craze and the aesthetic qualities of Chaplin's films. The second chapter of Part II focuses specifically on the idea that an amusement craze is by definition a short-lived phenomenon, and explores how Chaplin's early films engage on an aesthetic level with the temporal rhythms of the contemporary mass-amusement culture of which his early career was a product.

CHAPTER 4

SLAPSTICK, CONTROVERSY AND THE CHAPLIN CRAZE

‘In this year, 1915,’ proclaims Peter Ackroyd in his recent biography, *Charlie Chaplin* (2014), ‘Chaplin became the most famous man in the world’.¹ ‘It was now widely reported’, Ackroyd continues, ‘that, on Charlie’s first appearance on screen in any of his new films, the audience would erupt in cheers and laughter’.² And such ‘eruptions’ were not limited to movie theatres, Ackroyd points out. They spread throughout American culture in further exuberant celebrations of the comedian: dancing Chaplin dances, singing Chaplin songs, consuming Chaplin comics, toys and souvenirs and even competing in Chaplin imitation contests.³ Ackroyd’s summary is typical of how biographers, since Theodore Huff’s seminal *Charlie Chaplin* (1951), have portrayed Chaplin’s reception in 1915: as an ‘eruption’ of joyous enthusiasm, beginning in America and spreading internationally.⁴ Taken in all its dimensions and expressions, this burst of excitement is routinely referred to in biographical narratives, as well as critical accounts of Chaplin’s career, as ‘the Chaplin craze’. Undeniably, this craze constitutes one of the most colourful events in the much-rehearsed story of Chaplin’s career, formalising the emergence of an enduring cultural icon with a suitably effervescent launch.

This chapter will argue that 1915 was indeed a unique and important moment in Chaplin’s career, but not for the reasons conventionally provided. The Chaplin craze, I will argue, calls out to be read as an amusement craze in the historically specific sense that I have cumulatively established over the previous three chapters in my investigations of the roller-skating, dance and moving-picture crazes. This chapter will explore alternative ways of understanding Chaplin’s early film career in

¹ Peter Ackroyd, *Charlie Chaplin* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2014), 80.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Theodore Huff, *Charlie Chaplin* (New York: Schuman, 1951), 6. See also: John McCabe, *Charlie Chaplin* (London: Robson Books Ltd., 1974), 79; David Robinson, *Chaplin: The Mirror of Opinion* (London: Secker Warburg, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 35; Charles Maland, *Chaplin and American Culture: The Evolution of a Star Image* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 14; Simon Louvish, *Chaplin: The Tramp’s Odyssey* (London: Faber, 2008), 74-84.

the mid-1910s, specifically those that become apparent when this moment is read as a craze amidst a raft of crazes, and situated in a cultural climate in which new, mass-orientated amusements excited peculiarly intense public feelings on a spectrum ranging from exhilarated delight to infuriated outrage. It is in this context, I argue, that the cultural phenomenon of Chaplin's rise to fame can be best understood, and the aesthetics of his early films best appreciated.

When discussing the Chaplin craze, critics and commentators have often been content to itemise the various forms of spin-off Charlie Chaplin merchandising that proliferated ferociously in 1915, taking these as sufficient indicators of Chaplin's cultural impact. I will focus, instead, on the specific debates and underlying cultural dynamics that generated intense public interest in Chaplin in the first place; those that made Chaplin not just a popular, merchandisable screen actor, but a profound national obsession. Though the Chaplin craze was global in scale, in keeping with the subject of this thesis I will focus on its American manifestations.

This chapter offers an account of the Chaplin craze in three by-now familiar parts – origins, boom and controversy – thereby mapping Chaplin's rise onto the typical formation of amusement crazes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Within this account I explore how not only did the Chaplin craze have much in common with other amusement crazes, but how it was integrally related to the ongoing rise of moving pictures specifically. This account challenges prevailing understandings of the Chaplin craze in two specific ways, which are further elaborated in two supplementary sections at the end of the chapter. Firstly, it situates Chaplin's rise to fame, and his early flourishing as a filmmaker, in the context of a broader slapstick boom taking place at the time and pioneered by the Keystone Film Company. Secondly, it highlights Chaplin's important role in wider contemporary debates and controversies about slapstick and moving pictures more generally, exploring how these debates and controversies generated interest in, and excitement about, the new comedian. I argue that the relationships under scrutiny here – between Chaplin and Keystone and between Chaplin and opponents of slapstick or movie-sceptics more generally – are central to determining how we understand Chaplin's early career and films. Conventional accounts have interpreted these relationships in a particular way that tends to divorce Chaplin from contemporary mass-amusement culture in order to see him in the idealised image of a filmmaker striving against his context to elevate his work to the distinguished status of 'art'. I

critique this now-conventionalised interpretation and offer a more historically attuned alternative that illuminates Chaplin's embeddedness in the turbulent mass-amusement culture of the period.

Cycles of the Craze

i) Origins

Chaplin owed his start in movies to the Keystone Film Company, a company which liked to surprise its audience with fresh novelties. Between 1912 and 1915, Keystone built up a strong reputation among exhibitors and audiences for producing slapstick *with a difference*. As one *Motion Picture News* reviewer put it in 1914: 'Keystone pictures have long been famous for their comedy which seems always to have a new and delightful twist'.⁵ While Keystone relied on a limited repertoire of narrative formulas and slapstick clichés, it constantly sought novelty through their use of editing effects, dangerous stunts, unusual locations and guest stars.⁶ As head of the Keystone Company, Mack Sennett built his own reputation upon his ability to engineer such 'twists'. 'The slapstick he did not invent,' recalled a perceptive journalist in 1918, 'but he made it fashionable.'⁷ Indeed, 'fashionable' seems an appropriate word, since Sennett not only brought film slapstick to a wider audience, but he also invested it with an aesthetic of perpetual novelty.⁸ The Keystone Company's tireless pursuit of 'new and delightful twist[s]' was akin to that of fashion itself.

Chaplin's employment by Keystone might be seen as precisely one such twist. In his autobiography, Sennett stresses the unconventionality of employing an

⁵ Clifford H. Pangburn, 'Tillie's Punctured Romance,' *Motion Picture News* 10, no. 19 (November 14, 1914): 40.

⁶ On these features of Keystone slapstick, see: Douglas Riblet, 'The Keystone Film Company, 1912 to 1915' (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1998), 54-65 and 98-115.

⁷ 'Slapstick and Pie Throwing of Movies Past Uneasy Lies Head of the Comedy King,' *Duluth News Tribune*, February 27, 1918, 6.

⁸ Rob King has documented how by 1914 Keystone films were being shown at lavish Broadway theatres like The Strand as well as unionised working-class theatres like the Savoy and the Superba in Los Angeles. Rob King, *The Fun Factory: The Keystone Company and the Emergence of Mass Culture* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2009), 102.

‘obscure British comic’ with no film experience.⁹ Sennett pointedly recalls that his producer, Charles O. Baumann, was furious when he heard about the costly appointment of an actor whom Sennett had seen only once, performing in a touring vaudeville show: “‘We just got our little company in the black,’ Bauman [sic] squalled at me. ‘Now with this silly cheap comedian you picked out of nowhere, you’re plowing [sic] us under the red.’”¹⁰ Sennett was openly prone to fabricate, exaggerate and mythicise, but there is no doubt that the employment of Chaplin was indeed unusual and risky: as an Englishman and a stage actor he was doubly foreign to American screen slapstick. But as with the ‘discovery’ of ragtime in the 1890s, importing something unexpected into an established context was a strategy with pedigree in the amusement industry, calculated to generate curiosity, novelty and excitement: these were the potential rewards for the risks taken in introducing an unconventional element into the otherwise familiar framework.

There were two aspects of Chaplin’s stage act that evidently aroused Sennett’s interest, as we can infer from the way in which Chaplin was deployed in the earliest Keystone films in which he appeared under the direction of Sennett, Henry Lehrman and George Nichols. Firstly, there was the persona of the drunk which Chaplin had played in *A Night in an English Music Hall*, the vaudeville sketch in which he had toured America between September 1910 and November 1912 and in which he was billed as ‘The Inebriate’.¹¹ The films of Chaplin’s first three months at Keystone, before he assumed directorial duties himself, show Keystone’s eagerness to deploy Chaplin in this persona. Chaplin plays the drunk in *Mabel’s Strange Predicament* (1914), *Tango Tangles* (1914) and *His Favorite Pastime* (1914).¹² Though drunkenness was not an uncommon source of comedy in Keystone films, no Keystone comedian had previously played a drunk as a consistent comic

⁹ Mack Sennett, *King of Comedy* (1954; reprint, San Jose; New York; Lincoln; Shanghai: To Excel, 2000), 149.

¹⁰ Sennett, *King of Comedy*, 154.

¹¹ ‘The Inebriate’ was the role in which Americans were most likely to have encountered Chaplin before his film career, and indeed Sennett claimed this was the role in which he had first witnessed Chaplin. Sennett, *The King of Comedy*, 148. On Chaplin’s American tours, see: David Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art* (1985, revised edition, London: Grafton, 1992), 88-98. On the various claims for having discovered Chaplin, see: Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art*, 101-102.

¹² He was to play a drunk in later Keystone’s also, including *The Face on the Barroom Floor* (1914) and *The Rounders* (1914).

persona from film to film. Whereas other performers might get drunk as part of a comic plot, Chaplin *getting* drunk is never part of the story. In each of the aforementioned Chaplin Keystones, he is already drunk and remains drunk throughout the film. For Chaplin, drunkenness involved no incremental becoming but was rather a sustained condition, and functioned as the pretext for a particular style of comic physical performance.

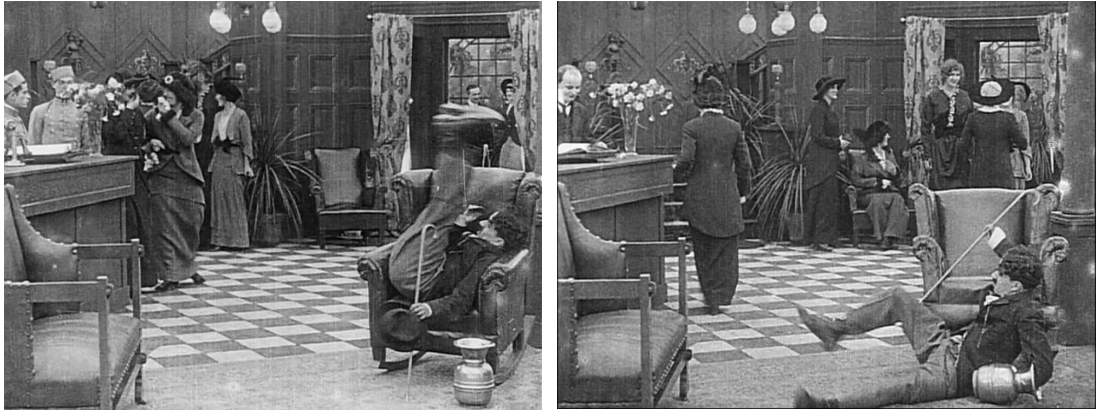
This particular style was the second aspect of Chaplin's stage act that Keystone eagerly appropriated and showcased. It was an especially acrobatic style, displayed mainly through elaborate pratfalls. In 1915, the film journalist Harry C. Carr recalled Chaplin's stage show thus:

It concerned the adventures of a very badly spifflicated young swell in a box at a music hall. The stage was set for a miniature music hall with boxes at one side of the stage. The tipsy young swell sat in one of those boxes. He tried to "queen" all the beautiful ladies on the music hall vaudeville bill. Several times he climbed over the edge of the box onto the miniature stage. Most of the time he was either falling into or out of the box. The swell had to do about a million comic "falls" during the progress of the sketch. It was very funny and ended in a riot of boisterous mirth.¹³

The theatre box of *A Night in an English Music Hall* is approximated in various situations in Chaplin's early Keystones. In *Mabel's Strange Predicament* (1914) he tumbles out of his chair (figs. 4.1 - 4.2). In *His Favorite Pastime* (1914) he rolls drunkenly over a bannister (4.3 - 4.4). In *Caught in the Rain* (1914) the curb of the pavement provides sufficient opportunity for an acrobatic performance of physical discombobulation (fig. 4.5), while in *Tango Tangles* (1914) it is a set of stairs (fig. 4.6). In *The Face on the Barroom Floor* (1914), in the scene with which I opened this thesis, Charlie gives an impressive tumbling display with no props at all but a piece of chalk (fig. 4.7). While the performances of other Keystone comedians were emphatically physical and kinetic, they were rarely acrobatic in the manner that we see here. Chaplin imitates precarious states of bodily disorder, but demonstrates great physical control and dexterity in the process. We register both the vivid impression of corporeal chaos and the impressive acrobatic skill involved in creating

¹³ Harry C. Carr, 'Charlie Chaplin's Story, Part 2,' *Photoplay* 8, no. 3 (August 1915): 43.

it. Furthermore, these two seemingly incongruous aspects of the performance are mutually enhanced by their combination.



Figs. 4.1 and 4.2. Chaplin gives an acrobatic tumbling performance in the opening sequence of his third Keystone film, *Mabel's Strange Predicament* (1914).



Figs. 4.3 and 4.4. Chaplin tumbles over a handrail in *His Favorite Pastime* (1914) as he may have tumbled from the theatre box in the music-hall sketch *A Night in an English Music Hall*.



Figs. 4.5 - 4.7. Chaplin displays his acrobatic skills by balancing precariously on curbside, stairs and barroom floor in *Caught in the Rain* (1914), *Tango Tangles* (1914) and *The Face on the Barroom Floor* (1914).

What Keystone evidently saw in Chaplin's stage act was something that was simultaneously recognisable and fresh: a style compatible with its own since both

were violent and full of movement and yet introducing new things to it though a different kind of stylised acrobatics.

This can be further illustrated with a small selection of scenes from early Keystone films which stage explicit comparisons between Chaplin and other Keystone performers. In *Between Showers* (1914), one of the earliest films to feature Chaplin, he co-stars with Ford Sterling. The pair play two ‘gallants’ who compete for the affections of a girl on the street. One of the jokes of the film is that all amorous young men like these are alike. Discovering the girl stranded on the pavement by a deep puddle, Sterling insists she stay put while he fetch something to help her across. While he is gone, Charlie discovers the girl and makes the exact same proposal (figs. 4.8 and 4.9). However, this joke about the unconscious *similarity* of the two characters is also an opportunity for the performers to showcase their *differing* comic styles. They perform the same act but in a different manner. Thus we see Sterling performing with rapid fire gestures and articulate hand movements, whereas Chaplin gives a more acrobatic performance as he repeatedly loses his footing on the curb (figs. 4.10 and 4.11). Though not drunk in this instance, Chaplin demonstrates the distinctive kind of physical comedy that he was bringing to the Keystone Company from music hall.

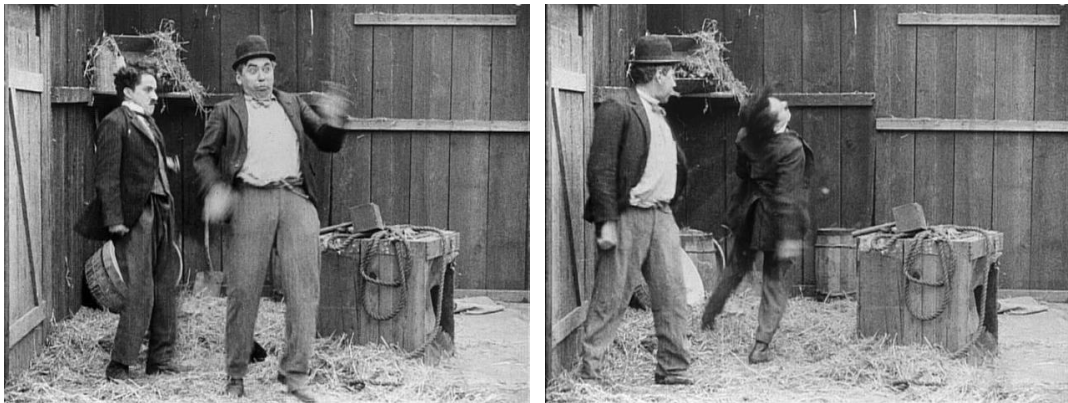


Figs. 4.8 and 4.9. Ford Sterling and Chaplin play rival ‘gallants’ using the same tricks to court a woman in *Between Showers* (1914).



Figs. 4.10 and 4.11. Ford Sterling and Chaplin showcase their contrasting comic specialities in *Between Showers* (1914).

The Fatal Mallet (1914) and *Mabel's Married Life* (1914) also include scenes in which Chaplin and another Keystone performer go through the same motions in turn, but in their own distinctive ways (figs. 4.12 - 4.15). It is clear from these scenes that rather than wanting to shoe-horn Chaplin into the mould of other Keystone performers, as critics have claimed, Keystone enabled Chaplin to showcase his distinctive talents *alongside* those of his co-stars, as part of a varied Keystone repertoire.



Figs. 4.12 and 4.13. Mack Sennett and Chaplin take turns at kicking and being kicked in *The Fatal Mallet* (1914). Sennett responds to Charlie's kick with humorous facial mugging, while Chaplin responds to Sennett's kick with an acrobatic bodily contortion. That Sennett performs facing while Chaplin performs with his back to the camera highlights their differing comic specialities and the camera's attention to these.



Figs. 4.14 and 4.15. Mabel Norman and Chaplin take turns to spar with a dummy in *Mabel's Married Life* (1914). Normand's performance showcases her frolicsome playfulness while Chaplin's shows off his acrobatic elasticity (1914).

While Chaplin was certainly a skilled performer in his own right, he also represented for Keystone something beyond his individual talents: English music-hall comedy.¹⁴ In his autobiography Sennett recalls his thought process as he watched Chaplin on the stage for the first time:

Charlie revealed most of the trade skills of the music hall people. He could fall, trip, stumble, somersault, slap and make faces. These were stock-in-trade items which we could use. I did not see then, and I do not know anyone who claims to have seen then, the subtleties [...] which a few years later were known as the genius marks of Chaplin's art.¹⁵

From Sennett's perspective as a filmmaker, Chaplin represented less a distinct individual talent than a composite catalogue of 'stock-in-trade items' belonging to the English 'music hall people' which could be incorporated into the Keystone style, thus fuelling Keystone's ongoing mission to perpetually diversify and revitalise its output.

Thus Chaplin's early months at Keystone might be compared to the initial public debuts of ragtime and moving pictures in vaudeville, discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. When these amusements first emerged, they were not self-sufficient entities, but rather elements of a larger show designed to produce sensations of curiosity and surprise, and to perpetually renew these sensations. Similarly, Chaplin was brought

¹⁴ *A Night in an English Music Hall* had been running, under the title of *Mumming Birds*, since at least 1903 with various actors playing the drunk role, including Billie Reeves and Billie Ritchie, later to be dismissed at Chaplin imitators. Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art*, 75, 81-82.

¹⁵ Sennett, *King of Comedy*, 156.

into the Keystone operation as a fresh element that contributed to the perceived dynamism of the company. Indeed, as film historian Douglas Riblet has shown, Keystone's promotional strategies at that time sought to advertise the *range* of talent housed under the Company's roof, promoting individual star performers 'while not allowing any one star to overshadow the studio as a whole.'¹⁶ Ragtime, moving pictures and Chaplin himself would only become crazes when they achieved some distinction from their original context, thereby allowing them to be perceived as 'new' entities in themselves.

Chaplin's popularity as part of the Keystone studio in 1914 was distinct in nature from the kind of individual fame that came with the Chaplin craze in 1915. However, we must also understand that it was Keystone who, inadvertently perhaps, paved the way for this transformation. As I have argued, the first few Keystone films to feature Chaplin had highlighted his distinctive performance talents. Then, in the latter half of 1914, Keystone foregrounded Chaplin in even more conspicuous ways. It starred him in a monthly series of two-reel specials: *Dough and Dynamite* (October, 1914), *His Trysting Place* (November, 1914) and *His Prehistoric Past* (December, 1914).¹⁷ These specially promoted films must have helped to cement a particular image of Chaplin in moviegoers' minds, for in each one he appeared in what would become his trademark costume: his moustache, cane and derby. Even more significantly for Chaplin's growing status at Keystone, he was selected to play a lead role in an unprecedented stunt: *Tillie's Punctured Romance* (November, 1914), a six-reel slapstick film in which Chaplin co-starred alongside the Broadway celebrity Marie Dressler.

At the time of *Tillie's Punctured Romance*, multiple-reel films were becoming widespread but slapstick had never been attempted in this format and thus the film was a sensational event in the film world.¹⁸ As such, it helped to focus moviegoers' attention on Chaplin, the performer selected from the Keystone stable to

¹⁶ Douglas Riblet, 'The Keystone Film Company and the Historiography of Early Slapstick,' in *Classical Hollywood Comedy*, ed. Kristine Brunovska Karnick and Henry Jenkins (New York; London: Routledge, 1995), 187.

¹⁷ The standard product at the time was a one-reel comedy. A two-reel production was given special promotion. On Keystone's 'special' films, see: King, *The Fun Factory*, 112-119.

¹⁸ On the unique distribution and reception of *Tillie's Punctured Romance*, see: King, *The Fun Factory*, 134-139.

be the star of this high-profile film. Moreover, since the film was so unusual, interest in it extended beyond Keystone's habitual movie audience, thus establishing Chaplin as a recognisable emblem of Keystone slapstick more widely.

Though Chaplin did not appear in his trademark outfit in *Tillie's Punctured Romance*, the six reels gave him the opportunity to conspicuously reiterate his characteristic mannerisms: hopping sideways around corners, twirling a cane and doing his shuffling walk. He was evidently effective in this, for in a *Moving Picture World* review George Blaisdell made special mention of Chaplin's 'marvellous right-footed skid'.¹⁹ Chaplin took every opportunity to demonstrate this move, Blaisdell pointed out, 'whether he have under him rough highway or parlor floor'.²⁰ But the reviewer was not complaining: he found this distinctive little trick 'just as funny in the last reel as [...] in the first'.²¹

In their accounts of the Chaplin craze, critics – Robinson, Kimber and Ackroyd, for example – tend to divorce Chaplin's growing popularity at Keystone in 1914 from the activities of the company, even presenting his rise as occurring *despite* the company.²² In fact, Chaplin's early success was inextricable from Keystone. He owed much to the company's willingness to showcase distinctive aspects of his style, as well as its evolving release practices – two-reel specials and a feature film. While it was not their intention, Keystone undoubtedly laid the ground for Chaplin's profile to exceed its own in the following year.

ii) Boom

Chaplin's screen popularity had grown rapidly in late 1914, and it continued to grow in 1915. But between these years there was also a crucial shift in the *quality* of his fame. There was a resounding sense that Chaplin had somehow burst the conventional limits of a screen performer's cultural placement. Charles McGuirk's

¹⁹ George Blaisdell, "Tillie's Punctured Romance." Marie Dressler, in Sennett's Six-Reel Keystone Will Contribute Much to the Gayety of Nations,' *Moving Picture World* 22, no. 7 (November 1914): 914.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art*, 101-133; John Kimber, *The Art of Charlie Chaplin* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 53-66; Ackroyd, *Charlie Chaplin*, 53-66.

often-quoted ‘Chaplinitis’ article, printed in *Photoplay* in July 1915, is highly suggestive of this:

A little Englishman, quiet, unassuming, but surcharged with dynamite, is influencing the world right now. You can feel him in the theater ; you read of him in the magazines ; you get a glimpse of his idiosyncrasies in some twist of fashion.²³

According to McGuirk, Chaplin’s popularity had exploded, dynamite-like, and now seemed omnipresent. This sense of surprising all-pervasiveness was typical of the way in which contemporary amusement crazes were described and discussed. Hugo Münsterberg had described the American dance craze similarly in 1914:

[H]e who observes the life along Broadway may indeed suspect that dancing is now to be intertwined again with every business of life, and surely with every meal of life. No longer can any hostelry in New York be found without dancing [...]. The dance seems once more the center of public interest; it is cultivated from luncheon to breakfast [...].²⁴

Like this dance craze, as interpreted by Münsterberg, Chaplin had also become seemingly ‘intertwined [...] with every business of life’ and ‘the center of public interest’ in America. Just as the dance craze had extended its scope from ballrooms and dancehalls to ‘hostelr[ies]’ of all kinds, and from evening occasions to any time of day ‘from luncheon to breakfast’, so had Chaplin’s influence reached beyond the movies and into theatre, magazines and fashion. In both the dance craze and the Chaplin craze there was a perceived expansion into new physical and cultural territory.

This Chaplin boom was triggered in part by his move at the end of 1914 from Keystone to Essanay. Whereas Keystone prioritised its brand identity over that of individual performers, Essanay made Chaplin the *raison d’être* of an entire series of ‘Essanay-Chaplin’ films.²⁵ In these films, Chaplin was always the star performer, while Essanay’s marketing gave Chaplin personal credit for the quality of the

²³ Charles McGuirk, ‘Chaplinitis, Part 1,’ *Motion Picture Magazine* 9, no. 6 (July 1915): 121.

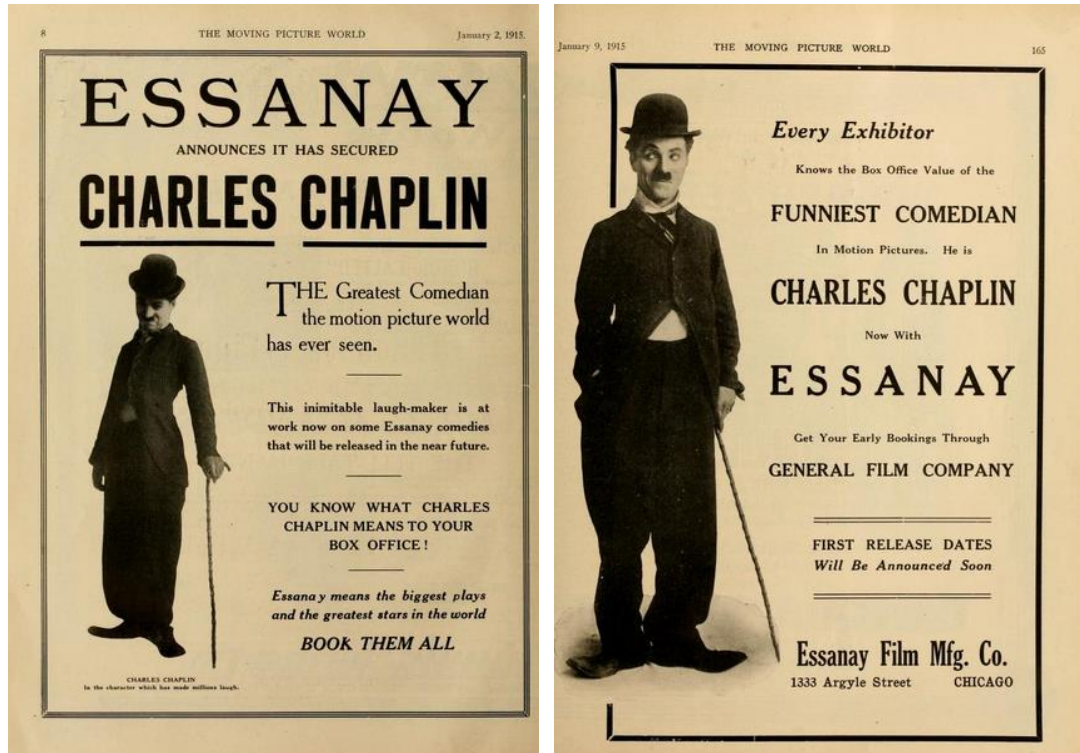
²⁴ Münsterberg, *Psychology and Social Sanity* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1914), 274 – 275.

²⁵ [Advertisement for ‘Essanay-Chaplin’ series], *Moving Picture World* 25, no. 1. (July 3, 1915): 14.

comedy. As a press release for the new series put it: ‘though the scenes themselves are full of fun, it is Mr. Chaplin’s unique antics that raises the comedy into the class of comic masterpieces.’²⁶

The new series, and its attendant marketing, also consolidated Chaplin’s image, ensuring that it was stable, consistent and immediately recognisable – important at a time when film branding was shifting its emphasis from the identities of companies to those of star performers. Essanay, in its initial promotion of Chaplin, decided to limit its focus not just to Chaplin, but to just one of the several personas in which he had appeared for Keystone. In the run up to the release of the first film, *His New Job* (1915), eye-catching, full-page advertisements appeared in all the major film trade journals. They featured full-body shots of Chaplin in his derby and cane, with captions evidently intended to cement the association between this familiar figure and the idea of big audiences and big sales (figs. 4.16 and 4.17). The films themselves also contributed to the standardisation of this image, with Chaplin appearing in the same distinctive outfit in all but the last three Essanays: *A Night in the Show* (1915), *Burlesque on Carmen* (1915) and *Police* (released belatedly in 1916).

²⁶ ‘Manufacturers Advance Notices. “A Night Out” (Essanay),’ *Moving Picture World* 23, no. 9 (February 27, 1915): 1307.

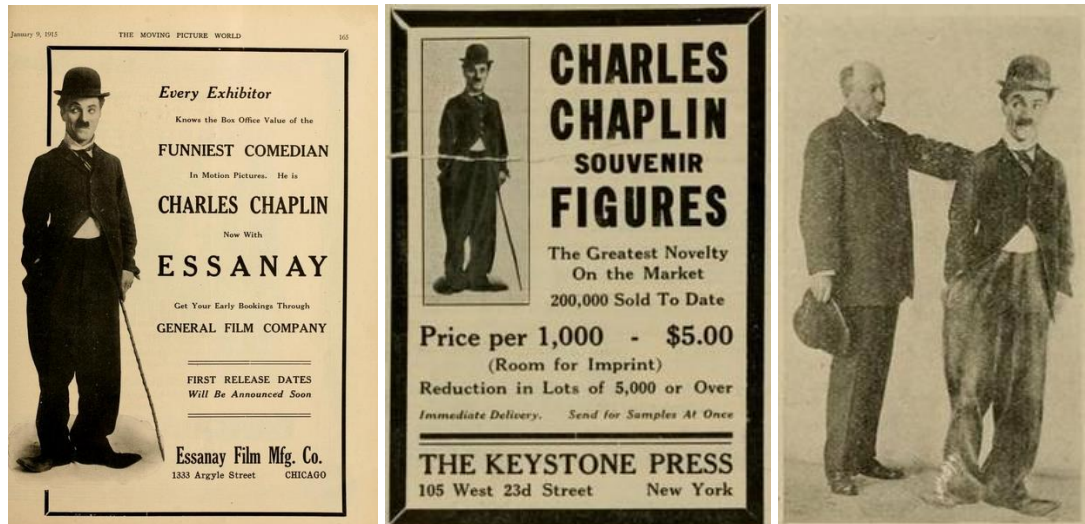


Figs. 4.16 and 4.17. Advertisements for the Essanay-Chaplin series addressed to exhibitors prior to the release of his first Essanay film. Fig. 4.21. This page from *Moving Picture World*'s 'Advertising for Exhibitors' column commends a theatre for its use of Chaplin cut-outs. Epes Winthrop Sargent, 'Advertising for Exhibitors,' *Moving Picture World* 26, no. 2 (October 9, 1915): 242.

With its newly assured stability, Chaplin's image became useful to film exhibitors as well as others interested in cashing in on audiences' familiarity with the actor. One particular Essanay publicity image was used widely by exhibitors and merchandisers, which inevitably helped to create an immediately recognisable trademark (figs. 4.18 – 4.20). According to a report from Washington in *Moving Picture World* in June 1915, a 'craze' for cardboard cut-outs of film favourites had started when a local artisan, 'who does sign painting and poster mounting for the local theaters, brought out the first cut-out of Charles Chaplin' (fig. 4.21).²⁷ This conspicuous use of Chaplin's image undoubtedly formed an inextricable part of the general experience of the Chaplin craze. 'For most of us', recalled Gilbert Seldes nearly a decade later, 'the grotesque effigy dangling from the electric sign or propped against the side of the ticket-booth must remain our first memory of Charlie Chaplin.'²⁸

²⁷ 'Film Notes in Washington,' *Moving Picture World* 24, no. 13 (June 26, 1915): 2131.

²⁸ Gilbert Seldes, *The Seven Lively Arts*, 1924 (reprint, Minola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2001), 41.



Figs. 4.18 - 4.20. A single publicity photograph of Chaplin was widely used to create an immediately recognisable image for the star. Essanay trade announcement in *Moving Picture World* 23, no. 2 (January 9, 1915): 165; advertisement for Charles Chaplin souvenir figure in *Moving Picture World* (April 10, 1915): 322; exhibitor with Chaplin cut-out in: Epes Winthrop Sargent, 'Advertising for Exhibitors,' *Moving Picture World* 24, no. 4 (April 24, 1915): 547.



Fig. 4.21. This page from *Moving Picture World*'s 'Advertising for Exhibitors' column commends a theatre for its use of Chaplin cut-outs. Epes Winthrop Sargent, 'Advertising for Exhibitors,' *Moving Picture World* 26, no. 2 (October 9, 1915): 242.

At the same time as Chaplin emerged as a trademark for his own series, he also took on another dimension that intensified the interest of moviegoers and elicited that of the broader public. He began to give interviews to film journals and

national newspapers and the man behind the screen became a newly available source of curiosity and excitement.²⁹ McGuirk summarised this aspect of Chaplin's fame in his 'Chaplinitis' article:

From New York to San Francisco, from Maine to California, came the staccato tapping of the telegraph key. 'Who is this man Chaplin? What are his ambitions? What's his theory of humor? Is he married, or single? How does he like American life? Does he eat eggs for breakfast? Is he conceited?' The newspapers wanted to know; the country demanded information.³⁰

This now-familiar range of questions, both professionally relevant ('What's his theory of humor?') and personally intrusive ('Does he eat eggs for breakfast?') defined Chaplin's status as not merely an actor, on the one hand, or a celebrity, on the other, but a peculiar hybrid of the two: a film star.³¹ As a public figure of this nature, Chaplin was familiar to a wide audience which included those who enthusiastically attended his films as well as those who passively consumed his personality by reading the papers or listening to street-level chat. As Chaplin's star persona was elaborated, it offered an appealing general-interest story: a rags to riches tale that took him from poverty and obscurity in the Whitechapel slums of London, to wealth and fame in Hollywood. Or as the New York *Sun* summarised it in headline form in August 1915: 'Charlie Chaplin, Comedian of Movies, Had Sad Youth. Remarkable Rise to Fame of Character Whose Stork Step and Falls Amuse Thousands Daily'.³²

But Chaplin's status as a film star had another dimension that gave it a special quality, distinct from the matinee idols of the past and the film stars of the

²⁹ See, for example: 'Charlie Chaplin, Comedian of Movies, Had Sad Youth. Remarkable Rise to Fame of Character Whose Stork Step and Falls Amuse Thousands Daily,' *The Sun (New York)*, August 22, 1915, 6.

³⁰ Charles McGuirk, 'Chaplinitis, Part 2,' *Motion Picture Magazine* 9, no. 7 (August 1915): 87.

³¹ See: Richard DeCordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

³² 'Charlie Chaplin, Comedian of Movies,' 6. For another key example see: Rose Wilder Lane, *Charlie Chaplin's Own Story* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1916). This book is based on a story that appeared in 29 instalments in *San Francisco Bulletin* from July 5 to August 4, 1915 as 'The Life of Charlie Chaplin, Funniest Man on Earth'. On this biography and its controversial legacy see: Stephen Weissman, *Chaplin: A Life* (New York: Arcade Publishing, Inc., 2008), 272-275; Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art*, 180-185.

future. Chaplin was among those – most notably Mary Pickford, William S. Hart and Douglas Fairbanks – whose film stardom constituted a newsworthy phenomenon *in itself*.³³ Film actors had never received such breadth or intensity of public attention, nor such high salaries, and these facts fed Chaplin's notoriety. The \$1,500 figure of his weekly salary was widely reported with the intention of astounding readers: it had gasp-worthy value even, and perhaps especially, for those who did not regularly attend movies.³⁴

If Chaplin was an example of the new phenomenon of film stars in 1915, he was also, in turn, an emblem of the recent boom and development of the moving-picture industry that made the star phenomenon possible. Indeed, Chaplin's name was routinely used as synonymous with movies, particularly where the discussion concerned their growing popularity and integration into daily life and mainstream culture.³⁵ 'If you want to know who is hurting the saloons worse than any other man,' a saloonkeeper told a *Photoplay* journalist in November 1915, 'I can name him for you. He is Charlie Chaplin.'³⁶ This particular comment comes in the context of an article that is not specifically about Chaplin at all, but about the effect of moving pictures on the saloon trade generally.³⁷ Similarly film journalist E. V. Whitcomb wrote, in February of 1915, that '[g]oing to see Charlie Chaplin has become a habit all over the country', thus Chaplinising, as it were, a claim about cinema-going more broadly.³⁸ In 1915, then, Chaplin became an emblem of the burgeoning phenomenon of the movies.

³³ See: Richard Schickel, *His Picture in the Papers: A Speculation on Celebrity in America Based on the Life of Douglas Fairbanks, Sr.* (New York: Charterhouse, 1973).

³⁴ For examples of press discussions of Chaplin's salary, see: Victor Eubank, 'The Funniest Man on Screen,' *Motion Picture Magazine* 9, no. 2 (March 1915): 77; 'Have you the Chaplinoia? Kansas City in the Throes of a Movie Mania Epidemic,' *Kansas City Star*, September 3, 1915, 6.

³⁵ See pp. 122-126 above. See also: 'Amazing Developments in the Moving Picture Field,' *New York Times*, September 7, 1913, 4.

³⁶ 'Moving Pictures Aid to Temperance,' *Photoplay* 8, no. 6 (November 1915): 43.

³⁷ For other examples of Chaplin's name used as a synonym for movies, see: 'Giants Twice Bring Dismay to the Reds,' *New York Tribune*, July 10, 1915, 12; 'Ibsen Gains on Charley Chaplin,' *New York Tribune*, September 17, 1915, 7.

³⁸ E. V. Whitcomb, 'Charlie Chaplin,' *Photoplay* 7, no. 3 (February 1915): 35. One example of the sensational proclamation that movies were becoming a national habit can be found in a *New York Times* article of 1913, entitled 'Amazing Developments in the Moving Picture Field', which quipped thus: 'The old song, "Oh, where will it be to-night, to-night?" is answered by millions of voices: "Why to the movies of course!"' 'Amazing Developments in the Moving Picture Field,' 4.

It was something more than Chaplin's enhanced visibility and newly assumed star status, however, that made McGuirk, among others, 'feel him in the theater' and 'get a *glimpse* of his idiosyncrasies in some twist of fashion' (my emphases) even when Chaplin was not being represented explicitly.³⁹ Not only was Chaplin's image widely seen in American life in 1915, but there were also strong correspondences between Chaplin's persona and performance style and recent developments in American style and culture more generally, creating the impression that America itself had taken a somehow 'Chaplinesque' turn.⁴⁰ It could be said, then, that what McGuirk, among others, recognised in Chaplin was an embodiment, in comic form, of an emerging cultural style.

This felt affinity between Chaplin and his moment can be grasped by, for example, examining the ways in which he was taken up by the 'new' music of ragtime. In the summer of 1915, writers of popular songs in the ragtime style seized on Chaplin as ideal subject matter, often referring to his immediately recognisable movements as if they constituted a new dance.⁴¹ Meanwhile, 'Charles Chaplin ensemble number[s]' and dance acts found their way into musical shows across the cultural register; from lavish Broadway reviews to cheap burlesque.⁴² Perhaps most illustrative of the perceived association of Chaplin with ragtime was the incorporation of the Chaplin walk into the ground-breaking ragtime musical *Watch Your Step* (1914). Billed as the world's first 'syncopated musical show', it was a sensational event in American amusement culture.⁴³ It brought together perhaps the

³⁹ McGuirk, 'Chaplinitis, Part 1,' 121.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Dance historians Marshal and Jean Stearns identify 'dance-songs with instructions' as a popular song genre emerging in 1912 and gaining currency during the 1910s. They cite Perry Bradford's *Messin' Round* as an early and influential example. Marshall Stearns and Jean Stearns, *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* (1968; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 95. On Perry Bradford and 'dance-songs with instructions', see: Stearns and Stearns, *Jazz Dance*, 103-108.

⁴² 'Chaplin in Revue,' *Photoplay* 8, no. 1 (June 1915): 115; 'The Players from Ocean to Ocean And What They Are Doing Today,' *Photoplay* 8, no. 3 (August 1915): 113.

⁴³ Unidentified clipping in the Harvard Theatre Collection, Cambridge, Massachusetts, quoted in Charles Hamm, *Irving Berlin: Songs from the Melting Pot, The Formative Years, 1907-1914* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 222. On *Watch Your Step* (1914), see: Hamm, *Irving Berlin*, 173; 214; 221-222; Margaret Knapp, 'Watch Your Step: Irving Berlin's 1914 Musical,' in *Musical Theatre in America: Papers and Proceedings of the Conference on Musical Theatre in America*, ed. Glenn Loney (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984), 246-250.

three most significant figures of the ragtime revolution: Irving Berlin, who wrote the songs, and Vernon and Irene Castle, who performed the leading roles.⁴⁴ It also put the new music in the spotlight with its lavish debut at an upmarket Broadway theatre, the New Amsterdam.⁴⁵ The original show did not feature Chaplin. With its debut in early December 1914, Chaplin's popularity was only just beginning to make waves and had not yet boomed with *Essanay*. But when the show was taken on the road to England in 1915 (with the English actor Lupino Lane taking the place of Vernon Castle), the directors interpolated a new Chaplin song amongst the Berlin originals: *That Charlie Chaplin Walk* by Nat D. Ayer.⁴⁶ The lyrics of *That Charlie Chaplin Walk* closely followed Berlin's *Syncopated Walk*, another song in the musical, changing 'Ev'rybody has a syncopated walk', in the original, to 'Ev'rybody does that Charlie Chaplin walk', in the parody.⁴⁷ The alliance between the songs suggested that the Chaplin walk and ragtime syncopation were now recognised as related signifiers of an up-beat, American brand of modern amusement culture.

It was, and is, the nature of show business to exploit any topical issue, yet the readiness with which Chaplin was so organically and frequently absorbed into the emerging world of popular music and dance suggests a deeper affinity than mere topicality, and this claimed affinity bears exploring.⁴⁸ A profitable starting point is the similarity between Chaplin's early screen persona and the anthropomorphic qualities that were attributed to ragtime syncopation. In 1911, the songwriter Harry Von Tilzer claimed that ragtime 'reflects the spirit of the American people, their extraordinary activity, restlessness, initiative, joyousness and capacity for work, and for play'.⁴⁹ Writing in the *New Republic* in 1915 (also the principal year of the

⁴⁴ Hamm, *Irving Berlin*; Eve Golden, *Vernon and Irene Castle's Ragtime Revolution* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007).

⁴⁵ Hamm, *Irving Berlin*, 221.

⁴⁶ Nat D. Ayer, *That Charlie Chaplin Walk* (London: B. Feldman & Co, 1915). D. Ayer's song writing credentials included the 1911 ragtime hit *Oh You Beautiful Doll*.

⁴⁷ Ayer, *The Charlie Chaplin Walk*, 1; Irving Berlin, *The Syncopated Walk* (New York: Irving Berlin Inc., 1914), 2-3.

⁴⁸ On topicality in contemporary song-writing, see: Robert Snyder, *The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York* (Chicago: I. R. Dee, 2000), 22-23; Isaac Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley: A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket* (New York: John Day Company, 1930), 62-65.

⁴⁹ Harry Von Tilzer, quoted in Jolo, 'Ragtime vs. Classical,' *Variety*, December 23, 1911, quoted in Karl Koenig, ed. *Jazz in Print (1856-1929): An Anthology of Selected Early Readings in Jazz History* (Hilldale, New York: Pendragon Press, 2002), 87.

Chaplin craze), Hiram K. Moderwell reiterated the claim that ragtime was an expression of American character, though specifically urban:

As you walk up and down the streets of an American city you feel in its jerk and rattle a personality different from that of any European capital. This is American. It is in our lives, and it helps to form our characters and condition our mode of action.⁵⁰

Ragtime was, for Moderwell, the musical equivalent of the characteristic ‘jerk and rattle’ of the American city, and an expression of the national temperament. At the same time as such claims were being made, ragtime lyricists and choreographers were gravitating to Chaplin as subject matter, not only because of his topicality.

Both in his persona and his distinctive way of moving, Chaplin embodied the same distinctively American and distinctively modern qualities that commentators attributed to ragtime. While perpetual restless activity and motion was typical of any Keystone film, Chaplin had a way of making himself the sole source and embodiment of these qualities. The ragtime effect of a Keystone film usually involves the agitated motion of all the actors on screen, and is driven by the unfolding of a prank or a chase. In a Chaplin film by contrast, Chaplin is usually the dominant source of motion on screen, and his movements seem motivated by nothing other than his own inner restlessness.⁵¹ Chaplin’s early performances also portray a character with a similar kind of off-the-cuff ‘initiative’ to that which Tilzer heard in the jauntily confident zig-zagging of ragtime melodies. One of Chaplin’s most characteristic behaviours is, as Walter Kerr notes, his habit of ‘adjusting the rest of the universe to his merely reflexive needs.’⁵² He frequently makes minor, expeditious adjustments to his environment, transforming objects to suit his purposes or pushing and pulling the limbs of those around him as though operating the levers of a big machine (figs. 4.22 and 4.23). Just as ragtime’s syncopated melody-lines dance around but do not interfere with a steady 2/4 marching rhythm, Chaplin’s

⁵⁰ Hiram K. Moderwell, ‘Ragtime,’ *New Republic* 9, no. 50 (October 16, 1915): 286; 285.

⁵¹ Alan Dale, *Comedy is a Man in Trouble: Slapstick in American Movies* (Minneapolis; London : University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 38.

⁵² Walter Kerr, *The Silent Clowns* (New York: Knopf, 1975), 75.

snappy, instantaneous gestures, seem to syncopate his self-assured forward momentum through a scene or situation.



Figs. 4.22 and 4.23. Chaplin expeditiously adjusts his human surroundings as he navigates situations and spaces in *Making and Living* (1914) and *The Rink* (1916).

The ‘capacity for work, and for play’ that Tilzer heard reflected in ragtime, might seem incongruous with a character most famously known as a Tramp. However, as several critics have pointed out, the majority of Chaplin’s early films between 1914 and 1916 place him in the role of a recognisable occupation, and he repeatedly demonstrates his willingness to try his hand at any job. Witness, for example, Charlie’s exuberant assumption of new jobs as piano mover in *His Musical Career* (1914), dramatic actor in *His New Job* (1915) and boxer in *The Champion* (1915). However, in each of these cases Charlie’s emphasis is on the ‘playing’ of the role rather than accomplishing its objectives: his blatant charlatantry exposes the difference between performative-role assumption and being, suggesting an ironic version of the American can-do spirit that Tilzer attributed to ragtime.

Chaplin’s performances seem more attuned to the cynical characterisations of ragtime’s supposedly American qualities that were issued at the time. Music critic Daniel Mason expressed the opinion of many when he responded as follows to Moderwell’s account of ragtime as the spontaneous music of the urban American folk:

Here is a music, local and piquantly idiomatic, and undeniably representative of a certain aspect of American character – our restlessness, our insatiable nervous activity, our thoughtless superficial “optimism,” our fondness for “hustling,” our carelessness of whither, how, or why we are moving if only we can “keep on the move.” If [...] there was nothing more

solid, sweet or wise in America than this galvanic twitching, then indeed rag-time would be our perfect music. But every true American knows that, on the contrary, this is not our virtue but our vice, not our strength but our weakness, and that such a picture of us as it presents is not a portrait but a caricature.⁵³

Arguably, Chaplin functioned as a similarly dubious ‘caricature’ of American character: less a wholesome and vigorous worker, than a superficial and careless hustler. Perhaps the most articulate account of Chaplin along such lines came from Wyndham Lewis, writing retrospectively on Chaplin in 1927. ‘First, of course, was the feeling that you were in the presence of an unbounded optimism (for one so small, poor and lonely)’, wrote Lewis. This feeling, however, was then followed by the realisation that the same ‘small, poor and lonely’ figure was ‘very capable and very confident’ in his ‘flea-like adroitness’.⁵⁴ The result was a ‘combination’, toxic for Lewis, ‘of light-heartedness and a sort of scurrilous cunning’ that was even embodied in ‘his irresponsible epileptic shuffle’.⁵⁵ Lewis’s disgust with Chaplin, and particularly the fact of Chaplin’s mass popularity, certainly resonates with Mason’s reservations about ragtime and the kind of national temperament and identity it might be forging.

The concluding shot of Chaplin’s 1915 film *The Tramp*, provides a useful example of the Chaplin walk, offering more than one possible attitude implied by its distinctive kinaesthetic qualities. The shot shows Chaplin walking forlornly down a country road, having just been rejected by a potential lover (fig. 4.24), only to suddenly shrug off his despondency and resume his exuberant, eccentric strut (fig. 4.25). This is either a chirpy and optimistic response to his disappointment or it is a callous deflation of the previous scene revealing that he does not really care about the woman and the only thing that matters is to keep on moving. And if the tone and rhythms of ragtime could be interpreted as either wholesome or degraded depending on your point of view, the same was true of the Chaplin walk: it could equally be the walk of a cheery underdog or a ‘scurrilous’ hustler. Thus Chaplin’s famously ‘jerky’

⁵³ Daniel Gregory Mason, ‘Folk-Song and American Music (A Plea for an Unpopular Point of View),’ *Musical Quarterly* 4 (July 1918): 324.

⁵⁴ Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1927), 82-3.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

performance style resonated with some of the broader debates about ragtime's moral nonchalance and the rhythmic identity, as it were, of American national culture.



Figs. 4.24 and 4.25. In the concluding shot of *The Tramp* (1915) Chaplin punctures the pathos of the film's penultimate scene by shrugging off his dejection in an instant and resuming the galvanic Chaplin walk: a gesture of commendably optimistic overcoming or of emotional and moral vacuity?

I have focused here on illuminating the shared aesthetic qualities of Charlie and of ragtime. Yet these same overlapping qualities can be more generally attributed to the mass-amusement culture that began to emerge in the late-nineteenth century. Specifically salient here is that culture's fascination with perpetual and enhanced mobility, the desire to 'keep on the move', as Mason put it in relation to ragtime, regardless 'of whither, how, or why we are moving'.⁵⁶ Roller-skating rinks, amusement parks, dance halls and movies were in their own ways all associated with the celebration of sheer movement and, of course, the idea that such mobility could invigorate and liberate personal identity and social relationships. Recall, for example, the successful roller-skating rink manager who boasted to the *New York Herald* in 1885: 'You must remember, that skating cultivates energetic habits of the body, for if you attempt to be lazy in the rink you are likely to be knocked down.'⁵⁷ Here was a place where a 'restless' people exercised their fascination with motion and explored its opportunities for physically expressive behaviour and unexpected social collisions. During the Chaplin craze of the mid-1910s, the perpetually agitated, dexterously syncopating figure of Charlie, evidently embodied in a potent

⁵⁶ Mason, 'Folks-Song and American Music,' 51.

⁵⁷ 'The Roller Skating Craze. Rinks Springing up All over the City and More Wanted,' *New York Herald*, March 15, 1885, 8.

onscreen image that still-evolving fascination with movement that drove American amusement culture. If Chaplin seemed omnipresent in 1915, as Charles McGuirk suggested in his ‘Chaplinitis’ article, it was not only because his image was widely displayed. McGuirk could ‘feel him in the theater’ and ‘glimpse [...] his idiosyncrasies in some twist of fashion’ because Chaplin so vividly personified a more broadly emerging cultural mood and rhythm.⁵⁸

The Chaplin Craze: Controversy

Popular enthusiasm for Chaplin’s films was only half the story of the Chaplin craze. Writing in September 1915, the film critic George Blaisdell qualified his praise for Chaplin’s films with a telling statement: ‘Of course, there are many who are not only not with Chaplin; they are against him.’⁵⁹ This ‘category’ of opponents included exhibitors, ‘not many, to be sure, but they are of sufficient importance, or their houses are, to be entitled to recognition—to respect’. It also included members of the clergy, reform groups, cultural arbiters and some ordinary filmgoers too. Chaplin’s films were frequently criticised and sometimes attacked for a range of misdemeanours including their lack of coherent plots, their ‘vulgarity’, and above all, Chaplin’s temperance-baiting and outrageously comic portrayal of a drunk.⁶⁰

More significant than this opposition *per se*, however, was the polemical dynamic in which it was a component; the for-or-against debate that defined the nature and intensity of his fame. This dynamic permeated discussion of Chaplin in this period, from fan banter to newspaper articles. ‘People do rave about him and people do not’, wrote one *Photoplay* reader, for example. ““He is vulgar,” they say. Well I say, “Not on your life.””⁶¹ A *New York Tribune* journalist wrote in a similar

⁵⁸ McGuirk, ‘Chaplinitis, Part 1,’ 121.

⁵⁹ George Blaisdell, ‘Here and There. Charles Chaplin in “The Bank” Shows us a New Player and Opens Up Possibilities for the Future,’ *Moving Picture World* 25, no. 11 (September 11, 1915): 1836.

⁶⁰ Frank H. Madison, ‘Pictures and People,’ *Moving Picture World* 24, no. 10 (June 5, 1915): 1637; ‘Denunciation of Charlie Chaplin,’ *New York Tribune*, October 13, 1915, 9; ‘Answer Department,’ *Motion Picture Magazine* 10, no. 10 (November 1915): 138; Evelyn Stesch, ‘Letters to the Editor,’ *Motion Picture Magazine* 10, no. 11 (December 1915): 168. On temperance and its significance in social and cultural debates at this time, see: Paul S. Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), 191-219.

⁶¹ Stesch, ‘Letters to the Editor,’ 168.

manner in August 1915: 'We were against Chaplin once,' but have since 'lost a distinction and broke[n] a vow' and joined the other camp.⁶² The following month the *Kansas City Star* asked its readers: 'Why should a comedian, whose work is of the broadest slap-stick variety, attain such a vogue?' The existence of an anti-Chaplin stance was implicit in the question.⁶³ As with other amusement crazes, this polemical dynamic served to escalate the issue and to present the Chaplin craze as a battle to be won or lost on a national scale.

As with other amusement crazes of the period, debates about Chaplin took energy from larger social and cultural debates. In this case it was debates about the movies more generally, and, beyond the movies, the emerging mass-amusement culture of the period. Chaplin thus presented a fresh opportunity to express wider and ongoing concerns about morality, cultural standards and aesthetic sensibilities, as well as the ways in which these should, or should not, be governed. I will now explore how the figure of Chaplin offered one such opportunity for debate, and particularly how his becoming so transformed him from one of several popular comedians at Keystone in 1914, to a national figure with *Essanay* in 1915.

Prior to the Chaplin craze, slapstick comedy was itself already a controversial subject. This controversy was illustratively played out in the pages of the fan publication *Moving Picture Magazine*. In response to many animated readers' letters concerning slapstick, and specifically Keystone, the magazine dedicated the 'Photoplay Philosopher' column of its April 1915 issue to the subject. 'The readers of this magazine have been locking horns on the merits of Keystone comedies and their many imitators,' reported the eponymous 'philosopher', 'and I have been asked to express an opinion.'⁶⁴ In doing so he offered four criteria, which usefully reflect contemporary concerns about slapstick films: (1) 'Do they amuse a majority of photoplay patrons, or enough of them to warrant their continuance?' (2) 'Do they do the Motion Picture business good or harm?' (3) 'Is their influence for good or evil?' (4) 'Do they help to place the industry on that high plane which we all hope for it, and to raise the standard, or do they hinder?'⁶⁵ The philosopher concluded,

⁶² 'Germans Check Drive of Caine,' *New York Tribune*, August 21, 1915, 7.

⁶³ 'Have you the Chaplinoia?,' 6.

⁶⁴ 'Musings of "The Photoplay Philosopher",' *Motion Picture Magazine* 9, no. 3 (April 1915): 107.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

somewhat abruptly, that slapstick ‘will never do the Motion Picture any good’ since it played no role in elevating the tastes or fine-tuning the sensibilities of a mass audience. Yet the purpose of the article seems not to have been to conclude the discussion about slapstick, but to fuel it, as indeed it did in the readers’ letters pages over the following months.⁶⁶

The concerns raised by the Photoplay Philosopher reflect the major debates that concerned people inside and outside the movie industry (discussed in more detail in Chapter 3) regarding cinema’s social effects and cultural status. In 1915, the specific issue around which many of these issues clustered specifically was censorship, which became the staging ground for the greatest power struggle yet seen over the rising medium.⁶⁷ *Motion Picture News* described the conflict in an illuminating, albeit partisan way, in an article entitled: ‘The Church, the Saloon, the Politician and the Picture’.⁶⁸ The article described how the clergy, saloon operators and politicians opposed moving pictures for different reasons, but how they had put aside their differences and ‘lined up together’ to attack the film industry and to imperil the very existence of the movies as a popular form of entertainment.⁶⁹ This opposition proceeded by publically aggravating the long-standing fear that moving pictures, and, in fact, commercial mass amusements in general, were ‘detrimental to public morals and to the young’.⁷⁰ Though the *Motion Picture News* was inclined to interpret it cynically, this opposition did undoubtedly reflect, at least in part, genuine and profound concerns about social and cultural change. These were the conditions for intensified debate about slapstick.

⁶⁶ May B. Martin, ‘Letters to the Editor,’ *Moving Picture Magazine* 10, no. 8 (September 1915): 178; Addison Blume, ‘Letters to the Editor,’ *Moving Picture Magazine* 10, no. 8 (September 1915): 178; Stesch, ‘Letters to the Editor,’ 168.

⁶⁷ Despite the efforts of the MPPC to demonstrate effective self-regulation with the formation of its National Board of Censorship in 1909, by 1914 state legislature for localised film censorship was spreading. The following year would see the first bill for federal censorship enter Congress (though it was rejected). See: Jonathan Green and Nicholas J. Karolides eds., *Encyclopedia of Censorship* (New York: Facts on File Inc., 2005), s. v. ‘National Association of the Motion Picture Industry’.

⁶⁸ William A. Johnston, ‘The Church, The Saloon, the Politician and the Picture,’ *Motion Picture News* 12, no. 2 (July 17, 1915): 52.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

They were also the crucial conditions for the controversy that ensued over Chaplin in 1915, as is illustrated most poignantly by the troubled release of *A Night Out*. ‘The Essanay Co. and Charlie Chaplin’s second comedy release under the Chicago firm’s standard has been receiving a great deal of attention recently from the National Board of Censorship’, reported the *New York Clipper* in March 1915.⁷¹ The problem, the *Clipper* explained, was that the film coincided with the Board of Censorship ‘issu[ing] an edict banning all drunk scenes.’⁷² This was unfortunate as drunkenness was the comic premise of *A Night Out*, which followed Charlie and Ben Turpin through a series of very loosely related drunken mishaps. Moreover, as the *Clipper* pointed out, and as everyone knew, ‘Chaplin has been considered up to date as the very best portrayer of a comic “souse” on the screen’.⁷³ Indeed, the drunk persona was his speciality. It had been his most consistent role at Keystone and it had distinguished him from other comedians. Thus the means by which Chaplin had initially distinguished himself now imperilled the very release of his films. Indeed, the release of *A Night Out* encountered serious problems. According to the *Clipper*, ‘the film didn’t come up to what the National Board’s critics deemed quite refined enough comedy, and several scenes were ordered chopped’.⁷⁴ Given that the film is one long drunk scene, it is perhaps understandable that Essanay decided not to make the proposed cuts and instead to release the film without the approval of the Board of Censorship. As a result, the film was withheld in several parts of the country by local forces.⁷⁵ Notable among these was the Massachusetts Moving Picture Exhibitors League, who, according to the *Moving Picture World*, reasoned that ‘although Chaplin’s popularity is exceedingly great in this state, it would be an unwise move for the exhibitors to offer any unapproved film to their patrons on account of a strict censorship bill that the Legislature is now considering.’⁷⁶

⁷¹ ‘Current Film Events. Censor Board Starts Something with Chaplin’s Second Essanay Picture “A Night Out”,’ *New York Clipper*, March 6, 1915, 12.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ ‘Current Film Events,’ 12.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Frank H. Madison, ‘North Western Briefs,’ *Moving Picture World* 11, no. 12 (March 27, 1915): 1955; ‘When Providence was Providential,’ *Photoplay* 13, no. 1 (June 1915): 114.

⁷⁶ ‘Sustains National Board. Massachusetts Leagues Holds Up Chaplin Picture Which Had Not Been Approved,’ *Moving Picture World* 23, no. 10 (March 6, 1915): 1424.

While it was not uncommon for films to suffer such a fate, the censorship of *A Night Out* was felt more acutely in the film world, and beyond, because of the fact, as pointed out by the Massachusetts Moving Picture Exhibitors League, that ‘Chaplin’s popularity was exceedingly great’. Moreover, the film was widely and keenly anticipated by audiences and exhibitors: it was the latest instalment of the new and extensively promoted Essanay-Chaplin *series*, for which a new film every three weeks was promised. Thus the delay or withdrawal of a film was even more conspicuous than would have been the case had this been a stand-alone release.

In the short term, the censorship of *A Night Out* was potentially damaging for Essanay’s sales. But it had other effects too. It inadvertently drew attention to the film and, as is habitually the case, enhanced excitement and curiosity about it. *Motion Picture News* reported on a specific instance of this dynamic in action:

A rumor that Charles Chaplin, in “A Night Out,” had been taken off the screen of the Isis theater, at Denver, Col., reached Pueblo, where the film had been booked for the Majestic. The uneasy Majestic management was assured by the General Film Company that there was nothing to it, and the advertising the film had received helped the business.⁷⁷

Photoplay reported a similar instance:

One night not many weeks ago, the Chaplin film, “A Night Out,” was advertised at one of the photoplay houses in Newport, R. I.

When time came to show the film, the manager announced that the Mayor, who had constituted himself the town board of censors, had forbidden the picture.

Whereupon, that night and every night following for the rest of the week, at least a hundred Newporters went over to Providence and fooled the Mayor.⁷⁸

Though the report does not say so explicitly, it is likely that the forbidding of the film by the Mayor may have served as advertisement. Other examples of the accidental promotional effects of a ban abound in the sphere of mass amusements. For example, Elizabeth Marbury warned of this effect in relation to the dance craze:

⁷⁷ Madison, ‘North Western Briefs,’ 1955.

⁷⁸ ‘When Providence was Providential,’ 114.

‘The forbidding of dances in public centers’, she wrote in her introduction to Irene and Vernon Castle’s *Modern Dancing* (1915), ‘sets that alluring sign “Forbidden fruit” upon what otherwise would arouse no prurient curiosity.’⁷⁹

The other consequence of this attention from the censors early in Chaplin’s Essanay year was that it set up an expectation that Chaplin’s future films either played into or played against, adding another exciting dimension to the public drama of his film-making career. As late as October 1915, the probability of censorship was still an important criteria for film journalists reviewing Chaplin’s films. *Motion Picture News* journalist Peter Milne commended the film *Shanghaied* (1915), for example, for being ‘free of vulgarity’, and proclaimed: ‘Charlie Chaplin’s finicky censor is gloriously shanghaied—he is gone and forgotten, never to return (let us hope).’⁸⁰ Milne’s parenthetical qualifier illustrates the play of expectations involved in following the meta-drama of the Chaplin series. The assured proclamation – ‘Chaplin’s finicky censor is gloriously shanghaied’ – is ironically transformed by the qualifier – ‘let us hope’ – into a tentative speculation, thus reopening a range of outcomes and allowing us, once again, to anticipate a final resolution. Of course, watching Chaplin tread the line between the acceptable and the unacceptable was all the more compelling due to the sensitivity of the censorship issue at the time. Followers of the series could project onto Chaplin their expectations about the fate of moving pictures and even of mass-amusement culture more generally.

The discussion of Chaplin in 1915 evokes a Janus-faced figure, encompassing two polar extreme characters. For some, Chaplin represented the worst of slapstick, the ruination of the movies and the degradation of American culture. For others he represented the most forward-looking aspects of the slapstick genre, the saviour of the movies and an invigorating presence in the life of the nation. One could hear how Chaplin’s films ‘spoil[ed] a perfectly enjoyable evening’ of otherwise quality films, how they were ‘low and vulgar and cheap’, and how censorship boards were opposed to ‘that kind of picture’.⁸¹ At the same time one could hear Chaplin described as leading a revolution within slapstick. For Peter

⁷⁹ Elisabeth Marbury, ‘Introduction,’ in Vernon and Irene Castle, *Modern Dancing* (New York: World Syndicate Co., 1914), 25-26.

⁸⁰ Peter Milne, ‘Shanghaied,’ *Motion Picture News* 12, no. 15 (October 16, 1915): 89.

⁸¹ Martin, ‘Letters to the Editor,’ 168; Madison, ‘Pictures and People,’ 1637.

Milne, films such as *Shanghaied* (1915) demonstrated for the first time that slapstick could be ‘very funny without vulgarity.’⁸² According to George Blaisdell, Chaplin in *The Bank* went beyond ‘the boundaries of a rough-and-tumble comic’ and ‘reach[ed] into the field of the dramatic, into the realm of pathos’, thus expanding his repertoire and perhaps also the tastes of his audience.⁸³ The urgent question about slapstick, but also other kinds of movies – ‘Do they help to place the industry on that high plane which we all hope for it [...]?’ – was applied to Chaplin and returned fiercely polarised answers.⁸⁴ Yet it was because of what was at stake that commentators were prepared to take sides with such vehemence: the future of moving pictures; the future of national recreational habits; the future of American culture.

How far was Chaplin merely a convenient placeholder for controversies that were happening anyway? To answer this question, I will bring into focus one distinctive aspect of Chaplin’s films that kindled and sustained controversy: the extraordinary range of Chaplin’s repertoire and the seemingly schizophrenic manner in which it was showcased.

In 1915, two Chaplin films were celebrated for breaking new ground: *The Tramp* (1915) and *The Bank* (1915). In praise of the former film, Charles McGuirk wrote that ‘Chaplin had crossed the border into pathos and expressed it solidly and surely’.⁸⁵ Similarly, Blaisdell wrote that *The Bank* ‘demonstrate[s] that his capabilities are not limited by the boundaries of a rough-and-tumble comic. The same native talent that constitutes him the premier fun-maker enables him to reach into the field of the dramatic, into the realm of pathos.’⁸⁶ Both journalists contended that these films implied elevated ambitions. However, having aroused such expectations, Chaplin confounded them with boisterous slapstick films without pathetic elements. *The Tramp* was followed up with *By the Sea*, a Keystone-style one-reeler in which Charlie gets into a series of flirtations and scraps at a beach resort. *The Bank* was followed by *Shanghaied*, which, while ‘free of vulgarity’ as

⁸² Milne, ‘Shanghaied,’ 89.

⁸³ Blaisdell, ‘Here and There,’ 1836.

⁸⁴ ‘Musings of “The Photoplay Philosopher,”’ 108.

⁸⁵ McGuirk, ‘Chaplinitis, Part 2,’ 89.

⁸⁶ Blaisdell, ‘Here and There,’ 1836.

noted, consisted largely of pure slapstick physical comedy and stayed well clear of 'the border into pathos.'⁸⁷ Because of this range, Chaplin was hard to pin down and selective viewers could arrive at seemingly incongruous impressions of the same filmmaker, thus fuelling the polemical engine of the Chaplin debate.

The kind of heterogeneity that existed from film to film in the Essanay-Chaplin series was also available *within* the films. Blaisdell wrote of *The Bank* that '[t]o see Chaplin merge from farce to straight drama is for the moment something in the nature of a jolt.'⁸⁸ The contrast between the two distinct modes was almost palpable, it seemed to Blaisdell, and experienced in the manner of a physical 'jolt'. Similarly, McGuirk wrote that Chaplin's films offered 'subtlety, horseplay, a fringe of pathos, all mixed up in a bewildering hodge-podge of film'.⁸⁹ The term 'hodge-podge' implies that ingredients are 'mixed up' but do not blend. Thus the slapstick 'horseplay' retains its identity as such, and is not refined by the elements with which it jostles. In fact, the jostling of these various elements might even be said to accentuate their difference, to intensify our 'jolted' consciousness of the diversity within films. For McGuirk, this was not a failing but an aesthetic: the essence of Chaplin was not the slapstick, nor the pathos, but the delight to be found in the 'bewildering hodge-podge' of these elements, the rich and dynamic heterogeneity of the films and Chaplin's protean ability to do normally incongruous things.⁹⁰ Yet not everyone recognised such a sophisticated aesthetic of bewilderment in Chaplin's films. More often, commentators wanted to take a stance in the Chaplin debate and in order to do so they were prepared to be selective in their accounts. In this way, the range of Chaplin's repertoire helped to sustain the polemic at the heart of the Chaplin craze.

⁸⁷ Milne, 'Shanghaied,' 89; McGuirk, 'Chaplinitis, Part 2,' 89.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 1836.

⁸⁹ McGuirk, 'Chaplinitis, Part 2,' 86.

⁹⁰ Film critic Alan Dale gives a more recent articulation of this aesthetic when he describes Chaplin as 'incoherent, unresolvable, but in a productive way'. Dale is in fact referring to Chaplin's onscreen persona, but it might also be applied to his implied persona as a filmmaker. Alan Dale, *Comedy is a Man in Trouble*, 37-38.

Rethinking the Chaplin Craze

i) Chaplin and Keystone

In Chaplin criticism and commentary, Chaplin's relationship with the Keystone Company is routinely construed in terms of conflict, both aesthetic and ideological. And here we find a clear set of antithetical contrasts which serve to valorise Chaplin over Keystone. In aesthetic terms, critics contrast Chaplin's 'polished acting and pantomime' with 'the hectic, broad Keystone style'.⁹¹ Chaplin's movements are said to be slow and subtly expressive, whereas those of his colleagues are supposed to be characterised by speed and exaggeration. In terms of ideology, Keystone is presented as commercially motivated, turning out films as quickly and cheaply as possible, and enforcing 'production-line methods' to do so.⁹² Chaplin, on the other hand, is portrayed as an 'instinctive subtle artist' who 'rebelled against the witless knockabout and frenetic pace of the Keystone house style' by wanting to spend more time on each individual film.⁹³

The idea of an antithetical relationship between Chaplin and Keystone has a long history, stretching back to 1915 when journalists began to report on Chaplin's rise to fame. However, at this time, and throughout the later 1910s, it was also *only one* available interpretation of the Chaplin/Keystone relationship, and not necessarily even the most dominant. Another contemporary view sees a much closer, symbiotic relationship between Chaplin and Keystone, yet this interpretation has fallen into abeyance. In what follows I will explore the *range* of views from the mid-1910s about the relationship between Chaplin and Keystone, and interrogate why one has survived in the ongoing critical account and the other been obscured. I do this to recoup a reading of early Chaplin that, I argue, is more historically attuned. This means bringing into focus Chaplin's closely integrated relationship with contemporary mass-amusement culture through the specific example of Keystone. It

⁹¹ Charles Maland, *Chaplin and American Culture: The Evolution of a Star Image* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 5. Rob King discusses the undeveloped state of this debate in relation to the work of Maland and David Robinson, the two most salient writers on Chaplin in the scholarly field. King, *The Fun Factory*, 66.

⁹² Robinson, *Chaplin: Life and Art*, 143.

⁹³ John Kimber, *The Art of Charlie Chaplin*, 55.

is this relationship, as I have argued throughout this thesis, that makes Chaplin's early films most aesthetically interesting on their own terms, and his career most illuminating of its specific cultural-historical milieu.

The claim that Chaplin and Keystone were diametrically opposed in what they represented aesthetically emerged concurrently with Chaplin's move to Essanay in 1915. It first appeared unequivocally in 'Charlie Chaplin's Story', a four-part series by the film journalist Harry Carr, based on interviews with Chaplin, that appeared between July and October 1915:

His first days at the Keystone [sic] were anything but happy ones. They didn't understand him and he didn't understand them. Chaplin had been carefully trained along the lines of English pantomime. He found the silent drama a la American [sic] to be utterly different in every particular.⁹⁴

Carr draws a line between 'English pantomime' and 'silent drama a la American' and declares them utterly different. He goes on to dramatise these differences via the story of Chaplin's role at Keystone in relation to another Keystone performer, Ford Sterling:

Ford Sterling had just left the company and it was hoped that Chaplin would take his place. They naturally looked to see Chaplin work on the same lines [sic] as the comedian they had lost.

Chaplin, however, worked on entirely different methods. Sterling worked very rapidly, dashing hither and thither at top speed. Chaplin's comedy was slow and deliberate and he made a great deal out of little things – little subtleties.⁹⁵

Thus an aesthetic opposition between Chaplin and Keystone is clearly drawn: Sterling moved 'at top speed' while Chaplin was 'slow'; Sterling was frantic in his actions, 'dashing hither and thither', whereas Chaplin was controlled and 'deliberate'; Sterling emphasised bodily motion and broad actions whereas Chaplin 'made a great deal out of little things – little subtleties.'

⁹⁴ Carr, 'Charlie Chaplin's Story, Part 2,' 46. This article was the most detailed account of Chaplin's career at the time, and widely used as a source by journalists beyond the film world, thus having a substantial impact on the popular understanding of Chaplin in this period. For an example of direct quotation from Carr's *Photoplay* article in the non-film press, see: 'More on Chaplin,' *Anaconda Standard*, August 8, 1915, 7. For more on the significance of this article, see: King, *The Fun Factory*, 84-85.

⁹⁵ Harry C. Carr, 'Charlie Chaplin's Story, part 3,' *Photoplay* 13, no. 4 (September 1915): 107-108.

At the same time as Harry Carr's *Photoplay* article was published, however, it was more common to hear Chaplin and Keystone discussed as organically related or equivalent: both exemplified the recent popularity of slapstick comedy in moving pictures. This was certainly true in the case of the aforementioned 'Photoplay Philosopher' feature on slapstick in *Motion Picture Magazine* and the reader responses that followed. The article names *Tillie's Punctured Romance* as 'the latest and most pretentious photoplay in this class of work' – i.e. slapstick – and refers to Chaplin's performance as illustratively showcasing '[t]he familiar Keystone hallmarks, such as the throwing of pies into people's faces and the kicking and throwing of persons into every ludicrous position conceivable.'⁹⁶ In the letters that followed the article, no distinction was drawn between Chaplin and Keystone even though his departure from Keystone and rise with Essanay was by then already well known. One correspondent, for example, expressed his enthusiasm for 'Charles Chaplin, Fatty Arbuckle, Mabel Normand, and others', listing Chaplin alongside two famous performers still with the Keystone company without feeling the need to distinguish between them.⁹⁷

Chaplin was not only frequently seen as, in effect, interchangeable with Keystone, but by the summer of 1915, he took over as the most widely recognised emblem of slapstick, thus out-Keystoning Keystone itself. The author of the letter cited above concluded his piece on slapstick with a statement about Chaplin specifically: 'It is my honest conviction that Charles Chaplin has done as much good for us as any uplift movement, and probably a good deal more. It is good for us to laugh unrestrainedly.'⁹⁸ The author thus seems to concertina all the other Keystone performers, discussed throughout the article, into the single figure of Chaplin as an emblem of Keystone-style slapstick. This rhetorical operation was widespread. Reporting on film-censorship activity in Evanston, Illinois, *Moving Picture World*, described 'dissatisfaction with a certain type of comedy shown.'⁹⁹ The article discusses slapstick in general terms, then, toward the conclusion, Chaplin becomes

⁹⁶ 'Musings of "The Photoplay Philosopher",' 107.

⁹⁷ Blume, 'Letters to the Editor,' 178.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁹⁹ Madison, 'Pictures and People,' 1637. See also: Epes Winthrop Sargent, 'The Photoplaywright. Miss Justice on Comedy,' *Moving Picture World* 24, no. 8 (May 22, 1915): 1253.

its specific referent: ‘Nevertheless the fact remains that Charlie Chaplin can fill a motion picture theater more satisfactorily to the manager than any other attraction.’¹⁰⁰ Here, as elsewhere, the representative weight of slapstick fell neatly on Chaplin, whose metonymic value in this respect was beyond dispute.

The other aspect of the mid-1910s discussion of Chaplin’s relationship with Keystone that has been left out of critics’ retrospective commentaries, is the *ironic* inflection of the idea that the two parties were as different as Chaplin liked to claim. This irony is conspicuous in Carr’s ‘Charlie Chaplin’s Story’ article of 1915: ‘In a general way, [Chaplin’s] idea is that comedy should be more subtle and have more real story,’ summarised Carr, ‘although the horse-play antics he indulges in make that idea hardly credible’.¹⁰¹ Here, Carr makes fun of Chaplin’s claims, returning the comedian to the slapstick fold by pointing out his ‘horse-play antics’. He was not alone, in 1915, in treating the claimed refinement of Chaplin’s work with ironic detachment. Reviewing Chaplin’s Essanay debut, *His New Job* (1915), for the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Kitty Kelly noted:

In this display he is a little nicer than he has been in some Keystone confections, but not too nice to spoil his humorous appeal. [...] The rest is slapstick broad and quick—and I should say, hard for the performers. [...] [H]is mission seems to be a stage rustling sort [sic] until he has knocked everybody over with a plank and generally disarranged all the feelings that are feelingable.¹⁰²

Similarly, E. V. Whitcomb of *Photoplay* warned readers that Chaplin’s comments about his own films were ‘a little misleading.’¹⁰³ ‘It is a well-known fact’, he continued, ‘that the members of his company doing slapstick have to be able to stand more “punishment” than the members of any other company, when he himself is directing. Already the Essanay players are shaking in their shoes [...]’.¹⁰⁴ The

¹⁰⁰ Madison, ‘Pictures and People,’ 1637.

¹⁰¹ Harry C. Carr, ‘Charlie Chaplin’s Story, part 4,’ *Photoplay* 13, no. 5 (October 1915): 97.

¹⁰² Kitty Kelly, ‘Flickerings from Filmland,’ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 2, 1915, 10. Essanay used this article in its advertising. For example see: [Advertisement for Essanay-Chaplin series], *Moving Picture World* 23, no. 8 (February 20, 1915): 1084.

¹⁰³ Whitcomb, ‘Charlie Chaplin,’ 37.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

Essanay films may have been ‘a little nicer’ than the Keystones in some aspects, but in others they were a lot nastier. In terms of the physical intensity of their roughhousing, they were understood to *intensify* the stylised violence for which Keystone slapstick was notorious.

The ironic treatment of Chaplin’s claimed departure from the Keystone style is vividly exemplified by one of the cartoons that prominently accompanies Carr’s ‘Charlie Chaplin’s Story’ article. The cartoon purports to illustrate a line from Carr’s text, dealing with Chaplin’s stated interest in ‘real stor[ies]’. Carr informs the reader that due to his intense concentration on plotting his comedies, ‘[m]ost of the time, Chaplin seems abstracted and as far away as in a dream.’¹⁰⁵ The illustration depicts Chaplin deep in thought while a preacher pats him on the back in approval of his attitude of concentration (fig. 4.26). Above Chaplin’s head, however, is a thought cloud revealing that he is in fact concocting a scene of typical slapstick violence that would shock the unknowing preacher. The imagined scene is highly suggestive of Keystone. In it, Chaplin is sparring with a figure who closely resembles Chester Conklin, with whom Chaplin had indeed co-starred in several Keystones in the latter part of 1914: *Those Love Pangs*, *Gentlemen of Nerve* and *Dough and Dynamite*.¹⁰⁶ More specifically, the image resembles a moment of particularly brutal slapstick roughhousing in *Gentlemen of Nerve* (fig. 4.27). Thus the cartoonist refuses to take Chaplin’s claims at face value, and uses them to throw attention back onto the intensely physical and violent style of slapstick with which Chaplin was widely associated.

¹⁰⁵ Carr, ‘Charlie Chaplin’s Story, Part 2,’ 97.

¹⁰⁶ ‘By all accounts,’ writes Rob King, ‘it was [*Dough and Dynamite*] that set Chaplin on the course of bona fide film stardom.’ King, *The Fun Factory*, 90. See also: Charles Chaplin, *My Autobiography* (1964; reprint, London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2003), 157.



Figs. 4.26 and 4.27. Cartoonist E. W. Gale rendered Chaplin's claims to be a serious artist ironic, conflating Chaplin with Charlie and representing his comic imagination with a scene of slapstick violence evocative of Keystone's films. Chaplin holds Chester Conklin by the tie as he kicks him in the stomach in *Gentleman of Nerve* (1914).

The ironic treatment of Chaplin's claimed aloofness to Keystone becomes even more understandable when we consider that having moved to Essanay Chaplin was now in open competition with this former employer, and that Keystone were *also* claiming to have left the old style of slapstick behind. Sennett had actually beaten Chaplin to it in his own interview with Carr for *Photoplay* in May 1915, a month before 'Charlie Chaplin's Story' commenced in June.¹⁰⁷ 'Rough horse play has suddenly vanished from moving picture comedy,' Sennett announced in the interview.¹⁰⁸ 'The moving picture comedy now demands subtle effects. [...] That takes real art; it also takes real scenarios; also takes real directing [sic].'¹⁰⁹ He admitted that this was 'stuff at which Charlie Chaplin excelled', but he stopped short

¹⁰⁷ Carr, 'Charlie Chaplin's Story, part 4,' 97.

¹⁰⁸ Harry C. Carr, 'Mack Sennett—Laugh Tester. The Man Who Makes the Keystone Comedies,' *Photoplay* 12, no. 3 (May 1915): 76.

¹⁰⁹ Carr, 'Mack Sennett Laugh Tester,' 76.

of giving the comedian credit for this development *per se*.¹¹⁰ Instead, he attributed it to the dynamism of the ‘motion picture business’ with its ‘constant changes’. Moreover, he presented himself as one of the few men capable of ‘mastering’ that capricious beast.¹¹¹ Evidently, one way of gaining an advantage in the production of comedy films was to be considered at the cutting edge of the field, and in 1915 both Sennett and Chaplin were staking a claim. Yet to many observers, the idea that Chaplin, or Keystone, were uplifting the film industry with quality films was patently absurd and widely treated as a joke. In fact, it was a joke very much in keeping with the Keystone style, which always sought fresh and unexpected ways in which to, as Sennett put it, ‘whale[...] the daylight out of pretension’.¹¹²

This overview of interpretations of the relationship between Chaplin and Keystone in 1915 suggests that the interpretation that has proved most critically appealing in the long term may not be the most historically attuned. Critics including Kerr, Robinson, Kimber and, more recently, Peter Ackroyd have offered a narrative in which Chaplin’s rise to prominence in the mid-1910s relies on his sharp and antithetical distinction from Keystone.¹¹³ It is claimed that Chaplin’s audience ‘singled him out’ from the wider pool of slapstick performers based on some qualitative distinction.¹¹⁴ Contemporary audiences are said to have responded to Chaplin because they perceived in him ‘something different’ from the usual slapstick dross that Keystone provided.¹¹⁵ This is a critical account underpinned by several neatly satisfying elements, containing as it does an implicit tension between man and context and an explicit distinction of man from context. So seductive is this account, in fact, that it has been allowed to obscure contemporary perceptions of the Chaplin/Keystone relationship that were more attuned to the affinities and interdependencies between them. Chaplin’s rise to fame relied significantly on the

¹¹⁰ Carr, ‘Mack Sennett Laugh Tester,’ 76.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Sennett, *King of Comedy*, 78.

¹¹³ Kerr, *The Silent Clowns*, 72-73; Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art*, 108-113; Kimber, *The Art of Charlie Chaplin*, 54-56; Ackroyd, *Charlie Chaplin*, 53-66.

¹¹⁴ Richard Schickel, ‘Introduction: The Tramp Transformed,’ in *The Essential Chaplin: Perspectives on the Life and Art of the Great Comedian*, ed. Richard Schickel (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), 6.

¹¹⁵ Kimber, *The Art of Charlie Chaplin*, 54.

quality and the booming quantity of Keystone and Keystone-style slapstick between 1912 and 1915. With his move from company comedian at Keystone to solo comedian at Essanay, Chaplin became a representative figurehead of a slapstick boom. In some cases, that slapstick boom was perceived entirely in terms of its leading comedian, as, in fact, a *Chaplin* boom. Chaplin's distinction therefore relied less on an antithetical contrast with Keystone, as the received critical wisdom has it, than on his intensification and embodiment of the company's style.

In order to secure and safeguard this more historically attuned perception of the Chaplin/Keystone relationship from the lure of the appealing but distorting antithesis account, I will now trace the trajectory of that account from a marginal to an orthodox interpretation. The intention is to demystify the now-orthodox interpretation; to reveal how its allure is contingent upon specific critical interests that change over time.

The idea that Chaplin and Keystone were diametrically opposed and that this opposition had something to do with both Keystone's pedestrianness and Chaplin's merit, was first given legitimacy by claims made in late 1916 and 1917 by commentators outside the film industry. Two particular articles are well known in this respect and frequently cited: Minnie Maddern Fiske's 'The Art of Charles Chaplin' which appeared in *Harpers Weekly* in May 1916, and Harvey O'Higgins's 'Charlie Chaplin's Art' published in *The New Republic* in February 1917. An actress and a playwright respectively, Fiske and O'Higgins contrasted Chaplin with contemporary slapstick, and this contrast formed the centre of their arguments. Chaplin possessed a gift, according to Fiske, for 'making irresistible entertainment out of more or less worthless material', i.e. slapstick.¹¹⁶ Chaplin's work contained an 'elusive quality', she wrote, which 'leavens the lump of the usually pointless burlesques in which he takes part.'¹¹⁷ Fiske puts slapstick down to raise Chaplin up: the more 'worthless' and 'pointless' Chaplin's material, the greater his transformative power. O'Higgins argued along the same lines. Chaplin worked, he explained, 'on a stage where the slapstick, the "knockabout", the gutta-percha hammer and the "rough-house" are accepted as the necessary ingredients of comedy,

¹¹⁶ Minnie Maddern Fiske, 'The Art of Charles Chaplin,' *Harper's Weekly* 62 (May 6, 1916): 69.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

and these things fight against the finer qualities of his art, yet he overcomes them.’¹¹⁸ This ‘overcoming’ was essential for O’Higgins, as for Fiske. It was Chaplin’s central achievement. It exemplified, according to O’Higgins, ‘how a real talent can triumph over the most appalling limitations put upon its expression’.¹¹⁹ Neither Fiske nor O’Higgins mention Keystone by name, but since the company was the premiere purveyor of ‘slapstick’, ‘knockabout’ and ‘rough-house’ comedy, informed readers would have understood the implication.

As Chaplin’s career and legacy developed, the importance of his relationship to Keystone waned in accounts of his work, though it would return later with renewed force. When Fiske and O’Higgins had celebrated Chaplin in 1916 and 1917 they could claim to be making an original statement, demonstrating their superior perspicacity in singling Chaplin out from the ‘worthless material’ of contemporary slapstick, as many did not.¹²⁰ With the release of Chaplin’s first feature *The Kid* (1921), however, Chaplin had issued a clear declaration of his aspirations beyond short-form slapstick, and with his move to Universal Artists in 1923 Chaplin had announced his independence from the conventional studio system of which Keystone had been a part. Meanwhile, by 1917 Mack Sennett had stopped using the Keystone trademark and moved into independent production. The style of slapstick he had pioneered between 1912 and 1915 began its slide from the cutting edge of film comedy to a subject for quaint nostalgia. As a result of these developments, comparisons between Chaplin and Keystone – a hot topic in 1915 – were increasingly irrelevant in the critical oeuvre. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, there was renewed interest in telling ‘Charlie Chaplin’s Story’, this time from the newly available perspective of hindsight. In this context the Chaplin/Keystone drama was revived.¹²¹

One important document in this respect is Chaplin’s book, *My Autobiography*, published in 1964, which significantly influenced the accounts of critics and commentators in the following decades. Chaplin’s account of his

¹¹⁸ Harvey O’Higgins, ‘Charlie Chaplin’s Art,’ *The New Republic* 10, no. 118 (February 3, 1917): 17.

¹¹⁹ O’Higgins, ‘Charlie Chaplin’s Art,’ 17.

¹²⁰ Fiske, ‘The Art of Charles Chaplin,’ 69.

¹²¹ Maland, *Chaplin and American Culture*, 331-332, 337.

experience at Keystone very closely resembles Carr's *Photoplay* account from 1915, following the same key points in the same order, and it seems likely that Chaplin used the earlier article as a source. Again, the contrast between Chaplin and Keystone is dramatised through a comparison with 'the great Ford Sterling whom I was to replace', but this time Carr's ironic inflections are absent.¹²² Observing Sterling's 'harassed' performance style, Chaplin recalls 'wonder[ing] what Sennett expected of me. He had seen my work and must have known that I was not suitable to play Ford's type of comedy; *my style was just the opposite*' (my italics).¹²³ Chaplin does not force the art vs. amusement angle in relation to Keystone, but it is a key theme of the book implicit in much of the account.

In the 1970s there was a concerted movement to cement Chaplin's status as a great filmmaker, with several still-influential books published that narrativised this claim through stage-by-stage accounts of his career.¹²⁴ In this context, the value-laden opposition between Chaplin and Keystone became an orthodox component of the critical commentary. It served to dramatisate a particular view of film as an art form, a view that was becoming increasingly entrenched in American culture at the time with an increased public interest in film history and the rise of Film Studies as a discipline in universities.¹²⁵ Inheriting the auteurist terms of the 1950s and 1960s, filmmakers were great if they transcended the impersonal and industrial aspects of film production to achieve a degree of personal control over their work.¹²⁶ Films produced in a recognisable signature style were, by implication, of a higher order. Working with these assumption, Chaplin critics painted Keystone as representing everything that great film art was not. Keystone's distinctive aesthetic of rapid

¹²² Chaplin, *My Autobiography*, 142.

¹²³ Chaplin, *My Autobiography*, 143.

¹²⁴ Kerr, *The Silent Clowns*; John McCabe, *Charlie Chaplin* (London: Robson, 1978); Gerald Mast, *The Comic Mind: Comedy and the Movies* (2nd ed., Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

¹²⁵ Maland, *Chaplin and American Culture*, 352-356. See also Lee Grieveson, 'Cinema Studies and the Conduct of Conduct,' in *Inventing Film Studies*, eds. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2008).

¹²⁶ The most influential proponent of this view in a American context was Andrew Sarris. See: Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions, 1929-1968* (1968; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1996). See also: John Caughie *Theories of Authorship: A Reader* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

editing and busily crowded frames was seen as the corollary of its ‘mechanical’ production methods, its indifference to artistic progress and its commercial imperatives.¹²⁷ Conditions at Keystone allegedly stifled individual talent and artistic development, giving performers, as Walter Kerr put it, ‘little or no breathing space in which to become individualised.’¹²⁸ Thus Chaplin’s relationship with Keystone is presented as a conflict between an individual artist, or author, and an impersonal, factory-like system. The narrative arc of this relationship follows Chaplin gaining his ‘independence’ – a key word of many accounts, and one that offers a neat trajectory of emergence that matches the prevailing critical method of designating quality.¹²⁹

The claim made by Fiske and O’Higgins in the late 1910s, that Chaplin’s defining aesthetic qualities were to be established in opposition to Keystone had value in this context and was dusted off and asserted anew. The difference, however, was that in the late 1910s Fiske and O’Higgins had represented the opinion of a self-consciously avant-garde minority, speaking against the tide of public opinion: ‘It will surprise numbers of well-meaning Americans to learn,’ Fiske had boldly asserted to the ‘well-meaning’ readers of *Harper’s Weekly*, ‘that a constantly increasing body of cultured, artistic people are beginning to regard the young English buffoon, Charles Chaplin, as an extraordinary artist, as well as a comic genius.’¹³⁰ Since then, however, this claim has become orthodox in critical accounts of Chaplin’s work. Moreover, the narrative of Chaplin’s battle with Keystone for artistic integrity and independence has played a role in confirming a broader idea of what a great artistic figure is and does – an idea that I mean to call into question and speak back to.

It is clear that the conventional interpretation of the relationship between Chaplin and Keystone provides critics with a neat critical model that is self-evidently satisfying to narrate and complementary to their valorisation of Chaplin as an independent artist. However, to insist on this interpretation at the expense of others

¹²⁷ Kimber, *The Art of Charlie Chaplin*, 72.

¹²⁸ Kerr, *The Silent Clowns*, 73.

¹²⁹ Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art*, 143, Robinson, *Chaplin: The Mirror of Opinion* (London: Secker & Warburg; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 23, 25, 32; Maland, *Chaplin and American Culture*, 5; Kimber, *The Art of Charlie Chaplin*, 72; Dan Kamin, *The Comedy of Charlie Chaplin: Artistry in Motion* (Lanham, Maryland; Plymouth: Scarecrow Press Inc., 2008), 81.

¹³⁰ Fiske, ‘The Art of Charles Chaplin,’ 69.

distorts the way in which he was understood at the time, and even the grounds upon which he became an iconic figure in the first place. More problematically, it sidelines and denigrates qualities of Chaplin's early films that could more helpfully be understood in terms of what they are rather than in terms of what they are not yet.

One final point to add to the case for rethinking the Chaplin/Keystone relationship in relation to Chaplin's rise in 1915, is that Chaplin's Keystone films of 1914 were widely exhibited throughout the following year. As film scholar Douglas Riblet discovered, 'Keystone exploited the Chaplin mania by rereleasing his films during the summer of 1915 to compete with the newly released Essanay Chaplins.'¹³¹ And while the contemporary trade press demonstrates that audiences and exhibitors valued the 'latest' Chaplin films, newspaper records show that exhibitors still advertised his Keystone films as a draw in 1915.¹³² Sometimes they made no distinction between old and new films, and would advertise 'Charlie Chaplin', without reference to the particular film, let alone the production company or the year of its original release.¹³³ If this was the way in which Chaplin's films were being exhibited, then Chaplin's growing popularity in 1915 cannot be mapped exclusively onto a linear path of artistic development within Chaplin's Essanay films, but must take note also of Chaplin's Keystone films.

ii) The Dynamics of Controversy

In the first part of this chapter, I described the controversy that surrounded Chaplin in the mid-1910s. Here I want briefly to emphasise the importance of that controversy for establishing Chaplin's fame and rooting him in the public imagination. Specifically, I want to put forward controversy as *an alternative* to the critically accepted version of how the Chaplin craze seized the nation between 1914

¹³¹ Riblet, 'The Keystone Film Company,' 186.

¹³² 'Charlie Chaplin's Life in Stone Age,' *Tucson Daily Citizen*, February 15, 1915, 8; 'What The Press Agents Say "His Trysting Place"', *Gazette Telegraph* [published as *Colorado Spring Gazette*], February 17, 1915, 7; 'Advertisements,' *Pawtucket Times* [published as *The Evening Times*], February 20, 1915, 7; [Advertisement for film programme at Ada Meade theatre], *Lexington Herald*, February 21, 1915, 8; [Advertisement for film programme at Amuse-U theatre], *Charlotte Daily Observer*, August 8, 1915, 10; [Advertisement for film programme at Broadway theatre] *Salt Lake Telegram*, August, 8, 1915, 24.

¹³³ For example: 'Advertisements', *The State (Columbia, South Carolina)*, August 8, 1915, 19.

and 1916. Ultimately, I want to show how the critically accepted version of the Chaplin craze distorts the nature of Chaplin's reception in the mid-1910s by extracting him from the volatile context of contemporary mass-amusement culture. My account, reading against the critical grain in this respect, provides a more historically attuned picture, and, it is hoped, can enhance an appreciation of the films precisely because it situates Chaplin more firmly in the context of their production.

In critical writing today, the phrase 'the Chaplin craze' conventionally refers to a groundswell of enthusiasm for Chaplin. Critics acknowledge adverse reactions to Chaplin but these are not considered part of the Chaplin craze. Opposition is considered relevant to the Chaplin craze insofar as it must be conquered in order for Chaplin's popularity to grow. This version of the craze is encapsulated in a passage from Theodore Huff's *Charlie Chaplin* (1951):

By 1915 [Chaplin] had become and was to remain the most popular figure in motion pictures. Children and grown-ups of almost all classes succumbed to the "Chaplin craze." [...] Middle-class elders, alone, held out. Ministers and teachers complained of Chaplin's "vulgarity"—objecting particularly to his "drunk act."¹³⁴

According to Huff, people either 'succumbed' or 'held out against' the Chaplin craze. The main 'out-holders' were the '[m]iddle-class elders', topographically located outside the 'craze', resisting its allure and blocking its further growth, albeit temporarily. The story that is told beyond this point is how Chaplin won over his initial opponents as his film-making matured and his talent burst its chrysalis of typical contemporary slapstick.

This version of the Chaplin craze runs throughout Chaplin commentary and criticism, from Huff's popular biography of the 1950s to Charles Maland's more recent and more rigorous cultural history, *Chaplin and American Culture: The Evolution of a Star Image* (1989). Maland's explanation of the craze reveals the same topographical configuration of enthusiasm and opposition as Huff's: 'Not everyone was caught up in the Chaplin craze. In fact, a significant minority found Chaplin's films a social menace.'¹³⁵ Thus Maland locates opposition to Chaplin's

¹³⁴ Huff, *Charlie Chaplin*, 6.

¹³⁵ Maland, *Chaplin and American Culture*, 14.

films outside the enthusiasm of the Chaplin craze. From here, Maland maps Chaplin's growing fame onto his developing ability to make films that appealed to those who opposed him in the first instance:

By the end of the Essanay period Chaplin's star image was composed of the softening, more romantic Charlie and the serious, hardworking, ambitious, and modest young filmmaker who aspired to high art. [...] He [...] had faced the genteel moralists of America and had begun to make films that, in certain ways, were more palatable to them.¹³⁶

Maland's analysis ultimately serves to reinforce existing assumptions about Chaplin's early work and its teleological relationship to the later, and supposedly greater, features. He chooses to focus selectively on Chaplin films that he claims appealed more to 'the genteel moralists of America': *The Tramp* (1915) and *The Bank* (1915), for example. These also happen to be the same films routinely singled out as anticipating Chaplin's classic features.

This conventional account of the Chaplin craze presents an all-too-tidy picture of how Chaplin's reputation and film-making developed during the mid-1910s. While there were certainly aspects of Chaplin's film-making that defied the conventions of slapstick, or packaged it up 'a little nicer', as Kitty Kelly put it, there was more to it than a linear process of development toward goals of refinement and acceptability.¹³⁷ Chaplin's films in the mid-1910s were a palpable 'hodge-podge', to borrow a phrase from Charles McQuirk's 'Chaplinitis' article, that produced a great variety of responses.¹³⁸ Importantly, enthusiasm for and opposition to Chaplin galvanised one another forming a mutually escalating circuit (figs. 4.28 and 4.29). Herein, I argue, lies the specific intensity of the Chaplin craze in the mid-1910s.

¹³⁶ Maland, *Chaplin and American Culture*, 24.

¹³⁷ Kelly, 'Flickerings from Filmiland,' 10.

¹³⁸ McQuirk, 'Chaplinitis, Part 2,' 86.

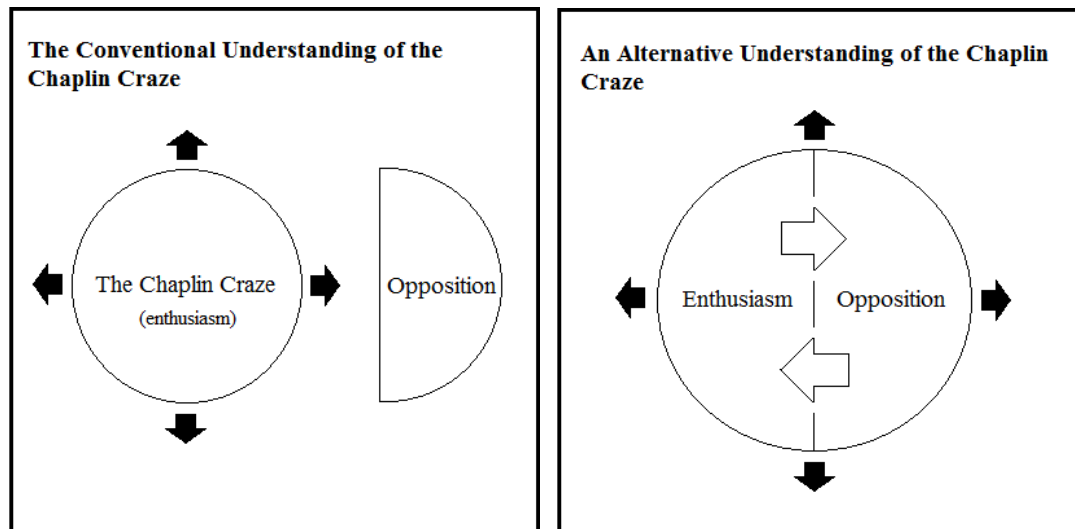


Fig. 4.28 and 4.29. The first diagram illustrates how the Chaplin craze is conventionally understood. The ‘craze’ here refers to enthusiasm for Chaplin which spreads outward through society, stimulated by the intense and widespread appeal of his films. Opposition to Chaplin is located outside the craze as a static element that may either ‘hold out’ against the craze or ‘succumb’ to it.¹³⁹ The second diagram illustrates an alternative model which, I argue, better explains the dynamics of the craze. Enthusiasm and opposition react against and fuel each other, establishing a feedback loop of escalating intensity and drawing more and more people into the debate.

It remains to add that this intense fascination with Chaplin was accelerated by the wider concerns of the moment. Cinema was emerging indubitably as America’s major amusement pastime, though only a decade earlier it had been widely regarded as a shabby and disreputable business whose days were numbered. There were intense struggles over the place of cinema in America’s social and cultural landscape. Chaplin became a highly visible and much-cited icon in these debates, a widely recognised image that became available as a site of contestation in wider debates about slapstick, cinema and mass-amusement culture.

An anecdote from a later moment in Chaplin’s career, usefully unearthed by Charles Maland, will serve as an appropriate coda to this chapter.¹⁴⁰ In 1947 Chaplin’s career was at a low point. His reputation had been badly damaged by personal unpopularity and political scandal and his latest film, *Monsieur Verdoux*, was expected to flop at the box-office. In this inauspicious context, Chaplin’s publicity agent, Russell Birdwell, devised a plan to rescue the new film: a publicity campaign that deliberately played up his employer’s controversial reputation; that

¹³⁹ Huff, *Charlie Chaplin*, 6.

¹⁴⁰ Maland, *Chaplin and American Culture*, 246-250.

would stir up ‘a vortex of fiery condemnation and enthusiastic praise.’¹⁴¹ Chaplin had always polarised opinion, it was one the most persistent features of his career, so why not turn this to an advantage? By the late 1940s, however, it was too late. Chaplin no longer focused public attention in the way he once had, and although *Verdoux* would divide critical opinion, as Birdwell had expected, the raging storm that would subsume the country failed to appear. But Birdwell’s attempt represents a valiant effort to resummon an earlier moment in Chaplin’s career, the years between 1914 and 1916 when Chaplin’s films and the public drama of his film-making had indeed generated a ‘vortex’ of ‘fiery’ and ‘enthusiastic’ emotions, catching the imagination of the American public at large and propelling Chaplin to fame. During those early years, the public were fascinated by Chaplin because he was a sign of the times. If his films or his career were curious or shocking, they were so because they seemed to spell out larger changes coming in movies or in American culture more widely. *Verdoux* was an unusual and in some ways shocking film, but for many it was now only Chaplin’s singular anomalousness that was being advertised.

¹⁴¹ United Artists Collections, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Wisconsin State Historical Library, Madison, Lazarus files, box 16, folder 14, quoted in Maland, *Chaplin and American Culture*, 246.

CHAPTER 5

‘HERE TO-DAY’ (GONE TOMORROW):

THE TEMPORALITY OF THE CHAPLIN CRAZE

By the summer of 1915, Chaplin had become one of the most famous figures in American life. Yet few would have agreed then with the claim made a decade later by Gilbert Seldes that Chaplin was ‘of all the men of our time, [...] most assured of immortality’.¹ If a ‘craze’ is to be understood as ‘a capricious and usually temporary enthusiasm’, as the OED defines it, then Chaplin was widely considered to be himself a craze in this temporally bounded sense. As one *Moving Picture World* journalist pointed out in September 1915: ‘One frequently hears the question: “How long will Charlie Chaplin last?”’² The expectation that Chaplin’s fame would be short lived did not, however, detract from its intensity in its own moment. Indeed, speculation about the duration of his success seemed to energise the public excitement – both negative and positive – that surrounded Chaplin like an electrified aura. It crackled implicitly in the language in which his fame was reported, in words like ‘vogue’, ‘craze’ and ‘fever’ and neologisms such as ‘Chaplinitis’, ‘Chaplinioa’, and ‘Chaplinalia’.³ Some commentators delighted in foreseeing Chaplin’s imminent downfall: ‘Progress and retrogression is the universal lot,’ proclaimed *Photoplay* in November 1915, ‘and Chaplin’s cycle of dirt and acrobatics is about to run.’⁴ Others, meanwhile, were charged with anticipation: ‘the brainy little man with the far-away look in his eyes will continue to astonish and hold us yet,’ Charles McGuirk had opined for *Moving Picture Magazine* in August 1915.⁵

¹ Gilbert Seldes, *The Seven Lively Arts* (1924; Reprint, Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2001), 41.

² George Blaisdell, ‘Here and There: Charles Chaplin in “The Bank” Shows us a New Player and Opens Up Possibilities for the Future,’ *Moving Picture World* 25, no. 11 (September 11, 1915): 1836.

³ For examples, see: ‘Have you the Chaplinioa? Kansas City in the Throes of a Movie Mania Epidemic,’ *Kansas City Star*, September 3, 1915, 6; Robert Grau, ‘Why Did Charlie Chaplin Decline a \$5000 a-Week Vaudeville Offer?’ *Motion Picture Magazine* 10, no. 9 (October 1915): 106; ‘Brief Montreal Notices,’ *Moving Picture World* 29, no. 7 (August 14, 1915): 1197; Epes Winthrop Sargent, ‘Advertising for Exhibitors,’ *Moving Picture World* 26, no. 5 (October 30, 1915): 783.

⁴ ‘Close Ups. The Case of Charlie Chaplin,’ *Photoplay* 8, no. 6 (November 1915): 49.

⁵ McGuirk, ‘Chaplinitis, Part 2,’ 89.

Despite their differing opinions about Chaplin's longevity, commentators (be they professional journalists or bickering school children) participated in the Chaplin craze as an event: something happening *now*, playing out week by week, month by month as the films kept coming and the public response developed; a live experience whose duration was uncertain and trajectory unpredictable, and which, like other crazes, was potentially evanescent. Recapturing something of that sense of liveness is perhaps one of the more quixotic goals of this thesis as a whole. In this chapter, meanwhile, I will explore Chaplin's ontology as a 'man of the moment' in the mid-1910s, in terms of both his comic screen persona and his public reputation as a filmmaker. While critics have tended to focus their efforts on articulating the *enduring* aspects of Chaplin's art, I argue that in order to understand and appreciate Chaplin's early films in their own cultural moment and milieu, we need to pay attention to and take seriously their *ephemeral* aspects. This chapter will explore Chaplin's peculiar relationship to time operating at three various levels: within films (sections i and ii, focusing on *His New Job* (1915) and *The Pawnshop* (1916) respectively), between films (section iii) and between the Chaplin craze and the larger sequence of amusement crazes that characterised the contemporaneously emerging mass-amusement culture (section iv).

A small number of critics have noted the idea of the ephemeral as an important aspect of Chaplin's early films, though almost always in the context of text-focused analyses that do not take into account the nature of his fame and its specific context in the mass-amusement culture of the mid-1910s. In an essay on Chaplin included in *What is Cinema? Vol. I* (first published in French in 1958), André Bazin argues that the very essence of Chaplin's screen character is his 'basic principle' of 'never going beyond the actual moment.'⁶ Charlie acts, and apparently thinks, 'as if there was no such thing as the future', nor the past.⁷ His is 'a mode of being that is suited to one instant'.⁸ For Bazin, this temporality is important because it makes a social statement. He sees it as a celebration of individual vitality in the

⁶ André Bazin, 'Charlie Chaplin,' in *What is Cinema? Vol. I*, trans. Hugh Gray (1967; reprint, Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2005), 148.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

face of society's 'elaborate machinery for building the future . . . its moral, religious, social and political machinery.'⁹ Walter Kerr, another astute critic of Chaplin's early films, also saw Chaplin's instantaneous nature as central to his distinctive onscreen persona. 'The secret of Chaplin, as a character, is that he can be anyone', Kerr explained.¹⁰ '[W]ith the flick of a finger or the blink of an eyelash, [he can] instantly transform himself.'¹¹ '[E]very posture [...] can be adopted on the instant and just as instantly dropped.'¹² Like Bazin, Kerr finds a deeper meaning in Chaplin's close and dynamic relationship to the present moment, though for Kerr it is 'a philosophical not a social statement'. For Kerr, Chaplin's always-in-the-moment mode of being on screen confronts us with the perennial instability of personal identity as an aspect of the human condition.¹³ In neither account, however, do the material conditions of Chaplin's film-making and fame enter the equation. Chaplin's instantaneousness is considered as something performed within the stable universe of his films, not something to which the production of Chaplin's films, and, indeed, the production of his fame, might also be subject.

Bazin's and Kerr's interpretations are important, I suggest, because they foreground the delightful craziness – what Alan Dale calls the 'managed incoherence' – that is central to Chaplin's persona in his early film, but which is frequently side-lined in critical accounts of Chaplin's work.¹⁴ According to critics such as Robinson, or more recently Jeffrey Vance, the Tramp character only becomes fully realised in the context of cohesive, well-rounded narratives such as that of *City Lights* (1936).¹⁵ They therefore trace Chaplin's artistic development during the 1910s in terms of increasing coherence, both narrative and thematic,

⁹ Bazin, 'Charlie Chaplin,' 152.

¹⁰ Kerr, *The Silent Clowns* (New York: Knopf, 1976), 85.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Kerr, *The Silent Clowns*, 85.

¹⁴ Alan Dale, *Comedy is a Man in Trouble: Slapstick in American Movies* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 38.

¹⁵ David Robinson, *Chaplin: The Mirror of Opinion* (London: Secker & Warburg; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 25; Jeffrey Vance, 'Chaplin at Keystone: The Tramp is Born,' in *Chaplin at Keystone*, DVD inlay (London BFI, 2010), 14.

assuming that Chaplin's essence is fully realised only in his feature films, and only under construction, as it were, in his earlier work. This approach generally fails to recognise the intransigent absurdity of Chaplin's early films as a positive virtue, while also presenting a highly selective version of Chaplin's early work. What both Bazin and Kerr highlight is how Chaplin *resists* the kind of coherent and fixed identity on which more conventional conceptualisations of Chaplin as the Tramp rely.

However, I question Bazin's and Kerr's insistence on rationalising their astute observations about Charlie's peculiar temporality as social or philosophical statements ensuing directly from the artist himself. To do so obscures the relationship I want to bring into focus in this chapter: between Chaplin's way of being on screen and the emergent mass-amusement culture in which Chaplin's early career flourished. Thus, I aim to enrich an appreciation of Chaplin's early work by illuminating the links between Chaplin's comic performances on screen, the nature of the Chaplin craze as a cultural phenomenon and the wider context of the amusement culture that was emerging in the specific context of industrial modernity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Beyond Chaplin studies, film scholars have explored the connections between the cinema and the specific temporalities of modernity, a seminal work in this project being Walter Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936).¹⁶ In this chapter I will touch on the work of two more recent scholars working in this line, Mary Ann Doane and Tom Gunning.¹⁷ Where these scholars focus on the rhythms of industrial production and capitalist commodity circulation, however, I shift focus to the rhythms of consumption inherent in the serial and evanescent nature of amusement crazes.

¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, 'Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' 1936, in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Ardent (London: Pimlico, 1999), 211-244.

¹⁷ Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2002); Tom Gunning, *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

i) Spontaneity in *His New Job*

His New Job (1915) was Chaplin's first film for Essanay, released on February 1, 1915. It marked an important, and precarious, moment in Chaplin's career, since he was leaving behind the Keystone Film Company, where his popularity had flourished, to commence a new film series for which his star presence would be the *raison d'être*. Both *His New Job* and the publicity materials that accompanied its release show an acute awareness of this transitional state of affairs, as the very title of the film indicates. Due to this self-consciousness they provide a useful window onto how, at that time, Chaplin and Essanay understood the distinguishing features of Chaplin's onscreen persona, and what they deemed to be its most saleable qualities. What I want to stress in the following analysis is the emphasis in both the film and publicity material upon certain qualities associated with the temporality of the instant: spontaneity, immediacy and a rebellious resistance to routine discipline. This will allow me, in the course of the chapter, to make a larger case about how Chaplin's early films and his early fame were attuned to the 'craze culture' of the period, and how the qualities that were emphasised as distinguishing features of Chaplin's screen persona in *His New Job*, among other films, reflected larger cultural preoccupations.

His New Job follows Charlie's employment as an actor at a movie studio and its entertainingly disastrous consequences. In contrast to the true story of Chaplin's 'new job' at Essanay, Charlie is not taken on as a leading comic actor, but rather to play a minor role in a serious historical drama. This situation provides a sturdy framework for the transgressions through which Charlie asserts his comic identity: he is consistently at odds with his surroundings and repeatedly defies the behavioural expectations of the film set and the aesthetic expectations of the historical drama. Significantly, his comedy quite consistently takes the form of the destructive intrusion of the spontaneous and impulsive into the scripted and teleological.

Moments after securing his job, Charlie demonstrates his ignorance of conventional studio conduct by marching straight onto the set mid-take, to which disruption the director responds: 'Go and get your script'. The script is thus immediately established as the ordering apparatus of the film-making process. Yet, as Charlie goes off to locate it he makes clear that possessing a script will not necessarily keep *him* in order. Nonchalantly collecting the document from the

producer's desk, he gives it only a cursory glance before returning to the more pressing business of smoking. He then proceeds to spoil another shot by crossing the set again to present the director with the unread script. The joke is on the director, for it is his own instructions to Charlie that result in the ruination of a second shot. The joke is also on the very idea of a script, for while a shot in the director's film is ruined, *His New Job* gets away with a successful gag, having realised the choreography determined by its own script.

The film turns next to the matter of pre-shot rehearsals. The action of this sequence bears explanation. Charlie receives his instructions from the director, and though distracted several times by the charms of the leading lady, he appears to listen carefully (figs. 5.1 and 5.2). In the following rehearsal, however, he is way off the mark. He stumbles on the carpet thanks to his characteristic shuffling gait, and when he draws his sword he hits himself in the face. A second attempt is yet busier with spontaneous business: scratching one leg with the other, glancing around the set, shrugging, nodding to one of the other actors, scratching his nose. His presence bristles with the kind of unplanned tics and creases the rehearsal process is intended to smooth out. When the cameras finally roll, Charlie flaunts his immunity to rehearsal most spectacularly. After notable bits of improvisation – saluting the rug when he trips on it, using his sword to slice the ash from his cigarette – Charlie leans nonchalantly on a column and we realise that this too is improvised because the column gives way. Now the scripted shot is completely derailed as Charlie manically attempts to straighten the column and the leading lady becomes hysterical. Like the use of scripts, the practice of pre-shot rehearsals proves futile and Charlie's 'spontaneity' proves irrepressible, staged as it is within the carefully constructed character of Chaplin's film.



Figs. 5.1 and 5.2. These laborious pre-shot rehearsals will prove futile in *His New Job* (1915).

Charlie's disruptions of the historical drama work to associate his screen persona with the spontaneous and unscripted. It is through these disruptions that Charlie's comic alterity from his surroundings is established, and thus through them that he defines himself. Yet it is important to recognise that he is not defining himself from scratch here. Chaplin is working with an audience's existing familiarity with this work. Each of the ostensible improvisations that Charlie brings disruptively into the director's shots are at the same time his recognisable trademark mannerisms established during the previous year at Keystone. The military salute with which Charlie anthropomorphically addresses the rug is a reworking of the signature gesture of tipping his hat, often to inanimate objects, as in *The Rounders* (1914) when he addresses a set of steps on which he has drunkenly stumbled (figs. 5.3 and 5.4). When Charlie dispatches the ash from his cigarette – an impromptu prop – it recalls the frequent cigarette play of earlier films (figs. 5.5 and 5.6), including *Mabel's Strange Predicament* (1914), *His Favorite Pastime* (1914) and *Caught in the Rain* (1914). The frantic scrambling around the falling pillar is also familiar from scenes such as Charlie and Mack Swain attempting to move a piano in *His Musical Career* (1914) (figs. 5.7 and 5.8). Thus, what are presented as spontaneous, impulsive deviations from the script, are at the same time familiar, routine elements from Chaplin's well-stocked but nonetheless not limitless repertoire of personalised pieces of comic business. The film thus inscribes Chaplin's trademark gestures – and thereby Chaplin himself as a performer – as signifiers of impulsivity, spontaneity and immediacy.



Figs. 5.3 and 5.4. Charlie salutes inanimate objects: a rug in *His New Job* (1915); stairs in *The Rounders* (1914).



Figs. 5.5 and 5.6. Cigarette play in *His New Job* and *The New Janitor* (1914).



Figs. 5.7 and 5.8. Charlie scrambles manically to support falling objects in *His New Job* (1915) and *His Musical Career* (1914).

In their marketing efforts, Essanay framed *His New Job* as an advertisement for the forthcoming Essanay-Chaplin series. ‘This two reel comedy is just what its title indicates’, proclaimed the advance notice that appeared in all the major trade-press

journals: ‘Mr. Chaplin built it up on the fact of his coming to the Essanay company’.¹⁸ Beyond this subject matter, however, the notice tells exhibitors little about the film itself and concentrates instead on the uniqueness of the filmmaker – the creative entity responsible for the forthcoming series. His methods, rather than his matter, are held up for approval:

Mr. Chaplin produced the play without any scenario whatever, although he had carefully thought out the outlines of his plot before-hand. Most of the incidents and practically all of the mirth producing tricks were extemporaneous, however, Mr. Chaplin originating them as the camera clicking out the film [sic].¹⁹

Thus Chaplin the filmmaker is portrayed as acting in the moment, in ways aligned with those adapted by his screen persona within the film. Charlie’s extravagant incompetence as a character becomes, paradoxically, a metaphor for Chaplin’s supreme improvisatory competence as a filmmaker. And by the same token, the incompetence that makes Charlie comically out of place in the film-within-the-film becomes a metaphor for Chaplin’s distinctive value in the film market, since it was allegedly because he did not follow a script that his comedy was ‘the most original and fun the most spontaneous and unstilted of any ever produced [sic].’²⁰

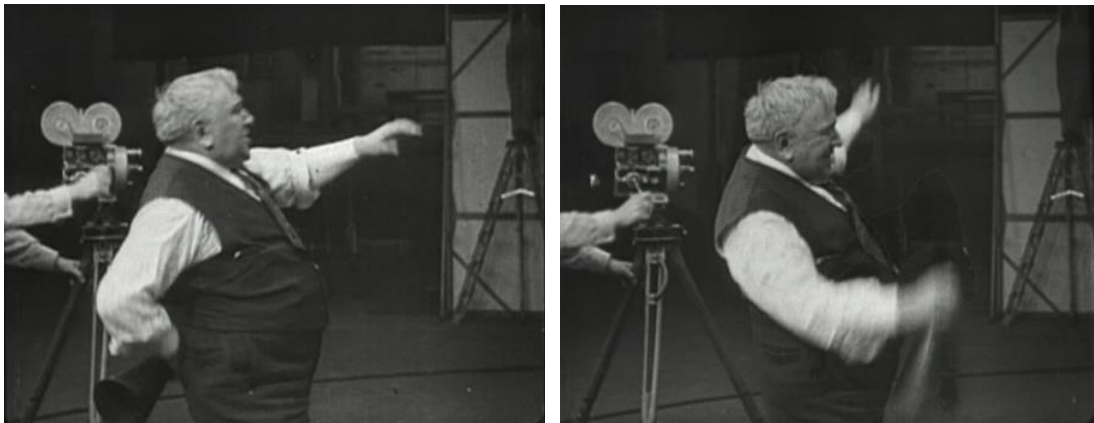
What Essanay evidently wanted to stress in its marketing of the film was that Chaplin’s screen performances offered a powerful sense of immediacy, in contrast to other people’s films. According to the advance-notice account of his methods, Chaplin’s ‘mirth producing’ is recorded directly onto celluloid; his extemporary performances are live events occurring at the very moment that the camera is ‘clicking out the film’. The cinema audience are thus invited to share in the ‘extemporaneous’ moment of production and to experience the excitement of the live moment in which anything could happen. Charlie’s prolonged tussle with the falling

¹⁸ ‘Manufacturers Advance Notices. “His New Job” (Essanay),’ *Moving Picture World* 23, no. 6 (February 6, 1915): 845.

¹⁹ ‘Manufacturers Advance Notices,’ 845.

²⁰ Ibid. In early 1915 Chaplin faithfully reiterated the same ideas in the same terms, explaining to *Motion Picture Magazine* readers, for example, ‘[w]ith the plot in mind I go before the camera without the slightest notion of what I am going to do.’ ‘In this way I think you can get more spontaneity into the action than trying to study out all the detail beforehand. That, in my opinion, is fatal. It makes the film look stilted and unnatural’. Victor Eubank, ‘The Funniest Man on Screen,’ *Motion Picture Magazine* 9, no. 2 (March 1915): 77.

column in *His New Job* is worth closer attention here for the way it dramatises liveness within the film. In contrast to the established production practices of the film set, Charlie must respond *in the moment* to the unpredictable movements of the column as it careens this way and that. In attempting to position himself, Charlie also unbalances his own body, jerking his limbs and running on the spot to keep himself from falling. Ironically, the enraged director becomes an advertisement for the pleasures that this performance offers the audience. He jerks back and forth in sympathy with Chaplin's movements, enthralled despite himself by the balancing act taking place before his eyes. His involuntary physical response implies the powerful immediacy and direct visceral appeal of Chaplin's performance in contrast, presumably, to the results of his own more staid methods of film-making. Meanwhile, the continued cranking of the film camera by a disembodied hand (figs. 5.9 and 5.10), despite the derailing of the director's script, symbolically acknowledges the cinematic value of Chaplin's script-spurning performance.²¹



Figs. 5.9 and 5.10. The cameraman keeps cranking and the director becomes physically enthralled by Chaplin's disruptive column-balancing performance in *His New Job* (1915).

Though underrepresented in Chaplin scholarship, these ideas about Chaplin's distinctive performance methods, and the heightened spontaneity with which they were associated, circulated widely in 1915, entering even the more general discussions of Chaplin's rise to fame. The *New York Sun*, for example, explained to readers:

²¹ This was evidently a performance stunt with special significance for Chaplin as he recreated it the following year in another movie-set film, *Behind the Screen* (1916), as discussed above on p144. *The Pawnshop* (1916) also features a balancing act, on a step ladder this time, with a policeman playing the role of the enthralled spectator.

[Chaplin's] skill in pictures is said to be due to his lack of all consciousness of the camera, his ability to enter a scene without a word of script and extemporize to a degree that supplies hundreds of feet of unrehearsed and impromptu fun. Indeed he is averse to excessive rehearsal, since he believes that it deprives him of spontaneity. Since no other actor has ever made such a general success as a camera comedian, his ideas on the subject must be right.²²

Mythologising accounts of Chaplin's acting technique were evidently an important part of his wider reputation. A further example of this is the account of Chaplin's first experience of movie acting for the Keystone Film Company offered in 'Charlie Chaplin's Own Story', a serialised biography that appeared in the *San Francisco Bulletin* between July and August 1915.²³ According to the story, Chaplin's first attempts at acting for the camera were a disaster. After failing dismally to follow Mack Sennett's directorial instructions, Chaplin came to a realisation: 'The trouble with the films, I decided, was lack of spontaneity.'²⁴ And when Sennett expressed his concern about Chaplin's work, Chaplin returned with a critique of Keystone's methods:

"I don't know what I can do. You've had the best scenarios we've got, and we haven't hurried you," [Sennett] said reasonably. "You know the rest of the companies get out two reels a week, and we've taken three weeks to do what we've done with you—about a reel and a half."

"Yes, but the conditions are all wrong," I hurried on. "Rehearsing over and over, and no chance to vary an inch, and then that clicking beginning just when I start to play. And I miss my cane. I have to have a cane to be funny."

"I want to make up my own scenarios as I go along. I just want to go out on the stage and be funny," I said. "And I want the camera to keep going all the time, so I can forget about it."²⁵

²² 'Charlie Chaplin, Comedian of Movies, Had Sad Youth Remarkable Rise to Fame of Character Whose Stork Step and Falls Amuse Thousands Daily,' *The Sun (New York)*, August 22, 1915, 6.

²³ These articles were to become the basis of an apocryphal biography released in 1916: Rose Wilder Lane, *Chaplin's Own Story* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1916). On the controversial history of this biography, see: Stephen Weissman, *Chaplin: A Life* (New York: Arcade Publishing, Inc., 2008), 272-275; Robinson, 1992, 180-185.

²⁴ Rose Wilder Lane, 'Acting-Directing Apprenticeship with Mack Sennett,' in *Focus on Chaplin*, ed. Donald W. McCaffrey (Englewood Cliff, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), 37.

²⁵ Lane, 'Acting-Directing Apprenticeship,' 38.

In this story, Sennett tries to impose ‘scenarios’ and ‘[r]ehearsing over and over’ on Chaplin, as the director in *His New Job* does upon Charlie. It is by resisting these injunctions that Chaplin establishes his distinction. Thus Keystone is taken (albeit quite unfairly) as a foil against which Chaplin asserts the distinctive qualities of his performance: spontaneity and immediacy.

The film camera was inevitably present in any discussion of Chaplin’s film-making methods in 1915. As we have seen, some accounts claimed that Chaplin’s distinctive performance style was a result of his ‘lack of all consciousness of the camera’.²⁶ As such he exhibited a rare immunity to the ‘camera fright’ that allegedly affected many actors performing for the mechanical eye of the camera and that resulted in stiff and stilted performances.²⁷ Other accounts construed the relationship between Chaplin and the camera differently, in ways that associate his working method and performance style with the instantaneous temporality of the photographic process. In *Charlie Chaplin’s Own Story*, having got into the swing of movie acting, Chaplin describes his work thus:

I worked every day, during every moment when the light was good, not stopping for luncheon or to rest. I enjoyed the work; the even click-click-click of the camera, running steadily, was a stimulant to me; my ideas came thick and fast.²⁸

Not only does the camera act as a ‘stimulant’ for Chaplin’s ideas, but they seem to parallel each other; to be working to a shared rhythm. Chaplin generates ideas one after the other, as quickly and as regularly as the film camera exposes frame after frame – or so this passage has the reader imagine. Chaplin works in time with the camera and he is therefore *present*, extemporising live, in every frame of film that later would pass through the projector before cinema audiences.

In an interview with *Motion Picture Magazine*’s Victor Eubank, published in March 1915, Chaplin attributed to the camera an important role in his creative process. He said it put him under a productive pressure: ‘You can understand that

²⁶ ‘Charlie Chaplin,’ *The Sun* (New York), 6.

²⁷ ‘About Moving Pictures,’ *Dallas Morning News*, January 17, 1909, 6. For a recent academic account of camera fright in early cinema, see: Jonathan Auerbach, *Body Shots: Early Cinema’s Incarnations* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2007), 42-62.

²⁸ Lane, ‘Acting-Directing Apprenticeship,’ 40.

while the camera is working there is not much time to think', he explained.²⁹ 'You must act on the spur of the moment. In one hundred or less feet of film there is no time to hesitate.'³⁰ The mechanically constant and unvarying progress of film through the camera thus creates a heightened sense of the present, forcing Chaplin to perform 'spontaneously'. 'The moment' – usually unnoticed, passing seamlessly – becomes palpable, making itself felt acutely, acting as a 'spur' that provokes spontaneous action. Chaplin thus uses the sensation of 'camera fright' as a source of inspiration. The camera also creates immediacy in another way. Under the pressure of rolling film there must be no distance between thought and action: they must occur instantaneously and simultaneously. Chaplin's comments advertise the idea that his films will offer their audience a powerful semblance of immediacy and of co-presence in the moment of creation.

Gunning and Doane's work on cinematic temporalities offers a wider cinematic context to this fascination with immediacy, which I will relate more specifically to mass-amusement culture. Gunning draws on social and labour history to imagine early cinema audiences and the experiences and concerns that shaped their engagement with the medium. He argues that 'workers unused to the rhythms and temporality of industrial production had to develop new work habits and attitudes towards time to survive in early-twentieth-century factories.'³¹ Cinema, he argues, vicariously negotiated the psychological conflicts that such adaption involved. He elaborates this argument with the specific example of a scene from D. W. Griffith's *The Fatal Hour* (1908). His points are worth laying out here for their illuminating potential in regards to immediacy and presence in Chaplin. Gunning focuses on *The Fatal Hour*'s 'rush to the rescue' sequence – one of the first examples of its kind in cinema history – in which cross-cutting between an imperilled woman and her rescuers creates tension and excitement.³² The presence of mechanised time is integral to the sequence since the girl is tied up facing a clock

²⁹ Victor Eubank, 'The Funniest Man on Screen,' *Motion Picture Magazine* 9, no. 2 (March 1915): 77.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Gunning, *D. W. Griffith*, 105.

³² Ibid.

rigged with a pistol so that she will be shot when the clock strikes twelve. Gunning explains how the sequence specifically evoked ‘industrial time’:³³

‘[p]arallel editing makes the progression of time palpable through its interruption, imposing a rhythm on unfolding events. The climax of *The Fatal Hour* evokes the cutting edge of the instant; time is measured in moments, and the smallest interval spells the difference between life and death.’³⁴

For Gunning the sequence has a curious double function in relation to the audiences’ own temporal experiences: ‘Making the passage of time more palpable, parallel editing offers both a celebration and an overcoming of the new rhythms of modern production’.³⁵ On the one hand, the scene evokes the ‘experience of temporal enslavement’ by ‘industrial time’ that was imposed on industrial workers. On the other hand, the girl’s eventual escape ‘acts out a drama of liberation’ from this same ‘enslavement’.³⁶

A similar ‘drama of liberation’ from the ‘new rhythms of modern production’ is detectable in the narrative, recounted above, of Chaplin adapting himself to the mechanical ‘click click click’ of the film camera. This too can be read as ‘a celebration and an overcoming’ of mechanical rhythms. Initially, the mechanical clicking of the film camera gives Chaplin an anxious sensation of camera fright. He feels imposed upon and stifled by the machine. But he learns to work with it. Due to the time pressure that it imposes upon him, the mechanical rhythm of the camera becomes the stimulant for spontaneity and crazy comic ideas that joyously defy the oppressively mechanical. In Gunning’s example of the rush-to-the-rescue sequence in *The Fatal Hour*, an emancipatory drama is enacted through film editing. In the Chaplin narrative, on the other hand, Chaplin performs the same drama as a one-man show, thereby becoming the focused embodiment of its conflicting energies.

Doane’s argument about ‘cinematic time’ looks beyond the industrial workplace of the factory to consider the underlying logic of ‘commodity capitalism’

³³ Gunning, *D. W. Griffith*, 106.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 106.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 105, 106, 106.

of which industrial labour was one component.³⁷ Drawing on Marx, she argues that in a society increasingly organised around the production and perpetual exchange of commodities, a 'reified, standardized, and rationalized' time was increasingly necessary for, amongst other things, the rapid production of goods and their accelerated circulation across a large geographical expanse.³⁸ However, the reshaping of time according to these imperatives had, and has, a side effect. As lived experience is 'more and more tightly sutured to abstract structures of temporality', Doane argues, its subjects feel '[t]he lure of contingency, the fascination [with] a present moment in which anything can happen'.³⁹ 'The present,' she explains, takes on a powerful fascination as 'a temporality emancipated from rationalization'.⁴⁰ Film, Doane argues, is inherently capable of eliciting such fascination due to the 'promise of its indexicality, and hence its access to the present', though in narrative cinema this pleasure is 'contained' by editing and thus 'yoked to meaning' and 'safely deployed'.⁴¹ Both Doane and Gunning argue that modernity produces an ambivalent fascination with the present which is reflected in cinema, which, in various ways, evokes the 'experience of temporal enslavement' as well as imagining escape from it.

While Doane and Gunning's ideas focus on the production and distribution of goods in capitalist modernity, they shed some light on the connection between Chaplin's peculiar mechanical, instant-by-instant spontaneity and the short-lived, serial nature of contemporary amusement crazes, of which Chaplin was himself seen to be one. Amusement crazes arguably manifested a desire for the spontaneous and the immediate, in contrast to the felt imposition of industrial time: crazes purported, in their very name, to be unplanned eruptions of irrationality. At the same time, however, they were becoming increasingly regular and serial in nature; as though on a conveyor belt of perpetual novelty that harnessed the consumption of amusement into the very industrial rhythms that crazes appeared to resist. Both Chaplin as he

³⁷ Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, 27, 106.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 11, 107.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 107, 106, 107, 107.

acted on screen, and the amusement crazes as they played out on a national stage, were arguably expressions of the same ‘fascination with the present moment’, conditioned as it was by the rhythms and temporality of industrial modernity.⁴²

ii) Serial Novelty in *The Pawnshop* (1916)

‘Most people are agreed’, summarised Raoul Sobel and David Francis in their 1977 book on Chaplin’s early films, ‘that one of Chaplin’s finest sustained pieces of imaginative humour is the sequence in *The Pawnshop* when he examines the clock Albert Austin has brought in.’⁴³ Indeed, the scene had been, and now continues to be, one of the most cited of Chaplin’s early films.⁴⁴ In addition to the verbal fun of describing a performance so bristling with comic business, the scene appeals to critics because it seems to encapsulate something distinctive about Chaplin. In *The Seven Lively Arts* (1924), Gilbert Seldes offered a moment by moment account of it to share his impression that the devil is in the detail: ‘Chaplin’s work is “in his own way”—even when he does something which another could have done he adds to it a touch of his own.’⁴⁵ Later critics have responded with equal or greater enthusiasm. Walter Kerr offered a detailed description of the scene to illustrate his thesis about Chaplin’s ‘philosophy’ (‘The man of all attitudes makes the universe his helpless plaything’).⁴⁶ Sobel and Francis perceived ‘a crazy logic running through it all, a perverseness in dealing with reality which, one senses, lies at the core of Chaplin’s art.’⁴⁷ For David Robinson, the scene exemplifies ‘one of [Chaplin’s] most characteristic gag constructions’: the metaphorical transformation of objects which

⁴² Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, 27.

⁴³ Raoul Sobel and David Francis, *Genesis of A Clown* (London: Quartet Books Limited, 1977), 211.

⁴⁴ See, for example: Harvey O’Higgins, ‘Charlie Chaplin’s Art,’ *The New Republic* (February 3, 1917): 16-18; André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, 146; Kerr, *The Silent Clowns*, 92; Richard Schickel, ‘Introduction: The Tramp Transformed,’ in *The Essential Chaplin: Perspectives on the Life and Art of the Great Comedian* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), 11; Matthew Bevis, *Comedy: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 29-30.

⁴⁵ Seldes, *The Seven Lively Arts*, 361.

⁴⁶ Kerr, *The Silent Clowns*, 92.

⁴⁷ Sobel and Francis, *Genesis of A Clown*, 211.

Robinson calls ‘transposition’.⁴⁸ As these examples suggest, the scene has in fact become a test-case for attempts to articulate the Chaplinesque in Chaplin’s early films. The following account aims to make a contribution to that tradition as well as an intervention into the scholarship. Chiefly, I want to show how the scene dramatises and comments on the distinctive temporal rhythms of Chaplin’s performances in general – routinely neglected by conventional accounts.

My re-reading of the clock scene from *The Pawnshop* follows from a simple shift of focus. Generally, critics have been so enraptured with Chaplin’s performance in this scene that they have overlooked an important and illuminating element: Albert Austin’s performance as the customer and his role as an onscreen audience for Chaplin’s antics. The frame composition is split evenly between Chaplin on the left and Austin on the right, inviting our attention to oscillate between the two figures (fig. 5.11). And while Austin’s performance is less spectacular than Chaplin’s, it functions in close dialogic relation to it, serving to enhance and in fact complete Chaplin’s act. When we take Chaplin’s and Austin’s performances together, as the staging and framing of the scene ask us to, we get an adjusted answer to what this sequence might encapsulate about Chaplin, and, as I will argue, a pertinent comment about the mechanics of desire driving a contemporary mass-amusement culture.



Fig. 5.11. The shot frames the two men equally for the ensuing comic double act in *The Pawnshop* (1916), encouraging the spectator’s attention to oscillate between Charlie’s actions and Austin’s responses.

⁴⁸ Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art*, 174.

Austin's performance represents spectatorial fascination with Charlie as a process. Initially Austin seems entirely uninterested in the man behind the counter, merely going through the motions of the routine exchange in which he is occupied. A subtle but noticeable change comes upon him when his gaze, returning from a lackadaisical tour of the shop, alights upon Charlie attending to his clock with an auscultator. Austin's interest is sparked by the unexpected sight and he now pays close attention to Charlie's actions (fig. 5.12). As Charlie's assessment proceeds, Austin becomes more active: he cross-references Charlie's face with his busy hands and he leans in to get a closer look (figs. 5.13 and 5.14). His performed fascination with Charlie focuses our own spectatorship in a way that accentuates the appealing eccentricity of Charlie's performance. Austin, unlike the audience, is entirely unsuspecting of Chaplin's bizarre behaviour. Thus our own pleasure in Charlie's habitual eccentricities is refreshed by seeing Austin's growing amazement as he is gradually drawn into the insanity of the performance.



Figs. 5.12 - 5.14. The apathetic Albert Austin is drawn into an absurd performance in *The Pawnshop* (1916). Austin's performed fascination dramatises Chaplin's effect upon his cinema audience.

But perhaps more striking is the way in which, having caught Austin's attention, Charlie holds it; how his performance sustains Austin in a prolonged state of fascination that seems to endlessly recycle. Austin is riveted, glancing away only a couple of times as though introspectively processing a backlog of bafflement. Charlie's striking metaphorical transformations of the clock – he treats it like a small animal, a can of food, a china tea cup, among other things – come one after another in a brisk and steady rhythm (as if to illustrate the statement in *Charlie Chaplin's Own Story*: 'the even click-click-click of the camera, running steadily, was a stimulant to me; my ideas came thick and fast').⁴⁹ This perpetual cycle of transformation, by which the clock is repeatedly reinvented, holds Austin transfixed.

⁴⁹ Lane, 'Acting-Directing Apprenticeship,' 40.

Each transformation lasts only a moment, just long enough for Austin to grasp the idea before another takes its place. One of the funniest things about the scene, I would argue, is that Austin allows his clock to be steadily destroyed before his eyes. Austin appears as though he might at any moment come to his senses and intervene, but his outrage is continually overridden by his fascination with the continually surprising performance. It is as though his common sense is temporarily short-circuited by his fascination with a nonsensical series of actions that perpetually defers the logical conclusion he seems to be awaiting. Like a juggling act, the perpetual motion of Chaplin's performance belies the absence of any actual progression, in this case towards a sensible valuation of the clock. In this way, Austin's performance as enchanted spectator draws attention to the nature of Chaplin's performance: a regular *series* of acts of invention, rhythmically predictable yet consistently surprising.

To this interpretation it must be added that Austin's presence also serves to put Charlie under pressure to perform, to keep the series going – a pressure that makes the performance all the more exciting and gives it a sense of immediacy, a sense of the live and unpredictable. As Charlie ruins the clock, we wonder when will Austin's outrage finally get the better of his curiosity. And as we realise that Charlie's work on the clock is in fact directionless, we also realise that as soon as Charlie stops coming up with new and surprising ways of handling it, he will have to face his customer. The tension builds as the scene goes on – at four minutes its duration is conspicuous – and as the clock dwindles away Charlie is left with less and less to work with. The scene thus encourages us to anticipate its termination in order to *draw attention* to the feat of its prolongation. Through this sense of imminent termination we become more acutely aware of Chaplin's ability to act, or appear to act, upon 'the spur of the moment', to make something out of nothing again and again. The seeming unsustainability of the situation and its inevitable but teasingly deferred termination is thus a necessary condition for this staged test of Charlie's spontaneity and powers of invention.

While critics have sensed the poignancy of the clock scene, they have not recognised its many precedents in earlier Chaplin films. These precedents tend to be obscured

by critics' exclusive focus on Chaplin in the scene. They become strikingly apparent, however, when the scene is understood as a double act. The first example occurs no later than *Mabel's Strange Predicament* (1914), Chaplin's third Keystone and the first full-reel film in which he appears in his iconic costume. In this scene Chester Conklin plays the role of the fascinated spectator whose attention is conspicuously prolonged by Charlie's serial surprises (figs 5.15 - 5.19). Comparable scenes occur in several Keystones, including Chaplin's directorial debut *Caught in the Rain* (1914) (figs. 5.20 - 5.24), several Essanays, including the nautical extravaganza *Shanghaied* (1915) (figs. 5.25 - 5.28), and the first scene of Chaplin's Mutual debut *The Floorwalker* (1916) (figs. 5.29 - 5.34). Many of these scenes are without the clever metaphorical 'transposition' of objects, to use Robinson's term, for which *The Pawnshop* is often celebrated, yet they all work to dramatise the same mechanics of fascination apparent in the clock scene.⁵⁰ All are constituted by a series of surprising and discrete acts that follow each other at a brisk and regular pace, thus creating a rhythm that cues the spectator into a cycle of surprise and anticipation. All feature an onscreen surrogate for the audience who vividly enacts the fascination evoked by this cycle.

⁵⁰ Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art*, 174.



Figs. 5.15 - 5.19. A drunken Charlie baffles and outrages Chester Conklin with a series of random acts in *Mabel's Strange Predicament* (1914).



Figs. 5.20 - 5.24. Charlie bewilders Mack Swain and Alice Davenport in *Caught in the Rain* (1914).



Figs. 5.25 - 5.28. Charlie mystifies a chef with a bizarre dance routine in *Shanghai'd* (1915).



Figs. 5.29 - 5.34. Charlie and Albert Austin in *The Floorwalker* (1916) enact a scene that resembles the more famous clock routine in *The Pawnshop* (1916).

In each case Chaplin's performance is put under a productive kind of pressure by the situation he is in. What Charlie is doing is always a provocative breach of propriety, be it intruding into a hotel room as in *Caught in the Rain*, or a kitchen as in *Shanghaied*, or using shop products without paying as in *The Floorwalker*, or destroying a poor man's clock as in *The Pawnshop*. In each case, his behaviour aggravates his audience and builds tension as we wonder how much insult his victim will endure, or how long Charlie will be able to hold off a probably violent reaction to his behaviour. The importance of this productive pressure in producing the exciting immediacy of Chaplin's performance is illustrated by the contrast with a considerably less effective scene in *A Night Out* (1915), Chaplin's second Essanay, in which he tries a similar routine *without* an onscreen audience. The camera framing and mise-en-scène replicate an earlier scene from *Caught in the Rain* (1914), but without the outraged couple (figs. 5.35 – 5.40). And out with the outraged couple goes the dramatic situation that framed the earlier performance and seemed to motivate Charlie's improvisation. Now Charlie is alone in his own hotel room and can take as long as he likes in fooling around with its contents. His transformative use of objects is more inventive and striking in this scene: the telephone becomes a water fountain, then a beer tap (figs. 5.35 and 5.36); his jacket, hung on a chair, comes to life when he shakes hands with its empty sleeve (figs. 5.37 and 5.38). And yet without the tension with an onscreen audience, as in the other similar scenes, the sense of immediacy is lost and the scene drags on. It is perhaps instructive that in the later incarnations of this scene – *Shanghaied*, *The Floorwalker*, *The Pawnshop* – Chaplin reinstated the onscreen audience.



Figs. 5.35 - 5.40. Chaplin recreates the hotel-room sequence from *Caught in the Rain* (1914) less successfully without an onscreen audience in *A Night Out* (1915).

In the majority of these instances of spectacular serial improvisation, Charlie must continue to invent and surprise in order to hold off his inevitable comeuppance. In *Caught in the Rain*, Swain finally confronts the intruder when he uses Swain's wife's wig to dry his face. Evidently this is one step too far and provokes Swain's outrage enough to overpower his curiosity (figs. 5.41 and 5.42). In *The Floorwalker*, as soon as Austin comes to his senses he violently reprimands Charlie for his mistreatment of the merchandise (figs. 5.43 – 5.46). Similarly in *The Pawnshop*,

Austin erupts with indignation when Charlie finally returns his now-ruined clock to him (figs. 5.47 and 5.48). These scenes are outlays of comic invention produced and given impact by self-destructive situations of necessarily limited duration. They evoke our anticipation of an abrupt conclusion at the moment Chaplin's capacious but presumably finite ability to extemporise is exhausted. Our awareness of this limited duration draws attention to the abundant spontaneity, vitality and inventiveness with which Chaplin prolongs the performance. In doing so it also conjures the fantasy that Chaplin could perhaps go on in this way indefinitely, without plan or goal, responding only to the spur of the moment and perpetually thriving in and from the instant.



Figs. 5.41 and 5.42. Charlie's intrusion becomes too much for Mack Swain and he finally interrupts Charlie's drunken antics in *Caught in the Rain* (1914).



Figs. 5.43 - 5.46. As soon as Charlie exits the frame Albert Austin comes to his senses and belatedly responds to Charlie's transgressions in *The Floorwalker* (1916).



Figs. 5.47 and 5.48. Albert Austin belatedly realises his clock has been destroyed and his anger erupts at Charlie in *The Pawnshop* (1916).

iii) 'Awful Chance[s]' and 'Terrific Test[s]': Serial Production at Essanay and Mutual⁵¹

In frequently putting Charlie in time-pressured situations that forced him to act upon the spur of the moment, Chaplin was arguably dramatising his own position as a

⁵¹ Harry C. Carr, 'Charlie Chaplin's Story, part 4,' *Photoplay* 8, no. 5 (October 1915): 99.

filmmaker. Chaplin's mode of production in the mid-1910s was quite different from that which he would adopt in the 1920s, taking his time over a single feature until it he was satisfied.⁵² At Keystone, Essanay and Mutual, Chaplin worked to demanding release schedules geared towards serial regularity, forcing him to perform under pressure as he in turn forced Charlie to perform in a variety of scenarios in his films. From 1915 to 1916, press and publicity material publicly dramatised the Chaplin craze as a time-pressured event, drawing attention to the precariousness of what one contemporary journalist called Chaplin's 'vogue in Filmdom.'⁵³

Today the canonical narrative of Chaplin's career presents the serial format as a barrier to Chaplin achieving his full artistic potential; as a stifling obstruction to be overcome. By contrast, I suggest that it was an integral part of Chaplin's film-making and part of his public reputation as a filmmaker. In what follows I will examine release records, press and publicity materials and films from between 1914 and 1917 to explore Chaplin's aesthetic relation to the serial format, in which he was, for a time, so evidently proficient and successful.

Whereas scholars have tended to present Chaplin's early films as representing a steady movement across the mid-1910s away from serial regularity, contemporary evidence suggests a different trajectory. Keystone worked to regular release schedules and here Chaplin appeared in films on an almost weekly basis. However, Keystone's release schedules were not typically organised around individual performers and therefore Chaplin's films did not form a series as such.⁵⁴ This changed with Chaplin's move to Essanay in 1915. As discussed in the previous chapter, the new Essanay-Chaplin line of films was conceived specifically as a Chaplin series.⁵⁵ Essanay evidently strove for regularity in its release of Chaplin films, even if the company did not always, or even normally, achieve it. Chaplin's

⁵² Richard Koszarski, *An Evening's Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture* (New York: Scribner; Toronto: Collier MacMillan Canada; New York: Maxwell MacMillan International, 1990), 178,

⁵³ Grau, 'Why Did Charlie Chaplin Decline,' 106.

⁵⁴ Rob King, *The Fun Factory: The Keystone Company and the Emergence of Mass Culture* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2009), 72-73.

⁵⁵ See pp. 162-163 above.

initial Essanay contract required him to produce a film for release every two weeks.⁵⁶ After the three-week delay of his eighth film, *Work*, finally released in June 1915, Essanay adjusted the release schedule to one two-reel film every three weeks, announcing this publicly in its trade-press advertising (fig. 5.49).⁵⁷ When Chaplin moved to Mutual in 1916, the ideal of serial regularity became a reality. For the first six months of the contract, Mutual released a Chaplin film at precise monthly intervals, once a month and always on a Monday. Early Mutual thus represents the peak of a trajectory towards efficient serial regularity that developed steadily between 1914 and 1916 before it rapidly declined in 1917. In this year, Chaplin's rhythmic regularity disintegrated and it came to a permanent end as soon as the Mutual contract's twelve-film quota was fulfilled. We can say that 1914 to 1916 forms a distinctive period in Chaplin's career on the basis that his films were released frequently (at least one film a month) and serially (i.e. exhibitors and moviegoers continually anticipated the next Chaplin film). This pattern was formalised most clearly in 1915 and 1916, just as the Chaplin craze was at its height, before declining rapidly in 1917 and throughout the rest of the 1910s.

⁵⁶ Robinson, *Chaplin: The Mirror of Opinion*, 27. Chaplin's second Essanay film, *A Night Out* (1915), was released on schedule, but a move of studio delayed by a week the release of his third film *The Champion* (1915). He caught up, however, by releasing *In The Park* the following week and turning out his next three films, *A Jitney Elopement* (1915), *The Tramp* (1915) and *By the Sea* (1915), on time.

⁵⁷ The new release schedule followed a three-week delay of Chaplin's eighth Essanay film *Work* (1915).



Fig. 5.49. Essanay addresses the delay of the latest Chaplin film and announces a new Chaplin series mid-way through the year, with films to be released every three weeks. [Advertisement for 'Essanay-Chaplin' series], *Moving Picture World* 25, no. 1. (July 3, 1915): 14.

Chaplin's Essanay year is particularly revealing about the nature of his seriality because at that time the implications of a dedicated Chaplin series were still being worked through. In early 1915, Essanay's marketing focused on the promise of familiarity inherent in the idea of a series. So that audiences would always know what they were getting with the Essanay-Chaplin line, Essanay's first move had been to stabilise the image that had been emerging during the previous year at Keystone. Whereas Chaplin had appeared in a range of costumes at Keystone, Essanay's initial publicity drive reiterated the now-iconic costume.⁵⁸ Towards the end of the year, however, Essanay shifted their emphasis to accommodate an element of surprise. 'Again Chaplin is found in an entirely new role', proclaimed the advance notice for *Burlesque on Carmen* (1915):

[...] Mr Chaplin apparently is able to put over something new in almost every production. You look for him as he appeared last and you find that

⁵⁸ During the previous year at Keystone, Chaplin had frequently appeared in what we know now as the Tramp costume, but not always. And he had played a range of personas, from melodrama villain in *Mabel at the Wheel* (1914) to city slicker in *Tillie's Punctured Romance* (1914). Additionally, press and publicity more commonly referred to him by his real name, 'Charles Chaplin'.

his make-up has disappeared and a new one donned [sic]. But it is the same Chaplin underneath, you find the same personality that has made him beloved all over the world.

It is largely this element of surprise that makes his fun of the top-notch variety. You expect to see one thing and you are confronted with an entirely new phase of the mysterious Chaplin. But the surprise is always pleasing and the fun is always there.⁵⁹

The notice locates the audiences' pleasure in the tension between surprise and familiarity to which the series gives play. It was this balance, Essanay seemed to realise, that was the key to prolonging audience interest in a serial format, and at striking this balance Chaplin was highly adept. In the 'Chaplinitis' article of August 1915, film journalist Charles McGuirk had already highlighted Chaplin's abundant 'versatility' as one of his fascinating and distinctive qualities. For McGuirk, as surely for many filmgoers, it prompted one to ask: 'What will he do next?' And by this point, Chaplin had evidently won audiences' trust that it would be something worth waiting for. McGuirk was convinced that, judging by his career thus far, 'the brainy little man with the far-away look in his eyes will continue to astonish and hold us yet'.⁶⁰ The following year at Mutual, Chaplin more frequently played up to his developing reputation for the unexpected: in *The Vagabond* (1916) Chaplin gave audiences his most serious dramatic role yet; in *One A.M.* (1916) he performed solo for almost the entire two reels; in *The Rink* (1916) he revealed a hidden talent for roller skating.

The anticipatory excitement of the Chaplin series, particularly during 1915, was only enhanced by the impression that his productivity and his popularity were being pushed to their limits and tested.⁶¹ In the October edition of the *Photoplay* series 'Charlie Chaplin's Story', Harry C. Carr cast the frequency of Chaplin releases in a thrilling light:

Chaplin is of the opinion that he is taking an awful chance with his popularity to be shown in a new comedy every week or so. We see Maude Adams at long intervals—once a year, perhaps, and we are eager to see her.

⁵⁹ 'Chaplin to Burlesque "Carmen,"' *Motography* 14, no. 24 (December 11, 1915): 1235.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

But would we be so keen if we could see her in four or five different plays the same night in the same town?

As Chaplin says, this is a terrific test of his popularity.

In the meantime, however, his popularity continues to increase into a veritable craze.⁶²

Carr's account makes a drama of Chaplin's work: the stakes are mounting as the demand for new films increases to 'craze' proportions, at the same time as it becomes increasingly difficult for Chaplin to keep his films fresh and surprising. Apparently quoting Chaplin, Carr describes his mode of production as 'an awful chance' and 'a terrific test'. Yet this is only ostensibly a complaint. It might also be read as a boast, drawing attention to the talent and daring required to take chances and be put to the test. On other occasions, Chaplin publicly referred to particular films in the same dare-devil terms: 'Did you see "The Tramp"?' he asked McGuirk during an interview. 'I know I took an awful chance. But did it get across?'⁶³ The following year Chaplin reportedly commented upon the film *One AM*, a two-reel solo drunk performance: 'One more like that and it's goodbye Charlie.'⁶⁴ These comments self-consciously stage Chaplin's career as a precarious balancing act: do something too unpredictable and you alienate the audience, do something too predictable and you bore them. By insisting on the possibility of a fall from fame, Chaplin's comments heighten our sense of his achievement and crank up our emotional investment in the series; they invite our participation in a live event in which the stakes are real and nothing is predetermined.

iv) Chaplin's Temporality and Craze Culture

The preceding analysis dealt with two parallel Chaplins: the persona that appeared on screen, and the filmmaker that people read about. Though separate entities, they overlapped. Both were characterised by abundant spontaneity, unpredictability, dynamism, surprise, a close relationship with the present moment and the constant possibility of metamorphosis or starting anew. Such qualities were not unique to Chaplin, however, and in exhibiting them he was also available to emblemise

⁶² Carr, 'Charlie Chaplin's Story, part 4,' 99.

⁶³ Charles McGuirk, 'Chaplinitis, Part 2,' *Motion Picture Magazine* 9, no. 7 (August 1915): 89.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Robinson, *Chaplin: Life and Art*, 172.

something beyond himself. I therefore want to outline briefly, with reference to the crazes discussed in Part I, how these qualities were the same that defined an emerging mass-amusement culture, thus situating the Chaplin craze as part of this culture – subject to its rhythms and temporalities – while at the same time emblematic of it.

As in the previous chapter, the popular songs about Chaplin that were published, performed and recorded during 1915 provide a point of entry into Chaplin's relationship to contemporary mass-amusement culture. These songs were examples of a genre that proclaimed, and attempted to cash in on, current fads. The lyrics of these songs often made explicit the short-lived and serial nature of the fads they described with lyrical structures that hinged on the formula of 'out with the old and in with the new'. The song *Those Charlie Chaplin Feet* is one example:

There's a funny man I know, who gets all people's dough,
He works in the movie show, Mr. Charlie Chaplin.
Dancing in the cabaret, is a thing of bygone days,
Here's the latest and the greatest craze...⁶⁵

This is the first verse. It sets up the now-outdated fashion for 'dancing in the cabaret' just in time for it to be elbowed aside by a rollicking chorus celebrating 'the latest and the greatest craze': 'those Charlie Chaplin feet'. Another 1915 Chaplin song, *That Charlie Chaplin Walk*, exemplifies the same formula with an opening verse that describes the recent dance craze in some detail:

Remember when everyone danced in the town?
It got such a hold on the people around.
Made such a hit that they all got it bad
And everybody just simply went mad.
It got so they danced all the nights and the days,
If you were good you made a hit.
But since moving pictures became all the craze
Everyone now must admit...⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Edgar Leslie and Archie Gottler, *Those Charlie Chaplin Feet* (New York: Maurice Abraham's Music Co., 1915), 2-3. Chaplin mentions the *Those Charlie Chaplin Feet* in his autobiography, recalling that it was featured in the Ziegfeld Follies of 1915 as a dance number complete with a Chaplin-costumed chorus line. Chaplin, *My Autobiography*, 172. The song was also recorded by the popular vaudeville duo Collins and Harlan for Columbia Records, and by the Victor Military Band as an instrumental version. See: 'The National Jukebox: Historical Recordings from the Library of Congress,' The Library of Congress, accessed July 10, 2014, <http://www.loc.gov/jukebox/>.

⁶⁶ Nat D. Ayer, *That Charlie Chaplin Walk* (London: B. Feldman & Co, 1915).

The verse uses the examples of the dance craze to set up the generic features of amusement crazes: their contagious spread over all ‘the people around’; their habitual ‘hold’ upon people; their expanding consumption of both the ‘nights and days’; their ‘mad’ intensity. Having called these familiar craze features to mind, it transfers them to the new craze for Chaplin, described in a chorus that concludes: ‘London, Paris or New York / Everybody does that Charlie Chaplin Walk.’ The attitude of these songs towards their subjects is irreverent and playfully ironic. To ask the listener if they ‘remember[ed] when everyone danced in the town’ and to call dancing ‘a thing of bygone days’ was a joke. The dance craze was reaching a peak at this time and very much a current and topical issue. Yet the song also winks to the listener who knew how craze activities were short-lived and perpetually being displaced. The song implicitly acknowledges that as a ‘craze’, Chaplin was also subject to this perpetual process of renewal. It does so without sentimentality. Rather, the acknowledgment contributes a cynical undertone in the song’s irreverent and devil-may-care celebration of the present.

As briefly discussed in the previous chapter, another popular song formula that was appropriated by Chaplin songs was that which named and explained new dance steps – what dance historians Marshall and Jean Stearns identify as a historically specific ‘genre’ of ‘dance-songs with instructions’.⁶⁷ ‘A funny step has struck the town’ announced one such song, *Charlie Chaplin Walk*, by William Downs and Roy Barton. The line, ‘If you knew it, you could do it / Here’s the way you walk right through it’, pre-empts the verse, leading into an instructional chorus:

Put your two heels close up tight,
Swing your cane, fix your hat just right,
Shuff, shuff, shuff, shuff shuffle with ease
Pointing your toes out at ninety degrees.
Next you raise your right foot so,
Round, round, round on your left you go.
Oh joy, ‘at a boy, that’s the funny Charlie Chaplin Walk.

⁶⁷ Marshall Stearns and Jean Stearns, *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* (1964; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 95.

The instructional dance song was a recent development in popular song that accompanied the revolution in social dance between 1912 and 1915.⁶⁸ Perry Bradford's *Messin' Round* was an early example in 1912 that prefigures 'The Charlie Chaplin Walk' in obvious ways:

Now anyone can learn the knack,
Put your hands on your hips and bend your back,
Stand in one spot, nice and light,
Twist around with all your' might,
Messin' round, they call that messin' round.⁶⁹

Emerging initially from the black vaudeville circuit in the early 1910s, the format was soon taken up and conventionalised by Tin Pan Alley to cash in on and disseminate new dances to larger, white audiences.⁷⁰ As with 'That Charlie Chaplin Walk' and 'Those Charlie Chaplin Feet', the dance songs revelled in the endless succession of styles, as in this example from Shelton Brook's hit of 1916, *Walking the Dog*:

You were all crazy 'bout the "Bunny Hug,"
Most ev'ry body was a "Tango Bug."
But now, some-how, the funny Dog-walk,
Is all the town talk.⁷¹

Such lyrics affirm and celebrate the immediate present by constantly rehearsing the movement from past to present tense: 'You *were* all crazy', 'Most ev'ry body *was*' / 'But *now*', 'the funny Dog-walk *is*'. Chaplin evidently suited this format of songs as a widely topical man of the moment.

But Chaplin excited audience not only because he was the latest item in the fashion parade. The dynamics of the whole parade were also replicated within his own film-making. He was famous for delighting his audiences with surprises, for keeping them guessing. Be it in his wildly eccentric actions in a particular scene, or

⁶⁸ Stearns and Stearns, *Jazz Dance*, 95-114.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Stearns and Stearns, *Jazz Dance*, 107.

⁷⁰ Stearns and Stearns, *Jazz Dance*, 106-108.

⁷¹ Shelton Brooks, *Walkin' the Dog* (Chicago: Will Rossiter, 1916), 1.

his versatility from film to film, Chaplin thrilled audiences with a sense of immediacy and instantaneity. And in this sense, Chaplin occupied a peculiar position in relation to the larger culture of mass-amusement crazes in which he was enveloped. On the one hand, the Chaplin craze was a short-lived fad fuelled by its own novelty and topicality, both necessarily limited resources bestowed in the first place by the serial mechanics of a larger amusement culture. On the other hand, the Chaplin craze is a body of films that embodies the temporality and rhythms of the emerging culture to which it was also subject. The public excitement over dance crazes and new amusement crazes was founded on the same larger cultural fascination with the present. To borrow Doane's terms, they offered an experience of 'time unharnessed from rationalization, a nonteleological time in which each moment can produce the unexpected, the unpredictable'.⁷² Chaplin did not transcend the Chaplin the contemporary amusement culture. If Chaplin appealed to his audiences' desire for immediacy and perpetual novelty at every instant – with every click of the camera turning over or with every film – then he was also appealing to the same desires that threatened his own longevity. The question 'What next?' that Chaplin was able to keep his audience asking, could easily become 'Who next?' Chaplin's popular success in filmmaking in the mid-teens owed much to his ingenuity in perpetually provoking the first question and thereby deferring the second.

⁷² Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, 22.

CONCLUSION

It has been the aim of this thesis to release Chaplin's early films, specifically those made between 1914 and 1916, from critical assumptions that, I argue, limit our historical understanding and aesthetic appreciation of this extraordinary body of work. Of course, the films cannot be 'released' into a vacuum: this process goes hand in hand with establishing new relationships and interpretations. I have attempted to do so by rethinking Chaplin's relationship to the transformational amusement culture of a specific period in American history, a culture whose relevance to Chaplin, Chaplin scholars have at best underestimated and at worst ignored. The major results of this rethinking and accompanying analysis are, I hope, a more historically attuned understanding of Chaplin's early career and a more aesthetically sensitive appreciation of his early films.

This thesis has confronted two specific critical assumptions central to conventional assessments and interpretations of Chaplin's early career and films. The first is that Chaplin's early films always and principally anticipate his later 'classic' feature films, for example, *The Gold Rush* (1925), *City Lights* (1931) or *Modern Times* (1936). Of course, in many ways they do. However, much is lost when Chaplin's early films are valued, as they often are, *only insofar as* they anticipate later feature films. The second assumption confronted is that Chaplin's contemporary appeal and enduring value are best located where he marks his independence from, and thereby transcends, the formal conventions and the production dynamics of contemporary amusement culture. Again, much is lost once Chaplin's early films have passed through this reductive critical filter. By contrast this thesis has urged greater caution about such teleological assumptions and, concomitantly, a greater receptivity to the contemporary amusement culture from which Chaplin emerged. It has demonstrated how changing our approach in this way enhances the informed enjoyment of Chaplin's early works taken on their own terms. It has done this by illuminating some of the symbiotic ways in which the emergence of mass-amusement culture shaped Chaplin and he shaped it.

Since the great surge of critical interest in Chaplin in the 1970s, critics have tended to celebrate his greatness as a filmmaker in terms of his ability to transcend his moment. Critics emphasise his independence as a filmmaker and the timeless

emotional appeal of his classic feature films. The problem is that in doing so they often sublimate the very qualities which, I would argue, made Chaplin's early films great in their own moment, for example their playful allusiveness and the dexterity with which they tapped into contemporary controversies. These aspects only become apparent when we locate the films in their specific historical context. Moreover, also side-lined by an overly teleological approach to Chaplin's early films are other more self-evident qualities that do not require historical background knowledge, such as the films' delightfully unpredictable diversity of effects and their sheer exhilarating craziness.

Three principle findings of this thesis can be summarised here, all contributing to the central project of taking Chaplin's early films and career more on their own terms. Firstly, comparing the depiction and dramatic function of craze amusements in Chaplin's earlier and later films (Part I) has illuminated a distinction between Charlie's early comic persona and his later, more well-known one. In classic features such as *City Lights* (1931) and *Modern Times* (1936), Charlie is an innocent, naive character who is continuously imperilled by a modern world which his simple and inherently decent nature is constitutionally unable to comprehend. Yet, we have seen how in the early films, *Caught in a Cabaret* (1914), *A Night in the Show* (1915) and *The Rink* (1916), for example, Charlie's early persona aligns itself *with* the disruptive effects conventionally attributed to the 'new' amusements of modernity. This alignment of Charlie and modernity *within* Chaplin's early films, was also in keeping with his iconic significance in the mid-1910s as a symbol of modernity in its exciting, liberating, threatening and destructive aspects, as explored in Chapter 4. Interpreting Chaplin this way represents a significant intervention into his critical legacy since critics have generally interpreted the early persona as an *absence* of a distinctive persona – a reading that tends to delegitimise defining qualities of his early films and distort their contemporary cultural resonance.

A second finding of this thesis is the strong presence of developmental trajectories within Chaplin's films between 1914 and 1916, that are distinct, and even run counter to, the single overarching trajectory of Chaplin's film-making career as this has been conventionally traced. One such trajectory concerns the rhythms of production and reception. Critics have tended to find support for the narrative of Chaplin's growing independence and artistic vision in the lengthening of the time Chaplin spent on each film, implying a constant development from 1914

into the 1930s. As I argued in Chapter 5, however, this interpretation of events fails to take notice of another story: between 1914 and 1916, Chaplin became increasingly adept at regular serial production. This development culminated in six months of regular monthly releases in 1916, before it then unravelled in 1917. The release of *The Kid* in 1921 heralded Chaplin's 'comeback', as it was then referred to, as a maker of feature films, this being a different kind of film-making which entailed a different kind of relationship with the audience.¹

The development of regular serial film releases is important because it forms the context in which aspects of Chaplin's film-making that have previously been neglected can be re-appreciated. Significantly, it reveals how diversity and surprise, and even, in Alan Dale's phrase, a kind of 'managed incoherence' of persona from film to film, constitute the appeal and excitement of Chaplin's early films.² Focusing on the serial nature of Chaplin's early releases also informs an understanding of the temporal nature of the Chaplin craze as a cultural phenomenon: a 'live' experience in which audiences participated by following the films as they were released one at a time. At its broadest, Chaplin's seriality can be seen as reflecting and engaging with an emerging culture of mass-amusement that was fascinated by immediacy and the present moment, and sought perpetually to generate the sensation of novelty within regularised, rationalised frameworks.

The other important developmental trajectory within Chaplin's 1914 to 1916 films traced by this thesis is Chaplin's increasing focus on himself as the embodied source of comedy in his films. This is not in itself an original observation. It is conventional to discuss how as Chaplin's films developed, particularly between 1914 and 1915, he came to the fore as the exclusive centre of attention.³ However, my argument is specifically about how Chaplin channelled *existing* comic ideas – from Keystone and from craze culture more generally – into his solo performance; how, in other words, Chaplin's films were increasingly able to showcase the vigorously disruptive dynamics of contemporary amusement culture in the person of one brilliantly maverick exemplary figure. This development allowed Chaplin to become a more distinctive and distinguished performer, but this distinction was not achieved,

¹ Burns Mantle, 'The Shadow Stage,' *Photoplay* 19, no. 5 (April 1921): 51.

² Alan Dale, *Comedy is a Man in Trouble: Slapstick in American Movies* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 38.

³ For a classic account, see: Walter Kerr, *The Silent Clowns* (New York; Knopf, 1975), 72-73.

as critics have often implied, *in opposition* to Keystone or contemporary amusement culture more widely. This distinction is instead a matter of the *distillation* and *intensification* of existing comic sources. Chapter 4 traced this trajectory with specific reference to Chaplin's use of Keystone's comic strategies. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 demonstrated the same trajectory in relation to Chaplin's use of past and present amusement crazes as comic source material.

Finally, a third finding of the thesis is a symbiotic relationship between Chaplin's rise to fame and rapid development as a filmmaker between 1914 and 1916, on the one hand, and the dynamism and volatility of emergent mass-amusement culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, on the other. As the three case studies in Part I are intended to demonstrate, the rise of new amusements such as roller skating, ragtime dance and moving pictures corresponded to a profound transformation in American leisure. People of all classes began to 'step out' – to borrow Lewis Erenberg's phrase – from socially enclosed private spheres into the more open sphere of commercialised amusement.⁴ Amusement entrepreneurs responsible for the expansion of this commercialised public world found that masses of people of various social categories could be lured by the promise of emancipatory mobility, both bodily and social. As Lauren Rabinovitz has shown in the case of amusement parks, new amusements offered to 'liberate[...] the body from its normal limitations of placement and movement in daily life' and to free participants, if momentarily, from their social identities in the oppressively class-based society of industrial capitalism. The emergence of new amusements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were manifestations of this development in American leisure. Meanwhile, the public furore and controversy that these amusements inspired, and the whole rhetoric of 'crazes' that accompanied their rise, represented extravagant stagings of debates about deeper social and cultural transformations. The crazes were public dramas in which the fantasies and anxieties of a changing society were played out in hyperbolic figures and forms. Chaplin's rise in the mid-1910s should be recognised, I argue, as one of these crazes, and the emergence of mass-amusement culture should be recognised as an important subtext for Chaplin's films.

⁴ Lewis Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Night Life and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

Among the mass amusement crazes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Chaplin craze was not the most dramatic. If press reportage can be taken as a sufficient indicator, then roller skating, dance and moving pictures generated greater, more ferocious controversies, in which concerns about sexual conduct, gender roles, class hierarchy and national culture were raised to a more intense pitch of moral panic. But such amusement controversies nevertheless form the context in which Chaplin became not only a popular screen comedian but a national and, in fact, international obsession and public figure in the mid-1910s. The excitement over Chaplin in this period involved the same concerns about a changing society and culture, displaced as they often were from cinema in general onto Chaplin as its representative embodiment. Moreover, the Chaplin craze relied on the same dynamics of controversy that characterised other mass-amusement crazes. Like these, the Chaplin craze was not merely an expression of the ‘popular energies’ or ‘popular vitality’ often ascribed to popular culture, but the result of the dialogical interplay of conflicting responses to wider cultural transformations.⁵



Figures 6.1 and 6.2. Charlie’s attempt to locate his inner artist by executing a portrait devolves into broad slapstick in *The Face on the Barroom Floor* (1914).

To close this thesis I return to the scene with which it began, with Chaplin bathetically deflating the fine art of portraiture with an eruption of broad slapstick in *The Face on the Barroom Floor* (1914). I initially invoked this scene as a call to read

⁵ Rob King, *The Fun Factory: The Keystone Company and the Emergence of Mass Culture* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2009), 169; John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1989), 20.

Chaplin's early films on their own terms: as fine slapstick and as part of an emerging amusement culture. I reinvoked it to set the scene for my closing remarks on the further implications of this study. Like much of the mass-amusement culture considered in this thesis, and like the phenomenon of the craze itself, the gag in question can be viewed as a joyous affirmation of the present. Charlie begins with a cartoonish impersonation of a fine artist. Preparing to depict his lost love, he gazes off beyond the frame, squinting his eyes as if to shut out the particularities of his moment and location and bring into focus the timeless essence of his imagined sitter (fig. 6.1). But this act is mockingly derailed as he totters precariously and topples on his rear end, his artistic intentions giving way to an uproarious demonstration of slapstick tumbling (fig. 6.2). The yearning for transcendent aesthetic pleasure implied by Chaplin's impression of a portrait artist, is thus usurped by the corporeality and immediacy of slapstick, affirming his embodiedness in the moment. Thanks to the repeatability of the film medium (and the continuing work of film preservation and restoration in supporting this), this celebration of the present can, paradoxically perhaps, be replayed and replayed and so enjoyed beyond its original moment. However, it might also cue us to think more historically about Chaplin's early films, for Chaplin was 'a man of his moment' in more ways than one: not only within the self-contained dramas of his films, but also in a broader cultural setting. By attending in detail to the historical specifics of amusement culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as this thesis has done, we can, I argue, appreciate Chaplin the more as an intense and specific talent working in and with the materials and predispositions of his moment.

By recognising early Chaplin in this way we are presented with opportunities for engaging imaginatively with a past cultural moment, but also for reflecting on the way in which we experience, criticise and enjoy our own cultural present. Like Chaplin's absurd portraitist in *The Face on the Barroom Floor*, we too need an occasional bump with our immediate surroundings to re-sensitise us to where we are and what we have.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

[Advertisement for Essanay-Chaplin series]. *Moving Picture World* 23, no. 1 (January 2, 1915): 8

[Advertisement for Essanay-Chaplin series]. *Moving Picture World* 23, no. 2 (January 9, 1915): 165.

[Advertisement for Essanay-Chaplin series]. *Moving Picture World* 23, no. 8 (February 20, 1915): 1084.

[Advertisement for Charles Chaplin souvenir figures]. *Moving Picture World* 24, no. 2 (April 10, 1915): 322.

[Advertisement for 'Essanay-Chaplin' series]. *Moving Picture World* 25, no. 1. (July 3, 1915): 14.

Aberdeen Daily News. 'Bacon's Skating Mishap. Incident That Depletes Character of New Assistant Secretary of State.' September 25, 1905, 5.

Addams, Jane. *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*. 1909. Reprint, New York: Macmillan, 1930.

Anaconda Standard. 'More on Chaplin.' August 8, 1915, 7.

'Answer Department.' *Motion Picture Magazine* 10, no. 10 (November 1915): 138.

Ayer, Nat D. *That Charlie Chaplin Walk*. London: B. Feldman & Co, 1915.

Attenborough, Richard. *Directors Series*. Interview by John A. Gallagher. 1992. Accessed, April 26, 2012. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=agunnHHLXkA>.

Barry, Richard. 'Tango Pirates Infest Broadway Afternoon Dances.' *New York Times*. May 30, 1915, sec. V, 16.

Berlin, Irving. *Follow the Crowd*. Waterson, Berlin & Snyder Co., 1914.

———. *The Syncopated Walk*. New York: Irving Berlin Inc., 1914.

Blaisdell, George. 'Here and There. Charles Chaplin in "The Bank" Shows us a New Player and Opens Up Possibilities for the Future.' *Moving Picture World* 25, no. 11 (September 1915): 1836.

'Brief Montreal Notices.' *Moving Picture World* 29, no. 7 (August 1915): 1197.

———. "'Tillie's Punctured Romance." Marie Dressler, in Sennett's Six-Reel Keystone Will Contribute Much to the Gayety of Nations.' *Moving Picture World* 22, no. 7 (November 1914): 914.

Brooks, Shelton. *Walkin' the Dog*. Chicago: Will Rossiter, 1916.

Blume, Addison. 'Letters to the Editor.' *Moving Picture Magazine* 10, no. 8 (September 1915): 178.

Boston Daily Advertiser. 'Keith's New Theatre.' March 2, 1897, 5.

———. 'Plays Next Week.' May 22, 1897, 8.

Boston Journal. 'Court Record.' July 31, 1880, 2.

———. 'Modern Dance Craze Hits Puritan Capital.' May 11, 1914, 7.

Boston Sunday Journal. [Advertisement for vaudeville programme at Keith's Theatre]. December 5, 1897, 15.

Burchell, H. P. *Spalding's Roller Skating Guide*. New York: American Sports Publishing Company, 1906.

Callow, Simon. 'The Divine Comedy of a Very Difficult Man.' *Guardian Weekly*. June 6, 2014, 36.

Carey, John. 'From Tramp to Tyrant.' *Sunday Times*. March 30, 2014, 29-30.

Carr, Harry C. 'Charlie Chaplin's Story, Part I.' *Photoplay* 8, no. 2 (July 1915): 27-31.

———. 'Charlie Chaplin's Story, Part II.' *Photoplay* 8, no. 3 (August 1915): 43-46.

———. 'Charlie Chaplin's Story, Part III.' *Photoplay* 8, no. 4 (September 1915): 107-111.

———. 'Charlie Chaplin's Story, Part IV.' *Photoplay* 8, no. 5. (October 1915): 97-102.

———. 'Mack Sennett—Laugh Tester. The Man Who Makes the Keystone Comedies,' *Photoplay* 12, no. 3 (May, 1915): 71-76.

Castle, Vernon and Irene Castle. *Modern Dancing*. New York: The World Syndicate Company, 1914.

'Chaplin in Revue.' *Photoplay* 8, no. 1 (June 1915): 115.

'Chaplin to Burlesque "Carmen".' *Motography*. 14, no. 24 (December 11, 1915): 1235.

Charlotte Daily Observer. [Advertisement for film programme at Amuse-U theatre], August 8, 1915, 10.

Chicago Tribune. 'Samples of Rag Time Music Found in Works of Great Composers.' December 30, 1899, 13.

———. 'Traces Crime to Nickel Theater. Judge Cleland say Juvenile Offenders Owe Downfall to This Cause.' April 14, 1907, sec. I, 5.

'Close Ups. The Case of Charlie Chaplin.' *Photoplay* 8, no. 6 (November 1915): 49-50.

Conrad, Peter. 'Forget London: Charlie Chaplin Belongs to Us All.' *Sunday Independent*. April 20, 2014, 22.

———. 'A Superstar Who Suffered in Silence.' *The Observer*. April 6, 2014, 36.

Currie, Barton W. 'The Nickel Madness.' *Harper's Weekly* 51 (August 1907): 1246.

Dallas Morning News. 'About Moving Pictures.' January 17, 1909, 6.

Duluth News Tribune. 'Escape is Impossible! When All the World is Mad over the Dance Craze, How Can Duluth Get Away?' February 8, 1914, 3.

———. 'Orpheum.' January 24, 1914, 3.

———. 'Our Principle Excitement.' February 20, 1911, 3.

———. 'Short Lived crazes.' *Duluth News Tribune*. July 29, 1892, 2.

———. 'Slapstick and Pie Throwing of Movies Past Uneasy Lies Head of the Comedy King.' February 27, 1918, 6.

———. 'The Roller Skating Craze.' March 19, 1885, 4.

Edmonds, I. G. *The Big U: Universal in the Silent Days*. South Brunswick, New Jersey: A.S. Barnes, 1977.

Egan, Raymond and Richard A. Whiting. *And the Called it Dixieland (They Made it Twice as Nice as Paradise)*. New York: Jerome H. Remick & Co, 1916.

Eubank, Victor. 'The Funniest Man on Screen.' *Motion Picture Magazine* 9, no. 2 (March 1915): 75-77.

Evening Bulletin (San Francisco). 'The Roller Skate Imbrogio.' September 25, 1871, 1.

Evening News (San Jose, California). 'Short Lived Crazes.' August 5, 1892, 4.

Evening Standard (San Jose, California). 'Originator of "Ragtime" Ned Wayburn's Claims to Authorship Disputed.' December 13, 1899, 3.

'Film Notes in Washington.' *Moving Picture World* 24, no. 13 (June 26, 1915): 2131.

Fiske, Minnie Maddern. 'The Art of Charles Chaplin.' *Harper's Weekly* 62 (May 6, 1916): 494.

Gazette Telegraph [published as *Colorado Spring Gazette*]. 'What the Press Agents Say "His Trysting Place".' February 17, 1915, 7.

Grand Forks Herald. 'Crazes.' January 12, 1886, 4.

———. 'Nubs of News.' December 7, 1900, 4.

Grau, Robert. 'Why Did Charlie Chaplin Decline a \$5000 a-Week Vaudeville Offer?' *Motion Picture Magazine* 10, no. 9 (October 1915): 106.

Harrison, Louis Reeves. 'A Comedy to Those Who Think.' *Moving Picture World* 25, no. 5 (July 31, 1915): 788.

Hartford Daily Courant. 'The Rink. Experiences with Roller Skates.' November 15, 1869, 2.

Hartt, Rollin Lynde. *The People at Play: Excursions into the Humor and Philosophy of Popular Amusements*. 1909. Memphis: General Books, 2010.

Hughes-Hallett, Lucy. 'Book of the Week.' *Sunday Telegraph*. March 30, 2014, 27.

Houston Daily Union. [Advertisement for Barwise and Wayne, proprietors of Plimpton's Patent Roller Skates]. December, 14 1871, 3.

Idaho Daily Statesman. 'A Fall in Indianapolis.' December 10, 1892, 7.

———. 'Roller Skates Again.' July 4, 1895, 5.

Idaho Statesman. 'Roller Skating Craze. Prospective Revival of a Once Popular Pastime.' January 20, 1898, 5.

Johnson, James Weldon. *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. 1912. Reprint, New York: Penguin, 1990.

Johnston, William A. 'The Church, The Saloon, the Politician and the Picture.' *Motion Picture News* 12, no. 2 (July 17, 1915): 52.

———. 'The Public and the Other Side.' *Motion Picture News* 11, no. 16 (April 10, 1915): 33-34.

Jolo. 'Ragtime vs. Classical.' *Variety*, December 23, 1911.

Joplin, Scott. 'School of Ragtime: Six Exercises for Piano.' New York: Scott Joplin, 1908. In *Scott Joplin Collected Piano Works, Vol. I*, edited by Vera Brodsky Lawrence, 283-286. New York: New York Public Library, 1971.

Kansas City Evening Star. 'The History of Roller Skating.' April 15, 1885, 1.

Kansas City Star. 'Have you the Chaplinoia? Kansas City in the Throes of a Movie Mania Epidemic.' September 3, 1915, 6.

———. 'Getting Away from the Dance Craze.' *Kansas City Star*. August 15, 1914, 10.

Kelly, Kitty. 'Flickerings from Filmland.' *Chicago Daily Tribune*. February 2, 1915, 10.

Kühl, Gustav. 'Rag Time.' *Die Musik* 1 (August 1902):1972-1976. Reprinted as 'The Musical Possibilities of Rag-Time.' Translated by Gustav Saenger. *Metronome* 19 (March 1903): 11; (April 1903): 8.

Knoxville Journal. 'Short Lived Crazes.' August 4, 1892, 3.

Koenig, Karl, ed. *Jazz in Print (1856-1929): An Anthology of Selected Early Readings in Jazz History*. Hilldale, New York: Pendragon Press, 2002.

Lane, Rose Wilder. 'Acting-Directing Apprenticeship with Mack Sennett.' In *Focus on Chaplin*, edited by Donald W. McCaffrey, 30-42. Englewood Cliff, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971.

———. *Charlie Chaplin's Own Story*. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1916.

Leslie, Edgar and Archive Gottler. *Those Charlie Chaplin Feet*. New York: Maurice Abraham's Music Co., 1915.

Lewis, Roger. 'Charlie Chaplin, by Peter Ackroyd.' *The Spectator*. April 12, 2014, 22.

Lexington Herald. [Advertisement for film programme at Ada Meade theatre]. February 21, 1915, 8.

———. ‘As to Roller Skating.’ January 31, 1907, 9.

Madison, Frank H. ‘North Western Briefs.’ *Moving Picture World* 11, no. 12 (March 27, 1915): 1955

———. ‘Pictures and People.’ *Moving Picture World* 24, no. 10 (June 5, 1915): 1637.

Mantle, Burns. ‘The Shadow Stage.’ *Photoplay* 19, no. 5 (April 1921): 51-53.

‘Manufacturers Advance Notices. “A Night Out” (Essanay).’ *Moving Picture World* 23, no. 9 (February 27, 1915): 1307.

‘Manufacturers Advance Notices. “His New Job” (Essanay).’ *Moving Picture World* 23, no. 6 (February 6, 1915): 845.

Marbury, Elisabeth. ‘Introduction.’ In Vernon Castle and Irene Castle, *Modern Dancing*, 19-29. New York: World Syndicate Co., 1914.

Martin, May B. ‘Letters to the Editor.’ *Moving Picture Magazine* 10, no. 8 (September 1915): 178.

Mason, Daniel Gregory. ‘Folk-Song and American Music (A Plea for an Unpopular Point of View).’ *Musical Quarterly* 4 (July 1918): 323-332.

McGuirk, Charles. ‘Chaplinitis, Part 1.’ *Motion Picture Magazine* 9, no. 6 (July 1915): 121-123.

———. ‘Chaplinitis, Part 2.’ *Motion Picture Magazine* 10, no. 7 (August 1915): 85-89.

Miami Herald Record [published as the *Miami Herald*]. ‘Gossip from Gay Gotham Day by Day.’ August 8, 1914, 2.

Milne, Peter. 'Shanghaied.' *Motion Picture News* 12, no. 15 (October 16, 1915): 89.

Moderwell, Hiram K. 'Ragtime,' *New Republic* 9, no. 50 (October 16, 1915): 284-286.

Morning Oregonian. 'An Editor's Impatience With Present-Day Photoplays.' *Moving Picture News* 12, no. 11 (September 18, 1915): 40.

———. 'Bear Dance Craze. New York Society's Fondness for "Bunny Hug" Shocks.' January 15, 1912, 3.

———. 'Wiggle Dance Craze Seizes upon Seaside.' September 1, 1912, 8.

'Moving Pictures Aid to Temperance.' *Photoplay* 8, no. 6 (November 1915): 43.

Münsterberg, Hugo. *Psychology and Social Sanity*. London: T. F. Unwin, 1914.

———. 'The Photoplay: A Psychological Study.' 1916. In *Hugo Münsterberg on Film: The Photoplay: A Psychological Study and Other Writings*, edited by Allan Langdale, 45-162. New York: Routledge, 2002.

'Musings of "The Photoplay Philosopher".' *Motion Picture Magazine* 9, no. 3 (April, 1915): 107-108, 165.

New Haven Evening Register. 'Bishop Huntingdon on Roller Skates.' April 16, 1885, 3.

New Orleans Times. 'Roller Skating.' August 29, 1875, 1.

New York Clipper. 'Current Film Events. Censor Board Starts Something with Chaplin's Second Essanay Picture "A Night Out".' March 6, 1915, 12.

New York Herald. 'Blocking the Wheels. Common Council to Encounter the Roller Skating Craze.' March 10, 1885, 4.

———. 'Cheap Shows Peril to Children.' December 24, 1908.

———. 'The Roller Skating Craze. Bishop Huntington on the Attractions and Dangers of the Rink.' April 16, 1885, 4.

———. 'The Roller Skating Craze. Rinks Springing Up All Over the City and More Wanted.' March 15, 1885, 8.

New York Times. 'Amazing Developments in the Moving Picture Field.' September 7, 1913, 4.

———. 'Do Women Lack Cultivated Literary Taste? Harry Leon Wilson Thinks They Do and Deplores the Condition of Modern Fiction.' November 21, 1915, 17.

———. 'Eloped with a Roller Skater.' February 21, 1885, 1.

———. 'Evils of Roller Skating. The Providence Rinks to be Closed on Grounds of Immorality.' December 5, 1885, 2.

———. 'Gliding about on Roller Skates.' December 16, 1884, 3.

———. 'Influence of Social Follies.' January 5, 1912, 12.

———. 'Moral Skating Rinks. Chicago Rink Managers a Board of Censors on Moral Conduct.' March 22, 1885, 7.

———. 'Police Permit Only Tame Vaudeville.' December 28, 1908, 1.

———. 'Preferred to a Coachman. Roller Skating "Professor" Elopes with an Heiress.' February 14, 1885, 1.

- . ‘Ruined by Roller Skating.’ July 18, 1885, 8.
- . ‘The Lone Survivor of a One-Time Popular Sport.’ January 9, 1910, 9.
- . ‘The Craze Coming to an End.’ May 3, 1885, 1.
- . ‘The Roller Skate Industry. Manufacturers Making Hay While the Sun Shines.’ March 18, 1885, 3.
- . ‘The Skating Mania.’ May 18, 1885, 4.
- . ‘They Met in a Skating Rink.’ March 10, 1885, 3.
- . ‘Those Terrible Rinks. Roller Skating Ruins the Hudson River Theatrical Business.’ March 11, 1885, 2.
- . ‘Welfare Inspector at Society Dance.’ January 4, 1912, 1.
- . ‘Women Aroused by Dance Evils.’ May 27, 1915, 11.
- New York Tribune.* ‘Denunciation of Charlie Chaplin.’ October 13, 1915, 9.
- . ‘Germans Check Drive of Caine.’ August 21, 1915, 7.
- . ‘Giants Twice Bring Dismay to the Reds.’ July 10, 1915, 12.
- . ‘Ibsen Gains on Charley Chaplin.’ September 17, 1915, 7.
- . ‘The Roller-Skating Craze.’ February 8, 1885, 6.
- . ‘Wage War On Shows. Mayor Hears Evidence.’ December 24, 1908, 4.
- New York World.* [Advertisement for cinématographe exhibitions at B. F. Keith’s vaudeville theatres], June 28, 1896, 14

Nye, Edgar Wilson. 'An Essay on Roller Skates.' *The Telegraph and Messenger (Macon, Georgia)*, March 25, 1883, 1.

———. 'With a Yoicks, Tally-Ho! Bill Nye Relates His Experiences While Enjoying the Pleasures of the Chase.' *Daily Inter Ocean (Chicago)*. October 19, 1887, 7.

———. *Remarks*. 1888. Reprint, Chicago: Thompson and Thomas, 1891.

O'Higgins, Harvey. 'Charlie Chaplin's Art.' *New Republic* 10, no. 118 (February 3, 1917): 16-18.

Omaha World Herald [published as *Morning World Herald*]. 'Short-Lived Crazes.' July 19, 1892, 6.

Pangburn, Clifford H. 'Tillie's Punctured Romance.' *Motion Picture News* 10, no. 19 (November 14, 1914): 40.

Pawtucket Times [published as *The Evening Times*]. 'Advertisements.' February 20, 1915, 7.

People's Institute and Women's Municipal League. *Cheap Amusement Shows in Manhattan: Preliminary Report of Investigation*. New York: People's Institute and Women's Municipal League, 1908. Subjects Papers, Papers Relating to the Formation and Subsequent History of the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures, box 170, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library.

Philadelphia Inquirer. 'At the Theatres.' June 27, 1897, 19.

———. 'Never Another Skate.' June 30, 1902, 13.

———. 'Roller Rink Reform. Mayor Smith Requested by Managers to Investigate Their Establishments.' April 28, 1885, 2.

———. ‘The Bicycle Craze. Reformed Presbyterians Are Opposed to Riding on Sunday.’ May 25, 1898, 2.

———. ‘The Button Craze.’ March 10, 1900, 11.

———. ‘There’s a Craze for Gymnastics.’ April 26, 1900, 11.

Plimpton, James Leonard. Improvement in skates. U.S Patent 37305. January 6, 1863.

‘Questions and Answers.’ *Etude* 16 (October 1898): 285.

Salt Lake Telegram [published as *The Evening Telegram*]. [Advertisement for film programme at Broadway theatre]. August, 8, 1915, 24.

———. ‘Roller-Skating Craze.’ April 25, 1906, 3.

Sargent, Epes Winthrop. ‘Advertising for Exhibitors.’ *Moving Picture World* 24, no. 4 (April 24, 1915): 547-548.

———. ‘Advertising for Exhibitors.’ *Moving Picture World* 26, no. 2 (October 9, 1915): 242-244.

———. ‘Advertising for Exhibitors.’ *Moving Picture World* 26, no. 5 (October 30, 1915): 782-783.

———. ‘The Photoplaywright. Miss Justice on Comedy.’ *Moving Picture World* 24, no. 8 (May 22, 1915): 1253.

Saturday Morning Citizen [published as the *Beverly Citizen*]. ‘Short Lived Crazes.’ October 1, 1892, 4.

The State (Columbia, South Carolina). ‘Advertisements.’ August 8, 1915, 19.

Richardson, Anna Steese. "“Filmitis,” the Modern Malady,’ *McClure’s Magazine* 46, no. 3 (January 1916): 12-14; 70.

Stesch, Evelyn. ‘Letters to the Editor.’ *Motion Picture Magazine* 10, no. 11 (December 1915): 168-169.

St. Louis Republic. ‘The Play.’ November 1, 1896, 32.

Seldes, Gilbert. *The Seven Lively Arts*. 1924. Reprint, Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2001.

Sennett, Mack. *King of Comedy*. 1954. Reprint, San Jose; New York; Lincoln; Shanghai: To Excel, 2000.

Shepard, David. ‘The Search for the Chaplin Mutuals: An Interview with Renowned Film Preservationist David Shepard.’ Interviewed by Tim Lussier. *Silents Are Golden*. 2006. Accessed July 15, 2014, <http://www.silentsaregolden.com/articles/davidshopardinterview.html>.

Sousa, John Philip. ‘The Menace of Mechanical Music.’ *Appleton’s Magazine* 8, no. 1 (July, 1906): 278.

St. Paul Daily Globe. ‘A Country for Crazes.’ July 24, 1892, 14.

Sun (Baltimore). ‘The Roller-Seating Craze.’ March 26, 1885, 1.

Sun (New York). ‘Charlie Chaplin, Comedian of Movies Had Sad Youth. Remarkable Rise to Fame of Character Whose Stork Step and Falls Amuse Thousands Daily.’ August 22, 1915, 6.

———. ‘Moving Pictures Menace the Regular Drama.’ April 7, 1912, 5.

‘Sustains National Board. Massachusetts Leagues Holds Up Chaplin Picture Which Had Not Been Approved.’ *Moving Picture World* 23, no. 10 (March 6, 1915): 1424.

Times Picayune (New Orleans). ‘Crying Evils Of The Roller Skating Craze.’ March 25, 1885, 6.

———. ‘Lure of Syncopation. Ragtime Period in the Annals of Music in the United States.’ March 4, 1915, 2.

‘The Mercenary Microbe.’ *Harper’s Weekly* 38 (December 30, 1893): 1243.

‘The Players from Ocean to Ocean and What They Are Doing Today.’ *Photoplay* 8, no. 3 (August 1915): 113.

Tucson Daily Citizen. ‘Charlie Chaplin’s Life in Stone Age.’ February 15, 1915, 8.

Wakefield, H. R. ‘Reply To “A Peeress”.’ *Times*. May 21, 1913, 11.

Walker, Caroline. *The Modern Dances: How to Dance Them*. Chicago: Saul Brothers, 1914.

Washington Herald. ‘The Motion Picture Problem.’ December 13, 1920, 6.

Wheeling Register. ‘Roller Skating Craze. Dr. Talmage Preaches a Sermon on the Mania.’ April 13, 1885, 1.

———. ‘The History of Roller Skating.’ March 24, 1885, 3.

‘When Providence was Providential.’ *Photoplay* 13, no. 1 (June 1915): 114.

Whitcomb, E. V. ‘Charlie Chaplin.’ *Photoplay* 7, no. 3 (February 1915): 35-37.

Wilkes-Barré Times. ‘Wife Has Bicycle Craze. Rode Away in May and Never Got Back. Husband Wants Divorce.’ August 30, 1899, 1.

Wilson, Edmund. 'Some Recent Films.' *New Republic* 45, no. 576 (December 16, 1925): 109.

———. 'The New Charlie Chaplin Comedy.' *New Republic* 44, no. 561 (September 2, 1925): 45-46.

———. 'The Seven Low-Brow Arts.' *The Dial: A Semi-Monthly Journal of Literary Criticism, Discussion and Information* 77, no. 3 (September 1924): 244-250.

Worcester Daily Spy. 'Roller Skates An Important Decision in Favor of a Worcester Manufactures.' February 5, 1883, 4.

Secondary Sources

Abel, Richard. *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History / Anthology 1907-1939*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Adorno Theodor and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. 1944. Reprint London: Verso, 1997.

Auerbach, Jonathan. *Body Shots: Early Cinema's Incarnations*. Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2007.

Ackroyd, Peter. *Charlie Chaplin*. London: Chatto & Windus, 2014.

Allen, Robert C. and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practise*. New York: Knopf, 1985.

Allen, Robert C. 'Contra the Chaser Theory.' In *Film Before Griffith*, edited by John L. Fell, 105-115. Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press; London: University of California Press, Ltd., 1983.

Babcock, Barbara A. 'Introduction.' In *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, edited by Barbara A. Babcock, 13-36. Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1978.

Bazin, André. 'Charlie Chaplin.' In *What is Cinema? Vol. 1*. Translated by Hugh Gray, 144-153. 1967. Reprint, Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2005.

Bean, Jennifer. 'The Art of Imitation: The Originality of Charlie Chaplin and Other Moving-Image Myths.' In *Slapstick Comedy*, edited by Rob King and Tom Paulus, 236-261. New York: Routledge, 2010.

———. 'Charles Chaplin: The Object Life of Mass Culture.' In *Flickers of Desire: Movie Stars of the 1910s*, edited by Jennifer Bean, 242-263. New Brunswick, New Jersey; London: Rutgers University Press, 2011.

Benjamin, Walter. 'Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.' 1936. In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Ardent, 211-244. London: Pimlico, 1999.

Berlin, Edward A. *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History*. Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1980.

———. *King of Ragtime: Scott Joplin and his Era*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Bevis, Matthew. *Comedy: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Blesh, Rudi and Janis Harriet. *They all Played Ragtime: The True Story of an American Music*. New York: Knopf, 1950.

Body, Kasia. *Boxing: A Cultural History*. London: Reaktion Books, 2008.

Bordwell, David, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960*. London: Routledge, 1985.

Bordwell, David. *On the History of Film Style*. Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1997.

Bottomore, Stephen. 'The Panicking Audience? Early Cinema and the "Train Effect",' *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 19, no. 2 (June 1999): 177-216.

Bowser, Eileen. *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915*. New York: Scribner; Toronto: Collier Macmillan Canada; New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1990.

Braun, Marta. *Picturing time: The Work of Etienne-Jules Marey, 1830-1904*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

———. *Eadweard Muybridge*. London: Reaktion, 2010.

Carrol, Noël. *Comedy Incarnate: Buster Keaton, Physical Humor and Bodily Coping*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Caughie, John. *Theories of Authorship: A Reader*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981.

Chaplin, Charles. *My Life in Pictures*. London: Bodley Head, 1974.

Cohen, Stanley. *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*. 1972. 3rd ed. Reprint, London; New York: Routledge, 2002.

Dale, Alan. *Comedy is a Man in Trouble: Slapstick in American Movies*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

DeCordova, Richard. *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America*. Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001.

DiMaggio, Paul. 'Cultural Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century Boston: The Creation of an Organizational Base for High Culture.' *Media, Culture and Society* 1, no. 4 (January 1982): 33-50.

Doane, Mary Ann. *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive*. Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Elsaesser, Thomas. 'Early Cinema: From Linear History to Mass Media Archaeology.' In *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, edited by Thomas Elsaesser with Adam Barker, 1-8. London: BFI, 1990.

Erenberg, Lewis. *Steppin' Out: New York Night Life and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Everson, William K. *American Silent Film*. 1978. Reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1998.

Ewen, David. *Tin Pan Alley*. New York: Funk and Wagnall's, 1964.

Fiske, John. *Understanding Popular Culture*. London; New York: Routledge, 1989.

Franklin, Paul B. 'The Terpsichorean Tramp: Unmanly Movement in the Early Films of Charlie Chaplin.' In *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities on and Off the Stage*, edited by Jane C. Desmond, 35-72. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001.

Gammond, Peter. *Scott Joplin and the Ragtime Era*. London: Abacus, 1975.

Goldberg, Isaac. *Tin Pan Alley: A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket*. New York: John Day Company, 1930.

Golden, Eve. *Vernon and Irene Castle's Ragtime Revolution*. Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2007.

Green, Jonathan and Nicholas J. Karolides, eds. *Encyclopedia of Censorship*. New York: Facts on File Inc., 2005.

Grieverson, Lee. 'Not Harmless Entertainment: State Censorship and Cinema in the Transitional Era.' In *American Cinema's Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices*, edited by Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp, 265-284. Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2004.

———. *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America*. Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2004.

———. 'Cinema Studies and the Conduct of Conduct.' In *Inventing Film Studies*, edited by Lee Grieverson and Haidee Wasson, 3-37. Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2008.

Gunning, Tom. 'The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde.' *Wide Angle* 8, nos. 3-4 (Fall 1986): 63-70.

———. "'Now You See It, Now You Don't': The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions.' *Velvet Light Trap* 32. Fall 1993): 4-12.

———. *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994.

———. 'Crazy Machines in the Garden of Forking Paths: Mischief Gags and the Origins of American Film Comedy.' In *Classical Hollywood Comedy*, edited by Kristine Brunovska Karnick and Henry Jenkins, 87-105. New York; London: Routledge, 1995.

Hansen, Miriam. *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994.

———. 'The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism.' *Modernism/Modernity* 6, no. 2 (1999): 59-77.

Hamm, Charles. *Irving Berling: Songs from the Melting Pot: The Formative Years, 1907-1914*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Harris, Neil. *Cultural Excursion: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Taste in Modern America*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Havig, Allen. 'The Commercial Amusement Audience in Early 20th Century American Cities.' *Journal of American Culture* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 1-19.

Hodgson, Godfrey. 'The American Century.' In *The Cambridge Companion to Modern American Culture*, edited by John King, 33-52. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004.

Hounshell, David A. *From the American System to Mass Production, 1800-1932: The Development of Manufacturing Technology in the United States*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1984.

Huff, Theodore. *Charlie Chaplin*. New York: Schuman, 1951.

Jenkins, Henry. *What Made Pistachio Nuts? Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1992.

Kasson, John. *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1978.

Keil, Charlie. *Early American Cinema in Transition: Story, Style, and Filmmaking, 1907-1913*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001.

Keil, Charlie and Shelley Stamp. 'Introduction.' In *American Cinema's Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices*, edited by Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp, 1-11. Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2004.

Kember, Joe. *Marketing Modernity: Victorian Popular Show and Early Cinema*. Exeter University Press, 2009.

Kerr, Walter. *The Silent Clowns*. New York: Knopf, 1975.

Kesterton, David B. *Bill Nye*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981.

Kimber, John. *The Art of Charlie Chaplin*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.

King, Rob. *The Fun Factory: The Keystone Film Company and the Emergence of Mass Culture*. Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2009.

Knapp, Margaret. 'Watch Your Step: Irving Berlin's 1914 Musical.' In *Musical Theatre in America: Papers and Proceedings of the Conference on Musical Theatre in America*, edited by Glenn Loney, 246-250, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984.

Koszarski, Richard. *An Evening's Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture*. New York: Scribner; Toronto: Collier MacMillan Canada; New York: Maxwell MacMillan International, 1990.

Kramer, Peter. 'Vitagraph, Slapstick and Early Cinema: Peter Kramer Reports from Pordenone.' *Screen* 28, no. 2 (spring 1988): 89-105.

———. "'Clean, Dependable Slapstick': Comic Violence and the Emergence of Classical Hollywood Cinema' In *Violence in American Cinema*, edited by David J. Slocum, 103-116. New York; London: Routledge, 2001.

Krutnik, Frank. 'General Introduction.' In *Hollywood Comedians: The Film Reader*, edited by Frank Krutnik, 1-18. London: Routledge, 2003.

Lewis, Wyndham. *Time and Western Man*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1927.

Louvish, Simon. *Chaplin: The Tramp's Odyssey*. London: Faber, 2008.

Maland, Charles. *Chaplin and American Culture: The Evolution of a Star Image*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989.

Manvell, Roger. *Chaplin*. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1975.

Mast, Gerald. *The Comic Mind: Comedy and the Movies*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973.

McCabe, John. *Charlie Chaplin*. London: Robson, 1978.

McCaffrey, Donald. 'Introduction.' In *Focus on Chaplin*, edited by Donald McCaffrey, 1-7. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971.

Michel, Jean-Baptiste, Yuan Kui Shen, Aviva Presser Aiden, Adrian Veres, Matthew K. Gray, William Brockman, The Google Books Team, Joseph P. Pickett, Dale Hoiberg, Dan Clancy, Peter Norvig, Jon Orwant, Steven Pinker, Martin A. Nowak, and Erez Lieberman Aiden. 'Quantitative Analysis of Culture Using Millions of Digitized Books.' *Science* 331, no. 6014 (January 14, 2011): 176-182.

Maland, Charles. *Chaplin and American Culture: The Evolution of a Star Image*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989.

Musser, Charles. *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907*. New York: Maxell Macmillan, 1990.

———. 'Work, Ideology, and Chaplin's Tramp.' In *Resisting Images: Essays on Cinema and History*, edited by Robert Sklar and Charles Musser, 36-67. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990.

Nasaw, David. *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*. Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Neale, Stephen. *Cinema and Technology: Image, Sound, Colour*. New York: Macmillan, 1985.

———. *Genre and Hollywood*. London: Routledge, 2000.

Neibaur, James L. *Chaplin at Essanay: A Film Artist in Transition, 1915-16*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co Inc., 2008.

———. *Early Charlie Chaplin: The Artist as Apprentice at Keystone Studios*. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2012.

Michael North, *Machine-Age Comedy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Okuda, Ted and David Maska. *Charlie Chaplin at Keystone and Essanay: The Dawn of the Tramp*. Lincoln, Nebraska: iUniverse, 2005.

Pearson, Roberta E. 'The Menace of the Movies: Cinema's Challenge to the Theater in the Transitional Period.' In *American Cinema's Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices*, edited by Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp, 315-321. Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2004.

Peiss, Kathy. *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986.

Rabinovitz, Lauren. 'The Coney Island Comedies: Bodies and Slapstick at the Amusement Park and the Movies.' In *American Cinema's Transitional Era:*

Audiences, Institutions, Practices, edited by Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp, 171-190. Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2004.

———. *Electric Dreamland: Amusement Parks, Movies, and American Modernity*. New York; Chichester, West Sussex, 2012.

Riblet, Douglas. 'The Keystone Film Company, 1912 to 1915,' PhD dissertation. University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1998.

———. 'The Keystone Film Company and the Historiography of Early Slapstick.' In *Classical Hollywood Comedy*, edited by Kristine Brunovska Karnick and Henry Jenkins, 168-189. New York; London: Routledge, 1995.

Robinson, David. *Chaplin: His Life and Art*. 1985. Revised edition, London: Grafton, 1992.

———. *Chaplin: The Mirror of Opinion*. London: Secker & Warburg; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

Rosenzweig, Roy. 'From Rum Shop to Rialto.' In *Moviegoing in America: A Sourcebook in the History of Film Exhibition*, edited by Gregory A. Waller, 27-45. Malden, Mass; Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2002.

Rutsky, R. L. and Justin Wyatt. 'Serious Pleasures: Cinematic Pleasure and the Notion of Fun.' *Cinema Journal* 30, no. 1 (Autumn 1990): 3-19.

Sarris, Andrew. *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions, 1929-1968*. 1968. Reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1996.

———. *"You Ain't Heard Nothin' Yet": The American Talking Film History & Memory, 1927-1949*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Schickel, Richard. 'Introduction: The Tramp Transformed.' In *The Essential Chaplin: Perspectives on the Life and Art of the Great Comedian*, edited by Richard Schickel, 3-41. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006.

Sargeant, Amy. 'Dancing on Fire and Water: Charlot and *l'esprit nouveau*.' In *Slapstick Comedy*, edited by Rob King and Tom Paulus, 193-206. New York: Routledge, 2010.

Schafer, William and Johannes Riedel. *The Art of Ragtime: Form and Meaning of an Original Black American Art*. New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1973.

Schickel, Richard. *His Picture in the Papers: A Speculation on Celebrity in America Based on the Life of Douglas Fairbanks, Sr.* New York: Charterhouse, 1973.

Singer, Ben. *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and its Contexts*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.

———. *Intimate Strangers: The Culture of Celebrity in America*. 1985. Reprint, Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000.

Snyder, Robert. *The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York*. Chicago: I. R. Dee, 2000.

Sobel, Raoul and David Francis. *Chaplin: Genesis of a Clown*. London; Melbourne; New York: Quartet Books, 1977.

Stamp, Shelley. *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000.

———. 'It's a Long Way to Filmland: Starlets, Screen Hopefuls, and Extra in Early Hollywood,' in *American Cinema's Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices*, edited by Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp, 332-351. Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2004.

Stearns, Marshall and Jean Stearns. *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance*. 1968. Reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1994.

Susman, Warren. *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

Traub, Morris. *Roller Skating Through the Years: The Story of Roller Skates, Rinks and Skaters*. New York: William-Frederick Press, 1944.

Trotter, David. *Cinema and Modernism*. Malden; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

Turner, James. *The History of Roller Skating*. Lincoln, Nebraska: National Museum of Roller Skating, 1997.

Uricchio, William, and Roberta E. Pearson. *Reframing Culture: The Case of the Vitagraph Quality Films*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University, 1993.

Vance, Jeffrey. *Chaplin: Genius of the Cinema*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2003.

———. ‘Chaplin at Keystone: The Tramp is Born.’ In *Chaplin at Keystone*, 1-15. DVD inlay. London BFI, 2010.

Weber, Max. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, vol. 2. Trans. Ephraim Fischhoff. 1924. Reprint, New York: Bedminster Press, 1968.

Weissman, Stephen. *Chaplin: A Life*. New York: Arcade Publishing, Inc., 2008.

Wilder, Alex. *American Popular Song*. New York; Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1972.

Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Filmography

This filmography is in two parts: List of Films Cited and List of Films Consulted. The first details the films referred to in this thesis. The second details non-Chaplin films viewed at the British Film Institute's (BFI) National Film and Television Archive (NFTVA), London, and the Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

A detailed filmography of Chaplin's career can be found in David Robinson's *Charlie Chaplin: His Life and Art* (1985), on which I have drawn to create the following selective list. Robinson's filmography is complete with the exception of *A Thief Catcher* (Keystone, 1914), discovered in 2010, in which Chaplin plays a cameo role as a Keystone cop.

With the exception of *A Thief Catcher* and one lost film, *Her Friend the Bandit* (Keystone, 1914), Chaplin's complete works from 1916 to 1917 are available on the following DVD collections:

Chaplin at Keystone. DVD. London: BFI, 2010.

Charlie Chaplin: The Essanay Films, Volume 1. DVD. London: BFI, 2003.

Charlie Chaplin: The Essanay Films, Volume 2 DVD. London: BFI, 2003.

Charlie Chaplin: The Mutual Films, Volume 1. DVD. London, BFI, 2003.

Charlie Chaplin: The Mutual Films, Volume 2. DVD. London: BFI, 2005.

List of Films Cited

Chaplin at Keystone

Film	Director/s	US Release Date
<i>Making a Living</i>	Henry Lehrman	February 2, 1914
<i>Kid Auto Races at Venice</i>	Henry Lehrman	February 7, 1914
<i>Mabel's Strange Predicament</i>	Henry Lehrman, Mack Sennett	February 9, 1914

Film	Director/s	US Release Date
<i>Between Showers</i>	Henry Lehrman	February 28, 1914
<i>A Film Johnnie</i>	George Nichols	March 2, 1914
<i>Tango Tangles</i>	Mack Sennett	March 9, 1914
<i>His Favorite Pastime</i>	George Nichols	March 16, 1914
<i>Mabel at the Wheel</i>	Mabel Normand, Mack Sennett	April 18, 1914
<i>Twenty Minutes of Love</i>	Charles Chaplin	April 20, 1914
<i>Caught in a Cabaret</i>	Mabel Normand, Charles Chaplin	April 27, 1914
<i>Caught in the Rain</i>	Charles Chaplin	April 27, 1914
<i>The Fatal Mallet</i>	Mack Sennett	June 1, 1914
<i>The Knockout</i>	Charles Avery	June 11, 1914
<i>Mabel's Married Life</i>	Charles Chaplin	June 20, 1914
<i>The Face on the Barroom Floor</i>	Charles Chaplin	August 10, 1914
<i>The Masquerader</i>	Charles Chaplin	August 27, 1914
<i>The Rounders</i>	Charles Chaplin	September 7, 1914
<i>The New Janitor</i>	Charles Chaplin	September 24, 1914
<i>Those Love Pangs</i>	Charles Chaplin	October 10, 1914
<i>Dough and Dynamite</i>	Charles Chaplin	October 26, 1914
<i>Gentlemen of Nerve</i>	Charles Chaplin	October 29, 1914
<i>His Musical Career</i>	Charles Chaplin	November 7, 1914
<i>His Trysting Place</i>	Charles Chaplin	November 9, 1914
<i>Tillie's Punctured Romance</i>	Mack Sennett	November 14, 1914
<i>His Prehistoric Past.</i>	Charles Chaplin	December 7, 1914

Chaplin at Essanay**(all films directed by Charles Chaplin)**

Film	US Release Date
<i>His New Job</i>	February 1, 1915
<i>A Night Out</i>	February 15, 1915
<i>The Champion</i>	March 11, 1915
<i>In the Park</i>	March 18, 1915
<i>A Jitney Elopement</i>	April 1, 1915
<i>The Tramp</i>	April 11, 1915
<i>By the Sea</i>	April 29, 1915
<i>Work</i>	June 21, 1915
<i>The Bank</i>	August 9, 1915
<i>Shanghaied</i>	October 4, 1915
<i>A Night in the Show</i>	November 20, 1915
<i>Burlesque on Carmen</i>	April 22, 1916
<i>Police</i>	May 27, 1916

Chaplin at Mutual**(all films directed by Charles Chaplin)**

Film	US Release Date
<i>The Floorwalker</i>	May 15, 1916
<i>The Vagabond</i>	July 10, 1916
<i>One A.M</i>	August 7, 1916
<i>The Count</i>	September 4, 1916
<i>The Pawnshop</i>	October 2, 1916
<i>Behind the Screen</i>	November 13, 1916
<i>The Rink</i>	December 4, 1916
<i>Easy Street</i>	January 22, 1917
<i>The Cure</i>	April 16, 1917
<i>The Immigrant</i>	June 17, 1917

Chaplin at First National

(all films directed by Charles Chaplin)

Film	US Release Date
<i>A Dog's Life</i>	April 14, 1918
<i>Sunnyside</i>	June 15, 1918
<i>The Kid</i>	February 6, 1921

Chaplin at United Artists

(all films directed by Charles Chaplin)

Film	US Release Date
<i>The Gold Rush</i>	June 26, 1925
<i>The Circus</i>	January 6, 1928
<i>City Lights</i>	February 27, 1931
<i>Modern Times</i>	February 5, 1936
<i>The Great Dictator</i>	December 16, 1940
<i>Monsieur Verdoux</i>	April 11, 1947

Other Films Cited

(alphabetically listed)

Birth of a Nation, The. Directed by D. W. Griffith. David W. Griffith Corporation, 1915.

Fatal Hour, The. Directed by D. W. Griffith. American Mutoscope & Biograph, 1908.

Sherlock Jr. Directed by Buster Keaton. Metro, 1924.

Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show. Directed by Edwin S. Porter. Edison, 1902.

List of Films Consulted

(Non-Keystone films feature prominent slapstick performers. Names of these performers are given in brackets)

BFI, NFTVA

(chronologically listed by year; alphabetical within year)

Film	Production Company	Year
<i>Stolen Glory.</i>	Keystone	1912
<i>Cure that Failed, The</i>	Keystone	1913
<i>Deaf Burglar</i>	Keystone	1913
<i>His Chum the Baron</i>	Keystone	1913
<i>Love and Rubbish</i>	Keystone	1913
<i>Muddled Romance</i>	Keystone	1913
<i>Riot, The</i>	Keystone	1913
<i>Toplitsky and Co.</i>	Keystone	1913
<i>Fatty Again</i>	Keystone	1914
<i>Fatty's Jonah Day</i>	Keystone	1914
<i>How Old Are You?</i>	Keystone	1914
<i>Lovers Luck</i>	Keystone	1914
<i>Plumber, The</i>	Keystone	1914
<i>Sweedie Learns to Swim (Ben Turpin)</i>	Essanay	1914
<i>Those Country Kids</i>	Keystone	1914
<i>Water Dog, The</i>	Keystone	1914
<i>Ambrose Little Hatchet</i>	Keystone	1915
<i>Battle of Ambrose and the Walrus</i>	Keystone	1915
<i>DO- RE-ME-FA</i>	Keystone	1915
<i>Hash House Fraud, A</i>	Keystone	1915
<i>He Wouldn't Stay Down</i>	Keystone	1915
<i>Hogan's Aristocratic Dream</i>	Keystone	1915
<i>Love, Speed and Thrills</i>	Keystone	1915
<i>Miss Fatty's Seaside Lovers</i>	Keystone	1915
<i>Doctoring a Leak (Ben Turpin)</i>	Vogue	1916

Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound**Division****(chronologically listed by year; alphabetical within year)**

Film	Production Company	Year
<i>The Rivals</i>	Keystone	1912
<i>Bangville Police, The</i>	Keystone	1913
<i>Barney Oldfield's Race for a Life</i>	Keystone	1913
<i>Fishy Affair</i>	Keystone	1913
<i>Hide and Seek</i>	Keystone	1913
<i>His Sister's Kids</i>	Keystone	1913
<i>Muddy Romance</i>	Keystone	1913
<i>That Ragtime Band</i>	Keystone	1913
<i>Ambrose's First Falsehoods</i>	Keystone	1914
<i>An Incompetent Hero</i>	Keystone	1914
<i>Barnyard Flirtations</i>	Keystone	1914
<i>Double Crossed</i>	Keystone	1914
<i>False Beauty</i>	Keystone	1914
<i>Hard Cider</i>	Keystone	1914
<i>His Taking Ways</i>	Keystone	1914
<i>His Talented Wife</i>	Keystone	1914
<i>How Heroes are Made</i>	Keystone	1914
<i>Love and Surgery</i> (Billie Richie)	L-KO	1914
<i>Mabel's Blunder</i>	Keystone	1914
<i>Those Country Kids</i>	Keystone	1914
<i>Ambrose Nasty Temper</i>	Keystone	1915
<i>Children of Mike and Meyer Elope, The</i> (Weber and Fields)	World Comedy Star Film Corporation	1915
<i>Cupid in a Hospital</i> (Billie Ritchie)	L-KO	1915
<i>Fatty and Mabels Simple Life</i>	Keystone	1915
<i>Ham and the Jitney Bus</i> (Ham and Bud)	Kalem	1915
<i>Mike and Meyer in Jail</i> (Weber and Fields)	World Comedy Star Film Corporation	1915

Film	Production Company	Year
<i>Mike and Meyer in the Store</i> (Weber and Fields)	World Comedy Star Film Corporation	1915
<i>Miss Minerva Courtney in her Impersonation of Charlie Chaplin</i>	Metropolis	1915
<i>No One to guide Him</i>	Keystone	1915
<i>Our Dare Devil Chief</i>	Keystone	1915
<i>Silk Hose and High Pressure</i> (Billie Ritchie)	Universal	1915
<i>Vendetta in Hospital</i> (Billie Ritchie)	Universal	1915
<i>When Ambrose Dare The Walrus</i>	Keystone	1915
<i>Alaskan Mouse Hound, The</i> (Ham and Bud)	Kalem	1916
<i>Great Detective, The</i> (Ham and Bud)	Kalem	1916
<i>Ham and the Masked Marvel</i> (Ham and Bud)	Kalem	1916
<i>Ham's Whirlwind Finish</i> (Ham and Bud)	Kalem	1916
<i>Ham, The Explorer</i> (Ham and Bud)	Kalem	1916
<i>Love Magnet, The</i> (Ham and Bud)	Kalem	1916
<i>Midnight at the Old Mill</i> (Ham and Bud)	Kalem	1916
<i>Sauerkraut Symphony</i> (Ham and Bud)	Kalem	1916
<i>Deadly Doughnut, The</i> (Ham and Bud)	Kalem	1917
<i>Model Janitor, The</i> (Ham and Bud)	Kalem	1917
<i>Politics in Pumpkin Center</i> (Ham and Bud)	Kalem	1917
<i>Whirlwind of Whiskers</i> (Ham and Bud)	Kalem	1917