

**THE
SLAPSTICK
SYMPOSIUM
MAY 2 AND 3
1985**

**THE MUSEUM
OF MODERN
ART**

NEW YORK

41ST FIAF

CONGRESS

EDITED BY

EILEEN BOWSER



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FEDERATION
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ARCHIVES DU FILM
1988

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INTRODUCTION

Eileen Bowser

This symposium was inspired by some remarks of Robert Benchley:

In order to laugh at something, it is necessary

- 1) to know what you are laughing at,
- 2) to know why you are laughing,
- 3) to ask some people why they think you are laughing,
- 4) to jot down a few notes,
- 5) to laugh.

Even then, the thing may not be cleared up for days.

During the Slapstick Symposium held at The Museum of Modern Art in the spring of 1985, we looked at some short silent American slapstick films, we jotted down these notes, and we laughed quite a lot. We have not even yet cleared up the thing, but nevertheless we present here the record of the symposium.

La Federation Internationale des Archives du Film (FIAF) looks for international topics for its symposia in order to serve the interests of most of its members as well as to take advantage of the unique possibilities for the international exchange of ideas. We restricted the topic selected for the symposium to be held on the occasion of the 41st Congress to the short silent slapstick film produced in the United States because we consider that this subject has wide international interest. We might, of course, have included the slapstick films of other countries and examined the international connections of the genre, but as a first step in what we hope might lead to a more profound study of the genre, and to limit the topic to a reasonable size, we decided to concentrate on the American film. The American silent slapstick films were so extraordinarily popular all over the world that they have survived in great numbers in other countries, even when they may have disappeared in the United States. Thanks to the dedication of film archivists in those countries in collecting and preserving them, The Museum of Modern Art was able to borrow or acquire many of the films.

In the hope of making discoveries and with the intent of forcing ourselves to take a fresh look at the genre,

we excluded for the most part the well-known films of Chaplin, Keaton, Lloyd and Langdon (although it proved impossible to keep them out), in favor of the mostly-forgotten comedy shorts that accompanied feature films in the cinemas throughout the teens and twenties. We wanted to ask some questions about the place of the slapstick film in American film history and, in general, to open up the topic for scholarly study. The participants were asked to limit their talk to only half of the time allotted to them, using the rest of the time to show films they had selected. We permitted the speakers to rewrite their papers afterward if they wanted, and some have taken advantage of that opportunity to polish their words. Others have chosen to let their informal comments stand just as they made them at the time. Listening to the tape recording, I have been tempted to write in [laughter] here and there, but nobody likes a laugh track.

The Slapstick Symposium was accompanied by two evenings of additional screenings and was preceded by an Identification Seminar. During the week before the FIAF Congress, an invited group of experts looked at films contributed by archives around the world, in a united effort to identify their original titles, dates and production credits. It is yet another indication of the enormous popularity of the silent American slapstick film that many of them survive only in worn distribution copies, with foreign release titles or with no main title at all. The report on the results of that seminar to the Slapstick Symposium and the compilation of the information which forms the second part of this publication is the work of Ron Magliozzi. Although he made his report in the middle of the symposium, we have placed it last here, in order to relate it more closely to the list of films examined. Some of the films which could not be identified at the time because they were not in a condition to be projected have since been copied by The Museum of Modern Art as part of its preservation program. That has made it possible to view the films and add a few more identifications to the list. We have no doubt that the remaining unknown slapstick films will eventually recover their identity.

We would like to extend cordial thanks to all those who contributed papers and helped to identify films, and to our FIAF colleagues who generously agreed to lend or let us copy their films. The symposium not only opened up a new and vigorous investigation of an aspect of film history, it also contributed to the preservation and restoration of America's moving image heritage. For that, we shall always be grateful to the Fédération Internationale des Archives du Film.

CALIFORNIA SLAPSTICK: A DEFINITION

Jay Leyda

In an effort to make the lives of film scholars working on American comedies simpler and happier, I wish to propose a fresh definition: "California Slapstick." Why not "Hollywood Slapstick?" For one thing, Hollywood as a term has become so over-used and wornout, selling everything from shampoos to diets, that no one listens to that word anymore.

Geographically, California is more exact. If Sennett is our central figure - and he is - he expressed his first independence close to the Mexican border. As I'm trying to avoid gossip and the anecdotal style that gets me into trouble with the rigorous historians, I will not get into his motives for staying close to the border. Sennett then worked his way as far north as San Francisco. He ended up building his studio no closer to Hollywood than Edendale, California. The time frame for California Slapstick is easily remembered: it begins when Sennett left the Griffith group, then already wintering in California, taking along his funniest colleagues and his already harmonious crew. That was in 1912. Keystone became an instantly recognized name that sold its productions to corporations and to the ticket buyers.

Here is a sample:

[Projection: THE SURF GIRL, 1916, produced by Mack Sennett for Keystone/Triangle, directed by Glen Cavender. Cast: Fritz Schade, Raymond Griffith, Ivy Crosthwaite, Glen Cavender, Dale Fuller, Julia Faye, Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle, Keystone Cops.]

And a well-known finale:

[Projection: the final sequence of THE ROUNDERS, 1914, produced by Mack Sennett for Keystone, directed by Charles Chaplin. Cast: Charles Chaplin, Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle.]

The time frame should end, logically, with sound, but it didn't quite:

[Projection: the pie-fight sequence from THE BATTLE OF THE CENTURY, 1928, produced by Hal Roach, directed by Clyde Bruckman. Cast: Stan Laurel, Oliver Hardy.]

What were the ingredients of California Slapstick? I say "ingredients" advisedly, as you will see, when I get into metaphors, where we all land, sooner or later, Sennett included. California Slapstick has to have violence, acrobatics, embarrassment, irrationality. All of these are pushed to such extremes that students who love to apply the term "expressionist" to any film that hasn't yet been labeled could easily change my suggested term to "expressionist slapstick." Do, if that will make you happier.

Back, rigorously, to metaphor. Sennett as synthesis demands a concrete image. I have chosen the steel furnace where the different ores and chemicals are shoveled in, often producing a quite unexpected variety of steel each time, although I don't believe the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce would like the furnace metaphor. They might prefer a more fashionable and more dangerous metaphor drawn from nuclear science - "push in the rods," "melt-down," that sort of thing, but I could not pretend to know anything about that world. To stick with the furnace: everyone who worked for and with Sennett contributed a shovelful, and every film-producing country of the world shoveled in a distinct and recognizable chemical. Sennett was not only open about this - he was insistent. In each of his ghost-written autobiographies he manages to get it clearly stated: "I got all my ideas from French comedies." And there they all are: well-established formulas at Pathe and Gaumont before Keystone came into existence - the Keystone Cops, the brittle movements of Max Linder, the floods of accumulation chases, uncontrolled fantasy, with a ground bass of social satire (this has to come from outside California).

The East Coast also shoveled plenty across the continent, beginning with Sennett's first absorptions of the world's comedies while working as a jack-of-all-trades at Biograph:

[Projection: THE CURTAIN POLE, 1909, Biograph, directed by D. W. Griffith. Cast: Mack Sennett.]

Some perceptive critics claim that he took something away from Biograph, too: the dramas that Griffith put his whole heart into, that turned up later as Sennett parodies. "Performance Studies," please note.

Then there were the rich chemicals of vaudeville, burlesque, circus, that nourished the Russian avant-garde as much as they did Keystone. Vaudeville certainly includes the London Music Hall - several shovelfuls from

there, all the graduates of Fred Karno's troupe. Sometimes they just threw in a hastily pre-digested chunk of their ancestry:

[Projection: excerpt from A NIGHT IN THE SHOW, 1915, Essanay, directed by Charles Chaplin. Cast: Charles Chaplin, Edna Purviance, Leo White.]

It was all of these - vaudeville, burlesque, circus - that brought Buster Keaton to the Arbuckle-Sennett ensemble. Arbuckle seems to have been a sort of guide to introduce newcomers to the tradition. First Chaplin, then Keaton:

[Projection: excerpt from THE BUTCHER BOY, 1917, Comicque Film/Paramount, directed by Roscoe Arbuckle. Cast: Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle, Buster Keaton.]

Don't forget the big Franco-Italian contribution:

[Projection: POLIDOR SI SPOSA (POLIDOR'S WEDDING), 1912, Italy, produced by Pasquali Film.]

What about deviations from the heights of California Slapstick? We can always borrow the jargon of art history: "follower of Perugino," "pupil of Constable," "workshop of Lucas Cranach," "in the style of..." etc., etc.

TAKE THIS BOOK AND EAT IT: BURLESQUE AND THE COMEDY OF
SIGNS IN VITAGRAPH'S "GOODNESS GRACIOUS"

Tom Gunning

Author: Are you fond of hermits?

Medley: Very.

Author: I have a charming one, and introduce a
dance in his solitary cell.

Medley: That's surprising - but why?

Author: Why? Why because there must be a
dance that's all.

- from Thomas Dibdin's burlesque melodrama,
Boniface and Bidgetina, 1808.

There is an extraordinary sequence in Chaplin's film THE PAWN SHOP in which, as the pawnbroker's assistant, Chaplin is taken in by a melodramatic actor who is pawning his wedding ring. Pantomiming a tale of poverty and misfortune, he reduces the tramp to sobs. Chaplin has meanwhile been eating a cracker, so bursting into tears becomes a visual explosion of crumbs. Moved by the actor's story he offers to take the ring, but he finds only a large bill in the register. This presents no problem to the actor, who immediately produces a mammoth wad of bills from which he peels the needed change. Astonished, Chaplin stares first at the actor, then at us. After the actor leaves, Chaplin picks up a hammer lying on the counter and whams himself in the head. After this blow he again looks at the camera and bends the hammer head between thumb and finger revealing it is made of rubber.

I would like to use this sequence to open up a series of questions I have concerning the remarkable explosion of slapstick comedy during the era of silent cinema, and the often acknowledged, but rarely examined, fact that this genre produced possibly the greatest films of the silent era and arguably the greatest films ever made. To begin with Chaplin is reverse polemics, because I feel that this issue has often been obscured by resource to a hagiography of the individual clowns of the silent era. Certainly one can't deny that the great silent comedies are the products of the genius of such master clowns as Chaplin, Keaton, Lloyd, Langdon and Stan Laurel, or the inspiration of Arbuckle, Larry Semon, and Lloyd Hamilton. However, I would maintain that there is a logic of slapstick within which these clowns operated that is

independent of individual performers. That is why I have chosen a brilliant but neglected film, Vitagraph's GOODNESS GRACIOUS[1] from 1914 as my example, a film probably neglected because it does not find a place in the established succession of silent clowns. (Sidney Drew, one of the film's stars, was a silent comedian of some popularity. However, his other comedies seem quite different from GOODNESS GRACIOUS.)

Walter Kerr, in the best overview of American silent comedy, The Silent Clowns, has offered some extremely interesting insights into the peculiar quality that silence contributed to film comedy.[2] At the risk of simplifying a subtle phenomenological reading, I will summarize his ideas by observing that the world of silent films was in some way abstract; photographically real, and certainly material, but drained of the immediate presence that sound added. I would relate this to the view of silent film found in all theorists of the period, from Epstein to Eisenstein, that silent film was a system of signs. All arts can be viewed from this semiological perspective, but during the silent era the process of sign making was the acknowledged logic behind filmmaking. Vachel Lindsay with his slightly crackpot idea of film hieroglyphics said it first. In his 1917 review in the New Republic of Pickford's ROMANCE OF THE REDWOODS, Lindsay went through the film finding a constant process of "picture writing" in which objects stand for emotions, and images signal characters:[3]

Now note the hieroglyphics. The arrow in the uncle's papers, a black-snake whip, Jennie's little derringer, Brown's six-shooter, the gambling paraphernalia, the silk hat of the boss gambler, the dancing shadows on the doorways, all enable these episodes to be vividly given with few printed words on the screen... At breakfast everything from griddle cakes to an apron is picture writing to tell the finely graded process of Jennie's conquest of the tough... Meanwhile Black Brown with his wicked gold buys her a doll, in humorous allusion to her size, but actually the symbol of his tenderness for her, and the third outstanding hieroglyphic of the piece.

Any one familiar with silent films knows how to read these film hieroglyphics. I would claim that the genius of silent comedy in the United States lay in its ability to play with these signs common to most silent films, to make us super conscious of them, in fact, to burlesque them.

During the nineteenth century the term "burlesque"

referred not to taking off one's clothes but to stripping conventions of their believability. Every stage hit was sure to produce a burlesque version in which characters, situations and rhetoric were inverted and made ridiculous. The influence of this form on silent film comedy has never been given full acknowledgement. Sennett's films are often burlesque melodramas. Keaton recounts that he and his father occasionally interrupted their stage act in order to go into a burlesque of a scene from a famous melodrama (and the logic of many of his films should be looked at in this light). He later described the act to Rudi Blesh:[4]

Joe [his father, Joe Keaton] was on stage doing legomania alone, and I ran to the prop room, grabbed a yellow sou-wester and a lighthouse keeper's cap, and lit a ship lantern. Heading for the stage, I called to the electrician to douse the lights and throw a green spot on Joe.

Then I stomp out and say, "There's another thing you didn't know, Martin. I could have married your wife."

Without a second's hesitation, Joe clenched his fists and spat out the words, "You lie! I gave you the mother, but you'll never have the cheeild!"

Then I get bopped in the face, light on my fanny, and the old man falls over me. Off with the raincoat and hat and back into our act as if nothing had happened. But the audience was killing itself. You see, I had started the famous scene from Shore Acres where the two brothers fight in the lighthouse.

The burlesque tradition of referring to a previous text, or a system of conventions, allowed silent comedy to become a comedy of signs dwelling in a space of intertextuality. Burlesque has always involved a second level of relation to a previous work, using this reference to destroy the assumptions of the original. Speaking of the burlesque novel, Archibald Shepperson offers this useful definition:[5]

[burlesque] incorporates the salient features of some type of novel... and holds them up to ridicule or criticism by presenting them in an absurd grotesque manner, incongruous with the serious intention of the original work.

It is as a burlesque of stage and film melodrama that

GOODNESS GRACIOUS operates. But through the film's mockery of melodrama, we can discover the symbiotic relation that existed between comedy and melodrama in silent cinema. Both films work with clearly legible signs. Melodrama takes them seriously as the signs of virtue and vice (for a brilliant understanding of melodrama from this point of view, see Peter Brooks' The Melodramatic Imagination). Comedy unmasks them, recombines them, and creates a new zone of stylistic freedom, fashioning a carnival out of a ritual. It is no accident that Mack Sennett considered the time he spent working under D. W. Griffith at Biograph his night school and graduate course. Sennett supplied Griffith with the story for THE LONELY VILLA (stolen from André de Lorde's play Au Téléphone by way of several previous film versions). Some years later at Biograph, Sennett directed HELP! HELP! a burlesque of THE LONELY VILLA, in which a suburban wife frantically calls her husband, convinced that burglars are invading their home. The sign of the burglar, a rustling window curtain, turns out to be caused by the family dog.[6] Sennett also contributed the story for Griffith's THE LONEDALE OPERATOR and any number of his later Keystone films, such as TEDDY AT THE THROTTLE or BARNEY OLDFIELD'S RACE FOR A LIFE, could be seen as burlesques of Griffith's train melodrama.

Although the drama of signs was particularly evident in silent cinema, it must be recognized that it was partly stage melodrama's dependence on similar visual conventions that made it so adaptable to silent film, as well as to being burlesqued. Let me take a scene from GOODNESS GRACIOUS. The millionaire father is shot by the villain. Reeling from the impact of the bullet, he turns unsteadily, about to fall. Before he does, however, he reaches for a rug and carefully spreads it on the floor so he'll have something clean and a bit softer to land on.

Now compare this action with the melodramatic tradition of laying down a carpet of green baize when a scene of violence was about to take place. Originally done pragmatically to protect costumes, Gilbert Cross has pointed out that it became part of melodrama's system of visual and aural signs, informing the audience of the action to come. As one contemporary observer put it, "It was supposed to be a good thing to prepare audiences for a thrill, and so when they saw the green drugget they knew that their feelings were going to be harrowed.[7] It is a short but significant step from a drama based on such conventional signs, to one that undoes them; a movement, one might say, to a second level sign system, from a language to a metalanguage.

Silent comedy as practiced by the great clowns took this sort of comic inversion even further. Burlesque supplied the possibility of not simply parodying specific works or genres, but of turning the whole process of signification upside down. And these films are so eternally funny precisely because they are playing with these signs, showing us their freedom over them, making our taking of signs seriously ridiculous. Returning to THE PAWNSHOP, we see on the one hand how Chaplin debunks the actor's gestures - not worth crying over, simply conventional melodramatic signs. But Chaplin himself is a master of signs in another register. His rubber hammer is his joke on us, the demonstration that he doesn't unmask the actor in the name of some "reality," but simply to prepare us for a world made entirely of signs, breeding signs madly, happily, crazily, the process of signification turned into a carnival, a topsy turvydom.

GOODNESS GRACIOUS shows us this playfulness in the extreme. Burlesquing a stage melodrama, we enter a universe in which conventions conquer logic, producing an absurdity that is wilder than anything I have seen in Sennett. Much of the film is one long game of hide-and-seek, and it is the absurdity of this ritual of peek-a-boo that delights. In the opening of the film, Gwendoline (beautifully played by Clara Kimball Young, an accomplished melodramatic actress, as her performance in Maurice Tourneur's TRILBY shows) turns to see the villain still pursuing her. He immediately pulls over the fake tree next to him in order to conceal himself. These ridiculous moments of concealment (and concealment and revelation was the life blood of melodrama) reach their apogee when Gwendoline arrives at the villain's meeting place, only to be confronted by a surreal group of checkered rectangles held by protruding fingers. When she turns her back on them, heads and arms of the villains hiding behind them pop out. But it is a small potted plant, holdable in one hand and bearing only a couple of leaves, that most burlesques this convention of concealment. The villain hides behind it after shooting the millionaire. And later, Gwendoline crouches beside it for two weeks, waiting for the villain to return to the scene of his crime, which he eventually does.

The delights of GOODNESS GRACIOUS are too many to recite, particularly since to see them is wonderful while to describe them is less so. But its unmasking of the narrative patterns of melodrama is particularly savage and worth describing. The millionaire resolves the plot by revealing that, in fact, he wasn't murdered at all, least of all by his son, but has simply been in a trance all this time, appearing to be dead. This absurdity is announced by an intertitle which explains it was "one of those strange coincidences which occur only in cases of

this kind." A few years later it might have said, "that occur only in the movies."

While the film is in many ways designed specifically as a parody of melodramatic theater (with visible spotlights and two-dimensional flats), it also debunks filmic conventions. Noel Carroll once pointed out to me that in silent films characters frequently seem to share the condition of the audience they can't hear, and are never distracted by actions happening next to them. This is parodied in the scene in which Cornelius "stealthily" enters the villain's hangout and overhears their plan to kidnap Gwendoline. Although he knocks over a table and a potbellied stove and climbs over the villains' elbows in order to "overhear" them more clearly, he is blithely ignored. Intertitles also participate in the burlesque, announcing at one point: "A desperate chase ensues (of course)" and pointing out barely visible information such as "the villain (who may have been noticed through the window in the preceding scene)."

But if Chaplin was watching in 1914, he might have learned from this film the way that burlesque can transform the frenzied action of melodrama into the rhythm of a foxtrot. Practically every scene is choreographed as a dance, with Miss Young showing particular grace. Notice the reaction of Gwendoline and Cornelius as the millionaire refuses to accept his son's marriage. In perfect step they move up to the millionaire and kneel before him pleadingly. Rebuffed, they back into the foreground, turn to the camera and sigh; sidle over to a table on the left where Cornelius grabs a champagne bottle, turn back to face father, are rebuffed again, and so rhythmically move toward the door in the background. Once there, they pirouette in perfect unison, stretching out their arms in one last plea. Papa unmoveable, they simultaneously drop their arms and step toward the door, Gwendoline assuming her characteristic slouch and Cornelius upending the champagne bottle. All in perfect rhythm, never once breaking step.

It is a dance the camera participates in, as well. No other silent film is undercranked so radically, sending actors into wild speed. But the camera also adjusts its rhythm to debunk a melodramatic gesture. As Gwendoline and Cornelius escape from the villain's gang, they come down the stairs in fast motion. As they move toward the camera, however, the motion slows, becoming stately and solemn as they lift their arms in thanks for their deliverance. Thanks offered, the arms drop and the undercranking whisks them out of the frame.

The first title of the film introduces Gwendoline as a recently-orphaned young girl who devours the works of

Laura Jean Libbey, a popular romantic novelist of the era. Gwendoline consults her volume of Libbey throughout her odyssey, linking her with those characters in the western comic tradition, such as Don Quixote, whose foibles result from the too serious reading of silly books. However, GOODNESS GRACIOUS pushes this involvement with sign systems further. Gwendoline does not simply read Laura Jean Libbey. As the intertitle said, she devours her - literally, chewing on pages with voracious appetite. After her marriage to Cornelius, when there is no food in the larder and the kids are crying from hunger, she starts a family tradition and gives them each a page from Libbey to swallow. In a work that stands near the beginning of a rich tradition of the ingesting and digesting of signs, what action could be more appropriate? Unless it would be the cooking and eating of a shoe.

[Projection: GOODNESS GRACIOUS, 1914, Vitagraph/
J. Stuart Blackton, directed by James Young.
Cast: Clara Kimball Young, Sidney Drew, Ned
Finley, James Lackaye, Robert Connelly, Kate
Price, Etienne Giradot.]

Notes

1. GOODNESS GRACIOUS, or MOVIES AS THEY SHOULDN'T BE, 1914. The film was shown in New York City on February 7, 1914, at the newly-opened Vitagraph Theater on a bill with A MILLION BID, a straight melodramatic feature film, and live pantomimes starring Vitagraph actors (see The Moving Picture World, February 14, 1914, p.787.) Curiously, the film does not appear in the list of Vitagraph releases in The Moving Picture World from November 1913 to April 1914. The film is distributed by The Museum of Modern Art as part of their program, Vitagraph Comedies, which also includes a John Bunny film and a more conventional Sidney Drew film.
2. Walter Kerr, The Silent Clowns, particularly p.26-27.
3. Reprinted in George Pratt, ed., Spellbound in Darkness, p.232.
4. Rudi Blesh, Keaton, p.54-55.
5. Archibald Shepperson, The Novel in Motley, a History of the Burlesque Novel in English, p.7.
6. Ron Mottram first pointed out the relation between these films to me.
7. Gilbert Cross, Next Week - East Lynn: Domestic Drama in Performance, 1820-1874, p.140.

SUBVERTING THE CONVENTIONS: SLAPSTICK AS GENRE

Eileen Bowser

The silent slapstick film, like the feature film, was a commercial commodity of the big business entertainment industry and had its own distinct conventions, yet it seems to me that in some ways it functioned as a subversion of the feature film in the way that the French avant garde subverted French narrative cinema in the twenties, although less consciously. I would like to try to isolate some of the elements that may have performed this role of undermining the conventions of mainstream cinema. Many of these elements were survivals, or revivals, of the preGriffith cinema.

Nearly all the gags of slapstick had already appeared in the years before 1908: pie-throwing, explosions, acrobatic leaps and falls, undercranking and overcranking of the camera to speed or slow the action, and such specific gags as the newly-painted park bench that leaves stripes on the actor's clothes. These gags were the heritage of generations of clowns in the music halls, cafes, vaudeville, circus and fairgrounds, clowns who now performed for the camera. Stereotypical figures were a mainstay of this early cinema, and the comic chase was in itself a dominant genre before 1908. Another key genre of the preGriffith era was the fantasy trick film. It began to fade out under the onslaught of the drive for an illusionistic reality in the narrative cinema after 1907, but was revived in a new guise in the slapstick film, where many gags depended on its special effects.

The vulgarity of the preGriffith cinema (and the often unsavory conditions to be found in the nickelodeons spreading rapidly through downtown entertainment districts) brought out the reformers and idealists with a call for a moralistic cinema which would uplift the working class and immigrant audience. At the same time, the "manufacturers," as the producers were known, tried to increase the base from which consumers could be drawn by producing a more refined product for a middle class audience. In a rather short time, 1908 - 1909, the moral melodrama of which David Wark Griffith was the leading practitioner became dominant over both comedy and fantasy, the chief fictional genres of the earlier period. At the very time when the slapstick genre was beginning to flourish in France and Italy, in the United States slapstick faded away. There were attempts at a more polite form of comedy, but at the beginning of this period, melodramas were produced in much greater

numbers.

I like to think of Mack Sennett as the symbol of the bursting forth of slapstick comedy from the constraints of the moral melodrama, as he sprang forth from the constraints of the Biograph Company practices in 1912 to set up Keystone films. This was the same year the Griffith melodrama had found its full narrative voice and the year when the competition of the independents with the Trust companies began to overturn the balance of power. It was as though having been kept down for a few years, this lively spirit of the popular cinema had to explode. Sennett, who more than anyone exploited this spirit, is precisely the man to mark this change.

In one of the more conscious efforts to undermine the dominant genre, Sennett produced hundreds of slapstick films which took as subject the very melodramas and suspense thrillers with which Griffith had achieved such great success. *FOR LIZZIE'S SAKE* (1913), *BARNEY OLDFIELD'S RACE FOR A LIFE* (1913), *THE BATTLE OF WHO RUN* (1913), *IN THE CLUTCHES OF A GANG* (1914), *CURSES! HE REMARKED* (1914), these are only a few of the many films which burlesqued these genres.

It is the spirit of early cinema that is revived with the growth of the slapstick genre after 1912. All the things that the moral melodrama was meant to suppress appeared again in slapstick comedy: anarchy, amorality, eroticism, vulgarity, fantasy, cruelty, the total disrespect for the forces of organized society. When the melodramas began to find the means to express individual characterization, the slapstick film was content with the use of stereotypes of the professions, classes, races, religions, nationalities, youth and age, lovers, rivals and clowns. With the increasing control over the product and its exhibition by the organized production companies, various subject matter was declared taboo, or to be used only within the confines of "good taste," yet the slapstick film, with a joyful amorality, went on its merry way showing violence, mayhem, murder, suicide, infidelity, corruption, deformities, homosexuality, transvestism, drunkenness, semi-nudity.

The difference, of course, was that slapstick film was understood, as was early cinema, to be unreal. Nevertheless, these taboos were not broken without considerable uneasiness in some people's minds, as one may discover in reading the press comments of the time. Certain films were deplored as containing too much vulgarity, others were praised with the comment: "There is nothing in this film to offend anyone." The Vitagraph Bulletin for November 1, 1909, describing *A STICKY PROPOSITION*, declared that "Fly paper as a comedy adjunct

is no novelty, but the treatment of this subject is new and much enjoyed by those who appreciate real humor that is not of the slap-stick sort." The so-called "polite comedy" for these polite people was produced in equal numbers all during the slapstick era: in the effort to bring real-life characters and everyday situations to comedy, the refined version used the stylistic conventions of the melodrama. Only the slapstick film succeeded in escaping the bounds, in providing, perhaps, an escape valve for propriety. I wonder whether it did not also lead the way toward changes in film styles and changes in the dominant moral standards of the twenties, as the scanty costumes worn by Mack Sennett's bathing beauties and by the young women in the Fox Sunshine Comedies were forerunners of what was to become accepted beach attire.

It may seem simplistic to say it, but one element that differentiates the short comedy from the feature film is that it is short. Even in the period 1908 - 1912, comedy began to appear in the split-reel format, while what was then called a "feature" was a full reel or longer. Like the films of early cinema, the creators of the comedy short are less concerned with developing complex plots and characterization. Slapstick doesn't have the time nor the compulsion to draw the audiences into the illusion of reality.

One of the rules of the narrative cinema as it developed at the time of Griffith at Biograph was that an actor should never look at the camera. To do so would break the spell, would intrude into the illusion of a real world, would implicate the invisible spectator as voyeur. Long after this rule was in force, actors in slapstick films often did look at the camera, in open acknowledgement, as in early cinema, that this is only an act, a show, to amuse the spectator. The practice was eventually abandoned by most comedians, but the device of openly acknowledging the camera (and the spectator) was often brought back much later on, as in the Bob Hope-Bing Crosby "Road" pictures of the forties, with a much more developed consciousness that the illusionism was being broken, as a gag.

For the major comics, there was also the tendency to play in full shot and in long takes, permitting an entire elaborate routine to be seen and appreciated. Chaplin's films avoided what film historians used to call "cinematic" qualities, to concentrate on his abilities as a performer. I would prefer to think of his practice as another example of the survival of an earlier style, in which an action was completed in one shot before moving to the next. The intention was presentation, not representation.

Of course slapstick films also specialized in rapid cutting and parallel editing. They emphasized action and speed. The practices of early cinema survived in combination with the newer ideas. Certainly Sennett, while we take him as a paradigm of the subversion of the moral melodrama, first learned about making films in the very place where melodrama reigned supreme.

One of the most significant aspects of slapstick that we might call subversive was the destruction of space. The continuity cinema had carefully set up the conventions by which a space could be defined by a series of related shots. As an example of this kind of comic destruction, there are numerous slapstick films that begin with a joke about the establishing shot. In *HANGIN' AROUND*, a Monty Banks film of 1923, the opening shots show what appear to be preparations for a wedding, but the first long shot shows they are actually getting ready for a funeral. In the 1928 Edward Everett Horton film *BEHIND THE COUNTER*, Horton appears to be pacing around a hospital room waiting for news of the birth of his baby, but the camera pulls back to reveal that he is in a department store, hoping to get an interview for a job. The Sennett films are full of people who seem to be riding a horse or doing all kinds of things except what the longer shot then reveals. These kinds of gags depend on the spatial conventions accepted by filmmakers and audiences at the same time that the slapstick films set out to undermine them.

Slapstick films revived the use of the split-screen. A split-screen means two images are on the screen at the same time, ordinarily two images filmed separately with alternate sides of the frame blocked off, which then appear side-by-side on the screen - although in the beginning it could also simply be a wall or curtain dividing two sides of a stage. It was a device used in earlier days for fantasy and trick effects but also as a way to keep the action in one shot instead of cutting to another. The newer narrative systems broke up the action into several shots. In the slapstick films, however, there are many gags which depend on the split-screen. It soon became a joke about continuity cinema itself. For example, in one slapstick film (I have forgotten the title but the same gag was used many times), the comedian slides behind a skinny telegraph pole and out on the other side of it wearing a different costume, by way of a split-screen image. There are examples of the split screen in the feature film also, especially in cases of the magical appearance of a character in someone's thoughts, but as narrative conventions begin to be formalized, such images appear as an anomaly there, while in the slapstick film they are part of the normal

equipment, material for a gag. The split-screen was no longer used as it was in the preGriffith cinema, but as a subversion of the accepted rules for defining space.

I think there are probably many other examples of the slapstick genre's ability to escape, undermine or subvert the practices of the classic feature film, and I would like to offer this approach as a methodology for understanding some aspects of the slapstick genre, its relation to the feature film and the development of film styles. Changes in film history do not occur in isolation, and there is probably a symbiotic relationship between the development of the feature film and the slapstick film. Each had its role to play in the theater program, and any study of the relationship should include a history of exhibition practices as well. In 1928, the Butterfield Circuit in Michigan followed the practice of opening the program with a short comedy, followed by the live vaudeville acts in which this circuit specialized, followed by a newsreel, and finally, the feature film. The comedy, it was thought, could stand on its own and serve to warm up and relax the audience for the live actors, who traditionally avoided having to face an audience cold. It might be useful to find out the variations in exhibition practice as it affected the showing of the slapstick comedy. How did its subversive nature act in conjunction with the showing of films with standardized narrative conventions?

I have more questions than answers, but I think it is probably necessary to find the right questions before we can begin to have a better understanding of this kind of cinema.

To end, I would like to show a film that has no particular relationship to my thesis, but a close relationship to the lunch which is to follow. It is a 1928 film produced by Hal Roach called FEED 'EM AND WEEP.

[Projection: FEED 'EM AND WEEP, 1929, produced by Hal Roach, directed by Fred L. Guiol. Cast: Max Davidson, Anita Garvin, Edgar Kennedy, Charlie Hall.]

LEAVE 'EM LAUGHING:
THE LAST YEARS OF THE BIOGRAPH COMPANY

Patrick Loughney

The career of D. W. Griffith looms so large in the history of the Biograph Company that it has become nearly impossible to view the importance of the film's twenty-one year existence from any other perspective than the plateau of the five landmark years of his employment, between the summers of 1908 and 1913. This emphasis is certainly not unwarranted but it has tended to leave in the shadows the contributions of other persons, whose decisions and filmmaking skills were just as important, at the time, to the life and reputation of the company.

During the next few minutes, I would like to share with you a view of Biograph that is more from the valley of comedy - so to speak - than the mountain of melodrama. My first goal is to show how this perspective suggests some explanations for the evolutionary changes, in the film comedy of one company, that preceded and became slapstick. My second is to offer for your consideration and, I hope, enjoyment, five long forgotten films starring Charlie Murray, the comedian who brought to full bloom the slapstick tradition at Biograph.

As you will hear this view owes more to the methods of business history than the esthetics of comedy but I believe it could well be as important to our understanding of early film as unearthing the remains of the first rubber chicken or break-away suit.

In general, the least regarded of Biograph productions are the comedy films. This is due to a variety of events that occurred within the company, and throughout the industry in general, toward the end of its first decade. The beginning years of Biograph production were oriented primarily toward comedies and actualities. The far less frequent dramas appeared as special releases that seem almost to have been made as a means of keeping a toe-hold in an area of the market then dominated by Edison and foreign producers.

Copyright records in the Library of Congress and Biograph Company records in The Museum of Modern Art show that this production orientation remained consistent until 1903, when the market for Mutoscopes and actualities began a somewhat simultaneous decline in popularity. Comedies held steady through 1904; helped, no doubt, by the appearance in August of the famous Biograph chase comedy, PERSONAL. Successful repetition of

this formula buoyed the company into 1905. Biograph filmmakers claimed to have "invented" the form, and perhaps they did, but evidence exists to show that it was probably borrowed from the English comedies they were importing and releasing through this time. Whatever the case, 180 comedies were produced in 1904 at an average length of 587', 104 actualities of varying lengths, and 19 dramas of various types at an average length of 661'.

The chase comedy, however, soon proved to be a fragile foundation upon which to base the future of an increasingly troubled company. Actualities dropped steadily through 1904 to 48 titles in 1905 (from 104 the year before). Patent litigation with Edison absorbed most of the profits and affected comedy productions as well, which declined to 78 in 1905 (from 180 the year before), at an average length of 486'. Conditions worsened in 1906 as the number of actualities fell to 29 and the comedies to 31. The low point came in 1907 when the number of comedies fell to 20 and actualities to 4, in the last year that they were made at Biograph. Dramas did poorly as well, falling from 19 in 1905, to 9 in 1906, and 4 in 1907.

The change in Biograph's fortune came in the person of Jeremiah J. Kennedy, a man whom Terry Ramsaye reports was hired to close down the operation. Kennedy, who had a reputation for successfully reconstructing weak companies, stayed on to reorganize. He settled Biograph's ruinous legal battles and, according to Ramsaye, apparently organized a team that performed extensive market research. No corroborating evidence has been found to support this claim but it is clear that Kennedy and Marvin shifted film production away from comedy, and the occasional stodgy costume drama, towards melodrama.

A corps of actors with dramatic experience was hired along with newcomers to the entertainment business. A regular production schedule was arranged and, also according to Ramsaye, strictly adhered to. The rest of this part of the story, of course is film history. 1908 saw the release of 56 dramas, at an average length of 753'. In 1909, Griffith was more confident of his position, the cast and crew more practiced, and 101 dramas were released at an average length of 793'. In 1910, Biograph released only 83 dramas but Griffith had extended their average length by 200'. His films, by this time, had made Biograph a profitable company. Production settled into a successful pattern and Kennedy and Marvin soon became loathe to tamper with it. 70 dramas were released in 1911 and 75 in 1912. In 1913, when directing opportunities were regularly given to Griffith assistants, production increased to 97.

Comedies did not disappear at Biograph after 1907 but they were clearly no longer the most important area of production. Griffith was responsible for their direction and he even wrote scenarios for some. As a formulaic entity, however, he simply did not bring to comedy the same level of intense creative development that he brought to the film melodrama. This is because Griffith's view of film genres, echoing the existing hierarchy of American popular entertainment, placed drama (and all artistic pretensions) firmly at the top, leaving nativist and immigrant low comedy traditions ignominiously at the bottom. To an industry struggling to establish itself among the turn-of-the-century American middle class, the comedy film was too low a form to be transformed into the "high-class" entertainment that critics and audiences demanded. The level of development which film comedy had attained by 1907 was also still far below the expectations of audiences accustomed to the incredible range of great comedians then appearing exclusively in the theater, vaudeville circuits, burlesque wheels, and elsewhere.

I do not mean to suggest that comedy was suppressed by the new regime at Biograph. But it is sure that the type of comedies that had been made before 1908 were, in fact, one of the elements of the film industry that had drawn the sharpest criticism of those who urged varying degrees of censorship. This criticism was expressed within the industry, as well, and the trade journals, which first appear in 1907, sound a consistent theme on the subject of unacceptable films.

Analysis of the industry-wide change in film content, extracted from the copyright records of 1907 through 1910, shows that well made historical dramas and didactic melodramas helped legitimize the industry. Biograph, under Kennedy and Griffith, caught the drift of that change and soon came to lead it. By late 1908 there was little interest in going back to the level of such comic crudities as *THE HOOPSKIRT AND THE NARROW DOOR* (1904), *PEEPING TOM IN THE DRESSING ROOM* (1905), *WINE, WOMEN AND SONG* (1906), and *HOW WOULD YOU LIKE A WIFE LIKE THIS?* (1907).

Comedies continued to provide an important source of income but it is evident, after 1908, that they were considerably changed in content. The previous emphasis had been on single, drawn-out gags based on direct ethnic satire, extended chases, and sexual titillation. Griffith's new emphasis on melodrama affected the development of what might be called the period of Biograph's "middle class situation comedies." Muscular Irish female domestics, frantic Jewish tailors, country

rubes, tramps and lunatics did not disappear. They gradually became, instead, secondary characters providing exaggerated comic relief in longer, more sophisticated films depicting the humor of middle class foibles associated with the rituals of courtship, elopement, marital misunderstandings, and the frustrations of urban life.

The initial transformation of comedy production was slow as Griffith devoted himself almost entirely to melodrama. Comedies, in 1908, recovered only slightly (from 20 the year before) as 26 were released at a virtually identical average length of 635'. [Remember, during the same period, melodramas moved from 4 (585') to 56 (753').] In 1909, they increased to 45 but decreased in length to 470'. The decrease in average length reflects Griffith's elimination of meaningless chase scenes but it also probably signifies Biograph's adherence to the weekly footage quotas established for members of the newly-formed Motion Picture Patents Company.

Development also lagged because Biograph and Griffith did not employ any comedians with a range of experience comparable to the dramatic actors they hired. The pre-1908 years, when Biograph concentrated on comedy, had produced some durable techniques and a small cadre of performers and directors. But only the Dillon brothers and Tony O'Sullivan, among the performers, survived the transition from the chase comedy era. There is no doubt that they had some influence (if only on technical matters) on the comic instincts of Griffith as well as Mack Sennett, Mabel Normand, Fred Mace, Ford Sterling, Del Henderson, and later, Anita Loos. But the members of this latter group were either without acting experience when hired or were from more humble origins in popular entertainment. Moreover, they came into a production order firmly oriented to melodrama. The names we now think of as important Biograph comedians, in reality, were stock players whose dramatic talents did not often appeal to Griffith, and who found their only real opportunities as the production of comedies became more independent of his supervision beginning in 1910.

Griffith's experiments with comic forms, during his first year, did include elements perfected by his predecessors, among whom was his cameraman, Billy Bitzer. The most striking evidence is THE CURTAIN POLE, a film of extravagant length which the Biograph Bulletin - a publication not usually at a loss for hyperbole - gave up on and described as "a subject that defies description." In form, it is a chase comedy with additional elements of humor derived from drunkenness, ethnic satire, gout, a false nose and some reverse motion

ethnic satire, gout, a false nose and some reverse motion footage thrown in for good measure. The added dimension, however, is the subordination of these elements within a satiric narrative about the utter failure of a superior French gentleman to impress an All-American girl with his elaborate display of social graces. It is, I believe, a watershed production of the sort that appears during periods of important stylistic change.

Nevertheless, whatever experimentation may be said to have occurred in comedy from 1908 to 1910, it seems less, on the whole, in the direction of the farcical THE CURTAIN POLE than in the area of "comedy of manners." The style and sentiment of Griffith were much more clearly developed in the "Jones family" series of 1909. Perhaps it can be said that the lessons of THE CURTAIN POLE were lost on Griffith but not on Sennett.

The number of Biograph comedies began a slow return to parity with dramas in 1910 - 1911, when the first of a long series of changes affected cast and production schedules. Florence Lawrence and, for a time, Mary Pickford, were lost to rival companies, and Griffith began filming on the West Coast leaving the comedy performers in greater isolation as a unit.

	Comedies		Dramas	
1909	48	470'	89	793'
1910	39	647'	69	972'
1911	57		70	
1912	70		75	

(Sennett leaves at end of summer 1912 taking Mace, Normand and Sterling with him.)

1913	96	97
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(Griffith leaves at end of summer 1913.)

1914	68	61
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In 1910 the Jones and Wright family series continued intermittently and Sennett, paired with either Mace or Henderson, began to appear in an unconnected string of

Jinks family and a series of detective comedies starring Sennett and Mace as the "Biograph sleuths." It is also evident at this point that the Biograph comedians began appearing less frequently as "extras" in the dramas.

In February of 1912, with the release of THE FATAL CHOCOLATE, starring Normand, Sennett and Henderson, a more formal development occurred. Beginning with this film, all Biograph comedies were identified, on the title frames and in the Bulletins, as "farce" comedies. Perhaps Biograph was simply trying to follow a perceived change in the market. Farce style comedians were quite popular by this time, particularly John Bunny at Vitagraph, and contemporary reviews seem to consistently place the comedy films of several companies ahead of those by Biograph. I know of no explanation except to say that this labelling appears almost as a sort of declaration of independence, by the comedy unit, from previous stylistic restrictions.

The labelling is important within the history of Biograph because it signaled a third period of change in comic style. Elements of low comedy began to appear in almost every film, after this time, as if the lessons of THE CURTAIN POLE were beginning to bear fruit. Not only that, a discernable shift toward parody appears in titles and plots that make fun of Griffith's melodrama. HELP! HELP!, released in April, tells of Mrs. Suburbanite who becomes frightened of what she believes are burglars outside her window. She telephones Mr. Suburbanite who races to the rescue only to find a toy poodle behind the curtains. Direct ethnic satire also returns in films like THE SPANISH DILEMMA, THE FICKLE SPANIARD, ONE ROUND O'BRIEN and NEIGHBORS, a film about excitable Frenchmen.

This change of comic style also foreshadowed a change in the future of Biograph more ominous than that of 1908. The old companies, which made films of all types, were beginning to decline in the face of new companies centered around the talents of individual stars or the production of films in specific genres. Comedians and actors, who were famous in other segments of popular entertainment, began finding new fame and money in film. In the year when Sarah Bernhardt, James O'Neill and James K. Hackett all made first films, Biograph, in a headstrong but fatal move, reaffirmed its policy of denying publicity and fair contracts to its players and directors.

One change happened in 1912 that had less affect on Biograph than might be supposed. At the end of the summer Sennett quit, taking Normand, Sterling and Mace with him, to form the Keystone Company. This left Biograph without its principal comedians. The void was

soon quickly filled by the widely experienced vaudeville and burlesque comedian, Charlie Murray. Murray is remembered today among vaudeville historians as half of the headlining team of Murray and Mack. Film historians usually find him at Keystone, or late in the 1920's opposite George Sidney in the then popular series, THE COHENS AND THE KELLYS.

Murray began starring with his third film, GETTING RID OF TROUBLE (September 5, 1912) and he quickly established himself as the "top banana" of the comedy unit. He is credited with no scenarios - a traditional Biograph way of getting lead parts - but he quickly showed that he was adept at a wider range of roles than Sennett, Mace or Sterling. No doubt this came from his two decades of vaudeville experience.

To me, Murray symbolizes the unbroken connection between late 19th century forms of popular entertainment and the motion picture industry. His first starring film, which we will see shortly, marks the full-fledged return to Biograph of the American low comedy traditions which had been largely abandoned in 1908. Sennett's later Biograph films show that he and his cohorts were allowed an increasingly wider range of license in their characterizations. But it is also clear that they were bound by certain restrictions that, perhaps, remained in place from their tentative early days. I am referring to the elements of direct ethnic satire, female impersonation and the chase, in which Murray so obviously excelled in the more than 100 comedies he made during his two years with the company.

Most of our knowledge about Murray's early film work or, indeed, all of the nearly 200 post-Sennett/Griffith films comes from the copyright fragments in the Library of Congress or the Biograph negatives in The Museum of Modern Art. These records are complete enough to allow a full look at the final years of Biograph comedy production. Sennett's departure opened up opportunities for others besides Murray. Anita Loos became a regular writer of intertitles, gags and scenarios, and Del Henderson became a regular co-star with Murray, as well as a full-time director.

The chemistry of this new group produced two interesting changes by late 1912 that mark the last creative phase of comic development at Biograph. The first, reflecting the influence of other companies, is the appearance of a series of "burlesque" comedies. Produced less frequently than the farces, they are the most obvious examples of the ensemble's low comic instincts. Murray plays the leading roles, of course, and it is in these burlesques that we see comedy with the

stops pulled out. Brick bats, eccentric costumes, pratfalls and the other full-blown characteristics of slapstick. They are certainly no more remarkable than comparable films of the better producers of 1913 and 1914, but they are also not deserving of the obscurity into which they have fallen.

The second element of this change is more difficult to define. The Biograph comedy units of the later years showed an increasing penchant for self-parody. This is most apparent in the numerous comedies which revolve around themes relating to small-time vaudeville and burlesque, stranded acting troupes and the general hardships associated with life in American entertainment professions of the time.

This phenomenon was not unique to Biograph, of course, but the directorial style of the later comedies, in particular, show what I believe was an effort to recapture, in a remarkably reflective mood, the ephemeral feelings that the entire company must have shared during the departure of so many talented people during and after 1912.

Before we see our films, I would like to share with you a few brief images that express what I mean.

[Projection: SLIDES]

With so many more important projects in line to claim limited restoration funds, the films you are about to see have had to wait their turn. They are work prints without intertitles that have been made available through the extra efforts of Eileen Bowser and The Museum of Modern Art. If one of the tests of a silent comedy is that it succeeds in communicating without intertitles, then I think you will find these films successful.

[Projection: GETTING RID OF TROUBLE, 1912, Biograph, directed by Dell Henderson. Cast: Charles Murray, Edward Dillon.
LOVE'S MESSENGER, 1912, Biograph, directed by Dell Henderson. Cast: Charles Murray, Kate Toncray.
A MIXED AFFAIR, 1912, Biograph, directed by Dell Henderson. Cast: Dell Henderson, Charles Murray, Grace Henderson, Florence Lee.
THE DAYLIGHT BURGLAR, 1913, Biograph, directed by Dell Henderson. Cast: Dell Henderson, Charles Murray, Gus Pixley, William Butler.]

ALMOST A WILD MAN, 1913, Biograph, directed
by Dell Henderson. Cast: Charles Murray,
Gus Pixley, Edward Dillon, Bud Duncan,
Dorothy Gish.]

LLOYD HAMILTON

Walter Kerr

I have been watching these last films along with you, and I must say it is a shock to see Charlie Murray with his teeth in. When I was a kid in the 1920's, Murray had advanced from Sennett one-reelers to THE COHENS AND THE KELLYS, the feature-film series that Universal produced with George Sidney. And Murray, of course, had aged in the meantime; along with age went some of his teeth. His mouth naturally turned down in any case, and all he had to do was leave his upper plate at home in order to do those rubberfaced grimaces that serve so many vaudeville comedians even now.

He had a long career. Now about the same time, in the silent twenties, I was particularly fond - and I was not the only one - of a two-reel comedian named Lloyd Hamilton. Lloyd Hamilton is no more than a name today. Most people don't know him at all. Relatively few of his films are floating around to be seen. The Museum has five now, I think, and there are a few others to be found if you scour the city, but not too many. Hamilton is a big question mark, really. Buster Keaton called him one of the funniest men in films. That is pretty strong praise from a man like Keaton. Chaplin, too, acknowledged Hamilton's talent. When you went to a Saturday matinee, or to any evening program for that matter, if a Lloyd Hamilton Educational film flashed on the screen - his films were released by Educational Pictures - immediately you knew you were in for a class act. That is to say, it was going to be a better short subject than you were likely to get during the rest of that week. At least you expected it to be.

Hamilton was generally treated with a considerable respect, without ever moving forward - successfully anyway - into features. Why he shouldn't have got beyond his status as a top-ranking two-reel comedian is not clear. Because we have relatively few films, we can't be sure. We can't mark transitions, for one thing. Why do we have so few films? Well, there is that old story about a fire in the Educational lab that destroyed all his negatives, but some such story has been told of almost everyone's films. In 1949, Buster Keaton told me that none of his two-reelers survived, that they had all gone in a warehouse fire. That is what he thought at the time, that is what someone told him. It wasn't true at all. We know that nearly all of them exist at the present time.

Whatever happened, today people look puzzled if you mention Hamilton. They cannot imagine, exactly, seeing him as a feature comedian. Now the question is, what made him distinctive enough to have an A-one rating as a two-reel comedian, and what did he lack that made him unable to move on, to go over into features? Other men could do it, once Chaplin and Keaton and Lloyd had established the pattern. Langdon managed it for six films. There was no closed corporation here, nobody said: "There isn't room for any more feature-film comedians." When Raymond Griffith came along, there was room for him. But Hamilton stayed where he was.

What was distinctive about him? Not his looks, exactly. He is a tall man, a big man, a rather muscular one, it turns out, and with quite a round face. If you see him with a small, trim moustache on (he tries this in only one of the films we have), he looks extremely ordinary. He began work in films wearing a tremendous overlay of whiskers, in a series of comedies featuring "Ham and Bud." He appeared with a partner named Bud Duncan, and the team made at least 200 one-reelers. Obviously, they were very popular. A glance at surviving prints today doesn't tell us much more than the fact that Hamilton spent a great deal of footage kicking Bud Duncan around. The two men seemed to have a sort of Mutt and Jeff relationship translated into simple physical violence. One of the films that exists shows them as a pair of blacksmiths. There is a great deal of muscle flexing, there is a great deal of kicking around. And there is a lot of crepe hair.

However, Hamilton did finally move away from the caterpillar-eyebrow school of clowning and tried to find for himself another image and another manner, something that would have a little more distinction and something that might just gain him a wider audience. Furthermore, violent physical comedy was getting a little tired by this time, it had been so thoroughly explored. In the twenties, when the major comedians who had been working in one and two-reelers were shifting over into features, Hamilton moved up beyond Ham and Bud into two-reelers. He joined forces with a producer named Jack White to form Mermaid Films, releasing through Educational.

He had a changed image, now. He had scraped off all the false hair and plastered his face white. As it appears, he was not a terribly even plasterer. That is to say, in some films the makeup base looks like a rather nice semi-clown-white smooth, in others it looks extremely grainy and coarse. I don't know whether he just lacked a makeup man to run in and dust him off every once in a while, or what. But there is some variability

in his makeup. His hair is slicked down and on top of it he wears a tilted checkered cap which again accents the roundness of his face. A bow tie, a wing collar - his clothes were otherwise ordinary. He has also acquired a rather curious walk. It is a waddle. Generally speaking, he walks from the hips. He has also developed fastidious fingers, which he carried primly, so that we are constantly getting not only a waddle as he walks down the street, we are also getting an apparent refinement that looks inappropriate on him. In other words, he uses gestures and a walk that could be considered effeminate but were not meant to be. In this period, it was not at all assumed that effeminate mannerisms indicated homosexuality. Homosexuality could be suggested in other ways. The simplest way seems to have been showing a man wearing a wristwatch. Whether anybody really thought that in the period, I don't know. But so legend has it. Actually, when any comedian wanted you to know he was playing a homosexual, he was able to let you know. That is to say, if you recall Stan Laurel's THE SOILERS, and if you remember the cowboy who prances elaborately through the barroom, you know what was intended.

So these fastidious gestures and the rather odd walk were not meant to be satirical thrusts at homosexuals. Working in "drag" wasn't either. Working in drag was absolutely stock, taken for granted as a comic device. You've seen Charlie Murray do it here just now. Wallace Beery started his career in drag. I think every major comedian used it at one time or another. We have at least one Hamilton film in which the comedian works in drag. When Hamilton used the business, he used it in the way Arbuckle did; that is to say, he appeared in drag in order to get closer to women. If women mistook Arbuckle for a woman, they would of course become more intimate with him. Nor would they object to his accompanying them into the ladies' dressing room. Hamilton treated it in much the same way. Buster Keaton called him an overgrown boy, and that comes close to defining his character.

Now, what kind of comic business did he do, what trademarks did he develop? Film clowns had to have a concept, a pattern of behavior, a thing that struck them funny that they could apply in a hundred situations with only slight variations. And Hamilton did have an oddball imagination that is a little bit different from any other screen comedian's. I'd like to show you a film called MOVE ALONG. The print is a dupe, but I hope you'll be able to see it all right. There are in this film three or four gags that are, I think, quite distinctive.

[Projection: MOVE ALONG, 1926, Hamilton Comedies,
directed by Norman Taurog.]

I find that film quite charming, in a number of ways, even after watching it quite a few times. There are certain details I like most particularly, though. One of them is the streetcar. That seems to me a splendid gag. The whole business of having to tie a shoelace on a street is a bloody nuisance. You can never find a place to put your foot. The curb is too low and everything else is too high. It is a problem, a perfectly real problem, and Hamilton solves it most ingeniously and logically by signaling the car to stop for him and then using it for a footstool. At the same time, the gag suggests to me what silent screen comedy was, how it came into being and how it made its effects. It seems to me that screen comedy can be described - it is really a contradiction in terms - as a "fantasy of fact." The camera is really a recording instrument. It is meant to make documents, that is to say, images of absolute reality. Whatever is seen on the screen must be actual. The streetcar is actual. If you had a fake streetcar, a cardboard streetcar, the gag wouldn't work at all. It is the reality of the street, and the traffic going on around Hamilton and the big streetcar coming to his rescue, to serve his purpose - this enormous thing serving his little purpose - that is all real, except for one thing. You can't hear any of it. It is silent. It is a contradiction in terms. Reality escapes into fantasy. You can do far more fantastic things if you don't have to duplicate the reality of sound. The sounds of people talking, horns honking, cops blowing whistles, might break the dreamlike nature of the image and spoil the nature of the gag. This seems to me a highly representative example of the kind of gagging that is most effective in silent film.

I also happen to be personally fond of - I don't think it is terribly funny, but I am fascinated with - the tray that slips onto Hamilton's head. That is, in a way, very Keaton-ish. Keaton was terribly insistent on the fact that film is two-dimensional. He didn't want to pretend that it was three-dimensional, he didn't want to suggest depth to you. That is why he would race a locomotive straight toward the camera, come right up to the camera and stop dead. You see, there was a "glass" there. There is something between us and "it," and he wanted to remind you of that. And I think the tray does it too, because Hamilton is working here in two dimensions. And because he is working in two dimensions, the gag becomes possible. You can't see the third dimension that enables a man to walk past another while leaving a tray that is in his hand on somebody else's head. The waiter would bump into Hamilton, actually, in three-dimensional life. But if you can get it into two dimensions, then you can get away with the gag.

I like the business of setting up housekeeping on the street (there is a little bit of footage missing there) and the directness of the shift from rain to snow. I mean, it is raining one minute, it is snowing the next. And that is because in Hamilton's world the seasons can come and go that fast. It reminds me a bit of another Hamilton film that I admire a great deal. It is hard to describe. Hamilton wants to go into the movies. He is a small town boy, and wants to go into the movies very badly. He has to leave home, he has to leave his Mom and the vine-covered cottage with the picket fence and all that sort of thing. But eventually he decided that he will go. His Ma tells him, "Oh, be careful, the city is wicked, be very careful how you walk through the streets because they're dangerous." He says, "I will, I promise you, absolutely I will." He says goodbye to the family, kisses everybody out on the front steps, and walks down into the garden or the little path to the picket fence - and walks right out into the big city. That is, right then and there. I don't mean a cut. I don't mean a dissolve or anything like that. The big city comes right up against the cottage. There's a sharp dividing line between them but they are right next to each other. That amuses me a great deal. It seems funny to me when Hamilton goes to the city in one step, and it seems funny when he comes back. The cottage is so readily available.

Another bit of business I like in this film is Hamilton's throwing the flower water away in wintertime, having it land on the portrait of the old man to create a snowy beard for the old fellow, just in a casual slush. That is good fun and it is even plausible.

If Hamilton had a defect that I can pin down off hand, it is that his imagination - which was quite vivid - apparently was restricted to a relatively few kinds of jokes, so that he had to repeat himself. He had to borrow heavily from his own films. Now, borrowing in silent film comedy was of course entirely legitimate. Everybody borrowed from everybody else. All they had to do was add a slant of their own. In one of Hamilton's shorts he's running away from someone and for a moment, he becomes part of a public statue. Now, of course, you have seen that. You have seen it in what is maybe its definitive form in CITY LIGHTS. It opens CITY LIGHTS. When the drapery is removed at the dedication of a big piece of statuary, there is Chaplin, sound asleep in the lap of the god who is being unveiled. That gag goes all the way back to Max Linder. There is a Linder short subject in which Max is always drunk. He comes from a costume ball dressed in armor and, absolutely sodden, he doesn't know where he is going, and he happens to stagger

into a museum which is having an exhibition of new pieces. Now Linder doesn't do much with this gag, he just stands there and lets visitors admire him as though he were a statue until he is stolen by thieves.

Of course Keaton used the same gag, and I think his use is the funniest. It occurs in THE GOAT. Buster is also running away from someone and there is an unveiling of a statue going on. Buster disappears behind the white sheet that is covering the statue for the moment. Then the unveiling takes place just as the cop chasing him comes into view. The statue is a statue of a horse and Buster is now sitting on it. Unfortunately, the horse now begins to buckle because it is apparently not dry yet. As Buster's weight gradually collapses the plaster horse, it is contorted into all kinds of agonized shapes. That seems to me to be the funniest use of the gag, the one that gets the loudest response in the theater, that I know of. But the gag is everywhere, and there is no reason why Hamilton should not have used it, too.

He also borrowed gags for a film called NOBODY'S BUSINESS. He is on a streetcar, trying to read a letter from home. He is standing in the middle of the aisle because all the seats are now taken. There are three or four people strap-hanging around him and so, as he reads his letter, the other people who are strap-hanging look over his shoulder and begin to read it too. Finally there are three or four people reacting to each sentence in the letter, whether it is emotion, anger, or whatever is called for. These people insist on Hamilton slowing down a bit, as they have not quite finished by the time he's ready to turn a page. They take over the letter, eventually, and he never does get it back. Again, that certainly has been done before. The base for it is probably in Chaplin's SHOULDER ARMS, Charlie in the trenches of World War I. Charlie has got no letter in the day's mail, so he reads somebody else's over his shoulder and reacts visually to everything that is in it. It is a wonderful little passage.

There are other examples of this kind of thing. In NOBODY'S BUSINESS, Hamilton does several direct lifts from Keaton. Keaton, in MY WIFE'S RELATIONS, lives in a boarding house with his wife and her relatives. Her brother is having his coffee at the dinner table with all the rest of them. He puts some sugar into his cup of coffee and then he puts some more sugar in, and then he puts some more sugar in. Buster is looking on and getting more disgusted by the moment. Of course he isn't revealing much with his face. We simply see him get up, go over to the brother, and pour the coffee into the sugar bowl. Hamilton uses exactly the same gag in

NOBODY'S BUSINESS.

He's running a lunch wagon in the same film, and a wind storm blows up. The wagon comes loose from its moorings and goes flying into an amusement park, up on to a roller coaster. As it curves and swings around the very top, it goes off the edge and into the water and starts to sink. It really does sink, then starts to come up again. There is a submarine under it, surfacing. Of course, that is the ending of THE NAVIGATOR.

You can go through the films and find endless examples of borrowing. I think his borrowings, sometimes, are too literal. The general rule was, it is all right to borrow, as long as you have got your own little switch, or addition, or variant. If you've got an extra twist, then you are part of the competition. Hamilton didn't always have one, at which point (as I mentioned earlier) he might borrow from himself. Sometimes he almost remakes complete films. I am thinking of one in which he begins to be getting ready to go out. He puts on a jacket, but the jacket rips up the back and he has to put safety pins all the way down to hold it together. Then when he's all ready the lapel comes off, and when he corrects that, the whole sleeve drops off. After he has attended to these matters, he gets an overcoat from a rack and stands by the rack putting it on. In the process he somehow attaches himself to the rack so that he has the whole coat rack on his shoulders without knowing it. Then he goes out on the street, where the rack begins picking up clothes from other people. He did this routine in great detail in at least two different films. I know that Laurel and Hardy did endless re-makes, but they were normally shifts from silent films to sound, where there was a reason, a specific excuse, for redoing the film. Whereas Hamilton just seems to have been out of fresh material when he borrowed. But that is a guess. I find that I do like the evidence of imagination that is there in the films we have. I like it a lot. And I certainly wish we had a larger selection of films to help us reach reasonable judgements. Is anybody still trying to find them? Or sadly, is Hamilton simply a lost cause?

[Projection: THE VAGRANT, 1921, Mermaid Comedies, Hamilton/White series, directed by Jack White. Cast: Lloyd Hamilton.]

MUTT AND JEFF MEET THE HORSLEYS

Steve Higgins

The Nestor Film Company was formed in 1910 from the remnants of the Centaur Film Manufacturing Company. Centaur had been organized in the summer of 1908 by David Horsley, his brother William, and Charles Gorman, a former Biograph actor, as a producer of western and comedy subjects. Business offices for Centaur were located at Fourth Avenue and 14th Street in New York City, with a studio and factory at 900 Broadway, Bayonne, New Jersey. A second studio would eventually be established in Mariner's Harbor section of Staten Island, near Bayonne.

Centaur had suffered from a sporadic release schedule during its brief existence, but its combination of comedies, both "refined" and "Negro," and westerns appears to have been popular with audiences. The studio's successful alternation of these two genres in their release schedule was also a powerful example to other producers, most notably Adam Kessel and Charles O. Baumann, who, in 1912, established the reputation of their New York Motion Picture Corporation on a similar weekly offering of westerns by Thomas Ince and comedies by Mack Sennett.

The Horsleys operated outside the "Trust," among the Independents. David once said that the "Trust" considered them too small to bother with, and that was certainly true, at least in the beginning. In a letter dated 7 October 1908, F. C. Aiken of the Theatre Film Service Company wrote to Frank L. Dyer, General Counsel of the Edison Manufacturing Company, to report on the creation of the "Centaur" Company. This new firm was claimed to be a manufacturer of "American made film" and therefore deserved study as a possible infringer of Edison patents.[1] Dyer, however, was unperturbed. In a response dated 13 October, he told Aiken that[2]

The Centaur Film Company has been thoroughly investigated by us, and is doing absolutely nothing. They applied for a license which was refused, and, so far as I am aware, have neither any talent nor ability to do any harm.

Because they apparently had very little capital, and because no one would sell them the necessary equipment on the open market, the Horsley brothers had to resort to improvised cameras, developers and the like to turn out

their films. Charles Rosher, recently arrived in the United States from England in 1909, went to work for the Horsleys in the Bayonne studio. As he recalled for Kevin Brownlow, it wasn't really a studio, but rather "a shop, with a lot of bathtubs for developing the film. They used to go out and make pictures with an improvised camera..."[3] The precursor of the cameraman's clap-stick was a Horsley design, and the Horsley laboratory expertise became famous in the industry, largely through the efforts of William and able assistants like Rosher.

In January 1910, after less than a year and a half of production, the Horsleys changed their brand name from Centaur to Nestor. The transformation, however, was carried out with a minimum of fanfare, and much confusion. The earlier brand simply vanished from the films themselves, to be replaced after several weeks by "Nestor." In the press, columnists expressed uncertainty over whose productions they were actually reviewing. At first, readers of the Moving Picture World were advised to "watch for [the] monthly issue of the 'Nestor' Film de Lux / Produced by Centaur." [4] The following week, the same periodical announced that "on and after Feb. 15, 1910 the American Film Producing Co. will release regularly one reel each week" through its sole agent, A. G. Whyte of New York City. [5] I have been unable to verify the incorporation of a new film production company by that name in 1910, so it is possible that the Horsleys and Whyte merely wished to emphasize what they termed the "Rattling Good American" [6] quality of their product. For a time, the films were known simply as A. G. Whyte releases, but by mid-February of 1910, the transition from Centaur to Nestor was complete, and once again the Horsley name predominated in publicity and news items.

With the new brand name came reorganization and a noticeable upgrading of the studio's production standards. One of the first of the new releases, THE WAGES OF SIN, was commended for its "considerable improvement in acting and story over previous issues." [7] The company's commitment to its mixture of genres continued, and occasionally overlapped with the production of western comedies. The directorial staff in 1910 included Milton H. Fahrney and Al E. Christie. Comparing favorably the Horsley product to that turned out by the "Trust," columnists regularly commented upon the "strong" narratives, "excellent" acting and gritty realism of Nestor dramas. Even so, such a talented director as Fahrney could not always overcome the decidedly eastern look of his New Jersey and Staten Island westerns. [8] Nineteen eleven saw Nestor briefly abandon westerns for contemporary melodramas, in what was seen as a bid for a more respectable audience, but this plan was quickly dropped as the Horsleys responded to

exhibitor pressure to return to the more lucrative cowboy dramas. In June of that year, Nestor made its first trip to California, with Fahrney leading a company of twenty to the west coast in search of visual authenticity. Al Christie and Thomas B. Ricketts remained in New Jersey to head the firm's two comedy units, thus assuring Nestor of an increased release schedule of two reels per week.[9] The division of the company into a bi-coastal organization was accompanied by the announcement of the Horsleys' acquisition of the rights to Bud Fisher's popular comic strip, Mutt and Jeff. [10]

Mutt and Jeff, the strip, began life on 15 November 1907 in the San Francisco Chronicle as A. Mutt. Originally conceived as an occasional feature across the top of that paper's sports page, to which Bud Fisher was already a regular contributor, A. Mutt caught the imagination of the reading public and quickly became a daily strip, moving within a month of its first appearance to Hearst's San Francisco Examiner, and from there to national syndication. The character of Jeff was introduced briefly in March of 1908, and the two were paired for good on 22 March 1909, when Fisher brought his talents east to Hearst's New York American.

Mutt and Jeff was not the first regular newspaper strip in the United States. In 1904, Clare Briggs created A. Piker Clerk for Hearst's Chicago American in response to a circulation war with the rival Daily News. Devised as a gimmick with which to hook sports page readers, Briggs' strip dealt with horse-racing - the theme of the original A. Mutt panels - and the efforts of its lead character to raise the necessary capital for his various betting schemes. Like Mutt, the Briggs character was a "thin-necked, pop-eyed fellow with slack chin and heavy mustache who was dressed in loud, high-society clothes." [11] However, Hearst found this strip vulgar and, after only eighteen dailies had been prepared, it was discontinued.

In contrast to Briggs, whose creation was by design only a temporary feature, Bud Fisher quickly realized the full potential of exposure to a daily audience. While Mutt was at first, as John Fell has suggested, only the latest in a long line of "posturing figures [used] as anchors of characterization for spoken gags," [12] Fisher gradually enlarged the strip's universe to include a full complement of recognizable "types" engaged in gag situations of sufficient inventiveness to warrant continued reader interest. That interest grew to loyalty, both among regular Hearst readers and on the part of the publisher himself.

By 1911, Mutt and Jeff was possibly the most popular

strip in the United States. A newspaper promotion that year in Hearst's American, wherein readers clipped coupons for a free copy of a Mutt and Jeff anthology - one of the earliest examples of the comic book in this country - drew an unprecedented response for over 45,000 copies.[13] The potential for tapping into a ready-made film audience with a series based on Fisher's characters was clear.

Production on the Mutt and Jeff series began in May of 1911, with Fisher personally credited as the scenarist of each film, although this may have been merely a contractual agreement. The two surviving prints were directed by Al Christie, but it may be that the early entries in the series were turned out by Thomas B. Ricketts, at that time a more seasoned director than Christie, and thus a more obvious choice for so important an undertaking by Nestor. The actors chose for the roles were veteran vaudevillians Gus Alexander as Jeff and, as Mutt, Sam Dade Drane, who would end his career in 1916 as Abraham Lincoln in Colin Campbell's production for Selig Polyscope of THE CRISIS.

Aside from the tie-in with Fisher's famous comic strip, the Mutt and Jeff series is also of interest because it introduced to film the concept of subtitles, titles appearing on the images instead of between them. In an effort to approximate the experience of reading the original strip. William Horsley developed the idea of placing character dialogue at the bottom the frame. The process was hailed as a means for audiences to understand film plots "without the bothersome breaks" caused by intertitles,[14] but in practice the new subtitles were used in a variety of ways, in several different types of Nestor comedies, and not always successfully. The four surviving films that use the process do so in a variety of ways, including as an adjunct to traditional intertitles, as well as on their own. The trade press was occasionally critical of the fact that the dialogue beneath the images did not coincide with the action itself,[15] but the novelty of the device seems to have won over the majority of reviewers when it was first unveiled in June of 1911.

David Horsley pushed the Mutt and Jeff series with great determination in the trades, and even went so far as to take the initial release, MUTT JOINS THE FORCE, on a whirlwind tour of the country, projecting it to groups of exhibitors and exchange men in cities throughout the midwest, while James McIntyre, also of Nestor, undertook a similar tour of the northeast. Horsley visited fifteen cities in two weeks, with McIntyre covering twelve in the same number of days.[16] Nestor may have conceived of the tour as a publicity stunt, or perhaps the Horsleys were

truly nervous about the reception awaiting the Mutt and Jeff series; regardless, the press coverage was substantial and favorable. Nestor expected great things of these films, but it seems that the extraordinary attention given to the start of the series may have worked against the company's best interests. Too much was expected of what was, after all, an experiment and Nestor was given little room for developing a regular series truly reflective of the original newspaper feature.

The series got off to a shaky start. The second release, MUTT AND JEFF AT THE FORTUNE TELLER, suffered from a problem which Nestor was never able to overcome, and which was indicative of the flaw in their approach. As the New York Dramatic Mirror noted:[17]

The picture contains many laughs from the nature of its action, and the conversation of the players, but it must be borne in mind that a motion picture is still a picture of action: therefore there must be action, and if there be words let them suit the action. The first part of the scene at the fortune teller's is an illustration of the "too talky" effect. Mutt sometimes has the unpleasant habit of facing front and explaining his action, which is not an eccentricity of the character, but something which will spoil his characterization in time.

The Mutt and Jeff strip did not have the sophisticated graphic style or the strong characterization of Winsor McKay's several features, George Herriman's Krazy Kat or George McManus' Bringing Up Father; rather, it offered simple jokes played against sketchy, barely-drawn backgrounds. The situations were quickly grasped, and were more verbal than visual. As Fell's description implies, the characters were the props to the gags. Readers returned day after day because Fisher's humor was consistent, and his characters were simple and direct. The films, on the other hand, were inconsistent in the quality of their scripts - one good argument against Fisher's actual involvement in their creation - and in their balance of verbal and visual elements. The two surviving prints bear this out. In both MUTT AND JEFF DISCOVER A WONDERFUL REMEDY and MUTT AND JEFF JOIN THE OPERA, the viewer is constantly pulled back and forth within the same frame between the broad slapstick of the action and the punning slang of the subtitles. The characters are oddities, in keeping with the premise of the strip, but in their bizarre make-up the actors are no longer exaggerated "types," but rather unappealing grotesques. The jarring effect of Drane's and Alexander's appearance, coupled with their

loosely-structured narratives, make the surviving films, and by implication the entire series, the antithesis of what Fisher strove for and achieved so regularly in his daily strip.

Nestor not only encountered problems with coordinating the verbal and visual elements of their films; they also found that the very concept of a series based on a famous comic strip was a mixed blessing. Mutt and Jeff may have had a ready-made film audience, but that audience also brought with it to the theater preconceptions and expectations, many of which Drane and Alexander undoubtedly failed to match. Reviewers regularly commented upon the two actors' failure to capture the characters' "eccentricities," their constant mugging and over-acting. It eventually was suggested that replacements were needed if the series was to be a success.[18] Less than two months into the project, the Moving Picture World was failing "to find among habitues of the picture shows any great enthusiasm for this series of pictures...."[19]

In all, Nestor produced 25 Mutt and Jeff titles. At first, they were accorded a full reel each. However, this lasted for only 12 weeks, after which time Mutt and Jeff were produced as split-reels. By December of 1911, they were at the bottom of the Nestor comedy program, and were sharing the schedule with the company's next attempt at comic strip adaptation, Harry Hershfield's Desperate Desmond. It was hoped that when Nestor moved its entire production force to Hollywood in October of 1911 the change of locale and principal actors would revive the Mutt and Jeff films, but the Moving Picture World could only express ambivalence about the new actors, stating that "perhaps they are better than those who formerly took these parts; but that is hard to decide." [20] By February of 1911, Nestor officially announced the abandonment of both comic strip series, claiming that Saturdays would now see the release of only "classy and up-to-date" split-reels.[21]

Unlike earlier efforts to capitalize on the success of such comics as Frederick Burr Opper's Happy Hooligan and Richard Outcault's Buster Brown, Nestor's Mutt and Jeff series sought to reconcile the unique qualities of print and film. However, what began as an ambitious attempt to locate a common ground between two popular art forms ended in an ultimately unsatisfactory hybrid. The result is little more than a fascinating footnote to film history, but one that offers fertile ground for further speculation on American popular culture at the turn of the century. As an example of the never-ending efforts by early film entrepreneurs to identify and cultivate new audiences, Nestor's Mutt and Jeff films reveal much about

the relationships, both explicit and implied, among the popular arts of the period.

[Projection: Nestor Comedies:

THE BLESSED BABY, 1911, directed by
Thomas Ricketts. Cast: Gertrude Clair,
Mr. Waldron.

MUTT AND JEFF JOIN THE OPERA, 1911,
directed by Al E. Christie. Cast: Gus
Alexander, Sam Drane, Victoria Forde.

DIPPY ADVERTISES FOR A PUP, 1911,
directed by Al E. Christie or Thomas
Ricketts. Cast: Mr. Waldron.

MUTT AND JEFF DISCOVER A WONDERFUL REMEDY,
1911, directed by Al E. Christie. Cast:
Gus Alexander, Sam Drane.

BIG NOISE HANK, 1911, directed by Thomas
Ricketts or Al E. Christie. Cast: Mr.
Sprague, Mr. Waldron.]

Notes

1. F. C. Aiken to Frank L. Dyer, 7 October 1908, Motion Picture Patents Company Papers, Edison National Historic Site, West Orange, New Jersey.

2. Frank L. Dyer to F. C. Aiken, 13 October 1908, Motion Picture Patents Company Papers, Edison National Historic Site, West Orange, New Jersey.

3. Kevin Brownlow, The Parade's Gone By, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969, p.226.

4. Moving Picture World, 8 January 1910, p.38.

5. MPW, 15 January 1910, p.61.

6. Ibid.

7. New York Dramatic Mirror, 29 January 1910, p.17.
8. NYDM, 19 October 1910, p.32; 9 November 1910, p.33; 16 November, 1910, p.31; 23 November 1910, p.31.
9. MPW, 3 June 1911, p.1241.
10. MPW, 3 June 1911, p.1254-1255.
11. Coulton Waugh, The Comics, New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1947; Brooklyn, New York: Luna Press, 1974, p.27-28.
12. John L. Fell, Film and the Narrative Tradition, Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974, p.106.
13. Waugh, p.335-336
14. MPW, 8 July 1911, p.1618
15. NYDM, 16 August 1911, p.25; 27 September 1911, p.33.
16. MPW, 15 July 1911, p.42.
17. NYDM, 26 July 1911, p.25.
18. NYDM, 2 August 1911, p.26; 9 August 1911, p.25; 16 August 1911, p.25; 27 September 1911, p.32-33; 18 October 1911, p.32.
19. MPW, 19 August 1911, p.466.
20. MPW, 6 January 1912, p.43.
21. MPW, 10 February 1912, p.491.

VITAGRAPH COMEDY PRODUCTION

Jon Gartenberg

Of all the earliest film studios, Vitagraph was the longest lasting. The history of the company spans the entire period of early film history, from the first motion picture projections of the 1890s through to the coming of sound when the company's assets were sold to Warner Brothers in 1925. There is a thirty-year body of work to look at in terms of a company which managed to survive all the rapid changes in the industry, pioneering in methods of studio production and exploitation and in stylistic expression. My previous research has centered around this company's filmmaking practices during the nickelodeon era, 1905 - 1907 (See "Vitagraph before Griffith: Forging ahead in the nickelodeon era" in Studies in Visual Communication, Fall 1984.) During this period, Vitagraph was in the forefront of composing sophisticated contemporary dramas. Making dramas in the newly-completed 1906 studio had challenged the company to find new ways of representing space and time in a continuous narrative flow. Vitagraph was meeting the demands of more complex narratives by integrating composition in depth with simultaneous action in successive shots, years before Griffith made parallel editing famous at Biograph. THE 100 TO 1 SHOT, OR A RUN OF LUCK (1906), FOUL PLAY, OR A FALSE FRIEND (1907), and THE MILL GIRL - A STORY OF FACTORY LIFE (1907), exemplify Vitagraph's significant contribution toward the development of a parallel editing style of filmmaking.

My look at Vitagraph comedy production stems from my interest in this early cinema period. Time constraints prevent me from providing a detailed analysis of this aspect of Vitagraph's filmmaking, but this paper outlines an approach I would like to explore in more depth in the future. In particular, the work of Larry Semon - a major comedian at Vitagraph from 1916 to 1924, during which time he made more than one hundred films - is noteworthy in relation to the evolution of a particular stylistic approach to making comedies. His films also bear an intriguing relationship to Vitagraph's early cinema period, especially to the trick film genre and the comedy chases.

There is a large corpus of production to look at over Vitagraph's thirty-year history. In general, Vitagraph concentrated its greatest efforts on making dramas, both of historical subjects and of contemporary interest. One can divide the comedy production into three major phases:

the comedy chases and trick films of the early years; the sophisticated domestic comedies starring John Bunny and Flora Finch and Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Drew; and the elaborately-constructed Larry Semon comedies of later years, involving expensive sets and acrobatic tricks. What distinguished the family-centered films of Bunny and the Drews was not only their humorous comic routines but also the serious emotion the characters felt for each other, enhanced visually by shots conveying repose and reflectiveness through framing and the use of special lighting effects. For example, in *THE PROFESSOR'S ROMANCE* (1914), starring Sidney Drew, the professor is shown at the right of the frame, specially lit, writing, thinking about his loved one as a title indicates that "the professor suffers from a more subtle attack than that of children." These comedies hold up today not only for their humor, but also for the depth of emotional feeling the characters express for each other.

The death of John Bunny in 1915 and the departure of the Drews from the company in the same year left a certain void in Vitagraph comedy production. In 1916, Semon, a former cartoonist and magician (the same professions followed by Blackton and Smith before they founded Vitagraph), began acting for the company and soon directed his own films as well. Like other slapstick comedians of the era, Semon developed routines around mishaps with golf balls, mistaken identities, and other such incidents, often ending in chases. However, Semon began to decrease his emphasis on the "milking" of such routines for their slapstick comedy aspects in order to concentrate on elaborating spectacular visual feats in his films. *THE SAWMILL* (1922) is a representative example of how Semon best exemplified what I would call the "slapstick spectacle," a subgenre of the slapstick comedy. Almost the entire action of the film centers around chases through the elaborate set of a logging camp. Semon appears less interested in the comic pursuit of love and more in the antics surrounding all the possible permutations for creating action within the set. Especially in *THE SAWMILL*, but also evident in other Semon films including *FRAUDS AND FRENZIES*, *BATHING BEAUTIES AND BIG BOOBS*, and *THE STAR BOARDER*, Semon organized his comedy around the vertical use of the space, with characters falling from one plane of action to another. Rather than using the set to build suspense, Semon creates a rapid succession of big pratfall-like gags, one after another. This required Semon to exploit the vertical levels of action in order to heighten the sense of the falls.

In this regard, he comes full circle with the concerns of the earliest Vitagraph comedy chase films in which an inventive variation was Vitagraph's construction of the

chase along vertical rather than horizontal lines. THE GREEN GOODS MEN (1906) introduces into the chase elements of movement up a fire escape, over roofs, and down a chimney into the police station. "AND THE VILLAIN STILL PURSUED HER"; OR, THE AUTHOR'S DREAM (1906) contains a chase that moves through the interior of a building, up stairs, onto the roof, and into a hot-air balloon in the sky, until the protagonists let go and fall back to earth, the artist crashing into his garret and awakening from the dream. In these comedy chases, the variations in movement further broke up the diagonal line of action present in the prototypical chases of the period.

Similarly, Semon organized much of his comedy around these vertical concepts. Semon chases involve climbs up telephone poles, building cranes, trees, and other such tall objects in the environment. In films such as THE SAWMILL, to achieve the full impression of the great heights, Semon chooses to show the action from long shot. Frequently, he moves from close view in successive images back to an extreme long shot of the action, to show people clinging to high places. In then focussing on the mechanics of the protagonist's swinging and falling on ropes, moving cranes, and crashing through trees through these elaborate sets, Semon gains a sense of choreography but loses a feeling of emotional intimacy as may be found in the work of the great comedians such as Chaplin, Keaton and Lloyd when confronted with similar such crises. Semon is less involved than they are in personalizing these moments because he avoids simultaneously showing his reactions to the action in closeup.

As spectators, we become more involved with Semon's mechanical effects and less attendant to the protagonist's emotional relationship to his perilous circumstances. In contrast, when Harold Lloyd in HIGH AND DIZZY (1920) or SAFETY LAST (1923) is suspended on ledges high above the city, he "milks" his relation to these edifices for all its humor and tension through angling the camera in special ways to give the illusion of height and danger, and in showing close views his reaction to the action. In creating the "spectacle frame," that is, in showing the action in long shot, Semon goes against the current of the great comedians.

Similarly, in early cinema Vitagraph was going against the current of the times when the studio continued to produce trick films. Vitagraph made numerous "object animation" pictures well into the nickelodeon era, long after trick films declined in the production of the other studios. Many of these trick films involved stop motion effects. Showing objects moving in a convincing fashion without wires required a closer view of the action,

however, at a time when close views were seen by filmmakers as interruptive to the narrative rather than contributing to it. In an analogous way, Semon's use of long shots to show off his spectacle tricks moved him away from the style of the great comics of the times. In executing his spectacular feats, Semon creates distancing effects in which he fails to convey the subtle feelings and emotional crescendos evident in the work of his more famous counterparts.

[Projection: LIQUID ELECTRICITY, OR THE INVENTOR'S GALVANIC FLUID, 1907, produced by Vitagraph.
FRAUDS AND FRENZIES, 1918, produced and directed by Larry Semon for Vitagraph.
Cast: Larry Semon, Stan Laurel.
THE SAWMILL, 1921, produced by Vitagraph, directed by Larry Semon and Norman Taurog. Cast: Oliver Hardy, Larry Semon.]

PIE AND CHASE

Gag, Spectacle and Narrative in Slapstick Comedy

Donald Crafton

Whether judged by production statistics, by contemporary critical acclaim, by audience popularity or by retrospective opinions, it is abundantly clear that the American silent film comedy (in its two-reel and its feature version) was flourishing in the mid-twenties, and that it rivaled the drama as the dominant form of cinematic expression. My aim is to rethink the function of the gag in relation to the comic film as a classical system - not to examine or catalog all the possible variations of the gag (as joke, as articulation of cinematic space, or as thematic permutations[1]), but rather to examine its operation in the slapstick genre.

Let us introduce the subject by way of an amusing account of a screening of Charlie Chaplin films in Accra, Africa, reported in the New York Times in 1925:[2]

It was a film from the remote antiquity of filmdom; a film from the utter dark ages of the cinematograph, so patched and pieced and repieced that all continuity was gone; a piebald hash chosen from the remains of various comedies and stuck together with no plot. Just slapstick. But Charlie had survived even that, and how they did love it!

The anecdote provides several insights into the status of film comedy in its "Golden Age." Most important for us, it expresses the opinion that this assemblage of Chaplin shorts is primitive because it lacks continuity. The writer intuitively distinguishes between the linear aspects of film - plot, narrative, diegesis - and its nonlinear components - spectacle and gags. Take away the story and what do you have left? "Just slapstick."

Much criticism of silent film comedy still hinges on the dichotomy between narrative and gag. When Gerald Mast remarks in The Comic Mind, that Max Linder's film SEVEN YEARS BAD LUCK "...is interested in a gag, not a story to contain the gags or a character to perform them,"[3] or that the plots of Sennett's Keystone films "are merely apparent structures, collections of literary formulas and cliches to hang the gags on"[4], there is, in such statements, an implicit valorization of narrative over gags. These films are flawed because the elements

of slapstick are not "integrated" with other elements (character, structure, vision, cinematic style - Mast's criteria).

In this reading of film comedy, slapstick is the bad element, an excessive tendency that it is the task of the narrative to contain. Accordingly the history of the genre is usually teleological, written as though the eventual replacement of the gag by narrativized comedy was natural, ameliorative, or even predestined.

Viewing dozens of short comedies from the teens and twenties in preparation for the Slapstick Symposium, it became clear that there was no such selective process operating. On the contrary, slapstick cinema seems to be ruled by the principle of accretion: gags, situations, costumes, characters, camera techniques are rehearsed and recycled in film after film, as though the modernist emphasis on originality and the unique text was unheard of. Unlike "mainstream" dramatic cinema which progressed rapidly through styles, techniques and stories, in slapstick nothing is discarded. Camera tricks perfected by Méliès and Zecca are still in evidence a quarter-century later; music hall turns that were hoary when Chaplin, Linder and Keaton introduced them to cinema in the teens were still eliciting laughs by those clowns and others at the end of the silent period. We are forced to ask, if gags were so scorned, then why did the gag film linger on for so long, an important mode of cinematic discourse for at least forty years? And is there not something perverse about arguing that what is "wrong" with a film form is that which defines it to begin with?

The distinction between slapstick and narrative has been properly perceived, but incorrectly interpreted. I contend that it was never the aim of comic filmmakers to "integrate" the gag elements of their movies, or to subjugate them to narrative. In fact, it can be seen that the separation between the vertical, paradigmatic domain of slapstick - the arena of spectacle I will represent by the metaphor of the thrown pie - and the horizontal, syntagmatic domain of the story - the arena of the chase - was a calculated rupture, designed to keep the two elements antagonistically apart. In Narration in the Fiction Film. David Bordwell asks, "Is there anything in narrative film that is not narrational?"[5] My answer is yes: the gag.

If we examine typical Hal Roach two-reel comedies from 1925-26, we find a microcosm of what some film analysts have described as the series of symmetries and blockages that define the systematicity of classical American cinema. To synthesize and paraphrase their theories (too

grossly), every narrative begins by establishing a schema, or set of spectator expectations, then systematically disrupts this initial stasis. The remainder of the narrative is a series of lurches, waves, pendulum swings, reprises and reversals that all tend, in the end, to regain (however incompletely) the lost ideal equilibrium of the opening. In classical film especially, these "imbalances" or impediments to narrative resolution frequently take the form of an intrusive spectacle - the way the story in a musical film "stops" for a number (e.g., a Busby Berkeley routine or a Harpo Marx performance), or, perhaps an even better parallel, the way the flimsy story of a pornographic film stops for shots of sexual performance. Similarly, in a comedy, when the gag spectacle - the Pie - begins (the reel-long pie fight from Laurel and Hardy's *THE BATTLE OF THE CENTURY* is exemplary), the diegesis - the Chase - halts. One important difference between slapstick and the dramatic film is that these intrusions of spectacle are much more frequent in comedy, producing a kind of narrative lurching that often makes the plots of slapstick comedies quite incoherent (and delightfully so).

The Pie

Let us first look more closely at those nonnarrative gag elements that the term slapstick usually encompasses. This usage is appropriate when we consider the origin of that word, referring to a circus prop consisting of two thin slats joined together so that a loud clack was made when one clown hit another on the behind. The violent aural effect, the "slap," may be thought of as having the same kind of disruptive impact on the audience as its visual equivalent in the silent cinema, the pie in the face. In fact, very few comedies of the twenties really used pies, but nevertheless their humor in a general sense frequently depended on the same kind of emphatic, violent, embarrassing gesture. The lack of linear integration that offends some slapstick commentators can also be traced back to its roots in popular spectacle. In his 1913 home correspondence manual, Bret Page advised would-be vaudeville comics that[6]

The purpose of the sketch is not to leave a single impression of a single story. It points no moral, draws no conclusion, and sometimes it might end quite as effectively anywhere before the place in the action at which it does terminate. It is built for entertainment purposes only and furthermore, for

entertainment purposes that end the moment the sketch ends.

Such an aesthetic of spectacle for its own sake is clearly inimical to the classical narrative feature, but not at all hostile to slapstick cinema of the teens and twenties.

However gag and slapstick are not synonymous. Slapstick is the generic term for these nonnarrative intrusions, while gags are the specific forms of intrusions. Like verbal jokes, to which they are closely related, gags have their own structures, systems and logic that exist independently of cinema. The gag may also contain its own microscopic narrative system that may be irrelevant to the larger narrative, may mirror it, or may even work against it as parody. "Sight gags," those that depend primarily on visual exposition, still have characteristic logical structures, the same that one finds in multipanel comic strips. Think for example of the gag in JUS' PASSIN' THRU, a Will Rogers film from 1923, produced by Hal Roach and directed by Charles Parrott (Charley Chase), where we see a hobo checking the gates of houses for the special chalk tramp sign that indicates whether there is a mean dog inside. One can easily see how the sequence could be presented effectively as a wordless comic strip: In the first two frames we would see "shots" of the tramp eschewing those yards with the mark on the gate (the exposition of the nonhumorous part of the joke that vaudevillians would have called "the buildup"); in the penultimate panel we would see him fleeing a yard through an unmarked gate with a dog in hot pursuit; the final panel would show him adding his own beware-the-dog sign to the gate.

Other examples of "comic strip logic" might be mistaken identity gags (accomplished by fluid montage and parodic sight-line construction) such as the one that begins the Charley Chase film LOOKING FOR SALLY: The arriving hero waves from a ship at a girl on the dock that he incorrectly assumes to be his fiancée; she waves back, not at Charley (as he thinks) but at her friend on another deck. (See also Chaplin, A DOG'S LIFE, and dozens of other films which use the same gag.) Also commonplace are camera tricks, for instance double exposures and animation, that exploit the film medium's capability of disrupting the normal vision that the narrative depends on for its consistency and legibility. Manipulation of cause and effect - for example, when a little action produces a disproportionate reaction - is another form of cinematic excess characteristic of the sight gag. It is important to remember that the narrative content of the gag may be nil - for example, the jarring closeups of Ben Turpin's eyes. Such cases

are illustrations of what Eisenstein called "attractions," elements of pure spectacle.

Writing in 1923, Eisenstein defined the "attraction" as[7]

...every aggressive moment in [the theater], ie. every element of it that brings to light in the spectator those senses or that psychology that influence his experience.

Eisenstein also referred to those moments as "emotional shocks" and insisted that they are always psychologically disruptive (for example, the gouging out of an eye). He contrasted the attraction to the lyrical, meaning the part of the presentation readily assimilated by the spectator. Probably referring to THE KID, he notes that the lyrical may coexist with the disruptive attraction, for example, the "specific mechanics of [Chaplin's] movement." In slapstick comedy, I am claiming, there is a variant of this concept: the "lyrical" is the narrative, functioning as the regulating component; the "attraction" is the gag or, again in Eisenstein's words, the "brake" that has to be applied to sharpened dramatic moments." [8] In another context, Tom Gunning has described early cinema (pre-1906) as a "cinema of attraction:" [9]

Whatever differences one might find between Lumière and Méliès, they should not represent the opposition between narrative and nonnarrative filmmaking, at least as it is understood today. Rather, one can unite them in a conception that sees cinema less as a way of telling stories than as a way of presenting a series of views to an audience... In other words, I believe that the relation to the spectator set up by the films of both Lumière and Méliès (and many other filmmakers before 1906) had a common basis, and one that differs from the primary spectator relations set up by narrative film after 1906... Although different from the fascination in storytelling exploited by the cinema from the time of Griffith, it is not necessarily opposed to it. In fact the cinema of attraction does not disappear with the dominance of narrative, but rather goes underground, both into certain avant-garde practices and as a component of narrative films, more evident in some genres (eg, the musical) than in others.

Gunning's observation is astute; the disruptive gags of slapstick can be regarded as an anachronistic

"underground" manifestation of the cinema of attraction. I disagree though with his unwillingness to polarize the two components. While other genres work to contain their excesses, in slapstick (like avant-garde, a kind of limit-text), the opposition is fundamental. Furthermore, it is carefully constructed to remain an unbridgeable gap.

The Chase

We'll look more briefly at the other component, the Chase, or the narrative dimension of film comedy. Rather than examine specific narrative structures, it is enough to say for our purposes that the narrative is the propelling element, the fuel of the film that gives it its power to go from beginning to end. (To continue the automotive metaphor, one would say that the gags are the potholes, detours and flat tires encountered by the Tin Lizzie of the narrative on its way to the end of the film.) Film narrative has been the subject of considerable recent scholarly exposition, and rightly so. But its other, that is, those elements that block narrativity - the Pie - has been dismissed as textual excess, if it has been considered at all. Although I am using the term Chase to indicate the linear trajectory of the narrative in general, in fact actual chases are encountered more frequently than pie-throwings in the twenties. Pursuing a criminal, retrieving a lost object, and - most importantly - reuniting a separated couple in marriage are the most important themes in twenties comedy. Not surprisingly, the same themes predominate in dramatic films as well and we should bear in mind that, as Tom Gunning, Eileen Bowser and others have noted, the line between comedy and melodrama can be very fine. One thinks, for example, of Anita Loos' claim that she tried to turn the screenplay of Griffith's THE STRUGGLE (essentially a remake of Ten Nights in a Barroom) into a comic farce, while the film that Griffith directed turned out to be a "serious" temperance melodrama. The disruptive elements, the "attractions" concocted by Loos, were recuperated by Griffith's narrative priorities.

So much for theory. Let us look at HIS WOODEN WEDDING, produced in 1925 by Hal Roach, directed by Leo McCarey and starring Charley Chase.[10]

Rich playboy Charley is marrying Katherine (Katherine Grant) on Friday the 13th. The date is a portent of the loss of stasis that is about to occur, and an explanation, couched in the uncanny, of several aspects of bad luck that will inevitably mar the wedding: the best man (unknown to Charley) is Katherine's former

suitor (now spiteful). He plants false knowledge in the form of a note to Charley informing him that his fiancée is not what she seems: "Beware! The girl you are about to marry has a wooden leg." By coincidence (extraordinary in life, but typical in fiction), Katherine sprains her ankle just before the wedding, causing her to limp down the aisle which appears to substantiate the rumor. Charley shouts "Stop! I've been engaged to a girl with a wooden leg - I must break it off."

Charley boards a cruise ship to escape his sorrow. On board he deduces the plot, recovers his diamond engagement ring from the best man and turns the boat around to find Katherine, who has independently learned of the hoax and is following the ship with her father on his yacht. She arrives just as Charley falls overboard, immediately strips down to her bathing suit and saves him. As a seeming closure, she displays her very real bare leg to the best man (and the audience) and uses it to kick him overboard, thus cancelling the effects of his libelous false knowledge with this empirical demonstration of her corporeal integrity.

What is especially interesting, and also very typical of many films of the period, is the manner in which the apparent closure is not really final. Here it is the scene of reunion as they pose in an embrace that ends the film. It is inscribed outside the symmetry of the narrative as a formal tableau composition, as though the validity of the narrative must be confirmed by subsuming it into spectacle in order to confirm that the initial promise of order - the protagonists' marriage - will be fulfilled. To put it another way, the man and woman are rejoined (visually wed) at the moment that the division between narrative and spectacle is balanced, but not resolved, and the film must end.

Also typical, but, more so of melodrama, is the insistence on a woman's body as the site of the restoration of natural order. In this reading the latent narrative is essentially a castration nightmare: the revelation to the groom on his wedding day that his bride has a horrifying lack (a missing leg), followed - in a fantasy sequence showing his future children and the family dog all sporting wooden legs - by the fetishization of its prosthetic substitute. The woman is being projected as the scene of the man's fears and anxieties concerning familial responsibility and sexual performance. Only when the threat of the woman's repugnant phallic intrusion into their relationship, the despised wooden leg, is removed can the wedding - of flesh and not of wood - take place.

[Projection: HIS WOODEN WEDDING, 1925, produced by
Hal Roach, directed by Leo McCarey.
Cast: Charley Chase, Katherine Grant,
Fred de Silva, John Cossall, Gale Henry.]

This film is an excellent example of the narrative complexity of all the McCarey-Charley Chase collaborations, as well as an illustration of how gag and narrative interact and regulate each other by means of a lively dialectic. One cannot help but compare the complex system of alternation of spectacle and diegesis to the same systems observable in Eisenstein's films of the same period. The opposition of Pie and Chase may be outlined in a chart:[11]

"Pie"	"Chase"
Gag Titles	Glance-object editing style
Inappropriate actions (Charley recognizes old friend)	Expected chain of events (wedding)
Fantasy insert	Triple pursuit: 1) Katherine-Charley 2) Rival-diamond; 3) Charley-diamond, Katherine
Attenuated reaction (long glance at camera when manikin's leg falls)	Motivating action: duplicitous note to Charley
Drunken gags	Disruption of chain of events by fate (Katherine sprains ankle)
Running gag of hats (occurs several times with different hats, different characters)	Disruption of chain of events by mistaken perception (cane for leg, manikin leg for real)
Small action - large reaction (suitcase smashes car)	Parallel action in several spaces
Repeated action (car smashing)	Actions to restore order: Rival retrieves diamond
Inappropriate action (car pushed into water)	Charley gets drunk Diamond in hat Katherine's fathers' discovery
Truncated syllogism (throwing hat over rail into wind)	K and father pursue Charley pursues hat, finds girl
Sight gag (hat hanging by	Ch hides ring in boa Ch tricks rival

string)	(keyhole scene)
Spatial gags (girl's cabin door opens at top), boat tossing on waves	Ch tries to recover ring K and father pursue Diamond retrieved (1st closure) Ch dives in ocean Ch commandeers boat, turns it around (2nd closure) Boat and yacht meet Ch and rival into ocean Katherine undresses, reveals "real leg" (3rd closure) Katherine uses leg to kick rival (4th closure)
Semi-diegetic insert (dance scene)	
Progression ad absurdum (dance scene)	
Exaggerated reaction (boat turning at high speed, dancers falling)	
Revelation (Katherine's "real" leg displayed)	
Final tableau [apotheosis] (father turns away while couple kisses)	
(couple restored, final closure)	

In a response to this paper in its original version, Tom Gunning has made some valuable criticism that I should briefly address.[12] First, he draws attention to the two-dimensionality of my picture of "the forces that disrupt and the forces that contain" and insists on the complexity of the relationship. I agree. But I cannot follow the argument that the narrative is "a process of integration which smaller units are absorbed into a larger overarching pattern and process of containment" or that gags are "an excess that is necessary to the film's process of containment." This is probably an accurate description of other genres but slapstick seems to me to be defined by this failure of containment and resistance to bourgeois legibility. Gunning cites the dancing sequence as an example of the recovery of gags by narrativization. True, the purpose served by the scene is to retrieve the engagement ring from the "virgin wilderness of the old maid's underclothes," but at what lack of economy! The same point would have been served by Charley's finding the ring on the deck. Instead, he musters all his persuasive resources and incites the old maid to literally make a shimmying spectacle of herself. The abruptness of Charley's desertion after he gets the ring is funny in part because his off-hand gesture mimics the irrelevance of the ring to the narrative. The diegetic fact here becomes the excessive part of the elaborate joke.

Gunning also rightly notes that my chart contains several elements (such as truncated syllogisms) that are inversions of narrative logic. The point here is that

such inversions are possible only through the gag's deceptive assimilation of narrative form. It is by seeming to resemble certain narrative situations that narrative anticipation is subverted. This is not simply an issue of two separate forms, but of a dialectical interrelation. It is in fact the process of parody, in which narrative logic is not so much ignored, as laid bare.

No one would argue that HIS WOODEN WEDDING is lacking in parody. Charley's "courting" of the old maid, for example, is a parody of his courtship with Katherine. But again, it seems to beg the question. I maintain that in these instances, the tail really is wagging the dog, and to say that the gags' assimilation of narrative structure is a laying bare of the illusionistic invisibility of the fictional mechanism is simply another way of saying that spectacle is here containing narrative, and not the other way around. The "message" of this and other slapstick films is that the seeming hegemony of narrative in the classical cinema is vulnerable to assault by the "underground" forces of spectacle. The film's multiple narrative closures are overly redundant even by classical standards (I count four). The obstacles mounted by fate are overcome, but not at the cost of annihilating the impact of the gags. It is the non sequitur components of the humor that we recall best. Like the wooden wedding of the title, the absorption of all the disruptive elements by the narrative never takes place.

One way to look at narrative is to see it as a system for providing the spectator with sufficient knowledge to make causal links between represented events.[13] According to this view, the gag's status as an irreconcilable difference becomes clear. Its purpose is to misdirect the viewer's attention, to obfuscate the linearity of cause-effect relations. Gags provide the opposite of epistemological comprehension by the spectator. They are atemporal bursts of violence and/or hedonism that are as ephemeral and as gratifying as the sight of someone's pie-smitten face.

Notes

1. For example, as Dan Kamin does in his chapter on "The Magician" in Charlie Chaplin's One-Man Show. Metuchen, N. J.: Scarecrow Press, 1984, p.37-55.
2. "Chaplin's Gold Coast Triumph," New York Times, quoted in Film Daily Yearbook, 1926, p.15.
3. Gerald Mast, The Comic Mind: Comedy and the Movies. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill, 1973, p.39.
4. Ibid, p.53.
5. David Bordwell, Narration in the Fiction Film. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, p.53.
6. Bret Page, Writing for Vaudeville. Springfield: The Home Correspondence School, 1913, p.147. Cited by Henry C. Jenkins, "What Made Pistachio Nuts?: Anarchist Comedy as a Cultural System," The Velvet Light Trap, forthcoming.
7. Sergei Eisenstein, "Montage of Attractions," in Jay Leyda, ed., Film Form and The Film Sense. New York: World, 1957, p.230-231.
8. Eisenstein, "The Unexpected," in Leyda, ed., Film Form. New York: Harcourt, 1949, p.23.
9. Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," Wide Angle, VIII, 3/4, 1986, p.64.
10. HIS WOODEN WEDDING is available in 16mm from Blackhawk Films, Davenport, Iowa. Other players are Gale Henry, Fred deSilva, John Cossar. Photographed by Glen R. Carrier. Edited by Richard Currier. Running time: 24 minutes.
11. I have omitted a discussion of the 1926 Hal Roach film DON KEY, SON OF BURRO that was part of my original presentation for reasons of space. The film was projected at the time of my presentation and is available for viewing at The Museum of Modern Art.
12. I am grateful for Gunning's comments at the Slapstick Symposium presentation on May 3, 1985, and again at a Columbia Seminar meeting at The Museum of Modern Art a few weeks later.
13. "Narration refers not to what is told, but rather to the conditions of telling - to the overall regulation and distribution of knowledge in a text..." - Edward Branigan, "Diegesis and Authorship in Film," Iris, no. 7, 2nd Semester 1986, p.38.

CHAPLIN'S TRAMP AND IDEOLOGICAL APPROPRIATION

Charles Musser

Charles Chaplin, his films, and the tramp character that he created have been a center of controversy - political, artistic, moral and ideological - for decades. Undoubtedly, we will continue to argue over their significance in the years ahead. This is not surprising, for "Charlie" is still perhaps the best known and certainly the longest-lived character produced by the American motion picture industry. Seventy-five years after its creation, "the little fellow" continues to appear in new productions - if not in Chaplin films then in IBM advertisements. Here a large corporate entity appropriates a screen persona soon after its creator is dead and against the wishes of the estate. Playing with the public's memory, the advertisements rework the character in ways that achieve not only various commercial/promotional/marketing goals but ideological ones as well.

Chaplin's tramp has certain attitudes toward life that are basic to his character. He hates work and avoids it in many ingenious ways. Moreover, he rejects the rules of proper society and the work place, undermining them in a multiplicity of ways. Yet Charlie is successfully tamed (hypnotised? charmed?) by the IBM computer. He has become a happy worker who, sitting on a huge stack of papers, inputs various reports. Instead of creating chaos, he organizes it. Charlie is an old-fashioned tramp who has always had trouble with technology (such as the assembly line in MODERN TIMES). But even this tramp easily masters the IBM computer as the commercial concludes. Charlie goes off into the distance kicking his heels with the joy derived from his technological coup. IBM has finally turned Charlie into a productive worker and well-adjusted member of society.

The Tramp in American Life

The tramp character did not originate with Chaplin. It was rooted in English and American popular culture and in these countries' social structures. The "modern" tramp phenomenon developed in the United States during the 1870's depression. Between 1873 and 1877 as much as one-third of the labor force was unemployed, forcing many

men to leave home in search of work. Subsequent depressions, notably the depression of the 1890's repeated this deracinating process. Many permanently abandoned the established social systems. Other tramps had either dropped out because of alcoholism or broke under the unrelenting pressures of industrial wage labor. They existed on the periphery of the nation's socio-economic system. Having no permanent home, they lived on the road. Many worked briefly at different jobs but most stole, begged, or were fed in soup kitchens.

Americans viewed the tramp phenomenon in different ways. Often tramps were condemned as a menace that needed to be controlled or eradicated by strong doses of law and order. Yet there was a very strong tendency to see tramps in more romantic terms. In an article that appeared ten years before Chaplin entered the film industry, the New York Tribune described the tramp in these terms:

The nearer these refugees from modern society can approach the habits of their primeval ancestors the greater appears to be their satisfaction. Many of them boast not only that they no longer need to work, but they can live without begging. They tell you that they are perfectly independent of the laws which govern the rest of the world.

...Is stealing to the man or boy who has abandoned human society for that of nature a crime? Stealing is the first law of nature by which all animals not subdued by man and all plant life obtain subsistence.[1]

Tramps were seen as a Rousseau-ian ideal, "natural men" unfettered by society's values. Their rejection of society, its values and political economy, represented an implicit criticism of American life but not a direct threat to society. This enabled them to be portrayed as comic characters, annoying but relatively harmless scavengers whose petty thievings and inevitable punishment provide numerous situations for comedy.

The tramp was a stock character in late 19th and early 20th Anglo-American popular culture: in the music hall and vaudeville (W. C. Fields was a "tramp juggler"), the comic strip (Happy Hooligan, Weary Willie and Burglar Bill), pulp literature and the newspaper. The comic character of the tramp quickly appeared on the American screen. In June 1897, the American Mutoscope Company made THE TRAMP AND THE BATHERS, in which the tramp steals the clothes of a swimmer. At Vitagraph, J. Stuart Blackton and Albert Smith made BURGLAR ON THE ROOF, with

Blackton playing the role of the tramp-thief.

[Projection: THE BURGLAR ON THE ROOF, 1897, produced
by Vitagraph. Cast: J. Stuart Blackton.]

Almost every production company had its tramp comedies at the turn of the century. In Sigmund Lubin's THE TRAMP'S DREAM (1899), a tramp dreams he is introduced into a bourgeois household and treated with respect, offered food and chats with the daughter. In many Edison comedies, the tramp is also looking for a free lunch.[2] In PIE, TRAMP AND THE BULLDOG (copyrighted 6 May 1901), the tramp apparently outwits a housewife by using a pair of stilts to get the pie on the window-sill. He becomes the victim of a bulldog which jumps out the window and bites into the tramp's backside. In THE TRAMP AND THE NURSING BOTTLE (copyrighted 21 August 1901), the tramp surreptitiously drinks a baby's milk, behaving like the unsocial and pre-social character he is supposed to be. In POOR ALGY (copyrighted 7 October 1905), Algy is in the park with his girl friend. The tramp steals their lunch and Algy's clothes, forcing the nice middle-class boy to don the tramp's rags. When Algy tries to catch up with his girlfriend, the woman is protected from the apparent tramp by a pugilist who happens to be running by. Algy, the solid citizen, is a victim of the tramp's trick and receives the ritualistic beating which routinely ends all tramp comedies of the pre-Griffith period.

[Projection: THE TRAMP AND THE NURSING BOTTLE, 1901,
produced by Edison, directed by Edwin S.
Porter (?).
POOR ALGY, 1905, produced by Edison,
directed by Edwin S. Porter.]

The tramp genre continued into the nickelodeon era. In METHOD IN HIS MADNESS (released 16 March 1910 by Essanay), a tramp pretends to have an epileptic fit in front of a bar and receives first aid in the form of a drink.[3] After executing this ruse several times, he teaches the trick to a second tramp, somewhat seedier than the first. The bartenders are finally fooled once too often and the tramp receives the familiar beating that ended earlier films.

[Projection: A METHOD IN HIS MADNESS, 1910, Essanay.
A MILLIONAIRE BARBER, 1911, Essanay.]

Most but not all films about tramps were comedies. Griffith's A KNIGHT OF THE ROAD (released 20 August 1911) was a drama. A Biograph Bulletin synopsized its plot:

This Biograph subject shows the real nature of the hobo. Being of a sentimental turn, he is impressed by the daughter of a ranch owner and in consequence becomes her and her father's protector against the machinations of several of his type. The owner in gratitude offers him a home and a job on the ranch, but work and the hobo never agree, so he steals away to remain ever a "Knight of the Road." [4]

The plot closely parallels Chaplin's later film, THE TRAMP (Essanay, released 11 April 1915).

[Projection: A KNIGHT OF THE ROAD, 1911, produced by Biograph, directed by D. W. Griffith. Cast: Frank Powell, Dorothy West.]

The Tramp and The Crisis of Work

The tramp's resistance to productive labor is a crucial component of Charlie's character. It is Chaplin's exploration of this relationship to work that resonated with his earliest spectators. Chaplin's first films were released early in 1914, in the same year that Henry Ford inaugurated the endless-chain conveyor for final assembly of the Model T, culminating his development of the assembly line. [5] Car manufacturing previously required a team of skilled mechanics. The automobile assembly line treated workers as human machines, requiring them to execute the same series of actions over and over again. Scientific management was being widely applied to production processes in other industries as well. Worker resistance to these new methods, to habitualization and degradation of labor, encouraged Hugo Munsterberg to write Psychology and Industrial Efficiency (1913) in which he explored "under what psychological conditions we can secure the greatest and most satisfactory output of work from every man; and finally, how we can produce most completely the influence on human minds which are desired in the interests of business." [6] The application of this new industrial system created uneasiness outside the working class as well as within it. Despite the immediate material benefits of maximizing industrial efficiency, many in the middle class also felt indirectly threatened by these developments. [7]

Into this ideologically charged atmosphere came Chaplin. Even Chaplin's first film, significantly called MAKING A LIVING (released 2 February 1914) attracted favorable notices, even if it was not appreciated on the

Keystone lot. The New York Telegraph called it "a screaming piece of farce-comedy of the type that the Keystone Company turns out so successfully." [8] The film was then described in the following terms: "The hero believes in making a living with the least possible amount of work and he is possessed of a nerve which would make a book agent look like a bashful girl at a prize fight." [9] In his next film, KID AUTO RACES (2 March 1914), Chaplin appeared as a tramp for the first time and refined his commentary on work. [10] In this simple yet provocative picture, Charlie makes it impossible for a film crew to photograph a local news event. The film's apparent intent is proclaimed by its title, intertitles and a few brief shots of the soapbox derby in which the tramp does not appear. We might say that the film is edited as if the tramp did not exist. [11] But the tramp makes it impossible for the crew to perform its job. The film traces the escalating warfare between tramp and director (Henry Lehrman) which only ends when the "kid auto race" is over. KID AUTO RACES also contains a biographical subtext vis à vis Chaplin's strained off-screen relations with Lehrman, who directed the actor's first film as well as this one. Feeling that Lehrman left his best comic bits on the cutting room floor in MAKING A LIVING, Chaplin acts out his retaliation in this second film. This acting out, however, masks the fact that Chaplin and the tramp character found quite different solutions to the problem of work. Chaplin quickly became his own writer-director and so assumed control of the production process. To do this, he was even willing to risk \$1,500 against the release of his first directorial effort. In contrast, Chaplin continued to refine his screen persona's resistance to "productive" labor.

[Projection: KID AUTO RACES AT VENICE, 1914,
produced by Keystone, directed by
Henry Lehrman. Cast: Charles Chaplin,
Henry Lehrman.]

A Reality-Based Tramp or an Eternal Clown?

Prominent critics have often down played Chaplin's reliance on the tramp character or at least its basis in real life. As Walter Kerr remarked,

The tramp is a philosophical, not a social statement. And it was a conclusion to which Chaplin came, not a choice he imposed from the outset. The tramp is the residue of all the bricklayers and householders and bon vivants

and women and fiddlers and floorwalkers and drunks and ministers Chaplin has played so well, too well. The tramp was all that was left. Sometimes the dark pain filling Chaplin's eyes is excess of the situation at hand. It comes from the hopeless limitation of having no limitations.[12]

A similar formulation was made by Theodore Huff in his study of Chaplin, published in 1951. Like Kerr, he offers a liberal interpretation of Chaplin and his screen persona: "The tramp character he created could be of any country and of any time. In appearance he could be any age from twenty-five to fifty-five." [13] Here Chaplin's art is universalized and thus severed from its historical context. After a brief survey of critical writings about Charlie, Huff concludes: "These endlessly various interpretations have kept the Chaplin legend eternally green and have led each new generation to rediscoveries of the secret of his art. Each finds in Chaplin what he brings to him - as with great art." [14] At the time, such observations served a progressive role in that they countered right wing attacks against Chaplin that were reaching a crescendo and were soon to culminate in barring Chaplin from the United States. Earlier interpretations along similar lines, however, had rendered Chaplin more palatable for elites and "safe" for a mass audience.

The severing of Chaplin's character from its social context is perhaps most evident in Raoul Sobel and David Francis' Chaplin: Genesis of a Clown. These historians have argued that the labeling of Charlie's character as a tramp is a "common shibboleth" which is "most misleading." [15] As they contend, "The vagrants who roamed the London streets and slept along the Embankment at the turn of the century, and even well beyond it, would have found nothing in common with the portrait Chaplin projected on the screen." They even offer a photograph of a typical English tramp to substantiate their remarks. Ultimately Chaplin becomes "the eternal clown."

Chaplin's THE TRAMP

Rather than dismiss the tramp character and its basis in English and American society, we might begin by taking the opposite approach. Chaplin supports this, for he claimed to have met a "knight of the road" shortly before making THE TRAMP. In Theater Magazine he reported:

The inspiration for [THE TRAMP] came from an

accidental meeting with a hobo in a street in San Francisco... He told me the story of his life. Of long jaunts through the beautiful country, of longer rides on convenient freights, of misfortunes which attend the unfortunates who are found stealing a ride on a side-door pullman, and of the simplicity of the farmers who lived only a short distance from the city. It was a delight to hear him talk, to gather from it the revelations of his character, to watch his gestures, and his trick of facial expression. All these elements were carefully watched by me, and noted for further reference. He was rather surprised when we parted, at my profuse thanks. He had given me a good deal more than I had given him, but he didn't know it. He had only obtained a little food and drink and a chance talk from me. From him, I had a brand new idea for a picture.[16]

While John McCabe, in his book on Chaplin, dismisses this account as completely fictional,[17] I am not so sure. Chaplin had played the tramp before; one should not be surprised if he researched his character. He had a production schedule to maintain and was responsible for his own scenarios. The search for new stories would have encouraged such encounters. While Chaplin's account of this meeting was undoubtedly romanticized, it still could have happened. Yet even if one agrees with McCabe, the account still tells us that Chaplin was consciously modeling himself on the American tramp, a figure few people in the United States could completely avoid in their daily lives.

John James McCook, a Connecticut reformer active in the late 19th century, made a more systematic study of tramps, interviewing and photographing them for articles and lectures. Of the tramp he wrote: "I know him very well. I have generally found him a pleasant, approachable fellow and I should rather take my chances on reforming him, with purely civil and secular measures, than an ordinary felon." [18] He described society's attitudes toward the tramp in the following terms: "the tramp plays hole and corner with a Public which affects impatience while it really feels tenderness." [19] His attitude suggests that of the well-intentioned farmer in THE TRAMP whose attempts at reforming Charlie are doomed to failure. McCook's survey reveals essential qualities of Chaplin's tramp persona. "Connecticut Fatty" told McCook that "There are just two kinds of people in the world that are really happy - the millionaire and the bum." [20] Chaplin would explore this assertion in THE IDLE CLASS. A McCook questionnaire filled out by tramp William Smith is extraordinary in its parallels. Smith

listed his occupation as "Gentleman." Asked "when did you last work at it?", he answered, "Always." Asked "when are you going to work again?", he responded, "Never." Asked "how do you generally secure food?", he replied, "by my cheek." Asked "where do you generally sleep?", he retorted, "the best Place i can get." Asked if he were "temperate, intemperate or an abstainer," he concluded, "Take all i get." [21] Charlie could have answered these questions in identical fashion.

McCook also photographed many of these tramps in the 1890's. Their dress - bowler, vest and suit - was remarkably similar to Charlie's. Charlie's basic costume was created at a particular moment in history and then frozen. Although his costume was not notably out of place in KID AUTO RACES, in succeeding films it gradually became an anachronism. By the early teens, tramps were usually dressed more casually (as is the case in Griffith's A KNIGHT OF THE ROAD). More and more, Charlie was seen as an old-fashioned tramp, a "dying breed" susceptible to romantization both by Chaplin and his audience.

By the time Chaplin made THE TRAMP at Essanay in 1915, his screen character had become more complex than at Keystone. Charlie, like William Smith, sees himself as a gentleman tramp. When a woman (Edna Purviance) is in distress, he protects her and her money from fellow tramps. Charlie behaves like a socially responsible person even though he is not a member of proper society. "Gentleman" and "tramp" are opposites. Their integration into a comic contradiction, a contradiction that did not exist in KID AUTO RACES, is a central aspect of Chaplin's developing screen persona. This combination of tramp and gentleman is comically unstable: either under pressure or through habit, Charlie often reverts to his social role as a vagabond.

As a reward for saving his daughter (and her money), the farmer gives Charlie a meal to eat and then tells him, "as a reward you can work." For a tramp like Charlie, work is anything but a reward. Such a reward burlesques the Protestant work ethic in a manner that urban audiences, particularly the working class, could appreciate. The farmer, of course, does not work but counts his money and orders around the help. When the gentleman tramp is given a pitchfork, he does not protest. He knows he must appear to comply, for such geniality is the path of least resistance even though he will not do a true bit of productive labor for the rest of the film. This is a second comic contradiction in Charlie's character. He often tries to appear to people as he believes people want him to appear, masking his true self in the process. Yet Charlie knows who he is

and what he wants. He is a tramp living "by his cheek," even if the farmer thinks he is a potential farm hand.

The "pitchfork sequence" is composed of 24 shots filmed in only four different set-ups. At first, as one might expect of someone who is unaccustomed to work, Charlie uses the fork ineptly, stabbing the farm hand inadvertently. The pitchfork is a foreign instrument, the violence funny but seemingly gratuitous. By the fourth shot, however, Charlie has mastered the tool. He realizes it need not be an instrument of labor but can be used to prod and direct the farm hand who actually performs all the work (shots 4 - 6). Chaplin gets more adept with the pitchfork as an instrument of work avoidance. When the farmer comes to check up on them, Charlie jabs the farm hand with the fork, making the rube drop the sack of flour on the farmer, knocking him out. In an earlier Keystone comedy, the farmer might have bounced up and started a free-for-all.[22] Here the farmer remains unconscious for some time. While it might have been an "accident," Charlie realizes he doesn't have to work if the farmer cannot supervise him. Charlie and the farm hand take time out and Charlie shows him how to steal eggs from the chicken coop (a little advice for the working class?). They return and drop another sack on the farmer just to make sure he remains unconscious for a little longer (shots 7-18). Charlie, preparing for the farmer's return to consciousness, resumes work and carries a bag of flour down the ladder. When the farmer kicks him, Charlie drops the bag: again it lands on the farmer's head (shots 19-20). In the last four shots, Charlie deftly shifts responsibility for the accident onto the farm hand whom the farmer beats with a stick. Charlie continually outwits the farm hand, avoids work and deflects punishment, assuming many characteristics of the authoritarian farmer. Only when the farm hand dumps a sack on his head at the scene's conclusion is Charlie brought back to reality.

In subsequent scenes Charlie is again put to work but his contributions remain minimal. Edna assigns him tasks that he tries to do because he loves her. He attempts to milk a cow by using its tail as a pump handle. Fortuitously he finds a half-filled pail he can present to Edna. Even this contribution is undermined as he puts his foot in the bucket. He laughs, but Edna, a serious and romantic character, does not find it funny. Next Charlie is sent to gather eggs. His tramp background induces him to pocket a few for himself, a completely useless but ingrained habit. When he returns, giving the basket of eggs to Edna, she playfully hits him on the leg, breaking the eggs and prematurely ending a romantic interlude that might have otherwise been his "reward."

While Charlie works, the hobos watch the farmer counting his money in the kitchen. The farmer could lose his money because he loves it too much. His greed will make the loss all the more painful - and appropriate. The hobos decide to rob the farmer's house and demand Charlie's cooperation at gunpoint. Never ready to argue with a gun, Charlie agrees. If they want him to be a robber, he will appear to go along. He places a ladder against the house, leading to an open window. Inside, however, the tramp waits at the open window with a wooden mallet, ready to defend Edna's home. With the assistance of the farmer and the farm hand, Charlie easily routs the hobos, chasing after them even though he is outnumbered and unharmed. Ironically, he is hit by the farmer's wild gunshots.

While Charlie is nursed back to health, he is in his version of heaven. Edna reads aloud to him as he smokes good cigars and sips brandy and soda. This is the life of the idle rich, of William Smith's millionaires. Charlie now sees himself as Edna's suitor, the classic reward for his heroic action in 19th century melodrama. But this is a comedy and his happiness proves to be based on an illusion that is shattered by the arrival of Edna's boyfriend. (Like Edna, he is a serious romantic lead). Charlie decides to move on. The last shot of *THE TRAMP*, Charlie changing his gait as he walks down the road, can be read as a cliché: "Easy come, easy go," or, "c'est la vie." Yet the film suggests a more complex reading. Charlie, one feels, assessed the situation he was leaving behind. He realized that the easy life would soon end anyway and that he was not cut out for a farmer's life of hard work. At least he had tasted the good life. For a moment he was treated like a millionaire. His dream of love was lost, but it was only a dream and he still retained his freedom, identity and dignity.

In *THE TRAMP*, Charlie did not simply decline a life of work and respectability. He also rejected the criminal violence of his hobo acquaintances. Over the course of the film, hobo and farmer each assumed a shared interest with Charlie. In both cases he rejected their assumptions. Charlie does not feel at home with any social group. By choice he is "an outcast among outcasts" (the title of yet another Griffith drama involving a tramp). Finally Charlie is alone because it is the only way to be true to his desires. He is a representative of American individualism, an important factor in accounting for Chaplin's popularity among middle-class audiences and many intellectuals. Since the work ethic and individualism are normally linked in American culture, the rejection of degrading work and advocacy of individualism produced a comic opposition and a radical populism.

[Projection: THE TRAMP (excerpt), 1915, produced by Essanay. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Cast: Charles Chaplin, Edna Purviance.]

Charlie's New Jobs

As Sobel and Francis have pointed out, Charlie is usually found on the job in the films made between 1914 and 1917. They suggest that this challenges our conception of Charlie as a "real" tramp (as does Kerr)[23] Yet Charlie's approach to work reinforces and finally enriches our appreciation of his tramp character. In THE PAWNSHOP (2 October 1916), Charlie is a new employee: a situation also found in HIS NEW JOB, EASY STREET, and other films of the Essanay/Mutual period. His previous job history is unknown to us, but his attitude toward this new opportunity indicates that he never worked any place for very long. Charlie's relations to work and the work place shift although all his actions undermine work as productive labor. Work is often play: cleaning the balls from the pawnshop symbol, he bounces them off the head of his co-worker, and when he sweeps, he sweeps a piece of string into a straight line and walks on it as if it were a tightrope.

Often Charlie's actions are destructive: at one point he demolishes a bass with his head. In another case, though "carelessness" or well concealed intent, he destroys his duster by dusting the fan, letting the blades cut the feathers down to stubble, which makes it impossible for him to continue his task. Under such circumstances, Charlie's tenure will be short-lived (and he is, in fact, faced with dismissal once during the film). If Charlie stays, it is because of the pawnbroker's daughter. As in THE TRAMP, the rejection of work is made more complicated by Charlie's attraction to the boss's daughter. Here Charlie apparently wins the girl by defeating the crook. Yet Charlie's situation is finally as untenable as it is in THE TRAMP. Kept on, he would destroy the business in a matter of months. Whether he wins or loses the girl, he will be back on the street.

[Projection: HIS NEW JOB (excerpt), 1915, Essanay, directed by Charles Chaplin. Cast: Charles Chaplin, Ben Turpin.]

THE PAWNSHOP contains one of Chaplin's most famous scenes, in which he takes apart a customer's alarm

clock. The clock, of course, is the instrument which regulates the work place of modern capitalism. It is not only the fact that Charlie destroys the clock, but the manner in which he does it (playfully), that rejects the regimentation of the work place.

The anger and violence that Chaplin expresses toward work often catch a modern critic by surprise. His humor sometimes seems more frightening than funny. Yet for working-class audiences which suffered the regimentation and repression of the new work place, films like WORK (21 June 1915) and HIS NEW JOB (1 February 1915) could provide a release and recognition through laughter. In WORK, Charlie is ostensibly a paperhanger's helper. In truth, he is a beast of burden who drags the paperhanger's wagon up the hill. His boss sits in the cart and even gives a friend a lift. When they start to paper the house, Charlie seems anxious to perform his task. But is it just accident that Charlie's pastebush always seems to hit his employer in the face, that the board always boxes the boss's ears? Or is it an "unconscious" articulation of Charlie's masked anger?

Chaplin assigned a socially significant role to the family that hires the paperhanger. They are the Fords and their dwelling is compared to the automobile: it is "a two-passenger, form fitting home." Mr. Ford's first line of dialogue is "Hurry My Breakfast." In a rush, he is plagued by inefficiencies. This bourgeois family is thus associated with Henry Ford, the model T and the assembly line. There are several searing moments of social humor. As the paperhangers start work, Mrs. Ford runs in and puts the silver in the safe - lest the workmen steal it. Following her example, the two men anxiously take their watches off and hide them deep in their pockets as well. Their suspicion becomes mutual. Because the paperhanging has delayed Mr. Ford's breakfast, Mrs. Ford's lover shows up while her husband is still home. The lover quickly pretends to be a fellow worker, although the ruse is not entirely successful. Over the course of the film, the home/auto, the Ford's domestic relations and the productive relations between family, paperhanger and helper are destroyed.

Similar devastation occurs in HIS NEW JOB. Chaplin is hired by a film company to be a property man's helper. The helper, in fact, does all the work so that when Charlie is needed to act in one of their productions, the property man demands a helper "or I'll blow my job." Charlie gets him fired by stabbing the director through a curtain with a sword and then handing the weapon to the property man just before the angry director appears. By the end of the film, the relationships of production have been undermined, the studio ends up in shambles, and the

historical drama in which Charlie appears has been turned into a farce. Charlie's ability to destroy the world of work on its multiple levels distinguishes these films from Keystone comedies being made at the same time.

Chaplin's Metafilm

The full scale destruction that concludes many of Chaplin's films has another value. His films are essentially parts of a longer, larger metafilm. The tramp falls out of one situation and into another, always entering the new situation on the bottom rung. This circularity is most evident in films such as THE TRAMP and THE IDLE CLASS where Charlie starts on the road and ends up on the road. In between he has entered society, played with its values and foibles, found the comfort attractive but the cost of its long-term acquisition too high. In these two films he chooses to leave, reasserting his own identity. In films such as HIS NEW JOB and WORK, he reasserts his own identity less consciously by destroying the work place rather than by a conscious choice to leave.

This metafilm has its disjunctions. A film such as THE FIREMAN (12 June 1916) seems to be a low point in Chaplin's creative output. The comedy never quite jells and disrupts the metafilm for no apparent purpose. Charlie's tramp persona does not seem to be lurking under the surface the way it is in HIS NEW JOB or WORK. His disruptive acts do not mask a psychic anger. It is clever farce but not what makes Chaplin a great comedian. THE IMMIGRANT (17 June 1917), in contrast, disrupts this ongoing metafilm for a purpose.

In THE IMMIGRANT Charlie is an immigrant tramp with his customary small pouch of possessions. Although he lands in America with a significant amount of money (won in a crap game), he soon ends up destitute. THE IMMIGRANT has a happy ending because Charlie is saved by an artist. When he finds a fifty-cent piece on the street, Charlie buys dinner. The coin turns out to be counterfeit and he finally is able to pay the bill using the artist's tip. The artist also finds Charlie and Edna to be soul mates and hires them as models on the spot, giving them an advance that allows them to be married. There are several possible interpretations for this ending. One, suggested by THE PAWNSHOP, is that the ending is implausible and unlikely to be sustained. Such "realism" may not be the correct basis for interpretation in this instance. It may be preferable if the spectator enjoys the happy ending. Chaplin, one feels, was underscoring the affinities and parallels between artist and tramp -

their similar use of imagination, for instance. In this sense, the ending of THE IMMIGRANT is a special case.

THE IDLE CLASS

This metafilm is also periodically punctuated with the appearance of a second Chaplin character - the rich idle alcoholic. As Connecticut Fatty suggests, this character is the tramp's alter ego. The relationship between the two are explored in THE IDLE CLASS (25 September 1921) for which Chaplin played both roles. The existence of one character does not preclude the existence of the other. Both have a legitimate though not equal place in this metafilm. Charlie would like to be the rich man who has everything a man could want - including a wife (Edna). The two male characters act as well as look alike. The lumpen proletariat and the lumpen bourgeois have much in common: they don't work. The question is not, as Walter Kerr suggests, which is the idle class.[24] There is a purposeful elision: satirically, they make up one idle class. Chaplin's ability to sustain the parallels makes the film a tour de force.

THE IDLE CLASS opens with a train pulling into a station and the porters helping the passengers disembark. While Edna (the pivot around which much of the film's comedy and confusion revolves) steps out of the passenger car, Charlie exits from a small box under the train's carriage where he has stowed away. The gentleman tramp's belongings include a brass alarm clock (which he shakes as if it is broken), his bag and a set of golf clubs, modest equivalents of the possessions of the wealthy. Edna climbs into a cab with her two maids. Before the vehicle pulls out, Charlie, with an air of great discernment, also selects a cab. The cab is Edna's and he hops on the back, holding onto the spare tire. Such minor discrepancies in comfort are insignificant in his eyes. The key difference (here and throughout the film) is between inside and outside. Edna is in the train and in the cab, while Charlie is underneath the train and on the back of the cab. It is the difference between being inside and outside society.

The rich alcoholic misses his wife's arrival because his clock is broken. It may be more expensive than Charlie's, but neither works. Time is not important for these two idlers. They have no schedule and no urgent appointments because they do not need to earn a living.

For Charlie, class differences are alternately illusions or insurmountable barriers. The contradictions between the illusions of equality and the realities of

class difference are sources of comedy and pathos. The golf course, for instance, becomes a site for comedy based on the illusion of equality. Charlie indulges in the rich man's game of golf. On the course, the rich fail to see any distinction between Charlie and themselves. One golfer chums up to Charlie, offering the tramp his cigarette case. Charlie takes the case, offers his new friend a cigarette and then puts the case in his own pocket. On the course, he gradually acquires the accoutrements of the rich - a fine collection of golf balls and some new clubs pulled out of a golfer's bag by Charlie's independently-minded cane. Superficially he acts like one of them. Yet the tramp's habit of living "by his cheek" operates automatically, audaciously and profoundly.

At the end of the film, Charlie's true identity revealed, he is cast out of the masquerade ball. Edna must reject him, but sends her father (Mack Swain) after him to apologize. Mack Swain finds Charlie and shakes his hand, but when Swain turns around, Charlie kicks him. The kick is his final assessment of the values exhibited by his "betters." While Charlie knows this class barrier is insurmountable except perhaps in his dreams or for a few anonymous moments on the golf course, he does not accept or respect these distinctions. With his identity exposed, he chooses to return to the road rather than be trapped by the role society assigns to him.

THE GOLD RUSH

Chaplin also reasserts the continuity of this metafilm in THE GOLD RUSH, despite the film's more conventionally linear narrative. Charlie goes to Alaska during the gold rush at the end of the 19th century. Through many twists of fate, he ends up a millionaire. Suddenly wealthy, the former tramp wins the girl he loves (Georgia Hale). Even in this story where Charlie goes from idle poor to idle rich, a circular structure exists just below the surface. At the end, Charlie leaves Alaska on an ocean liner. He is asked to pose in his old tramp outfit for the press photographer. As he backs away from the camera, he falls off the cabin roof and into the arms of a surprised Georgia on the deck below. She is also leaving Alaska but in less favorable circumstances. She and a crewman mistake Charlie for a stowaway and for a moment it seems he might be thrown off the ship, separated from his wealth and forced to return to the life of a tramp. It does not happen, but when the group returns to the upper deck, the camera holds on the coiled rope where Georgia had tried to hide Charlie. At the last

moment, THE GOLD RUSH points toward a latent circular structure.

The manner in which Charlie acquired his wealth is an important aspect of THE GOLD RUSH. It is not earned by hard work, but by luck or, as the intertitles reiterate, by "fate." It was luck which blew Jim McKay (Mack Swain) through the cabin door, changing the balance of power just as Black Larson was about to send Charlie out into the snow storm and to his certain death. It was luck that made Jim McKay need Charlie to find the mine, and fate that killed Black Larson, preventing him from registering the mine in his name. The wealth was not earned but acquired through good fortune. Certainly this accounting for Charlie's wealth suggests a critique of social darwinism, the popular philosophy of the 1920's which argued that a process of natural selection occurred in which the most worthy rose to the top.

Conclusions

This analysis has been based on a selection of Chaplin's films. Further work would undoubtedly reveal additional aspects of Chaplin's tramp persona and his relation to work. Nonetheless, it is at odds with many recent interpretations of Chaplin's work.[25] While Sobel and Francis' rejection of the tramp character's centrality challenges us to look at Chaplin's films in new ways, it finally leads to an impoverished appreciation of the comedian's oeuvre. They attribute too much importance to the disjunctions in the Chaplin metafilm and fail to examine these disjunctions in a sympathetic light. Sobel and Francis also argue that Chaplin's work should be appreciated primarily for its surface glitter, for Chaplin's comic imagination and accomplished execution. They conclude their study by noting

A combination of any two objects, functions, ideas and actions, provided that their juxtaposition was incongruous, was all that [Chaplin] needed. Brilliant and amusing as they are, they state only that fantasy and reality are interchangeable... And in this lies the "Little Fellow"s' elusiveness. If everything can be treated in the same way, if children can become chickens, a safe become a larder, a walking-stick a billiard cue and a bald head a mere surface on which to strike a match, how can we judge what is his own reality, his own point of view? The answer must be that we cannot, and that the more we

pursue it, the more elusive it becomes.[26]

Sobel and Francis make a point that is similar to one made by Walter Kerr in The Silent Clowns. Kerr sees Charlie as an existentialist, a Sartrean creation living from moment to moment. He asserts that

The secret of Chaplin, as a character, is that he can be anyone. That is his problem. The secret is a devastating one, for the man who can, with a flick of a finger or the blink of an eyelash, instantly transform himself into absolutely anyone is a man who must, in his heart, remain no one.[27]

Such analyses neutralize the radical intent of the films.

Around controversial film texts, one often discovers not only major differences of interpretation but often different texts. So it was with LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN where a modernized version of the film sustained an assessment of early cinema that was impoverished and, I would argue, ideologically complicit. In the case of Chaplin's films from the teens, one often encounters a similar problem. The Mutual films, in particular, have been reedited for release as sound pictures with a sound track added and the intertitles removed. As WORK demonstrates, titles often orient the audience's interpretation of the pictured narrative - by identifying the head of household with Henry Ford, for example. The removal of titles thus helps to free these films from their historical context, aiding the critics seeking to turn Chaplin's output into "timeless narratives."

IBM has simply taken advantage of this ideological neutralization. Having been turned into a timeless and widely beloved clown, Charlie can be used to sell the products of one of America's leading corporations. Nonetheless, IBM's manipulation of the tramp character has an underlying grasp of the tramp as analysed in this essay. It is because he hates work that Charlie's enjoyment of his newest job has resonance. It is because he normally destroys the work place that his steady transformation (via the computer) into a reliable member of the work force suggests that the viewer could likewise find happiness through the purchase of IBM products. Although IBM and its advertising agency have better understood what Charlie is about, this appropriation is only superficial. Chaplin is not behind it. Of course, one can imagine that Charlie might find quite a lot of comic "business" to do if confronted with a computer, which often functions as today's counterpart to the clock. He might destroy a few while mastering its

intricate programs. He might play video games on it when the boss is out of the office or manipulate the accounts for his own benefit - in an effort to further his romance with the owner's daughter. He probably would not need it to generate "new ideas": he always seemed to have enough on his own.

The historian's role, however, is not to counter these misappropriations of the tramp character with flights of fancy but to articulate a critical perspective that undermines such misappropriations. Despite Kerr, Sobel, Francis and other critics, Charlie the tramp has a very clear idea who he is. It is his sense of identity and of knowing what he wants that makes it impossible for this tramp to accommodate himself to most situations for a protracted period of time. It is society, particularly a capitalist society, which tries to transform him into what they want him to be (just as Kerr tries to transform him into an existentialist). Charlie only appears to acquiesce (even in the IBM ads). While Kerr argues that Charlie is "no natural tramp," in fact the character has much in common with real tramps. Tramps survived because they adapted quickly to the many different situations they confronted on the road. They took whatever job came along if they needed money - but only for a short duration. Each, like Charlie, was a jack of all trades, a master of none.

Notes

1. New York Tribune, Sunday Magazine Section, May 1904.
2. These Edison films exist in the Paperprint Collection in the Division of Motion Pictures, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound, at the Library of Congress.
3. This film is in the AFI Collection at the Library of Congress.
4. Eileen Bowser, ed., Biograph Bulletins, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973, p.292.
5. Harry Braverman, Labor and Monopoly Capital, New York Monthly Review Press, 1974, p.147.
6. Hugo Munsterberg, Psychology and Industrial Efficiency, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1913, p.24.
7. Sectors of the middle class, for instance, were impoverished in the process of this development. The progressive era that extended into the World War period was characterized by an uneasy, complicated alliance between large sections of the working and middle classes.
8. New York Telegraph, 8 February 1914, p.2E.
9. Ibid.
10. Actually, Chaplin may have first appeared as the tramp character for MABEL'S STRANGE PREDICAMENT, the film released after KID AUTO RACES. Since Chaplin later claimed credit for the idea behind KID AUTO RACES, the film nonetheless has a privileged position in Chaplin's oeuvre. David Robinson, Chaplin: his Life and Art, New York: McGraw Hill, 1986, p.117-118.
11. Likewise, Charlie does not exist for the middle-class figures who nearly run him over in their automobile at the beginning of THE TRAMP.
12. Kerr, Silent Clowns, p.85.
13. Huff, Chaplin, p.3.
14. Huff, Chaplin, p.4.
15. Raoul Sobel and David Francis, Chaplin: Genesis of a Clown, London: Quartet Books, 1977, p.159.
16. Charles Chaplin, "How I Made My Success," Theater

Magazine, September 1915, p.121.

17. John McCabe, Charlie Chaplin, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1978, p.74.

18. John James McCook cited in Adela Haberski French, The Social Reform Papers of John James McCook: A Guide to the Microfilm Publication, Hartford: The Antiquarian and Landmarks Society, Inc., of Connecticut, 1977, p.31. Further research needs to be done on the differences between tramps in England and the United States.

19. Ibid.

20. Connecticut Fatty, interview, 8 May 1893, cited in French, The Social Reform Papers, p.8.

21. William Smith, questionnaire, December 1891, cited in French, The Social Reform Papers, p.32.

22. An example of this would be FATTY'S MAGIC PANTS when Fatty knocks out Harry McCoy. McCoy is out only for a moment and a free-for-all quickly starts.

23. Sobel and Francis, Chaplin, p.160-61.

24. See Walter Kerr, The Silent Clowns, New York: Alfred Knopf, Inc., 1975, p.92.

25. Walter Kerr, The Silent Clowns, p.186.

26. A number of historians have linked Chaplin's films to their working class audiences, for instance Robert Sklar, Movie-made America, p.110-115.

27. Sobel and Francis, Chaplin, p.221-222.

28. Walter Kerr, The Silent Clowns, p.85.

THE STREETMOB AS RUBE GOLDBERG MACHINE

A note on the 'chase' film in the slapstick era

David Levy

An angry crowd chased and beat up a suspected chain snatcher who had to be rescued by cops in Central Park yesterday. - The New York Post, Monday, 29 April 1985.

The formal evolution of the chase film in the slapstick era reveals a fascinating transformation of the sort of basic structure that had been typical of the pursuit in the cinema's first decade.

If we can accept D. W. Griffith's THE CURTAIN POLE, completed in the fall of 1908 and released a few months later, as a boundary or marker separating those two production periods, the chase subjects turned out on either side of that boundary can more or less be described in terms of scale of production, structure, and victim status. By scale of production I refer to the elements of setting and cast; by structure I want to draw attention to the way in which the topographical "obstacles" in the chases of the earlier period were transformed into the chain reaction gags of the later one; and by victim status I have in mind the conversion of the chase's original pariah-quarry into a type of American social hero.

"It has been so long," declared a February 1909 review of THE CURTAIN POLE in the New York Dramatic Mirror, "since we have seen a 'chase' picture from the Biograph people." The chase, the reviewer went on, had been overdone, and done so badly by the studio that it had "grown into disrepute." By 1907 Biograph's use of the pursuit certainly had declined into a sort of perfunctory gimmick: in ARCADIAN ELOPEMENT a three-shot lunatic chase was employed as a scenic detail in a story of harassed lovers, and WIFE WANTED was only another stale re-make of their influential 1904 hit, PERSONAL.

Scripted by Billy Bitzer, THE CURTAIN POLE borrowed some elements from popular Pathé pictures of the period such as JE VAIS CHERCHER LE PAIN (1907) and LE CHEVAL EMBALLE (1907), including a swelling chase crowd, reverse

creature attacks, he takes refuge in a refuse can (f), after knocking over a couple of art patrons (g) and some old codgers on a bench (h). Trapped inside the can, he gets his chance to escape when the dog takes after a cat (i). But the dog is soon back on his trail, chases him into a hotel (j) and then into the room of a notorious boozier (k), lodged across the hall from a young lady (l). She hears the racket and opens her door (m), allowing the dog to enter her room and hide in the bath (n). Meanwhile... the young man relaxes against a seltzer bottle (o), spritzing the drunk who awakens. After a tussle they decide to drink to friendship, the drunk drowning some hair tonic which sets him in a frenzy. A crook (p) enters the young lady's room, demands her money at gunpoint, and is about to make his getaway when Lloyd and his mad companion burst into the room. Lloyd soon boots the crook through the bathroom door and into the bath where the dog seizes him by the seat of the pants (q). Roused by the racket a hotel clerk (r) summons the police, and other weird guests converge with them outside the door. Lloyd drives them all off and shares some chocolates with the girl and his former enemy, the dog. But not before burlesquing the sort of passionate leg action seen in the concluding shot of CALL A COP.

In PLAY SAFE (1926), a hybrid genre subject that is part chase, part rescue, Mario Bianchi (better known to fans as Monty Banks) is assaulted by thugs, chickens and mailbags, stretched, banged around and otherwise abused, but finally succeeds in rescuing a heroine trapped aboard a runaway train. Released near the close of the slapstick period and the start of the larger motion picture industry trend to sound synchronization, the film reveals Banks's limited talent for sustained stuntwork and his evident capacity to absorb real physical punishment.

The madcap chain of events that is the film's centerpiece is set in motion by a scuffle between Banks and a gang of villains in the engine cabin of a monster freight train. The throttle is kicked full open and the train gathers speed, stranding the heroine on board with an unsavory remnant of the hoodlum group. Banks, who has lost his place on the engine, chases the rogue train on a horse-drawn wagon, on horseback, on foot, and finally in a racing car which leaves him stretched between the fast moving train and the speeding vehicle. The balance of the thrills-and-spills comedy requires him to escape from the villains on board and to get the heroine and himself off the train, which he succeeds in doing with the assistance of miniaturized railroad sequences, process shots and special effects editing. Agile switches of camera angle, including the mixing of footage from moving vehicles and stationary camera set-ups, shape the

relentless train action that is the film's key interest.

From the standpoint of the progressivists, PLAY SAFE might have been regarded as the near-perfect pure slapstick spectacle, with its mechanical and abstract structure of accelerated action and gag retardation more or less totally divorced from the moral dilemmas of the American social environment.

A variety of factors help account for the change in chase structure I have attempted to outline: the shifting values of America in the period surrounding the Great War and the transformed character of the film industry, now based in California, are but two. In 1913, the Motion Picture Patents Company was still a legal if not a real fact of motion picture life, with the independents continuing to develop and promote new movie concepts and star players.

[Projection: A BATH HOUSE BEAUTY, 1914, produced by Mack Sennett for Keystone/Mutual, directed by Roscoe Arbuckle. Cast: Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle.
CALL A COP, 1921, produced by Mack Sennett, directed by Mal St. Clair. Cast: Marie Prevost, George O'Hara, Pat Kelly, Jack Richardson, Eddie Gribbon.
COUNT YOUR CHANGE, 1919, produced by Hal Roach, Rolin Film Co. Cast: Harold Lloyd, Snub Pollard, Bebe Daniels.]

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Walter Kerr. The Silent Clowns, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975.

George C. Pratt. Spellbound in Darkness, Greenwich: New York Graphic Society, 1973.

Mack Sennett. King of Comedy, Garden City, New York, 1954.

DISCUSSION

GIAN PIERO BRUNETTI: My English is not very good for speaking directly and I have not prepared my remarks. I am studying the relationship between American slapstick and Italian and European comedy in its beginnings. During this symposium, I learned a lot of things and received an enormous quantity of ideas from the speakers. Excuse me, I prefer to speak in French. [From this point, the editor has provided an English translation.]

There are many things that we may yet try to see, at a moment when we think we know quite a lot about the comic cinema of the early years. One has the feeling - through familiarity with this cinema for many years, even if we have not had the opportunity to see all of the films, the unknown films that we have seen here - that this cinema makes a part of our natural landscape, of our culture, makes a part of our landscape like the moon. We know the films, and it seems to us that these films from the early part of the century continue to transmit energy even now, that they continue to speak to us.

What interests me is not only the image on the screen. It is necessary to see two other aspects: one is the nature of the spectator sitting in the darkness of the cinema; and the other is an aspect that we don't yet know very well, the relation between the American slapstick comedy and European comedy. We have had some studies of the Italian cinema in the first years - I have been studying it, myself, and there is also present here Maria Adriana Prolo, who has made a very important study of the beginnings of our cinema - yet I have the feeling that there is still a lot that we don't know about it.

But we could know more, we could do more research. We could begin by having an exchange between the European and American historians to study what are the links and the differences between the two systems: what the European cinema gave to early cinema, and what the American cinema offered.

On the other side, there is the nature of the spectator. The energy, the quantity of images that came to be shared by the national cultures, to become the collective memory, is a kind of energy that continues to speak to us even now. The different generations of people may decode, may read, and enjoy these films even today. Here is something that doesn't happen with other genres which no longer have anything to say to us, for

the reason of the metamorphosis of cultural forms. We feel that the cinema of the first years changed, and continued in other forms. But slapstick lives even today.

David Levy posed the question of the origin of the chase. Myself, I think we must go further to find the origins, of all the slapstick systems, back to the popular spectacles of the Middle Ages. Even, if I am not too ambitious, one may find a relationship to the Chanson de Roland - for example, in the rhythm, and in the impossibility of saving the victim in the end - and the chase, which is on a lower, more popular level, in the comic cinema. And it is for this lower, more humble level that certain rules must be changed, to fit the public. The Italian cinema in the first years was predicated on certain kind of public. It was necessary to learn to speak to this type of public, and to link a spectacle of gestures to a certain system of social rites that are linked to the drama of a bourgeois society, of vaudeville, cafe concerts, the circus, etc.

When this cinema is no longer capable of being understood by the largest possible public, (the cinema of the beginning years doesn't go beyond the first World War) it is because it is the prisoner of a certain form, of spectacle, of a past culture - the parody is based on a certain code. Then there was a public divided in two. There were people who could laugh, but others, undergoing a process of self-identification, who could not. One side preferred the drama, and the public was divided in two. We say that the American cinema now had the capacity to unify the public - to find a language that went beyond the American cinema. It was enlarged to become a new language, even if the language was derived from an old tradition, at the same time considering cinema as an autonomous art. We consider the specificity of the cinema. And then, if I spoke before of the rhythm of the Chanson de Roland, one must see that the modernity of the American slapstick comedy is linked to the rhythm of a society that is changing. There are faults with this machine that doesn't work very well and has problems, but nonetheless projects itself forward. We believe that in the European cinema the rhythm is still linked with a peasant society and an urban society not yet affected by mechanization.

Thus it is necessary to study the differences: the rhythm, the syntax, which is constructed on one hand of the rhythm of the piston, the automobile, and on the other hand it is constructed of the social rhythm, the rhythm of a ceremony, of a society which is going to die, a cinema which cannot go past the World War.

There is another difference that is striking in the cinema that I know best, the Polidors, the Cretinettis. The personalities are delightful, to be sure, but they do not have the possibility of developing. They are the ancestors, who, like Fatty Arbuckle, are limited to their particular place, whereas nearly all the actors of American slapstick have the possibility in a certain moment to leave, to take off the mask, to have another dimension, to have other roles which don't depend on physique. And at the same time they act as announcing angels, who leave and announce something new. This doesn't happen in the European cinema.

In the European cinema, there is the destruction of a whole language, but not a future. The American comics try to build a future, a very confused one, that doesn't know where it is going. There is always, with this destruction, the imagination of a possible world, in which, for example, animals may speak. Or one may destroy everything, but even the destruction is with different means. In the Italian cinema, there is a logic of destruction, a logic which is well built with links between deeds. Or there is a destruction by accumulation, in a certain way it is like an arithmetic progression. In the American cinema, there is a destruction by progression, by geometry, that may completely ignore logic.

There is another dimension. The actors in European cinema come to an end, they are destroyed, because they haven't the force to construct, to imagine something that goes beyond the present. They do very well in the present, but lack the force to build in the future. The American filmmakers, from my point of view, have this enormous modernity. They imagine the future because they are from an alpha-beta, but also, perhaps, they are the more interesting form of the divulgation of the second law of thermo dynamics of the world which goes toward entropy or chaos, or Albert Einstein's theory of relativity.

EILEEN BOWSER: Thank you for your interesting comments. And for your suggestion of the further research work to be done. There are plans for another symposium on the silent slapstick film to be held in Europe, probably next year, probably to be organized by the University of Paris, on the topic of the European silent film comics, as a kind of continuation of what we have begun here. I don't have any details yet, but I hope that some of the American film historians here will be able to participate in it and exchange ideas with the European historians.

ANDREW C. MCKAY: I am from Philadelphia, and I was

involved in the Identification Seminar last week. I find this to be a neglected field, unfortunately. The comedy shorts in the twenties were considered as fillers, and for exhibitors, the features were the important films. The short films were often not well documented. In our research, we found a paucity of materials. The National Film Archive's catalogue of the silent fiction film was published in the sixties (I don't know if it has been updated), and is very useful because in addition to credits, dates, and the length, it has brief synopses. Title lists are not much good without synopses, because it is difficult to know the description without the synopses. During our work, we found the research work of Karel Časlavský to be very helpful, and also the work Sam Gill has done at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. We urgently need more research, more documentation materials to be made available, to be shared among archives. For example, where are the surviving Kodascope and Pathescope catalogues? Only a few copies can be found.

EILEEN BOWSER: Thank you for that fervent plea for more research in this field. Now, time is getting short and we have to decide whether to continue this discussion a bit longer - or whether, as some of you asked - we will look at yet another slapstick film. [The decision was to show the film: HAM, THE EXPLORER (1916), Ham and Bud Comedy, produced by Kalem.]

REPORT FROM THE SLAPSTICK IDENTIFICATION SEMINAR

Ron Magliozi

The Slapstick Identification Seminar took place from April 22 through April 26, 1985. Nearly eighty films from archives in Brussels, Budapest, Copenhagen, London, New York, Ottawa, Washington, D.C., and the collection at Yale University were gathered here to be identified.

These were films which were missing titles and credits, their dates of production in question, and their release dates unknown. In most cases the archives which held the films were even uncertain about who were the actors in the films.

The experts whose job it was to identify these films included Karel Caslavsky from Prague, Einar Lauritzen from Stockholm, Jay Leyda, Eileen Bowser, Steve Higgins and Lee Amazonas from New York, Sam Gill from Los Angeles, Pat Loughney from Washington, D.C., and Andrew C. McKay from Philadelphia. Other experts dropped by during the week, including John Cocchi, Charles Musser, Herbert Reynolds, Jon Gartenberg and Richard Koszarski.

In addition to the expertise of these participants, we had a fine set of tools for our job. These tools included a number of trade periodicals, weekly film publications and studio bulletins from the teens and twenties, as well as the U. S. Copyright Catalogues, a number of books about the short slapstick film, and the files of the Museum of Modern Art Film Study Center.

There was one more aspect of the seminar which gave it an added edge of excitement for us, one more task we had to perform that gave the proceedings a sense of urgency, and this was the fact that nearly half the films we were viewing were nitrate prints, prints that are on the verge of extinction. In some cases we found that these prints could not be projected, that they were too shrunken to go through a projector or that they had severe sprocket damage which had the same result. During the week we drew up a priority list of those nitrate prints which due to their rarity or their physical condition were most in need of immediate preservation. Indeed, at least half of the nitrate prints were of such rarity, or of such fine image quality, that we recommended immediate preservation. This was not an easy task, since our first and lasting instinct was simply to demand that all the

nitrate prints be preserved without question.

In terms of identification, I am happy to announce that we had many successes. The seminar resulted in the complete or partial identification of fifty-nine films.

I have already told you who were the experts with whom I spent the week, but I haven't made it clear that I also spent the week with the likes of:

Snub Pollard
Lloyd Hamilton
Billy Franey
Joe Cobb
Louise Fazenda
Raymond Hitchcock
Sid Smith
Glen Cavender
Bert Roach
Stan Laurel
Slim Summerville

Larry Semon
Arthur Trimble
Spec O'Donnell
Merta Sterling
Charles Chaplin
Spencer Bell
Lee Moran
Rube Miller
Paul Parrott
the "Our Gang" Kids

Not to mention Napoleon and Sally (who you may not know were a popular team of chimps), Brownie the Wonderdog and his fellow canine performers Teddy and Pete. Some of you are undoubtedly unfamiliar with a number of these names, but I can assure you the experience of that week was one I wish all of you could have shared.

I would like to finish my talk here by mentioning just a few of the highlights and lessons of the past week. Most of these points have already been raised by the previous speakers, so let me add further emphasis.

Two major highlights for us were the discovery of two "firsts." We identified a print of the first Keystone/Triangle film, MY VALET, which was produced by Mack Sennett and released in 1915, and the first Mermaid Comedy, A FRESH START, produced by Jack White and released in 1920. Other highlights included the chance to catch glimpses of several famous Chaplin imitators of the period such as Billy Ritchie, and one fellow we believe to be Arkadi Boytler, a Russian who did Chaplin imitations in German films.

We viewed a Pathé censorship reel from the Library of Congress which featured scenes cut from slapstick comedies of the twenties, including gags cut from the film of Harold Lloyd, and gags of an explicitly sexual nature that even surprised some of us with their daring. I am reminded at this point of one of the most impressive lessons we learned, or re-learned, which was not to

underestimate the insight that slapstick films can give into the ethnic, racial and sexual politics that existed in America during the period of the silent film.

Previous speakers have discussed slapstick conventions, those enduring comic "texts," if you will, from which all silent comedy works. Indeed, we became even more keenly aware of the significance of preserving and studying the films of lesser known but often wonderously talented comedians and comediennes for the context that their gags and bits of comic business can provide for our understanding of the better known silent clowns, Chaplin, Keaton, Lloyd and Langdon.

What I am saying in effect is that whether the film is funny or not is not the only question we can ask about these films, and certainly not always the most interesting aspect of the films.

A point in fact, what I find to be a special pleasure of these films and especially of California slapstick comedies of the twenties is their documentary quality. The fact that so many of these films are shot on location, on the real streets of Hollywood and vicinity is significant. There is rare beauty in these fresh new streets, these new neighborhoods with their fledgling palm trees, the garden paths, the city streets, store fronts, the street lights, a glimpse now and then of a non-actor moving or staring in the distance... but you understand my point. A record of everyday reality in the twenties is always present in these films.

One final impression of the Identification Seminar which I want to communicate concerns the nature of the research being done into short films of this period. Present research into the many series of comedies produced in the silent period has been undertaken by a handful of film archeologists. Having taken part in just such work this past week, I can verify that it will be vitally important to film scholars of the future, and that for me, it has been fun. There we were at the edge of this archeological "dig," although it may have resembled a screening room, and up came a Mermaid Comedy, the first I had ever seen, or an L-KO Comedy, a Jack White Comedy, a Weiss Brothers-Artclass Comedy, a film from the Buster Brown Series, the Mike and Ike Series, the Mickey McGuire Series, or a Century Comedy, Vogue Comedy, Rayart-Radiant Comedy, Hallroom Boys Comedy, and so forth.

I have chosen three films to illustrate what I have been describing. Three of our successful identifications:

[Projection: A DOG CATCHER'S LOVE, 1917, Keystone/
Triangle, directed by Eddie Cline.
Cast: Slim Summerville, Peggy Pearce,
Glen Cavender, Teddy the Dog.
DIZZY DAISY, 1924, Jack White Comedy/
Educational. Cast: Louise Fazenda,
Lee Moran, Dick Sutherland.
HAM TAKES A CHANCE, 1916, Kalem,
directed by William Beaudine. Cast:
Lloyd Hamilton, Bud Duncan.]

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Fox Folks
Griffithiana, No. 12-13-14-15, October 1983
(Sennett issue)
Motion Picture News
Motion Picture News Booking Guide
Moving Picture World
The Standard, Volume 18: January 1931
Universal Weekly

Miscellaneous

Museum of Modern Art Film Study Center
Files

List of Participating Archives

BRUSSELS: Cinematheque Royale de Belgique

BUDAPEST: Filmarchivum/Magyar Filmtudományi Intézet

COPENHAGEN: Det Danske Filmmuseum

LONDON: National Film Archive/British Film Institute

NEW HAVEN: Yale University Film Study Center

(Note: this is the only participating institution from outside the FIAF membership: films were lent through the courtesy of Don Crafton.)

NEW YORK: Department of Film/The Museum of Modern Art

OTTAWA: National Film, Television and Sound Archives

PRAGUE: Československý Filmový Ústav/Filmový Archiv

WASHINGTON: Division of Motion Pictures, Television and Recorded Sound/Library of Congress

THE FILMS IN THE SLAPSTICK IDENTIFICATION SEMINAR

compiled by Ron Magliozi

Note: Film dates are release dates unless otherwise indicated. Trade periodical references are abbreviated: MPW for Moving Picture World and MPN for Motion Picture News. "Source" refers to the archive which provided the print; however, the nitrate films that were copied for the project are now in the collection of The Museum of Modern Art.

1. LIVE WIRES AND LOVE SPARKS, 19 March 1916.
Danish title: Billie Ritchie Paa Maskebal. Source: Copenhagen. Production: L-KO/Universal. Cast: Billie Ritchie, Eva Nelson, Peggy Pearce, Gene Rogers.
Additional identifications made by seminar participants: George Gebhart, Bert Roach, Joe Murphy, Alice Howell.
Notes: Nearly complete print, two reels. Imitation of Chaplin and the Keystone Cops. Stunt work on telephone wires. Sign: "Lightning Telephone Co." A masquerade ball, a wife in disguise, a large family of children.
Ref: MPW, 18 March 16, p.1886.
2. FIREMAN SAVE MY CHILD, 26 May 1918.
Danish title: Brandmajoren. Source: Copenhagen.
Production: Rolin Film Co./Pathe. Director: Alf Goulding.
Cast: Harold Lloyd, Bebe Daniels, Snub Pollard, Gus Leonard, Charles Stevenson, Helen Gilmore, Bud Jamison(?).
Notes: Lloyd crashes the Fireman's Ball and ends up fighting a fire. After several attempts, he saves the life of the home owner's daughter and wins her as a reward. Another print exists in Museum of Modern Art.
Ref: MPW 25 May 1918, p.1188.
3. DIZZY DAISY, 29 June 1924.
Danish title: Den Kloge Pige. Source: Copenhagen.
Production: Jack White Comedy/Educational. Director: Fred Hibbard. Cast: Louise Fazenda (Daisy), Lee Moran, Dick Sutherland, Sunshine Hart (fat woman with jewels), Billy Griffith (butler), Spencer Bell (waiter chased by sea lions), Cliff Bowes, Otto Fries, Virginia Vance.
Notes: Gags: fish in stocking, vase on staircase, Daisy's father knocks off porch rails with his spit. Long speedboat chase. Substantially complete, two reels.
Ref: MPN 31 May 1924, p.2618.
4. A DOG CATCHER'S LOVE, 24 June 1917.
Danish title: Gennem Ild Og Vand. Source: Copenhagen.

- Production: Keystone/Triangle. Director: Eddie Cline.
 Cast: Slim Summerville (dog catcher), Peggy Pearce
 (banker's daughter), Ora Carew [? listed on intertitle],
 Teddy (the dog), Hal Cooley, Glen Cavender, Harry
 Breen (?), Harry Depp (bank assistant). Notes: Plot
 involves filmmaking (briefly uses Triangle Studio as
 location), forgery, and dog catching. Process shots.
 Model ship and stock footage war ships.
 Ref: MPN 7 July 1917, p.117.
5. MY VALET, 27 October 1915.
 Danish title: Kammertjeneren. Source: Copenhagen.
 Production: Keystone/Triangle. Director: Mack Sennett.
 Cast: Raymond Hitchcock (John Anthony Jones), Mack
 Sennett (his valet), Fred Mace (the count), Frank Opperman
 (father), Alice Davenport (mother), Frank Hayes (cop),
 Mabel Normand (daughter). Notes: Hitchcock is supposed to
 meet and marry the daughter of old friend, and changes
 roles with his valet.
6. HER NATURE DANCE, 8 April 1917.
 Danish title: Naar Dansefeberen Raser. Source:
 Copenhagen. Production: Keystone/Triangle. Director:
 William Campbell. Cast: Fritz Schade (dancing master),
 Eva Thatcher (his wife or girlfriend), Gene Rogers, Alice
 Lake, Marie Prevost. Notes: Burlesque on Isadora Duncan's
 dancing style. Special effects involving a horse.
 Incomplete and out of sequence, one reel of original two
 reels.
7. GALL AND GOLF, 3 September 1917.
 Danish title: Golfspil og Smukke Øjne. Source:
 Copenhagen. Production: Vitagraph. Director: Larry Semon.
 Cast: Larry Semon (a golfing pickpocket), Donald McBride
 (Scotsman), Joe Simberg, Joe Basil, Earle Montgomery,
 Templar Saxe. Notes: Semon and girl form pickpocket team
 on golf course. Gag: oversize golf balls. Long chase
 sequence.
 Ref: MPN 8 Sep 1917, p.1642.
8. MITT THE PRINCE, 1927.
 Belgian title: Mitt le Prince. Source: Brussels.
 Production: Weiss Brothers/Artclass. Director: Jim Davis.
 Cast: Snub Pollard, Marvin "Fatty" Lobach (Loback or
 Lobeck), Ted Stanhope (man in punch bowl). Notes: Laurel
 and Hardy imitation which may refer to TWO TARS. Snub and
 friend are janitors who undo each other's work; sent to
 make a delivery, they wreck the car; they substitute for
 the expected aristocrats at the party.
 Ref: Blackhawk Catalog clippings.
9. JUST A GOOD GUY, 21 December 1924.
 Hungarian title: Gepember. Source: Budapest. Production:
 Hal Roach/Pathe/Arthur Stone Comedies. Director: Hampton
 Del Ruth. Cast: Arthur Stone (model for robot), Olive
 Borden (daughter), Kewpie Morgan, Richard Daniels
 (father), Glen Cavender, Katherine Grant, Noah Young

- (cop), Michael Visaroff (pawnshop owner), Silas Wilcox (cop). Notes: Arthur Stone takes the place of a robot; a pawnshop.
Ref: MPN 20 Dec 1924, p.3184.
10. HELPFUL AL, 27 January 1926, & AL'S TROUBLES, 10 March 1926.
Hungarian title: Bix es Box. Source: Budapest. Production: Century Comedy/Stern Bros. for Universal. Director: Charles Lamont. Cast: Al Alt, Charles King (in the first film), Jack Singleton (in the second). Notes: The print consists of two films, the first half of one film and the second half of the other. In the first, two skirt-chasing, top-hatted fellows have a child dropped into their auto; they try to find clothes for it. The second half deals with the two fellows in blackface getting involved in the wedding of a black couple, and ends with a chase in a shipyard.
Ref: MPW 6 Feb 1926, p.564, 13 Feb, p.528, 20 Mar, p.193, 27 Mar, p.278; MPN 6 Feb 1926, p.701; 13 Mar, p.1205.
11. BUSTER'S GIRL FRIEND, 1927.
Hungarian title: Buster es a Csodakerék. Source: Budapest. Production: Buster Brown Series/Stern Bros. for Universal. Director: Gus Meins. Cast: Arthur Trimble (Buster Brown), Doreen Turner (his girlfriend), Buddy Messinger (his fat friend), Tige (the dog). Notes: Buster presents a puppet theater with Tige as star; his friends throw food at the stage. Buster and his friends go to an amusement park and Tige gets into trouble there. Ends with moral: "Resolved - one good time deserves another."
Ref: Universal Weekly Vol. 25 No. 3, 26 Feb 1927, p.40.
12. Original title unknown, 1928 - 1929.
Hungarian title: Hollywood Pletyka. Source: Budapest. Credits unknown, cast consists of monkeys. Notes: Title translates as "Hollywood Gossip." A star-struck monkey goes to Hollywood and gets into the movies. Her boyfriend rescues her from the evil influences. A monkey film director is named J. Bruze, parody of James Cruze. Microphones on the stage of the film within the film indicate comedy made in the sound era; there are no titles, a sound track may be missing. UNCLE TOM'S CABIN on a marquee of a Times Square movie theater, may refer to version released 2 September 1928.
13. MICKEY'S BATTLE, 5 December 1927.
Hungarian title: Gyermekek Haboruja. Source: Budapest. Production: Mickey McGuire Series, No. 4/ Larry Darmour for Standard Cinema Corp., R-C pictures Corp. release. Director: Al Herman. Cast: Joe Rule (Mickey McGuire) (the young Mickey Rooney). Notes: Rival children's gangs fight; a drag scene, blackface scene, reference to Charles Lindbergh, "Scorpion Club." End is missing.
Ref: MPN, 9 Dec 1927, p.1827.

14. SOUP AND NUTS (?) 1915 - 1916.
Source: New York. Production: Vogue Comedy. Cast: Rube Miller (waiter), Madge Kirby (waitress). Notes: Knockabout in a restaurant, features a fight between the waiter and the chef over the beautiful new cashier. The title is on film with date of 1921, but probably not original. Cast identified by seminar participants. Several films with this title were made.
15. BEHIND THE FRONT (?), 12 February 1919.
Archive's title: Fatman in Knock-about. Source: London. Production: Century Comedy/Universal. Cast: Bert Roach (Nicholas Nutmeg), Alice Howell (wife), Jimmy Finlayson (?), Marvin "Fatty" Lobach (cop), Hughie Mack (Nector Husband), Phil Dunham. Notes: A wartime plot with spies; Howell in drag. Gags: autos detoured through a living room; a cowboy at recruiting center with mice and cats in his chaps. Out of sequence. One reel. Title not confirmed, original synopsis not yet found.
16. Original title unknown, ca 1919 - 1921.
Archive's title: Ben Turpin Comedy. Source: London. Production: Mack Sennett. Cast: Ben Turpin. Notes: Not projected during seminar, arrived as negative, print made and viewed in 1985. Mazie, the Folly Girl, is playing Liberty Theater when her pearls are stolen. Ben is thrown out of Smith's Boarding House and collides with thief, their suitcases get mixed. Chase follows: thief gets case but Ben still has pearls. Rest of film concerns Ben's efforts to return the pearls. (Not LOVE'S OUTCAST as suggested earlier.)
17. THREE OF A KIND, 13 June 1926.
Archive's title: Three Fat Comedians. Source: London. Production: Standard Comedies/Three Fat Men Comedies/Joe Rock/Standard Cinema, distributed by FBO. Director: Harry Sweet. Cast: Frank "Tiny" Alexander. Hillard "Fatty" Karr, Frank "Kewpie" Ross, Lois Boyd. Notes: Three fat men do a very poor job of trying to entertain diners at a restaurant and are pelted with food. Only one reel of original two reels.
Ref: MPW 26 Jun 1926, p.708.
18. RUBE'S HOTEL TANGLE (?), 11 April 1916.
Archive's title: No Flirting. Source: London. Production: Vogue. Directed by Rube Miller. Cast: Rube Miller, Alice Neice, Madge Kirby. Notes: Not projected during seminar, arrived as negative print made and viewed later. One reel. A couple of country bumpkins arrive at hotel, she discovers such marvels as a shower bath, he flirts with women in lobby, much roughhouse, until manager puts up sign saying "No flirting here." Man locks up wife in bathroom so he can follow girl to park. Flirting continues there until sign "No flirting here" falls on his head. Followed to park by her husband and his wife; chase goes back to hotel, to rooms, until the flirt tries to hide

in a folding bed, which breaks hole in wall.
Identification not certain because printed synopsis of this film is not sufficiently detailed. Introductory titles not original: a stylized stage set with checked floor, two clowns throw animated letters "Now is the time to sit back and enjoy an Ideal Comedy", followed by the Educational trademark, "The Spice of the Program" from an oil lamp.

Ref: MPW, 15 Apr 16, p.397 (illus.), 22 Apr 16, p.685.

19. BABY FACES (?), February 1927.

Title on film: Das Susse Geheimnis. Source: London.
Production: Rayart-Radiant Comedy/Morris R. Schlank.
Director: Robert Furer (?). Cast: Al Alt (husband), Pauline Curley (wife). Notes: A husband convinced in error that his wife is pregnant takes a baby from the hospital by mistake. Location shot at Hollywood Clara Barton Memorial Hospital. Only one reel of original two reels. Cast identified in titles. Identification uncertain, no synopsis has yet been found. Ref: MPN Booking Guide.

20. Original title unknown, ca 1919.

Archive's title: Billy West Comedy #1. Source: London.
Production: Billy West Comedies/Bull's-Eye Films (?) Cast: Billy West. Notes: Not projected during seminar, arrived as negative. Print made and viewed in 1987. Begins in midst of action, a cop is chasing Billy and a very big man in a flophouse, wakening everyone, in the confusion they escape. Big man forces Billy to rob house: in the darkness, a girl with exaggerated bee-stung lips and ringlets wakes up, hearing noise, goes with Flashlight to look, phones police. Her child takes a liking to Billy, and when big man brutalizes the child, Billy tries to save the child and his mother. Only a part of the film.

21. HAUNTED HEARTS, 25 August 1919 (Copyright date).

Archive's title: Billy West Comedy #2. Source: London.
Production: Billy West Comedies/Bull's-Eye Films.
Director: Charles Parrott (?) Cast: Billy West, Charlie Dorety. Notes: Not projected during seminar, arrived as negative. Print made and viewed in 1985. High speed (slow camera) chase on foot, cop after Billy in suburban street, but cop is only trying to return wad of money he thinks Billy dropped. Money belongs to a man who drags Billy into hotel lobby. Gags: shoeshine stand, girl's wooden leg; smoking "Camels," lobby fountain with belligerent fish; hotel bedroom jokes, man tickling Billy thinks it is his wife; friend waiting for Billy to be thrown out of lady's swimming bath readies himself for a big show, Billie walks out wearing woman's bathing suit, girl on arm. M. Coco, M. Coco Cola, exchange cards, fight duel. California license plate for 1919. Described as "fun in a hotel" in distributor's report, MMA Special Collections.

22. Original title unknown, 1920's.

Archive's title: The Lost Engagement Ring. Source:

London. Notes: Not projected during seminar; arrived as negative. Print made and viewed in 1985. At Polly Prue's School for Girls, old maid school mistress takes girl's engagement ring for safekeeping, drops it, cat carries it off. Two men trying to get ring, climb wall, pretend holdup of girls, but no luck. At night, sneak in, shooting match with school mistress in dark. She can't talk to cops until she puts her teeth in. Men in drag to avoid capture by cops and a wife. In melee, man finds ring on floor, returns it to girl. In a playhouse, loving couple at window kiss, pull window shade. Made in California, time indicated by short skirts.

23. Original title unknown, 1916.

Archive's title: Sueño Vindicator. Source: London. Production: E and R Jungle Films. Director: Edgar A. Martin. Cast: Napoleon and Sally (chimps), Lillian Leighton (wife), Ralph McComas (artist). Notes: An artist lusts for his model at the expense of his fat wife. He is knocked unconscious and dreams of two chimps as "Pan." His rendezvous with the model proceeds in neo-classical dress. There were 26 E and R comedies made in 1916, when Lillian Leighton was with the company.

24. PLUCK AND LUCK, 18 Feb 1916.

Archive's title: Loose Pokes Comedy. Source: Prague. Production: Pokes and Jabbs Comedy/Vim. Cast: Walter Stull (Jabbs), Bobby Burns (Pokes). Notes: "Loose Pokes," a plumber, and "Professor Sauernotes" are character names. Two anarchists, a bomb in a piano, a dwarf in a piano. Location shots, Jacksonville, Florida. Ref: MPW 26 Feb 1916, p.1347.

25. HAM TAKES A CHANCE, 15 Feb 1916.

Czech title: Krotitelé Hadů. Source: Prague. Production: Ham and Bud series/Kalem. Director: William Beaudine. Cast: Lloyd Hamilton (Ham), Albert Duncan (Bud), Gus Leonard (Prof. Nonpareil), Ethel Teare (Mlle. Dainte), Jack McDermott (Eph). Notes: Vaudeville setting, a snake-charmer and a knife-thrower. Gags: Taking a snake for a walk on a leash. Ref: MPW 26 Feb 1916.

26. Various titles, 1920's, fragments.

Archive's title: Unidentified Nichol #22. Source: Washington, D. C. Production: Pathé. Cast (in various fragments): Brooks Benedict, Billy Bevan, Alice Day, Vernon Dent, Ralph Graves, Barney Hallum (Hellum), Oliver Hardy, Sunshine Hart, Madeline Hurlock, Pat Kelly, Matty Kemp, Stan Laurel, Harold Lloyd, Raymond McKee, Jerry Mandy, Ernie Morrison (Sunshine Sammy), Eddie Quillan, Martha Sleeper, Sojin, Ruth Taylor, Glenn Tryon, Ben Turpin. Notes: Believed to be censor cuts. Begins with a "Topics of the Day"; a nude woman swimming; a silhouette of a woman undressing behind a curtain; a "Smith Family

Comedy" for Sennett(?); Harold Lloyd in NEVER WEAKEN, THE FRESHMAN, I DO; clips from BROKE IN CHINA and AMONG THOSE PRESENT.

27. Original title unknown, 1920.
Archive's title: Unidentified Nichol #38. Source: Washington, D. C. Production: Gayety or Vanity Comedy/Al Christie Cast: Billy Bletcher. Notes: Billy takes a girl to lunch but has no money. Stick drawings on the inter-titles. One reel. Date from license plate.
28. Original title unknown, 1910 - 1911 (?)
Archive's title: Unidentified Nichol #3. Source: Washington, D. C. Credits unknown. Notes: Two comedy tramps try to get a drink in a saloon (believed to be a vaudeville act). One impersonates a cop; chase ensues; one of the tramps gets a job in the saloon. Location shooting near train yard, a sign reading YMCA, W. 23rd Street, NYC. Exterior of saloon is painted flat. One reel.
29. THE PEST, 4 December 1922.
Archive's title: Unidentified Post #17. Source: Washington, D. C. Production: Amalgamated Producing Co./Metro Pictures Corp. Director: Stan Laurel and/or Gil Pratt (?) Cast: Stan Laurel (salesman), Glen Cavender (profiteering landlord), Vera Reynolds (his tenant), Joy Winthrop (pest), Hero (dog), Silas D. Wilcox (Judge), Max Asher (Italian peddler), Stanley J. "Tiny" Sanford. Notes: Stan sells books door-to-door, and rescues girl from villainous landlord. Delivers his spiel to deaf person by mistake, then pursued by a fast-motion talking lady, rings doorbells, pursued by heroine's bulldog, chased by dog catcher when he masquerades as a dog, etc. This print incomplete; complete version preserved in New York.
Ref: Museum of Modern Art catalogue.
30. Original title unknown, 1919 - 1922 (?)
Archive's title: Unidentified Nichol #41. Source: Washington, D. C. Production: Moranti Producing Co., or Mercury Comedies-Bulls Eye, or Joker Comedy/Universal 1916. Director: Grover Jones (?) Cast: Milburn Moranti or Morante (Henry, the husband), Hazel Tranchell (Cleo, the wife). Notes: Husband and wife meet a con team at the beach and plan to leave each other for respective new partners. They leave notes for each other which they must later retrieve when they learn the truth. Made in Long Beach, California at Balboa Studio (?).
31. Original title unknown, 1915 - 1916 (?)
Archive's title: Unidentified Jacobs and Cayton #1. Source: Washington, D. C. Production: Jester Comedies (?) Cast: Marcel Perez (Twede Dan)?, Nilde Baracchi (Wild Cat Winnie). Notes: Man in distress tied-up, a gun pointing at him, a clock ticking away, is rescued by a woman. Scratches on negative to simulate explosion. A western setting, but may be produced in New Jersey. Print

- incomplete. Marcel Perez also known as Fernandez Perez and Marcel Fabre (used character names of Robinet in Europe and Tweedledum in Eagle Films made in Jacksonville, Florida, prior to appearing as Twede Dan in Jester Comedies produced by William Steiner in New Jersey).
32. Original title unknown, 1920 - 1921 (?)
 Archive's title: Unidentified #42. Source: Washington, D. C. Production: Billy Franey Comedy/Reelcraft Pictures Corp. Director: George Jeske or Tom La Rose (?) Cast: Billy Franey (cab driver). Notes: A rural maiden travels to the city where a cab driver rescues her from villains. Features a dwarf.
33. WHEN SUMMER COMES, 27 November 1922 (copyright).
 Danish title: Bobbys Kamp Med Løverne. Source: Copenhagen Production: Mack Sennett/Pathé. Director: Roy Del Ruth. Cast: Billy Bevan, Billy Armstrong, Kewpie Morgan, Mildred June, Gordon Lewis, Edgar Blue Washington, Tiny Ward (Jewish Indian). Notes: A chase by lions through a hotel; a bear and kitten cuddle; special effect process shot for long flivver, split-screen for action with lions. One reel of a two-reel film.
34. COLD HEARTS AND HOT FLAMES, 20 September 1916.
 Danish title: Brand Assurancen. Source: Copenhagen. Production: L-KO Comedies/Universal. Directed by J. G. Blystone. Cast: Billie Ritchie. Notes: Not projected during seminar, nitrate print too shrunken. New print made after preservation, identified as reel two of this film, reel one is #36 below, Den Falske Chaplin, and film is complete. Takes place in a residential hotel in Los Angeles, which has a hot air furnace that provides many gags. Hot air from register blows up girl's skirts, blows a child to the ceiling. Billie Ritchie pushed inside the flue by the villain, shown in flue trying to avoid flames, he is blown through chimney onto roof. Other gags involve sticky flypaper, cat, mice, cheese.
 Ref: MPW 23 Sep 1916, p.2023; MPW 4 Nov. 16, p.633.
35. HOT LUCK (?), 2 September 1928.
 Danish title: Byens Bramfri Brandmaend. Source: Copenhagen. Production: Juvenile Comedies/Jack White/Educational. Director: Charles Lamont. Cast: Malcolm "Big Boy" Sebastian (?). Notes: Not projected during seminar, nitrate print too shrunken. New print viewed after preservation. Imitates Our Gang in THE FOURTH ALARM (1926). Kids in a baseball game, with a goat cart, then copy the real fire engine company by creating their own volunteer fire company. Advertisement for HOT LUCK, MPW 25 Aug 28, shows Big Boy sliding down fireman's pole, but synopsis doesn't quite match film.
36. COLD HEARTS AND HOT FLAMES, see #34.
 Danish title: Den Falske Chaplin. Source: Copenhagen Notes: Not projected during seminar, nitrate shrunken. New print made after preservation and found to be reel

one of the film known as Brand Assurancen, described above.

37. A FRESH START, June 1920.

Danish title: Kvinder og Vilde Dyr. Source: Copenhagen Production: Mermaid Comedy/Jack White/Universal. Director: Jack White. Cast: Lige Conley, Jimmie Adams, Marvel Rea. Notes: This is the first Mermaid Comedy. It features lions. Gag: animation/live action sequence shows characters burrowing in the ground like ground hogs. Two reels.

Ref: Motion Picture Studio Directory and Trade Annual, 1921, p.278 (for director credit).

38. Original title unknown, 1916 - 1917.

Danish title: Det Livlige Pensionat. Source: Copenhagen. Production: L-KO/Universal. Cast: Billie Ritchie, Gene Rogers, Reggie Morris, Alice Howell. Notes: Few minutes only projected during seminar, nitrate shrunken. Print made after preservation. Billie flirts with women in park, both have husbands wearing straw hats. Billie goes to work at soda fountain (alone in store), drinks something, goes in private office. Man puts poison label on bottle, Billie and other men take drink before seeing label, think they are dying. Billie drinks milk from pan like a cat, his persecutor brings out box like coffin, sends in a preacher. In the end, men learn it was joke. Women wear ankle-length skirts.

39. LOVE AND MARRIAGE IN POSTERLAND, 6 May 1910 (copyright).

Danish title: Et Maerkeligt Bryllup. Source: Copenhagen. Production: Edison. Notes: The characters and objects come to life from posters. The hero and heroine emerge from posters, have a romance, set up a home, acquire a child. Only a few minutes of the shrunken nitrate could be projected during seminar, but it was sufficient for identification. After preservation, new print made by the Museum of Modern Art.

Ref: US Copyright Catalogue; MPW 21 May 1910, p.832.

40. Original title unknown, 1920's.

Danish title: Paa Stilladset. Source: Copenhagen. Production: Hallroom Boys Comedy. Director: Al Santell. Cast: Sid Smith, Billy Franey. Notes: Not projected during seminar, nitrate shrunken. Print made after preservation. On a construction site, the boys are running, things fall on them. Franey blindfolds Smith, they are lifted up to top of structure, with all the usual high building thrills, very well executed. Smith rips off blindfold to find himself balanced high above busy L.A. street. Franey falls, head first into ground, but gets up, dizzy. A worker leaves banana peel on beam, Smith is in way of hot bolts, hook in back of his clothes leaves him swimming in air, he then falls through wagon load of grain on ground. Probably second reel of film. (Not HIGH FLYERS, 6 December 1922.)

41. A CLOSE SHAVE, 1 December 1920
Danish title: Pitt og Patts Barbersalon. Source: Copenhagen. Production: Hallroom Boys Comedy/Cohn Productions. Director: Gilbert W. Pratt. Cast: Sid Smith, Harry McCoy, Polly Moran. Notes: Less than one minute could be projected during seminar. After preservation, new print made. At employment office, the boys see ad for jobs in barber shop. In front of shop, not yet open, they fall asleep on curb and dream rest of film. At end, wake up, jobs are gone. In dream, they work as barbers, are rivals for the manicurist and for the customers. Racial jokes: girl's legs seen in basement window, she is black, etc. Scalp massage grows a toupee. Man who won't take off hat, produces endless hats, resolved when barber produces U.S. flag. Fleeing shop, boys buy second-hand clothes belonging to naval officers, attend party as heroes, are caught by officers, about to be executed, wake from dream.
Ref: MPW, 15 Jan 21, p.323.
42. Original title unknown, ca 1916.
Danish title: Reggi Som Mesterbokser. Source: Copenhagen. Production: Falstaff. Cast: Walter Hiers (?) Notes: Not projected during seminar, shrunken nitrate. New print made after preservation. Boxing training at the gym makes a man of Reggie, a bald-headed comic who is afraid of a mouse. In a dream sequence, he is a cowboy, goes to Florida country club, holds it up, makes each girl kiss him, the men kiss each other, drags out man in chair and hangs him in tree. Back in gym, Reggie enters boxing ring as masked man and wins admiration. Florida location. Women wear ankle-length dresses. One reel.
43. Original title unknown (?), ca 1925.
Danish title: Rivalerne. Source: Copenhagen. Production: Christie Comedy (?) Cast: Neal Burns (butler). Notes: 3 rival suitors arrive for a date and each is repulsed by the butler. Butler removes bearded disguise to appear as suitor. Rivals throw him down hill. Bribes maid to pretend girl has false teeth and hair; all rivals flee. Girl accepts him but returns trick by pretending to remove fake eye, teeth, wig. To escape he fakes insanity. He can't convince doctor of his sanity because girl gives him electric shocks. Escapes, returns in disguise as cop, wins girl. This is not SOUP TO NUTS, 1925, as previously thought, although Neal Burns plays a butler in both. Two reels.
Ref: MPW 5 Sep 25, p.65 (SOUP TO NUTS).
44. LIZZIES OF THE FIELD, 7 September 1924.
Danish title: Sardindaase Reparatørerne. Source: Copenhagen. Production: Mack Sennett. Director: Del Lord. Cast: Billy Bevan (in two roles), Andy Clyde, Tiny Ward, Sid Smith, Jack Richardson, Barbara Pierce, Jack Lloyd, Ralph Graves. Notes: Rival automobile repair shops, the

Red Dog Garage and the Black Cat Garage, compete for customers. Gags: the logos on the back of the employees' overalls are animated and show cat and dog fight; Bevan dreams that he is driving his bed; special effects show an elongated flivver. This print is incomplete, missing the auto race that ends the film. Film exists elsewhere. Some sources list Eddie Cline as director.

45. GALLOPING GHOSTS (?), 20 September 1926.

Danish title: Spøgefuldt Spøgeri/Ballonbrødrene. Source: Copenhagen. Production: Three Fat Men Series/Joe Rock for R-C Pictures. Director: Ralph Cedar. Cast: Gale Henry, Lois Boyd, Billy Franey, Frank "Tiny" Alexander, Hilliard "Fatty" Karr, Frank "Kewpie" Ross. Notes: Less than a minute projected during seminar, nitrate shrunken. New print made after preservation. Three fat men and two women (one pretty, one ugly) at an employment agency, all accept jobs as servants in a house belonging to a scientist who has been away on a trip; there is a laboratory, and a monkey. Gags: haunted house jokes; animated sequences show a cuckoo bird emerge from clock to sit on woman's head; feathers stick to monkey; cat in bed; skeleton; firing guns at each other by mistake. Mystery cleared up at end. Identification not confirmed, synopsis not yet found.

46. TIN CANS (?), 26 October 1921.

Danish title: To Hunde om et Ben. Source: Copenhagen. Production: Century Comedy/Universal. Director: Fred Hibbard. Cast: Brownie the Wonderdog, Teddy the dog, Bud Jamison, Jerry Mandy (housebreaker). Notes: Features dogs and housebreakers. Keystone-type cops are so inactive, the captain dusts them off as though they were statues. Two reels. Identification uncertain, synopsis not yet found.

47. SPEED, BOYS, 12 November 1924.

Danish title: Ungerne Imitation. Source: Copenhagen. Production: Century Comedy/Universal. Director: Arvid Gillstrom. Cast: Arthur Trimble, Walter "Spec" O'Donnell, Tommy Hicks, Bubbles. Notes: Similar to "Our Gang" series. Children run a miniature railroad for the engineer (father of one of them), who is ill. Filmed on the miniature railroad in Venice, Cal. A billboard for BEN HUR (NYC premiere December 1925). Arthur Trimble plays in drag. Ref: MPW 22 Nov 1924, p.361.

48. MICKEY'S TENT SHOW, 20 October 1933 (copyright date).

Danish title: Ungerne Paa Gale Veje. Source: Copenhagen. Production: Mickey McGuire Comedies/Standard Cinema/Larry Darmour. Director: J. A. Duffy. Cast: Joe Rule (Mickey McGuire) [later known as Mickey Rooney], Mary Ann Jackson, Billy Barty, Shirley Jean Richert, "Hambone" Johnson. Notes: This is sound film, missing the track. Mickey's gang stage a circus with props given them by an auctioneer, while a rival gang tries to destroy the show. Mickey does a Mae West imitation; Barty and others also in drag. Gag:

- Barty smashing a radio. Two reels.
Ref: U.S. Copyright Catalogue.
49. Original title unknown, 1925 - 1929.
Danish title: Verdens Bedste Agenter. Source: Copenhagen.
Production: Three Fat Men Series/Standard Cinema/Joe Rock
or Larry Darmour (?) Cast: Frank "Tiny" Alexander,
Hilliard "Fatty" Karr, Frank "Kewpie" Ross. Notes: Less
than a minute projected for seminar, shrunken nitrate. New
print made after preservation. The fat men hide in baggage
car, one of them inside trunk, another in bag, mistreated
by porters. They arrive in town, find a horseshoe, break
a mirror, walk around a ladder. Travelling salesman, they
go in different directions, get rejected. Trick cigars,
garters, girls. Sink canoes on pond. Enter a club by
mistake where bizarre tricks are played, swords,
guillotines.
50. THE SUNDOWN LIMITED, 21 September 1924.
Danish title: Vestekspresen. Source: Copenhagen.
Production: Our Gang Comedy/Hal Roach/Pathe. Director:
Robert F. McGowan. Cast: Joe Cobb, Allen "Farina" Hoskins,
Jackie Condon, Mary Kornman. Notes: Nearly complete print.
Two reels. Ref: Leonard Maltin, Our Gang, p.47-48.
51. SMITH'S RESTAURANT, 19 August 1928.
Archive's title: Fun in a Restaurant. Source: London.
Production: Mack Sennett/Smith Family Comedies/distributed
by Pathe. Director: Phil Whitman. Cast: Mary Ann Jackson,
Raymond McKee, Ruth Hiatt, Daphne Pollard. Notes: Not pro-
jected during seminar, shrunken nitrate. New print made
after preservation. Second of two reels. Little girl in
chef costume uses vacuum cleaner on lady, who loses her
underclothing. Noon in the cafeteria. Group comes in to
picnic with own lunch; customer accepts free bread and
gravy without buying the beef; couple samples everything
before deciding not hungry; possible buyer for restaurant
enters, sits in spilled molasses; woman's unravelling
stockings get mixed up with her spaghetti; tabasco on hot
dog, man blows out steam, flames; little girl throws pie.
Sennett/Pathe on intertitles. No synopsis found, I.D.
based on title.
52. THE JANITOR, 1919.
Archive's title: Hank Mann comedy. Source: London.
Production: Hank Mann Comedy/Morris Schlank/Arrow Film
Corp. Cast: Hank Mann (janitor), Merta Sterling (Hefty
Hilda, an overweight femme fatale), Madge Kirby (Cuckoo
Carrie), Dorothy Vernon. Notes: Hank Mann loses his job as
janitor, answers help wanted sign, and becomes janitor for
"Doves of Peace." He is sent to deliver a bomb and a
letter to a master spy. May relate to Red Scare of 1919.
Possible directors: Charles Parrott, Herman Raymaker, Fred
C. Windermere. No synopsis found, I.D. based on title.
53. THE DENTIST (?), 1919 - 1920.
Archive's title: Hank Mann comedy - dentist. Source:

- London. Production: Hank Mann Comedy/Arrow Film Corp.
 Cast: Hank Mann, Dorothy Vernon. Notes: Less than a minute
 could be projected during seminar, shrunken nitrate. Print
 made after preservation. Hank Mann uses biscuits to play
 checkers on checkered cloth; pins baby to washline to free
 his hands to make pancakes; pancake flies down front of
 woman's dress, Hank dances with her. Washing windows
 outside dentist's office, Hank asks for treatment. Given
 gas, he dreams of visiting a primitive tribe.
54. HIS NEW JOB, 1 February 1915.
 Archive's title: Charlie Chaplin. Source: London.
 Production: Essanay. Director: Charles Chaplin. Cast:
 Charles Chaplin, Ben Turpin, Charlotte Mineau, Leo White,
 Gloria Swanson, Alice Ayers, Keystone Cops. Notes:
 Incomplete print. Sign reads "property room." Chaplin
 gets a job in a movie studio, wrecks the studio, rises from
 prop man to star. The film exists complete in New York.
55. Original title unknown, 1918 - 1919 (?)
 Archive's title: Chaplin Imitator. Source: London.
 Cast: Arkadi Boytler (Chaplin imitator). Notes: Boytler
 was a Russian who did Chaplin imitations in German films
 (according to Karel Caslavsky). Also spelled Arkady
 Boitler. Less than a minute projected during seminar,
 shrunken nitrate.
56. Original title unknown, 1913- 1914.
 Archive's title: Kitchen Comedy. Source: London.
 Production: Biograph. Cast: Dave Morris, Jack Mulhall,
 Gus Pixley. Notes: A "coke" comedy; sign reads "The Snow-
 bird's Retreat" or "The Snowbird Realty." One reel.
 Probably before September 1914, beginning of The
Biograph.
57. GIVING THE BRIDE AWAY (?), 16 November 1919.
 Archive's title: Wedding Comedy. Source: London.
 Production: Hal Roach. Director: Charles Parrott. Cast:
 Snub Pollard, "Sunshine Sammy" Morrison, Mildred Davis.
 Notes: Could not be projected during seminar, shrunken
 nitrate. New print made after preservation. Missing very
 beginning and end. The wedding day of Snub and Mildred,
 Sammy as the best man, half of the wedding party goes to
 1st Baptist Church on 2nd Ave., the other to 2nd Baptist
 Church on 1st Ave. After much racing back and forth, they
 get married by a judge in his courtroom, not before the
 wedding license in Snub's back pocket catches fire and
 the fire department is called out. Title not confirmed,
 synopsis not yet found.
58. Original title unknown, ca 1916 - 1919.
 Archive's title: Hanky Panky on Holiday. Source: London.
 Production: Joker Comedy/Universal or Moranti Producing
 Co./Mercury Comedies (?). Director: Grover Jones (?).
 Cast: Milburn Moranti/Morante (husband #1), William Franey
 (husband #2), Beulah Lewis (wife #2). Notes: A day at the
 beach, husbands and wives flirt with other people's

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