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**DAVID
THORBURN:**

All right. Hello people. Welcome back to the second week of our course. I'm happy to have this wonderful live audience. But I also would like very briefly to address our video audience, who will no doubt be watching this long after I'm dead on MIT's OpenCourseWare. So think of this as a voice from the grave.

You and the video audience will sometimes notice that as I'm lecturing to this lively group, I will turn this way and look up. You should realize that what I'm turning toward and looking up at is this projection screen, which we will show you. And it sometimes has this outline on it, which hopefully guides us through each lecture and sometimes has other information and material on it. Sometimes it isn't worth shifting over to show the video audience that image. But that's what I'm looking at when I look so strange.

I'd like to begin today by taking a step back, by reminding you that the order in which we're watching the movies in this course is a little bit arbitrary because I wanted to use the feature films as the defining date. And that's the reason that we made Keaton come first because *The General* is an earlier film. It was almost a decade earlier than *Modern Times*. But the truth is Chaplin entered film before Keaton. And Keaton had certain advantages by the time he entered the movies, in part because of Chaplin's example, although also because of the fairly complicated way in which silent film had already elaborated itself after the first 10 years or so of the 20th century.

So I want to take a step back into that early phase, just before Chaplain becomes a filmmaker really in 1911, I think is when he joins the Keystone Studios. Just to remind you of a story that is told systematically in David Cook's *History of Narrative Film*, which is part of our required reading in the course. And I hope you will attend especially to the details Cook offers about those early years in Hollywood.

If you read those chapters from Cook about the early years of Hollywood before Chaplin, the movies before Chaplin, you'll recall that one of the most fundamental things that happens

before Chaplin even appears is the establishment essentially of the industry I was describing last time. The migration to the West Coast is worth mentioning. Because movies, of course, begin their career in the United States on the East Coast. Edison's first movie studio was in East Orange, New Jersey. The Biograph Company was originally located on the East Coast. And almost all the original earliest films, even the earliest films that were put into production and shown commercially, were made on the East Coast.

Why did people move to the West Coast? Why did Hollywood become the sort of center of the movie industry? What explains it? It happens very early. One might think of it as a very important moment in the history of culture, of popular culture, because for all the changes that the movie industry has undergone, Hollywood remains the kind of center of what is now a kind of global enterprise of movie making.

What helps to explain the move to the West Coast? Nothing fancy. In the back, yes.

AUDIENCE: Film year around.

DAVID They could film the year around. Why is that important, especially in the early days?

THORBURN:

AUDIENCE: You can make movies whenever. You don't have to produce them in the summer.

DAVID Yes. You're not as dependent on the weather. The Sun always shines in California. If it's

THORBURN: overcast, you can still film. And there's no snow. There's virtually no rain. The weather is very conducive to the making of film.

And especially in this early phase, when film stock was relatively primitive compared to the complexity of film stock we have-- today, the film stock is so subtle that you can film in the dark. You can film by fire light. Even amateur folks owning camcorders can film virtually in the dark. They can film by electric light inside a room. Or tape, they can videotape in that way.

In the earliest days of film, you needed a tremendous amount of light to expose the film. And what it meant that you were dependent on the weather.

So that was one major reason. But there's another one that's even more important in some ways, even though that would seem a sufficient reason for explaining why the migration to the West Coast occurred. There's another even more powerful one. It has to do with the idea of patent warfare.

Yes. What's your suggestion? You don't have to give the right answer. Give a--

AUDIENCE: Different types of terrains fall into those--

DAVID THORBURN: Oh, that's also true. Yes. The environment of Southern California is particularly conducive to a variety of film projects.

There are mountains nearby. There's ocean nearby. There's desert nearby. And, of course, that's also something that makes it a uniquely valuable environment. Maybe not a unique environment, but a particularly valuable environment. And that's a good answer. And you're right about that.

But there's something else. And it has to do with conditions in the East and Thomas Edison. Remember, Edison in a certain way wanted to lay claim to virtually every invention in the early part of the 20th century. And he was primed to do so. He was already recognized as a great genius, as the premier entrepreneurial inventor of his era.

And he immediately, as he had done with other projects of his, began to take out patents to try to control the use of movie technology. He wanted to become the Edison monopoly. He was fantasizing that he would control the movie-- whatever the movie industry would become, Edison's company fantasized it was going to take control of that. And, in fact, the Edison Company hired law enforcement officers and, according to some historians, even in some places hired goons, thugs, to go and break up the sets and the shooting of rival producers who were, according to Edison, infringing on Edison copyrights.

So the other reason-- another reason for the move to the West Coast was a lot of the entrepreneurial movie makers wanted to get free of the patent police. They wanted to get out from under the scrutiny of Edison and his police. And by running to the West Coast, they were able to do so. And, in fact, Edison was unsuccessful in controlling the technology, as Cook and other historians have made clear to us.

So the move to the West Coast is a very important one. And I will return to the cultural, the historical, and ideological or intellectual implications of that move to the West Coast in a few lectures, maybe next week if I get the opportunity. Because I want to talk a little bit more about what it meant for American movies that film was made on the farthest western verge of the society, away from cultural centers, unlike the way in which movies developed in Europe. And I'll talk about that implication a bit later. Probably next week, when we talk about the great

German silent film that concludes our segment on silent films.

So even before Chaplin enters, the rudiments-- or more than the rudiments, the basic system of mass production, of studio-based production, of manufacture of the films in one place and then the distribution system that developed in which theaters essentially rented or purchased films from the producers was already in place. And, of course, the two great figures here is Thomas Ince-- and Cook writes very well about Ince and his contribution to the movies-- probably the person to whom we could attribute the invention of the movie studio, I suppose. And Mack Sennett, who developed the Keystone Studios, out of which so many important early comedies emerged and the studio which Chaplin joined when he came to the United States to become a movie maker in, I think, 1911 or 1912.

So Ince and Mack Sennett are important. And one might say one further thing about this moment. As you know if you've read Cook, Sennett created what came to be called the Keystone Studios. And Keystone Studios were named, I think-- or maybe it was the reverse. I'm not sure-- was associated with their prime product in the early days. And they were called the Keystone Kops Komedies. We're going to show you a fragment of those in a moment. They were frenzied action, frenzied physical action.

So this is the era. This is the moment, the period in the first 10 years of the movie industry in the United States, when the basic system is being, by trial and error, worked out. And by the time Chaplin comes to join the system after the first decade or so of the 20th century, the system essentially is in place. There are already a number of famous performers, both in comedy and in drama. There are emerging certain particular studios who have refined the mass production technique to produce their movies on a regular basis. So an expanding market for the movies is being met by a systematic manufacturing process that Ince and Sennett begin to work out in systematic and long-lasting ways. In ways that in a certain sense continue in residual form, in vestigial form, to dominate the production of movies even today.

When we were talking about the primitive and the simplicity of early film, there was one film I had on the stocks we didn't have time to show you last week. And I thought I would show this to you as a way of illustrating again how relatively simple the early films are.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

See how influential that first sneeze was. The name of this film is *The Whole Dam Family*.

There's Mr. Dam. There Mrs. Helen Dam.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

There's their son, Jimmy Dam.

The simplicity of these movements are part of what's interesting to us. I mean this is still an era in which people are just fascinated by the idea that movies capture movies. But what's the joke here? The joke is embedded I suppose in the title, *The Whole Dam Family*.

There's Miss. I.P. Dam. There's Baby Dam. What an actor. You see how it's framed as if it's a painting, how stationary the camera is. There's the Dam Cook.

What's the joke here? Finally, we're going to come to the Dam Dog. What's going on here? It's kind of risqué. Remember, we're talking about late Victorian, post-Victorian era. What's the joke here?

It's the play on the word "damn." It doesn't strike you as shocking. But, in fact, if you said, damn you in 1890 or in 1900 in certain quarters, people stepped back and said, oh, my goodness. There's a kind of semi-vulgarity there.

In other words, it's not an accident that this is not the Thorburn family or the Smith family. It's significant that it's the Dam family. Why? Because they want to make a joke.

What's wrong with the joke? Why is it a stupid joke for a movie? Because it's not a visual joke. What does it depend on it? It depends on language.

In other words, it's almost as if the whole point of this film depends on a joke that depends not on anything that you can experience visually, but that is resident in a verbal trick. And it's a trivial joke. It's not much of a joke, but the film depends upon it.

And it's evidence in a very modest, but at the same time dramatic and obvious way of this process whereby the new medium, this new visual medium, has to emerge out of media, some of which are not visual at all, but are verbal. And it's as if early filmmakers haven't yet learned fully how to exploit the qualities of the medium they're working in. So it's a verbal joke, rather than a visual joke.

Much more powerful and much more successful were the Keystone Kops Komedies

themselves. And we have one example of that to show you. I'm not sure that this is a characteristic example. But it's close enough to give you as a sort of sense of what the Keystone Komedies were like before Chaplin entered the game.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

The essential joke of the Keystone Kops Komedies-- I don't even know how many there were, perhaps hundreds. There were certainly dozens and dozens. They were immensely popular early short films. Some film scholars have speculated that one reason for their popularity was that they made fun of policemen. That was an implicit sort of mildly anarchic impulse in these early comedies because authority figures, people in uniform, were being shown to be clownish in some way. The primary element, of course, is to find ways to exploit the movies' capacity to show motion.

And one reason I want you to see this relatively crude example is that there's a certain sense in which the short film that you saw last week from Keaton, the film *Cops*, is a sort of reprise of this tradition of movie making. Although you can see how much more coherent and character oriented Keaton's short film was, but the way in which especially the cops are mocked and shown to be completely clownish figures. Almost all of the Keystone Kops Komedies to my knowledge, involved incompetent policeman, who engaged in mad active chases, which often ended badly for the policeman. Sometimes they would end up all flying into a river, or an ocean, or some other natural disaster.

And I think you can also see-- that was actually a very dramatic effect for an early film. So there's an awful lot about this that would have interested early-- seeing that car turn over, some people in the audience might never have seen that in the movies before.

And one could say that these films in a certain way anticipate a great deal of the ridiculous action adventure activity that we see in films even today. But this is typical of those early films, where they'll make incredibly implausible jokes just for the sake of making the joke.

And I'm not sure-- all right, a Mack Sennett comedy. This is the kind of comedy then that was being made by the Sennett Studio before Chaplain arrived. They were also certain figures-- Fatty Arbuckle, the fat comedian who worked with Buster Keaton, is an example. Who had already begun to establish comic personae, something like the persona that Chaplin and

Keaton created.

So they were not the first to do this. So there was a subtler and already somewhat more character-oriented comedy beginning to emerge before Chaplin appears. But Chaplin's entry into American movies is also a turning point, a fundamental turning point, as many scholars have recognized. And it's a turning point primarily because what Chaplin introduces-- I mean introduces many, many things to comedy. But he introduces one thing especially-- well, two things especially.

The first thing that he introduces is what we might call the principal of the slow down. Instead of frenzied motion all the time in Chaplin comedies, there are moments of quiet. And in these moments of quiet-- and this is why they're important-- what begins to happen is an attention is thrown away from violent, frenzied physical action toward character. What Chaplin introduces into movies is a somewhat more systematic and serious interesting character than had ever occurred before.

And what follows from that introduction, from slowing down the action, creating moments of human interaction in which the interest is essentially psychological and individual, rather than an interest simply in frenzied motion and jokes, or frenzied motion and suspense, which is what you would get from a Griffith melodrama, what you're getting is-- so this introduces several things. First of all, it introduces a tonal variation. It means that in the middle of comedies, there could be quiet, serious moments.

And, in fact, it becomes the hallmark of Chaplin's comedy that it really is often not funny or at least that it's based on unfunny materials. And that there are poignant and moving moments. It's as if Chaplin combines comic and melodramatic elements, especially in his best work. I don't mean that when he came into the films he began to do this. In fact, he discovered how to do this in the course of his career, about which I will speak in a moment.

So Chaplin brings a new interest in character and in psychological nuance. And, because of that introduces tonal variation, a complexity of tone. We think of the Tramp figure as indelible and unchanging in a certain way. His costume always the same, his face always the same, the kinds of problems he gets into always similar. And that's partly true. But the Tramp was not born fully dressed in Chaplin's brain. He evolved the Tramp over a series of short films in the period from 1911 through about 1913 or '14.

And one way I can dramatize this for you is to show you how Charlie looked in the very first film he appeared in. He was not a director in this film. He was just an actor. And he was a walk-on actor. He was not the star. The camera had an immediate affinity for him. And after people saw this film-- this is the first film he appeared in. This is a still from a film called *Kid Auto Races at Venice*. It's a kind of documentary about soapbox racing.

And the Chaplain character had just been hired by Mack Sennett to join the Keystone Studios. And he made an appearance in the film. He really didn't have anything to do. But his appearance in the film caused all kinds of interest in the audience. The audience wanted to know who that character was, why he was so interesting, and what was interesting about him. You can see the beginnings of the Tramp costume there, but not the complete Tramp.

Here's another early version of Chaplin, wearing a long coat and not looking very nice. Charlie is supposed to be drunk in this picture. That's one reason he looks nasty. It's in a film called *Mabel's Married Life*. And he's actually in conversation with a dummy in this sequence.

But you can see here that the long coat violates our idea of who the Tramp was. So it took awhile before the Chaplain persona completely emerged. And it was partly a matter of trial and error, although very quick trial and error.

I want to say a word about Chaplin's career, to give you a fuller sense of how swiftly he became an icon and how significant his example is for our understanding of the power of movies. Chaplain's dates are 1889 to 1977. He was born in England. And his early childhood is actually the stuff of Dickensian melodrama, both terms I choose with some intentionality because there are parallels between Charlie Chaplin's early life and the victimization that Dickens dramatizes so powerfully in many of his famous novels. And there are parallels between Dickens' own childhood and Chaplain's childhood.

Dickens, the great 19th century novelist, who, like Chaplin, was interested in victims, laid emphasis on the problems of vulnerable people, of women, of children, who wrote variations on what we might call the mortgage melodrama all his career. His greatest works could be said to be forms of melodrama. I'm talking about Charles Dickens, the great 19th century English novelist.

And Chaplin grew up in an environment that was steeped, not only in Dickens, but in the traditions of stage and novelistic melodrama that permeated European culture and especially English culture of this time. But his life was a very difficult one in some ways as well. His father

died when he was eight. His mother was in and out of the institutions all of her life.

There were periods in Chaplin's life, when he was just a little child, when he was literally completely abandoned. And he and his older brother spent time living in doorways on the streets of London. He was literally a homeless urchin as a child.

He began to act on the stage from the age of seven and almost immediately was recognized as having astonishing gifts. He worked from 1906 through 1913 for a theatrical company in England called the Karno Company, K-A-R-N-O. And it was a company that put on a certain kind of theatrical anthology, in which there would be skits, comic skits and serious skits acted out. Sometimes when the skits were over, there would be song and dance numbers, sometimes just straight singing. A kind of British variety show, influenced especially by the traditions of the British musical.

And the Karno Company was a traveling company. And first, Chaplain worked with the company all around the British Isles. And then, in I think 1909 or 1910, the Karno Company made a triumphant tour of the United States. By this time, Chaplin was one of the leading actors in this. One of the great features of the Karno Company performances were pantomime performances. And Chaplin was a particularly brilliant pantomimist.

So he had a very significant career. He was already a successful performer on the stage in the Karno Company and drew on traditions of performance. Chaplin's father was a popular singer. His songs were published and he sang in the musicals for a certain period. And Chaplin's mother had visions or fantasies of being a performer herself and used to perform privately to Charlie.

So Charlie was steeped in performance, steeped in theater. And as a young boy, from the age of seven on, was already sort of acting on stage. Almost continuously after the age of eight or nine, made his living as an actor.

So as a relatively young man, he made a trip to the United States with the Karno Company. The Karno Company toured various cities in the United States, was a great success. A second tour almost immediately followed, I think within six months. And on that second tour, Mack Sennett saw Chaplain perform and hired him away from the Karno Company. Saw that Chaplin had certain gifts as a performer that would work in the infant medium of the movies and hired him away. And it was an inspired decision.

When Chaplain first joined the Keystone Studios in '19-- I think it's 1911. The date is in Cook. So be careful. My date may be a year or two off. But around 1911, he joins the Karno Company.

His first few films, his first three or four films, he's just a performer in. But he has an immediate affinity for the camera as well. And within half a dozen films, he's already beginning to direct as well as to act. And within a relatively short time, he gets to be in control of every aspect of the making of his films.

We can get some sense of how richly and symbiotically the audience reacted to the character of the Tramp that Chaplin created by talking in monetary terms about the development of his career, about the progress of his career. He officially joined the Keystone Company in 1914. He was hired in 1911 and 1912, came over to the United States.

And from 1914 and 1915, just that one year, he worked for the Keystone Company and made 35 films in that one-year period. He received what was then a princely salary of \$150 a week. The final films of those 35, the last 15 or 20 or so of them, featured the Tramp figure, who had now been fully elaborated in various adventures that became characteristic of Chaplin's vision of the Tramp. And they were unbelievably popular, by far the most popular shorts that had ever been sent out of any movie production company.

And they made Chaplain a household name, first in the United States, and then fairly quickly all over the world. So successful were those early films that in 1915 he was hired away by another company, the Essanay Company, E-S-S-A-N-A-Y. And for another year 1915, 1916, he worked just for the Essanay Company. But his salary went up from \$150 a week to \$1,250 a week in one year. And that's a gigantic-- more than a thousand dollars a week in 1915 is an unbelievable fortune, of course.

He makes only 14 films in that period. So he goes from making 35 films in a year to making only 14 films. And those 14 films are more highly finished. He spends more time with them. We can see in this period, we can see Chaplain learning. We can see Chaplin enacting in small the Fred Ott principle.

We could see Chaplin enacting in small the principal I talked about last week, in which we see him learning to develop performance styles that are appropriate to the camera, appropriate to cinematic experience, developing techniques as a director to emphasize certain aspects of the Tramp's character, experimenting with tonal variation in his films, experimenting with various

kinds of comic devices, some of which he imports from his performances with the Karno Company and many of which he refines and changes because he's working in the movies.

One famous example of this migration from stage to screen is a bit that Chaplain was especially famous for when he worked for the Karno Company. He did a bit there, a pantomime, called the *Inebriate Swell*, the inebriated-- the drunk aristocrat. That's what a swell is, a rich aristocrat, a man about town, the inebriated-- the drunken aristocrat.

And it was one of the most popular pieces that he performed on stage for the Karno Company. He remade a version of it, a very famous film. It's one of the very few short Chaplins where Chaplin doesn't play the Tramp, where he's dressed up in a tuxedo and he plays the inebriated swell. And it's a film called *One A.M.*

And in the entire film, Chaplin plays a man who is drunk and who keeps encountering objects that misunderstands. So as an example, he comes across a clothes tree in his house. And instead of hanging his clothes on it, he embraces it as if it's his wife, that sort of thing.

And almost the entire length of *One A.M.* has only one performer in it, Chaplain himself. And he kind of recreates and modifies what he had done on stage in that performance. It is in many ways a very brilliant performance and shows how imaginatively the Chaplain character can interact with objects, a theme to which I'll return tonight when I talk more systematically about *Modern Times* and about certain of Chaplin's favorite strategies for establishing character.

So he works for the Essanay Company. He makes 14 films, including in 1915 a film called *The Tramp*, fragments of which I'm going to show you in a few minutes. Then he's so successful again. And the 14 films he makes starring the Tramp become international-- I don't know what to call them-- international phenomena, best sellers. And the Tramp becomes the most sought after and the most memorable character in the movies.

So he's hired away again by the Mutual Company, one year later. And from 1916 to 1917, he works for the Mutual Company, in which he makes this time \$1 million for that year. And he makes only eight films in that year.

So he goes from \$150 a week, to \$1,250 a week, to \$1 million a year within three years. And each move gives him greater creative freedom, gives him more autonomy. He begins to sort of really refine his art. And we can see the process happening in these shorts.

In the films you're going to see tonight, both of the short films, *Easy Street*, 1917, and *The Immigrant*, also made in 1917, come from this Mutual period. And I mention this to you because they're already in some sense sophisticated films, even though they're not feature-length films. And you can see that Chaplain is bringing all the resources of his narrative skills, of his skills in creating character to bear on those films. They're already in some sense sophisticated works of narrative. And there is an apprentice period that occurs earlier, which I have just described to you.

Finally, in his career, he moves, in 1918, to a company called First National, for which-- those are the people who pay him a million dollars. I'm sorry. I made a mistake. His Mutual salary was a mere \$670,000.

He gets \$1 million when he goes to work for First National in 1918, when he makes, among other films, one of my favorite Chaplin shorts, a film in which we see the Tramp character playing a GI in the first World War. It's called *Shoulder Arms*. And it's a characteristic Chaplain short, except that now what Charlie is doing is contending with the Kaiser's army. He's fighting World War I.

In earlier films, we'd seen him fighting ice storms. We'd seen him fighting against hunger. We'd see him literally fighting in the boxing ring in a film called *The Champion*. We'd seen him working as an assistant to a pawn broker in a film called *The Pawn Broker*-- a whole series of jobs.

And by the time we get to 1918, it's almost as if the Tramp has held virtually every job you could imagine. He can't hold a job for long because he's a bum. He's a tramp. He's footloose. Again, a theme to which I'll return when we talk about *Modern Times* this evening.

And then finally, in 1919, Chaplain has become such a gigantic figure, such a international icon, that he joins with certain other icons, D.W. Griffith, the greatest, most famous director of the silent era; and Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, the two most famous actors after Chaplin in the silent era. The four of them get together and they form United Artists. And they formed it in part to create their own company so that they would be able to control their artistic output.

And Chaplain, working for United Artists, beginning in 1919, Chaplain goes to work on his feature films. And he makes the great film, the great silent features, that are at the heart of his

achievement. He makes *The Gold Rush* in 1925; a film called *The Circus* in 1928, a more imperfect and broken-back film in some way, but full of some of his most imaginative comic performances; one of his great films in 1931, called *City Lights*. And then finally, in 1936, the film you're going to see tonight, already deeply into the sound era, a film that remains in some fundamental way a silent film, *Modern Times*.

Chaplin then goes on, after the sound era is over, to make a series of movies in the sound era. And they all have some modest interest for us because they're Chaplain films. Some images from them that remain very famous to this day. In fact, one of them was in the *New York Times* today. Did any of you notice it?

There was an article about a scholar of globes, who had found evidence for the idea that a particular globe in a German museum, which was said to have been Hitler's globe, was not Hitler's globe. But in the middle of the story, what they-- any time a person of a certain age hears the word "globe" and "Hitler," they think of Charlie's film, *The Great Dictator*.

You're smiling. Why? Do you know the image? Have you seen *The Great Dictator*?

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE].

DAVID What is the image they're talking about?

THORBURN:

AUDIENCE: Playing with a globe.

DAVID Yes. There's a moment in the film-- it's a moment of great-- it's not really a very good film. And

THORBURN: Chaplain's sound films are mostly of historical interest, despite what some Chaplain buffs would say. His great work is-- he's a silent artist. And the sound film caused problems for him that he couldn't fully adjust to.

But every one of his sound films has interest and has brilliant moments. And the one you're remembering is one of the most remarkable and astonishing symbolic moments in Chaplin's work. Yeah. It's an incredibly ambitious film. It tells us how ambitious a figure Chaplin was because he makes a satire of Hitler and Mussolini in an era when Hitler and Mussolini are not yet recognized for the egregious, monstrous, evil figures that we know them to have been.

They were taken seriously. They had been voted into office. Millions and millions of people thought they were admirable leaders.

So when Chaplain made *The Great Dictator* in '19-- what- '40 or '41, he was doing something incredibly daring. And he was actually showing that he thought the movies were an art form capable of taking on the largest political subjects. So even though there are problems in the film, and it's not an absolutely great film, not memorable artistically in its own way, there are moments in it that are remarkable. And it's also a significant document because it reminds us of Chaplin's ambitions as an artist.

Chaplin was one of the very first filmmakers, along with D.W. Griffith I suppose, to realize that the movies had an aesthetic possibility, latent aesthetic energies and powers that if they were tapped, would make the movies the equivalent of traditional art forms, like theater and the novel. And, of course, he was right about that. And he even made some films that achieved that level of seriousness and resonance.

The moment that you're remembering, what happens in it?

AUDIENCE: He's like dancing with a globe.

DAVID Yes.

THORBURN:

It's a moment of sort of manic glee, in which the Hitler character, played by Charlie Chaplin, takes a globe out and it's like a balloon. And he pops it up and down. And we see him throwing it up and kicking it with his hat, like that. And it's a kind of fantasy of world domination. And it's supposed to show what a ridiculous and infantile figure this mock Hitler is. And it is the most memorable image from that film.

So in this article, that really had nothing to do with Chaplain, there was a picture of Charlie playing Hitler, kicking the balloon up and down. And one reason that I think it's significant, that it's a mark of Chaplin's greatness as an artist, that even in his imperfect texts, even in the films that really do not belong to the category, to the most important category of his most lasting and valuable art, images from those works are still part of our common cultural inheritance.

He's a very great artist, the first great artist of the movies. And a figure whose imaginative creations remain vital and alive today in a way that very few artists from that era remain, similarly accessible and important to people. And it's a mark of the reach of Chaplin's imagination that this is so, of his importance as a figure.

Well, there's much more one could say about the development of his career. But I want to cut this short because I want to show you the moment-- I don't mean that there's only a single moment. But I want to show you fragments from the film in which we can see Chaplin really discovering certain aspects of what he wants to do and also where we can see Chaplin screwing up. We can see Chaplin at a stage before he becomes the self-confident, totally autonomous artist he becomes relatively soon.

Can we put up fragments from *The Champ*-- from the Tramp? This is a film appropriately called *The Tramp*.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

And it's a fairly characteristic Chaplin film. But I think it's the film in which, among other things, Chaplin discovers that he can marry melodrama and comedy. It's the film in which he discovers that he can do effects that are pathetic, and poignant, and sentimental and mix them with comedy in ways that are interesting.

So here's a scene where Charlie is rescuing a damsel. And he does it in a kind of comic way. He's a kind of bum himself. But he's always a kind of chivalric figure.

Can you jump ahead? Let's just show the next one, Greg.

I'm just going to show you a bad moment here. He rescues this girl. She turns out to be the daughter of a farmer. He's then hired by the farmer in gratitude.

And then we get this bit. And I'm showing you this bit partly because I want you see that it isn't really all that funny or that it's just kind of easy slapstick. I don't mean that it's without interest. It obviously has some interest.

But this incompetence is inconsistent in some respects with the coherent character that he's going to begin to create. It's never that the Tramp becomes this fully competent character. But this kind of joke here, look at this. That's his foolish joke. That trivializes him in a way.

Can you think of examples of that in Keaton? Remember in *Cops*, where, for example, when he's riding along in his car, he devises that mechanism that ends up punching the cop. That would be an example of a kind of-- it's a joke. But it sort of violates the spirit of the movie. It

seems a piece of debris that is forced into the film, that may have a comic moment, but makes the film less coherent.

That kind of thing is characteristic of the Tramp. A bit later in *The Tramp*-- I don't have time to show you this passage-- a bit later in *The Tramp*, we see Charlie confronting the woman that he had rescued and discovering for the first time-- is it a long sequence, Greg?

GREG: No. It's only a half minute.

DAVID Well, put it up while I'm talking, if you can find it. You can see in this sequence, which I'll let run
THORBURN: behind me, while you pay attention to my words--

--and while the camera looks at it and then comes back to me. What you can see happening in this sequence is Chaplin discovering how he can be, not just comical, but sentimental. How he can elicit sympathy from his audience, create sentimental effects.

In other words, what Charlie has just done here in this image is he's meeting the girl's boyfriend. He didn't know the girl had a boyfriend. He was falling in love with her. Watch his expression here.

You see, he's very upset by what he's learned. In other words, this is not a funny moment. And this is the moment, I think, in Chaplin's career, where he realizes the films he's going to make should not be thought of as simply comedies at all, but as something more complicated than that, as comedies with heart, as comedies devoted to character, as comedies that are interested in human interactions. And that discovery tremendously enlarged movie comedy, tremendously enlarged the movies more generally.

And then we can see Charlie saying-- Charlie says goodbye. And he writes this little sad message and he leaves her. So it's the moment when pathos, sentiment, enters Chaplin's work. And in the films you'll see tonight, you'll understand why, after he made this discovery, he began to meld these two elements more and more fully together.

So this is a way of reinforcing what I called last week, the multiplicity principal. What we can see is that in those jokes with the pitchfork, there was no multiplicity. They were just funny because Charlie didn't know how to use the pitchfork. But later moments in this film, and in many later films, we see Chaplain beginning to create effects which have more than one consequence, more than one significance for the audience.

One of the most remarkable things about the chase scenes that Charlie Chaplin develops and begins to perform in his films-- and you'll see wonderful examples of them tonight-- is that the chase scenes themselves are tremendously moving. They're tremendously comical. They're full of comic bits that are just as imaginative as any comic sequence one could ask for. But they do something else, in addition to amuse us. They declare for Charlie's character.

When Charlie runs away from someone, what we can see him doing is using his intelligence, using his improvisatory capacity to figure out how to get away. So that even when he's running, he is also expressing his nature. And when the audience sees the imaginative, or clever, or daring way in which he makes his escape in a particular chase sequence, they're not just being amused by a joke. They are also understanding his character in a deep way. He's defining his character, even as he's also amusing us. So we can feel the multiplicity of that, the density, the texture of that, always a mark of superior entertainment, always a mark, I would say, of art itself.

Well, one way to clarify some of this, and especially to clarify Chaplin's remarkable popularity, is to talk about the Tramp as a myth, as a mythic figure. And if you think about his costume, you'll understand partly what I mean.

He wears a coat and vest that are too tight and pants and shoes that are too big. So the principle of mismatch or of ambiguity is built into his costume. And then he carries this cane and this hat. Now, he shows a kind of elegance. But it's a kind of shabby, down-market elegance.

But the question is, is Charlie downwardly mobile? Is he an aristocrat who's fallen on hard times? Or is he a poor person, who has put on airs and aspires to the world of tuxedos and fancy clothes? This question is never answered. And that ambiguity in his character may be part of why the audience is able to identify with him.

There's an uncertainty about where he belongs, a kind of mismatch or an ambiguity inherent in his costume. His body itself is a source of his mythological status. It's small, dexterous, energetic, incredibly graceful. He's one of the great acrobats and physical dancers, physical performers, that you'll ever see.

And in the films you'll see tonight, you'll see many examples of this, including examples of Chaplain on skates, of Chaplain doing the equivalent of dances, and of his dexterousness in

situations involving running or escape, just as powerfully as anyone. We'll see dramatizations of this, just as powerful as anyone could ever imagine, ever hope for.

And then his face. So his costume, his body, and then his face are part of the myth as well. He has an unbelievably expressive face. His face is a theater in itself. And it was Chaplain, more than any other early director, who explored the implications of the closeup. And I'll show you some examples tonight of the way in which Chaplin manages to use the closeup in silent film for incredibly-- to do so. And to be, at the same time, what we might call deeply, incredibly eloquent, a silence that is eloquent because of the qualities in his face.

And the moral qualities of the Tramp are also appropriately ambiguous. He has chivalric qualities. He wants to defend children and vulnerable women.

He's always a kind of defender of the weak. But at the same time, he's an opportunist and also a survivor. And these qualities don't fit perfectly together. And we see both elements in the Tramp character, again and again. Again, tonight, in *The Immigrant* especially, you'll see both sides of the Chaplain character, both his opportunistic side and also his chivalric side.

So these qualities created a kind of mythic aura, a mythic authority for Chaplin. And there's one other thing that contributed to the myth. It was that there's a historical reality to the hobo figure.

Long before Charlie Chaplin began to perform as a kind of tramp figure in the movies, they were real tramps in the society. And the existence of a genuine population of homeless people-- they often rode the rails, and they were present actors in most large and small cities in the country. The fact was there was a population of homeless people that the Tramp figure alluded to and reminded the audience of.

And that also helped to strengthen his mystic power because it was as if the audience was recognizing that in some sense Charlie was a kind of embodiment or a symbol of this social actuality. So he had a kind of mythic power that communicated itself to his audience. And it meant that every repetition of a Tramp film, which might very well go through the same motions, but put the Tramp in a slightly different environment or a slightly different job, would be pleasing to the audience, some principle of repetition and variation.

Well, finally, the paradox of Chaplin's work. And the paradox I want you to think about tonight-- and we'll end with this point-- is that Chaplin's world is full of comedy. It's a comedian's world,

although it's more than just comic, as I've suggested. But the irony of Chaplin's world is that the comedy is so fundamentally based on things that are so deeply unfunny.

Chaplin's the most deeply social and in some ways even political of directors. And I'll discuss this aspect of his work tonight, when we talk about *Modern Times* and some of his other films. But the crucial point here is that Chaplain's world is a world of elemental themes.

Virtually every single Chaplin movie is about hunger, aggression, victimization, confinement. I mean the subject matter of Chaplin's comedy is the furthest from comedy. And part of his genius, part of what makes him such a remarkable and important artist, is that this immensely unpromising material, this disturbing and in many ways frightening material, dramatized sometimes with full frightening effect-- Chaplin often, because of his diminutiveness, puts himself up against large figures, giant figures, to emphasize his vulnerability and smallness. Again and again, the substance of Chaplin's comedy is the substance of victimization, aggression, misery, inequality, inequity.

In other words, the subject matter of Chaplin's work is the furthest from comedy. And yet he makes enduring comedy, enduring melodrama, out of those unpromising materials. That paradox about Chaplin's world is at the heart of his work. And it's at the heart of why, of all silent directors, his very best films remain interesting today intrinsically, not just because they're wonderfully interesting artifacts. But intrinsically because they remain serious, valuable films.

All of the Chaplain films you're going to see tonight, the two shorts and *Modern Times*, fit that description, as I hope you will agree. See you this evening.