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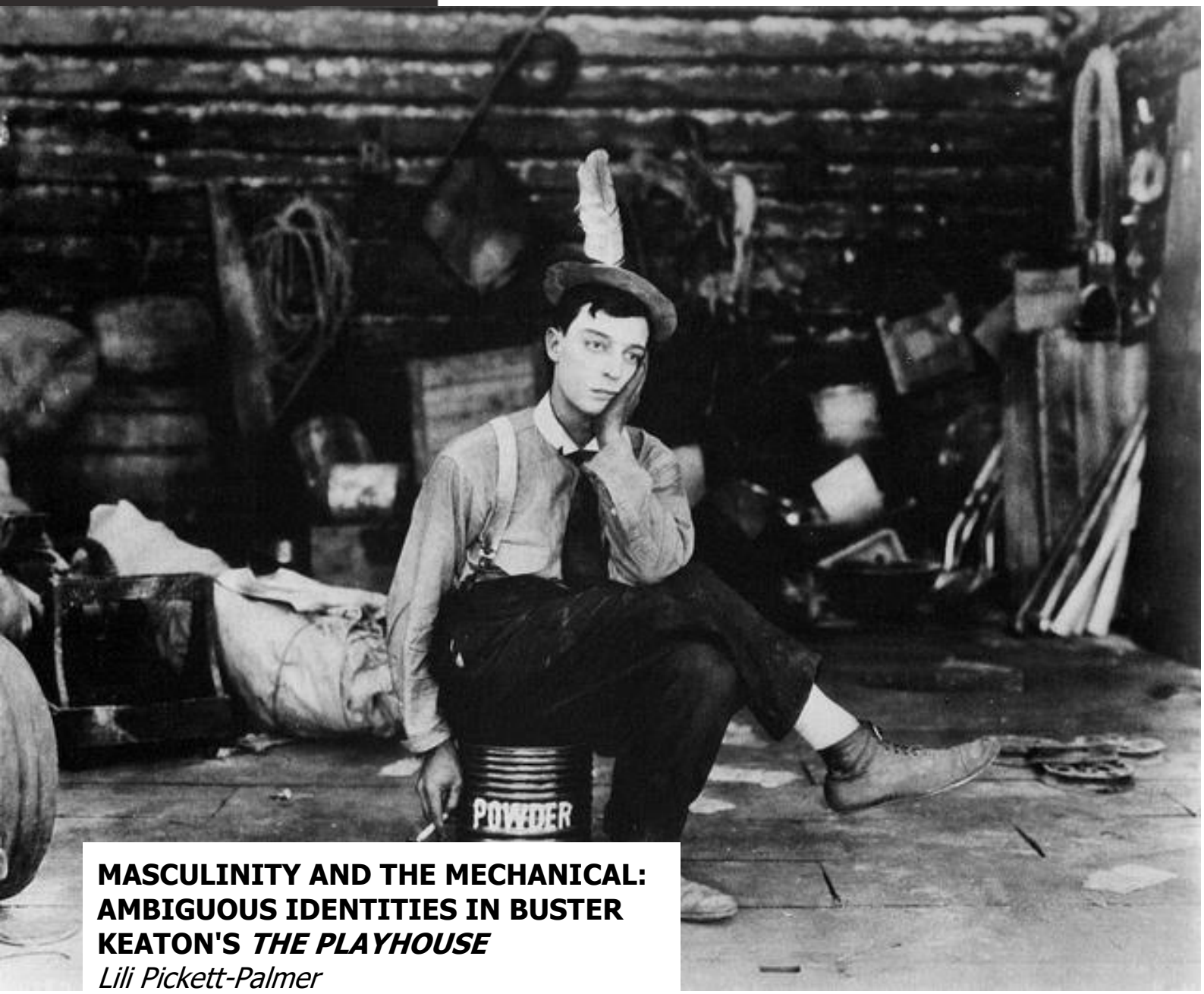

MASCULINITY AND THE MECHANICAL: AMBIGUOUS IDENTITIES IN BUSTER KEATON'S *THE PLAYHOUSE*

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Cover Image: Buster Keaton's *Hard Luck* (1921)
Thumbnail: Buster Keaton's *The Playhouse* (1921)

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Abstract

This article will seek to show how Buster Keaton's 1921 short film *The Playhouse* links the fragile ontology of masculine identity with the technological uncanny, two pervading anxieties of the silent period. Expanding on scholarship which identifies the narrative structure and content in Keaton's work as directly addressing a liminal gender identity (e.g. Kathleen Karlyn, Peter Krämer), I am working with the theories of the ludic body and object as 'thing', examining the multimodal play of props and body as creating a carnivalesque space of mutable identities (e.g. Lorenz Engell, Merleau-Ponty, Henri Bergson). I will also draw on historical studies: Michael Kimmel argues that the construction of modern masculinity was made through the navigation of acute and shifting anxieties; masculine identity was not only changeable in itself, but also vulnerable to notions of change. Judy Hilkey, in a study of conduct manuals which were immensely popular in America during the period, points out a didactic emphasis on the link between masculinity and success – particularly in the sphere of work. The loss of a job to a machine, therefore, was tied closely to a notion of emasculation. These studies show that general anxieties concerning the machine would have questioned masculine stability, forming a basis for the construction of masculine ontology in the period. Keaton's emasculation of the image is two-fold. Firstly, the establishment of machine systems allows Buster to negate the social obligations of his work place, in this way he enacts the literal displacement of manual (and male) labour with mechanical play: his machines are a replacement society. Secondly, Buster's integration of objects into a system of comedic, repetitive, machinery undermines their specific identities, making them thing-like and highlighting the instability of objects in general, which mirrors the unstable position of the masculine identity.

Key Words: masculinity, identity, gender, early film, thing theory, comedy, Buster Keaton, work, mechanisation, silent film

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This essay examines the importance of mechanical innovation in relation to the construction of masculinity during the era of early film. Focusing on a short film directed by Buster Keaton, I will explore how film practices addressed and affected newly formed connections between the anxieties surrounding masculinity and the anxieties surrounding industrial mechanisation. I will survey critics who have commented on how the shifts in industrial innovation, in its impact on forms of human labour, work, and worth, concurrently and consequently affected the construction of stable masculine identities in the period. I will link these historical interpretations to scholarship that address tendencies in theory and culture to see slippages between human and machine. I will argue that early film, as a technical innovation in itself and as a performative spectacle of technical innovations, held a privileged space in the cultural landscape of the period, providing a playful forum in which filmmakers and spectators alike could confront the shifting boundaries between human and machinic identities.

Charles Musser describes how the early film studios, such as the Edison Black Maria studio, comprised 'eccentric, almost carnivalesque' workplaces.[1] In these predominantly homosocial spaces, creative staff would work, sleep, and socialize in one space and at all times of night or day, causing the boundaries between work and family, productivity and play to slip, thus allowing for the identities constituted by those previously solid boundaries

to also fall into question.[2] I will argue that film's early participation in exposing and creating mutable identities was extended and developed by later filmmakers such as Keaton.

As Kathleen Rowe Karlyn argues in a psychoanalytic reading of Keaton's work, Keaton's comedy films are well placed to manipulate conventional forms of masculinity: propelled by narratives of emasculation in love and work, his films not only articulate contemporary anxieties of masculine identity, but also produce playful and absurd variations, allowing the audience to engage with the possibility of alternative or fluctuating identities.[3] This essay, however, will focus less on the gendered narratives in Keaton's work, and explore instead the elements of his work which are irreducible to the articulation of oedipal narratives. I will attempt to address the ways in which Keaton's ludic use of props, bodily movement, and theatrical space confront typical forms of identity construction independent of – and even contra to – their service of the narrative. Keaton's films bring together objects of play and work, reconfiguring their respective functions and functionality. As I will show, Keaton incorporates his own body into the scene of functional objects, showing how in film all bodies become machines, and all machines become a body. His carnivalesque display of how bodies and objects become fungible on screen not only presents a challenge to the notion of cohesive ontological boundaries between human and thing, but also – given the ontological connection between masculinity and machinery – offers a model in which masculinity is open to that same challenge.

Keaton's are films about boundaries: the boundaries between human and thing, between work and play, legible and insensible, ontologically sound and ontologically fragile. What I will argue in this essay is that these particular boundaries that Keaton's work illuminates underpin the relationship between masculinity, work, and the mechanical. By playing with these boundaries, Keaton's work summons recognisable forms of masculinity in order to challenge their legibility, cohesion and solidity. Keaton's work establishes masculinity as something which presupposes stability, solidity, and consistency. The playful manner with which the filmmaker misrecognises, misinterprets, and misrepresents masculinity offers a way of thinking masculinity as unbound from its assumed ontological imperative to be certain and inviolable.

I would like to begin my analysis of Keaton's work with a description of a threshold – a number of thresholds, really, which come to constitute the site of a set of identity slips, an elaborate escape plan, and a farcical screen gag. This gag takes place midway through Keaton's 1921 two-reel film *The Playhouse,* and begins as Buster is being chased around a theatre stage by an angry man.[4] To avoid a blow from the man's raised fist, Buster executes a perfect athletic dive through the sea-scape painted back-drop cloth, revealing a slit in its centre. Safe back-stage, Buster encourages an unsuspecting colleague to poke his head through the slit: this man assumes Buster's identity as the face to be punched on the other side. This simple gag stages the kind of complex game typical to Keaton's work: to avoid punishment, Buster treats the space around him like a machine of escape. In this gag, he misuses an object – a strip of fabric – which absurdly comes to obey his logic by helping Buster escape and punishing another man in his place. Before the event of Buster's dive, the static cloth is independently performing several tasks: the cloth divides space, it codes the theatre as a site of fiction and play, and gives the enclosed stage a painterly illusion of depth. With a tear in its surface, these primary purposes are extended. For example, the slit provides a means of escape while upholding its role as a divider of two spaces, thus keeping the escapee safe from his assailant. The activation of this secondary use of the object, in aid of a goal for which it was not strictly designed, shows that while a mute object may appear to have a single, modest intention, it may yet be manoeuvred towards a deviant purpose. With Buster's ludic shifting of his own identity (man as cannon-ball, man as dolphin), the sea-scape back-drop becomes his multi-purpose machine.

This gag negotiates two interpenetrating anxieties of the early film period: the fear of mechanization, and the fear of a loss of identity. While many scholars of Keaton have

commented on one of these two strands, the relationship between them has never been fully realized with regard to his work. With an analysis of *The Playhouse*, I will explore how Keaton navigated these contemporary anxieties in a way that exposes their implicitly mutual relationship.

First published in 1900, Henri Bergson's essays on laughter discuss how machines might inspire a sense of uncertain identity: 'if they were as fully alive as we, they would never repeat themselves, and so would keep imitation at bay. We begin, then, to become imitable only when we cease to be ourselves.'[5] The back-drop slit gag contains this unsettling aspect of repetition in that it continues to work even after Buster has fled the scene. After he pokes the first head through for a beating, another person appears – this time on the stage side – and curiously takes a look through the slit, only to be punched by Buster's first scape-goat who is waiting behind the stage. The cloth becomes an automaton, working without a handler; the bodies inside the slit belong to it, as organs or instruments. According to Bergson's theorization of mechanical imitation, the two men are able to imitate each other's motions because their identities – and humanities – have been absorbed into the machine of the cloth. One man comes forward from the back, penetrates the slit, is knocked back by a blow; a second man, on the stage side comes forward, penetrates the slit, and is knocked back by a blow. This forms an industrial rocking motion, resembling an oil pumping nodding-donkey.

The sea-scape back-drop machine, in its incorporation and transformation of other bodies, therefore opens the question of identity implied by Bergson. The gag suggests that not only can identity be mechanically incorporated and absorbed, but also endowed, or worn like a costume. The slit, once Buster has used it, comes to denote his identity to the extent that everyone who 'wears' the cloth receives a punch. This brings to mind Bergson's description of the comic as '*something mechanical encrusted on the living*'; this evocatively tactile description conjures the image of a parasite, forming a sheath that has grown on the flesh unbidden.[6] Encrustation of the mechanical is implied to aid and inhibit simultaneously, like an excess skin, extending and distorting the perimeters of the human form. The mechanical reminds the human that while it moves as a body, it is also a kind of object not so unlike a cadaver, a kind of artefact or thing. As Bill Brown tells us, the 'thing' is that which is never quite grasped, poised on the edge of language and on the verge of appearance.[7] Comedy is perhaps, in the case of Keaton at least, the image of something always in the process of becoming something else. By integrating objects and bodies into a mechanical system, Keaton unfastens them from their set identities and ushers them into the blurry arena of the thing. Extended to incorporate the thing-system, the boundaries of the object or body distort, untethering from the ontological certainty of the animate and inanimate, alive and dead, human and not. With the mechanical – whether industrial or comical – comes a loosening of identity.

This theorization tallies closely with certain recent historical interpretations of the period between 1890 and 1930. In a study of American conduct manuals – which were immensely popular in the era of early film – Judy Hilkey draws a clear link between industrial mechanization and a sense of destabilized identity, with a specific emphasis on gendered anxiety. Her argument shows that manhood was made synonymous with success, the attainment of which was posed as a moral imperative. The manuals exhibit the sphere of work as a key site of identity synthesis, where a poor work ethic effects emasculation. While the machine stood as a symbol for competitive drive and actualized power, the risk of obsolescence by mechanization posed a correlative threat to masculinity.[8] Michael Kimmel's study of masculinity in modernity supports this idea, asserting that the construction of masculinity could only be achieved through the navigation of acute and shifting anxieties, meaning that masculine identity was not only incoherent and therefore fragile in itself but also vulnerable to exterior currents of change.[9] These analyses show that a general anxiety concerning the stability of identity – as in Bergson's mechanical imitation – not only

engendered masculine anxiety, but formed the basis for the construction of masculinity. The mechanical, in its industrial and social position, constituted a challenge to identity that became fundamental to masculine ontology in the period.

The theme of masculine anxiety has been identified in Keaton's comic narratives by a number of commentators. For example, Peter Krämer proposes that, historically, Keaton occupies an unusual position in the predominantly homosocial world of comic film, navigating a tension between spectacle and narrative with his distinctive deadpan performance style. Consistently throughout his work, Keaton performs as a protagonist who resists identification with the desires and emotions of other characters in the film, escaping assimilation into the diegesis. For Krämer, this effect is calcified and mirrored in Keaton's character's exaggerated misunderstanding of how to properly resolve his masculine role in narrative society and realize himself as a man.[10] Karlyn makes the claim that Keaton's masculinity is distinctly liminal, and that his work 'corrects through laughter the abuses of masculinity', providing a 'safe place for engaging with models or figurations of masculinity'.[11] She argues from a psychoanalytical perspective that *Sherlock Jr.,* with its meta-narrative dream structure, subverts what it simultaneously accomplishes: namely the oedipal wish-fulfilment narrative.[12] Employing the marginal status of the detective – who protects the boundaries of normative society by seeing through it without participating socially or sexually – Keaton's character identifies and heroically vanquishes a host of father-figures, successfully replacing them. However, on achieving fatherhood at the end of the film Keaton reasserts his original social uncertainty and separation by scratching his head in puzzlement at the sight of his new-born children. With this gesture of disavowal the character seizes upon the moment before comprehension of sexual difference and returns himself to the liminal status of the adolescent, suspended on the brink of experience. Karlyn argues that this narrative trajectory creates a little boy's 'Never-Never Land' – a kind of refuge for the recoiling adult male – while simultaneously staging a world where the claims of masculine property and identity are exposed as incomplete phrases in a foolish dream, or a detritus of dismembered props and poses composed beneath the proscenium arch.[13]

I will develop these gendered readings of Keaton by focusing on the mechanics and mechanical characteristics of individual gags in *The Playhouse.* Like *Sherlock Jr.*, *The Playhouse* has a meta-narrative structure. The film begins with a dream about a variety theatre, in which Keaton is seen to play every character on the screen, performers and audience members alike. Consistent with Krämer's and Karlyn's claims that the character of Buster is anti-social or pre-sexual, his dream-world is one where he need only be social with himself. Shaken awake from this fantasy, Buster is deposited into the world of a real playhouse in which he is expected to work and interact with others. As the film progresses, the residue of the dream's nonsensical logic gradually undermines notions of stability in the physical world of sense that he has woken up into. It is the latter half of the film that I will focus on, as it is in this world of social and physical truth that Buster unpicks and reassigns the purposes of the objects around him, forming mechanical networks of fungible identities resistant to the normative society of the playhouse that employs him.

For James E. Caron, the manipulation of the 'world of intelligent movement' is the source of comedy in early slapstick films such as Keaton's and Chaplin's.[14] Caron draws on the phenomenological theory of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's 'pre-reflective domain': a state of mind in which the body performs automatic orientation in its surroundings, generating meaning through purposeful interaction with objects and space.[15] Because the audience members of comic film are always unconsciously participating in this automatic spatial existence in their daily lives, they are therefore sensitive to any disruption of this received yet unacknowledged system. Ludic oscillation between poles of bodily intelligence – clumsy and graceful – triggers this awareness, and a comic reaction. The comic, then, relies on an equivocal body, revealed as ambiguous by a rupture in kinaesthetic flow.[16]

Throughout *The Playhouse* Buster engages in a number of simple tasks which he performs with ludicrous ineptitude, contrasting sharply with his sudden bursts of athleticism, such as his dive through the back-drop. I contend, however, that Keaton's emphasis on high and low bodily intelligence goes beyond Caron's comic equivocation. In my interpretation, the sequences foregrounding his graceless incompetence are significant because of their placement of Buster in a position of resistance to the order of the playhouse as a site of work. After being roused from his dream, Buster attempts to sweep a pile of dust with a broom. His belligerent scowl tells us that it is unclear to him where the dirt should go or why. Since the dust does not immediately yield to his insipid efforts, he turns the broom upside-down and rams the floorboards repeatedly with its end. Suddenly the broom pierces the boards and the force brings Buster violently to the ground. Having achieved his counter-intuitive aim, he brushes himself off and begins to painstakingly (and ineffectually) coax the dust through the tiny hole, crouching close to the floor and using delicate strokes. The frustration and inexpert problem-solving here shows that Buster has fundamentally misunderstood the purposes of the objects around him: crucially he is a worker failing to grasp either the tool or the task. In this scene, lack of bodily intelligence reads as obstinacy, a refusal to integrate into the labour system of the work-place and participate in a masculine pursuit of success. In the sequence with the back-drop fabric Buster is also resisting the structure of the workplace, but in this case his willingness to make use of his strength in cooperation with the available objects results in the smooth success of his escape. In *The Playhouse,* therefore, the mechanical serves to dissolve and reform Buster's social identity. During periods of low bodily intelligence the machine of the work-place is shown to bristle against his insubordination, whereas his re-entry into Merleau-Ponty's pre-reflective realm serves to further distance Buster from his responsibilities, resisting the normative model of gendered work-place success.

In another scene, Buster's boss tasks him with finding a set of performers for an act, which he goes in search of with a childishly petulant expression. He soon discovers a group of men outside digging a row of trenches. The supervisor of their work is dozing on the verge, so at Buster's suggestion the men take advantage of the inattention to rush into the playhouse. For the act, Buster and the men are dressed as soldiers carrying out military activities; at the signal of a bugle sounded by Buster, the men manoeuvre themselves into the shape of a cross with Buster at its centre. While he remains still like the hub of a wheel, the four arms of the cross revolve around him, like spokes; the motion is distinctly mechanical, the men rotate like the sails of a windmill.

In this scene, Buster gives the false impression of interacting cooperatively with colleagues, an ironic play on the notion of functionalized teamwork. In actuality, these men do not belong in the playhouse, but have volitionally abandoned their actual field of employment in order to join Buster on stage. Much like the bodies that put their heads through the back-drop slit after Buster had jumped through it, these bodies metaphorically take on the form of parts in a working machine. Unlike the body of workers outside digging trenches, the corporation that Buster gathers on-stage is not employed to perform productive work; the wheel on stage does not propel anything forward, nor does it churn or grind, like a mill. Buster's wheel is a tool of play, whose most effective outcome, if it has one at all, is to allow the individual bodies within it to avoid their assigned societal work. The scene contains frequent cuts to the playhouse audience, showing two men dressed in military uniform, laughing uncontrollably. These cuts place that which the act is imitating – a military drill – in the position where it can be viewed and ridiculed as inherently pointless. Buster's machine in this scene therefore parades man-power as performative, a non-productive expenditure of individual bodies and of a body of men. This act makes a demonstration of how a team of individual workers become machine-like, losing their personal identities as they are integrated into the shape of the wider corporation. The wheel-drill diminishes the claim that a sense of personal success or pride can be derived from work,

it displays instead another kind of collectivity epitomised by the two audience members in military dress, who seem to mimic the playful motion of the on-stage wheel. Both men are missing an arm, and so each have only one hand to clap with; with great enthusiasm, they bring their opposite hands together to clap. In this gag the productive purpose of the body is denied: the lack of an arm, which in a work-place or military setting reduces the capacity to perform productive work, here becomes a tool for a mutually assistive relationship. The two men become – like the wheel on stage – one functioning body, a body which works toward the single purpose of responding reciprocally to a ludic suggestion.

When Buster calls the soldiers to attention to begin the parade, he draws his sword up in front of his face, which is stoically serious and composed. This flourish in the centre of the shot draws attention to the characteristic Buster expression: signalling that it is the comedy of seriousness that will drive this formation. As a phallic image the sword metonymically presents an image of the masculinity that the following parade of soldiers will ridicule. The sword constitutes a nexus, becoming the fixed object at the centre of a movement; it symbolises the stability of a masculine ideal that the mobile and fragile reality surrounds, spiralling outwards. With the cuts to the audience members clapping each other's hands, this fractal diagram of unravelling masculinity extends beyond the stage and beyond the frame of a single cut.

In this way, the ludic body rearranges societal relationships between bodies, objects and space. Relationships in the work-place are made up of boundaries between things: as the back-drop cloth shows, a spatial boundary is also a threshold between the normal or deviant use of an object or body. In both the soldier act and the back-drop gag, the playful restructuring of these boundaries suggests that however solid an object or social structure may appear it can also be something more fluid – something which can change as it passes through a medium, or act as a medium in itself. In a discussion of Jacques Tati, Lorenz Engell describes exactly this potential for playfulness with his definition of media: 'Media are ontogenetic machines. To put it simply, they are operative things that produce and assemble and reproduce things, including themselves'; for Engell, media 'generates what we might look upon as perceptible or physically given reality'.[17] In his formulation, multiple media serve to transmit sensory data through a variety of spatial boundaries. In the example of the back-drop cloth Buster converts a boundary to a medium. After the dive, the machine of the back-drop cloth performs a new function: whatever object penetrates, passing through the medium of the fabric shall take on the role of the person to be punched. In other words, the transgression over a given limit reforms the identity of the matter that transgresses.

Engell describes how, in Tati's comedy film *Playtime*, sensory information is divided through the complex space of a waiting room: the glass windowpane is boundary and gateway, it confines the interior and exterior to their proper locations while allowing the eye to trespass, and the bright interior to bounce off the surface.[18] Such an invisible threshold discloses certain modes of sensory passage while excluding others. These differentials in distribution make the media in Tati comic for Engell.[19] In Keaton's back-drop slit gag, there is an uneven distribution of knowledge and power mediated by the fabric. The slit offers a body the possibility of increasing its visual knowledge of the space behind it, which in turn redistributes the balance of physical power. The back-drop machine incapacitates the body that is penetrating the slit by disembodying the head and decapitating the body. It consequently gives the body on the other side an opportunity to physically dominate the other. For Buster, this works in his favour: as an errant worker, this playful redistribution of power and knowledge gives him the opportunity to escape punishment for his misdeeds while also denying his colleagues normal access to masculine productivity. After Buster has fled the scene, the second man to be punched lifts the cloth up from the floor and crosses into the back-stage area. This collapses the boundary between the two spaces, showing stage and back-stage in the same shot for the first time seemingly cancelling out the fabric's pattern of mechanical repetition. However, as he stands to argue with the man who punched

him, the hem of the back-drop falls to the floor to resume vertical hanging; the downward motion takes a few moments to settle into stillness, and like a pair of lips the slit ripples, laughing at their backs. In this way the back-drop fabric displays that it can retain the mechanical power of imitation, and that its status as a medium remains intact. The revelation that an object is a medium therefore not only disrupts the social equilibrium, but actively mocks the work-place society. In this way Keaton uncovers the latent flexibility in his surroundings, reflecting the sense of instability that connects machine, identity and work.

This effect is magnified by particular sequences in which a gag relies upon the audience's expectation of a certain object to remain solid. In these examples, the action focuses upon an object whose ontological status is defined by a quality of immutability. The first of these instances occurs just after Buster is roused from his dream: he appears to have woken in a bedroom; three men force Buster out of bed and he angrily exits through the door at the back of the room. The next shot contains more of the bedroom: the door is now central, the floor of the room is shown in its entirety and the three visible walls flank it symmetrically. The minimal geometric composition seems to attest to the realness of perspectival space after the dream. This sense of the concrete is immediately dismantled, however: the men push at the two walls on either side of the shot, which wobble, revealing an open space behind them. The room is only a set, and the walls are made of thin wood. The men fold the walls together and carry them out of the shot as the central wall is lifted on a rope, revealing Buster behind it. A wall as a concept depends on stability; the first wobble of the walls, uncannily revealing the calculated restrictions of the shot, therefore violates something which had been assumed to be inviolable. The unsettling of the notion of 'wall' in general metaphorically undermines the ontological security of space after the dream, disrupting the logic of the diegetic real.

The same operation is used again a few minutes later: confused by the appearance of a pair of identical women, Buster makes the assumption that he has been drinking too much. A sheet of paper fills the screen and we see Buster's hand make a pledge: 'I resolve never to drink any more, B'. When Buster comprehends his error, however, he returns to the pledge and adds the words 'but just as much' in the gap between resolution and signature. Like a wall, a pledge is not a pledge if it does not contain the promise to withstand change. These objects vow a double commitment, firstly to be solid, and second to prevent a violation – of honour in the case of a pledge, of home or property in the case of a wall. Like the back-drop cloth scene, these gags reveal that objects may also be media: they are thresholds that invite a crossing. Like the masculine identity described by Kimmel, these inviolable objects are fundamentally based upon the possible event of transgression.

With this interpretation in mind, Keaton's emasculation of the image is twofold. Firstly, the establishment of machine-systems allows Buster to negate the social obligations of his work place, in this way he enacts the literal displacement of manual (and male) labour with mechanical play: his machines are a replacement society. Secondly, Buster's integration of objects into a system of comedic, repetitive, machinery undermines their specific identities, making them thing-like and highlighting the instability of objects in general, which mirrors the unstable position of masculine identity.

In this way, the mechanical ease of Keaton's system of objects holds a mirror up to the anxieties of the period. In *The Playhouse*, Keaton brings out the gendered implications of the technological uncanny, unhinging objects from their set identities and revealing the inherently unstable nature of things in general and masculinity in particular. However, this exposition does not necessarily perform the liberating action of correcting masculinity as Karlyn argues; it more probably tends towards creating what Karlyn herself calls the 'safe place for engaging with models or figurations of masculinity'.[20] In the case of the dismantled walls, film as a mechanical medium of appearances reveals its aptitude for establishing and then destabilizing a concrete notion. In Keaton's incorporation of misused objects there is something of the prosthesis: on the edge of this well-articulated machine composed of

Buster and his host of objects hovers the fact of their filmic fantasy – that in the real world *x* can never truly be *y*. The presumed success of the constructed prosthetic social system belies the fiction and hyperbole of the gags.

In their mechanical-social effort to stay in the marginal space of 'things', as mutable and undefined, the components in Buster's machines hark back to their materiality as objects, fixed and intent. As the thingness unravels, the smooth motion of Keaton's artistry reveals itself as merely the flexing of a phantom limb, the ghost image of a society that he does not inhabit. As discussed, the anxieties this parallax view so poignantly reveals are at once technophobic and distinctly gendered. While the machine threatens to subjugate the human body, the thing-body it leaves behind is shown to be uncannily liminal. In its lack of definition it is a resistance to the desired clarity of masculinity, extending the fear of liberated femininity and mapping it onto the masculine body, posed here as nebulous or deniable. While the films may indulge in the play of mutable atypical relationships, they also serve to frame this deviation as immaterial, as part of the artifice of cinema, and, most crucially, as underqualified to assimilate into normative society.

Notes

[1] Charles Musser, 'At the Beginning', in *The Silent Cinema Reader,* ed. by Lee Grieveson and Peter Krämer (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 15 – 30 (p. 18).
[2] Musser, pp. 15–24.
[3] Kathleen Rowe Karlyn, 'The Detective and the Fool: Or the Mystery of Manhood in Sherlock Jr.', in *Buster Keaton's Sherlock Jr,* ed. by Andrew Horton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 90–112.
[4] *The Playhouse,* Edward Cline and Buster Keaton (First National Pictures, 1921). Buster Keaton and others, 'Buster Keaton: The Complete Short Films, 1917-1923', in *Masters of Cinema #30,* (London: Eureka Entertainment, 2006). The film can be viewed on youtube: Sharleen Francis, 'Buster Keaton, Edward Cline, The Playhouse (1921)', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxWF5gIBiiA> [Accessed 16/10/17].
[5] Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, (London: Macmillan, 1911), p. 32.
[6] Bergson, p. 37.
[7] Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry,* 28 (2001), pp 1 – 22 (p. 5).
[8] Judy Hilkey, *Character Is Capital: Success Manuals and Manhood in Gilded Age America*, (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 53.
[9] Michael Kimmel, 'Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity', in *The Masculinities Reader,* ed. by Stephen Whitehead and Frank J. Barrett (New York: Polity Press, 2001), pp. 266–87.
[10] Peter Krämer, 'The Making of a Comic Star: Buster Keaton and *the Saphead* (1920)', in *The Silent Cinema Reader,* ed. by Lee Grieveson and Peter Krämer (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 279–87.
[11] Karlyn, p. 92.
[12] *Sherlock Jr.,* dir. by William Goodrich and Buster Keaton (Metro Pictures Corporation, 1924).
[13] Karlyn, p. 107.
[14] James Edward Caron, 'Chaplin's "Charlie" as Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenological Everyman', in *Refocusing Chaplin : A Screen Icon through Critical Lenses,* ed. by Lawrence Howe, James Edward Caron, and Benjamin Click (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2013), pp. 1–25 (p. 2).
[15] Caron, pp. 2–5.
[16] Caron, p. 10.
[17] Lorenz Engell, 'Ontogenetic Machinery', *Radical Philosophy,* no. 169 (2011), 10 – 12.
[18] *Playtime*, dir. by Jacques Tati (France, 1967).
[19] Engell, p. 12.
[20] Karlyn, p. 92.

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Biography

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