



# Artistry in Motion

## Charlie Chaplin's Comedies in Historical Perspective

**Lecturer:** PD Dr. Stefan L. Brandt, Guest Professor

**Room and time:** Unterrichtsraum, Tuesdays 16-18

**Course number and type:** 124262 – Arbeitsgemeinschaft im Bereich “Cultural and Media Studies”

**First session:** October 11, 2011

**Course description:** This seminar deals with one of the greatest male screen legends of all time, Charlie Chaplin. “Chaplin was not just ‘big’,” one of his biographers notes, “he was gigantic” (Sieff, 2008). One of the most distinguished and influential filmmakers and actors of the foundational years of cinema, Chaplin was also a most controversial director, in part due to his life-long involvement with pacifist, progressive and left-leaning causes. The course will trace Chaplin’s career from the early days at Keystone and his co-founding of the film studio United Artists to his break with the silent film in the 1930s and his banishment from America in the late 1940s. We will deal with Chaplin’s extraordinary merits in the visual aesthetics of silent cinema and analyze his unusual acting techniques which culminated in the creation of his screen persona ‘The Tramp.’ In what way was the genre of the American film comedy (especially with its variations *slapstick* and *screwball*) influenced by Chaplin’s cinematic works? How did Chaplin as a free-thinking, independent director reflect 20<sup>th</sup>-century American history? Films to be discussed in class include *The Kid* (1921), *The Gold Rush* (1925), *City Lights* (1931), *Modern Times* (1936), *The Great Dictator* (1940), and *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947).

**Credit requirements:** I. Regular *attendance & participation* in discussions, at least nine *entries in the discussion forum* (1/3); II. *Oral presentation* as part of an expert group, with 2–page *handout & fact file* (1/3); III. Final paper of 8-10 pages.

**Deadline for Final Papers:** Friday, January 13, 2012. Note: There is no extension of this deadline! Please throw papers into the institute mailbox or send them in postal form. Do not send papers via email.

### Syllabus

**Oct. 11**      **Introduction – Slapstick and the Birth of the American Film Comedy**

Basic texts (recommended):

Fact file on Charlie Chaplin.<sup>1</sup>

Richard Dyer MacCann, “Chaplin” (1997), 148-157.

**Oct. 18**      **The Keystone Years**

Main examples (required):

*Making a Living* (1914, dir. Henry Lehrman, prod. Mack Sennett). Watch online!

*The Tramp* (1915, Charles Chaplin, prod. Jess Robbins). Please watch online!

Additional materials (optional):

Claudia Clausius, “Satire and Parody of the Early Films”, from *The Gentleman Is a Tramp* (1989), 53-74.

**Oct. 25**      **The Mutual Years**

Main example (required):

*The Immigrant* (1917, dir. Charlie Chaplin, prod. John Jasper). Watch online!

Additional material (optional):

Evan A. Lieberman, “Charlie the Trickster,” *Journal of Film and Video* (1994), 16-28.

**Nov. 1**      **No class!**

*Relax and enjoy!*

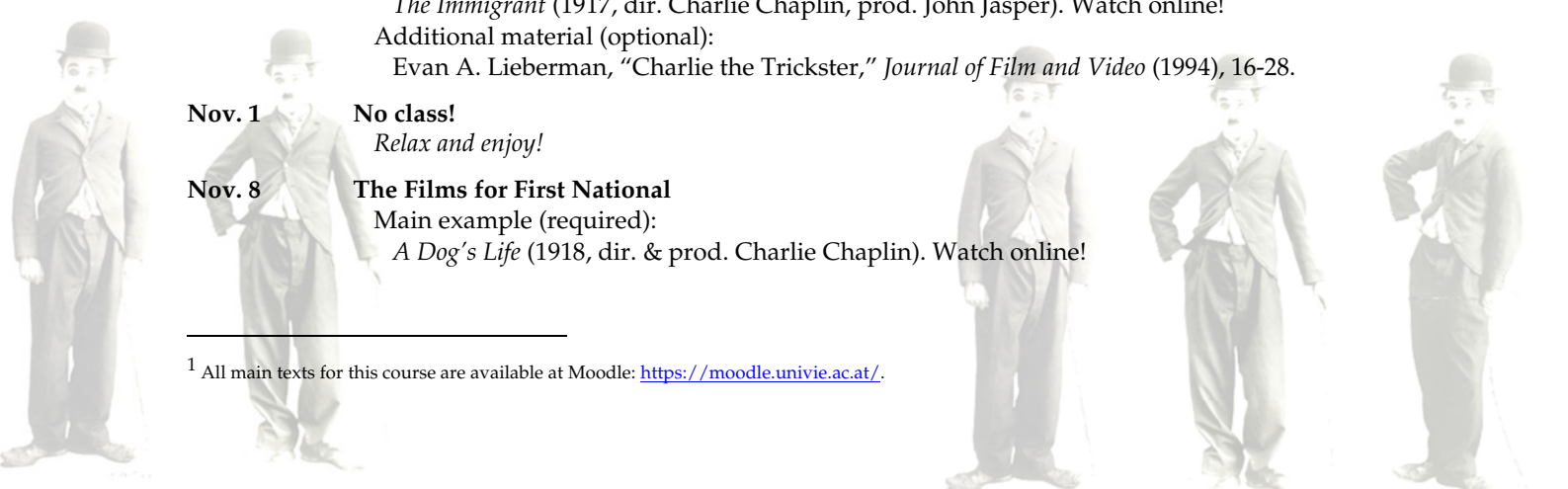
**Nov. 8**      **The Films for First National**

Main example (required):

*A Dog’s Life* (1918, dir. & prod. Charlie Chaplin). Watch online!

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<sup>1</sup> All main texts for this course are available at Moodle: <https://moodle.univie.ac.at/>.





Nov. 15

**Chaplin's First Major Success**

Main example (required):

*The Kid* (1921, dir. & prod. Charlie Chaplin). Watch online in several parts.

Additional material (optional):

Constance Brown Kuriyama, "Chaplin's Impure Comedy: The Art of Survival" (1992), *Film Quarterly* 45.3: 26-38.

Nov. 22

**The Era of United Artists and the Film Chaplin Wanted to Be Remembered For**

Main example (required):

*The Gold Rush* (1925, dir. & prod. Charlie Chaplin). Watch online in five parts.

Additional material (optional):

Claudia Clausius, "Double Perspective of Montage in *The Gold Rush*" (1989), 75-96.

Nov. 29

**Social Criticism, Tragedy and Loss**

Main example (required):

*The Circus* (1928, dir. & prod. Charlie Chaplin). Watch online in eight parts.

Additional material (optional):

Jeffrey Vance, "*The Circus: A Chaplin Masterpiece*" (1996), 186-208.

Dec. 6

**Illusion and Irony in Chaplin's 'Stroke of Genius'**

Main example (required):

*City Lights* (1931, dir. & prod. Charlie Chaplin). Watch online in six parts.

Additional material (optional):

Claudia Clausius, "Illusion in *City Lights*," from *The Gentleman Is a Tramp* (1989), 105-119.

Dec. 13

**The Red Decade – The Great Depression and Anti-Capitalism**

Main example (required):

*Modern Times* (1936, dir. & prod. Charlie Chaplin). Watch online in nine parts.

Additional material (optional):

K. Galanopoulos, "How Contemporary Are Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*?" (2007/08), 117-130.

Jan. 10

**The Battle against Fascism and Totalitarianism**

Main example (required):

*The Great Dictator* (1940, dir. & prod. Charlie Chaplin). Watch online in eight parts.

Additional material (optional):

Adrian Daub, "'Hannah, Can You Hear Me?' Chaplin's *Great Dictator*, 'Schtonk', and the Vicissitudes of Voice" (2009), 451-482.

Jan. 17

**Black Comedy and the Postwar Years**

Main example (required):

*Monsieur Verdoux* (1947, dir. & prod. Charlie Chaplin). Watch online in twelve parts.

Additional material (optional):

Claudia Clausius, "Inversion in *Monsieur Verdoux*," from *The Gentleman Is a Tramp* (1989), 143-158.

Jan. 24

**Exile and Revenge**

Main example (required):

*A King in New York* (1957, dir. & prod. Charlie Chaplin). Check out overnight from *Semesterapparat*.

Additional material (optional):

John Sbardellati and Tony Shaw, "Booting a Tramp: Charlie Chaplin, the FBI, and the Construction of the Subversive Image in Red Scare America" (2003), 495-530.

