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“THE CHAPLIN MACHINE SLAPSTICK, FORDISM AND THE COMMUNIST AVANT-GARDE”, By Ayse Dietrich*, Published by: Pluto Press, London. Written by Owen Hartherley. Year of Publishing: 2016. Subject Area: Culture. Book Type: Cinema, Architecture. Total Number of Pages: 232. ISBN: 978-0-7453-3601-5

The book is comprised of four main sections in addition to an excerpt from Charles Chaplin’s speech in the film *The Great Dictator* (1940)^[1], an introduction at the beginning, and a conclusion along with acknowledgements, notes and an index at the end.

The introduction, titled *Americanism and Fordism – and Chaplinism* discusses the immediate aftermath of the revolutionary wave of enthusiasm among the leaders of the Soviet Union to develop oppressive and anti-worker methods to increase productivity in the new Socialist state in accordance with the principles of American industrial theorist and engineer Frederich Winslow Taylor’s and Henry Ford. It discusses the interplay between industrial organization, comic entertainment and socialist politics in the aesthetics of the avant-garde; and gives a different perspective on Chaplin through the eyes of the avant-garde, as well as a thorough examination of American comedy in the late 1910s and early 1920s.

The first section of the book, *Constructing the Chaplin Machine*, talks about Chaplinism and the inhumanity of Chaplin as a consequence of universalism. By being branded anti-human, Chaplin is treated as a machine and a super human (*sur-human*) which serves as a paradigm for the avant-garde. In this chapter the reception of Chaplin by the Soviet and Weimar avant-garde is also discussed.

The second section titled *Red Clowns to the Rescue* discusses Taylorism, the appearance of biomechanics - a fusion of Taylorism and Chaplinism and Taylorized - acting in the Soviet Union and the Red Clowns, the circus elements of biomechanics, Eccentrism and the Factory of the Eccentric Actor (FEX), the new Soviet comedy, and the new stupidity which portrays the Western perception of Bolshevism and stupidities of bureaucracy and the NEP.

The third section titled *No Rococo Palace for Buster Keaton: Architectures of Americanism* talks

about Keaton's film *One Week* that was a satirical response to the Ford Motor Company documentary *Home Made* (1919) about prefabricated housing. Buster Keaton's distorted building shapes even had its influence on the towers for the Comintern in the 1920s. The film itself is not only slapstick, but also combines architecture, technology and motorization. Similarly, Soviet industry, Americanist archetypical skyscraper motifs, Reklamarchitektur, the display of construction, the characteristics of billboards and posters as a mass-produced indicator of the political aesthetics of the NEP, and 1920s modernist architecture (Derzhprom etc.) were used in many Soviet films as the object of satire or utopian dreaming.

The final section, *The Rhythm of Socialist Construction: Soviet Sound Film and the Creation of an Industrial Economy*, discusses the planned economy, the foundations of a modern industrial state described in the First Five Year Plan (1928-32), the assistance of American companies in Soviet industrial expansion (DniproGES etc.), the earlier Soviet sound films using sound, images, music and the technology of sound recordings (Esfir Shub's in *Komsomol Patron of Electrification* etc.), the national vs. international context of the Soviet sound films (Vsevolod Pudovkin's *Deserter* etc.), and animated films depicting the situation after collectivization in the Soviet countryside (Nikolai Khodataev's *The Little Music Box* etc.).

In the conclusion, the eccentric period of the Soviet cinema where the combination of historical accounts of workers' struggles and the devices from slapstick, the musicals which influenced the Soviet productions *Jolly Fellows*, *Circus*, *Volga-Volga*, *Eccentric Manifesto* and the Chaplinesque approach of *Circus*, and the end of Chaplinism in Soviet Circuses around the late 1970s are all discussed.

In his book, Owen Hathley has provided a masterly presentation depicting the parody which existed under a communist regime; and showed how Soviet film, art and architecture could not avoid the influence of capitalist Americanism (Fordism, Taylorism) and Chaplin's slapstick style of comedy. It is a pioneering work in the field of early film studies and politics.

^[1]*The Great Dictator* is a 1940 American political satire comedy-drama film written, directed, produced, scored by and starring Charlie Chaplin. This was Chaplin's first true sound film.

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