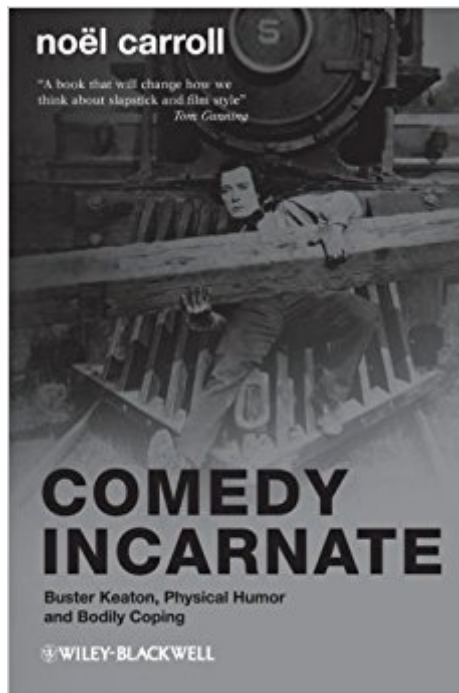




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Comedy Incarnate: Buster Keaton, Physical Humor, And Bodily Coping



Synopsis

In *Comedy Incarnate*, Noël Carroll surveys the characteristics of Buster Keaton's unique visual style, to reveal the distinctive experience of watching Keaton's films. Bold and provocative thesis written by one of America's foremost film theorists Takes a unique look at the philosophies behind Keaton's style Weighs visual elements over narrative form in the analysis of the Keaton's work Provides a fresh vantage point for analysis of film and comedy itself

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Customer Reviews

"Buster Keaton was an engineer of the comic, a craftsman of gags, a mechanic of humor. While Carroll does not aspire to be as funny as Keaton, he can match (and follow) him in intricate and brilliant analysis, providing a logic of illogic. A book that will change how slapstick and film style are written about." • Tom Gunning, University of Chicago "Comedy Incarnate is a brilliant, inventive and lucid examination of Buster Keaton's *The General*. Through close textual analysis, Carroll opens up a wide expanse of historical and theoretical territory positioning *The General* in relation to the writings of Merleau-Ponty, Bergson, and Poulet, as well as to the films of Chaplin, Lloyd, and Langdon. Lucy Fischer, University of Pittsburgh "Building on Keaton's directorial practice as a sort of civil engineer who engaged a mechanical universe, Carroll...investigates how Keaton's emphasis on gags and their intelligibility characterize the film in specific ways. In so doing he opens up an understanding of how Keaton's comedy of body intelligence works, especially in contrast to contemporaries like Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd,

and he shows how intelligence--the artist's and the viewer's--informs laughter." CHOICE

“Buster Keaton was an engineer of the comic, a craftsman of gags, a mechanic of humor. While Carroll does not aspire to be as funny as Keaton, he can match (and follow) him in intricate and brilliant analysis, providing a logic of illogic. Carroll’s book shows in detail how Keaton’s *The General* was built, gag by gag, producing a tour de force of visual analysis, showing the hard work that goes into constructing humor in the cinema. Further, Carroll in his introduction makes an important intervention in the usefulness of phenomenology for understanding the way the body and the world interact in Keaton’s film, and cinema, more broadly. A book that will change how slapstick and film style are written about.”

•Tom Gunning, University of Chicago

“Comedy Incarnate is a brilliant, inventive and lucid examination of Buster Keaton’s *The General*. Through close textual analysis, Carroll opens up a wide expanse of historical and theoretical territory positioning *The General* in relation to the writings of Merleau-Ponty, Bergson, and Poulet, as well as to the films of Chaplin, Lloyd, and Langdon. Most original is Carroll’s claim that Keaton’s work is characterized by a comedy of visible bodily intelligence which the director achieves by viewing the world through the eyes of an engineer or mechanic.”

•Lucy Fischer, University of Pittsburgh

Written in the same tradition as Carroll’s inimitable *Philosophy of Horror*, this recrafted dissertation embarks on a quest to understand the distinctive physical comedy of Keaton’s masterpiece *The General*. The book is informed by the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and others, which it uses to focus on Keaton’s “visual intelligibility”—i.e., his unique way of seeing and constructing gags for perceptive spectators. Building on Keaton’s directorial practice as a sort of civil engineer who engaged a mechanical universe, Carroll (Temple Univ.) investigates how Keaton’s emphasis on gags and their intelligibility characterize the film in specific ways. In so doing he opens up an understanding of how Keaton’s comedy of body intelligence works, especially in contrast to contemporaries like Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd, and he shows how intelligence--the artist’s and the viewer’s--informs laughter. This iconographic study plays with themes of automatism and adaptability, illuminating how both Keaton’s character’s perceived failure to think and his successful transparency of thought function to shape the film’s matchless comedy. Along the way, Carroll adeptly addresses such stylistic marks as the long shot of authenticity and camera angulation, which help the viewer not only see but also understand the comic questions in the narrative." CHOICE

Good book. Good info. A welcome addition to my library.

There is perhaps an unintentional irony here. The subject is humour, as depicted in the classic movies of Buster Keaton. Specifically in "The General". But also covering Keaton's other efforts, like "Cops" or "The Blacksmith". Yet the text's discourse is deadly serious. It is as though in a deadpan manner, Carroll takes us through excruciating dissections of the films. Looking at the thematic underpinnings, and analysing Keaton's techniques. Extremely reductionist approach. I do not disagree with the author's conclusions. Far from it. But by the end of the book, one could wonder what was so funny about the films.

Despite being a "new" book, the material appears to have been originally been a dissertation written back in the 1970s. As such, the conclusions are dated by about a generation, and written for the wrong (academic) audience. At \$64, this book is just not worth it.

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