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Playful Pain. Chaplin and Pathos

Tears!
despair of such a smile
where mirrors itself
pathos and distraction
of the pirouette
gray and gloomy and tender conclusion
of the piercing drama.

Jean Epstein[1]

Every epoch has the pathos it deserves. Every age works out its own recipe for a 'formula of pathos', expressing the actual state of culture and the most important elements of historical experience that it encompasses. Culture, understood by Aby Warburg as the space in which pathos' expression is crystallized,[2] is itself in some sense a tragedy, because its known forms of historical transmission are necessarily bound up in an eternal battle between that which is official and acknowledged, and that which is excluded and marginal. "Culture is tragic in its very essence," writes Georges Didi-Huberman, "because that which survives [*survit*] in it is above all tragedy: the clashing strains of the Apollonian and Dionysian, movements of pathos surfacing from our own non-memory, that is what life is made up of, internal tensions in our Western culture."[3] Warburg, writing about the Renaissance, spoke of the "universal Latin of pathos' language of gesture,"[4] which seemed to dominate contemporary forms of expression. However, he also always discussed the contamination inscribed into that Latin and the fact that every universal language of art is ultimately a dialect full of foreign traces and anachronistic remainders. This is why culture can undergo sudden and unexpected transformations, always opening onto that, which in its space is not entirely expressed,

clear, and comprehensible.

At the dawn of the 20th century it was cinematic burlesque which became what Karl Sierek called the "universal Latin of the pathetic language of gesture." His book *Foto, Kino und Computer*, where he argues this case, is dedicated to understanding the connections between Warburg's theories and modern media, cinematic burlesque which "rapidly blew up all traditional limitations of expression"[5] and simultaneously took on their functions. It was the overblown and occasionally absurd gestures of the most important comics of silent film, their unrestrained, acrobatic dynamic of expression, which became the formula for pathos in the early 20th century. And, in accordance with a fully 'tragic' model of culture, these slapstick formulas communicated an official vision of society with the help of its dynamic and often extreme disfiguration. Sierek places Max Linder at the beginning of this genealogy. His characteristic physical dynamic movement was imitated and transferred to the American scene first by Mack Sennett and the Keystone studio, and then improved upon and popularized by Charlie Chaplin.[6] What is interesting, as Walter Kerr points out, is that this entirely new 'Latin of the language of gesture' was from its very beginnings sentenced to a brief existence, because of the inevitable arrival of 'talkies', which irreversibly buried the forms of expression proper to it.[7] Cinematic burlesque is thus a cultural phenomenon that is truly tragic: the more intense and revolutionary it is, the more ephemeral and defenseless it becomes against the internal logic of the medium of cinema.

Chaplin seems like the best example of this tendency, for three reasons. Firstly, he was the most popular; secondly, his was the most advanced proof of the elasticity and expressivity of cinematic burlesque, in both his acting and in the entirety of cinematic composition; thirdly, he was the most thorough in examining the links between burlesque as an expressive language and the pathos of the 20th century's tragic history. The

uniqueness of Chaplin's talent in this regard was commented on by Francisco Ayala, who recognized him not only as a comic genius, but also as 'epic emotion'.

> It is hard to overestimate the fact – obvious to me – that the epic aura of America was crystallized in celluloid; in the mechanical rhapsodies presented to the masses. And the protagonist of this epic is Charlie.[8]

Contemporary theorists have had a difficult time deciding on the distance of tragedy, gravity and pathos from comic formulas.[9] For them, comedy is either the opposite of pathos, or a space for constructing anti-tragic expression. For Chaplin, however, pathos, which "gives him an unreal strength"[10] emerges to a large degree from an ability for directing gags. In one interview he surprised a journalist by confessing: "I like tragedy. I don't like comedy."[11] One would be mistaken, however, to attempt – as Philippe Soupault did – to place Chaplin in a tradition of tragedy as a genre grappling with fate and human vulnerability, or to say that "he is more tragic, than comic."[12] The creator of *The Gold Rush* is faithful to comedy - at least in the sense of breaking with the notion of fate as a comprehensive account of reality. The film instead leaves place for a core of human freedom and whatever amusing effects this freedom may bring about. Chaplin's movies are only tragic insofar as they are entirely comical. But the rigorous, thoughtful work on schemas of comedic expression becomes a source of eventual tragedy as the effect of hybridity, not as a straightforward return of the tragic in new conditions.[13]

In an unpublished sketch on the subject of the relationship between tragedy and comedy, Chaplin found an excellent formula for describing his own efforts.

> There is little difference between comedy and tragedy: Comedy twists the dimensions of life in a grotesque fashion and tragedy twists them in an opposite direction – but both

> are twisted. (...) Both comedy and tragedy are fundamentally based on one preoccupation that is: playful pain.
>
> Comedy is playful pain. It's essence is 'predicament', plight, danger and fear. Trouble is the subject of comedy. The object and predicate are the getting out of it.[14]

'Playful pain' does not only have to refer to the transformation of the painful elements of fate into the comic-grotesque. It is also a way of treating suffering - and its expression, pathos – as an element of play. And play need not be paralyzed by pathos, instead play reveals pathos in different ways, and also by playing with it transforms it. As Louis Delluc wrote, Chaplin "creates movement out of his sorrow,"[15] he introduces it into the world of burlesque as a rejuvenating and motivating principle.
This sadness undergoes metamorphosis, changes from object to tool of inquiry, and in this way transcends the space of pain.

Because of this playful engagement with pain, Chaplin took comedy extremely seriously, even claiming that it was "the most serious study in the world. There is no study in the art of acting that requires such an accurate and sympathetic knowledge of human nature as comedy work."[16] One cannot glean any general truths or rules from comedy, instead one must examine emotions and their expressions – precisely, in minute detail. Chaplin's burlesque shatters old formulas of expression and, with the help of the gag, understood as the 'disruption of pathos',[17] seeks out not only the expression of a recognizable, unified affect, but an entire constellation of physical layers, tensions and complications. In this way it becomes an element of play, opening up new solutions, free experiments with exposition and the connection of individual aspects of expression. "Chaplin is something of an epicure of emotions, a connoisseur of feelings. This attitude pervades his whole thought. He is inclined to be a sort of professional spectator, looking on and sampling life exquisitely, plumbing every sensation, even despair, for the sake

of the adventure in it,"[18] wrote Frank Vreeland. The point here is not the trivialization of pain, playing it for simplistic comedic effects. Chaplin's work is filled with a particular comic unease, which in its play with suffering strives to accomplish something that Sergei Eisenstein would likely call the "methodology of pathetization"[19] combining comedic antics with a new form of pathos-filled language of gestures.

The Pathos of the Body, the Pathos of Cinema

We are indebted to Eisenstein for one of the most important contemporary theories of pathos, aside from Warburg's. It is a theory for an age of mechanical reproduction of images and their montage in film. The Soviet filmmaker introduced the fundamental distinction between the older pathos of theatrical gesture and the new pathos of dynamic montage utilized in cinema. The task of the modern artist, according to Eisenstein, is pathetization "with the help of compositional means of expression, and not an actor's exaltation of heroes."[20] Only in this way can we overcome the psychological limitations in the representation of affect, and include pathos in a wider scheme of relations between various elements of the world. Eisenstein similarly construes the categories of 'formulas of pathos'. It is no longer tied to an actor's bodily expression, but refers above all to the 'principle of the leitmotif' or "principles of film montage that are particularly appropriate for pathetic film."[21]

Is this opposition of the old and the new applicable in the case of the burlesque – a category often treated as even overly theatrical, and as having barely internalized the properties of the cinematic medium? And does it not – from the perspective of its functioning – seem like a concept that ignores the crucial cultural changes introduced by movies? This possibility would demand that we see Warburg and Eisenstein's theories not as two opposing visions of two contemporaneous forms of pathos – inscribed either in the gestures of the actor, or in the dynamic

composition of images – but as complementary tools for describing a new plane of expression. The director of *Battleship Potemkin*, the master of dynamic montage in film, seems to assume that one can conceive of film in a purely documentary way, as a tool neutrally registering and portraying theatrical gestures performed in front of a camera. This dilemma is not only present in his writings, but also in those of other apologists of montage, who were similarly critical of the legacy of burlesque in general and of Charlie Chaplin in particular. As Jacques Rancière has shown, Charlie always occupied a somewhat ambiguous position in film criticism: "On the one hand, it is entirely assimilated into the unfolding potentialities of cinematic art; on the other, it is relegated to the margins of this art, identified with a performance, which cinema is merely the means of recording."[22] Victor Shklovsky and Jean Epstein are emblematic in this regard. The latter, though he admired Chaplin for many reasons, is also the author of the famous claim, that Chaplin " has brought to cinema nothing but himself."[23]

That is in fact no small feat, even from the perspective of the medium of film itself. Commenting on Epstein's critique, Rancière points out that "cinema could hardly be defined as art by the mere fact of 'using lenses' for themselves or making them the sole performers of artistic intention. Cinema is not the art of the movie camera – it is the art of forms in movement, the art of movement written in black-and-white forms on a surface."[24] Epstein's formalism ultimately seems naïve.. It is not possible, in film, to create a rigorous separation between the workings of the apparatus, the montage of images, the actor's performance, and the composition of specific images.[25] The acting of masters of burlesque is inconceivable without the medium of film that allows action to be divided into individual scenes, shortening the plot and condensing gesture. Only film can allow dynamic bodies to fully exist, and can portray their effects on their environment. These can never be reduced to filmed theatre. The actor's art

depends on the fragmentation and montage of every gesture, even the smallest movement. What is interesting is that an awareness of the consequences of this fact is clearly visible in various other parts of Epstein's commentary on Chaplin.

> The paradox, or exception, is based on the fact that neuroticism [nevrosisme] that often magnified reactions, is photogenic, although the screen seems merciless towards gestures that are even slightly forced. Chaplin created an overworked figure. His entire performance is the result of nervous over-exhaustion. A bell or horn elicits panic, sets him bolt upright and fills him with unease, he places a hand on his heart as a result of this irritation of the senses. This is not so much an example as the quintessence of photogenic neurasthenia [neurasthenie photogénique].[26]

But is this excessive excitement an effect of Chaplin's unique talent of acting and mimicry just as much as it is a product of the medium of cinema itself and the emotion it elicits? Epstein himself, a few sentences earlier, acknowledged that neurasthenia is not a psychological state performed by the actor, but a principle of cinematic communication. "The film is the only means of transmission between the source of this nervous energy and the room, which breathes this radiation. This is why the gestures that are most effective on the screen are nervous gestures"[27] – he wrote.

The point here is not to replace one generalization with another and assert that film does not possess an autonomous formal language of organizing images. On the contrary, it seems that its influence on forms of expression is so strong – or it was, in any case, when film was a fairly recent discovery – that even films with relatively simple compositions are illuminated with neurasthenic pathos. Cinematic burlesque became a particular site where this phenomenon crystallized, thereby mobilizing - thanks to the medium of film - an unprecedented

intensity of expression.

Acting and cinematic composition are inseparable in Chaplin's films. The gesture of the mime and his life on film cannot be seen separately, because they continuously reinforce each other's expression. As Eisenstein noticed, what in other cases would be the "structural principle of construction" in comedy is frequently portrayed as "the content of objectified ideas."[28] But the opposite is also true, where the dynamic of the cinematic image fills particular elements of comedy with pathos, in other genres it is only present on the level of the composition of the whole. "Thus" – Eisenstein adds – "a comic construction enables the functioning of a fundamental and universally known truth, which lies at the foundations of the composition of serious works (among others – at the foundation of works of pathos, where it appears and operates in its truest and purest form) – which gives force to the expression of the composition itself."[29]
This corresponds to the assertion of André Bazin, that "Chaplin's directing is simply an expansion onto camera of Charlie's acting (...) it is hard to imagine a closer interdependence between form and content, or a greater mingling of them."[30] This in turn leads to the conclusion, that in burlesque the apparatus itself becomes akin to the overly stimulating and excessively expressive bodies filling the screen. This is why comedic energy is no longer reminiscent of the theatrical music-hall, but, as Sergei Radlov wrote, a new Dionysian rite "on a triumphant processional around the globe in the trembling of illuminated, pulsating images, in the flickering of lights flooding plazas and prospects."[31]

In Chaplin's cinematic burlesque, old and new forms of pathos intermingle. The images are dependent above all on the intensity of the physical gesture, which is irreversibly marked by the neurasthenia of the cinematic medium. On the other hand, the screen, when filled to the brim with the presence of gestures, simmers with a dynamic energy, thereby discovering the form of expression proper to cinema. From this perspective, burlesque is

a unique and strictly modern form of pathos, torn apart by the polarization of every image by the dynamograms characteristic of Warburg's descriptions. Giorgio Agamben described this quite eloquently:

> Every image, in fact, is animated by an antinomic polarity: on the one hand, images are the reification and obliteration of a gesture (it is the imago as death mask or as symbol); on the other hand, they preserve the dynamis intact (as in Muybridge's snapshots or in any sports photograph).[32]

Charlie's persona was composed almost exclusively of repeatable, recognizable gestures, characteristic nervous tics. In a certain sense they are his formula for pathos, because they most frequently initiate comic sequences. But it is their ability to mobilize all of his surroundings, breaking with conventional forms of expression, pushing each symbol into creative crisis, that makes something more of them than merely recognizable figures brought to a standstill. This is why they are simultaneously dynamograms of pathetic expression, whose effects play out over the entire film.

Pathos 1: Intensification

As Warburg claimed, the transmission of the everyday Latin of the pathos-filled language of gesture takes place primarily due to the highest form of expression ("*superlativus* of expressive language"[33]). Thus a characteristic feature of the Italian quattrocento was supposed to rest on the influence of "Renaissance modes of presenting life according to truly ancient formulas of amplified physico-spiritual expression"[34]. In other words, the thread of correspondence between two different epochs can be drawn above all from a certain intensity of experience in formulas of expression that are capable of articulating something that Warburg, after Nietzsche, might have called the "tragic plenitude of life."

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The evocation of intensity, as Georges Didi-Huberman persuades us, is contained already in the very concept of *Pathosformeln*. It refers to expressions of a particular strength [*Kraft*], power [*Macht*], and potency [*Potenz*]. The formula of pathos intensifies expression in a paradoxical way, because it limits them and gives them a strictly defined form, so the strength of the tragic experience gains an expressive shape, becoming visible. Pathos as a form of expression is born out of the tension between the strength of experience, the intensity of affect piercing the body and the form, which translates affect into the pathetic gesture. It is not only Warburg, but also other theorists of pathos – Eisenstein and György Lukács – who utilize his description of the category of 'intensification' [*Steigerung*] emerging from limitation. The tradition goes back even to Friedrich Hölderlin's thoughts on tragedy - in which the center becomes a category of caesura - or Lessing on Laokoon.[36] According to Lukács "dramatic tragedy is the form of the high points of existence, its ultimate goals and ultimate limits."[37] The basic task – but also the curse – of tragedy is its giving a form to the chaotic liveliness of life, creating out of its shapeless and meaningless streams an accumulation and intensification of the expression of Being. The tool used for this kind of creation of form in tragedy is the gesture.[38]

Eisenstein also made intensification a central tenet of his theory of pathos,[39] in which he showed that the limitation of expression, its intensification, goes hand-in-hand with the transgression of form. Every formula of pathos that attempts to rein in the maximum of intensity becomes explosive, shattering stable narrative compositions or plots. This is also why, as Eisenstein wrote, "the primary feature of pathetic composition is a continuous state of exaltation, an endless 'stepping outside the self,' the permanent crossing of every element or line of the work from one quality into another, to a quantitative growth of the

force of expression of every frame, episode, scene, and ultimately the entire work."[40] The pathos of cinematic montage is a generalization of this rule, which Lukács observed in the individual gesture. Here we are dealing with limitations through cuts in the montage, which consecutively create the tattered fabric of a new, pathetic narration, creating an intensified expression in the intervals between successive cuts. This is also why Eisenstein equated pathos with an ecstasy, which "explodes the borders of all widely accepted norms"[41] despite being composed of pure limitations.

Cinematic burlesque seems to follow a similar path. Isn't it also a place of endless becoming through transformation, such as the creation of a whole of intense expression through a string of gags? As Petr Kràl wrote, "the agitation dominating burlesque is literally so universal that it refers to an authentic, ceaseless motion of which people, objects, and animals are merely the cogs"[42]

We can also see this as deriving far-reaching consequences from a new form of expression, offered by the discovery of cinema. "Generally speaking, the cinematographer controls the means of multiplying impressions, which might be deprived of ideational value, but have meaning as pure spectacle,"[43] wrote Sergei Radlov. We should add, however, that the basic unit of comic montage here is disintegration: the sudden collision, accident, tumbling of bodies and their hapless gestures, out of which there emerges a formula depicting the contradictions of modern life, its comic plenitude. Most of the scenes in burlesque are based on a principle of reduction: it is not realistic sequences that are grasped in all the complexity of their context, illuminating nuanced responses of the characters, but an endless collision of straightforward formulas of pathos, repeated movements and predictable poses, together forming an endlessly exploding whole.

Again it is burlesque,it seems, that accomplishes something on the level of staging that in other registers is only voiced on the

level of composition. As Eisenstein writes, "repeating one topic, one image, one poetic idea in different variants, or various arrangements, is an inseparable feature of the style of pathos."[44] Variations, conjugated in different ways like similar forms of expression, are characteristic of the gags in most of Chaplin's films. Their humor depends, after all, partly on the fact that the character meets the same defeats in a wide variety of situations, and his reactions are thought-provokingly predictable. Every time he stumbles, or is hit by something – regardless of whether he walks into a streetlamp or collides with an elegantly dressed lady – Chaplin tips his hat and makes a bow, as though the choreography of awkwardness organizing his peregrinations was nonetheless bound by middle-class propriety. That is why these predictable behaviors – the formulas of comic pathos – often evoke astonishment or are surprising in their obviousness.

Film comedy is a way of making expression more vivid in a modern world in which life is so intense, that intensifying it even more can only be done in a comic way. The tragic intensification of expression seems outmoded, false and overly slow. However, burlesque is truly modern only when – as in Chaplin's works – it is not a singular transgression, an ecstatic movement to a new territory of experience, but a form of continual movement around a border, crossing it constantly anew, in different directions. In other words, what counts above all is the moment, the act of transgression, not that which is revealed as a result - comedy here depends on uncovering new territory. It does not lie in the effects of the transgressive act, but in the act itself, as this act is simultaneously an act of opening and opened territory, creating its own space, expressing the field of its own possibility, utilizing a ceaseless breakdown. This quasi-transgressive movement was aptly captured by Eisenstein when he tried, alongside a pathetic vision of film narration, to describe the 'anti-

pathos' proper to comedy:

> A person steps outside the self, steps outside the self, steps outside the self but does not transform into some new quality (...) and continues to remain the same self, the same self, the same self. (...) the lack of a qualitative leap; in other words and 'explosion' was presented as if it had been made possible by slow-motion photography, as a result of which the looping of presented material became something fluid, like the ripples of a lake, broadening out into concentric waves.[45]

If Warburg, Eisenstein, and Lukács generally agree that pathos is born out of a tension between the force of an experienced emotion and the resistance and limitations necessary to develop expression, then Chaplin and his version of comic pathos changes the moment of tension into avoidance. It is not a frontal collision with unavoidable fate or the intensity of a tragic experience of life that is comic in his works, but rather the continuous evasion of this enormity. Charlie as a boxer in the famous scene from *City Lights* (1931) is constantly building the drama of the fight – an uneven match from the start – with his inimitable dodges that are dictated to an equal degree by fear and confusion. It is similar in cases of confrontation with the decidedly stronger and more merciless foes that the little tramp continuously faces: disappointments in love, social injustice or war.

What is interesting when reflecting on his own method of constructing comedy, Chaplin occasional pointed out the necessity of a certain amount of restraint, the utility of self-discipline:

> Restraint is a great word, not only for actors but for everybody to remember. Restraint of tempers, appetites, desires, bad habits, and so on, is a mighty good thing to cultivate. One of the reasons I hated the early comedies in which I played was because there couldn't be much »restraint« in hurling custard pies!

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The force of Chaplin's mature comedies is not only, however, restraint and self-discipline, but their incorporation as principles of construction in the very epicenter of a burlesque wild with gags. In this way, the artist links two sides of the pathos equation which Friedrich Schiller identified with control and action:

> In two ways, however, can the independence of the mind in the state of suffering manifest itself. Either negatively: if the ethical man does not receive the law from the physical and no causality over the mind is permitted to the state; or positively: if the ethical man gives the law to the physical and the mind exercises causality over the state. From the first arises the sublime of disposition, from the second the sublime of action.[47]

These two sides of elevated pathos correspond to the minor differences in Lukács and Eisenstein. On the one hand – tragic limitation through form (negative control), on the other – ecstasy (positive action). Chaplin's burlesque, however, strives toward both. Every attempt to resist reality becomes a way of acting in reverse, every evasion leads to a comic collision.

Pathos 2. Contraction and passivity

One of the oldest definitions of pathos – from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* – asserts, that it is not so much suffering, as a certain, more elementary, vulnerability to influence, a passive subjection to external or internal forces.

> 'Affection' [Pathos] means a quality in respect of which a thing can be altered, e.g. white and black, sweet and bitter, heaviness and lightness, and all others of the kind. The actualization of these already accomplished alterations. Especially, injurious alterations and movements, and, above all painful injuries. Misfortunes and painful experiences

when on a large scale are called affections.[48]

Suffering inscribed into the representation of pathos evokes the viewer's visceral reaction above all because it shows, in the fate of the individual hero, an ailment afflicting every human subject.

The presentation of this passivity must, however, be clear. It cannot get lost in details, attributing the experience of being influenced to too many causes. This is also why it should be preceded by an act of condensation, the contraction of pathetic actions into expressive contours. The figure of Charlie seems to be an ideal example of affecting the environment not as a result of conscious decision and an act of will, but precisely by being subject to various influences, passivity. The pathos contained in these adventures is an effect of coincidence, a case of material subject to its own inertia. For example, in *The Adventurer* (1917), the prisoner fleeing from the police (embodied by Chaplin) is able to evade traps laid out for him only thanks to the fact that he is continuously tripping over his own feet, falling over, and getting lost. For the same reasons, however, when he gains any ground in the chase, he immediately puts himself in the way of the police. The entire dynamic of this chase emerges from an inertia inscribed into the actions of the main character.

The majority of Chaplin's films are based on a compositional principle that was accurately described by Francis Hackett with reference to *The Kid* (1921): "The best motion pictures, I hear, are written with the scissors. The scissors, at any rate, have a great deal to do with the triumph of Charles Chaplin in (and with) *The Kid*. It is a movie stripped to its emotional essentials."[49] This contraction does not consist in frequent cuts in the montage, of course, but in the fact that the film – despite its banal and schematic plot – retains consistency and force of expression.[50] One could say that this is a result not only with of the Chaplin-the-actor's gestures, but also Chaplin-the-director's

sensitivity.

Contraction as a means of building pathetic expression depends above all on reducing possibilities. Of all the influences and forces acting on the individual, it is necessary to pick a few and show them clearly. Condensing thus requires a realization of form, finding a bridge between its internal requirements and the chaos of life. The double character of the tragic gesture which is both, as Lukács says, "what determines and is determined,"[51] makes it into a true wonder:

> Where nothing is fulfilled, everything is possible. But the miracle is fulfillment. It snatches from life all its deceptive veils, woven of gleaming moments and infinitely varied moods. Drawn in hard and ruthless outline, the soul stands naked before the face of life.[52]

The condensation in Chaplin's films works in a similar way, relying mainly on the expressivity and physicality of comic choreography. "He creates a miraculous movement, composed in its entirety of grace and precision. The mechanics are so simple, that it reminds me of the simplicity of Galileo's inclined plane. Charlie's tricks are to comedy what it is to all mechanics. They are the comedy or a sudden pose, expressive, united in its simplest and most important components."[53] – wrote Fernando Vela. Chaplin himself repeated that comedy should be distinguished by simplicity above all else. "Complexity isn't truth. We get things so cluttered up, get so damn clever that it hides the simple truth in a situation"[54] he would say, at the same time emphasizing that this general life principle could have its specific uses in film acting, which, because of the way that the camera could capture even the smallest motion, had to be particularly sparse.[55]

The condensation in Chaplin's films does not only mean a general simplicity of means used in comedy or a reduction of the plot to an essential minimum. It is also the creation of moments with a particular accumulation of straightforward

gestures in which – as Delluc writes – "he combines farce with short bursts of emotion sufficient for an entire drama."[56] Straightforwardness is transformed into a particularly intensive, pathos-filled expression. Precisely in these moments his burlesque takes on what Lukács saw as the most important dilemma of tragedy: "How can essence come alive? How can it become the sensual, immediate, the only real, the truly 'being' thing?"[57] It turns out that this problem can be solved – or illuminated in all its fullness – in moments when the form, wrenched entirely out of the fullness of life and estranged, is subject to a sudden destabilization. The life-span of pathos formulas is most clearly seen when their contraction is accompanied by the dissolution and disintegration of that which only moments before was accumulating into the cooling shape of a mass of plentiful energy. This is the source of the mechanics of Chaplin's comedy.

Where Lukács made pathos into a moment of contraction in a single, unambiguous form of gesture, that is where Chaplin shows us quivering form, its fundamental disharmony building into an intensity of expression. It is this particular pathos that finds itself closest to the 'anti-pathos' of Eisenstein, which can be felt when "we are encountering a full unity of form and content, or actually, the opposite – a complete 'doubling', with a complete 'discrepancy' between the content and the sign, as a result of the arbitrary, unnatural connection between them. It would seem that we would be fully justified in assuming that a structure that is the polar opposite of the principles of pathos ought to elicit diametrically opposite effects, countering pathos: the effect of comedy, humor.[58] Charlie, who we could say, paraphrasing Lukács, constantly stumbles over his own soul, most fully shows us the state of a human subject colliding with experiences impossible for him to master. As Didi-Huberman observes, "the affective gesture 'makes us its property,' though we are not entirely 'in its possession', because

it remains unconscious to a spectacular degree."[59] It is precisely in these gestures of splitting in half, simultaneously describing an expression and evading its own efforts to condense it, that we can see the state of radical passivity specific to Chaplin. "And this state" – Eisenstein writes – "when one is not oneself – described by the ironic saying 'not in one's own sauce,' – it is as if the opposite, the passive side that 'gives us wings,' an active, feeling of pathos, of 'stepping outside oneself."[60]

As Warburg realized, the most important forms of expression are movements that are not subject to conscious will and control, which remain unmotivated, unnatural and seemingly senseless.[61] Just like Chaplin's gags with gestures missing their target, crossing paths with each other and compromising their own intentions before they have an opportunity to go out into the world. These gags do contain, however, a crucial openness of form to life -, absent in tragedy, an openness to all life's chaos. Despite every effort to cut life down to size, it escapes with every inept gesture, every collision between excitable and unrestrained physicality. This openness suggests – yet another fundamental realization of Warburg's – that "the expressivity of gestures is symbolic inasmuch as it is symptomatic,"[62] which means that its realization, its history, recreates, unconsciously and passively, the repeated act of "counter-realization" [*contre-effectuation*].[63]

Pathos 3. Migration and Polarization

"A picture with a smile – and perhaps, a tear" – this is the title card that opens the film *The Kid*, expressing in shorthand the need to create comedic dramas and the mixing of high and low styles. At the same time these words illustrate one of the basic principles of the evolution of formulas of pathos analyzed by Warburg, strongly marking their presence in Chaplin's films: principles of polarization. As Didi-Huberman writes:

> In reference to Pathosformeln, the principle of antithesis

> manifests itself in a process that Warburg calls 'the inversion of meaning' (*Bedeutungsinversion*) or 'tension of energy' (*energetische Spannung*), but the plasticity of form and the strength, in times of their perseverance [survivances] lies in its ability to transform or to reverse tensions carried by the dynamograms: polarization can be brought to it 'maximum level of tension' or also, in some situations, undergo 'depolarization'; its 'passive' contents can become 'active,' etc.[64]

Eisenstein also reminds us of cases of "giving formulas of ecstasy a comic interpretation"[65] and redirecting energy that had earlier been most frequently utilized in pathos-filled compositions along entirely different tracks. Without this facility for inversion, all expression of pathos would be an outmoded pose - lofty language unable to make contact with the dynamic and changing realities of the modern world. In other words, pathos can only be a living form of expression if it can be redirected for comic purposes, when it can be utilized in different contexts. The example Eisenstein gives could easily have been taken from the burlesque cinema:

City Lights, dir. Charlie Chaplin (1931)

> The wise-guy smuggled dozens of alarm clocks across the border, having given them to an ostrich, which he has paid customs duty on, to swallow. Until a trick is played on him. The angry accomplice sets all the alarm clocks to the precise time when the ostrich will be triumphantly crossing the border. The ringing alarm clocks resulting from the ostrich's panic, are 'unpacked' early.[66]

Reading this, it is difficult not to think of the scene in *City Lights* when Charlie swallows a whistle. Unable to swallow it, he is also unable to spit it out – the whistle is stuck at the exact border between the inside and outside of his body. As a result Charlie,

though he tries to be quiet, keeps whistling, interrupting, amongst other things, a concert of romantic songs, a performance of utmost seriousness, gravitas and an old-fashioned pathos. Isn't this involuntary whistling a marvelous antithesis of the trained voice, an anti-song that captures the public's attention no less than the actual concert? In this effort to co-opt a moment of pathos for the sake of comedy, it is hard not to notice a simultaneous polemic with film dialogue, which, at the time of the making of *City Lights*, had started to force out mute gags.

The poetics of the majority of Chaplin's films is based on a maximal elasticity of all the ingredients of film. As we know, the gamut of possible forms of expression and imitation that Chaplin's character was able to enter into seems limitless. He could be a gold prospector, a singer and a criminal just as much as he could be a tree, a lamp or a mechanical doll. As Adolph Nysenholc observes, he often embodies entirely opposite character types even within one film. In *The Idle Class* (1921), Charlie is simultaneously rich and poor; the same duality can be seen in *The Gold Rush*, where, as a millionaire, he instinctively reaches for the remnants of a discarded cigarette – in *The Great Dictator* (1940) he becomes both victim and perpetrator.[67] This last example is particularly telling because it shows how powerful Chaplin's performance can be when exploring the possibilities for the polarization of meaning in physical expression. Hynkel's speech at the opening of the film is simultaneously funny and awful; the more the dictator tries to be frightening, the more comic are his poses and yelling.[68] Simultaneously, in the finale these external polarized formulas of expression find their opposing reply in the speech of the Jewish barber the soldiers mistake for their leader. The famous speech at the end of *The Great Dictator* also seems internally split: it oscillates between intimidation at the beginning and complete pathos and engagement at the end, or between the Jewish

barber and Chaplin himself using the film to express his own message to a world facing the dangers of war.[69]

The Kid, dir. Charlie Chaplin (1921)

The polarization in Chaplin's films most frequently pertains to the relationship between seriousness and humor, emerging from the collision of comedy and older forms of pathos, frequently occurring in situations of crisis and failure. The gag serves not only to expose them but also to make once again useful. This is why, in the most dramatic sequence of *The Kid*, when the police and employees of the orphanage try to take the child away from Chaplin, alongside the expressive formulas of pathos there suddenly appear motifs of a burlesque tug-of-war, where of course everyone is hitting someone they aren't supposed to, and an escape from the guards is only accomplished thanks to impossible acrobatics. In this case, however, the gags crown the sequence with a remarkably strong effect, when Charlie and the child embrace after a victorious battle with the functionaries. These images could be emblems of a modern language for the expression of pathos.

Situating seriousness and comedy or burlesque and drama alongside each other results in the antipathos described by Eisenstein - not a straightforward opposition to ecstatic expression, but fulfilling its function with the help of other means. Antipathos thus must be understood not "as a 'good-natured mood' or a kind smile, but as a phenomenon truly comic at first glance, but also possessing a deeper meaning (maybe a tragic one)."[70] But a comic inversion is also necessary in order to redeem the formula of dramatic comedy, which Chaplin wanted to unravel. All the more so because – as Nysenholc observes – despite the similarities between them, tragedy and comedy are not entirely symmetrical -there is a constant risk that comedy will

be overwhelmed by the tragic element.

> We laugh at the most serious things, farce is the mask of tragedy (...) But tears do not entail granting gravity to the most preposterous things, tragedy is not a travesty of the comic. Despite analogies to mirrors, we are dealing with an asymmetry, which can be a source, on the one hand, of tragic purity, in fine uncompromising, even in the very center of a grotesque licentiousness, on the other hand – a comic ambivalence, that explosive ingredient.[71]

The Kid, dir. Charlie Chaplin (1921)

As much as comedy can renew – thanks to its revitalizing strength – the language of tragic pathos, it can also work in the opposite direction. Understanding this, Chaplin had to avoid sentimentalism at all costs, even when – as in the beginning of *The Kid* – he is forced to introduce some seriousness into Charlie's behavior, or at very least some empathy, so as to justify his concern for the abandoned child.[72]

Chaplin transformed his widely known and often mentioned distaste for the sentimental, the need for continuous vigilance against its threat,[73] into a work method, treating serious and transcendent moments like electrons migrating between series of gags. He remained paradoxically faithful to formulas of pathos – which Lessing perceived in the poetry of Ancient Greece – according to which one should never directly show the moment of greatest transcendence, but only make reference to it via moments preceding it (depicting the approach of pathos), or those

The Great Dictator, dir. Charlie Chaplin (1921)

following it (depicting its consequences).[74] In this way, the audience's imagination remains the place of the action, thanks to which it can be raised above the overall tone of the performance. A similar principle guides Chaplin in his unsentimental, serious comedy. In one interview the artist declared: "It is better to suggest, to reach almost the great moment, the final pathos, and then go on. I hate spilling over, and fear it".[75]

It might seem that Chaplin's cinematic practice did not always conform to his avowed principles. Aren't the endings of his films examples of swelling moments, full of emphasis? For instance the fiery speech directed to all of humanity at the finale of *The Great Dictator*? Indeed, there is no doubt that that film ends, perhaps not sentimentally, but certainly in a very elevated way. But we are nonetheless confronted with a puzzling outward migration of the tone of pathos: it encompasses relationships between seeing and hearing above all – crucial to the film ever since the Jewish barber turns to Hannah, who not only is not in the crowd listening to the speech, but remains outside the country. There is thus no chance of contact between them, but Chaplin nonetheless rejects the option of depicting their conversation as pure fantasy on the barber's part. Quite the opposite, he plays the scene as if the conversation could actually happen. The barber asks: "Hannah, can you hear me?" and then tries to give her hope, repeating "Look up, Hannah." In the end she reacts as if she had heard something. Her father also seems intrigued: "Can you hear that?" he asks, but Hannah immediately silences him with a wave of her hand and looks up, shocked. As the screen fades for the end of the film, we see a smile beginning to appear on her face. Chaplin here presents a purely cinematic situation, a scene depicting contact

The Great Dictator, dir. Charlie Chaplin (1921)

between people happening only on the level of the film screen. And the film screen is not a straightforward carrier of words – though Charlie speaks here for the first time – nor a mute carrier of visual content alone, but a means of joining them in their estrangement, of constructing a relation between word and image beyond their natural context. On this plane – a purely cinematic one – there arises a message of hope, which can only be heard by raising one's eyes to the sky.

Chaplin's polarization, his characteristic playing with emotions, can be seen even more clearly in the finale of *City Lights*. Charlie, right after leaving jail, wanders the streets and is stopped by various newspaper boys. He finds himself near the flower shop of a girl who is doing quite well for herself, now that she has recovered her sight (thanks to his help), though she still awaits the return of her beloved. When she hears car doors slamming on the street, she is in a state of tension, remembering the moment when she met Charlie and mistakenly took him for a rich gentleman (as she still does at the moment we are describing.) A scene plays out right before her window, in which young boys mock Charlie and she looks on with amusement. Suddenly Charlie looks at her through the glass and freezes. The girl, convinced that this man (Charlie) has taken a liking to her, smiles to him with careless joy, offering him a flower and a coin. When she steps onto the street to give it to him, she touches his hands and recognizes her benefactor. She is shaken; it is unclear, whether with joy or disappointment, because instead of a handsome and rich young man, there is a beggar standing before her. "Is it you?" she asks with disbelief. Charlie nods, ashamed, and then asks her a question that seems dense with meaning: "Can you see now?"

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After a moment, the girl replies, in an even more multi-layered statement: "Yes, now I see." On the most obvious and direct level, this conversation refers to her operation and the recovery of sight. But there is another layer at work here: the return of her beloved, but also perhaps the loss of the fantasy of the ideal lover. The miracle of recovery and the sadness of disillusionment mix. To the very end of the scene – and thus the entire film – Chaplin does not eliminate this ambivalence.

The perception of the girl in *City Lights* is particularly unique because it happens not through sight, but through touch. Although they had earlier looked at each other through the window glass, she remained blind.[76] What made her see was the contact between two bodies, a minimal and affectionate collision, the true sign of an earlier intimacy juxtaposed, in this scene, with illusory auditory signals (the slam of the car door), which kept her in a state of delusion about her beloved. The pathos of the scene – preceded, we must remember, by a burlesque sequence with the newspaper boys – swings between hope and disillusionment, sight and touch. And never come to rest on any side.

City Lights, dir. Charlie Chaplin (1931)

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1 Jean Epstein, *Larmes!* (1921), in *Charlot: histoire d'un mythe*, ed. D. Banda, J. Mouré, (Paris: Flammarion, 2013), 189–190.

2 See Aby Warburg, *Dürer und die italienische Antike* (1905), in idem, *Werke,* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2010), 176-187. On the genesis of the concept of *Pathosformeln*, see: *Die entfesselte Antike. Aby Warburg und die Geburt der Pathosformeln*, ed. M. A. Hurttig, T. Ketelsen, (Berlin: Walther König, 2012). On the notion of the 'tragedy of culture', see: Ernst Cassirer, *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences: Five Studies*, trans. S.G.

Lofts, (New York: Yale University Press, 2000), 103-129; Georg Simmel, *The Concept and Tragedy of Culture*, trans. M. Ritter, D. Frisby, in *Simmel On Culture: Selected Writings*, (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2000), 55-75. On the philosophical interpretations of tragedy, see Peter Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, trans. P. Fleming (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

3 Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante. Histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg*, (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2002), 153. Unless otherwise noted, all translations by Katarzyna Bartoszyńska.

4 Aby Warburg, *Dürer und die italienische Antike*, 181.

5 Karl Sierek, *Foto, Kino und Computer. Aby Warburg als Medientheoretiker*, (Hamburg: Philo & Philo Fine Arts, 2007), 84.

6 Ibidem, 88.

7 See: Walter Kerr, *The Silent Clowns*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), 9.

8 Francisco Ayala, *Sur le linteau de notre époque* (1929), in *Charlot: histoire d'un mythe*, ed. Daniel Banda, José Moure (Paris: Flammarion), 219.

9 See Alenka Zupancic, *The Odd One In. On Comedy*, (Cambridge-London: MIT Press, 2008); Simon Critchley, *On Humour*, (London: Routledge, 2002).

10 José Carlos Mariátegui, *Schéma pour une explication de Chaplin* (1928), in *Charlot: histoire d'un mythe*, 120.

11 Harry Carr, *Chaplin Explains Chaplin* (1925), in Charlie Chaplin, *Interviews*, ed. K.J. Hayes, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 85.

12 Philippe Soupault, *La puissance du destin...* (1928), in *Charlot: histoire d'un mythe*, 210.

13 On the relation between tragedy and comedy in Chaplin, see: Ray W. Frohman, *Charlie Chaplin* (1919) in Charlie Chaplin, *Interviews*, 44; Benjamin de Casseres, *The Hamlet-Like Nature of Charlie Chaplin* (1920), ibidem, 47; Miriam Teichner, *Charlie Chaplin: A Tragedian Would Be* (1916), ibidem, 14; Grace Kingsley, *Beneath the Mask: Witty, Wistful, Serious Is the Real Charlie Chaplin* (1916), ibidem, 18.

14 Charles Chaplin, *Life and Death (1957–1960)*, Chaplin's Archive, Cineteca di Bologna, ECCI00314934, CH0049, 16.

15 Louis Delluc, *Charlot* (1921), (Paris: Éditions D'Aujourd'hui, 1975), 11.

16 Charles Chaplin, *Development of the Comic Story and the Tramp Character* (1915), in *Focus on Chaplin*, ed. D.W. McCaffrey, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc. & Englewood Cliffs, 1971), 45.

17 Frédéric Boyer, *Gagmen. Petites proses pour Charlot et mon père*, (Paris: P.O.L., 2002), 84.

18 Frank Vreeland, *Charlie Chaplin, Philosopher, Has Serious Side* (1921), in Charlie Chaplin, *Interviews*, 55.

19 Siergiej Eisenstein, *Patos*, in: idem, *Nieobjęta przyroda*, trans. M. Kumorek, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1975), 84.

20 Ibidem, 56.

21 This difference between Warburg's *Pathosformeln* understood as something ascribed to bodily expression and gestures, and Eisenstein's formulas of pathos connected with the pathetization of the not necessarily pathetic raw material (dynamic montage of images which are deprived of the sharp expressive value in the first place) is extensively commented in Sylvia Sasse's article on this issue. It seems however that even in Eisenstein's texts one can find phrases in which a certain 'metaphorical canon' of particular artists together with a specific communicability of their methods demonstrates an internal dynamics very similar to Warburg's notion of the *Nachleben*. See Sylvia Sasse, *Pathos und Antipathos. Pathosformeln bei Sergej Ejzenstejn und Aby Waburg*, in *Transformationen des Pathos*, ed. C. Zumbusch, (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2009), 171–187. Siergiej Eisenstein, *Patos*, 187 ("The content of the metaphor created by Homer and Mayakovsky is different, incommensurable and often even hardly comparable. It could not be otherwise considering the gap of the centuries and the scale of differences between social systems, which created these giants. Yet the 'canon of the metaphor', its structure, its psychic influence and regularity of its appearances and presence at the precise level of the thematically justified expression are identical.") On the cinematographic dimension of Warburg's theory and interpretative methodology, see Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, trans. S. Hawkes, (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 252.

22 Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis. Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, trans. Z. Paul, (London & New York: Verso, 2013), 192.

23 Jean Epstein, *Bilan de fin de muet* (1931), in idem, *Écrits sur le cinéma*, Vol. 1: 1921–1947, (Paris: Seghers, 1974), 234.

24 Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis. Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, 193.

25 The same argument has been used by Siegfried Kracauer in his critic of the avant-garde film, including some of the Epstein's works. See: Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 175-193.

26 Jean Epstein, *Grossissement*, in idem, *Écrits sur le cinéma*, 97.

27 Ibidem, p. 97

28 Siergiej Eisenstein, *Patos*, 216.

29 Ibidem, 217.

30 Quoted in Marcel Martin, *Chaplin*, trans. I. Nomańczuk, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1977), 31.

31 Siergiej Radłow, *Groźba kinematografu* (1917), trans. T. Szczepański, in *Cudowny Kinemo. Rosyjska myśl filmowa*, ed. T. Szczepański, B. Żyłko, (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2001), 64.

32 Giorgio Agamben, *Notes on Gesture*, in: idem, *Means Without End*, trans. V. Binetti, C. Casarino, (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 55.

33 Aby Warburg, *Dürer und die italienische Antike*, 181.

34 Ibidem, 178.

35 Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante. Histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg*, 147.

36 See: Friedrich Hölderlin, *Anmerkungen zum Ödipus*, in: idem, *Gesammelte Werke*, (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2008), 660–663; Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. E.C. Beasley, London 1853.

37 Georg Lukács, *The Metaphysics of Tragedy*, in: idem, *Soul and Form*, trans. A. Bostock, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974), 159.

38 See Georg Lukács, *The Foundering of Form Against Life. Sören Kierkegaard and Regine Olsen*, in idem, *Soul and Form*, 28-29.

39 See: Sylvia Sasse, *Pathos und Antipathos. Pathosformeln bei Sergej Ejzenstejn und Aby Waburg*..., p. 180-185.

40 Sergei Eisenstein, *Patos*, 51.

41 Ibidem, p. 56.

42 Petr Kràl, *Le burlesque ou la morale de la tarte a la crème* (1984), (Paris: Éditions Ramsay, 2007), 73.

43 Siergiej Radłow, *Groźba kinematografu*, 65.

44 Sergei Eisenstein, *Patos*, 110.

45 Ibidem, 209.

46 Charles Chaplin, *What People Laugh At* (1918), in *Focus on Chaplin*, 53.

47 Friedrich Schiller, *On the Pathetic*, trans. W.F. Wertz Jr., http://wlym.com/archive/oakland/docs/SchillerOnThePathetic.pdf Accessed October 10, 2014

48 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. W.D. Ross, http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.5.v.html Accessed October 10, 2014

49 Francis Hackett, *The Kid*, in *The Essential Chaplin. Perspectives on the Life and Art of the Great Comedian*, ed. R. Schickel, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), 153.

50 See ibidem, p. 154.

51 Georg Lukács, *The Metaphysics of Tragedy*, 153.

52 Ibidem, 153.

53 Louis Delluc, *Charlot*, 22.

54 Richard Meryman, *Ageless Master's Anatomy of Comedy: Chaplin, An Interview* (1967), in: Charlie Chaplin, *Interviews*, 133.

55 See Walter Vodges, *Charlie Chaplin: Rather a Quiet Little Guy Who Takes His Pantomimic Art Seriously* (1917), in Charlie Chaplin, *Interviews*, 31.

56 Louis Delluc, *Charlot*, 22.

57 Georg Lukács, *The Metaphysics of Tragedy*, 156.

58 Sergei Eisenstein, *Patos*, 68.

59 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Quelle émotion! Quelle émotion?*, (Paris: Bayard, 2013), 35.

60 Sergei Eisenstein, *Patos*, 68.

61 See Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante*, 286.

62 Ibidem, 284.

63 Ibidem, 285.

64 Ibidem, 245–246.

65 Sergei Eisenstein, *Patos*, 68.

66 Ibidem, 206.

67 Adolphe Nysenholc, *Charles Chaplin ou la légende des images*, (Paris: Klincksieck, 1987), 201.

68 For the extensive and convincing analysis of the Hynkel's speech see Jean Narboni, *...Pourquoi les coiffeurs? Notes actuelles sur «Le Dictateur»*, (Paris: Capricci Éditions, 2010), 57–64.

69 André Bazin, *The Myth of Monsieur Verdoux*, in idem, *What Is Cinema?*, vol. 2, trans. H. Gray, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 110-111.

70 Sergei Eisenstein, *Patos*, 69.

71 Adolphe Nysenholc, *Charles Chaplin ou la légende des images*, 199–200.

72 See Francis Hackett, *The Kid*, 154.

73 See Walter Vodges, *Charlie Chaplin: Rather a Quiet Little Guy Who Takes His Pantomimic Art Seriously*, 31.

74 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. E.C. (London: Beasley, 1853), 16-20.

75 Robert van Gelder, *Chaplin Draws a Keen Weapon* (1940), in Charlie Chaplin, *Interviews* , 95.

76 Hubert Damisch wrote an intriguing analysis of this scene pointing to the fact that it encompasses different phases of the history of cinema (from pure image to dialogue). He questions the status of the cinematographic image by neutralizing the material dimension of the shop window, through which the protagonists look at each other. From

our point of view it would be more interesting to develop his reflections and treat the transparent window as yet another example of the limit which Chaplin's pathos overcomes without canceling it. See Hubert Damisch, *"You can see now?" Montage transversal*, in: idem, *Ciné fil*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2008), 31–36.