



CHARLIE CHAPLIN OR METAMORPHOSED SADNESS

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PRÉCIS

Dalila Arpin presented the following paper in the context of a series of video conferences of the Lacanian Compass USA in 2019. In it she shed light on the use of Humor, as treatment of a depressive core using the case of Charles Chaplin's life and of the character he portrayed in his silent movies. One mirroring the other, where laughter and humor were a defense against anguish and suffering. Through Freud's articles in 1905 and 1927 and Lacan's concepts, Dalila will spell out the psychoanalytic theoretical subtleties involved in the concept of humor, such as the role of the super-ego and the effects that the comic has, as well as in love, of sublimation. Or as in Chaplin's own words: "humor raises our sense of survival and preserves our sanity".

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CHARLIE CHAPLIN OR METAMORPHOSED SADNESS

HUMOR AS TREATMENT

In the present paper, we will explore the notion of *humor* as a possible treatment of sadness and to illustrate our point, we will use a leading figure of humor in the international scale, Charles Chaplin. Chaplin excelled in the silent movies. The comic effect of his performances is undeniable. His fame cannot be compared to any other celebrity from the entertainment world. He provoked joy in children and adults. What was the secret of his art? Chaplin used all his talents as a comedian, musician, and movie maker to deal with a melancholic mood that inhabited him.

We will try to shed light in the notion of humor as a treatment of a depressive core. In the case of Chaplin, we will see how his childhood took place in a miserable district of London, place that was a precious source of inspiration for his films. Above all, the sadness of his experience was a raw material that he could transform with his know-how. Charlie's character owes much to the figure of his father-in-law, whom Charlie and his brother, Sydney, had to fetch drunken at the bar. The walking pattern of the character that the actor has immortalized comes from the gait of this man when he was in a state of intoxication.

Freud said that dark humor may seize the possibility to treat suffering by the same means but used differently. It is a humor that is only possible if the subject itself makes the joke. For an outsider, the situation is far from being comical: it is rather the pity that would seize us in such situation. Pity is a passion that consists in suffering because of the evils of others. Similarly, we cannot make fun of someone who is depressed. In a similar case, humor can shift the severity of the situation to a different goal from

the one that is expected. Even allowing the depressive subject to relativize its misfortune or to see it with more hindsight.

Freud points out that humor also intervenes when we laugh instead of getting mad ourselves. Humor is the best cure for anger. As one of the headlines of Readers' Digest says, *laughter is an infallible cure*.

In his text about the witz, "The Witz and its relation to the unconscious", Freud concludes that the varieties of humor differ according to the nature of the emotions. This is how we achieved the profit of humor. We could add, taking advantage of the pleasure principle. It is a way of deriving morbid satisfaction, beyond and below the pleasure principle, according to Lacan's definition of the surplus jouissance. Whether it is pity, suffering, anger or tenderness, the nature of the emotion determines the extent of the satisfaction encountered. For example, we can laugh at a past situation that gave us a lot of anguish (anxiety). But at the moment of telling it, we have already overcome that anguish and the situation becomes in itself comical, because it encloses the means of its own overtaking. In these cases, the comic removes some of its energy from suffering and transforms it, causing a thrift in the psychic outgo. It is also a transformation of the situation into a knowledge that is of the order of a joyful wisdom (*le gai savoir*).

However, it is important to have in mind that the comic remains preconscious. Because, if we are going to make intervene the abstract thinking, it is philosophy and not humor. This is the case of someone who overcomes its personal suffering by reflecting it on the national greatness or placing the suffer-

ing of a neighbor with much more importance than its own. In these cases, it is not a comic effect that occurs, but a distance, a recoil. What Freud calls the "preconscious", we can bring it closer to the joyful wisdom (*gai savoir*) of Lacan: since we cannot say the whole truth, we can only say half of it, keeping the modesty linked to the impossibility to know about sex.

In a text from 1927, entitled *Humor*, Freud returns to this question. He takes the joke of the condemned man who climbs on the scaffold (from the place where he will be hanged) on a Monday morning, and exclaims: "the week begins well". Freud goes in this later text beyond the economic point of view in which he explained the witz and the forms of the comic in 1905.

In the comic in 1905, Freud had advanced that laughs come from the comparison of acts or gestures in the ego, when the subject observes a situation and imagines that he would have done better. In the text entitled *Humor* (1927), Freud involves another instance: the superego. Humor has something grandiose, exhilarating, because it is the triumph of narcissism. The ego claims victoriously its invulnerability. The traumatism of the outside world cannot reach it. They are for this reason only a source of pleasure. In other words, it is not only a question of the triumph of the ego, but of the pleasure principle which succeeds in asserting itself in spite of the real circumstances.

HUMOR, A DEFENSE AGAINST SUFFERING

According to Freud, "it takes the place of a long series of methods that the psychic life of man has deployed to escape the constraint of suffering... A series that begins with neurosis, culminates in madness and encompasses drunkenness, self-absorption and ecstasy. Humor receives dignity from this relationship."¹ In other words, **it is close to sublimation**. We can see there a relationship between this dignity granted to humor and Lacan's sentence, where psychoanalysis takes its dignity in considering that there is non-sexual rapport, and the comic finds its source in the existence of the non-rapport. The comic, and we will see it in Chaplin's films, draws its resort from the fact that the fall is unexpected. If the story ended as desired, flawlessly, it would be a happy ending, the end of a fairy

tale and Charlot instead of an anti-hero, would be a hero. Certainly, some of Chaplin's movies end well, but the important thing is the unexpected aspect to it and not the happy ending that was expected from the beginning of the complications. In the comic, the story has a different ending from the one that the director has prepared us for. This is the surprise. The surprise is defined in Lacan's seminar *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1964), in the following way: "...this is why, the subject feels overcome by what he finds more and less than what he expected, but in any case, it is in relation to what he expected, which is of exceptional value."² Humor is therefore a treatment, because it provides more satisfaction which Lacan calls *surplus jouissance*.

WHAT CAUSES LAUGHTER

The surprise brought by the comic can also be provoked by witz (*mot d'esprit*). In the seminar, *The Logic of the Phantasy* (1966-1967), Lacan poses the equivalence between laughter, witz and surprise. He explains that laughter from witz occurs at the level of the I am not of the unconscious. In seminar *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1964), Lacan proposed that the Cartesian cogito could be broken down in psychoanalysis as follows: *I am, where I do not think, and I think, where I am not*. It is at this moment that the unconscious changes its status in Lacan's teachings: it is therefore presented as discontinuous. It is not that the unconscious knowledge is in a sort of reservoir waiting to be discovered, but what is peculiar to it is that it appears as a mark, as a fault, as a lack, as a rupture. The formations of the unconscious are precisely this lack from the point of view of the conscious discourse. This constitutive lack of the unconscious is essential to define the joyful wisdom (*gai savoir*). This failure is a name of the non-rapport, which is indicated at the level of the unconscious as the One who incarnates the non-sexual rapport. This means precisely that the unconscious knowledge always lodges a fault, that nothing can come to suture it. We can also say that sex is impossible to know.

Laughter occurs precisely at the level of the constitutive lack of the unconscious: at the One. Let's

1 Freud, S.; *L'humour*, p. 324.

2 Lacan, J. *Le Séminaire*, livre XI, p. 27.

remember the bifid nature of the One³, as Lacan indicates in seminar “... or Worse” (1971-1972). First, there is the One all alone. The non-sexual rapport makes a hole. It counts as a One because it is the One from the Real. Secondly, there is the One that is countable, it is the one that takes place in the sequence of numbers. Beyond this sequence, there is always at the bottom, the One of the empty set, the One of the RSO, which knots the partners of the social bond and the couple. It is the ‘rings of string’⁴ the most eminent representation of the One in the sense that it encloses a hole.

If Lacan was able to speak about the contingency of the encounter, it is because its value is inscribed in relation with the non-rapport. Lacan speaks in *The Signification of the Phallus* (1958) about the comedy of the sexes. This is the great text in which he introduces the Phallus into his theoretical work. He indicates that what is comical between the man and the woman is the Phallus. It is the Phallus which makes the relationship exist there where it does not exist, but it does so precisely because it is itself a fiction. Hence, there is a surprise when the moments of contingency allow the encounter. Something was brought where we did not expect it.

Humor therefore treats the real, the real of the One that does not exist by the surprise of making it exist and that is what causes laughter.

In Freud's text entitled *Humor* (1927), he argues that the ego hosts the instance of the superego capable of judgment. He is the heir of the parental instance. He keeps the ego under a rigorous dependency as it once was when the parents could scold the children. It is from this instance that comes the reproaches that are made to oneself as an example. But the superego also makes it possible to take a certain distance, because from the point of view of the superego, the interests of the self seems ridiculously small. The ego is therefore inhibited to react. In a certain way, the superego's intervention allows the removal of libidinal charges invested in certain events. Freud compares this to the treatment of paranoid ideas: we shouldn't want to dissolve or correct them, but instead try to extract their investment.

It is at this moment that Freud compares this

treatment to the fluctuation of melancholy and mania, as if the last would be the treatment of the former. It is a relief from the excessive investment of the former. The treatment of sadness through humor is its reduced treatment.

Humor would therefore be the contribution to comedy through the mediation of the superego. Although we know the role of the superego as a harsh master, it also happens that it removes the weight of the ego from certain situations. In this case, it is in the service of an illusion. It is the liberating and exhilarating character of humor. In this way the superego plays a consoling role in relation to the ego. The superego keeps it from suffering, just as parents could do for an anguished child.

HUMOR AND JOUISSANCE

It is therefore through an illusion, a fiction, that humor treats the sufferings of the subject. It is by the recognition of the signifying character of the world of the speaking being that Freud speaks of the satisfaction in the preliminary and final pleasure of the witz (mot d'esprit). It is also a question of a treatment of jouissance where suffering can change its value. Its investment is likely to be displaced. In this sense, the different forms of the comic and the witz are apt for the treatment of suffering in the human being. We know that the means that we have to practice this treatment are the equivocations of *lalangue*. The relation of the speaking being to *lalangue* is made of equivocations. In the experience of analysis, we put out in the open sky the precise equivocations that constituted us. The way of treating them is precisely by employing the same means, by the equivocations that the analyst's interpretations bring. These are powerful means of transformation of the libido in the psychic apparatus. Is not psychoanalysis itself a passage from tragedy to comedy?

CHARLES CHAPLIN, THE ARTICER OF LAUGHTER

Charles Spencer Chaplin was born in South London, April 16th, 1889. At the end of the XIX century, the

3 Lacan, J., *Le Séminaire*, livre XIX, “...ou pire”, p. 134.

4 Lacan, J., *Le Séminaire*, livre XX, Paris, Seuil, 1975, p. 115.

neighborhood where Charles Chaplin was born was Kennington which had all the characteristics of a shantytown. At the time, the family lived relatively comfortably, thanks to the work of his mother. The father, an alcoholic, had left them for a long time. According to my mother, said Charles Chaplin, "my world was a happy one"⁵. Hannah Hill Chaplin was a variety singer. Her son describes her as "cute", with blue-violet eyes and light brown hair, but little by little she begins to lose her voice and also her way.

A contingency full of surprises will decide the destiny of the young man. One night, the mother cannot ensure her performance and it is Charlie who goes on stage. He begins to sing at the same time as he makes comic gestures, in the style of performances that took place on the streets of London at the time. The children were on the streets and "produced themselves" to stave off boredom. That evening, the audience is delighted and to show its satisfaction, people throw coins to the stage. Facing this rain of money, the young Charlie stops singing and begins to pick them up. In doing so, it triggers the laughter of the spectators. As the teller picks up some of them and leaves the stage, the child pursues him. The room laughs loudly.

This is the way the story of Charlie, the comedian begins. The family is considerably poorer because of the mother's progressive inability to work. They are forced to move, and the two boys begin to prove themselves on stage. Charlie and his brother go on tour with London theater companies. They forge the project to practice on different slopes: dance, comedy, singing ... These are all assets that Chaplin will use later for the films designed by him, we must also add the musical compositions of many of his films. When Charles and Sydney are not hired, they chained themselves to odd jobs. This is how Charles will later find material for his films. He will know a good number of jobs that he will stage as an adult. Among these odd jobs, it is to note the 'bereaved flower seller' (City Lights, 1931), all dressed in black, selling flowers in pubs, lamenting the sadness for the death of his father (who is not dead)⁶, that overwhelms him.

Chaplin's autobiography is quite thorough, its style is descriptive and generous in details, in which he enumerates the events of his life. We will retain

only a few outstanding ones. But before embarking on the narrative and analysis of these facts, it is important to point out that the occurrences concerning sadness are numerous. Throughout the book, he clarifies his feelings about what he has experienced. Thus, he speaks of "poignant sadness"⁷, of "sadness that was in the air"⁸, "to be depressed"⁹, for example when he learns that his brother is the son of another father than his own. "The combination of tragic and comic"¹⁰ of an event, in which a sheep locked in a slaughterhouse escapes and makes the whole neighborhood laughs. The situation becomes less funny when the sheep is caught again, and the young Charlie learns that it will be killed to be eaten. He also speaks of "depressing affairs", for example about a play he plays at 17 y/o and is going to last just one week. After the discovery of the United States, his native country seemed small, narrow and gloomy; he suffered from "sadness, bitterness, or moroseness"¹¹. Throughout his life his mood will experience aggravations.

THE BEGINNING OF SADNESS

At age of 7 or 8, Charlie and his brother are placed in a foster home once the mother is unable to pay the rent. At first, they stay together. Then, the boys are sent to a boarding school and the mother to an adult home. She comes to visit them whenever she can. However, conditions are extremely harsh in the boarding schools of England in the end of the XIX and beginning of the XX century, and the young Charles discovers, helpless, the physical punishment that is practiced there.

At the age of 16, Charlie finds his mother giving pieces of charcoal saying that they are gifts for children. In the gypsy slang of the lowlands in England, pieces of coal are an expression used to describe money¹². At this point, it is his son who must bring her to the psychiatric hospital. Ironically, at the time he must play the role of a page that brings a crazy old lady to the asylum¹³. His fears of suffering the same fate as his mother are growing. Peter Ackroyd, one of his biographers, wonders: "Could fear, the obsession of madness, explain his dark moods and irrational anger¹⁴"?

Following the hospitalization of his mother, Charles interprets his sadness as a stroke: experi-

5 Ackroyd, P., Charlie Chaplin, Ed. Philippe Rey, 2016, p. 7.

6 Chaplin, C., My Autobiography, London, Penguin Books, 1964, p. 13.

7 Ibidem; p. 26.

8 Ibidem; p. 29.

9 Ibidem; p. 35.

10 Ibidem; p. 40.

11 Ackroyd, P., Op. Cit., p. 52.

12 Ackroyd, P., Op. Cit., p. 30.

13 Ibidem; p. 38.

14 Ibidem; p. 38.

encing sadness as numbness¹⁵. There will be several hospitalizations. The family will struggle to survive in deplorable financial conditions. Sydney finds work on a boat and leaves for long periods of time, where Charles finds himself alone at home. He meets what he calls “melancholy” when he is on tour with a company that hired him. Finding himself alone in a hotel room of a provincial town on a Sunday afternoon, his loneliness resonates with the darkness of the streets and the sound of church bells. He then urges his brother to write him regularly, because since the illness of their mother, they have nobody else in the world. His letter is so moving that Sydney responds immediately¹⁶.

At the age of 19, confronted with a moldy routine and a monotonous, sad and boring environment, he forges the project to leave. He has the thirst for adventure and plans to escape this atmosphere that accentuates his loneliness. As soon as the opportunity arises, he leaves for the USA.

While walking in the streets of New York, he ends up in a slum. He finds poverty hard, cynical and bitter. “This was very depressing to me and immediately made me want to go back to Broadway”¹⁷. The sensitivity for the poorest of the poor, the socially excluded, will never leave him and he will use it in some of his films such as ‘The Kid’, ‘The immigrant’ or ‘The vagabond’.

The return to England does not save him from another depressive feeling. While he is about to resume his life together with his brother, with whom he had a very good relationship, he announced that he has left the apartment they occupied together because his brother got married. “I was homeless and uprooted”¹⁸, his feelings are indescribable.

The bond with his brother will be one of the pillars on which he will rely in his life. His brother eventually follows him to the USA to become his manager when Charlie decides to start his own entertainment company.

In the life of this immense artist we can locate two fundamental elements: the relationship to his brother, as an imaginary double, and the romantic relationship, marked by a trait of the mother seen in his volatile and unstable character. The first constitutes

a pillar for him, as an imaginary support for the ego, while the second is often a source of destabilization.

WOMEN AND DISAPPOINTMENT

Often, he meets young women interested and eager for glory. They consent to part with him only after having drawn from him substantial sums of money.

All his life, he has sought love as a way to escape his loneliness, to dislodge his melancholy. However, it is only the last romantic encounter that allows him to feel himself, building a life project and a large family.

According to his biographer, “Chaplin never trusted the weaker sex. He was always haunted by loss, abandonment, affronts, and wounds of all kinds; he was extremely jealous. With his mistresses, he was suspicious, difficult, and hot-tempered”¹⁹.

One can question the attraction of the actor for women much younger sometimes bordering on pedophilia. With the exception of the first, Hetty, who was 15-year-old and he 19, the age difference was a common feature to all the encounters he had. After the failed flirtation with Hetty- to whom he asked in marriage at their third date causing her to escape horrified-, he falls in love with a 12-year-old girl. Praising the “innocence” she embodied for him²⁰, he denied afterwards having had any sexual intercourse with her.

Already in Hollywood, he often attracts young actresses in search of celebrity and fortune. This results each time in a contentious divorce petition with exorbitant fees to pay to escape female harassment, sometimes as a fraudulent paternity recognition in order to continue to receive from him a pension. Many of these women were very fragile and tried to commit suicide. The last of the series bursts in his home causing serious damage. The meeting with Oona cuts this repetition and allows him to write a new story.

If Chaplin was suspicious of women, one could hypothesize that the relation to the *hetero* was a threat to him. The encounter with disturbed and protesting women has surely confirmed this idea.

After disappointment, he finds consolation in

15 Ibidem; p. 70.

16 Ibidem; p. 83.

17 Ibidem

18 Ibidem, p. 132.

19 Ackroyd, p., Op. Cit. p. 17.

20 Ibid., p. 48.

his work. It is a way to say how much his job was a solution for this man as far as his deep misery is concerned.

Chaplin is a disciplined and lonely man: he does not use alcohol, preferring to remain sober and “insightful”²¹. As for sex, his finesse allows him to understand that most of his libido is sucked by his work, despite his non-adherence to Freudian thought. “I was disciplined and took my job seriously”, the actor used to say.

Married to Mildred Harris, he will experience a disappointment of a different order: the paternity. His wife gives birth to a child who lives only three days. This inspires Chaplin's famous movie "The kid". Ten days after the death of this child, he begins the casting. But the abyss between the newlyweds is already palpable. Their relationship is devastated and they live parallel lives. Mildred had a feline character and Chaplin finds that they are not made for each other. “The house is becoming sad”, he bitterly remarked.

The divorce is litigious, and Mildred claims an exorbitant pension. She gives interviews to the media in which she claims to divorce Charles's because she was a victim of mental cruelty. He eventually finds out that she had agreed with the company that he worked to harm him financially.

The separation with her takes unexpected paths. She sues him for astronomic sums of money, alleging he was the father of her child even if they haven't met for a long time.

After what he described as a “sordid moment”, when Mildred breaks into his house, smashes windows, threatens his life and asks for money, he has the encounter of his life : “The shadows disappear in the night and the next day the sun rays emerge”, Charles notes.

LOVE AS A SOLUTION TO SADNESS

Oona O'Neil is introduced to him by his agent to participate in the casting of the film ‘Shadow and Substance’ that he was preparing at that time. She is only 17 years old and had no experience in theatrical play. He notices right away “the luminous beauty with a

certain restraint and kindness in her”²².

Her lack of experience doesn't bring her to Chaplin's attention, but when he learns that Fox is interested in her, he hires her for the role. It is the beginning of more than twenty years of happiness, according to him. As he gets to know her, he is surprised by her sense of humor and tolerance. She was able to see the other person's point of view.

Oona was 36 years younger than Charles Chaplin and by marrying her, he marries for the 4th-time. But he is depressed during their honeymoon, anxious that the public could turn against him. Which does not fail to happen. Chaplin is severely criticized and insulted by the media. It is a scandal that does not contribute to the image of the director and comedian in the puritan America of that time. Despite the climax set by the press, the couple spends happy moments together. This is the beginning of a defamation campaign in his host country. After the release of ‘Modern Times’, the witch hunt of McCarthyism will continue to earn him the refusal of permission to return to the US. The words of this film, raised against the automation of man by the machine, are interpreted by the American authorities as Communist propaganda.

Their bond is sealed when Oona confesses to him, sometime after their marriage, that she does not want to continue her acting career. That's enough to reassure him that she does not want his money, because in addition she already comes from a wealthy family, her father is the famous playwright, Eugene O'Neil. Nor she is interested in enjoying his celebrity. This woman will be there to help him overcome moments of depression.

At the end of his life, he will say about his wife: “the depth and beauty of her character are a constant revelation to me”. Already an old man, waves of love invade him at her sight. Thanks to her, he reaches serenity.

The bond of love succeeds for this man only with Oona, who drops her dreams as an actress to be the mother of his children. Oona's father left her mother during her early childhood and she rarely saw her father. She was therefore a girl in pain of a father. Oona would tell Carol Mathau, her friend, that with Charles she had known the feeling of security²³. In

21 Ibid., p. 206.

22 Ackroyd, p., Op. Cit. p. 414.

return, she was to forever remain the little girl. “She would always be the One and Only”²⁴, “The One”.

In turn, Oona comes in the place of Chaplin’s mother, the one and only, whose departure to a clinic was enough to anguish and destabilize him. If he excels in silent films, it is an attempt to pay homage to his mother who had lost her voice because of a dubious aphonia.

There is also a change of position for this man that goes from being the object of women to the position of a loving subject. He only overcomes sadness when he consents to take a woman, who is not his mother, as the object of his love. This presupposes having mourned his mother as an object of his love in order to be able to address his libido outside his Oedipal structure. It is with this young and beautiful woman i(a) that he effectively recovers his ideal ego. Furthermore, it is with her that he finally has the opportunity to become a father of his children.

FROM TEARS TO LAUGHTER

Chaplin could equally make others laugh or cry.

“Many things have been said about my deep melancholy and loneliness”, says Chaplin in his memoir. “Maybe I never needed many friends, my celebrity attracts them indiscriminately”. Feeling harassed by friends and acquaintances, he eventually ran away from them. This made some people say that he was a loner and incapable of true friendship. “That’s wrong, he says. I have one or two friends who enlighten my horizon and with whom I share good times and make me feel good”.

Chaplin rejects Somerset Maugham’s comments about his taste for poverty, his nostalgia for the slums of London and his idea that this is a vector of freedom. He never liked being poor and the goal of escaping poverty was one of the driving forces of his career. Peter Ackroyd thinks that one of the characters of ‘The Countess of Hong Kong’ expresses the opinion of the comedian, that the poor have no taste. “They feed on misery. They choose to live in the worst neighborhoods, eat the worst of foods and dress in an excruciating way”²⁵.

Chaplin could be very moved in happy mo-

ments. So, he tells about his lush feeling of melancholy when he finds himself spending the night in a very luxurious hotel for the first time. The sight of the golden faucet is enough to trigger tears from him. His life is an attempt to elaborate this deep sadness, rooted since childhood. Thus, while it is forbidden to return to the US, he does not stay in London to not feel idle.

Lacan says *On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis* in reference to the case of President Schreber, “It is clear that what we are presented with here is a disturbance that occurred at the inmost juncture of the subject’s sense of life”. It is called by Schreber “the soul murder”²⁶.

Chaplin’s life and work were in our hypothesis, an attempt to rediscover a connection to life. After a disappointment with love, for example, Charles found consolation in his work and his libido was particularly focused on it.

Chaplin was a hard worker. He was constantly busy either shooting or collecting ideas for a new film. He dedicated his life to his career and the women he met were all from the entertainment industry. Chaplin’s relentlessness at work was a source to achieve the desired result. That is why for example, some scenes were shot about forty or fifty times²⁷. Very talented in different fields, singing, dancing, screenwriting, and the musical composition of his films, he always invested his work with great rigor.

IN WHAT CONSISTED HIS HUMOR?

Chaplin explains that he found his style in subtle discrepancies to what appears to be normal behavior. In other words, through humor we see the irrational in what is normally rational, what is not important in what is important.

He also thought that “humor raises our sense of survival and preserves our sanity”²⁸. With it we are less upset and overwhelmed by the vicissitudes of life. It makes it possible to give the exact proportion to things and reveals to us that above the exaggeration of seriousness lies the absurd.

We could conclude that in the comedian’s work there is a coincidence with the role of the su-

23 Ackroyd, p., Op. Cit. p. 229.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., p. 29.

26 Lacan, J. Ecrits, p. 466.

27 Ackroyd, P., op. cit., p. 88.

28 Chaplin, C., p. 210.

perego that Freud discovers in his text “Humor”. This extreme rigor shown by those who participated in his films, reveals a subject under the influence of the superego. No mediation of paternal law, for example, that could come to moderate his commandments. He finds sufficient resources to alleviate these imperatives through humor, although this attempt does not bite into the realities of his life.

In his work, Chaplin followed Lacan's proposal when he said, "seriously I am having fun"²⁹. “I said here, the fun was serious”³⁰. In the prism of the French language, seriousness reveals openness to the serial. By this Lacan means the property which is transferable from n to $n + 1$, to establish the series in a mathematical sense, “which can only be transferred from 0 to 1”³¹. The problem arises precisely, as says Lacan, when desiring to define this point: because “... what can be transferred from 0 to 1. It's there the tricky point”³² – reveals Lacan – “ [...] because the interval where something can be transferred from 0 to 1 could be at first sight bottomless”³³. We thus find again the idea that we advanced at the beginning of this conference on laughter, of what occurs at the level of the One of the sexual rapport and of the constitutive lack of the unconscious. In other words, laughter occurs both at the level of the One of the non-sexual rapport and at the One that counts. At the level of the One who can be counted, the series $n+1$ that the laughter allows hides the One of the non-rapport. The laughter allows for an instant something to appear at the place where there's nothing. It's like the romantic encounter.

Chaplin took his job very seriously. Although the ending result denotes a way to have fun seriously, film making was taken seriously, he didn't have fun at all. People who have been close to Charles Chaplin speak of someone who is difficult to live with, even tyrannical. Some even find similarities with the character of the Dictator, the movie.

“Both were born in April 1889, with a difference of 4 days.

Both had an alcoholic father and grew in the veneration of their mothers.

They had a heritage of madness and illegitimacy.

Some have suggested that Hitler imitated the manners

of Charlot in order to acquire the trust of the German people.

Chaplin saw in Hitler “a bad imitation of me”.

They represented the little man against the societal forces and they attracted people by an hypnotic force. If Chaplin had played the role of a tramp, Hitler had been one at 20.

They venerated Napoleon and the Christ, with whom they were identified.

They loved music and pretended to be composers. Hitler said to a friend: “I'll dictate the music and you'll write it”. That's exactly Chaplin's method.

Both could get an irrational fit of anger and abrupt mood swing as well as outbursts of paranoia.

Someone who knew Chaplin said that he was a dictator and a despot in his world.

Hitler was similar to Chaplin in distorting their own history and the periods of joylessness. They both could work hard and frenetically.

Hitler gave the impression to always play a role.

Nobody was more indicated than Chaplin to play this precise role”³⁴.

Chaplin's work is part of a vast translation challenge. As his biographer says: “His ability to translate melancholy was perhaps instinctive and almost unconscious”. What we observe in his filmography are two steps in parallel:

- From the signifying point of view, there is a replacement of meaning and not of signifiers because most are silent films. They can evoke the sadness, and its declinations, pity, jealousy, mercy, anxiety, in a joyful meaning and a happy replacement of the story, a rebounding despite the misfortunes. Luck smiles at Charlot and not to somebody else, etc.

- From the point of view of the jouissance for example, the transformation occurs from the jouissance in the slope of suffering into a surplus jouissance. In ‘The Immigrant’, people are seating in the dining room and there's only one dish for two people. So, the plates that move because of the movement of the boat benefit the neighbor in the opposite side, who does not have one. Chaplin demonstrates how

29 Lacan, J., Le Séminaire, livre XIX, “... ou pire”, Paris, Seuil, 2011, p. 81.

30 Ibid., p. 82.

31 Lacan, J., Le Séminaire, livre XIX, “... ou pire”, Paris, Seuil, 2011, p. 82

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ackroyd, P., op. cit., p. 211-212.

the same thing can be used in another way. There is therefore a passage from the value of *jouissance* to a use-value. In *Encore*, Lacan establishes a difference-between *jouissance* and what is useful. “*Jouissance* is what is useless”, Lacan says. Under the law, one has a right-to-*jouissance* (by profit or use) that is not however a command. The only instance that commands us to enjoy is the superego. Otherwise, the profit (the usufruct) grants us right-to-*jouissance* of our means, without wasting them. In an analysis, there is often a shift from the *jouissance* value of the symptom to the use-value of the *sinthome*.

The last scene of ‘The Tramp’ is another example:

“... shot from behind, he walks away from the camera on a dusty country road. Then, by a sudden turn Charlot, back in his feet again, shakes himself off and pursues his way with a light step. His little dance on the road is a form of self-assertion. He is free. Fundamentally alone, he will never be lonely because his resources are infinite. [...] He has the will to live ...”³⁵.

Charles Chaplin had a very precise idea of what he could bring to humanity and in doing so, one can think that he had given himself a universal mission. The shooting of ‘The Dictator’ was in progress when Hitler invaded Poland in 1939. While everyone thinks he's going to stop filming it, he says, “more than ever today, the world needs to laugh”. His work not only allows him to transform what he is dealing with, but also to make social bonds. He finds a way to live without financial problems and, at the same time, he does a work that brings a contribution to humanity. Chaplin's celebrity was well-known and could be recognized in different places. His work has also inspired many comedians. He invented a style.

As if following Freud's words in the text *Humor*, he advocated that if someone does not turn to despair when disappointed, one can overcome through either philosophy or humor.

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35 Ackroyd, P., op. cit., p. 89



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