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## newsletter addendum on CITY LIGHTS and QUEER FEET

1 message



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weekly news for the seminar on metalepsis / [art3idea.psu.edu/metalepsis](http://art3idea.psu.edu/metalepsis)

In the last "newsletter" notice I left off the banner (above) and didn't have enough time to mention the movie, Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights*, or the story I would like you to read (but failed to mention in the last class), G. K. Chesterton's "The Queer Feet." Carolina Dayer may be able to show you *City Lights* some time this week or next, no rush; and you can find an on-line text of "The Queer Feet" a lot of places, [this one](#) is fine. Yes, you are already analyzing **Zeuxis and Parhassius** using the calculus (I hope), but once you are warmed up you will not want to stop.

Why study these works? Well, you need practice with the "calculus" of metalepsis. The calculus should help you (1) understand how the work is structured, (2) open up the work to some less-obvious connections, and (3) understand the process of reception as integral to the "content" of the work. After all, metalepsis is fundamentally about the relationship between the reader and the text, the occupant and the space, the viewer and the viewed, etc. etc. The calculus should LIBERATE you from dull content analysis that only looks at the obvious themes and says stupid things about them.



**City Lights.** You can google all the important facts about this movie, and it has attracted some intelligent commentary. We cannot forget the "framing elements" if we call ourselves proper metalepsarians. The movie begins with a civil ceremony that is "soiled" by the presence of a tramp sleeping in a noble statue, and it ends in a "wedding gone wrong" when the "bride" fails to recognize her "bachelor." CIVIC<>PERSONAL, or C<>P, might be one way of characterizing these entry-posts. We will not forget to notice the role of the CURTAIN in the beginning, a curtain that has "risen" with the flower girl's restored sight at the end of the film. The "personal" element in the opening "civic" event works as a contaminant. The tramp sleeping in the arms of the statue is a stain, a violation. The personal is a small element inscribed at the heart of the Civic, which we might write as Cp. With a mind to symmetry, we might

expect the film to close with a Pc. Is this the case? Well, I don't want to spoil this grand moment for you, since it is so beautiful, but let me say that there is a synesthetic exchange, so that the civic act of marriage must appear as a very small element within a very personal moment.



If you find these bounding elements, Cp and Pc, suitable symmetrical, we can look into the "mimetic contents" of the main story dealing with the girl's blindness and the tramp's lucky/unlucky friendship with the wealthy bi-polar fellow who at first helps him but then gets him thrown in jail. Realize that the bounding elements are going to enter, in disguise ( $\emptyset/\emptyset$ ), into this memetic content. The  $\emptyset/\emptyset$  is already a good code for the bi-polar rich guy and the up-and-down friendship with Chaplin. It is also a metaphor about blindness and sight. Look at the "chase scene" in the beginning where Charlie is running among cars to escape the cops. He goes in a parked limo and then out the opposite door, a miniature with a lot of significance. He goes in a "tramp" and comes out a "rich guy" because the flower girl only hears the slam of the expensive car's door. She thinks that whoever got out of that car must be a rich person. That little trip converted him in her "eyes," but of course the irony is that if she could have seen him she would have realized the trick. As it is, she believes that Charlie is rich, and is not too surprised when he finds the money for her sight-restoring operation. The  $\emptyset/\emptyset$  is anamorphic in many ways through this film: poor to rich, blind to sighted, friendly to hostile (the rich benefactor).

Just when you think reversed predication has done all it can do, you remember to "interrogate the gap." This is the rule that states that, between the two "positions" of predication lies a gap, and this gap creates a imaginary but material condition. How? Think of the car that is the gap between rich and poor in the opening chase scene. Think of the "blindness" that persists when the flower girl regains her sight. Think of the results of the rich guy's bi-polar amnesia, where the gap is the reason Charlie is sent to prison. This dimension has serious results!!!

You might also analyze some single scenes, such as the one in the beginning where the tramp is fascinated by the nude statue in the shop window but wants to appear to be viewing it as an "art connoisseur," stepping back and forward to replicate the "detached critical spectator" found in an art museum. His back and forth is timed to synch. up to a sidewalk elevator-platform that keeps opening and closing. We think the tramp is going to fall into the hole but just as he steps back the platform rises to the "up" position. When he realizes the "automaton" nature of this (real) gap in space, he becomes alarmed and angry, and he complains to the workman who, as the platform is not in the fully up position, seems to be a small guy. But as the platform moves up, Chaplin's complaint terminates when he finds that he is at odds with a giant. Again, the  $\emptyset/\emptyset$  function operates a see-saw of reversed predications, "smaller-than" versus "greater-than."

There is a funny scene where Charlie swallows a whistle. At the beginning of the film we may have been surprised that this "silent film" has a sound track that is not just music. The public speakers quack and peep; their voices have been reduced to animal sounds, in the same way that, at large public events, sound systems sometimes distort voices and bring out the machine or animal qualities. At the party held by the rich bi-polar guy, we see Charlie swallow a whistle, giving him an involuntary "inner voice." Chaplin had used this before with burps, growling stomachs, and other ways that people "speak without wishing too." At the end of another Chaplin film, *Modern Times*, Chaplin gives a performance as a singing waiter but, as if to avoid breaking the rule of silence for a "silent" film, sings in a "macaronic"

language. Even though the words are nonsense, we and the audience in the film know exactly what he is talking about. Here, the  $\emptyset$  is "given away" by the non-sense, the  $-\emptyset$ . The result is a bridge, something to save the situation, usually by making people laugh.

When you are done playing with the metaleptic possibilities, go back to the Cp and Pc bounding elements and compare them with the uncanny's primary cross-inscriptions, Da (the dead person who has forgotten how or refuses to die), and Ad (the living person haunted by some fatalistic relation to death). The uncanny is permanently metaleptic because it uses reversed predication to create an "impossible bridge" between life and death, but it also creates material miniatures found in all media. We can poetically consider how the opening scene constitutes a small "living being" sleeping in the arms of dead statues, while in the final scene we have a "dead thing," very tiny, that provides the bond that has linked the tramp and the flower girl. Do not get romantic about this. The dead thing is both beautiful and horrible; it is what makes this film a consummate work of art. Find your own corner of this film and find more miracles.

**The Queer Feet** is a brilliantly set-up short piece by the early 20c. British writer G. K. Chesterton. This is [analyzed in full already](#), all you have to do is read the story, read the analysis, and play with the calculus. At the end you will wonder why the word "acousmatic" is never much discussed in architecture, when it has to do with the way a space can alternate between two radically opposite states. If you're thinking this may be a chance to see the "Lordship and Bondage" parable of Hegel come to life, you're probably right.

In the meantime you should be up to date reading the [Mladen Dolar articles](#) so that you are no longer afraid of the Big Bad Lacan. It wouldn't hurt to get the basics out of [Beyond the Pleasure Principle](#); or to make sure you read the on-line introduction to Todd McGowan's book, [Enjoying What We Don't Have](#). Then there's [Apollo Robbins](#) ... work work work!



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