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CRISIS AND RENEWAL IN ARGENTINIAN ANIMATION. THE CASE OF *EL EMPLEO*¹

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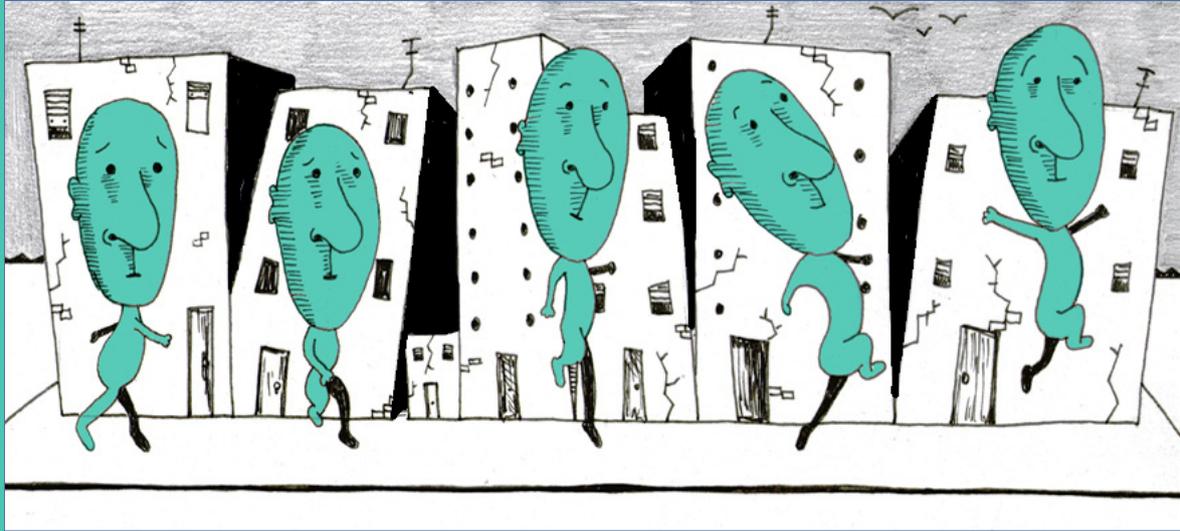
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Abstract || Crisis processes change the social imaginary and influence artistic creation and cultural products. The aim of this work is to analyze the impact of the 2001 Argentinian crisis on film animation. By means of an audiovisual analysis of the film *El empleo* (dir. Santiago Grasso, 2008), I address the elements that are problematized and the discourses posed by the film. The conclusion aims to expand the scope of academic studies focusing on the impact of crisis on cultural products in the field of contemporary animation.

Keywords || Animated films | Crisis | Argentinian animation | Alienation | Employment

0. Introduction

This paper presents an analysis the animated film *El empleo* (dir. Santiago “Bou” Grasso, 2008) to trace the effects of the Argentinian crisis of 2001 upon the country’s cultural production. This independent animated short offers a promising focus for our study because, being produced at the margins of the culture industry, the piece is not subordinated to commercial interests, and thus the director is afforded more freedom in selecting themes. Furthermore, within the repertoire of works produced by independent animators which proliferate at the end of the century, the example under scrutiny offers a paradigmatic case through which to observe the impact of the crisis within the field of audiovisual creation: the film puts forward a biting critique of employment and the place that the human being occupies within the capitalist system of production, questioning the relations of production that form the base of the economic model that collapses in December of 2001.

Animation is an audiovisual format that offers a high degree of expressive liberty and permits the representation of concepts and ideas that proceed directly from the mind of the author (Autor, 2015). As Santiago Grasso points out in an interview (Godfrid, 2009), although technically *El empleo* could have been shot with actors, the use of animation permits the development of ideas that might be difficult to express in other forms. In the same vein, Luis Bras (1990) suggests that, despite the wealth of techniques cinema can boast, the animated image makes it possible to show actions that challenge the laws of nature and normal experience and conduct.

Dejemos la normalidad para el cine con actores, entremos en la poesía de la imaginación, del color que no es así, de los árboles que no son así, de los seres que no son así. Son como los pensó el animador, que al inventar sus criaturas les impuso una vivencia distinta a obediencia a las leyes de la naturaleza. En esa impertinencia reside el verdadero encanto del dibujo animado. (Cited in Manrupe, 2011: 18)

Animation establishes a special type of significative relation between that which is represented and the society in which it is produced, since the abstraction of the animated image permits its appearance as “ícono-simbólico—escapando a la indicialidad de la imagen fotográfica—y de esta forma dar cuenta de manera más efectiva de las construcciones ‘imaginarias’ que configuran un cierto imaginario social” (Pelli, 2012: 57). As Castoriadis describes, the acts of signification which proceed from the social imaginary “hacen que exista un mundo en el cual esta sociedad se inscribe y se da un lugar. Mediante ellas es como se constituye un sistema de normas, de instituciones en el sentido más amplio del término, de valores,

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de orientaciones, de finalidades de la vida tanto colectiva como individual” (1997: 195).

Thus, analysis of the imaginary world of the animated film permits an examination of the elements that the creator selects for the representation of capitalist relations of production, and allows an attempt to establish the perspective adopted in the elaboration of the film’s discourse. As Eliseo Verón points out: “el análisis de los discursos no es otra cosa que la descripción de las huellas de las condiciones productivas en los discursos, ya sean las de su generación o las que dan cuenta de sus ‘efectos”” (1998: 127). While we accept that the representations of cinema do not show reality as such, they do allow their analysis as social constructions, since films “constituyen uno de los instrumentos de que dispone una sociedad para ponerse en escena y mostrarse” (Sorlin, 1985: 252).

To realize our inquiry we will focus, firstly, on the characteristics of Argentinian animation, the field in which the analyzed work is circumscribed. Then we will contextualize *El empleo* with reference to the social, economic and political situation in which it was produced, placing the film in relation to the conditions of production (Verón, 1998) and the ideological configuration of the social medium in which it is embedded (Sorlin, 1985). We hope to come closer to an understanding of how the financial crisis of 2001 occurred and what repercussions it has in Argentina’s cultural production, especially in the fields of film and animation. Finally, we will turn to the film itself and offer the conclusions of our analysis. Given that the film contains no dialogue, the analysis must be conducted through a hermeneutic of audio-visual elements: sounds, labels, colors, textures, and the actions of characters take the central role in our study, as they are the sole meaning-bearing elements of the piece.

1. Animated Film in Argentina

The story of the development of Argentinian animation reaches back to the origins of cinema. According to Giannalberto Bendazzi (2008), the first animated feature film was produced in Argentina. He refers to *El Apóstol*, directed by Quirino Cristiani in 1917. Argentina is also where Cristiani produced the first talkie animated feature film, *Peludópolis* (1931). Argentina’s first color animated film appears in the forties: *Upa en apuros* (dir. Dante Quintero, 1942). This short is an example of the earliest traces of influence from Disney Studios in Argentina, and it inaugurates an Argentinian school of animation influenced by Disney’s aesthetic. (González, 2011: 36).

Apart from these seminal works, there also exist animations used in advertisements starting from the appearance of television in the

fifties, with a particularly prolific period of production in the seventies. The animation industry has also been centered on the development of television series, which includes the adaptation of comic books and comic strips. This period witnesses the consolidation of the studios of distinguished animators like Manuel García Ferré, Jorge Martín, Oscar Desplats and Carlos Constantini. After this phase of popularization for animation and the transition to democracy, we arrive in the nineties at the period of “contemporary Argentinian animation” (Siragusa, 2010: 27). As Alejandro González notes (2011), the mid-nineties represent a watershed moment in which many new animators emerge who begin to revitalize animation for the cinema and also for television, culminating in the production of the televised program *Caloi en su tinta*. A list of the most significant works of this period would include the productions of Illusions Studios and Protagonik Films, and would also make reference to the work of the contingent of independent animators who emerge beginning around the year 2000. As Manrupe points out, “Lo que los *fanzines* fueron hacia 1997-1998, en el cambio de siglo lo constituyó la animación” (2004: 117).

The stimulation of Argentinian animation can be attributed to the confluence of many factors. Firstly, during the nineties there is a rise in the popularity of animated series which catered to adult audiences, like *The Simpsons* (dir. Matt Groening), *Beavis and Butt-head* (dir. Mike Judge) and *Mercano el marciano* (dir. Juan Antín). Second, advances in technology make it possible to animate using a simple personal computer equipped with the adequate software, thus eliminating the production costs that in earlier days would have been used to finance the employment of film crews and actors. Take for example Alejandro Szykula’s series *Alejo y Valentina*, developed entirely by means of Flash, a program originally disseminated online. It is relevant that the exchange rate of the dollar was quite low in the nineties, encouraging investment in new technologies. Thirdly, in this period there is an increase in the number of schools which offer specialized training in animation, which, of course, increases the number of potential animators. Fourthly, animation’s status is strengthened by the appearance of several festivals, such as ANIMA in Córdoba and Expotoons in Buenos Aires, where animators exhibit their work and establish a network of contact between artists and academics. Finally, there is the crucial element of government assistance tendered to the industry through the National Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts (INCAA).

So, during this period we see the world of animation incorporate new groups of directors who introduce recent technologies while simultaneously introducing novel thematics and perspectives to the industry. In this group of cultivators of the craft we find Ayar Blasco,

Santiago Grasso, and Juan Pablo Zararamella, animators who undertake independent projects in the margins of their television work, finding outlets by which to liberate themselves creatively from constraints upon form and thematic content. At the same time, there exists an important strain of experimentation coming from the academy, as, for example, from the Universidad del Cine, the *Centro Experimental de Animación de la Universidad de Córdoba*, the AVEX (Avellaneda Experimental) group, and Pablo Rodríguez Jáuregui and the Escuela para Animadores de Rosario.

The revitalization of Argentinian animation that we observe in the contemporary period is linked to these independent directors. Films like *Mercano el marciano* (dir. Juan Antín, 2002), *The Planet* (dir. Pablo Rodríguez Jáuregui, 2002), *Luminaris* (dir. Juan Pablo Zaramella, 2011), *Teclópolis* (dir. Javier Mrad, 2011), *Ánima Buenos Aires* (dir. María Verónica Ramírez, 2012), *Padre* (dir. Santiago “Bou” Grasso, 2013) and *El empleo* show how independent animation in Argentina distances itself from traditional clichés and from animation’s stereotyped role as children’s entertainment, tackling more complex themes, such as globalization, the relations of production under the capitalist system, or the missing people during the most recent military dictatorship.

The tight link between the comic strip and animation should be kept in mind. Santiago Grasso, as an animator and comics artist, is exemplary of this link. In the field of Argentinian comics, too, we observe a process of crisis and renewal materializing at the turn of the century. The crisis of 2001 coincides with the decline that affects the comics industry since the beginning of the nineties. The crash is what deals the killing blow to the existing model, a fact that becomes clear in light of the disappearance of the leading publishers (von Sprecher, 2011). With the arrival of Web 2.0, independent comics production, which had survived in the form of fanzines and desktop publishing, shifted its locus to the internet, where first comics blogs appear (Fernández and Gago, 2012). This new mode of production offers the greatest creative freedom to the genre and fosters the emergence of a new generation of creators.

In non-animated Argentinian cinema we also find a process of renewal during the nineties, materializing with the arrival of a new generation of directors which constitute a “nuevo regimen creativo” called the Nuevo Cine Argentino (NCA) (Aguilar, 2006: 14). Adrián Caetano, Lucrecia Martel, Martín Rejtman, and Pablo Trapero stand out, among others. The films of the NCA evince a rupture with earlier cinema because they use different, and often more precarious, modes of production, and abandon an anti-establishment posture, rejecting the political demands that shaped the identity of Argentinian cinema of the preceding decades (Aguilar, 2006). Furthermore, as Agustín Campero (2009) points out, the NCA comprises a complex

amalgam of films in which, often, the borders between fiction and documentary are blurred. Nonetheless, though one cannot speak of a homogeneous movement, the films of the NCA always express a sort of veracity: “no sólo de la verdad de la relación entre el director y las condiciones de producción de su obra, sino también de la verdad del mundo en el que vivimos” (Campero, 2009: 8).

Just as with the animation of the period, the work of the NCA is largely funded by the INCAA and foreign foundations. With regard to the foment of national cinematic production, it is important to keep in mind the importance of the role of the state, which has continually invested in the field of cinema, even in times of economic recession (Puente, 2007: 50). Another of the elements that characterize the NCA is the use of alternative means of distribution in order to achieve visibility, especially exhibition in film festivals, like the Independent Film Festival of Rotterdam and the Buenos Aires Festival Internacional de Cine Independiente (BAFICI).

We can observe the impact of the crisis in the thematics of cinematic production of this period, where it appears reflected frankly and explicitly in documentaries like *Memorias del saqueo* (dir. Fernando “Pino” Solanas, 2004) and *La dignidad de los nadie*s (dir. Fernando “Pino” Solanas, 2005). The crisis is ubiquitous in the films of the NCA; it forms a part of their customary thematic repertoire (Page, 2009). The context of crisis appears in a realistic form in films like *Pizza, birra, faso* (dir. Adrián Caetano y Bruno Stagnate, 1998) and metaphorically in films like *La ciénaga* (dir. Lucrecia Martel, 2001). We even find the imprint of the crisis in films on the commercial circuit, like *El hijo de la novia* (dir. Juan José Campanella, 2001) and *Luna de Avellaneda* (dir. Juan José Campanella, 2004).

The changes in the sphere of comics, film, and animation originate in the neoliberal decade of the nineties and crystallize with the crisis at the turn of the century. The political, economic, and social context of this period lays the foundation for this process of transformation, which leads to an opening of form and content in the production of animation, freed from the restrictions imposed by the culture industry. Next, we will trace the chronology of the crisis of 2001 and explore the implications it has for the cultural production of Argentina.

2. The Crisis of 2001

A political, economic, and social collapse occurs in Argentina in December of 2001, originating in the recession beginning in 1998. The crisis erupts due to the government’s decision to restrict the free withdrawal of cash, ordered on December 3, 2001, a measure dubbed *corralito*. Although the measure is intended to avoid the fleeing of

capital from the country, it ultimately means the confiscation of savings. This move elicits massive popular protest, like the *cacero/azos* (protest by banging on pots and pans) and demonstrations that break out all over the country under the slogan “They all must go!” (“*¡Que se vayan todos!*”), which results in the immediate resignation of president Fernando de la Rúa. Thus culminates a decade of neoliberal politics characterized by privatization, deindustrialization, unemployment, precarization of labor, and a magnification of social inequality (Svampa, 2005).

Under these circumstances, Argentina declares the suspension of payment of external debt and plunges into a deep economic crisis. Unemployment goes from 12.4% in 1998 to 23.6% in 2002, while the poverty rate rises precipitously from 25.9% in 1998 to 57.5% in 2002 (Saxton, 2003). The rapid deterioration of the economic situation incurs dramatic political consequences; the presidency changes hands five times in the space of two weeks. At the same time, tremendous social instability is unleashed with protests, riots, and looting, which the police and security forces proceed to suppress harshly. In this way, the devastating experience of unemployment, hunger, and the recession come to form part of the collective imaginary of Argentina (Grimson, 2004). For Claudio Díaz (2015), one of the most profound changes that the crisis elicits in Argentinian society after the neoliberal decade is related to modes of thinking, feeling, and perceiving reality. As the author affirms in an interview, neoliberalism entails deep modifications in the social imaginary:

El individualismo, la sospecha de que todo lo que viene del estado es malo, la idea de un Mercado que funciona como instancia superior que tiene leyes propias y tan misteriosas como si fuera una instancia divina, que tiene sus propios sacerdotes que hablan un lenguaje incomprensible. En ese imaginario, la lógica de la mercancía lo envuelve todo, lo atraviesa todo. (Heinz, 2015)

The myriad dislocations provoked by the crisis which Argentina suffers at the turn of the century reverberate in the objectives, representations, and narrative forms of the country’s authors. Historical-material conditions determine cultural phenomena, by way of complex and interrelating processes of limitation and pressure that leave traces upon social processes they influence (Williams, 1997). We affirm with Verón that “toda producción de sentido está insertada en lo social” (1998: 125). The climate of social upheaval and the human landscape of the crisis receive “una expresión simbólica en distintos lenguajes artísticos producidos en ese contexto” (Amado, 2009: 16). Thus, the analysis of cultural products allows the description of examples of the historical and social process, that is to say, the crystallized ideology and conception of the world in a given moment (Williams, 1997).

Various academic studies address the imprint of the crisis in reference to the distinct spheres of cultural production in Argentina. In the field of popular music, there exist analyses of the way in which the social imaginary manifests in the songs of the nineties (Díaz, 2015). One also finds studies occupied with the impact that the first decade of the new century has upon literature (Rodríguez Périsko, 2015), as well as upon comics following the 2001 crisis (Gago, 2016). Many authors study the cinematic production of this period, focusing especially on the Nuevo Cine Argentino (Aguilar, 2006; Amado, 2007; Campero, 2009; Dillon, 2014; Link, 2015; Page, 2009), but also on commercial cinema (Dillon, 2015). However, in spite of the existence of a corpus of animated films that represent in some way the effects of the crisis, there is a lack of research that addresses this cultural phenomenon. Accordingly, the goal of this study is to fill this void, and so we proceed to an analysis of *El empleo*.

3. Analysis of *El empleo*

El empleo (2008) is an animated short, directed by the Argentinian Santiago Grasso, which depicts without dialogue the working day of a man from when he wakes up in the morning until his arrival at his work post. It is an independent animation produced with the aid of a Beca Nacional de Creación granted by El Fondo Nacional de la Artes and the subsidy of the INCAA. The film is the winner of more than ten prizes from various international film festivals, among which the Annecy International Animation Film Festival (2009), the Havana Film Festival (2009), the International Film Festival of Valencia Cinema Jove (2009), and the Mar de Plata International Film Festival (2008) stand out.

The director, known as Santiago Bou Grasso, is a designer of visual communication at the Universidad Nacional de la Plata (Buenos Aires). Apart from his work as an illustrator and comics artist, his past output includes work on various feature films from Argentina and other countries: *Condor Crux* (Juan Pablo Buscarini, Swan Glecer and Pablo Holcer, 2000), *Patoruzito* (dir. José Luis Massa, 2004), *Gisaku* (dir. Baltasar Pedrosa, 2005), *El Arca* (dir. Juan Pablo Buscarini, 2007) and *Nocturna* (dir. Adrià García and Víctor Maldonado, 2007), among others. He is currently developing his work through the production company opusBOU, which has put out four animated shorts: *El pájaro y el hombre* (2005) and *-Hola?* (2007) are formal experiments with conventional thematic material, while *El empleo* (2008) addresses the theme of the relations of production, and *Padre* (2013) is an exercise in historical memory that handles the end of the last military dictatorship.

El empleo is executed in 2D animation painted with watercolor, although it includes certain 3D-designed objects, like the alarm clock of the first scene. The short's ochre color palette conveys a subdued atmosphere, especially with reference to the almost transparent human figures. The mottling characteristic of watercolor is used solely for the interiors. The textured background highlights the colors of the non-human elements, such as the wall, the floor, the furniture, the sky, etc. Contrarily, the people in *El empleo* appear drawn without details, diluted in flat colors of uniform tone. This chromatic symbolism within the diegesis conditions the emotional response that the story elicits, accentuating the state of apathy in which the characters are immersed and reflecting an ambience of alienation.



Image 1: An objectified laborer.

The story begins with the sound of an alarm clock, which signals the beginning of the working day of the protagonist. The animation offers realistic images but presents surrealistic situations, in which human beings appear transformed into objects according to the work which they carry out. From the very first scene, the use of humans by humans is made visually manifest. The protagonist turns of his alarm clock on a table supported by what appears to be a crouching man, drawn in such a way that on the first viewing this element of the scene might pass unnoticed. However, when he gets out of bed and turns on a free-standing lamp the audience observes clearly that this “lamp” is actually a man performing the role of a lamp.

While the scenario produces a certain air of strangeness, the appearance of *El empleo*'s title in space beside the lamp-man helps the audience to establish a perspective through which to endow the scene with meaning. In this way, the linguistic message fulfills

a double function. On the one hand, it carries out the denotative function that literally indicates the short's title. On the other, *El empleo* fulfills a connotative function that permits the clarification of the actions that occur in the story. As Barthes points out, “el texto guía al lector entre los significados de la imagen, le hace evitar algunos y recibir otros, y a través de un *dispatching* a menudo sutil, lo teleguía hacia un sentido elegido con antelación” (1986: 36-37). In the absence of dialogues in the diegesis, seemingly closed off from meaning, the title impels us without other linguistic interpositions to locate the symbolic significance of the images from a point of view that dialectically unmask the link between labor and alienation.

In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, Marx writes that the laborer is alienated because “in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind” (Marx, 1959: 30). Accordingly, the film reflects the estrangement of people from the performance of their tasks. The apathetic gestures betray a stoic, almost acetic acceptance, of their activities. These visible gestures allow us, as Eisenstein proposes, “to trace the visible symptoms back to their absent (or untotalizable) causes” (Jameson, 2009: 107). In this connection it should be kept in mind that in an economy of continual crisis, employment is defined by the contingency of its absence: unemployment. As Bordieu sustains, the generalization of labor insecurity in society cultivates the fear of unemployment and the terrible consequences that accompany it, so that workers find themselves at the mercy of their employers: “Casualization of employment is part of a mode of domination of a new kind, based on the creation of a generalized and permanent state of insecurity aimed at forcing workers into submission, into the acceptance of exploitation” (1998: 82).

After getting up from bed, the protagonist begins a morning routine in which expected everyday objects are replaced with human beings that perform those objects' functions. He shaves before a man-mirror, he drinks his coffee sitting on a man-chair in front of a table made of one man and one woman in the light provided by a man-lamp. The echo of the title channels the interpretation of the images through the perspective of the relations of production. Once the context in which the story unfolds is established, the camera draws near to the protagonist's face, isolating him from the rest of the objectified characters, to show the state of apathy and alienation in which he finds himself. In this way, the short is characterized by a precise use of rhythm of action, which is sufficiently unhurried for the spectator to reflect on the symbolism of the situations through which the protagonist passes.

Before walking out the door of his apartment, the protagonist takes his raincoat, suitcase, and keys from the woman-coatrack. In all

of the characters one encounters the same empty look, alien to the situation at hand. Only lazy blinking and laconic sighs convey the idea that the human-objects are living. From when we exit the protagonist's apartment, every scene assumes a similar structure: a situation is presented, prolonged for a few seconds in order to generate an expectation in the viewer before delivering its resolution. A man waits a few seconds for a taxi, a close-up of walking feet follows, and finally a person is shown from the waist up as a man-taxi. After stopping before a human traffic light and entering a building through a man-door, the protagonist enters an elevator. In this scene, when the elevator rises out of view, the shot lingers longer than necessary, creating a suspense that resolves when we see that the mechanism used to lift the elevator is an obese man who serves as a counterweight. Once the man arrives at his destination within the building, he exits the elevator and deposits his raincoat and suitcase in a woman-locker.

After the comically witty scenes in which he enters the building, the camera becomes more circumspect, centering on the phlegmatic walking of the character. Finally, he halts and, with the same economy of movement, he lays himself out prone in front of a door in order to carry out his own function as a man-doormat. Up to this point, the idea of the human-object which each scene reinforces has been produced in otherness, so that the viewer has been able to enjoy the spectacle from the exterior. However, the transformation of the protagonist into an object transfers the reification to the spectator. The sequence in which the other character approaches and cleans his shoes on the protagonist's back conveys the humiliation of the man-doormat, who is literally 'walked all over' by the other man. The sequence ends with a stoic sigh from the protagonist, prone on the floor with smears of dirt from the other man's shoes visible on his back.

It should be noted that the work chosen for the protagonist is the most humiliating of all. The rest of the human objects that appear carrying out their tasks initially convey estrangement or alienation and later comic absurdity. However, the identification of the protagonist's work makes the spectator *feel like a doormat*. In this way, the idea of the use of people by people is accessed from the perspective of the victim, positioning this point of view as the starting point for the viewers' interpretation.

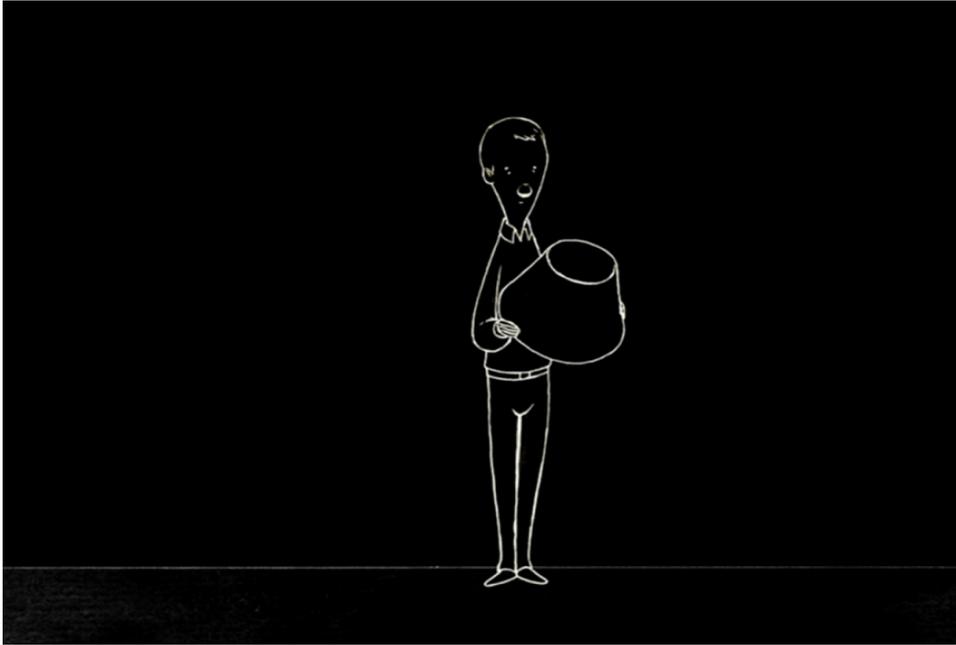


Image 2. Consciousness as prerequisite for change.

At the end of the film's credits, the man-lamp from the title-scene reappears, removes the lampshade from his head, contemplates it for a moment, and then throws it angrily to the ground and leaves. According to Deleuze (1989), in observing another person we discover references to our own concerns.

even though this business necessarily expresses social contradictions and problems, or directly suffers their effects. The private element can thus become the place of a becoming conscious, in so far as it goes back to root causes, or reveals the 'object' that it expresses. (Deleuze, 1989: 218)

After this scene, we do not know what next step the short's protagonist might take. The ending is open, but that which unequivocally emerges from the images is the message that consciousness of one's situation is what is necessary for liberation from the state of alienation.

4. Conclusions

The impact of the Argentinian crisis of 2001 awakes in certain animators the sense of the necessity of creating works with didactic value that serve as tools for social change. As Pablo Rodríguez Jáuregui says in an interview with *La Capital* in December 2001,

Hay que intentar que las producciones articulen de alguna manera con la realidad para que no sean algo decorativo o un divertimento estético, sino que cumpla alguna función social en un momento crítico del país. Hablo por mí, pero creo que hay que intentar hacer un cine militante aplicado a los dibujos animados. De cualquier manera no nos vamos a hacer ricos pero tenemos trabajar para que trascienda al prestigio personal. (Rodríguez Jáuregui, 2001)

El empleo is an example of how the experience of the crisis resonates in the artist's choice of themes and objectives, as it casts a critical eye on the capitalist model of relations of production with the aim of denaturalizing them. The film allegorically shows the exploitation of human beings by other human beings. The images invite us to reflect on the status of work in capitalist society, in a course that runs from the protagonist to the viewer. However, the story does not offer this indictment conclusively; it simply suggests it, so that the audience must arrive at this sentiment for itself. In this way *El empleo* differentiates itself from the Nuevo Cine Argentino, which is characterized by its avoidance of allegorical narratives (Aguilar, 2006; Page, 2009).

Santiago Grasso transposes the discourse of critique into filmic narrative: the moving images are utilized with critical and dialectical ends. All of the short's action is subordinated to the transmission of abstract concepts found imbricated in the phenomenological substrate of the characters' actions. This staging of concepts is attuned to the intellectual cinema of Sergei Eisenstein, where visual relations arise which compel the viewer to abstraction and generalization: "something like a Marxian version of Freudian free association" (Jameson, 2009: 113). The soviet director's project was to create film which conveyed in an associative mode the theses of Karl Marx in *Das Kapital*, through the actions developing during "a day in a man's life" (Eisenstein et al., 1976: 7). *El empleo* undertakes a related project, but uses the span of a man's working day to address a theme present in Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, the matter of alienated labor.

In *El empleo*, the associations are not produced between consecutive scenes, as happens in intellectual montage, but rather, meaning is produced within the same scene. In effect, the short illustrates the quotidian pathos of the human beings through an allegory that denaturalizes the exploitation and the alienating character that underlie the capitalist system of production. Visually, the short represents characters with the work they perform, establishing a metonymic relation between the worker and the work, between the human subject and its objective labor. The distinct characters that cross paths with the protagonist perform their tasks as though they were objects and are used as such; they are objectified. This recurring figure takes its full meaning with the final scene, in which it is revealed that the protagonist is one more link in the system of production. The identification of the spectator with the main character demands a reading in first-person, which brings us to the reflection that we too form a part of the system. In this way, the state of alienation emerges through the images, which show from a denaturalized perspective the objectification of the human being and its mercantile use in the service of the economy.

During the film, the relations of production are assumed with resignation, as something inexorable, unquestionable, and outside all doubt, independently of any consideration of how degrading or hard labor may become. As Grimson points out, the phantom of economic devastation and the sensation that the situation could always be worse generate paralysis and conservatism in Argentinian society, and contribute to the development of “la capacidad de regular los límites de las prácticas, de las expectativas y de los deseos” (2004: 192). Therefore, it is in these fears that we experience the manifestation of the limits of the social superstructure determined by the economic base (Williams, 1997).

In this sense, the discourse of the film connects with what we encounter in contempo-rary Argentinian film, which offers a cynical perspective on the possibility of the subver-sion of market control or the reestablishment of collective action (Page, 2009). Additionally, it reflects, in the words of Maristella Svampa, the process of decollectivization of Argentinian workers at the root of the neoliberal decade: “la pérdida de aquellos soportes colectivos que configuraban la identidad del sujeto (sobre todo, referidos al mundo del trabajo y la pertenencia social) y, por consiguiente, a la entrada a un periodo de ‘individualización’ de lo social” (Svampa and Pereira, 2004: 3).

In contrast to work of the NCA, *El empleo* presents reflection as a tool for change, since consciousness permits the the denaturalization of objectification of labor relations. The final scene shows how the resignation that emanates from the characters transforms into anger. The reflection provokes a fissure in the naturalization of the process, through which we can glimpse the exploitation of humans by humans. Such an admonitory revelation leads to anger, and anger leads to action. In this way a correlation between the private and the political is produced, a realization of the idea of Gramsci (1975) that in order to end the consensual reproduction of economic relations between humans, it is first necessary to acknowledge our passive participation in the process. As Stéphane Hessel expresses in *Engagez-Vous! (Time for Outrage!)*, (2011), indifference must be defeated if we are not to lose the faculty of indignation and the commitment to act, essential and indispensable components of being human.

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