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THEATRICAL IMPRINTS IN CONTEMPORARY ARGENTINE CINEMA: THREE MODALITIES OF ASSIMILATION

Improntas teatrales en el cine argentino contemporáneo: tres modalidades de asimilación

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ABSTRACT

At the beginning of the new century, Argentine cinema added to its repertoire topics and narrative and expressive procedures from the theater of the previous decade. Among the different modalities of assimilation, we can distinguish in the first place the films made by stage directors and actors that evidenced the formal concerns and the inquiries of language that came from their theatrical work. In the second place, we find films of the *mise-en-scène* and «minimal situations» in which there is a reevaluation of the image above the actions that take place inside, through the predominant use of stylistic resources of clear theatrical imprint such as the long take and the depth of field. Finally, films with episodic structures that refer to the division into acts of the theatrical works. Within this last category, we recognize two variants of the structure: films whose episodes have plots that are independent from each other and those whose episodes are connected by the same characters and by the same plot.

Key words: cinema-theater-intermediality-narrative- film analysis

RESUMEN

A comienzos del nuevo siglo el cine argentino traslada a su repertorio tópicos y procedimientos narrativos y expresivos provenientes de la práctica escénica de la década anterior. Entre las diversas modalidades de asimilación se distinguen, primero, aquellos films realizados por directores y actores teatrales en los que se evidencian las indagaciones de lenguaje y preocupaciones formales que proceden de su labor escénica. En segundo lugar se destacan los films de la «puesta en escena» y situaciones mínimas en los cuales hay una revaloración de la imagen por encima de las acciones que se desarrollan en su interior, a través del empleo predominante de recursos estilísticos de clara impronta teatral como el plano secuencia y la profundidad de campo. Y por último, sobresalen aquellos films de estructuras episódicas que remiten a la división en actos de las obras teatrales. Dentro de esta categoría reconocemos a su vez dos variantes de dicha estructura: films cuyos episodios son argumentalmente independientes entre sí y films cuyos episodios están conectados por los mismos personajes y por una misma trama.

Palabras clave: cine-teatro-intermedialidad-narración-análisis filmico

1. INTRODUCTION

The historical relationship between theater and cinema has been approached by many studies that focused on following the traces of that connection from the origin of cinema to the present days: from the coexistence with formulas from different areas —such as variety theater, circus and prestidigitation— to its institutionalization and establishment as an autonomous art, separated from the rest, to stage adaptation as a form of reflection of the cinematographic discourse about itself. The initial thematic subordination of cinema to theater, the acceptance of its techniques and expressive resources before those which had an exclusive cinematographic nature, the use of theater cast and the search for legitimacy through the adaptation of classical works to attract a cultured audience laid the foundations of a relationship which, to a greater or lesser extent, is still in force nowadays. Pérez Bowie (2004), when referring to the relationship that theater and cinema have established throughout history, proposes the term “intermedial dialogue” to refer specifically to the bidirectional processes of inter-influence between both media, a permanent relationship which was more or less intense in different stages.

If we focus on contemporary Argentine cinema, we may identify the productivity and exchange of themes, narrative structures and expressive elements from the theater of the 90s, particularly from the theater of situation made by Rafael Spregelburd and defined by him as:

a form of writing —or reading— theater that does not privilege the discursive resources in which literature or dramatic fables transmit their contents, but an experience in which a situation, a simple game of conventions that spans over a specific amount of time, constructs meanings which collide with the common sense of the community who watches them (Spregelburd, 2005, p. 282).

My goal is to postulate that the characteristics of this theater maintain a close connection with postdramatic theater (Hans-Thies Lehmann, 2010) and, at the same time, contain the seeds of what happened with Argentine cinema at the beginning of the new century, and which I propose calling “cinema of situation”¹ by establishing a series of regular elements shared by both cultural manifestations (Soria, 2015). The characteristics of postdramatic theater describe and let us reflect about the scenic practices of the 90s, while at the same time make it possible to extrapolate them to the field of cinema and the reference to a postdramatic cinema. Lehmann defines this as an anti-Aristotelian theater that refuses to express a univocal meaning related with a previous referent. On the contrary, it tries to restore the materiality of the strictly scenic language and banish the plot to a secondary position. The notion of “representation” interpreted as an imitation of life is now replaced by that of “presentation”, because this theater “erases the borders between what is real and what is fictional and, of course, it does not present itself as a doppelganger or a mirror, but as an equivalent of life itself” (Lehmann, 2012: unpagged).

In this theater, dialogues are no longer realistic, actions are characterized by their lack of definition and characters are not presented as identifiable beings with a psychological profile. On the other

¹ With the concept of “cinema of situation”, I refer, first of all, to a film text corpus which privileges a discourse construction focused on the composition of the pro-film elements. Secondly, I suggest an emphasis on the *mise en scène* based on expressive elements such as the long take, the depth of field and the immobility of the camera, whose implementation is not necessarily due to the laws of a narrative logic but merely to a succession of situations, mainly meant to show the affective evolution over time of a series of characters.

hand, and regarding the possibility to think about a post-dramatic theater in Argentina, Karina Mauro (2013) analyzes the productivity of the concept in the theatrical scene of Buenos Aires from the decade of the 90s. This researcher examines the theater as a directorial practice, insofar as the responsibility to provide a scene statement belongs to the director, which is highlighted by the evidence of the marks of enunciation, which had disappeared completely from modern drama. This article is crucial because it corroborates the performance of this concept by studying the film corpus that I present below, but also because it makes it possible to extrapolate it to the sphere of cinema aesthetics and to set out the possibility that a post-dramatic cinema may indeed exist. In general terms, Mauro claims that «the post-dramatic scene is the result or the testimony of a crisis in representation and, in theatrical terms, of the abandonment of Aristotelian mimesis» (2013, p. 672). At the same time, this researcher defines two general aspects of post-dramatic plays which are essential for an analysis of films, such as «the problematic character of the dramatic text and the fragmentary treatment of the components which were once part of Aristotelian units» (p. 675). That is, post-dramatic theater —and its cinema counterpart— breaks down the triad of place-action-time by proposing fragmentary spaces, actions that lack rational motivation and a temporality based on the pacing of the scene (Mauro, 2013), that consists on the «reiteration of movements or attitudes that are not significant by themselves, but which provide a rhythm to the scene through their constant or accelerated repetition» (p. 676). This is a nodal procedure that is repeated systematically in the film text that we analyze in our study.

Consequently, I am trying to establish and delimit the three ways in which theater has been assimilated by cinema in the new century. This assimilation is similar to the reformulation of the «theory of waves» presented by Bill Nichols (2007). This theory makes it possible to understand «how certain elements of style or structure can remain alive over time and lead to complex, syncretic or hybrid results» (Nichols, 2007, p. 20). Based on this idea, I want to identify the common features shared by both languages, because they are scattered around the corpus that I structured according to similar characteristics and different forms of appropriation:

- 1) a specific conception of communication (disintegration of language and loss of the referential function, self-referencing), 2) fragmentation and episodic narrations, lack of logical causality, privilege of the image and the experience over narration, implausible plots, 3) characters that are split and diluted, opaque motivations, 4) multiplication of meanings (Soria, 2015, p. 45).

These «cardinal rules» that are common to theater and cinema are essentially integrated (both at a formal and a narrative level) with the following modalities of assimilation² that I present here:

- 1) Films made by theater directors and actors which show an interest in formal language and concerns that come from their work in theater —*Todo juntos* (2002, Federico León), *Extraño* (2003) and *Cuatro mujeres descalzas* (2004, Santiago Loza).

² Although my objective with this study is to analyze the assimilation of theater by cinema, it is possible to observe an inversion of the influences that affect the cinema procedures on the contemporary theater scene. For example, and in line with the directors mentioned in this article, Federico León and Rafael Spregelburd, in their theatrical productions there is a deliberate and conscious use of audiovisual resources, such as the projection of recordings and the manipulation of time and space. Some examples are the works that are part of the *Heptalogy of Hieronymus Bosch*, particularly Spregelburd's *La paranoia* (2007) and León's *Yo en el futuro* (2009).

- 2) Films of «mise en scène» and minimal situations in which there is a revaluation of the image above the actions that take place inside, and that are pushed into the background —*Sábado* (2001, Juan Villegas), *Incómodos* (2008, Esteban Menis), *Ocio* (2010, Alejandro Lingenti & Juan Villegas).
- 3) Films with episodic structures that refer to the division into acts of the theatrical works. Within this last category, we recognize two variants of the episodic structure: a) films whose episodes have plots that are independent from each other —*A propósito de Buenos Aires* (2006, AA.VV.), *Luego* (2008, Carolina Gliksberg), *Vidrios* (2013, Ignacio Bollini & Federico Luis Tachella) —; and b) films whose episodes are connected by the same characters and by the same plot —*Castro* (2009, Alejo Moguillansky), *Todos mienten* (2009, Matías Piñeiro), *El turno nocturno* (2011, Matías Rispau).

Each of these films integrate from different approaches the procedures that come from theater with those that are characteristic of cinema, and that interaction provides common patterns that can be classified into the modalities that we have described and make it possible to outline one of the ways in which contemporary Argentine cinema presents itself. The films that make up those modalities may in turn be associated with the notion of “anomalous cinema” proposed by Gonzalo Aguilar, a cinema that does not necessarily fight the status quo, but which is created in its margins, which creates new routes to present itself and relocates cinema within the world of art by establishing connections and vanishing points (Aguilar, 2010, p. 241).

I will now outline the features of each of these films based on the elements with which they can be analyzed as cinema of situation or post-dramatic cinema, and which are carriers of those theatrical imprints that were discussed above. I will particularly focus on the analysis of the narrative and expressive procedures, the construction of time and space, the system of characters and the poetics of the actors in the films in order to establish the characteristics they share as well as the specific singularities with which they can be inscribed in each modality.

1) FILMS MADE BY THEATER DIRECTORS. In this first modality I include films created by playwrights and theater directors which show traces of their theatrical procedures.

TODO JUNTOS

This film is conceived from its first stages as a product that will be created with theatrical procedures. Federico León explains it in *Registros...*, where he reflects about his intentions to create a movie based on theatrical conventions, from the process of construction to the use of spaces, characters and acting. The theme that pervades *Todo juntos* is the last stage of a couple who are in the middle of a separation process but who cannot put an end to their relationship. Federico León and Jimena Anganuzzi are virtually the only characters in the film, and they wander around different public spaces like bars, call shop booths and taxis. In the words of the director: «We cannot know what conflict is there, or why they are separating. The movie has already started in every sense. That is similar to my theater plays: the narration shows the relationship between the characters over a lapse of time, as well as the evolution of those characters» (in García, 2003). Therefore, we do not know why they are breaking up or why they have such a hard time doing it. We are mere spectators in a constant coming and going of the couple, who remain at the end exactly as they were at the beginning: having coffee with an impassive attitude. The use of theatrical conventions and the fiction presented in *Todo juntos* is complemented with the autobiographical aspects of the story: Federico León and Jimena Anganuzzi were a couple outside the fictional universe and, just like in the film, they were going through a separation process.

This means that the film puts the personal life of the director on the stage and, at the same time, shows his construction process by unveiling the director-actress relationship:

As with all my works, I want the work to reveal how it was made. I could also say that the movie was the relationship between a director and an actress. I asked her to do certain things, as if she was being exposed and I was ordering her about. That was the process. The camera was recording and when I was acting I asked her to do things. This means that I directed her while I was inside the movie, as if that was the dynamics of that relationship between us (in Fontana, 2005, p. 11).

In rhetorical terms, the film starts with a scene in the countryside in which Federico León slaughters a pig. The quality of the image suggests that it is a home movie, and this is confirmed when the image freezes and is framed by a TV set. We can immediately hear the phone ringing, and that is the start of the comings and goings and the agreements and disagreements between Federico and Juana, who are constantly interrupted by phone calls from relatives and friends. The recurrence of close-up shots that last for a long time and show the faces of the main characters; their gaze, which is focused outside the field of the camera; and the silence that invades the image create an oppressive atmosphere in which the audience can feel an increasing uneasiness. Paradoxically, their meetings and the constant calls manage to achieve a complete lack of communication and a total disagreement. All these features, combined with the composition of the shots and their relation with the idea of cinema of situation, leads to a succession of situations that the characters experience in *Todo juntos* and that always shows them under the same light: as indecisive and exhausted characters in an unresolved status of uncertainty which turns the film into a circular narration. The director defines his directorial debut as follows: «*Todo juntos* is the story of a state, of the evolution of the characters through the world of what is already finished» (in Blejman, 2003). That is, it shows a single state which is unchanging but which becomes increasingly tedious due to the inexorable passing of time.

Apart from applying the same creative process for his theater plays and his first film —as well as similar expressive and narrative resources—, the director admits that over the last years a close relationship has emerged between cinema and independent theater.

Independent cinema started to pay attention to theater productions, and it «stole», as it were, different forms of production from independent theater and assimilated them for itself. It did the same with the forms of exhibition. (...) Theater always admired cinema, but cinema had a bit of a phobia about theater. Some film directors were a little bit scared of that situation in which they were there with actors in a live performance. Cinema started to approach theater approximately 10 years ago. That encounter was very good; both of them benefited from it (in Maxwell, 2013).

This presence of theater in cinema and the connection between them is also expressed by Gonzalo Aguilar (2007) when he refers to León's film as follows: «The poetry (or the anti-poetry if we prefer, which is the contemporary mode for poetry) is the bridge between the cinema and the theater, a bridge which is at the same time a hiatus or a gap» (Aguilar, 2007, p. 30). This poetry, according to this researcher, emerges from the moment in which cinema discovered the places in which people just pass through, like bars or the call shop in which language circulates, «a deeply poetic language, if we

define poetry as an enchanting rhythm that has lost its lyrical motivation» (p. 20). This is, ultimately, a rotund recognition by the filmmaker and the specialized researchers of the relationship between both artistic manifestations. The procedures used and the combinatory operations that emerge from that association turn *Todo juntos* into a paradigmatic example of this first modality.

EXTRAÑO

This film is the directorial debut of Santiago Loza, playwright and theater director with a lot of theater productions under his belt at the time of the film premiere.

Axel, the main character in *Extraño*, played by Julio Chávez, is a retired surgeon. He is a man of few words and a distant person with an impenetrable personality and evolution throughout the film. From the beginning, we can see him unperturbed and indifferent to what happens around him. He responds without uttering a sound, through body and facial gestures (raising his shoulders, his hands and eyebrows, tilting his head or giving the slightest hint of a smile). If he ever gives a verbal answer, he does it with sharp and final monosyllables: «Yeah, right». At the beginning of the film, Axel returns the key to his apartment and goes to live with his sister and her children. In this initial sequence, we obtain the scarce information that the film will give us about its main character: he is a (young) surgeon who no longer practices medicine—we do not know why—and he is also not interested in coming back to the labor market. In addition, the film establishes at the beginning the way in which it will portray this character: with a fixed camera over him and very few reverse shots of his interlocutors. In most of the following sequences there is a prevalence of immobility, with few variations in the perspectives within the shots and with the use of interior scenes. Through these resources, the universe created in the film is populated by solitary individuals who lead an impassible life. Axel, rather than speaking, listens to those around him: his sister, who separated from her partner and is in charge of two boys; Erica, a pregnant woman who has been living with him for a very short time; and the mother of a friend who committed suicide, who gives him a box with her possessions. These events, which should a priori involve some transcendence and dramatism (abandoning a career, being a single mother or going through the suicide of a friend), are here devoid of any emotion and do not have or claim any kind of explanation instead.

If we focus on the recognition of an authorial imprint and the identification of the traces of Loza's theatricality, we can identify in *Extraño* the construction of characters with similar features to those in his previous fictional works. A voice off-screen that expresses what Alex is thinking makes his isolation from his environment explicit: «There is a time that does not belong to me, neither in the future, nor in the past. A time which I can never reach». This feeling of the main character is shared by other characters who appear in the dramatic poetic production of Loza, whom Jorge Dubatti describes as follows: «The characters seem to be locked within their world, in a minimalist universe with fragmentary and daily perceptions (...). They are reflective as well as inactive, witnesses of an alien world in which they do not find their own place» (Loza, 2014, p. 10). However, we must mention an enormous difference between his films and his theater productions: while the main characters in *Extraño* and in *Cuatro mujeres descalzas*—and we might include here as well the main characters in *La invención de la carne* (2009)—have almost no lines and are mainly characterized through their presence and corporeality, his theater characters³ do nothing but talk. Andrés Gallina, in his «Preliminary study» of *Textos reunidos*, claims that the theater of Loza is a «theater of voices» and that his characters want to «translate and reassert their experience» (Loza, 2014, p. 17). On the other hand, the characters in the

³ We refer here to the characters in the monologues of *Todo verde*, *La mujer puerca* and *Asco*, among others.

films move through that experience without the need to reflect about it or comment on it, which underscores the possibility that the narration is shaped by the body of the actor with their gestures and silences without the need to use words.

As a contrast to the interior scenes in the film, there are fixed images —as if they were still-lives— or tracking shots of different sites of the city as a transition. All of them are unknown places that reinforce the lack of any kind of reference, which in turn intensifies the feeling of alienation of the main character. These images are empty shots of the city and of nature which in turn express the passing of time and the concept of waiting.

Santiago Loza confesses in an interview that he is interested in shadows —the intermediate area between the body and the background— and in temporality, the time «between» what was after and what comes later, «the trips in the middle that do not have a starting point or a destination» (p. 39). This interstice is the hidden form underlying our corpus, and from a visual perspective, it consists in showing what remains there, undressing the space, not to highlight or to give importance to the figure, but to reveal the elements that escape what can be seen, that cannot be apprehended with our sight but which are clearly part of those cracks like a shadow. In the language level there is a prevalence of a tension between what is said and what is not said or, precisely, the things that language cannot name. Precisely, when referring to *Extraño*, Loza explains that «the characters cannot define the core of their pain, they chase something that they do not know how to take hold of» (in Jacobs, 2007, p. 39).

CUATRO MUJERES DESCALZAS

This film, by the same director, represents the cinematographic debut of the theater actress María Onetto, who, after this first foray into cinema would not stop appearing in both media. The characters here are four women: Verónica, Bárbara, Marta and Sandra. They all share their loneliness, their sadness, their emptiness and their fear. They are unemployed and do not feel the need to laugh. In the course of *Cuatro mujeres descalzas*, the main characters establish different bonds and we get access, gradually and partially, to their lives: Verónica is leaving her apartment because she cannot afford the rent and she must return to her parents' house. She spends her days in an interior space, surrounded by packed boxes and plastic curtains that fog her image. Her only contact with the outside world is a phone and her friend Bárbara, who is going through economic difficulties and decides to rent out one empty room in her house to her friend Sandra, a married and pregnant woman who does not know whether to bring a son «to a world that I would not be able to explain to him»: Marta, for her part, is a friend of Bárbara and arrives in Buenos Aires from the interior of the country, looking for a job.

The theme of sadness fills the film, from the body language and the gestures of the characters to the dialogues they have: «Do I look happy or sad?», asks Bárbara to each of them. «When I am happy I start worrying because I wonder whether I am going crazy», says Bárbara. The question about how she «looks» shows an attitude which is determined by or concerned about the look of others, and it conveys the need that the characters feel to leave that introspective and claustrophobic aura that defines them⁴. These dialogues that suggest an exteriorization of feelings and emotion and that show the need to express them are sometimes presented as enigmatic, without a logic between the question and the answer, and this fact highlights the difficulty that the main characters have to understand them.

⁴ This restlessness and the need for the look of others are repeated in a later film of the director. In *La invención de la carne*, out of the apparent apathy and indifference of the characters, the following conversation emerges: «Him: What will they think of us? What will the people who are looking at us think?; Her: Do you care?; Him: About what?; Her: About what they think; Him: I don't know.»

In this search for an understanding of the meaning of their own existence, these four women move through dark, closed and empty spaces; and the silence that accompanies their «being in the world» is mainly interrupted by reflections around their fears, their worries and their failures with love. The contrived nature of the dialogues, combined with the representation of spaces, give the film a completely theatrical imprint which is formally reinforced through the almost complete predominance of a fixed camera, with long takes in interior spaces and a lack of establishing shots. As a counterpoint, and scattered along *Cuatro mujeres descalzas*, there are short, fragmented images of faces, bodies and spaces through close-ups and extreme close-ups. The film movement, as in the case of *Extraño*, generally appears in the form of horizontal tracking shots of streets of the city or highways that mark the transition between scenes.

With regard to the timeline proposed by the film, the management of time swings between two common elements in our corpus: on the one hand we find a complete match between the time of the story and the time of the narration, through the use of long takes that we mentioned above; on the other hand, we are shown an absolutely fragmented story in which ellipsis is the main resource to join the different shots. In the first case, the temporality of the action that takes place in the film matches that of the reality that is portrayed, «without the presence of any dynamic alteration, ellipsis or rhythm transformation due to the intervention of editors». (Bettetini, 1984, p. 37). Bettetini points out that «we find here a real reproduction, a real passive record of real time that can be retrieved in its entirety due to the way in which it is structured whenever it is shown on the screen» (p. 38). In the second case, on the contrary, the time of action is different from the time of the reality which is represented due to the presence of dynamic alterations, elliptic resources or «rhythmic transformations caused by editing procedures» (p. 38). The combination of both temporalities is a recurring element in the film corpus analyzed in this article, and it is interesting to highlight that, although there may be a predominance of procedures that remind us of the theater scene, such as the long take and the depth of field, they interact with the fragmentary nature of the cinematographic device and its capacity to underscore the relevance of some specific details. It is interesting to underline the different ways in which the essential writing procedures of each artistic modality can interact in this analysis of the different film textures that are included. According to Jacques Aumont (2013) in *El cine y la puesta en escena, découpage* is the representation of the difference between cinema and theater, and it is the culmination of the invention of the cinematographic art. Without it, «the mise en scène of cinema would be doomed to be forever the copy of the mise en scène of theater» (2013, p. 48).

This first modality proves the effectiveness of the concept of post-dramatic cinema, and bears witness to its theater background, insofar as it carries some of its main characteristics, such as digression and narrative lack of definition, the lack of explanations and the opaque motives, together with the reestablishment of the materiality of language.

Beyond the esthetic singularities of these playwrights, they share a similar proposal with regard to acting in their productions. We believe that the position of actors planned for the theater scene migrates towards cinema thanks to those same actors. However, and beyond the perception of similar acting poetics, we believe that it is necessary to consider the notion of acting situation as presented by Karina Mauro (2015), who describes it as «the spatial and temporal context in which the subject acts as an actor». This means that the acting situation is modified according to different aesthetic languages⁵ and is different, according to the researcher, from daily activities, because it is created for

⁵ A direct relationship between actor and spectator in the case of theater; a relationship mediated by the cinematographic device in the case of cinema.

others to watch. The characteristics that we can observe from the acting situation in the different modalities of the corpus are mainly the lack of representation, the presentation of actions by the actor which are modified depending on the elements of the *mise en scène* and the contact with other actors—that is, the permeability to everything that happens during the acting situation—the distance between the actor and the character and the permanent shift from the awareness and the lack of awareness of being acting. In the cases of *Extraño* and *Cuatro mujeres descalzas*, although the actors perform their actions in the name of the characters they represent and they present minimal attributes to describe them, there is an unbridgeable distance between the actor and the character because what is shown is systematically the artifice of a situation of cinematographic acting: due to the way in which they are captured by the camera, to the relationship with the rest of the characters, and to the dialogues. This distance is also applied to the identification process of the viewer, who finds it impossible to feel empathy towards the characters. *Todo juntos* applies the same process of acting construction than the practice in theater. The peculiarity or exceptionality of this film lies in its nature as an autobiographic work that involves again a tension between what is fictional and what is real and, at the same time, a complete identification between the actor and the character. The love relationship of the two main characters, which is in its final stage, is associated to a similar situation in the lives of director Federico León and actress Jimena Anganuzzi, which creates a double link with regard to the actions of the actors: a love relationship in its final stage both in real life and in the fiction or the acting situation; a director-actress relationship in real life (León directs Anganuzzi in the film at the same time that they act).

2) FILMS OF «MISE EN SCÈNE» AND MINIMAL SITUATIONS.

In this modality there is a predominance of the *mise en scène* based on the relevance of the movement of actors and the layout of the pro-filmic elements within the shot. The plot occupies a secondary position and the situations that the characters go through are minimal. The emphasis on the *mise en scène* is associated with the return of the image mentioned by Aumont (2013) when talking about auteur cinema. According to this theoretician, the return of the interest for images also matches the return of «an apparent theatricality that must be revealed in a very cinematographic way» (p. 113). In the films included in this modality we will witness the preeminence of segments where nothing happens and films with a lack of narrative climax, and there is where we can find the fullest expression of what I refer to as «cinema of situation».

SÁBADO

The plot in the directorial debut of Juan Villegas focuses on a Saturday in the life of three couples. The film begins *in medias res*, and the first scene takes us inside a car in which a couple is having an offhand conversation. Afterwards, there is a succession of stories about the three couples which are intertwined without a break and simultaneously. The three stories seem to cross each other randomly (in a police precinct, in a hair salon, on the street), and the moments with the strongest conflicts are avoided: the repeated car crashes are received calmly and naturally; and having sex with a friend's boyfriend does not represent any problem. *Sábado* is created through a series of trivial situations that do not follow the classic narrative development of exposition-climax-denouement. On the contrary, these scenes are connected by the random nature of meetings and dialogues. With regard to the emphasis on the *mise en scène* in this type of films, Rafael Filipelli (2001) says, in *El Amante*, that Villegas highlights the importance of narration by maintaining unity in the form and the representation of the cinematographic space, which he achieves through jump cut editing within the scene. According to

this director and cinema critic, it is precisely in interior scenes where the highest mobility is achieved thanks to the constant reframing.

The omission of scenes such as the accidents and the sex encounters that I mentioned above is justified by the director when he claims that the intention behind the film is to «not put emphasis on anything» (Bernini et al., 2003, p.161). When he remembers the process of construction of the film, Villegas admits that at the beginning he did not have a complete story but daily situations which he wove together by maintaining a time reference: the span of a day. With regard to the construction of characters, he says: «it did not make any sense to work on the psychology of the situations, although sometimes actors demand something along those lines. I preferred to work, not on psychology, but on rhythm, speed, and pauses» (Bernini, 2003, p. 158). Finally, the filmmaker reveals that his films talk about what happens to the characters, or rather, about characters who do not say what is happening to them, because according to the director, «lots of things are happening to them (...). These characters are suffering» (Bernini et al., 2003, p. 157).

The conversations between the characters are utterly trivial and repetitive. As we will see in this film and in those from other modalities, there is a radicalization of the use of daily speech, with language that lacks its usual intonation, with repetition and codes and a completely uniform tone. In the dialogues of *Sábado*, for example, the characters talk a lot without saying anything, about trivial and insignificant things. Agustín Campero points out that, like Rejtman, «Villegas shares an obsession for dialogues, their metrics, their timing and the absence of unnecessary tones. He establishes a dictatorship of *mise en scène* and formal unity» (2008, p. 67). In the final scene of the film, when Camila and Leopoldo are in the car, the repetitive conversation becomes exasperating:

Leopoldo (driving): Is it this way?
 Camila (in the front passenger seat): No.
 L: No?
 C: Yes, it is this way.
 L: Yes or no?
 C: Yes or no what?
 L: Is it this way, yes or no?
 C: No, keep driving
 L: But how long is it going to be?
 C: To do what?
 L: To get there.
 C: I don't know.
 L: Are you lost?
 C: No.
 L: Are you sure?
 C: Yes.
 L: Do you want a light?
 C: No.
 L: It's back there.
 C: What's up with you?
 L: Why?
 C: No reason.
 L: Do you want me to stop talking? Why don't you say so?
 C: Say what?
 L: That you want me to stop talking.

At the end, this lack of representation is shown in its extreme with Gastón Pauls starring as himself and correcting the pronunciation of his surname. In this case, there is a tension between fiction and reality in which the actual actor plays a version of himself in a fictional universe.

INCÓMODOS

Nicolás, Abril and Alfred travel to Miramar in the middle of the winter and for different reasons. Nicolás wants to scatter the ashes of his late grandfather; Abril wants to see her family; and Alfred wants to participate in a dancing contest. The presentation of each of the characters takes place before the initial credits, where we see them faced with different situations of abandonment: Nicolás has been abandoned by his girlfriend, Paula; Alfred is expelled from the dance group with whom he wanted to perform in the competition; and Abril, a shy and solitary character, has not seen her family for some years. After the credits, a *road movie* starts against the backdrop of the city of Miramar during the low season, a coastal city in which each of the main characters wants to give some meaning to this trip.

From a visual perspective, *Incómodos* is constructed through fixed and centered shots, most of them with a symmetrical layout. There is a total absence of cinematographic artifice in which the camera takes the point of view of the audience, particularly in the scenes in which the characters direct their thoughts and their looks to it. At the same time, there is a marked theatrical imprint in these scenes, because at first the shot is fixed and it shows an empty scene, and the character enters through one side until he comes to the center of the image. Then the character delivers their speech facing the camera and leaves the scene again. The centered image and the symmetrical layout are the most commonly used devices used by Esteban Menis in this film, both for the description of interior and exterior spaces and for the placement of actors within the shot. Also, there is a deliberate use of primary colors (blue, red and yellow) in the clothes of the characters, and these colors are striking because they provide a suggestive contrast with their dull state of mind and their uncomfortableness, and with the pale tones of a resort city in winter during the low season.

With regard to the dialogues, in *Incómodos* the language is verbose, automatic and compulsive, and at times it prevents any possibility of an interlocution. The night in which Nicolás and Abril meet, she introduces herself in a way that borders on a journalistic report:

My job is directing the operations of the toll stations and ensuring that the applicable charges are received quickly, efficiently and with the minimal possible interruption of car traffic. Since the highway was opened in 1994, the number of drivers who have chosen this payment modality has increased at a steady rate. Currently we have had over 110,000 customers and we keep growing.

This type of speech is present throughout the entire film, as if the objective was to portray the automatization and the artificiality of the words that prevent any type of communication and understanding between the characters. Finally, and as in the case of Axel in *Extraño*, Alfredo states: «I always have that feeling that I am outside of everything that's going on».

The characters are joined by an unknown link that is never explicitly mentioned; they share their loneliness, their unhappiness and a trip to Miramar —during the low season— which takes place along most of the film. As the title suggests —*Incómodos* means “awkward” in Spanish—, the entire

film is uncomfortable and weird: from the trivial conversations to the deeper ones that have to do with happiness. The characters, however, are aware of their sorrow but cannot and do not want to do anything about it. The delayed reaction of the characters to external stimuli is striking. There is some sort of *décalage* in the conversations in which their replies to each other take some seconds to arrive, which destroys any kind of fluidity in the dialogues and reinforces the isolation of the characters. They are, in most cases, and as Gonzalo Aguilar explains in *Otros Mundos*, «amnesic characters, real zombies that come from nowhere and go to nowhere, and who are obsessed with an undecipherable map» (Aguilar, 2006, p. 30).

The uneasiness shown by most of the characters in these films finds its expression in the trip as a trigger for their stories. And journeys represent one of the characteristic features mentioned by Zygmunt Bauman (2002) when analyzing the current era, because there are no longer fixed and predetermined places in which we can «become rooted», and if they exist, they are fragile and vanish before any attempt can be made to do so.

Ocio

Based on the book with the same name by Fabián Casas, *Ocio* focuses on the days lived by Andrés (Nahuel Viale) after burying his mother. As the title of this film by Lingenti and Villegas announces — *Ocio* meaning “leisure”, but also “idleness” in Spanish—, the story focuses on the daily life of the main character, in which he often finds himself in situations of complete inactivity: lying on the bed staring at the ceiling, listening to music or reading Camus, watching the fire of a match die out while water boils to make tea, going to a party, eating in silence with his brother and his father, spending time with a friend and smoking marijuana. The slack attitude of this character in this particular case is justified by the mourning process he is going through. He mourns the loss of his mother but also of a stage which is coming to an end: his adolescence. There is not a dramatic progression, but rather a series of situations that shape the plot. Towards the end of the film a moment of tension appears in which the physical integrity of Andrés is threatened: a motorbike gang is waiting for him when he gets home to beat him up because of a debt he had for a motorbike he bought. As in the case of *Sábado*, this scene, which represents a conflict or a threat for the main character, is not represented as such and becomes, oddly enough, just one more anecdote in Andrés’ passive life.

From a rhetorical perspective, the film is constructed through close-ups —mainly in interior locations— and long shots of the exterior locations, like the beginning of a long and empty road in whose meanders we can see, after an instant, three men (Andrés, his brother and his father), who are walking slowly towards the camera. Immediately afterwards, three successive close-ups of the faces of each of them individualize the characters, and the last shot (with the entire group and closing this initial scene) shows them in front of the tomb in the cemetery in which the mother has been buried. From that moment of loss of the maternal figure, the family starts to disintegrate, and each of its members mourn her by themselves and without externalizing it or talking to each other.

I want to refer here to the fact that this film was the target of criticism that announced the crystallization of Argentine cinema and reproached it for its lack of plots and the apathy of its characters. For example, Juan Pablo Russo (2010) published a review called «Los tiempos muertos (o de cómo filmar la abulia)» [Time out (or how to shoot apathy)] in which he says that «*Ocio* is just more of the same. This is a cinema in which the apathy of the characters takes over the story itself and turns the movie into a shipwreck in a sea empty of words and with beautiful images». Moreover, Miguel Frías (2010) describes the work by Lingenti and Villegas as «film with a cold, distant and apathetic atmosphere», and he praises the formal mastery and the acting. I want to underline the expression “beautiful

images” used by Russo and the one Frías employs when he refers to the “formal mastery” of the film, because beyond the criticism on the repetition of the characters, they both confirm the classification of this film into the category of a cinema of the *mise en scène* and minimal situations. These different spaces in which the main character lives and the way in which they are portrayed (the house, his room and the neighborhood) acquire significance when compared to the inaction of the characters and the frailty of the plot.

In *Ocio* dialogue is reduced to its minimal expression, up to a point in which it becomes virtually inexistent. The biggest verbal manifestations come through monologues and are uttered by incidental characters: a friend that tells Andrés a story while they watch TV, or a man who asks him for a cigarette on the street and offers some existential reflections. As I pointed out at the beginning, after burying the mother of the family, the father and the sons go through their mourning stages without having much to say to each other. Silence pervades almost all the scenes, with the exception of the sporadic appearance of music, particularly Argentine rock, either diegetically or extra-diegetically: in the background or to signal a transition. Also, the locations of the film (a cemetery, a hospital and a church) invite to silence as a privileged expressive and symbolic matter. In the words of Agustín Campero, «the works of Villegas are an example of the central ideology of the new cinema which gives more importance to the rigor of the *mise en scène* and which places all other narrative and non-narrative elements which create a film in the background» (Campero, 2008, p. 68).

With regard to the characters that inhabit the fictional works in our corpus, they are unintelligible, and this quality prevents us from knowing them, let alone understanding them. One repeated characteristic is their anonymity: we barely know their names, their age, where they work or what they do for a living. The main characters simply experience daily situations in which they are immerse, without experiencing conflicts or variations in their state of mind throughout the film. They are generally apathetic characters, without enthusiasm, who feel rootless and alienated from their environment, and who do not reveal any kind of aspiration. In every narrative film «characters create causes and show their effects. In the formal system they make things happen and they react to the turns of events» (Bordwell, 2007, p. 63). However, the characters in our corpus are the opposite of that definition. They are generally defined by their passivity, their stillness and the apparent lack of responsibility regarding their own acts. The situations in which they find themselves in seem to happen by chance, and this is the main factor for or the cause of their evolution in the story, either as part of their relationships with other characters or as an element that affects their fates. It is inevitable, given the similarities in the descriptions, to mention here the study on art cinema by David Bordwell (1996). On the one hand, because of his analysis of narration based on scenes that appear around chance encounters; and, on the other hand and with regard to the characters, because they do not want anything and they do not have a goal that moves them; instead, they just walk through them. According to this researcher, the characters «lack clear traits, motives and goals» (1996, p. 207) and the main character is shown as a passive element that moves from one situation to another.

4) FILMS WITH EPISODIC STRUCTURES THAT REFER TO THE DIVISION INTO ACTS OF THE THEATRICAL WORKS.

Within this category we can observe two varieties of episodic structure:

A) FILMS WHOSE EPISODES HAVE PLOTS THAT ARE INDEPENDENT FROM EACH OTHER (*A PROPÓSITO DE BUENOS AIRES, LUEGO, VIDRIOS*).

In these films episodes are not connected to each other through a narrative progression, and each one of them is generally set in different locations and with different characters, although they approach a common theme (the exploration of history and literature, solitude or lack of communication and misunderstanding in interpersonal relations).

In this modality there is a clear separation between the actor and the character or, to be more precise, the character reaches a complete dissolution, since they do not have a name to identify them. In all these cases, we find a radical disappearance of the character. In these films the presence of the actor is relevant as such, which means that the focus is put on them (as carriers of a specific corporeality and gestures and executors of specific physical actions) and on the different fictional situations they find themselves in, either carrying out trivial and everyday activities, or through verbal actions like reading and reciting literary and historical texts, or exploring the scene as a possibility to achieve different emotional states. According to the «imaginary dogma» that Segal sarcastically proposed (2007) with regard to the characteristics of Argentine cinema in the mid-2000 decade, it included minimalist acting or non-acting and distance between characters. Although those principles were established with an ironic tone, this dogma describes a form of acting which is equivalent to what we mention with regard to theater. It ultimately means the disappearance of the character and the recovery of the notion of an actor in its most basic sense, as someone who carries out or performs a specific action. Actors no longer play a character and become themselves in their representation. This is why their corporeality and gestures are placed in the center of the entire acting poetics.

A PROPÓSITO DE BUENOS AIRES

In the middle of the decade of 2000 a group of young directors emerged which were mostly graduates from the Fundación Universidad del Cine (FUC). The appearance of this group of young filmmakers brought with it the arrival of a new group of actors and actresses, most of them from the world of theater and, in some cases, with participation in television soap operas. That was the case for Esteban Lamothe, Esteban Bigliardi, Pilar Gamboa, Romina Paula, Julián Tello, Julia Martínez Rubio, María Villar, Ignacio Rogers or Julián Larquier Tellarini, young actors who appear over and over again in the films produced in the second half of that decade.

A propósito de Buenos Aires (2006, Manuel Ferrari, Alejo Franzetti, Martín Kalina, Cecilia Libster, Francisco Pedemonte, Clara Picasso, Matías Piñeiro, Juan Ronco, Andrea Santamaría, Malena Solarz and Nicolás Zukerfeld) is the business card of these young filmmakers, a collective film ideated, created and produced by students and alumni from the FUC. As in the case of *Historias breves*, we may consider this film as a founding manifesto in which, before embarking in their own individual films, the directors outline the narrative and expressive routes they will explore next: the city as a scenario, dialogues without emphasis and weak actions, a fragmentary structure that includes a succession of images which do not follow a strict casual order, the use of realist procedures —very long shots and location shooting— combined with other resources that promote a systematic alienation —narrative digression and lack of introduction of the characters and the links between them— and, finally, the

allusion to the fields of history, literature, theater and cinema both from a national and a universal perspective. The places explored in the film are Avenida Corrientes and Avenida Rivadavia, the Ecological Reserve, San Martín Theater, the famous patisserie *La Giralda*, the lakes of Palermo, the train station, the cemetery of La Recoleta and the National Library. The main characters go through all these places and build small and very brief stories which are not presented as such, but which show the threads of something underlying which will later on reappear just to disappear again. *A propósito...* constructs a discursive framework with historical and artistic references that are entwined with the present that the main characters inhabit, based on a superposition of readings of historical texts and literary works (Roberto Arlt, Macedonio Fernández) which establishes a dialogue between the past and the present. The intertitles that divide the story do not separate or punctuate the multiple scenes that take part in the film; their placement is completely random and its function is to organize and divide the different fragments. The main characters which appeared at the beginning and seemed to have been left behind reappear and disappear again with no mission other than their mere presence.

A propósito de Buenos Aires is a clear example of post-dramatic cinema or cinema of situation, because it is a «format which, due to its capacity to accumulate factors and to a certain lack of connection between its parts, as well as to its versatility to adopt different genres, is similar to the genre of pastiche (with off-screen voices, acting scenes, dialogues and panning everywhere)» (Gorodischer, 2006). These formal characteristics of accumulation, lack of continuity, variability and pastiche make up a structural morphology which is underlying in the cultural series analyzed in this article.

LUEGO

Directed by Carola Gliksberg, this film was submitted to the eighth BAFICI festival, where it competed in the section “Competencia Argentina”. The concept behind the scenes, the set design, the way in which elements came in and out of the shot and the dialogues of the characters place this film in the most radical extreme of cinema of situation.

From a thematic perspective, it narrates three short stories with different characters: the first one shows a pair of friends who have known each other since childhood —she is in love with him but does not dare to tell him—; the second one takes place in the hours before a couple has to say goodbye to each other; and the third one focuses, on the one hand, on a mother and her two children who are planning a trip to celebrate the graduation of one of the children, and on the other hand, the concealment of a secret which is never revealed. The three storylines are presented consecutively and their *mise en scène* shows a clear theatrical imprint. The framing is always centered and fixed —with the exception of a few short panned shots in which the camera follows the actors in the rare instances in which they move—. Characters are shown on camera, in front of it and captured with a wide shot. Moreover, they sometimes reveal the existence of the recording device by talking to the camera directly.

The three stories are set in empty spaces with neutral backgrounds, and the interiors are only furnished with one element which is used as a reference for spatial orientation: a bed, an armchair, a table with two chairs, a desk or a bathtub. In the cases in which the shot does not show any element, off-screen sounds suggest the location of the action (for example, with noises from the street), or the dialogues between the characters make it possible to guess the place where they are. That is, in this film the physical spaces inhabited by the characters are represented by an off-screen acoustic presence, in the soundtrack rather than in the image.

From a rhetorical perspective the stories are told mainly through fixed general wide shots, and the spaces are delimited by the characters entering and leaving the scenes (from the sides). Most of the

scenes begin with the entrance of a character into the shot and end after the character disappears, with an empty shot for a few seconds both prior to the action and after it. These comings and goings create the rhythm of the film and provide it with a dynamism which contrasts with the static nature of the shots. In the attitude and the frontal and perpendicular position of the actors in each shot we can observe a full corporeal awareness of the presence of the camera, and this awareness is also visible in the position of other scenography elements within the shots: the friends in the bathroom are standing side by side, with their entire body captured in the shot and facing the camera; and the couple sitting at the table and eating are positioned in the same direction. This frontal arrangement is reverted in the last story, whose first shot shows three characters sitting on a sofa with their backs to the camera.

Luego is part of the modality of films with an episodic structure whose different sections have plots that are independent from each other. However, the peculiarity of this case is that the moments in which characters from the different stories cross paths are the only contact between them, and the system of comings and goings acquires a structural function. Each story is connected to the next through the superposition, in the last shot of each storyline, of their main characters. These characters have no name and are unable to say the things they want to convey. The silences, looks, gestures and body movements express what they cannot verbalize. There is something that the body cannot restrain but which cannot be verbally enunciated. Gliksberg reveals that the moment in which someone does not say what they have to say, that constant postponement of characters and their discourses is what she most wants to focus on along these three stories (in Frías, 2008).

As in the other films, there is an express will to prioritize the *mise en scène* over the plot in this production. This is how the director explains it:

I am much more interested in the *mise en scène* than in the way in which a theme is dealt with. I let the construction be seen. I move with a deliberate artificiality, without reaching Godardian extremes, and with some resources from theater. I like the films by Ezequiel (Acuña), but my favorite director is Fassbinder (in Frías, 2008).

VIDRIOS

This is an independent production shown in BAFICI in 2013 starring young actors from the fields of theater and independent national cinema such as Nahuel Viale, Ignacio Rogers, Julián Tello, Julia Martínez Rubio, Walter Jakob, Alberto Rojas Apel and Ailín Salas. In this film we find ten scenes that are completely autonomous and independent from each other and which are shown, one after the other without any type of causal relationship, although with a common theme (the instability of social connections). They all share the fact that they examine interpersonal relationships from different angles such as ire, lack of communication, paranoia, shared time, learning and solidarity. Most of the different situations which are presented without interruptions take place in closed spaces (a bar, a room, a kitchen, an elevator), and the relationships that are discussed are mostly between friends and lovers. This film is another example of what we call cinema of situation, because the different episodes show the outline of a conflict which is not fully developed, let alone resolved, be it an internal conflict, a relationship problem with other characters or an external conflict (an elevator which stops in the middle of the night or a power cut). Each of these sequences tests the characters, who face different types of problems which show the frailty of the psyche and of human relationships. Also, the scenes approach the lack of conflict in its most extreme form: one episode consists of a very long shot with

two young men sitting on the floor in the dark, without saying a word, with a fixed camera at floor level.

Like in the case of *Luego*, the characters in *Vidrios* are anonymous and their only traits are the ones shown during the space and time of the scene: nervous, paranoid, thoughtful, irascible and reflective. With regard to the inability to speak, Ignacio Bollini and Federico Luis Tachella claim that «the characters in *Vidrios* can never say what they really feel» (in Russo, 2013), because the conflicts are outside of the situations that are shown, and at the same time the characters' attempts to establish an honest dialogue always lead to absurdity.

B) FILMS WHOSE EPISODES ARE CONNECTED BY THE SAME CHARACTERS AND BY THE SAME PLOT (*CASTRO*, *TODOS MIENTEN*, *EL TURNO NOCTURNO*).

Although in this type of film the episodes are connected through the plot and the characters, the cause-effect relationship between the actions is feeble and the behavior of the characters is unpredictable.

CASTRO

This is the first feature film by Alejo Moguillansky⁶. It was shot in 15 days and is considered the counterpart of *Todos mienten*, by Matías Piñeiro, because they were both shot between December 2008 and January 2009 and they share the same production company (Pampero Cine) as well as staff and actors. They both premiered at the Buenos Aires International Festival of Independent Cinema (BAFICI) in April 2009. *Castro* won the award for best movie in the National Films section. They were also shown together in the Latin American Art Museum of Buenos Aires (MALBA), an exhibition venue which has now been an alternative to the commercial circuit for some productions for some years.

From a rhetorical perspective, the film is structured in 11 episodes divided by intertitles. These titles describe the action which is going to take place next, the name of the character that the action will focus on or a sentence mentioned by one of the characters. From the beginning of the film and through each of its episodes, the narration focuses on the search for Castro, the character who gives its name to the film, and the element that gives structure to the different episodes and creates a bond between the characters: they all want the same thing (to find Castro), but we never know why. This is, according to Moguillansky, a «feverish record of sleepwalkers who run crazily through the city»⁷. The film ventures into a permanent formal innovation and into the revaluation of the shots, in a conscious and planned attempt made explicit by Moguillansky to «push cinema to places in which it still does not exist». From a basic narrative excuse or a plot framework (a chase), the director presents a choreographic and determined evolution of the exploration of different urban spaces as the origin of a fiction that is built between opposite registers which are clearly complementary and subsidiary to each other: a realistic observation from resources such as long takes and tracking shots in exteriors, but with bizarre situations most of the times.

⁶ He created short film and medium-length films before, including *La prisionera* (2006) and *Borges/Santiago, variaciones sobre un guión* (2008).

⁷ http://www.malba.org.ar/web/cine_pelicula.php?id=3443&idciclo=632&subseccion=programacion_pasada

We also classify *Castro* as part of cinema of situation because it is built through the mise en scène of the characters and their development inside a plot which becomes a vehicle to explore the form and the events that take place in front of the camera⁸.

TODOS MIENTEN

The story focuses on a group of friends who spend some days in a house on the outskirts of Buenos Aires. In apparent tranquility, the characters embark on different subplots which are not related to each other but which shape a playful and placid world proposed by Matías Piñeiro, with historical, literary and cinematographic references. The film is structured in episodes, with intertitles which act as separators between one scene and the next. In each of those scenes, the characters perform different activities such as reading, gardening, singing, riding a bike, painting or just sleeping. There is not a conflict that provides a meaning to the succession of episodes. Instead, we are witness to the evolution of the characters during their free time and of the relationships between them, far away from their daily lives. During this time we begin to see Helena's plan, who intends to leave the house after writing a story about JMR and the rest of its occupants. This plan lets us think that the film itself is the story written by Helena shown through a mise en abyme.

Piñeiro proposes a new universe based on leisure and on lies, «playing with lies as a possibility to invent a new order of things that can approach the truth through meandering paths. *Lying* as a positive world-producing process» (Piñeiro, 2009). We do not know anything about any of the characters, except for what they pretend to be and what they decide to show the others, either outside of the group or among themselves. For example, Helena (Romina Paula) seems to be the great-great-granddaughter of Sarmiento; Emilia (Pilar Gamboa) pretends to be a Spanish art critic and gallery owner to fool JMR (Ezequiel Lamothe); Mónica (María Villar) pretends to be in shock; Isabel (Julia Martínez Rubio) draws paintings with she signs with the name of her ex-boyfriend, JMR; and Iván (Ezequiel Bigliardi) is constantly repeating that he is going to leave, but he does not.

Often, the camera does not stop to create a visual record of the dialogues between the characters, but leaves them in the off-screen soundtrack and chooses to show what happens in the background or in a different space. Therefore, it acquires autonomy from the characters and their actions. This autonomy leads the camera sometimes to become another character within the group of friends: in some scenes it follows one character and then it abandons them to observe a scene which takes place in an adjoining room, although we can listen to that same character off-screen; sometimes it observes the group of friends practicing some outdoor activity from a distance; it also wanders around the house like the characters who come in and out of the rooms (and even of the closets), and interferes in the group rounds with insistent close-ups of the characters. In one of the episodes, for example, a fixed camera observes the exterior from inside a room which is supposed to be empty, and spies two of the characters who are just hanging out outdoors. As in the case of *Castro* with the choreographic movement of the characters through the two cities, here they come and go through the enclosed space of the house, with constant movement and activity: people going in and out of rooms, and doors that open and close.

In *Castro* and in *Todos mienten* we barely know who the characters are, what they look for, and why they do it (the work by Moguillansky is the most paradigmatic example of lack of definition, because

⁸ With regard to post-dramatic theater, I had the opportunity to examine the dialogue which this film establishes with *La escala humana* (2001, by Alejandro Tantanián, Javier Daulte and Rafael Spregelburd (Soria, 2015a). In both texts, I could observe an aesthetic of the absurd as an underlying structure, as well as the systematic transgression of the rules of the crime genre through fragmented structures in which the dramatic events are organized according to a linear and non-disruptive scheme.

we watch a chase during the entire film without ever finding out why they are chasing Castro). There is a gap of sorts between what characters want to express verbally and what words cannot name. In all these cases they are characters who create their inner world through externalization, which is both corporeal (their gestures and the expression in their faces, their movements, the way in which they stand in the scenes) and related to their discourse.

EL TURNO NOCTURNO

The directorial debut of Matías Rispau was screened in Buenos Aires Rojo Sangre (BARS) —an international film festival devoted to the genres of horror, fantasy and surrealism—, and it won the award to best national videofilm in 2011. From a thematic perspective, this film focuses on the working hours of Diego during the night shift in a service station. His friend Javier lives in front of the station and keeps him company during his shift; he does not have a job because he is waiting «for a gust of wind to inspire him to study something». As the night goes on, different unusual characters parade through the station, and strange situations take place. Some of the characters that appear include the Sinister Man, the Hysterical Woman, the Man-Child, Captain Somebody-or-other, the Breakdancer, the Kidnapper, the Leader Mariachi and the Suicidal Mariachi. They all appear as the episodes in the narration advance. Each of the episodes (eleven in total) is preceded by the timecode of the scene that is going to be shown and by a title which contains a vague reference to the situation that the audience will see. The film also includes a prologue at the beginning to introduce the main characters. Why do we analyze this film as another variant of cinema of situation? What procedures show aspects in common with the theater from the previous decade? On the one hand, we have the fragmentary structure in which the story is told. On the other hand, we have the story itself, riddled with ridiculous situations that constantly navigate the line between unlikelihood and impossibility. Also, *El turno nocturno* has a classical theatrical imprint with regard to the unity of time (the span of a night), of space (the service station) and of action (the way in which an employee behaves when faced with different circumstances which are not necessarily work-related). Although this film has a strong realistic root with regard to its setting (the station) and the way in which it is recorded, with numerous long takes and a moving camera, absurdity takes the lead in each of the situations in which Diego is involved, and this absurdity is underlined by the music. This last element reminds us of genres like adventure and suspense cinema, and it creates the different narrative atmospheres which appear one after another without a strict relation of causality. The linearity is provided only, as we said before, by the timestamp which opens each sequence.

2. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

After what has been presented here and the analysis of the films that are included in the corpus of study of this article, we can identify a type of film texts that share those elements that characterize what I proposed calling «cinema of situation»: predominance of image composition over plot and narrative digression. When we focus on the singular traits of each story we can identify a clear theatrical imprint which, after a detailed analysis of each specific case, could be structured according to the different ways in which theater is assimilated into cinema, the main axis of this study, which makes it possible to keep reflecting about contemporary Argentine cinema.

The formal aspects examined in our study —such as narrative and expressive procedures, time and space construction, the system of characters and acting poetics— reveal a common mold for all the films, and their specific features make it possible to organize them according to the different assimilation techniques that were presented. On the other hand, and from a thematic perspective, we

can observe that the corpus shows a variety of traits about existential topics that focus their view on questions that have to do with the human condition and its way of being and existing in this world: the search for meaning, circumstantial bonds and tedium in *Sábado*, *Incómodos* and *Ocio*; lack of communication and displaced privacy in *Todo juntos*; the passage of time and the refuge in introspection against the alien nature of the present time in *Extraño*; melancholy and the construction of new solidarity relationships in *Cuatro mujeres descalzas*; the construction of different forms of interpersonal relationships in *Luego* and in *Vidrios*; the inanity of existence, the triviality of work and absurdity in *Castro* and *El turno nocturno*; and the combination of appearances and truth through a ludic lens in *Todos mienten*. These are topics that find an adequate route for their expression in disruptive narrations and fragmented structures.

Finally, the ultimate objective of this work is to allow the proposed modalities to keep expanding and to create new approaches and forms of analysis in a wave-like and unending motion.

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4. LIST OF FILMS IN THE TEXT

- A propósito de Buenos Aires* (AA.VV, 2006)
- Castro* (Alejo Moguillansky, 2009)
- Cuatro mujeres descalzas* (Santiago Loza, 2004)
- El turno nocturno* (Matías Rispau, 2011)
- Extraño* (Santiago Loza, 2003)
- Incómodos* (Esteban Menis, 2008)
- La invención de la carne* (Santiago Loza, 2009)
- Luego* (Carola Gliksberg, 2008)
- Ocio* (Alejandro Lingenti & Juan Villegas, 2010)
- Sábado* (Juan Villegas, 2001)
- Todo juntos* (Federico León, 2002),
- Todos mienten* (Matías Piñero, 2009)

Vidrios (2013, Ignacio Bollini & Federico Luis Tachella, 2013)