

Informal Collection in Buenos Aires: Behind and Beyond Crises

Mariano Perelman^{1,2}

¹ Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CONICET), Argentina

² Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA), Argentina

Abstract

This article focuses on the creation process of a new circuit of commerce (understood as a space where moralities, money, and people circulate) related to *cirujeo* between 2002 and 2011. While the informal gathering is as old as Buenos Aires itself, in 2002, the agenda of two crises (economic and environmental) combined to position *cirujeo* not only as a survival activity but also as an activity linked to the environment. The article argues that although the crises framed the new circuit that disrupted gender relations, the groups within the collectors, and how they constructed the activity as a legitimate way of making a living, the danger of presenting *cirujeo* only as an epiphenomenon of the crisis is raised. To this end, the text gives an account of the different sedimentations that have produced how collecting is done today.

Key words: Economy, crisis, informal collection, Buenos Aires, making a living.

Recoleção Informal em Buenos Aires: Mias aqui e além das crises

Resumo

Este artigo se concentra no processo de criação de um novo circuito de comércio (entendido como um espaço onde circulam moralidades, dinheiro, pessoas) relacionado com o cirujeo entre 2002 e 2011. Enquanto a coleta informal é tão antiga quanto a própria Buenos Aires, em 2002 a agenda de duas crises (econômica e ambiental) combinou-se para posicionar cirujeo não apenas como uma atividade de sobrevivência, mas também como uma atividade ligada ao meio ambiente. O artigo argumenta que enquanto as crises emolduraram o novo circuito que perturbou as relações de gênero, os grupos dentro dos colecionadores e a forma como eles construíram a atividade como uma forma legítima de ganhar a vida, ele levanta o perigo de apresentar o cirujeo apenas como um epifenômeno da crise. Para isso, o texto dá conta das diferentes sedimentações que produziram a forma como a coleta é feita hoje.

Palavras-chave: economia, crise, coleta informal, Buenos Aires, ganhando a vida.

Informal Collection in Buenos Aires: Behind and Beyond Crises¹

Mariano Perelman

I met Gabriel a few weeks after he started collecting in August 2002. At 42, he had been unemployed “for a while.” First, he “managed” by doing *changas* (sporadic and temporary jobs). Then, the *changas* became increasingly spaced, and the money he was gaining was not enough. Finally, two years after starting to collect, he told me:

“One of my neighbors came, and he told me, ‘Negro, go out with me. You’re not doing anything here.’ At first, I didn’t want to; I was ashamed; I didn’t want my family or my neighbors to see me *cirujeando* [collecting]. But I went out one day. I made some money. It was difficult. Search in the garbage, the people who look at you. But here I am [he says between laughs and next to his cart]. I understood that this was a job like any other. People look at you badly; you can cut yourself; they can run over you. But you also meet people all the time, the *clients*, you have a good time, the street. You go around the world.”

Like Gabriel, dozens of people with whom I did fieldwork between 2002 and 2015, and thousands in general, began to search through the garbage for materials that could be sold, reused, or consumed as the primary way of accessing resources for “making money.”² For many of them, earning a living from garbage implied a break -sometimes- in their work trajectories and -sometimes- in social ones. In a short time for thousands of people, the collection became a way of making a living.

I center this text on *making* the new trade circuit related to (informal) recollection in Buenos Aires, Argentina, between 2002 and 2011. Although the informal collection is as old as the city itself, it was in 2002 that the new circuit was generated. My argument is simple. It was in 2002 when the agenda of two crises (economic and environmental) combined to position collection not only as a survival activity but also as an activity linked to the environment. The relationship between informal recovery and the environment -recycling- is not natural. It is how a process of impoverishment was built as a public problem.

Cirujeo is not a mere epiphenomenon of the crisis. In the first place, the temporalities of crisis are often problematic; secondly, crisis as rupture does not let us see the complexities of the process both locally and globally. The problem of residues as part of the Anthropocene or the *Capitalocene* has its global dimension (Alexander and Reno, 2012; Eckert, Rial, and Colombijn, 2020; Rial, 2016). Paiva (2008), studying the politics of the 1990s, states that all international agreements and conferences aim to propose strategies applicable to all parts of the world: the policy of the 3 Rs (reduce, recycle and reuse). However, although Latin America’s governments took up these measures, “both the modalities of production and consumption as well as the paths through which waste recovery occurs are different from those exhibited by the First World (...) In its cities with low or null collection coverage, absence of sites suitable for final disposal and high poverty rates, there are many people who survive from the collection and sale of waste.

1 A first version of this text was presented at the I International Colloquium Utopias of Recycling. I am gratefully for the comments received especially by Cristhian Cajé, Barbara Arisi, Freek Colombijn, Carmen Rial, the participants of the Colloquium and the anonymous reviewers.

2 During the text, I will use different categories to refer to the people dedicated to looking for materials that can later be sold, used, or reused. I prefer to talk about people who search in the garbage instead of “informal collection” since referring to informality implies taking a position and a differentiation between different fields (the formal and the informal) that does not allow the understanding of the complexities that are produced in the field.

Without intending it, they put into motion one of the actions recurrently suggested by environmentalism: the recovery of waste, although in paths different from those proposed in international Conferences and Agreements”. Years later, when this circuit was established, criticisms will also come about the uncritical use of other notions, such as the “circular economy.” (Carenzo, Juárez y Becerra, 2022; Gutberlet *et al.* 2017; Gutberlet y Carenzo, 2020; Suárez, 2021).

Environmental discourse (and the “moral economy” related to it) will begin to appear as a justification regime (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991) with an intrinsically recognized validity. The *cartoneros* did a vital work of installing their practices within that regime.

Since 2002, in Buenos Aires, a new circuit of commerce was created concerning garbage. I depart from the position of Zelizer (2008). For the author, each circuit (as conversation, exchange, interaction, and mutual determination) has agreements, practices, information, obligations, rights, symbols, and means of exchange. She distinguished by four elements: a border; a set of significant interpersonal ties; associated economic transactions; and a medium of exchange.

Combining these four elements generates an institutional structure reinforcing credit, trust, and reciprocity (Zelizer, 2004). For Zelizer, the circuits would resemble exchange spheres (Bohannan, 1955).

However, it is necessary to understand the intense work in the configurations themselves, allowing us to appreciate different regimes of value not only in different circuits but also in the same circuit.

My argument is that *cirujeo* as a legitimate way of access to living must be understood from the changes in the “world of work” and the “world of *cirujeo*” in a given context. This requires a look focused on the crisis but also “beyond” that allows understanding surgery not as a mere process of lack or negative (crisis, job loss) to understand the nuances and forms of survival in Argentina.

For this, it is essential to look more behind and beyond crisis. So, I will go a little further on Zelizer’s notion. There are common arenas -grammar- of discussion within the circuits and multiple ways of understanding value(s) that are situational. Within the trade circuit, different justification regimes can coexist. Circuits contain arenas of discussion in which one or several correct forms and regimes of value and ways of living are settled. The Economy and circuits of commerce cannot, then, be thought of abstractly. Regimes of justification and the practices of actors are constitutive of the Economy. The concrete actions, the interactions are -and here is another difference with Zelizer’s proposal- this circuit. How people conceive the activities that are legitimate to be carried out impacts the ways of working, exchanges, and on pricing. In short, in the Economy.

To understand these long-lasting processes -behind and beyond the crisis - and show the nuances of crises as ruptures- I focus from a perspective centered on legitimate ways of (earning) a living (Fernández Alvarez and Perelman, 2020). At the same time, I am interested in showing how these long-lasting processes and the dynamics produced as part of the crises – that made disputes on conceptions of values (based on the struggle of the *garbage*, aesthetics, and the activity itself)- generated new forms con *collection* and gender relations: ways of being *cartoneros* and *cartoneras*.

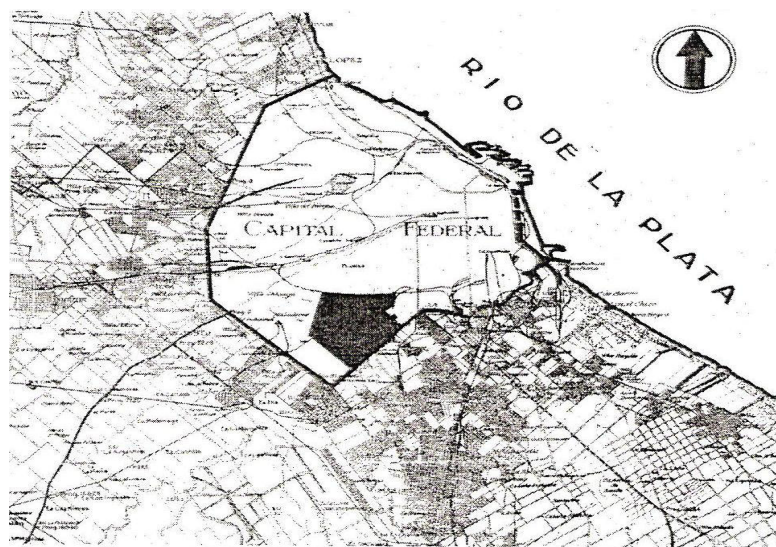
Before Crises

Periodizations are always forms of ordering processes. I will order the “history” of the *cirujeo* in three moments. A first one, until 1977 with the closure of the Burnings. A second moment between 1977 and until the beginning of the 21st century. Finally, I will focus on the process after the 2001 crisis and the massive appearance of the activity on the public agenda. This periodization may seem forced given that, as some studies have pointed out (Paiva, 2008; Schamber and Suárez, 2007; Suárez, 2001), the increase in the number of people had begun in the mid-1990s. With the implementation of neoliberal policies during the Menemist decade

(1989-1999), unemployment and social precariousness grew. In this framework, thousands began looking for alternatives to what they used to earn a living. However, it was with the “crisis of 2001” that a new circuit was configured, not only because of the massive number of people collecting but also because it gradually became a public problem that ended up configuring the circuit.

The first moment refers to what I have called “limited territories” (Perelman, 2008). For almost a century, until 1977, it is possible to find two forms of (informal) collection in the search for materials in the city. Another looked for materials in the *Quemas*, open-air dumps on the city’s outskirts.

Although hygienist and medical perspective on waste and on the people who live in or from garbage is not an exclusive process of Buenos Aires³, local configurations produced specific ways of living, as in “The *Quema del Bajo Flores*.”



FUENTE: BOLETÍN DE OBRAS SANITARIAS DE LA NACIÓN, 1941

The horse-drawn trucks first and the motorized after arrived at the *Quema*, opened their rear doors, and dropped “the garbage.” Then, hundreds of people -generally men- began to separate what they could sell. Once the load was dumped, machines worked that spread the dump and, simultaneously, made a pit to be completed by the unloading of other trucks. Once the burden of the trucks had been overturned, the *cirujas* ran to collect what fell. Juan remembers that “the machine wouldn’t let us gather in peace. Because it’s by the hour, so it operates constantly, it can’t stop”. Between its going back and going forward, “we were going to gather ourselves,” he remembered. He also recalled that “it was good because it spreads the garbage. So you can find... below, you discover everything.” The machine used to wait for them, says another of those who worked for several years in the *Quema*.

The idea that the formal employees used to wait for them shows the relationships established over the years between those who worked in the *Quema* and the *cirujas* who collected there. “The ‘*Quema*’ was a pile of dirt and garbage. The municipal trucks came in and dumped everything there. It was catching fire all the time (...). They gathered paper, made canvases, and put it there. I went with the truck, loaded it, and bye...” a man who was a paper buyer in 1970⁴ commented to us. The “*Quema*” was a moral world where conflicts and the ability to collect were produced from the status granted by violence (Perelman, 2015).

³ For the case of Rio de Janeiro see Lima (2021).

⁴ Interview by Verónica Paiva and Mariano Perelman in April, 2008.

FOTO 1: DESCARGA EN EL VACIADERO DEL BAJO FLORES



FUENTE: REVISTA ATLÁNTIDA, AÑO 48, N°1184, 1965

Violence, garbage, marginality, and poverty were how the people who lived from waste were seen, and how several told me about their experience in the burning. One of them recalls that “everything was marginal, always people who were outside the law, or escaping, or liked the easy life, alcohol, or had decided to live violently.”

That violent life was part of the garbage trade circuit. One of the few newspaper articles describes the *Quema* as: “big business. (...)the intermediaries who sell glass, cardboard, rags, and metals will know! A series of factories – some employing more than a hundred workers – are supplied daily from the dump, opening their sheds to receive caravans of trucks and cars with carefully specified merchandise (...) The tentacles of this thriving industry are those ragged beings that swarm in the burns (...) ‘Tincho’ started two years ago with a dilapidated Ford and now owns three latest model units” (Petcoff, 1965: 23).

The spatiality -the garbage dump located on the margins- as well as the characteristics of the *Quema* (garbage mountains in flood-prone areas, with constant fires), who and can collect (through violence), and the way of life of the collectors were configuring this “great business” as a marginal and illegal one. It is neither the people nor the objects that configure legal or illegality. The production of markets as illegal and marginal is related to the capacity of actors to impose and mobilize arguments (legal, morals, aesthetics) that produce forms of legitimation. Forms of legitimation are always disputed. In the case of the *Quema*, for example, violence was a legitimate form within the configuration but was contested by outside actors. Violence was part of that circuit (Perelman, 2020). The way in which economic practices are generated must not be understood as if these circuits were contaminated (by illegality, by violence). These discourses and practices are part of the economic practices themselves. These specificities are what produce values.



The production of value also refers to the esthetic of the dump as a political artifact related to a marginal and illegal place.

The aesthetic is not only an artistic condition or an attribute of beauty. From an aesthetic, it is possible to appreciate struggles to impose life forms and projects that construct 'the social.' Aesthetic as moral values generates borders between groups and between legitimate ways of thinking about what is valuable and worthy.

There is no natural relation between aesthetics and marginalization. It is a social construction based on the recognition of what is valuable. The production of value is processual (Munn, 1992). As the case of garbage shows -in its complexity- it is possible to go beyond the materiality of value (expressed in values forms) (Munn, 1992; Graeber 2001, Turner, 2008). A practical and situational approach to values goes beyond the idea that "people invest their energies into the things that they consider most important" (Graeber, 2001: 55) to center on the ways people manage to use the notion of worth situationally, produce value in different spheres of life and mobilizing it (Perelman, 2022a). So, value is not only social action through which people demonstrate their belief in what is the good life (Graeber), but it is also a moral, situational discourse that can be used.

In the *Quema*, smells, colors, garbage, clothes, and charts have configured a marginal aesthetic. When the world of *Quema* was finally dismantled, a territorialized waste recovery circuit had already been created.

The closure of the *Quema* was part of a re-aestheticization of the city. The civic-military dictatorship (1976-1977) carried out a plan to elitist Buenos Aires (Oszlak, 1991). In this context, a new collection system based on "ecological burial" was implemented. To this end, the Coordinación Ecológica Área Metropolitana Sociedad del Estado (CEAMSE) was set up, a company created by the states of the Province of Buenos Aires and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires to carry out the integral management of Solid Urban Waste in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area. As Sorroche (2016) stated, the system contemplated all the stages of waste management (collection, transfer, and burial). The development belts inspired it in London and Sydney, where the filling of flooded land was proposed -through the waste - to create parks on these "new" lands later. The collection system went from being deposited in landfills and home cremation to burial. The residents had to leave the waste bags on the sidewalks for the companies to collect them.

The new system transformed the *cirujero*. Until then, the (informal) collectors had access to the garbage. But, since 1977, the entrance of informal collectors to landfills has been prohibited. Once the waste was on the sidewalk, it became the property of the collection companies that charged the municipality per ton collected. Even more, *cirujero* was prohibited. Garbage acquires a new economic value: by quantity. The more companies collect, the more they earn. In short, during the 1970s, "a unique discourse was developed in favor of indiscriminate collection and final disposal. This system was in force until the crisis of sanitary landfills and the emergence of the phenomenon *cartonero* at the hinge of the new millennium" (Suárez, 2021: 3).

Second moment. From the crises

As I said, it was towards the end of 2001 and the beginning of 2002 that the *cirujero* began to gain public notoriety. The Argentine economic situation had been deteriorating. By May 1999, 27% of people were poor. In October 2002, the 51. Unemployment was 15.4 % in May 1999 and 17.8 in October 2002 (with a peak of 21.5 in May). Between 2001 and 2002, the situation was urgent: "poverty" acquired public notoriety and, as part of it, the *cartoneros*.⁵

⁵ According to Adissi (2003), in 2001, the *cartoneros* did not constitute a topic "in its own right" in the Media. However, towards the end of 2001, and with the diffusion of the increasing indices of poverty, the first photographs began to appear in the Buenos Aires newspapers without extending their presence to explain the "phenomenon." After the December 19 and 20 crisis, the first articles entirely dedicated to the *cartoneros* appeared. The main concern was to "unravel" how people provided themselves with an income. At the same time, the notes focused on the activity's legal framework (its prohibition).

The *collectors-cirujas* turned into *cartoneros*- appeared as a product of the economic crisis. In my observations and public appearances, the *cartoneros* and other actors marked the *cirujeo* as a “*rebusque*” –a way of earning a living but not a job- because of the lack of employment.

During my fieldwork, I could appreciate the shame women, especially men, felt for being *cartoneando*. Looking down and trying not to be seen were standard practices.

As a 51-year-old woman, Estela told me, “We were on the *lona* [without any money], then one day I told my husband, ‘I’m going to dedicate myself to *cirujear*.’ He didn’t like the idea, but there was no other choice. You don’t know what happened with the family, that we dedicate ourselves to *cirujear!*”, She said in 2004 while she laughed. It was not an easy decision to make. “I was ashamed since I came from a factory, I was ashamed, but then that’s it, everything went away, and I went out for *cirujear* with the cart.” However, the first months were difficult, especially going through the neighborhood where she inevitably ran into friends who saw her *cirujeando*. “I didn’t want to take the cart around here [she refers to the neighborhood]. So do you know what I did? she asks me with a little embarrassment; I gave it to my boys so they could take it to the train”.

Felipe, -a forty-year-old collector, remembers with nostalgia the times when he worked in a restaurant before his “fall.” In an interview in July 2003, he told me, “I had a remunerative job with which I could provide medical care for my children and security. I’m not saying outstanding economic security, but at least to say well ‘the month that He comes, I’m going to earn so much, I’m going to buy him a pair of slippers, a pair of shoes, a coat.’ Or do, like when I worked in a restaurant (...) I had the opportunity to go, take them to a movie, buy a good television (...) those things”. When, at the end of 1999, he was left without a job as a kitchen assistant, during that year and the following two, he dedicated himself to doing odd jobs that paid him “without a problem.” At the same time, his wife asked for the *plan*.⁶

But in 2002, even the odd jobs ended. A neighbor began to invite him to *cirujear*. It was difficult for him to decide since he had always viewed those who carried out the activity negatively. He thought they should look for a job and dedicate themselves to “work” and not “laziness.” He didn’t want to go out with a cart and be seen. He started *saliendo* [going out] with his friend. He remembers that when he left the house, he would look to all sides, trying not to be seen by the neighbors. He speeded up until he reached the station and took the *Tren Cartonero* [cardboard train]⁷. Once on the train, he calmed down a bit. During the first months, he lamented his fate; he walked, trying not to attract the attention of people who came across him.

Over time, he understood that being a *ciruja* cannot be hidden. He noticed that many did not accept him. “Look, I don’t steal; I look in the garbage!” He says, angry and hurt. “If I could work in a restaurant, I would go there immediately.” For Felipe, being a *ciruja* - as it is not a “remunerative job”- was opposed to work. He contrasts collecting with a dignified life (based on access to places, consumption, and dignity). Although *collecting* was shameful for him, he refers to the activity in opposition to other ways of obtaining money, such as theft. Compared to the restaurant one, collecting was not ‘work.’ But, It was a work –although “not as much work”- opposed to other activities.

Shame and dignity, work and non-work, are not opposites. Work is a field of dispute that acquires situational meanings, different forms, and contours. It is a category that is used situationally. Thus, the same activity can be considered work, and others not (anonymous). Subjects tend to justify their actions within an “ethics” framework about what is considered fair (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991). People appeal to public modes of recognition. In this sense, the *cartoneros* justify their actions by appealing to the notion of work and of “decent work.” This active work of framing and naming allows the production of (self) value based on what collectors consider morally correct.

⁶ He was referring to the social plan *Plan Trabajar*.

⁷ A special train for the *cartoneros* to go to the city.

In addition, the relationship between unemployment and *cirujeo* is also part of a public discourse produced during the crisis. In 2005, a foreign colleague asked me to contact one of my informants for an interview. After much thought, I decided to contact he/her with Juan, a collector with long experience in the activity.

I met Juan in 2002 at one of the “dialogue tables” organized by the Urban Recovery Program (PRU). This program was created within the city’s Ministry of the Environment, which sought to generate policies to formalize the collectors.

Juan knew well the history of the *cirujeo*, the changes, and the current policies.

So, one day we went to Juan’s house in a shantytown in the former territory of *The Quema*. It was time for the interview after the presentation, informal talks, and a walk around the house and the neighborhood. Then my colleague asked him since when he was a *cartonero*. Before answering, Juan looked into my eyes and held his gaze for a few seconds. Then he turned his head towards his/her interlocutor and replied: “Since 2001, with the crisis. Due to unemployment.” He continued to tell him/her how in 2001 the country had had a severe crisis, that there was a lack of work, and that he had lost his job as a truck driver and had to *cirujear*.

I knew that Juan had been collecting since the 1960s, first in *La Quema*, then in the Buenos Aires suburbs -when the civic-military dictatorship evicted him- and later again in the city. I always thought that Juan had sought my complicity in that look. I understood that “crisis” and “employment” were two public discourses that legitimized *cirujeo* as a legitimate way of earning a living. Juan appealed to those public grammars to position himself. If, until the 2000s, the *cirujeo* was considered a highly stigmatized activity, “the crisis” allowed old cartoneros to comfort their history and new ones to enter (Perelman, 2015). As in the case of Estela, the normalization of the activity generated a facility to think of *cartoneo* as a legitimate way of earning a living. She continues talking about a life “that we did not seek” and of being “all the people who worked and wanted to have their job well and be looked upon like anyone else.” But, also that “later I saw that a lot of people began to *salir* [going out], it was not a strange thing.” Even today, she feels watched, but she no longer cares, “you feel ashamed the first time, or many times when they are looking at you. You turn around and realize that people are looking at you, that you open a bag, and you are taking out what they left inside”.

According to Narotzky and Besnie (2014: S4), crisis “refers to structural processes generally understood to be beyond the control of people but simultaneously expressing people’s breach of confidence in the elements that provided relative systemic stability and reasonable expectations for the future.” In Argentina in 2001, the structural conditions -poverty growth, unemployment- meant that people could not have expectations about their near future. The times of crisis “drive people, if not compel them, to adapt their old modes of livelihood to changing conditions and to create new ones (...) Crisis contrasts with forms of stability that enable the design of projects and that support the trust that existing configurations will enable the realization of those projects” (Narotzky y Besnier, 2014: S7). For a large sector of society, the lack of support from family networks, the labor market, and from the State led to forms of uncertainty -a lack of certainty about the future and to have tools to act in a “correct” or “appropriate way (Visacovsky, 2019). So, they have difficulty creating possible forms of the admissible future and present saturation (Lomnitz, 2003).

The possibility of going out to collect was related to “another crisis”: one of the sanitary landfills created by the civil-military dictatorship. In addition, this process was combined with the slow development of environmental discourses as a legitimate way of demanding, thus part of a new rights agenda (Merlinsky, 2013). Leite Lopes (2004) called this extensive worldwide process the “Environmentalization of social conflicts.”⁸

8 According to Leite Lopes “The issue of the environment began to occupy a prominent place in the current democratic process, becoming an integral part of it. The environmental claims attracted the media’s interest for a “new type of citizenship actions”. It was the fact that they did not originate from political groups but from civil society organizations, which opened a new field of interest for the media – and not only for it, once other areas saw themselves equally renewed in this process. They can be cited for the constitution of new professional specialties, for the possibility of articulation and integration between the scientific community and civil society and, even, at the same time, new forms of action together with the judicial system” (Leite Lopes, 2004: 198).

Crises generate uncertainty based on moral values and current ways of living. Crises stress what people consider valuable (Narotzky and Besnier, 2014). And in that sense, it is that crises enable new ways of positioning themselves legitimately. Expectations about the future (and experiences about the past) generate forms of action. And they are moments when they become tense, and fields of possibility open up.

As I said, values are not only a moral dimension of life. It is also a form of demand. Concerning waste, for example, new (moral and values) “concepts and principles” began to question waste management (circular economy; zero waste; Extended Producer Responsibility) (Suárez, 2021), as well as a series of policy changes marked by “contingencies.”

In 2002, during the campaign for the Mayor’s election, the primary opponent of the current Government, the right-wing candidate Mauricio Macri considered that there was a “crisis in the final management of waste and *cirujeo* was absolutely out of control.” Macri said, “This is a million-dollar business, and the cartoneros have a criminal attitude because they steal the garbage. In addition, they do not pay taxes, and their work is inhumane (...); they cannot be on the street. We will get them off the street (...), Exercising the law. They are committing a crime.” He clarified that if they continue on the street, “I’ll take them into prison. You cannot disturb the order in something that is a crime, because it is as much a crime to steal the garbage as it is to rob a man on the corner (...) So, I call thousands of people to contest, and I give them work.” (*La Nación*, August 27, 2002 Interview to Mauricio Macri).

Macri synthesized many current discussions in the interview: environmental crisis, “crime,” and the collection as “a non-work/ job.” During my fieldwork at the dialogue tables, I was able to appreciate how this impacted the generation of policies “for” the cartoneros. For example, one of the members of the PRU told me that “Macri’s position as a result of this internal policy helped (...) The Government acts as a reaction by removing the green bags”, which, he continues, “was released in a hurry because something had to be done.”

Crises -the position of Macri can also be understood as part of them- enabled new discussion frameworks, such as the laborization of the activity with the environment. I often heard cartoneros say they “were working” instead of “stealing.” Later that “work” was interrelated with environmental care. In 2007, I found at Juan’s house on the table a copy of *An Inconvenient Truth* written by Al Gore -Vice President of the United States from 1993 to 2001 and Democratic presidential candidate in 2000. This book was dedicated to global warming. When I asked him about the book, he told me that he had bought it because they [the cartoneros] were taking care of the “environment.”

In my conversations, I heard the cartoneros refer to the value of their work in environmental terms.

If shame prevailed in the collectors during the first years, being working (and taking care of the environment) had become a central component of pride. It also configures the possibility of presenting themselves as legitimate actors. Environmental and economic crises were moments when garbage acquired a new value: economic and social.

That economic value was linked, above all, to the garbage market. The social, on the other hand, to the recognition of the work of the cartoneros.

I am not saying that economic value was new. However, during the crises, there have been new ways of thinking about values and the possibility of moving value from one sphere to another.⁹ Both crises make possible de discussion on the values of collectors’ works and waste. Regarding the (new) circuit of commerce born during the crises, the struggles show the cultural structuration of values beyond the economic dimension.

9 I must clarify that I am not thinking on spheres as close. I return to Guyer’s (2004: 30) proposal on changing the focus from a structural vision of “spheres of exchange” to the historical constitution of conversions and the creation of wealth in “turbulent conditions”. “What Bourdieu refers to as the “social alchemy” of the “endless reconversion of economic capital into symbolic capital” (1977: 195) will appear at more junctures and be more varied than the spheres model implies. The geographical and temporal reach that particular conversions allow will be subject to “endless” reconstitution as currency goods and their circuits change”

So, crises transform the social worth¹⁰ and worth of people, which is “dialectically tied to how people organize themselves in their aim to sustain life and possibly produce a good life” (Narotzky and Benier, 2014, S10). The *cartoneros* produced value in a double sense: on the one hand, seeking to configure their activity as a legitimate way of earning a living. On the other, showing that garbage -transformed into merchandise- has value.

The new circuit made it possible to normalize a previously embarrassing activity. This led to a stabilization of people on the activity, a way of naturalizing precariousness. Or, put another way, it has constituted the circuit. Nevertheless, shame and frames of reference for post-crisis have not been born in the crisis.

During my first years of fieldwork, shame and the attempt to get out of the activity -to “get a job” like the one they had before collecting- shaped the recycling market differently. Many of the *cartoneros*, for example, thought that the activity they were carrying out was merely circumstantial. For this reason, they decided not to invest in making carts and preferred to rent them to depositors (intermediaries between big industry and collectors). Moreover, the rent often implied the obligation to sell what was collected to the cart’s owner. Thus, a relationship of asymmetric reciprocity was generated between the actors that produced economic ties.

Trying to adapt the behaviors to a foreign territory also implied the regulation of the activity. In order not to be persecuted and to build certain predictability with the neighbors, the *cartoneros* tried to behave in a way they considered correct: not insulting, leaving clean after collecting, and not drinking alcohol. Besides, several times I heard collectors say that being cordial or showing signs of being a good person and of being a “hard worker” could make the “neighbors” give them “jobs.” Thus, the behaviors also configure reciprocity relations and exchange between the different actors. But, as in the case of normalization, these “correct behaviors” -paradoxically- make the *cartoneros* better *cartoneros* and contribute to establishing them in the activity.¹¹

New differentiations and ways of being on the street

The post-2001 crisis growth of people collecting on the streets drew the attention of social scientists. They (we) looked for new categories to understand what was happening. This look obstructed other explanations regarding the *cirujeo* beyond its “novelty.”

As I developed a reading since and from the crisis illuminates the collectors’ repositioning (a construction of the *self*) as valuable and worthy subjects. The context of the crisis in which new forms of resistance arose. Organizational experiences around work were resignified. The new constitution of this relationship between environment and *cirujeo* allowed, not without problems, to install the collection issue not as *cirujas* but as *cartoneros*. Thus, for example, in my fieldwork, I could appreciate how the collectors were learning an environmental language and acting based on it.

The crisis allowed Juan to transform his past and include his activity within the *trabajo digno* (*decent work*) notion. Given the lack of employment, recovering objects from garbage to survive appears as a legitimate option within the possibilities.

During my fieldwork, I often heard phrases such as “I am working. I am not stealing” or “here we go out to work. Instead of begging or stealing, we work”.

¹⁰ “Social worth is how a society values people: the value of people, but also the value obtained through people and the value invested and accumulated in people. This perspective is informed both by anthropological exchange theory, which links the accumulation of value to personal worth, and by a reconfiguration of the labor theory of value, which envisions people as the origin of all value incorporated in commodities” (Narotzky and Besnier, 2014, S10).

¹¹ This idea was developed in Perelman (2011b).

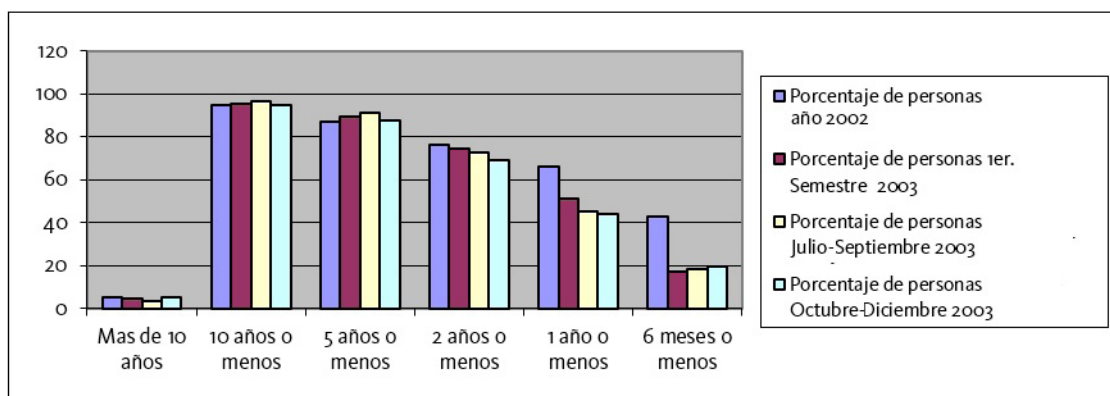
I also understood how the organized cartoneros began to discuss the “value” of the waste and their activity in this process. They not only questioned the “business” after or of the garbage but also sought to be recognized as part of a system that cost municipalities a large amount of its budget. This process contributed to the relationship between work and informal gatherings.

Thus, for many *cartoneros* who had been carrying out the activity before the crisis, *cirujeo* was a way of living (Millar, 2018). For others, it was produced as a way of making a living (Fernández Álvarez and Perelman, 2020; Narotzky and Besnier, 2014) as part of the crises and the normalizations that they allowed. For these groups, the forms of living - how people construct legitimate ways of being in the world, the actions they consider legitimate, and building their frames of reference for action- were different.

The agency of the actors, the ability to rethink their life based on the crises, the grammar around what is legitimate in a changing context, and the circuit of commerce around garbage allow tensioning of the visions that propose that people that live with/ on garbage are “residual humans” (Bauman, 2005). Centering on agency allows going beyond the studies that focus on the lack of work. According to these visions, certain people seem to be discarded from society. The perverse effects of capitalism have been so widely analyzed, and this is not the place to develop them here. Also, the precariousness process that has been imposed in recent decades. Of course, the effects of precariousness are not the same in all countries or social groups.

Graeber’s (2018) “Bullshit Jobs” allows thinking other processes. He distinguished between “bullshit Jobs” and “shits Jobs.” For Graber, the central question is how people themselves understand the activities they made and if their job is or is not useless. Bullshit Jobs are not mere low-income jobs or -necessarily- socially frowned upon. Moreover, they tend to be jobs performed by medium or upper-middle sectors. Shit Jobs, on the other hand, are low-valued jobs. Unvalued social jobs are not only part of marginal economic sectors. Furthermore, much of what could be called Jobs shit is worth billions of dollars. The division is not economic but moral.

A look beyond the crisis allows relativizing the subjectivizing generalization of the “bullshit Jobs” and the objectification of the “Shits Jobs.” And above all, this limit is not only social but can also be questioned and transformed. A significant differentiation was the one that was raised between *structural cirujas* (the ones that have always been) and new *cartoneros* (the ones that “fall” with the crisis), a difference that reproduced -in some way- the notions of structural poverty and new poverty developed in the 1990s.



Identifications are relational processes that change. Collective experiences gradually settle in bodies and groups. Thus, within the framework of the “crisis” was the creation of this differentiation between two social groups. The *structural cirujas* did not precede the *new cartoneros*, but both actors were built into the interaction. The differentiation is made from temporal-spatial experiences and relationships with the garbage, also expressed in the moral assessment of how to make a living.

The new configuration allowed *structural cirujas* to construct themselves as the legitimate cartoneros, the experts. “Now anyone *cirujea*,”; “We are the real *cirujas*, not like those of today who don’t know anything”; “Being a *ciruja* is a source of pride” were phrases I heard from collectors who had been working before the crisis.



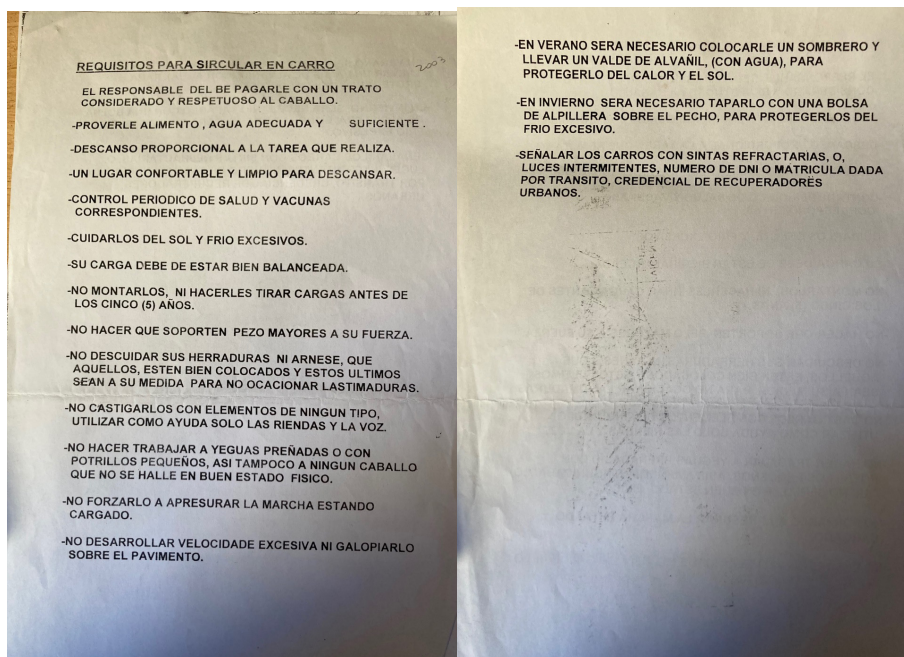
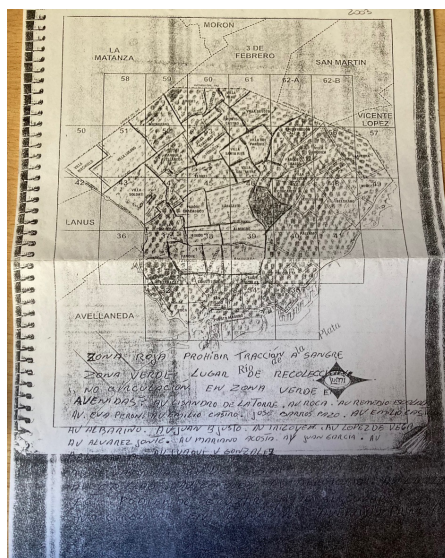
On the other hand, the crisis led the *new cartoneros* to “fall” and feel shame first. Then they could reconstruct the *self* from the *dignity of work* (as an abstract force idea) and form the environmental discourse. Work as an abstract idea and a public legitimate grammatic is related to Argentinean history, where the primary way of earning a living was from the labor market. Many of my interlocutors had had a trajectory linked to the labor market (whether formal or informal). As in the case of Felipe, they continued to think of it as the legitimate way of making a living. But, the reconfiguration of the collection based on moral revaluation began to question the vision of *cirujeo* as a shitty job, both in the past and present.

The massive appearance of collectors on the streets also caused the public notoriety of another group, the *carreros*. These collectors, who collected materials with horse-drawn carts, were not new. Furthermore, they had been the classic characters of collecting in Buenos Aires (Paiva, 2008), and until well into the 1990s, it was a prohibited but permitted activity (Perelman, 2017). However, this massiveness and new discourses (environmental and animal protection) implied rapid persecution. As blood traction was prohibited, the multiplication of the collectors generated a strong reaction against the *carreros*. The “animal rights” groups were central actors in this process. The “confiscations” of the horses began under the argument of animal protection.

Within this framework, the *carreros* began to meet to define actions to follow. The meetings produced recognition and transformed them into a group. Meetings are spaces for sociability (De L’Estoile, 2015) and are not just spaces for decision-making. They are “an essential element in the construction of the social universe, as they create a space of sociability that contributes to the consolidation of networks of relationships that cross the formal structure of organizations, establishing some of the parameters and mechanisms for disputes over power within these organizations, have a dimension of ritualized construction of collective symbols and put

into action multiple conceptions or representations related to the nature of workers' organizations and the role of their leaders and members, as well as the nature of the category that these organizations propose to represent" (Comerford, 1999: 46).

In those meetings, the *carreros* discussed what to do. Between 2002 and 2003, I participated in several meetings in which they sought to bring a map of permitted circulation zones to the legislature. They colored in a photocopy different areas. These areas were where there should be free circulation for carts - all on the city's edge. They wanted to take this map to the legislators as they thought they could get a collection space. We held dozens of meetings, some more and others less formal, to define, discuss, and establish what the zones should be and what the "behaviors" of the collectors should be. "Now they persecute us because there are thousands of assholes who leave everything dirty, who make noise, who don't understand the codes," they said. A form of us (*carreros*) and others (the *new cartoneros*) was also delimited in these talks. And they sought to show themselves as knowledgeable about the needs of animals.



In other meetings, they discussed what to do with the confiscation of the horses. Many of them talk of the horse as part of their family. The horse, thus, was constitutive of being *carrero* beyond a “working tool.” Using the horse -instead of the cart- was a central theme but not the only one. The care of animals appeared as the main moral argument of his work. One afternoon a group of *carreros* asked me and a lawyer if we could try to enter the property where the confiscated horses were. The *carreros* were concerned about the situation of their horses, as they had no information about them. Many referred to the relationship they had with their horses. They accepted that some did not care for them, but they said they were few. The relationship with horses also produced a gap within the *carreros*. As in the case of the *cartoneros*, it created a differentiation between the legitimated ones and the new *carreros*.

These were waiting times. While we waited for the horses and to be attended by the legislators, the *carreros* became *carreros*. Information was circulating. Differentiations were being built. In the moments in which something is expected to happen, relationships are activated for it to happen (Cavalcanti, 2013). And above all, ways of framing past and future actions are generated (Perelman, 2017).

Men, women, and crises

The new circuit of commerce had new gender relations. If crises are moments in which the frames of reference are disrupted, gender relations and the construction of masculinity and femininity also change.

According to my interlocutors, until 2001, the number of women collecting - at least in garbage dumps and on the streets - was very low. “Now it’s full of women,” Ramiro, an old collector, told me one afternoon. “It was not like this in the past. Then, we were all male.” The *Quema* was eminently masculine, and manhood was produced from violence: “It was not a place for women. Drinking wine all night, fights, weapons. Imagine,” said Juan.

In the *Quema*, the violence was part of the configuration and part of the constitutive trade circuit of the informal collection (Perelman, 2020). Twenty-five years later, many women were collecting. Between 2002 and 2003, the City of Buenos Aires Government surveyed 8,153 collectors.¹² Of them, 71.1% were men, and 28.9 women. During the following years, women continue entering the activity.

Women dedicated to the gathering were not unknown or a “novelty” (Gorban, 2011). As I developed elsewhere (Perelman, 2011a), *cirujear* cannot be considered a total break in the trajectories of many collectors. In many of my interlocutors, there had been a small structural distance -using the terms of Evans-Prichard (1987)- about residues. Many *cartoneros* that began to “come” to Buenos Aires lived in areas close to the garbage dumps and CEAMSE (like José León Suárez). Many men had combined *cirujeo* with other activities, especially as children. The same happened with women (Gorban, 2011).

Many women started collecting before men at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. I met Daniel and Noemí at a station in the Buenos Aires suburbs in 2003 while they were waiting for the train to take them to the capital. In the 1990s, Noemí was responsible for “the house and the children.” Daniel worked in a service company as a driver on different public passenger transport lines until 1999, when he lost his job. So, Daniel began to make “changes” (under construction, freight, repair) until these options disappeared. The couple could no longer maintain their home, so they went to live in a settlement built on an old garbage dump in the Buenos Aires suburbs near CEAMSE. With no income, Noemí and a neighbor began to ask for food in restaurants, bakeries, and stores in the area first and in the City of Buenos Aires later.

¹² Registro de Recuperadores Urbanos, Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, Secretaría de Hacienda y Finanzas, Dirección de Estadísticas y Censos, diciembre de 2003.

From there, they gradually moved on to *cirujear*: they received not only food but also used clothing, cardboard, and other discarded materials that they could later sell or fix for personal use. It took Daniel a few months to decide to “start.” He was ashamed that his neighbors would see him, and he was ashamed that he, the breadwinner of the family, needed to be rummaging through bags to find food, medicine, and materials to sell. But he was more ashamed that now the family income came from his wife.

For many of my male interlocutors, “starting” or “taking the plunge” was a decision made after that of their wives. Over time this decision allowed them to reconstruct their masculinity. As Gorban (2011: 168) has pointed out, “In a context in which women ‘go out with the cart’ [salir con la carreta] equally as men, differential criteria for valuing the same activity are established.” Although women’s activity was central to maintaining a familiar economy, it was seen as “help.” One of the effects of the crisis was, then, the recognition of women as *cartoneras* workers and not as mere helpers.

The differential valorization of the activity is also expressed in the ability to be in the public space. In the streets, violence is not a public expression of prestige. Even when violence has been part of how conflicts between collectors were resolved, it was not public. Moreover, violence is not part of correct behavior in the streets. Instead, violence is exercised and works as a moral argument around the uses of public space. Thus, if, during the 1970s, violence seemed to be part of the practices of the cartoneros, an inverse process occurred on the street. For my male interlocutors, the *cartoneras* can be subject to violence -primarily physical. “The street is not a place for women. They have to be in the street all day with people. It’s dangerous. Anything can happen to them. There are drunk people.” “You must know about the street; it is not for everyone. Women can suffer violence, from the police, from other kinds. It is not for women to work in the street.”

For male *cartoneros*, the street is a masculine space, as opposed to the domestic sphere and the neighborhood, which is the security space. The anonymous city appears, discursively, as a place of danger for women, an area beyond the control of men.

Caring for women (that is, control over them) was, for my male interlocutors, a central dimension of masculinity. *Cuidado* (care) was a polysemic notion. The women take care of “the pot”; the women take care of the children and the husbands. Women take care of their autonomy. Yet, at the same time, men dispute that autonomy and care. In everyday comments, I heard men refer to women’s attitudes on the street. “She went out to *cartonear* with makeup,” Raúl told me. “She went out, and she stayed hanging around all day. They have to talk to concierges. You know how this works!” stated Ramiro. Men reconstruct their masculinity based on strength (ability to carry) and caring for their women on the street.

Also, there has been a new division of labor. While men looked for the waste, women rang house bells or entered businesses to “ask” or beg. “Asking” (*pedir*) is configured as the opposite of working.

For most of my male interlocutors, physical strength is necessary for collecting. “A cart is many, many kilos. This is not for women.” Even in the work cooperatives, the place given to women referred to the site’s cleanliness to the separation, but never to jobs that required physical strength that men carried out. In 2007, I attended a meeting between cooperative members that was held before the one that would later be held with City Government personnel. In it, they drew up a draft of the minute that they would later sign to establish the members’ positions in the plant. The distribution was made according to previous experiences (work, friendship, and affinity), social hierarchies, and gender relations.¹³

¹³ I reproduce the minute draft correcting spelling errors and anonymizing names.

On July 2 [2007], the board of directors and part of the associates of the XX cooperative met at the XXX headquarters. To deal with the following order of business. Construction of the new green center located in the XX built by NITIDA. Having discussed with each associate the activity to be administered by each.

MAN (president of the cooperative): control.

WOMAN: plant control.

MAN: general tasks.

MAN: Control of exits and entrances of vehicles.

WOMAN: cook.

WOMAN: kitchen helper.

WOMAN: Kitchen helper.

WOMAN: Plastic separation.

OLDER MAN: Plastic separation.

MAN: General maintenance.

MAN: separation.

MAN: loading and unloading.

MAN: Separator.

MAN: Presser.

MAN: Presser.

MAN: Loader.

MAN: Loader.

MAN: Loader.

MAN: Loader.

WOMAN: Cleaning.

WOMAN: Cleaning

WOMAN: Administration.

Without having more topics to deal with, being 12:30 hours, today's minutes close.

President: MAN.

Prosecretary: WOMAN WIFE OF THE PRESIDENT.

More generally, in the city of Buenos Aires, the gender division is constructed by the local Government. For example, the "Environmental Promoters" program is performed by women (Puricelli, 2017) who go home by home trying to make residents aware of the environmental importance of separating waste. In addition, women are supposed to be more trustworthy than men for neighbors (Perelman and Puricelli, 2019). The entry of women into the activity, the construction of collection as an environmental practice, and a more formalized work broadened the notion of what being a collector means. Being cartonera does not only or always imply working with garbage.

Economy(s), moral values, and ways of living in times of crises

From what I have raised in this text, I would like to finish this article by rethinking some questions about “the recycling economy” post-crisis in Argentina.

First, it is necessary to think about the temporalities of social processes. As in 2001, there are critical moments in which there is consensus about being in crisis.

Crises can be considered ruptures and revealing moments of social processes (Sahlins, 1972). Therefore, it is necessary to (re)think about the temporalities of the explanations of crises and think about what crises reveal for whom (Barrios, 2017) and how different forms of uncertainties are produced (de L’Estoile, 2014). This for whom refers to the researchers as the actors themselves. The ruptures implied by this idea of crisis are not the same for all people, nor are they processed in the same way. The emerging processes for *carreros*, the “structural” *cirujas*, and the new cartoneros were different as I developed. To understand diversity, thinking behind and beyond the crisis is necessary.

Cartonear, *cirujear* as a legitimate way of making a living must be understood from the changes in the “world of work” and the “world of collection.”

A look beyond the crisis (“backward”) also allows an understanding of informal collection beyond its exceptionality, beyond a disruptive moment or stage (crisis, job loss), and to understand the nuances and forms of survival that have existed in Argentina. For many informal collectors was not a diversion from a way of living. And given the moral constructions around what is a dignified life and a dignified way of earning a living, it is necessary to focus on how people understand dignified life since moral assessments are constitutive of survival practices.

From here, it is possible to understand the differences around informal collection as something generalizable. For example, in Rio de Janeiro, the trajectories and access to the labor market of collectors have been different (Lima, 2021), which allows us to understand the activity as a way of life (Millar, 2018). Or how high-profit collectors in Indonesia try to go unnoticed, and companies that produce or use pellets from recycled plastics choose strategic invisibility for their activities (Colombijn, 2020).

There are different “recycling markets” with different aesthetics, such as the urban organic waste composting initiatives (Arisi and Soares, 2020), which are also based on discourses with “crisis” as a backdrop: it is the “conscious” of middle sectors that propose political forms of reuse.

This shows that in economies of recycling circulate different moralities and valuations that are the product of the crisis, but that do not end there. But this aestheticization as a way of producing value - which has much to do with aestheticization as a political form (Perelman, 2022b) - also occurs within the same circuit.

Cirujeo as dignified work was established and made possible by the inscription of the collection in the grammar of work and in a new circuit of commerce where the “environment” had a central place. This was not just an instrumental use of existing grammar but a construction produced from struggles to impose meanings. Studies on cartoneros have marked the importance of the work on recovering garbage that can become a material (Carenzo, 2011) or an economic input (Jurado and Schamber, 2020).

However, the relationship between the environment and recycling cannot be considered part of a single regime of value since different circuits around garbage coexist. Other ways of thinking about the circulation of objects through different spheres of social and economic valuation coexist today in Buenos Aires.

Following things and people allows us to understand the intertwined world that constitutes the economic circuit of recycling which, taking up Zelizer’s proposal, is constituted not only by economic practices but also by moralities, forms of exchange, and aesthetics. Furthermore, these ways of being in space, feeling, and thinking about gender relations have an economic component insofar as they structure how it is collected, bought, and sold.

If the circular economy appears as a collective political (and even aesthetic) project about how objects should circulate, a look from the point of collecting allows us to show not only that constitution but also those frameworks of possibilities in which the practices are endowed of senses. The cartoneros are part of a world where thousands of people reuse (re-circulate) things differently. The plurality of practices in which objects and people pass produce moral, legal, political, and value transformations. This is what the waste recovery circuit is made of.

Received: March 15, 2023

Accepted: March 20, 2023

References

- ADISSI, Grisel. 2003. "El fenómeno "cartoneros" en los medios gráficos porteños – La construcción de un nuevo sujeto/objeto histórico. [en línea, consultado: 05 de julio de 2005]. http://www.urbaed.ungs.edu.ar/recursos_fichero.htm
- ALEXANDER, Catherine; RENO, Joshua (eds.). 2012. *Economies of Recycling: The global transformation of materials, values, and social relations*. London/ New York: Zed Books.
- ARISI, Barbara Maisonnave; SOARES, Tobias Gustavo Silva. 2020. "Economia Circular no rumo da Sociedade Circular e da Bioeconomia Circular: Iniciativas de compostagem urbana de lixo orgânico em São Paulo e Florianópolis". *Iluminuras*, 21(55): 246-263.
- BARRIOS, Roberto. 2017. "What Does Catastrophe Reveal for Whom? The Anthropology of Crises and Disasters at the Onset of the Anthropocene". *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 46(1): 151-166.
- BAUMAN, Zygmunt. 2005. *Vidas desperdiciadas. La modernidad y sus parias*. Buenos Aires: Paidós.
- BOHANNAN, Paul. 1955 "Some Principles of Exchange and Investment among the Tiv." *American Anthropologist*, 57(1): 60-70.
- BOLTANSKI, Luc; THÉVENOT, Laurent. 1991. *De la justification: les économies de la grandeur*. Paris: Gallimard.
- CARENZO, Sebastian; JUAREZ, Paula; BECERRA, Lucas. 2022 "Is there room for a circular economy "from below"? Reflections on privatisation and commoning of circular waste loops in Argentina". *Local Environment*, 0(0): 1-17.
- CARENZO, Sebastián. 2011. "Desfetichizar para producir valor, refetichizar para producir el colectivo: cultura material en una cooperativa de 'cartoneros' del gran Buenos Aires". *Horizontes Antropológicos*, 17: 15-42.
- CAVALCANTI, Mariana. 2013. "À espera, em ruínas: Urbanismo, estética e política no Rio de Janeiro da 'PACificação'". *Dilemas. Revista de Estudos de Conflito e Controle Social*, 6(2): 191-228.
- COLOMBIJN, Freek. 2020. "Sigilo no fim da cadeia de reciclagem: A reciclagem de resíduos plásticos em Surabaya, Indonésia". *Iluminuras*, 21(55): 14-37.
- COMERFORD, John Cunha. 1999. *Fazendo a luta: Sociabilidade, falas e rituais na construção de organizações camponesas*. Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará/Nuap.
- DE L'ESTOILE, Benoît. 2014. "'Money Is Good, but a Friend Is Better': Uncertainty, Orientation to the Future, and 'the Economy'". *Current Anthropology*, 55(S9): S62-S73.
- DE L'ESTOILE, Benoît. 2015. "La réunion comme outil et rituel de gouvernement". *Genèses*, 98(1): 7-27.
- ECKERT, Cornelia; RIAL, Carmen Silvia de Moraes; COLOMBIJN, Freek. 2020 "Antropologia e resíduos sólidos/lixo". *Iluminuras*, 21(55): 5-13.
- EVANS- PRITCHARD, Edward Evan. 1987. *Los Nuer*. Barcelona: Anagrama.
- FERNÁNDEZ ÁLVAREZ, María Inés; PERELMAN Mariano. 2020. "Perspectivas antropológicas sobre las formas de (ganarse la) vida". *Cuadernos de Antropología Social*, 51: 7 - 21.
- GORBAN, Debora. 2011. "'Salir con la carreta' Restituyendo decisiones en un espacio de posibles". *Apuntes de Investigación del CECYP*, XV(20): 157-178.
- GRAEBER, David. 2001. *Toward an anthropological theory of value: the false coin of our own dreams*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- GRAEBER, David. 2018. *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- GUTBERLET, Jutta; CARENZO, Sebastián; KAIN, Jaan-Henrik; MANTOVANI MARTINIANO DE AZEVEDO, Adalberto. 2017. "Waste Picker Organizations and Their Contribution to the Circular Economy: Two Case Studies from a Global South Perspective". *Resources*, 6(4): 52. <https://doi.org/10.3390/resources6040052>

- GUTBERLET, Jutta; CARENZO, Sebastián. 2020. "Waste Pickers at the Heart of the Circular Economy: A Perspective of Inclusive Recycling from the Global South". *Worldwide Waste: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 3(1): 1-14.
- GUYER, Jane. 2004. *Marginal Gains. Monetary Transactions in Atlantic Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- JURADO, Alejandro; SCHAMBER, Pablo. 2020. "La reconstrucción post pandemia del sistema de reciclaje con inclusión social". <https://cafedelasciudades.com.ar/articulos/la-reconstruccion-post-pandemia-del-sistema-de-reciclaje-con-inclusion-social/> (accessed in October, 15, 2021).
- LEITE LOPES, Sergio (coord.). 2004. *A ambientalização dos conflitos sociais. Participação e controle público da poluição industrial*. Rio de Janeiro: Dumará Distribuidora de Publicações Ltda.
- LIMA, Maria Raquel Passos. 2021. *O Averso do lixo. Materialidade, valor e visibilidade*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora UFRJ.
- LOMNITZ, Claudio. 2003. "Times of Crisis: Historicity, Sacrifice, and the Spectacle of Debacle in Mexico City". *Public Culture*, 15(1): 127-147.
- MERLINSKY, María Gabriela. 2013. *Política, derechos y justicia ambiental: el conflicto del Riachuelo*. Buenos Aires: FCE.
- MILLAR, Kathleen M. 2018. *Reclaiming the discarded: life and labor on Rio's garbage dump*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- MUNN, Nancy D. 1992. *The fame of Gawa: a symbolic study of value transformation in a Massim society*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- NAROTZKY, Susana; BESNIER, Niko. 2014. "Crisis, Value, and Hope: Rethinking the Economy: An Introduction to Supplement 9". *Current Anthropology*, 55(S9): S4-S16.
- OSZLAK, Oscar. 1991. *Merecer la ciudad. Los pobres y el derecho al Espacio Urbano*. Buenos Aires: CEDES-HUMANITAS.
- PAIVA, Verónica. 2008. *Cartoneros y cooperativas de recuperadores: una mirada sobre la recolección informal de residuos. Área Metropolitana de Buenos Aires, 1999-2007*. Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros.
- PERELMAN, Mariano; PURICELLI, Verónica. 2019. "Cartoneros y promotoras ambientales. Caminar, desigualdad y experiencias urbanas en el espacio público de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires". In: *La ciudad mercancía: turistificación, renovación urbana y políticas de control del espacio público*. Buenos Aires: Teseo. pp. 201-222.
- PERELMAN, Mariano. 2008. "De la vida en la Quema al trabajo en las calles. El cirujeo en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires". *Avá. Revista de Antropología*, 12: 117-135.
- PERELMAN, Mariano. 2011a. "La construcción de la idea de trabajo digno en cirujas de la ciudad de Buenos Aires". *Intersecciones en antropología*, 12: 69-81.
- PERELMAN, Mariano. 2011b. "La estabilización en el cirujeo de la ciudad de Buenos Aires. Una aproximación desde la antropología". *Desarrollo Económico*, 51(201): 35-57.
- PERELMAN, Mariano. 2015. "Viejos y nuevos cirujas. Construcciones temporales y espaciales en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires". *Cuadernos de Antropología Social*, 42: 125-141.
- PERELMAN, Mariano. 2017. "Construyendo la legitimidad. Esperas y argumentos morales en la toma del Parque Indoamericano de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires". *DILEMAS: Revista de Estudios de Conflicto e Controle Social*, 10: 241-258.
- PERELMAN, Mariano. 2020. "Mercados informales y violencia(s) en Buenos Aires". *Antropolítica*, 50: 36-61.
- PERELMAN, Mariano. 2022a. "El dólar como capital(es). Protestas y formas de construcción de clase en el segundo gobierno de Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2011-2015)". *Etnografías contemporáneas*, 8(14): 154-173.

- PERELMAN, Mariano. 2022b. "La venta ambulante en Buenos Aires. Economía(s) (i)legales, estética y circulación de objetos." *Etnográfica*, 26: 109-123.
- PETCOFF, Emilio. 1965. "El mundo prohibido de los cirujas." *Revista Atlántida*, 48 (1184): 22- 27.
- PURICELLI, Verónica. 2017. "Nuevos sujetos en la recolección diferenciada de la basura: el 'Programa de Promotoras Ambientales' en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires". *Quid 16. Revista del Área de Estudios Urbanos*, 8: 195-208.
- RIAL, Carmen Sílvia Moraes (ed.). 2016. *O poder do lixo: abordagens antropológicas dos resíduos sólidos*. Rio de Janeiro: Associação Brasileira de Antropologia.
- SAHLINS, Marshall. 1972. *Stone Age Economics*. Chicago: Aldine Atherton Inc.
- SCHAMBER, Pablo; SUÁREZ, Francisco (eds.). 2007. *Recicloscopio. Miradas sobre recolectores urbanos de residuos en América Latina*. Buenos Aires: UNLa-UNGS- Prometeo.
- SORROCHE, Santiago. 2016. "Ni 'vagos' ni 'ladrones': trabajadores cartoneros. Las organizaciones cartoneras y la disputa por el reconocimiento de su actividad como un trabajo". *Revista Épocas. Revista de Ciencias Sociales y Crítica Cultural*, 3: 1-15.
- SUÁREZ, Francisco. 2001. *Actores Sociales en la Gestión de Residuos Sólidos de los Municipios de Malvinas Argentinas y José C. Paz*. 2001. 139 f. Tesis de Maestría en Políticas Ambientales y Territoriales – Universidad de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires.
- SUÁREZ, Francisco. 2021. "Gestión de residuos, la integralidad pendiente: Paradigmas, principios y agendas públicas". *Ambiente en Diálogo*, 2: 1-20-27.
- TURNER, Terence. 2008. "Marxian value theory: an anthropological perspective." *Anthropological Theory*, 8(1): 43-56.
- VISACOVSKY, Sergio. 2019. "Futuros en el presente. Los estudios antropológicos de las situaciones de incertidumbre y esperanza". *PUBLICAR-En Antropología y Ciencias Sociales*, 26: 1-25.
- ZELIZER, Viviana. 2004. "Circuits of Commerce". In: J. Alexander; G. Marx; Ch. Williams (eds.), *Self, social structure, and beliefs: explorations in sociology*. Berkeley: University of California Press. pp. 122-144.
- ZELIZER, Viviana. 2008. "Dinero, circuito, relaciones íntimas". *Sociedad y Economía*, 14: 11-34.

Mariano Perelman

National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) and University of Buenos Aires (UBA), Argentina

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4914-3198>

Email: mdperelman@gmail.com

Dossier editors

Cristhian Cajé

Federal University of Santa Catarina – UFSC, Brazil and
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam – VU, Amsterdam.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8713-7872>

Email: cristhiancaje@gmail.com

Barbara Maisonnave Arisi

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam – VU, Amsterdam.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7560-9636>

Email: barbara.arisi@gmail.com