



The Man of a Thousand Tricks: Chomón the animator¹

Paulo Roberto de Carvalho Barbosa

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais – UFMG
prcbarbosa@ig.com.br

Introduction²

At the beginning of the 20th century, a Spanish globetrotter circulated among some of the main European cinema companies, working as a specialist in tricks. He was prolific, leaving the visual imprint of his skill on about 500 films, many of which were directed by him, including short films, medium-length films and feature films. Segundo Víctor Aurelio Chomón y Ruiz was born in 1871 in the town of Teruel, in the autonomous region of Aragon. He moved to France in 1895, the debut year of the *cinématographe* Lumière. It is thought that he got in touch with moving images during his early years in Paris. Cinema technology, however, was shown to him only at the turn of the century, in the film-painting workshop of magician Georges Méliès, with whom he worked for two years. His first films appeared in 1902, when he moved to Barcelona to establish his own film-painting workshop in the Catalanian capital, what is known to be the first Spanish film-production company. This was the beginning of a career in cinema that lasted almost three decades and was only cut short by his death, in 1929, after shooting a documentary in Morocco.

Chomón was a polymorphic cinematographer, being a photographer, a documentarist and an inventor of equipment. He passed between the many transformations of the cinema in the first decades of the new century, always

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² English version by Francis K. Johnson, translator from Czech and Portuguese, MPhil, DipTrans, DPSI. FranciskJohnson@gmail.com.

adapting to innovation along the way.³ He had a special vocation for trick films, enhanced throughout numerous titles, characterized by technical ingenuity and overflowing fantasy.. Trick films were already part of his work in Barcelona, a period in which he commenced an intense collaboration with Pathé-Frères. He painted films for that prestigious French company, as well as photographing the titles of those films for the Spanish versions. Impressed by his wide-ranging skills, Pathé invited him, in 1904, to be one of their film directors. From 1905 to 1910 Chomón made 132 films for the company, 100 of which under his own directorship. He worked at a frenetic pace, creating trick films, phantasmagorical films, chase scenes, *féeries*, documentaries and comedies. He joined the company at a moment when it was expanding its activities, opening offices in cities such as London, Moscow, Berlin, Vienna, Milan, New York and Shanghai in order to market its products. Their main competitor was Méliès' Star Film company, and Chomón's job was to produce films for Pathé-Frères that would be capable of competing in terms of tricks and pyrotechnics with those of his ex-boss, who was currently the leading exponent of trick films.

Contact with new influences had invigorating effects on Chomón's work. He started colouring his films through mechanical stencils,⁴ he engaged professional actors as the stars, and started to have the benefit of the technical innovations that were in vogue amongst the company's directors. Animation was a particular feature of the techniques used by the cineaste and it came to occupy a special place in his filmography thereafter. From 1907 the year in which the technique first appeared until the middle of the 1920s, when Chomón made his last films, about forty titles in the Spaniard's catalogue contained animated scenes. This paper will discuss the principle animated films of this "Emperor of the Tricks",⁵ focussing in particular on his contributions to animation, an area that was then in the process of development as a language and which is still reinventing itself today. Without losing sight of the director's creative process, the article will give detailed consideration to Chomón's photography and its application to the animation of

³ For more information about Chomón's journey through the transformations of cinema in its first decades, see: *Do truque ao efeito especial: o cinema de Segundo de Chomón* (Barbosa, 2014).

⁴ For more information about the first film-colouring techniques, see *O primeiro cinema em cores: tecnologia e estética do filme colorido até 1935* (Barbosa, 2014).

⁵ The title "Emperor of the Tricks" was conferred on Chomón by the Italian Giovanni Pastrone, a producer who was notorious for his reluctance to praise his subordinates.

puppets and silhouettes and to pixilation. Its conclusion will highlight the way in which the Spaniard tried to turn animation into an end in itself, rather than a simple visual effect.

I – Animating the image

As old as cinema itself, animation traces its origins to the first years of moving images. In 1898 Stuart Blackton and Albert E Smith, the founders of the Vitagraph company, were shooting a film on top of a building in New York. The two were filming a conceived scene to get the trick of substitution splicing.⁶ They did not notice that a cloud of steam from a generator in the building was hovering the background during the filming. Having photographed it inadvertently several times in different positions, Blackton and Smith noticed, when they projected the film, that the cloud appeared and disappeared in quick succession on the screen, creating an unexpected illusion of movement. It took them until 1906 to capitalise on this effect, when it occurred to Blackton that, if clouds could have their movement manipulated in that way, the same thing would apply to pictures. This resulted in *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces*, the first film to show animated cartoons, and the first of several other animated films by Blackton.⁷

Humorous Phases of Funny Faces includes a series of chalk drawings taking on various shapes on a blackboard, in the first instance under the artist's hand and subsequently without any external help. This filmic trick – making cartoons complete themselves in a picture, apparently without the help of artists – caused a *frisson*. But if Blackton's animated pictures left the audiences open-mouthed, the North American's next film caused even greater amazement. *The Haunted Hotel* (USA, Blackton, 1907) tells the story of a traveller who stays in a country hotel where a series of bizarre events occur. At one moment in the film, plates, cups, cutlery and napkins move about on a table without the intervention of human hands to serve up an extraordinary breakfast for the guest.

The spectators were not the only ones to be impressed by *The Haunted Hotel* – the cinema professionals also greatly admired the film and were intrigued by the tricks

⁶ The substitution splicing trick involved interrupting filming in order to swap people or objects in the visual field and then recommence filming, thus creating the impression that some elements of the scene had disappeared or had been replaced by others.

⁷ For more information about the early years of photographic animation, see *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898 – 1928*, by Donald Crafton.

used in the breakfast scene. Such was the interest that Thomas Edison, the producer of *The Haunted Hotel*, decided, on a visit to London, to reveal how the trick had been done. Interviewed by a local newspaper, he explained that the "haunted breakfast" of the film had been achieved by using the camera differently, in such a way as to take just one photograph where 16 would traditionally have been taken. By this means, which would later be called "stop-motion animation", it was possible to give the illusion of movement to all sorts of solid objects, which behaved on screen as if they were being subjected to sorcery.

At the time of Edison's stay in London, Chomón was carrying out film work in London. He was mesmerised by *The Haunted Hotel* and spent days trying to work out the secret of the tricks used in the film. His curiosity was not satisfied until he read Edison's interview, in which he revealed the secret of stop-motion. Once back in Paris he tried out the technique in *La maison ensorcelée*, a film that starts with three friends taking refuge from a storm in a haunted house. Surprising things happen inside the house where, as in the case of *The Haunted Hotel*, domestic utensils move about over a table as they serve up an extraordinary breakfast for the uninvited guests.

In his next film, *Le sculpteur moderne* (1908), stop-motion is used to animate plasticine, a material that had only recently been invented. It was Julienne Mathieu, the director's wife, who presented this and others of her husband's tricks to the audience. She opened the stage curtains so that they could see, in the background, a black, framed rectangle, where tiny statue-like figures appeared. There were men dressed as Roman soldiers and women who appeared to be made from marble, all placed in the rectangle by means of multiple exposure.

After the procession of miniature living statues, Julienne introduced the transformation of blocks of plasticine into sculptures by the popular artist Georges Lucien Guyot, who occasionally collaborated with Chomón. Then she showed the plasticine being turned into a top hat, with two kittens inside it. The next picture showed the plasticine changing into a battered shoe in which some mice had made their nest. Bringing the film to a close, she showed the audience a smoking monkey, an eagle, an alligator and a lion's head (fig. 1), which finally turned into a stooping old woman.



Figure 1 – *Sculpteur moderne*

In 1908 animation was taking its first steps. With this series of animated films, Chomón was getting to grips with the technique and testing its limits. The title was *The Modern Sculptor*, which, in this case, was the cinema itself, willing to generate bodies and kinetic objects from blocks of plastic mass. Cats, lions, monkeys, mice, shoes and even bootlaces came to life on the screen, moving over a pedestal. It was stop-motion that made these phenomena possible, breathing life into amorphous matter by means of photography. Chomón himself, who was in charge of the carousel of images seen in the film, was a sculptor at the cutting edge.

There were very few people who had expertise in animation in 1908, and Chomón's work was pioneering. His approach to the new technique was very experimental, as can be seen not only in *Le sculpteur moderne*, but also in *Les ombres chinoises*, which the researcher Juan Gabriel Tharrats has identified as the first cinematic animation of silhouettes (1990: 30). The film opens with a couple of Chinese dancers, twirling coloured parasols. They are set against a small rectangular screen which, after a cut, occupies the whole of the cinema screen, showing an animation of silhouettes cut from paper. Features of this whimsical film, which was more interested in showing what it could do than in telling a story, included a dancer jumping over a rope, and household objects combining and recombining in strange anthropomorphisms.

The technical virtuosity of *Les ombres chinoises* calls for an explanation of how it was made. In order to animate the series of cut-outs from white card in the film, Chomón used a table of opaque glass, illuminated from below, and a camera looking down on it vertically, a set-up which is still used by animators nowadays. The director photographed the cut-outs, picture by picture, in different positions, which resulted in white images moving about against a black background. But Chomón preferred to use the negative of the film for the final version of *Les ombres*

chinoises, so that what was seen on screen was black images against a white background.

II – The life of objects

The director's exploration of animation led him to still more discoveries. In *El hotel eléctrico*, Chomón used stop-motion to animate human bodies. Known today as pixilation, the technique allows the human figure to trace, on the screen, movements that would be inconceivable on a normal stage. In the first decade of the 20th century, these movements were robotic, mechanical — ideal for displaying the changes through which people and urban life were passing under the impact of new technology. *El hotel eléctrico* was a hybrid film, combining live-action, pixilation and stop-motion scenes to portray the routine in a hotel where the services are provided entirely automatically, thanks to electricity.

The film opens in the hotel lobby, where a couple on holiday are being attended by a helpful doorman, who — instead of ordering porters to take Laure and Bertrand's luggage to their room — makes the cases go on their own by manipulating a system of little levers. Once in the room, the bags are opened and their contents — brushes, socks, trousers and shirts — transport themselves neatly into cupboard drawers. Obedient to the law of cause and effect, the film initially fulfils the purpose of introducing the spectator to the wonderful world of electric gadgets by describing the passage of the cases and their contents.

When the couple get to their room, more surprises await them as they spruce themselves up after their journey. Bertram manipulates yet more levers and a close-up shows a battery of brushes and cloths polishing his shoes in a further stop-motion session. Pulling some more levers leads to Laure being spirited to a chair at the back of the room, after which another close-up shows a flurry of brushes tidying up the young lady's hair (figure 2). Without either sub-titles or pauses, the narrative of the film flows smoothly on, with the tricks seeming like a natural part of the story.

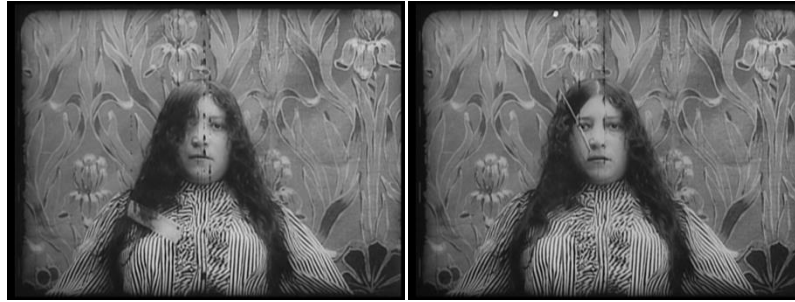


Figure 2 - Animated brush tending to Laure's hair

And so the procession of electrical contraptions continues — always with the help of animation. Now it is Bertrand's turn to be tidied up: a close up shows a shaving-brush and razor giving him a shave, and a comb tending to his hair. Yet another movement of the levers brings a writing desk from the back of the room, from which paper and pen appear and proceed to write a postcard, via stop-motion, to Laure's family. Once the "electric postcard" has been sent, it is time for the guests to have a rest, except that a drunk employee has messed about with the levers on the hotel's control panel, causing a break-down. And that is all that is needed for the room to dissolve into a whirlpool of beds, chairs, tables and cupboards, and the film ends with Laure and Bertrand surrounded by a chaos of flying objects.

So this is modernity a la Chomón. First of all he shows all the benefits that could flow from a hotel equipped to the limit with automatic electrical paraphernalia. But it does not take long for the dark side to appear, with the short circuit in the electrical system, which plunges the hotel into complete disorder. Intended as a tool to help humanity, the panoply of modern inventions only serves, in this case, to submerge the two guests in a world of chaos. Having become a source of problems, the new equipment inaugurates a period of uncertainty rather than comfort, showing the director's doubts about and resistance to the extreme reliance on technology in the modern world.

But Chomón's belief in cinematographic technology itself remained, even if viewed idiosyncratically. The director continued with his project of investigating the possibilities of cinematography, in particular by submitting his characters to all sorts of absurd situations. Of course, unusual situations are a staple of comedy, not least in the cinema, which can use technical trickery to multiply such situations. The same goes for fantasy, which, by its nature, is no slave to "the natural course

of things" and which also benefitted enormously from that new trickery. Amongst the many devices in the Spaniard's box of tricks, stop-motion proved the most fertile for materialising the mad dreams of fantasy worlds. In *Le rêve des marmitons* (1908) it is the device that is used for making people's hands detach from their bodies and remain alive, in a sort of proto-surrealism that would have delighted Salvador Dalí.

The film opens with the antics of a group of kitchen assistants in the depths of a castle. None of them does any work, and the mayhem caused by the cooks is such that an evil sprite appears and sets about making a drink that will send them all to sleep. He then starts cutting off their hands with a chopper while they are sleeping. Animated by stop-motion, the hands begin to chop carrots, potatoes and other vegetables, and this sorcery comes to an end only when the head chef awakes (and discovers that all the kitchen work has been done). This is animation at the service of laziness, showing a dream of how, one day, all the most tedious domestic chores might be done automatically, as in this proto-surrealist fairy story.

III - A bizarre world

In Chomón's hands, this new toy — stop-motion — was capable of allowing even flies to have a lead role in a film. And it was, indeed, a little fly that the director gets to intervene in *Le rêve des marmitons* by drawing caricatures on the bald head of one of the cooks: while the man is asleep, the insect wets its legs in a bottle of Chinese ink and then runs amok, making a number of irreverent drawings on the shiny pate.⁸ And just as the Spanish director could feature a fly in a film by means of stop-motion, so he could include, among his celluloid extravaganzas, parasols processing through the streets and dancing to the sound of a circus band. This occurs in *Symphonie bizarre*, a film that, as in the case of *Le rêve des marmitons*, would have warranted the description "surrealist" if that word had been current in 1908.

The very beginning of *Symphonie bizarre* is unusual: the shadows of a group of musicians can be seen on a wall in a road, in exactly the same way as if the group

⁸ A foundation myth about stop-motion, with Chomón in the lead role, was propagated by Carlos Fernández Cuenca (1972, p. 49-50). According to Cuenca, it was the Spaniard who "discovered" stop-motion in Barcelona, during the period when he was photographing film titles for Pathé. He was going about his work when a fly came to rest on his title cards and was, inadvertently, photographed several times. This only became evident when the film was developed, and the fly could be seen moving about "crazily" on the screen. But this is no more than a myth, the real inventor of the technique being the North American Stuart Blackton.

had actually been there. Then, to our astonishment, the musicians turn up and take up their positions next to their respective shadows as they play bass drum, trumpet, accordion, clarinet, cornet and violin. The band then set off on a procession through the streets, at the end of which the man with the base drum puts each of his colleagues, one by one, inside his instrument. Then he gets inside himself, except that the arm with which he was banging the drum stays outside and continues banging, as the drum zig-zags crazily along the pavement (figure 3).

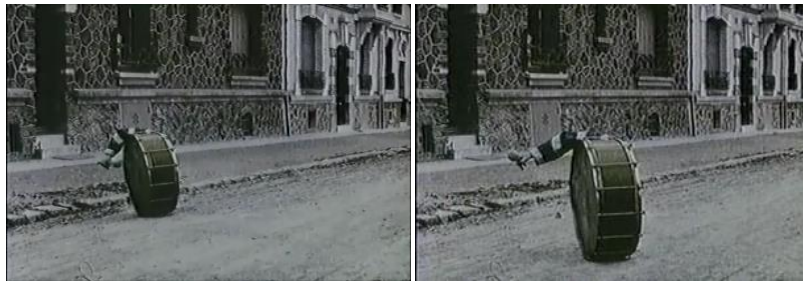


Figure 3 – *Symphonie bizarre*

Chomón returned to fantasy subjects several times in 1909. A haunted house was the phantasmagorical theme of *Une excursion incohérente*, a film about a nightmare, presented through the animation of silhouettes. Accompanied by two servants, an old married couple set out in a carriage for a stay in the countryside. The group get out for a picnic on the grass, but this is interrupted by a series of strange incidents and, eventually, by a torrential downpour. When they get back in the carriage, the group continue on their way to the house where they will be staying. When they arrive there, the servants head for the kitchen, while the couple go upstairs to have a rest. As they try to make something to eat, the servants are surprised by a pan on the oven that takes on the features of a grotesque face, and which brings their ill-fated culinary efforts to an end.

Meanwhile the couple are trying to get to sleep on the first floor. As the husband watches his wife getting ready for bed, it appears as if he is watching a film in the cinema, on a sheet extended between his bed and that of his wife. And this improvised screen is the setting for a nightmare, produced by animated silhouettes. The space between the woman's head and her foot turns into a bridge,

with a train travelling across it. When the train reaches the old lady's mouth, she swallows it. And her head turns into a house, from the door of which an agricultural labourer comes out pushing a wheelbarrow on his way to work. There follow various other weird events, and the nightmare comes to an end only when two horned men jump out of the old lady's mouth, which causes the panic-stricken husband to run off (figure 4) and jump into a water tank. His wife and the two servants give chase and fish him out in a bucket. The story finishes with the servants pumping water out of the poor man's stomach.



Figure 4 – Sinister silhouettes in *Une excursion incohérente*

Une excursion incohérente is yet another example of Chomón's technical expertise. To animate the film, he used a piece of equipment he had made himself, which was intended for stop-motion, and which was called Instrument No. 12.⁹ In the first cameras, in order to capture the sixteen photographs that were needed for one second of film, the camera's handle had to be turned twice. A single turn produced eight photographs, and one eighth of a turn produced just one. To bypass the traditional film process, Chomón modified his camera in such a way that the film advanced by just one eighth at every turn of the handle. This enabled him to capture just one photograph at each turn, which made difficult animations possible, as in the case of *Une excursion incohérente*.

Technique is an art, but art is not a technique, as the oriental saying goes, and Chomón was not only au fait with the details of cinematography, but also an ingenious inventor of imagery. The stupefying animated silhouettes that the

⁹ Chomón's Instrument No. 12 also had a mechanism for counting photographs, which gave it greater precision in both the overprinting trick and the stop trick.

husband sees from his bed look like a film in a cinema, showing how cinematic equipment could be used to portray nightmares. So the adjective "incoherent" is by no means out of place in the film's title. Although it referred primarily to the weird events projected on to the sheet, it also hinted at follies and contradictions that were part of the new age. And Chomón was doing this at a time when many absurdities which nowadays are seen as normal had not yet become part of everyday life, but were rather seen as the crowning glories of an age of instrumental rationality.

Before the arrival of the Surrealists, the Incoherents¹⁰ already had their sights on the emerging so-called rationalism. They were a collective of non-conformist artists and writers at the end of the 19th century who were protagonists of an art that would be anarchic and irreverent, and which would mock the current primacy of technical rationality over emotional sensibility. Chomón sympathised with the movement, as can be seen in his film *Une excursion incohérente*, a mix of live-action and animated images used, in a range of scenes, as a way of expressing scepticism about the much-vaunted modern age, with its hopes of human redemption through machinery and applied reason.

IV - On the heels of the pickpocket

In 1909, Chomón's contract with Pathé due to end in 1910 was in its final phase. But although the company made no mention of renewing it, the director still dedicated himself to his work with his habitual enthusiasm. And the end of his French period was marked by children's films, comic films and chase films, amongst others. Slippery Jim (*Pickpocket ne craint pas les entraves*, 1909) was a chase film that included two daring animation techniques. The film brought fantasy to a genre that, until then, had been resistant to the use of trick technology, and it did so by the incessant repetition of scenes filmed *au plein air*.

Two policemen have brought a pickpocket before the sergeant in a police station. The sergeant orders them to shackle the culprit's legs, and they lead him off-screen. We then see the pickpocket sitting calmly in a cell while the policemen attach metal shackles to his lower legs. After the policemen leave, we see the pickpocket's legs in close-up, whereupon, by means of stop-motion, they appear

¹⁰ Almost forgotten by historians nowadays, the Incoherents were founded in Paris in 1880 by the writer Jules Lévy, who advocated an art suffused with the absurd, with nightmares and with a childlike vision of the world.

to come apart at the shins, so that he can free himself of the shackles (figure 5). This is followed by a frantic chase of the thief, and once more animation – this time using photographic cut-outs – shows him on a bicycle that can fly over the sea, loop the loop in the sky, and land on the roof of a moving train, before returning to the road. All this to the delight of the audiences, who were amazed by his ubiquity.

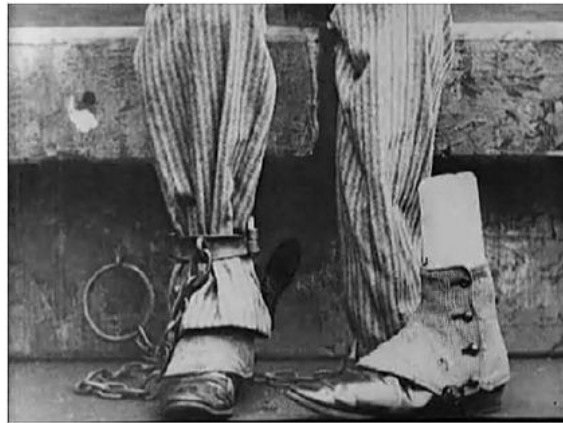


Figure 5 – *Slippery Jim*

The combination of fantasy and technical ingenuity that is seen in *Slippery Jim* was evident again in *El teatro eléctrico de Bob* (1909), a rare example of a film almost entirely composed of stop-motion scenes. The only live-action scene is at the opening of the film, which shows a group of bored children in a room. To entertain themselves the children set up a toy theatre, on the stage of which two puppets can be seen. Animated by stop-motion, the puppets box, roll round on the floor and simulate swordsmen duelling. A clown exercising on horizontal bars appears at the end of this film – a film that is less interested in narration than in demonstrating the capability of the cinematographer to give life to children's puppets.

One of the titles in Chomón's final period with Pathé should be mentioned, in that it makes use of pixilation, applied in a particularly inventive way. In *L'hotel hanté* (1909), the director shows a man who is trying to relax in a hotel bedroom where two ghosts spin his bed around, this way and that. The ghosts disappear and a chair appears, to the guest's further stupefaction. The chair spins around, multiplies into dozens of further chairs, shakes and turns, and even kicks its legs. Submitted to such dramatic shenanigans, the man seems at the mercy of a chair that is determined to drive him mad. A metaphor for the vortex of change through

which urban life was passing at that time, the film is one more astute commentary by the director about the frenetic contemporary scenario, which was becoming fuller and fuller of novelties produced by technological advances and by the infernal pace of modern life – a complex scenario that would soon extend into politics and, eventually, into the devastation of the First World War.

V - Puppets at war

When his contract with Pathé Frères came to an end, Chomón did not abandon the cinema. Instead, he returned to Barcelona to set up, in 1910, a new production company, together with a Catalan businessman.¹¹ And during two years in Spain he made about thirty films, only five of which have survived (three fictional and two documentary). It is quite possible that he used stop-motion in this second Spanish period, but there is no evidence of it, because none of the remaining films contain animated scenes. Animation reappears vigorously, however, in the period that followed the failure of the director's projects in the Iberian peninsula, especially when he became – commencing in 1912 – part of Itala Film, one of the most important Italian companies in operation at the beginning of that decade.

In Italy he collaborated in the making of hundreds of feature films, either under the auspices of Itala Film or of other production companies. And he worked in various capacities, as photographer, director, lighting engineer and producer of tricks. There were significantly fewer of his own films, given that the industry did not look favourably, at that time, on individual flights of fancy. These were new times and it was necessary for him to become anonymous in Italy, in accordance with the pragmatism that was in fashion in the industry, both within Italy and elsewhere. So he could only make his own films on the rare occasions when he was not involved in the company's regular projects. But although few in number, the films made by the Spaniard in Italy preserve something of his old obsession with animation, as can be seen in *La guerra i il sogno de Momi* (1917), which he co-directed with Pastrone. The film is divided between sequences in live-action and a long animated sequence that was entirely under Chomón's direction. The live-action part provides the nub of the narrative, while the animation is destined to

¹¹ In Barcelona, Chomón founded the production company Chomón y Fuster which, despite its intense activity, was declared bankrupt after nine months. Indebted, and without a studio where he could film, he was taken on again by Pathé, which had decided to open a branch in Spain, with Chomón at its helm. At Iberico Film, he left the creative thrust of Chomón y Fuster behind and made films about regional Spanish characteristics.

show the dream of a boy whose father is currently in the trenches of the First World War.

Together with his family, little Momi is awaiting news of his father, an Italian officer on the Alpine front. The news comes in the form of a letter, the information in which is presented in a flashback. News from the front becomes mixed up in the boy's imagination as he goes off to play with his toys. He falls asleep, which is the cue for a long dream sequence, featuring the bad-tempered puppets Trik and Trak. In Momi's dream, the puppets are shown to have irreconcilable differences, which they try to resolve by fisticuffs. When they have punched themselves out, they call up their armies to take the field against each other (figure 6). It is at this point that the film touches on events in the First World War, when Italy was pitched against the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a powerful ally of the Central Powers.

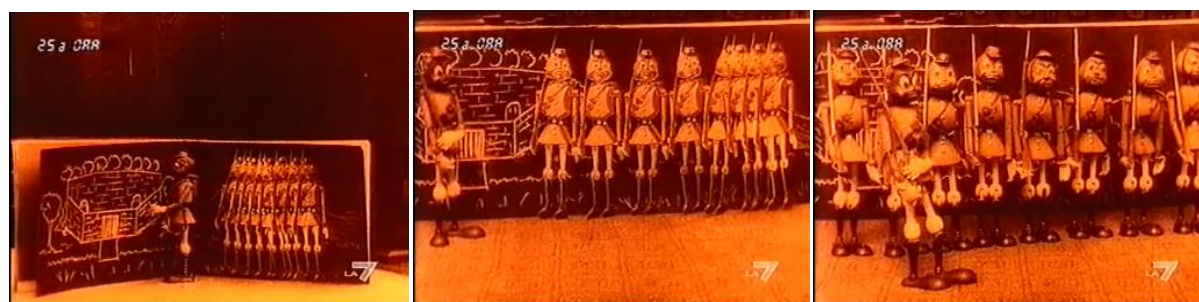


Figure 6 – Animated army in *La guerra e il sogno di Momi*

Animated by stop-motion, the dream sequence of *La guerra e il sogno di Momi* functions as a little documentary about the First World War. The first conflict of the century to make use of modern technology, this war saw the appearance of new and lethal weapons, such as the Germans' 70-ton cannon that was capable of firing 800-kilo missiles at a distance of 12 kilometres. In Momi's dream this weapon becomes the cannon Colossus and kills dozens of Trik's soldiers. In addition to the missiles, the cannon "vomits suffocating fumes", all with the intention of achieving a "lightning-quick victory"; here the reference is to the Germans, who were using chemical weapons against the Allied countries. But Trik's men are not to be outdone and they come up with an apparatus to suck the "mephitic gases" out of the atmosphere: a bellows attached to a bell, which sucks in the gas, in the film, by means of reverse motion. And what brilliant strategy is Trik going to come up

with to avoid Trak's cannon fire? Penetration into the enemy's arsenal and writing the following message on their missiles: "Return to sender".

Momi's imaginary war continues with a "battle in the clouds": Trak's soldiers appear in an airship, dropping bombs on to Trik's country, a reference to Germany's Zeppelin attacks on France and England. The scene of the bombs being dropped is followed by one showing the destruction on the ground. Houses fly through the air, buildings are engulfed in flames and bodies explode. Fortunately all of this is only a dream and we return to Momi's room, where the puppets are still fighting on top of him. Because the war has not finished in the physical world, it cannot be finished in the film by the victory of either side, and instead concludes with Momi waking up, having been pricked by Trak's bayonet.

Although presented as comedy, the vision of war in Chomón's short film is deeply pessimistic. The boy's dream shows what the live-action would not dare to show: destroyed cities, generalised chaos, and death on an industrial scale. And this was the actual result in Europe after the creation of an unprecedented, barbaric conflict, without any end in view. A war that was based on modern technology caused endless unhappiness to humanity. This was not the outlook that might have been expected for a new century inaugurated under the auspices of rationalism. And what was to follow? That was the question left hanging by this pessimistic film, which concludes with a prayer to the heavens "in the sacred hope of those who wait".

VII - Conclusion

At the dawn of the 20th century, the cinema raised deep questions. And what was the use of this medium, apart from the obvious function of registering "real life"? Chomón devoted his life to formulating responses to that question, testing the limits of technology with his films, opening up new routes, and generally attending to the experimental needs of the early years of the cinema. Animation was a highlight of his films, functioning as a fertile field of investigation. Endowed with a mysterious visual quality, it was an unknown dimension of moving imagery, creating, on the screen, dreamlike illusions. The director, whose basic function was the creation of dreams, understood that he was dealing with a new

cinematographic seam and he fell in love with the technique, using it in his main films and thus making his contribution to the development of that "art within art".¹²

Far from occupying a peripheral place in Chomón's poetic vision, animation was at the heart of his creative process. It was ideal for a director who sought to differentiate his work from that of Méliès, and it enabled him, at Pathé-Frères, to produce films that were more truly works of creative authorship. And it was a trick that was generally ignored by the French magician – a trick that lent itself to all sorts of variations, such as stop-motion with puppets, inert matter, silhouettes, photographs and whatever else came into the director's head. What could be more challenging for a lover of trickery? Chomón availed himself freely of this resource and, in return, animation gave his films a singularity that distanced them greatly from those of Méliès.

Finally, animation showed itself apt for inclusion in the industrialised system towards which cinema moved in the 1910s. It continued to permeate Chomón's work in Italy, providing the opportunity for all sorts of different scenarios in his Transalpine films, most of which were narrative films. Segundo de Chomón was not only one of the great creators of the nascent fictional cinematography, and one of the first masters of special effects,¹³ but he also contributed to the success of that "other" type of cinema, the type that was more individual and artisan, and was the preferred territory of artists dedicated to "making the everyday enchanting". Animation was hardly up and running at all in the cinema when Chomón gave it this first influx of originality and embraced it as his favourite field of experimentation.¹⁴ He helped to take the technique out of its limbo, liberating puppets, cut-outs, pictures and even human bodies to enter a world of free, surreal movement on his marvellous, enchanted screen.

¹² The expression "art within art" comes from the theorist Paul Wells, who uses it as the theme of his book *Animation: genre and authorship* (2002).

¹³ Op. cit., *Do truque ao efeito especial: o cinema de Segundo de Chomón* (Barbosa, 2014).

¹⁴ An expression of the French poet Guillaume Apollinaire.

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