

connectedness has meant, for example, that Havana or Buenos Aires have a direct and familiar immediacy for most Galicians that is not commonly shared by the rest of Spaniards, or Europeans in general, and this is reflected politically, economically, demographically, and culturally. In that sense, peripheral positions have meant much wider global visions.¹⁹

Migration, uprootedness, transculturation, and the feelings of nostalgic *saudade* (melancholy) and *morriña* (homesickness) are Atlantic themes that permeate Galician culture, having an enormous influence on its literature, music, and visual arts, and are a large part of the Galician cultural hybridity. Attesting to this reality we encounter a solid literary history of novels, stories, poems, and memoirs, with contemporary examples such as *A man dos paños* (The Migrant's Hand, 2000) by Manuel Rivas, *Tres Trebóns* (Three Thunders, 2005) by Xurxo Souto, or *Finisterre* by María Rosa Lojo (2005),²⁰ as well as a rich audio/visual culture that needs its own history, films such as *Mamasunción* (1984), *Gallego* (1987), *Sempre Xonxa* (1989), *Bs. As.* (2006), *Hotel Tívoli* (2007), and *Vikíngland* (2011), or the Caribbean and Latin American rhythms of the Galician diaspora and its eternal return: the *habaneiras* and tangos from Marful; the *conga santiaguesa* from Carlos Núñez's "Para Vigo me voy" or his album *Alborada do Brasil*; the *corridos* and *cumbias* from the popular Galician *orquestras*; or the transatlantic album *Saudade* by Luar na Lubre with Pablo Milanés, Lila Downs, and Adriana Varela, as so many others.

Even today, when traditional migration patterns have reversed and Galicia is now the recipient of migrant workers from Eastern Europe, Africa, and Latin America (sometimes the grandsons and granddaughters of former Galician migrants), this Galician mobility has not stopped, and still today Galician workers travel around the globe alongside the new migrants in the new world economy, from the Seychelles Islands to South Africa. Manuel Rivas and Xurxo Souto have written extensively about the enormous challenges, life-changing experiences and intercultural exchanges of this working community, which signal a move from the Atlantic to the global. This redirection towards the global is manifest in the *Revista Bravú* (main press outlet of the 1990s rural *movemento bravú*) which dedicated its third issue to this topic in 1998 ("7 portas, 7 mares").²¹ As Xurxo Souto explains:

19 Sharif Gemie has commented that, as a result of the massive migration of Galicians to the new world, "Galicia was experiencing an early form of globalization: its people were learning to think in a bigger world. Stretching out beyond their region, which was shaped by international forces" (52).

20 For an in-depth analysis of a variety of cultural manifestations of the Galician diaspora, see Hooper (*Writing Galicia into the World*) and Romero (*Contemporary Galician Culture*).

21 A detailed analysis of the *bravú* movement appears in Chapter 8.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A Peripheral Focus: The Rebirth of the *Novo Cinema Galego*

Nuestro cine es bastardo, exiliado, emigrado, fronterizo.
Ser artista ya implica ser extranjero, inadaptado.
'Our cinema is a bastard, exiled, migrant, border cinema. To
be an artist already implies being a foreigner, a misfit.'
Oliver Laxe, "Cine gallego: viento del norte, a favor" (quoted in Calzada)

La memoria, aquello que somos, se construye con una mezcla
de la realidad y la construcción mítica de esa realidad. [...]
La realidad se construye, ante todo, imaginándola.
'Memory, what we are, is constructed with a mixture of reality
and the mythical construction of that reality. [...]
Reality is constructed, above all, by imagining it.'
Eloy Enciso, "Efectos Especiales" (quoted in Koza)

En la periferia nacen las olas
'Waves are born on the periphery'
José Luis Castro de Paz, *En la periferia nacen las olas*.
Nouvelle Vague y documental

Rethinking Peripheral Cinemas from the Margins

In recent years there has been an emergence of the notion of the periphery/peripheral as a conceptual framework for the study of contemporary cinema. In the Iberian context, Josetxo Cerdán was one of the first critics to approach the production of experimental documentary non-fiction cinema in Spain through the conceptual lens of the peripheral, which he defines as avant-garde cinema on the margins of the mainstream audiovisual industry. His attention, however, has been mostly on Catalan experimental filmmakers and his essay, published in 2005, does not include any references to Galician documentary films. In the global sphere, Iordanova, Martin-Jones, and Vidal have edited the volume *Cinema at the Periphery* (2010), which offers a more theoretically informed peripheral view of world cinemas from a postcolonial

perspective, focusing on cinemas "located in positions marginal to the economic, institutional, and ideological centers of image making" (5).¹ Recognizing also the geopolitical location, the volume aims to "explore the connotations of the peripheral as a mode of practice, as a textual strategy, as a production infrastructure, and as a narrative encoded on the margins of the dominant modes of production, distribution, and consumption" (9). They thus propose a new model of polycentric vision, "*by making the periphery the center of our study*" (6, original emphasis). This also includes the conditions of production of minor cinemas within nation states: "These peripheral cultures may or may not feel that the nation or state speaks with the same voice as they do, and, accordingly, their cinematic output often represents a different view from yet another peripheral position" (7). Although none of the essays refers to the particular case of the Galician audiovisual sector, this view suggests the condition of pluriperipherality, a particularly important one for Galician cinema, which is subject to different forms of peripherality vis-à-vis the state and other supranational organizations, as in other areas of Galician cultural production.

Also in 2010 the peripheral became a central point of attention in the Galician audiovisual sector with the launch in A Coruña of the film festival (S8) *Mostra de Cine Periférico*. Already in its seventh edition, the (S8) *Mostra* was originally conceived as a forum for "experimentation, dialogue and reflection" about experimental cinema made from the fringes. Its focus has been on new trends in avant-garde cinemas not only from Galicia but also from Spain and overseas.² Paradoxically, this forum on the fringes of the mainstream has served as a center for the articulation of new theoretical discourses emanating from Galicia about peripheral cinemas, which in the process has been able to deperipheralize the Galician audiovisual sector and bring it out of invisibility.

Thus a number of critics, filmmakers, and audiovisual culture agents, from within and without Galicia, but all involved as collaborators in the launch of this project, have discussed their particular views on the different positive aspects of peripheral cinemas. Their intersecting positions have been posted on the (S8) *Mostra's* internet platform "Atlas Ilustrado da Periferia"

1 Earlier, in *Los cines periféricos* (1999), Alberto Elena studied non-Western cinemas (African, Middle Eastern, and Indian) from the perspective of their peripherality to hegemonic Western cinemas. Another volume published in 2010 (Conn Holohan, *Cinema on the Periphery*) deals on the peripherality of contemporary Irish and Spanish cinema from a comparatist approach. The book focuses on the changing representations of both national cultures, which have evolved from traditionalist cultural perspectives and merged with European modernity and globalizing trends.

2 The website platform is www.s8cinema.com.

(Illustrated Atlas of the Periphery) in Galician, Spanish, and English.³ The word "atlas" is significant, as the platform intends a cartographic remapping of the field of audiovisual production from its margins, as its presentation clearly indicates:

The periphery of cinema is a territory seldom explored, traversed only by a handful of fearless individuals who attempt to forge new and daring paths to the heart. The Peripheral Film Festival, in its first edition, started an indispensable cartography work [...] Putting the edges on the map, making them sharp and visible. That is a purpose of this Illustrated Atlas of Periphery. [*sic*]

For such a new cartography, this group of critics and filmmakers proposes a new peripheral positioning which questions the hegemonic values emanating from the center while aiming to bring visibility to the fringes. They all coincide on seeing the peripheral as more than merely a geolocation, but rather a conceptual, ideological, and aesthetic positioning. Thus Galician film director and critic Alberte Pagán has advocated for a "peripheric cinema, excentric, alternative," opting for the symbolic position of the mole, undermining the norms and values of mainstream cinema: "I prefer underground, clandestine art that destroys the shapes and formalities that we accept just without thinking" ("A toupeira"). For Barcelona-based Venezuelan filmmaker Andrés Duque the periphery is a voluntary process of distancing from the center, which represents a visual and ideological shift in perspective: "La periferia deviene de un proceso mental y de distanciamiento. La periferia es un espacio de posicionamiento frente al orden establecido" ("The periphery is the result of a mental process and distancing. [...] The periphery is a location positioning against the established order").

Galician film critic, screenwriter, and producer José Manuel Sande also defines peripheral cinema as an ideological and artistic position rather than a mere territorial location. For him, peripheral cinema is characterized by an attitude of contestation against the mainstream commercial industry and a perspectival shift that stretches the limits of the visual field towards a wider symbolic territory and a fuller image of reality:

Lugar marxinal e *maudit* da cidade, universo ninguneado polo corporativismo vinculado á arte [...], a periferia é unha actitude sumada a unha perspectiva aberta desde a que otear os riscos da

3 Some of the English translations provided on the website have substantial differences and errors. Wherever I quote the original source in Galician or Spanish, the English translation has been edited by me.

fanfarria e os extremos da experiencia artística. Rebelde, punk, bardo, farsante, filibusteiro ou insensato, se a vida contribúe a estreitar marcos, a periferia se estende e crece. A unidade desaparece, o universo exemplarizante se pecha e a ilusión dos límites infinitos prolonga o espazo ata que quizais non quede máis territorio.

A fringe and forgotten area of the city, a universe neglected by the corporate interests in the arts [...], the periphery is an attitude and an open perspective from where to observe the risks of the great fanfare and the limits of artistic experience. Unruly, punk, bard, fake, filibusterer or reckless; while life keeps trying to narrow the boundaries, the periphery spreads and grows. Uniformity disappears, the exemplary universe vanishes and the illusion of endless limits extends the space beyond the existing territory.

Furthermore, audiovisual promoter Elena Oroz highlights the multiple conditions of invisibility and intersectionality of peripheral cultural production:

To explain what periphery means (or even what it may mean) involves, first of all, to assume there is some kind of centre that, in metaphoric terms, it almost always, worked as a centrifugal point which not only pushes out what doesn't fit in the center but always makes it invisible.

Oroz emphasizes the need to visualize a new map with a plurality of centers and peripheries:

... a la hora de abordar el audiovisual contemporáneo no podemos hablar de un único centro, sino de diferentes puntos de fuerza, cada uno de los cuales genera su propia periferia y sus propias relaciones de desigualdad e indiferencia con lo que le es ajeno: ya sea el formato, el género cinematográfico, el país de producción o el sexo del director o directora.

... in regard to the contemporary audiovisual we cannot just talk about a single center but about different strength points, and each one of them creates its own periphery and its own relations of inequality and indifference to what is different: not only with respect to format but also cinematographic genre, country of production or the gender of the director.

As an alternative to the traditional marginality and invisibility of the periphery, she proposes new spaces of rhizomatic connections and a

multilateral network of affinities that alters the center/periphery divide through alternative forms of production, sharing, and collaboration between the peripheries:

Creo que la periferia ya no existe como la entendíamos, porque tampoco hay un centro claro. Y que es este sistema de redes y de afinidades el que, los que alguna vez nos hemos sentido periféricos, debemos potenciar y reforzar. No se trata sólo de constituir un espacio de resistencia, sino de construir uno que sea habitable.

I think the periphery is no longer as we once understood it, because there is no clear center. And it is this system of networks and affinities which must be enhanced and strengthened by those of us who have ever felt peripheral. It is not just a matter of establishing a space of resistance, but of building one that is livable.

Miguel Fernández Labayen and María Mallol González, curators of the first (S8) *Mostra*, insist on the valuable plurality and hybridity of the periphery as positive values that need to be fostered. They also advocate for the eccentric nature of peripheral cinema, both in the alternative conditions of film production, creation, and distribution and in the counterhegemonic practices and non-mainstream forms of cinematic representation:

... nos interesa reivindicar el carácter híbrido, variable, complejo y plural de 'la periferia'. Periferias que en el terreno audiovisual van unidas a unos contextos de producción anómalos (generalmente unipersonales y autofinanciados), a unos modos de representación marginales en su sentido contrahegemónico. Pero también, y no menos importante, a unos circuitos de exhibición paralelos, capaces de generar un tejido comunitario ex-céntrico en su sentido radical y primigenio.

... we want to assert the hybrid, changeable, complex and plural character of 'the periphery'. In the audiovisual arts, the peripheral goes hand in hand with anomalous contexts of production (typically self-produced and self-funded), and marginal counterhegemonic forms of representation. And also, which is equally important, it is linked with parallel exhibition circuits, capable of generating an ex-centric network community, in the radical and original sense of the term.

Galician filmmaker Ángel Santos discusses the multiple positionalities of the center/periphery dichotomy and the changing nature of their relationship, advocating for a widely disseminated audiovisual culture that defies borders and does not necessarily depend on a center (industrial or

economic) for its existence, opting instead for a more artisan-like creative experience:

... periferias hay tantas como puntos para situar el eje de una imaginaria circunferencia (bien sea en relación a criterios industriales, de creatividad, independencia, etc.). Hoy en día los círculos parecen haberse expandido y multiplicado exponencialmente, tanto que hasta ahora no habíamos asistido a una oferta tan amplia e inabarcable de obras y de cineastas/creadores, ya no como puntos a situar dentro o fuera del círculo [*sic*] formado por la(s) industria(s) sino, lo que es mucho más interesante, puntos diseminados aquí y allá sin vinculación alguna con cualquier tipo de industria y sí con el arte/artesanía de las imágenes y sonidos en movimiento.

... there are as many peripheries as points where to situate the axis of an imaginary circumference (according to industrial criteria or measurements of creativity and independence). Today the circles seem to have expanded and multiplied exponentially, in a way that we had not witnessed before such a wide and vast display of works and cineastes/creators, and not as points to situate inside or outside of the circle formed by the industry(ies) but, more interestingly, as points disseminated here and there not linked with any type of industry but with the art/artisanship of moving images and sounds.

Xurxo González (AKA Xurxo Chirro), a film critic and academic as well as a filmmaker associated with the new wave of Galician cinema of recent years, defends a peripheral positioning as an ideological and aesthetic standpoint of resistance against the market-driven conditions of film production:

... a periferia é un posicionamento que incide sobre todo no individuo que involucrado no seu presente creativo actúa nunha contraposición consciente ou afastando os criterios establecidos polo mercado da disciplina na que se atope. O sistema capitalista amosa a súa tendencia máis avasalladora e cruel dotando de invisibilidade a todo elemento discordante coas súas regras do xogo. Ante isto, é o creador quen adopta un posicionamento periférico para salvaguardar a súa singularidade e independencia da súa obra. ("Posicionamento periférico")

... the periphery is a positioning that impacts, over all, on the individuals who, immersed in their creative present, consciously act against, or even refuse, the criteria imposed by the market in their respective areas of work. The capitalist system shows its most dominating and cruelest trend, making invisible any discordant element which

goes against the rules of the game. In view of this, creators adopt a peripheral positioning aiming to protect their own singularity and the independence of their work.

Xurxo González's outlook summarizes well the general conceptualization of peripheral cinema as it applies to Galicia. His work as film critic and audiovisual culture agent with José Manuel Sande and Martin Pawley, organizing the first *Novo Cinema Galego* (NCG) exhibit at the Centro Galego de Arte Contemporáneo (Santiago) and creating the web platform *Acto de Primavera* for the Galician audiovisual sector, has been influential in the conceptualization of the *Novo Cinema Galego* among critics, filmmakers, and the audiovisual sector as a whole.⁴ The work of these critics is partially responsible for the new visibility of peripheral Galician cinema, in Galicia and abroad, at a time when, paradoxically, the general economic and political conditions might appear as less than ideal.

After the Bubble

Some of the most dramatic and iconic images of the recent economic crisis in Spain are the thousands of unfinished and vacant buildings dotting the landscape, seemingly in a state of permanent paralysis, while many homeowners who have lost their jobs and their unemployment benefits are forced to leave their homes. These eerie constructions effectively constitute ghost towns that remind us of the unbridled wave of neoliberalism that dominated Spain in the late twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first. Galicia was no exception in this regard. Incomplete institutional projects abound, most noticeably the controversial *Cidade da Cultura* in Santiago, a monumental visual metaphor for unfinished business, and perhaps for a misguided institutional path in pursuit of grand dreams which should have been more modest, better aimed, and in alignment with Galician social realities (see Chapter 1).

After the bonanza years of the 1993–2008 real estate bubble, a new lean period started that has already surpassed the proverbial seven-year period of *vacas flacas* (economic hardship). The situation of the culture industry, and the audiovisual sector in particular, has followed exacerbated patterns of recession. Perhaps the most disastrous cases in the Galician audiovisual sector have been in the field of animation, one of its most visible

4 A compendium of Xurxo González's influential critical reflections on the NCG is available as "Caldeirada de Novo Cinema Galego" on the website <http://novocinemagalego.info>. This website also includes a historical timeline of the development of the NCG, starting in 2005.

flagships, particularly in the case of commercial feature films involving bigger budgets, complex production schemes, and large teams, which were engulfed by the financial tsunami. Several animation feature films were literally paralyzed in midstream, or were completed but remain in financial limbo awaiting legal adjudication, while the two major animation studios in Galicia have collapsed (see Chapter 6). These animation film projects are the audiovisual equivalent of the empty buildings of the burst real estate bubble.

The field of audiovisual production in Galicia was profoundly shaken as a result of a sort of political and economic “fatal junction” of global and local events: on the one hand, as we have noted, the negative effects of the global economic crisis, which is still having a ripple effect on Galician society at large; and, on the other, the political landslides in the governments of the Xunta de Galicia—first, the ascent to power of the socialist-nationalist coalition in 2005–09 and the removal of the PP after 15 consecutive years in power with Manuel Fraga, largely a result of popular mobilization against the management of the *Prestige* oil spill disaster; and, second, the return to power of the PP in 2009, largely as a consequence of the coalition’s internal divisions and the onset of the economic crisis.

At the local level, in the allocation of political competencies in 2005, the Consellaría de Cultura was assigned to the Galician nationalist party (BNG) and Ánxela Bugallo was appointed as director. As a result, a new set of official criteria was instituted in relation to the promotion of the Galician cultural industry. In 2006 Manolo González, a documentary maker and academic founder of the EIS, was named director of the newly created Axencia Audiovisual Galega (AAG), designed as a meeting platform between Galician audiovisual creators and the administration. One of the results of these political changes was the establishment of new programs of official subsidies for film creation. The AAG and later the AGADIC (Axencia Galega de Industrias Culturais) instituted the new “axudas ao talento” (subsidies for talent), which at the time were resisted by the audiovisual industry sector and harshly criticized by the PP in opposition. These subsidies were aimed at directly supporting projects undertaken by creators (writers, directors, editors), including shorts and experimental films, rather than at production companies and full feature commercial films, as had been the norm in the past. This institutional shift would be a game changer in its ability to promote different kinds of projects that were more personal and more inventive, with fewer commercial considerations and more grounded in Galicia. Another important initiative was the creation of web-based platforms for the diffusion and exchange of Galician audiovisual creations, such as Teutubo and Flocos. This new cultural direction would eventually

prove to be the breeding ground for the emergence of a new generation of Galician audiovisual artists.

At the global level, the financial collapse that originated with the subprime mortgage crisis in the United States did not take long to make itself felt in the rest of the world. Spain was hit particularly hard, as it had been riding high on the real estate bubble during the years that the PP were in power. The PSOE, unable to stop the effects of the collapse, the financial strangling of the markets, and the increasing sovereign debt, gave power back to the PP in 2011. The newly elected government, under great pressure from the EU, started a harsh austerity plan which heavily curtailed social services, including investment in education and culture, while raising IVA taxes to unheard-of levels for cultural goods, such as DVDs, CDs, and cinema tickets. Thus one of the indirect effects of the crisis in Spain was the dismantling of the cultural infrastructure. In Galicia, where the PP had been voted back to power in 2009, at the beginning of the crisis, the dismantling of the previous government's programs was already a reality. The newly appointed directors of TVG were not interested in funding new projects, particularly alternative non-mainstream projects. The AAG was disbanded and official subsidies and public investment in the cultural arena suffered huge cuts or were simply abolished.⁵

The crisis also accelerated the general transition to a post-cinema era, marked by the obsolescence of the traditional forms of production and distribution and exhibition channels. The post-cinema age has been characterized by great changes in consumption patterns, already begun with the advent of new digital formats and the ease of copying and sharing, followed by the general desertion of film theaters and video stores, a reality exacerbated by each new technological development: digital cameras, smart TVs and phones, video streaming, new forms of video sharing such as Vimeo, Youtube, and Dailymotion, and social media platforms such as Facebook.⁶

5 The "axudas ao talento audiovisual galego" program has been maintained, with some interruptions and reductions in the allocations, as the result of a grassroots campaign by audiovisual culture agents, critics, and filmmakers (González, "Novo Cinema Galego"). The actual description of the criteria for the category of "experimental shorts" in 2010 clearly matched the new directions of the Novo Cinema Galego ("RESOLUCIÓN").

6 The same is true of the music industry as a whole, with the decay of traditional record companies and sales of physical records, as well as new channels opened with the availability of digital tools and internet connections. As a result, the chain of creation, recording, production, sharing, and distribution for new artists does not necessarily depend on the record companies hiring them, or the department stores

The combination of these sweeping political, economic, technological, and cultural changes, related to the patterns of globalization and neoliberalism, had unforeseen consequences for the audiovisual sector in Galicia. While the industry experienced a serious contraction, like the cultural industry in Galicia as a whole, and many companies collapsed, a new generation of independent filmmakers started to come to the surface as a reaction, with alternative approaches, methods, and aims. Manolo González, the former director of the AAG, expressed this surprising development through a strong visual analogy with the end of the Mesozoic era, when "dinosaurs died but small mammals survived" (Azalbert). These interrelated events have given us a new audiovisual lexicon, a new look, a new outlook, and even new brands, such as low-cost films, crowdfunding, peripheral cinemas, and *Novo Cinema Galego*.

The Rebirth of the *Novo Cinema Galego*

The lack of available resources for cultural projects has often been a motivation to look for alternatives on the fringes. In this case, what started as a major financial constriction and developed as a regression in cultural politics has generated an alternative response characterized by different visual aesthetics and cultural ethics. A new paradigm started to emerge in which innovative filmmakers could entirely sidestep the mainstream system and experiment with new forms: a new way of looking with a more direct and more personal perception of reality, crossing established borders and defying received notions with a broader peripheral vision, as it escaped the conditions of mainstream cinema; a new way of creating, experimenting with new digital tools, smaller teams, and greater mobility. In this new *guerrilla* cinema scenario, the reality of the cultural and economic atomization of Galician *minifundio* cinema could be turned into an advantage. The combination of the earlier audiovisual policies and direct incentives to creators from the AAG, with the availability of new technological applications and forms of electronic distribution, enabled possibilities for creating a more personal artistic work without the encumbrance of commercial trappings, and at the same time deperipheralizing the Galician audiovisual sector. These were fundamentally the conditions for the emergence of the *Novo Cinema Galego*.

The development of the NCG was thus an indirect result of positive encouragement by the Xunta's audiovisual subsidy policies and a reaction

selling their records, or radio and television stations playing their music being more interested in easily digestible mainstream music formats.

against the progressive collapse of the traditional film production companies during the economic meltdown. Young filmmakers who had started to produce personal and experimental shorts, animation films, and audiovisual school projects on the fringes of the industry soon began to get recognition outside Galicia and moved to longer projects. The visible starting point of the movement is considered to be the first feature film by Oliver Laxe, *Todos vós sodes capitáns* (You Are All Captains, 2010), which was financed with a subsidy of 30,000 euros from the AAG and went on to win the FIPRESCI award at Cannes. The film displayed a unique and bold personal vision in the form of a self-reflexive documentary that crossed the conceptual, territorial, and aesthetic boundaries of mainstream cinema while exploring and questioning the politics of filmmaking, identity, and representation. It was received with wide international acclaim, setting the tone and giving visibility to a new unconventional way of making cinema from the fringes.

Todos was only the first visible tip of the iceberg that had been slowly forming in previous years. Its success turned it into a new paradigm for Galician independent cinema. A new generation of innovative filmmakers started to emerge from invisibility with Oliver Laxe, Peque Varela, Xurxo Chirro, Eloy Enciso, Lois Patiño, Ángel Santos, Lara Bacelo, Sonia and Miriam Albert Sobrino, Susana Rey, Xacio Baño, Sandra Sánchez, Xacio Baño, Alberte Pagán, and Sonia Méndez, among others. They form a very diverse group of young men and women, working within and outside Galicia and within and outside the film schools. Significantly, a good number of them are women, reflecting the new roles of women in Galician society and the progress towards a certain deperipheralization of gender-based forms of marginalization in the audiovisual sector. Although they do not constitute a strictly unified movement, they have followed similar paths of experimentation on the margins of the commercial industry, consciously aware of their peripheral position and determined to have their visions projected on the global screen. As Villarmea Álvarez has observed:

This group of filmmakers addresses identity issues from a peripheral position, which is transnational in itself: they consciously avoid the centre to settle down in the margins, borrowing ideas from global non-fiction genres such as the travelogue, the found-footage documentary or the correspondence film in order to enrich their film tradition without giving up its particular idiosyncrasy. ("Transnational Identities," 242)

Their single trajectories have crossed and influenced each other, and their multiple roles as filmmakers, writers, producers, actors, educators, critics,

and cultural agents means that they have often been mutual supporters and collaborators. A series of common elements among these creators was succinctly identified by Xurxo Chirro in what appears to be almost a cultural manifesto: "The New Galician Cinema filmmakers share: cinephilia, small crews, the democratization of technology, self-management, risk, experimentation, improvisation, process, meta-language, referentiality, landscape, pantheism, irony, humour" (Naughten). Some of the most emblematic films of the NCG include: *Todos vós sodes capitáns*, *Vikingland* (Dir. Xurxo Chirro, 2011), *Arraianos* (Dir. Eloy Enciso, 2012), and *Costa da Morte* (Dir. Lois Patiño 2013), and film shorts such as *1977* (Dir. Peque Varela, 2007), *Paris#1* (Dir. Oliver Laxe, 2008), *12 noites con Piedad* (Dir. Otto Roca, 2009), *Eclipse* (Dir. Alberte Pagán, 2010), and *Anacos* (Dir. Xacio Baño 2012).⁷ These experimental films, made on the periphery, on the margins of the commercial industry, and away from the centers, have crossed literal and symbolic borders and received accolades in festivals around the world, including Locarno, Marseille, Cannes, Mar del Plata, Sundance, and Clermont-Ferrand.⁸ Significantly, there have been several film festivals outside Galicia with a focus on the NCG, such as the "Nuevas Estrategias" at the Buenos Aires BACIFI (2011), the "Jornadas del Novo

7 A recent 2013 poll about the best Galician films conducted among 11 influential Galician film critics and filmmakers revealed a very different perspective and result from earlier polls (see Chapter 5, note 16). In general, they tend to favor foundational films, ethnographic and documentary cinema, and contemporary experimental cinema, particularly short films. Thus they give nods to Galician historic film documentaries (known to academics, but hardly seen by most viewers), including film shorts and animation. They show obvious bias towards the recent wave of NCG, not altogether surprisingly, as some of the critics are also filmmakers and producers associated with the movement. The ranking order was as follows: *Vikingland*, *Galicia* (Carlos Velo, 1936; re-edited in 2011), *Mamasunción*, *Arraianos*, *O carro e o home* (Antonio Román, 1940), *Paris #1* (Óliver Laxe, 2008), *Montaña en sombra* (Lois Patiño, 2012), *1977* (Peque Varela, 2007), *Eclipse* (Alberte Pagán, 2010), and *Todos vós sodes capitáns* ("Votación películas gallegas"). None of them could be considered commercial successes by mainstream standards, but most have had widespread circulation in the alternative art film circuits, nationally and internationally. Again, another poll taken in 2014 of the best Galician films since *Cinegalicia* (1989) among critics, academics, and filmmakers tended to reflect the overwhelming bias towards NCG, with only two "commercial" films in the top ten: *Vikingland*, *Todos vós sodes capitáns*, *Arraianos*, *Costa da Morte*, *Bs. As.* (Alberte Pagán, 2006), *León y Olvido*, *1977*, *18 comidas*, *VidaExtra* (Ramiro Ledo, 2013), and *Belas dormentes* (Eloy Lozano, 2001).

8 While the full features have received prestigious awards at major festivals, such as *Todos*, which has gathered more than ten awards internationally, it is perhaps the shorts that have been most successful at film festivals, with both *1977* and *Anacos* receiving more than 15 international film awards.

Cinema Galego" in Bilbao Arte (2014), or the "New Galician Cinema" section at the Edinburgh and Glasgow *Iberodocs* film festivals (2015), evidencing the growing international currency of the NCG.

The appellation *Novo Cinema Galego* was the creation of several film critics and audiovisual culture promoters, among them Xurxo González, José Manuel Sande, and Martin Pawley. They refloat the old NCG denomination, which had been in use since the 1970s, giving it a new context and a new perspective, as well as an international projection.⁹ As Xurxo González explains, the coining of the term NCG in 2010 was originally intended to call the attention of the new Xunta government to the need to maintain investment in an area of growth; it was also a strategy to give it some visibility ("Novo cinema Galego"). But the Galician cultural sector as a whole more or less ignored these developments on the fringes of the industry. The official Xunta agencies, the TVG, the mainstream media, the producers, and the universities hardly acknowledged them. Instead, it was mostly the impetus of creators and the exterior projection of their works, mobilized in festivals, websites, and publications outside Galicia, that energized the movement.¹⁰ The name rapidly took root, being adopted by critics and viewers. Blogs, personal websites, and online film sites have been the common breeding ground for the conceptualization of the movement. One of the earliest academic attempts at a preliminary categorization of the NCG is the article by Isabel Martínez and María Gallego, "El Novo Cinema Galego" (2012), which provided a general overview of the movement, although

9 Particularly important in this regard was the work of Xurxo González, who was very involved in the early development of the NCG through his work at the AAG and AGADIC, and as coordinator of the audiovisual web platforms Teutubo e Flocos during the bipartite, among other activities. Equally important for its visibility was the launching of the NCG exhibit at the CGAC and the yearly "Panorama Audiovisual Galego" section of the Cineuropa in Santiago.

10 This situation is beginning to change. The NCG is already the subject of a course at the University of Oviedo (Asturias) in 2015–2016, and the course description explicitly recognizes its leading-edge position internationally: "Acercamiento teórico al Novo Cinema Galego, uno de los movimientos cinematográficos, al margen o en la periferia de la industria, más interesantes desarrollados en los últimos años en el estado español, que logró situar a Galicia y a los cineastas gallegos en el mapa mundial del cine de calidad, consiguiendo una repercusión y un reconocimiento internacional sin precedentes en la historia reciente del cine español." ("Theoretical approach to the Novo Cinema Galego, one of the most interesting film movements developed in recent years in the Spanish state, from the margins or on the periphery of the industry, which managed to place Galicia and Galician filmmakers in the world map of high quality cinema, achieving unprecedented international recognition and impact in the recent history of Spanish cinema.") ("Aula de cine.")

without extensive critical analysis.¹¹ The movement gained wide recognition in international festivals and influential film journals and newspapers, such as the prestigious *Cahiers du cinema*, which dedicated an article in 2013 to examining the emergence of the *Nouveau Cinéma galicien* (Azalbert). The exposure of these new filmmakers on the international film festival circuit was far-reaching, and has since grown exponentially: *Vikíngland* has been seen in more than 40 festivals around the world, *Todos vós sodes capitáns* in more than 60, and *Costa da Morte* in almost 100.

The NCG nomenclature made a subtle reference to the national cinemas of the 1960s and 1970s (including the prospective Galician cinema of the era, with Chano Piñeiro at the forefront). It followed the experimental tradition of *free cinema*, the various new waves of film of the period (British New Wave, French *Nouvelle vague*), and avant-garde video creation of the 1980s. In some ways, it is also related to the Dogme 95 cinema initiated by Lars von Trier in terms of its alternative ideological bent and purist aesthetic positioning, although they don't adhere to any kind of decalogue.

The filmmakers associated with the NCG exercise a plurality of aesthetic approaches, often not from within the straitjacket of traditional film schools, but they are related by the common goal of experimentation with new techniques and new forms of story-telling from the margins. Thus avant-garde strategies of fragmentation, estrangement, ambiguity, use of long takes, black-and-white, and footage manipulation are frequently employed. Their films tend to represent a purist vision of cinema, a poetic cinema free of the corporate trappings of the cinematic apparatus. They are characterized by an anti-establishment aesthetic standpoint, an unconventional and innovative style, and their peripheral position on the fringes of the film industry. These filmmakers boast an independent and iconoclastic spirit, engaging with current social issues, both local and global. Generally they do not aim for a space in commercial film theaters, but instead their films are shown in museums, film archives, festivals, schools, and other public spaces, and of course through the Internet. Rather than following the paths of commercial cinema already known, and repeating with fewer resources at a local level what has been done before, they aim for innovative new approaches. One of the paradoxes of the NCG is that by escaping from conventional commercial patterns and refusing to replicate the hegemonic imported models, instead exploring their Galician identity

11 For other general overviews of the NCG from Galician studies see Redondo; Gómez Viñas; Pablo Suárez; and Villarmea. Film scholars in Iberian studies have also started paying attention to the NCG. Thus Amago examines Laxe's self-reflexive questioning of the rhetorics of authenticity in *Todos*.

and affirming their difference, these filmmakers have been able to create a niche for themselves in the international arena of avant-garde cinema, something that as a whole Galician cinema had never done before.¹² It is thus a new cinema born on the periphery of the periphery, not behind the times, but on the leading edge of innovation and avant-garde experimentalism.¹³

The NCG could be considered as a border cinema defined by its liminality and hybridity, regularly exploring and stretching the boundaries of cinematic representation. These films move easily across genres, languages, and geopolitical borders. Indeed, mobility and migration are recurrent themes, sometimes reflecting the directors' own trajectories, which have often involved living and working overseas, in London, Paris, Portugal, Morocco, and Sweden, or at high sea. They typically cross the established border zones between fiction and non-fiction, documentary and essay, reflection and imagination, the autobiographical and the collective, narrative and non-narrative, memory and identity, the real and the fantastic. They experiment freely with diverse forms bordering on the documentary, but diverging from traditional styles, exploring instead the multiple faces of non-fiction, such as the fake documentary or mockumentary, the found footage, the docufiction, or the film essay, among others. Some directors prefer to refer to their work as documentary fiction, creative documentary, or non-fiction cinema.

In some ways, the NCG represents a return of the *auteur* model, a concept somewhat abandoned since its heyday in the 1960s and 1970s. In the Galician context, the NCG is connected with the foundational cinema of Chano Piñeiro and his early experimentation with the ethnographic look in *Mamasunción* and *Sempre Xonxa*, as well as the exploration of the landscape and the mixing of fiction and non-fiction in *O Camiño das Estrelas*. Likewise, their avant-garde aesthetic is also related to the original countercultural creative impetus of the Galician *Movida*, as in the video works by Xavier

12 Reflecting on the possible constitution of a canon for Galician cinema, Iván Villarmea Álvarez argues that, with the NCG, "por primera vez el cine gallego está a la altura de las obras internacionales que los cinéfilos autóctonos más aprecian" ("for the first time Galician cinema is at the same level of the international works that native cinephiles appreciate the most") ("Un canon"). Likewise, Gómez Viñas states: "It is remarkable that a cinema defined in production terms by low costs, light formats and the absence of an industrial infrastructure should again be garnering prestige and visibility in both Spain and the international arena" (154).

13 Spanish and Galician mainstream media have recently started to echo the forefront position of the NCG internationally. Thus *El País* notes that Galician cinema is positioned as "la vanguardia del cine mundial con películas que transmiten identidad," ("the avant-garde of world cinema with films that transmit identity") (Calzada), and *Faro de Vigo* states "la vanguardia del cine se filma en Galicia" ("the avant-garde of cinema is filmed in Galicia") (Mato).

Villaverde (*Veneno Puro*, 1984; *Viúda Gómez*, 1985) and Antón Reixa (*After shave*, 1986; *Ringo Rango* 1990).

Self-production and self-management schemes are commonly employed by NCG filmmakers, resembling in that sense the resourceful and personal investment strategies of amateur production models. The new means opened up by the availability of low-cost digital technologies meant that anybody could potentially create, share, and distribute their audiovisual productions from a computer terminal, tablet, or smartphone with internet access, thus bypassing the constraints of traditional industrial circuits and the lack of infrastructure and financial resources. As Villarmea Álvarez has commented, these filmmakers "no longer work in a standardized film industry located in a particular territory, but within a decentralized digital network" ("Transnational Identities" 233). Experimental films, shorts, and web series don't even have a space in traditional commercial circuits, but they can blossom in the new virtual spaces.

Crossing Borders:

Tensions and Frictions through the Galician Peripheral Lens

I intend to explore in the next section the tensions, frictions, and resistances that appear in the NCG, as the traditional fiction/non-fiction categories and space/time boundaries are crossed: rural and urban, home and abroad, tradition and modernity, local and global. I will be examining some of the most emblematic and widely recognized works associated with the NCG, starting with Oliver Laxe, the first internationally appreciated author of this group. *Paris#1* (2007) is Laxe's first film work, a 16mm black-and-white medium short of 30 minutes, shot on location in Galicia in the remote mountains of Os Ancares and the coastal village of Muxía. It is the first part of a trilogy which the credits describe as "ensayo cinematográfico en 3 actos chamado 'Paseos e polifonías para unha Galicia contemporánea'" ("cinematographic essay in 3 acts called 'Wanderings and polyphonies for a contemporary Galicia'"). The title of the trilogy already alludes to its hybrid nature, mixing qualities of the film documentary and narrative ethnographic essay, and the collective mobility, plurivocality, and multiperspectivism that encompasses the vision and soundscape of modern Galicia.

A number of tensions and frictions are revealed at the core of *Paris#1* between documentary/fiction, modernity/tradition, urban/rural, and nature/culture. The film presents a selective view of Galicia, focusing the gaze exclusively on the rural areas, although of course the categories of urban and rural are constantly crossed behind the cameras, just like fiction and non-fiction. In that sense, it appears to continue a certain

ethnographic film tradition of looking at the rural as the roots and essence of Galicia, from Antón Román to Chano Piñeiro, but from a self-reflexive and self-questioning perspective, something that we will see in other works associated with the NCG.¹⁴

Geographical dislocation also starts with the title of the film. The pre-credits alert us that Paris is one of the locations to which people from the Os Ancares area have migrated, in a sort of collective autobiographical gesture (Laxe himself was born in Paris, of Galician migrant parents). Thus from the beginning there is a personal investment and perspective in the story told, which somehow clashes with the traditional "objective" ethnographical documentary. There are other significant disjunctures in the film, since as viewers we keep expecting to see the images of Paris, or of the migration, but that expectation is endlessly deferred through the duration of the film, and is ultimately frustrated. The migration alluded to in the credits is never seen on the screen, thus producing a double sense of dislocation. It acts as a ghosted presence—we know that it is there, but we cannot see it, replicating in reverse the ghosted effect and dislocation that migration, and the modernity represented by the experience of the metropolis, has created in the contemporary fabric of Galician society.

Fiction and non-fiction categories are also constantly crossed. A number of techniques associated with experimental cinema are employed in *Paris#1*, which intend to create a friction with reality rather than recreating reality through fiction. Thus numerous marks of self-referentiality are inserted in the film, which continually alert the viewers to the filming process, making them aware of the camera's intervention in reality and of the constructed nature of representation. The first scene starts as a picnic in the mountains with a group of young friends setting up their film cameras and recording equipment. The rural idyllic setting is immediately interrupted by the deafening sound of the helicopter coming for water next to them. What follows after that is the result of their engagement with the surrounding Galician reality as seen through the camera lens, witnessing and interrogating the relationship of people to their natural habitats and the formation of a cultural identity. Likewise, the film uses a number of techniques that call attention to its own construction, such as long takes, repeated fades to black, and continuous changes of perspective,

14 The film is also in the tradition of experimental films and *auteur* cinema, with echoes of Fellini, Buñuel, and Saura. The initial image of the helicopter approaching to gather water to control forest fires is reminiscent of Fellini's *La dolce vita* (later used by Icíar Bollaín in *También la lluvia*), whereas the stark treatment of the hunting scene reminds us of Saura's *La caza*, and the sometimes surreal ethnographic look suggests Buñuel's *Las Hurdes, tierra sin pan*.

alternating distance and proximity, close shots and full shots without following the traditional suture practices of mainstream cinema. The film employs techniques that emphasize the Brechtian sense of estrangement, aiming to break the false (sense of) transparency of the images represented. Thus continuous jump cuts create a disjointed narrative, while multiple angles and takes of the same subject create a distorted multiperspectivism, thus simulating the working of a wide-angle peripheral vision versus a narrow central vision.

In addition, *Paris#1* repeatedly creates dislocations of image and sound through different technical processes, such as lack of continuity, mismatch, or turning the sound on and off intermittently. One means of highlighting the blurring of borders between reality and fiction in the film is the addition of "noise." This can be visual, in the form of dust speckles and blank frames of white light, or aural, such as the camera's own sound, creating a non-edited amateur/family video style, the feeling of "found footage," and a fake patina of historical elapsed time. The blurry, grainy quality of the black-and-white images suggests the ethnographic approach to a remote location in both time and space, but from a poststructuralist perspective that questions those conceptual boundaries. Thus these technical strategies foreground the frictions of tradition and modernity, urban and rural, challenging the transparency of the camera and disturbing the viewer's cinematographic logic. But spectators can also be disturbed by the tensions produced by the way the content is presented. Some of the film images are thus "difficult" to watch, in particular the inhumane treatment of animals in the hunt sequence, or their auction afterwards, which again has Buñuelian undertones. A form of Brechtian estrangement is employed effectively in one of the scenes, as the group of hunters are merrily gathered and eating bacon and sausage after the hunt, with no other sound than the persistent tolling of the cowbells in the background, thus foregrounding the tensions between nature and culture. The wanderings and polyphonies captured by Laxe's camera oblige the viewer to confront the clash of tradition and modernity, the relationship of people and their habitat in the formation of their cultural identity, and the multiple temporalities of Galician rural life in the modern age, produced by movement, migration, and hybridity. At the same time, they make the viewer confront the limits of representation, revealing in a postmodernist fashion the self-effaced false objective gaze of the camera.

Oliver Laxe's feature film *Todos vós sodes capitáns* is paradoxically exceptional and paradigmatic of the NCG at the same time. This film defines the kind of "border cinema" associated with the NCG, unapologetically experimental avant-garde fiction from the fringes, with a strong peripheral perspective. As the first long feature film that received a great deal of international recognition

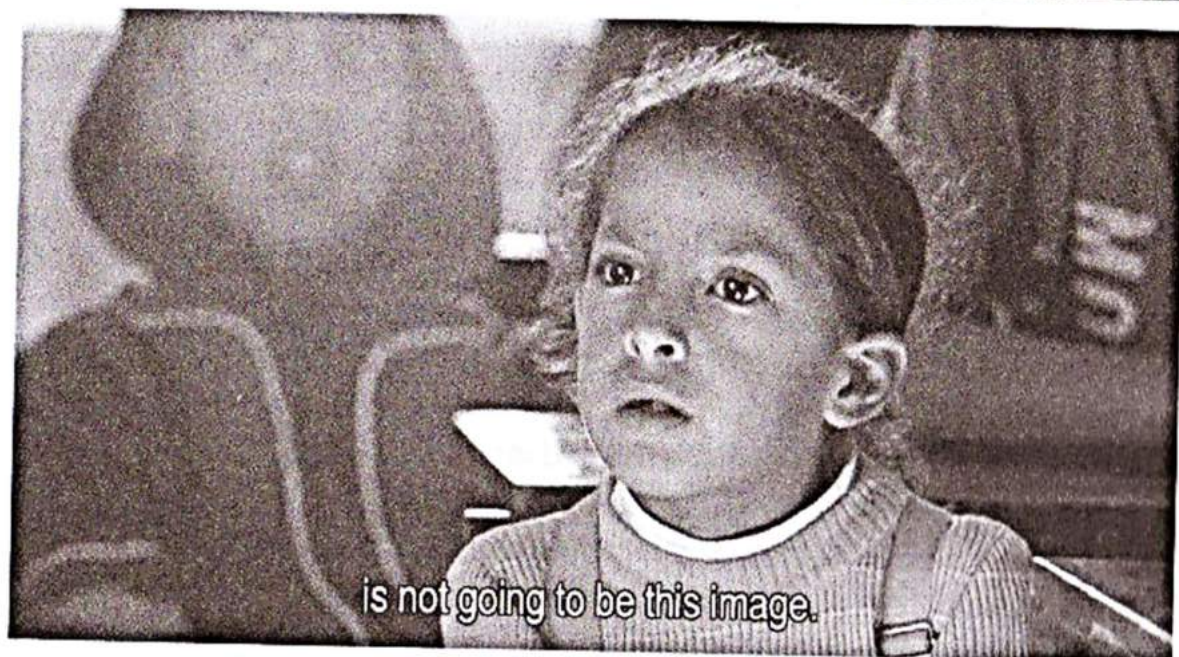
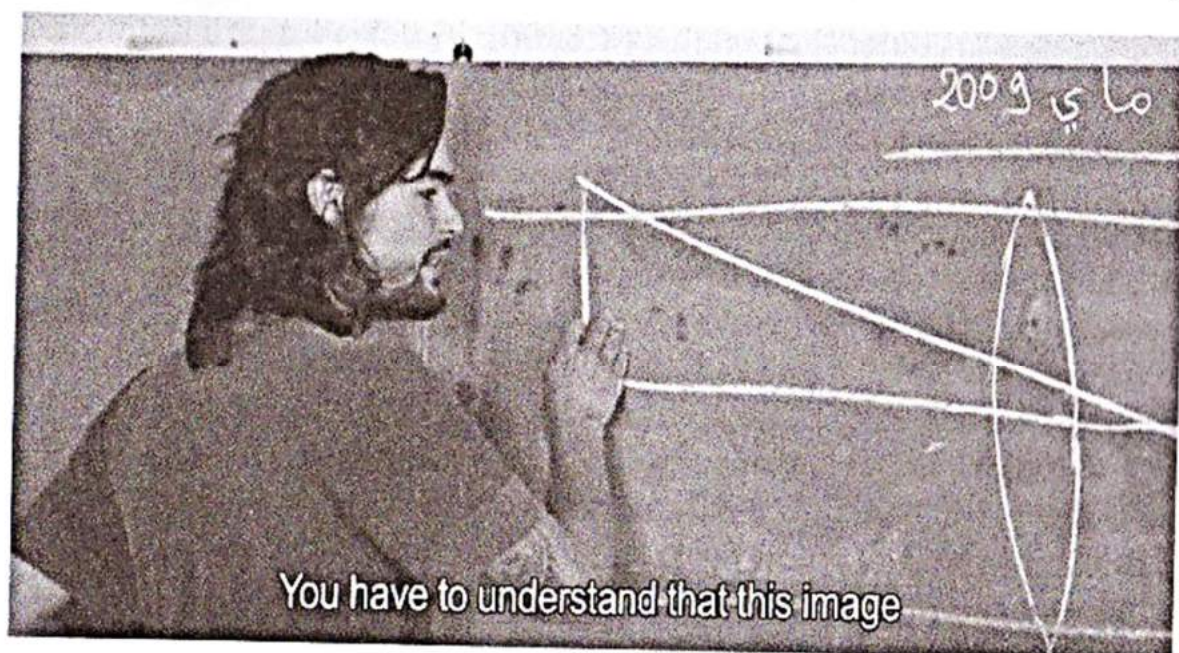
after its Fipresci award in Cannes, it has been seen as the visiting card of the NCG. At the same time, Galicia is conspicuously absent from the film, almost in an exact reversal of the invisibility of Paris in *Paris#1*. Indeed, *Todos* is a film that crosses traditional geopolitical and conceptual boundaries, as a hybrid production mixing documentary and (meta)fiction, ethnographic and verité styles, and territorial, cultural, and language borders (with its dialogues in Arabic, French, and Spanish, and the director's DVD commentary in Galician). The film's small technical crew was mixed, featuring a French-born Galician director, a German cinematographer, a Galician sound engineer, and two Moroccans as film editor and sound assistant. It was conceived and shot in Tangiers with Moroccan children as protagonists, and produced by a Galicia-based company. In that sense, it is a deterritorialized film that defies the traditional definitions of a national cinema and therefore does not quite fit the traditional paradigm of Galician cinema.¹⁵

Todos was the first production of Zeitun Films, an independent A Coruña-based company created by director Oliver Laxe, producer Felipe Lage, and film critic Martin Pawley. Zeitun has also had a key role in the development of the NCG, as it subsequently produced some of its most emblematic films, such as *Costa da Morte*, *Arraianos*, *O quinto evanxeo de Gaspar Hauser* (Alberto Gracia, 2013), and Laxe's *Mimosas* (2016). Interestingly, the expressed goals of the company as stated on their website are explicitly transnational, reflecting its peripheral vision and possibly a call for the attention of co-production partners: "Our objective is to promote co-productions between Europe and North Africa, which are committed to producing films that represent the core elements of cinema, and created by emerging auteurs from both sides of the Mediterranean." The two films produced to date that indeed engage in a dialogue with North Africa are Laxe's own *Todos* and his second feature film *Mimosas*, both of them shot in Morocco.¹⁶

We could ask ourselves: What is the interest of a Galician director in Tangiers? In principle it could be seen as no different from any other first-world director who has ever shot an ethnographic film in northern Africa, attracted by its difference, or its primitive exoticism, with the underlying weight of a history of an orientalist colonial gaze, including the new postcolonial perspective of progressive cineastes (starting with decolonization, such as Gillo Pontecorvo's classic *The Battle of Algiers* or Fernando Arrabal's *Viva*

15 The film has been criticized for its non-Galicianess at least by one Galician film critic, who called it a "Moroccan film" (Romero Suárez, "Idioma").

16 Zeitun ("olive tree" in Arabic) reflects Laxe's connection with the Maghreb and the symbolic centrality of the olive tree in *Todos*, as well as ironically nodding to his own first name.



Figures 20–21 You have to understand that this image is not going to be this image. Self-reflexive cinematic lesson in *Todos vós sodes capitáns* (2010), Zeitun Films.

la muerte and *J'irai comme un cheval fou*).¹⁷ The difference, of course, is that because of its historical peripheral position and the limitations of its film industry, Galicia has never participated in that sort of filmic exploration of the other, on the other side of the Mediterranean. Laxe's border cinema thus

17 Morocco was the subject of a good number of Spanish neocolonialist films, such as *La canción de Aixa*, *¡A mí la legión!*, *¡Harka!*, or *La llamada de África*. In the years since decolonization, several films have also focused on the region, including *Morirás en Chafarinas*, *El deseo de ser piel roja*, as well as the popular TV series *Tiempo entre costuras*.

offers a new vision of the periphery from the periphery, as it interrogates precisely the boundaries of filmic representation, the ideological boundaries in the construction of the filmic gaze, and the self/other, center/periphery dichotomies.

Oliver Laxe's personal trajectory is familiar with border crossings, as he was born in Paris from a Galician migrant family, lived in Galicia, studied filmmaking in Barcelona, worked in London, and, since 2007, has been living in Morocco. In Tangiers he worked in a shelter for marginalized children, where he developed the idea for the movie, and eventually shot *Todos*. The location is of paramount importance. Tangiers is a historical border city, international and multilingual, a traditional crossroads between north/south and west/east, and at the same time it encapsulates a radical form of otherness, the traditional religious, racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural other to European identity. But its history of European (French and Spanish) colonization and peripherality could be seen through the same lens as that of Galicia, only magnified in the distance. It is thus an appropriate border zone to explore questions of exclusion/inclusion, home/abroad, native/foreigner, which are central to Laxe's own cultural identity and conceptualization of border cinema: "Nuestro cine es bastardo, exiliado, emigrado, fronterizo. Ser artista ya implica ser extranjero, inadaptado" ("Our cinema is a bastard, exiled, migrant, border cinema. To be an artist already implies being a foreigner, a misfit") (Calzada).

Todos was based on Laxe's own experience teaching at the Dao Byed cinema workshop for socially excluded youngsters in Tangiers. It is a metafilm, in the form of a fictionalized documentary about the making of a documentary. The film employs different techniques to highlight the process of construction of the cinematographic gaze, such as the duplication of scenes and the use of multiple perspectives which alter the meaning of the images and break the narrative linearity of traditional filmic representation. The film features Laxe in the first part of the movie acting as the director of the workshop, in a constant struggle with his surroundings. As a self-reflexive documentary, the film reveals the underlying tensions and fissures in its own construction, the children's different ideas about the project, the local teachers' opposition to and criticism of the director's self-centered interests, the problems with the crew, the difficulties of shooting in the city, and the director's own ambivalence and eventual "surrender" of the project in midstream. The last half of the film changes the tone, location, perspective, and narrative rhythm, allowing for a different set of visions, which theoretically corresponds to the expressed interests of the children behind the camera (but are also aligned with the director's escape from the conventions of mainstream cinematic representation): non-narrative shots

of fields, olive trees, animals, or a group jump in the river, which represent an act of collective creative freedom.

The film adopts a postcolonial and postmodern perspective that resets the lens to decenter the focus and let us see the world from the margins, and not simply by providing the children with a mediated "voice" or giving them the tools to tell their own stories in front of the camera, but by inscribing the tensions and frictions of such a proposal in the film's texture. Thus, *Todos* does not merely document the "good deed" of giving cameras to a group of disadvantaged African children who had never had contact with such technology, which would allow the morally virtuous feeling of empowering marginalized children by allowing them to tell their own stories. That might be the subject of a "feel good" television documentary program. The film instead questions the motivations and the implication of such a move. Rather than legitimizing the paternalistic and superior perspective of the first world, the film explores the effects of the crossing of boundaries, problematizing the relations of power, raising questions of cultural appropriation, the ethical implications of filming the other, and the underlying positions of center and periphery, without giving any final answers.

Another border crossing film that also highlights cultural dislocation, migration, hybridity, and personal storytelling is the eight-minute animation short *1977* (Dir. Peque Varela, 2007), which has also received great international recognition. In this film issues of cultural identity, marginalization, tradition, and modernity are also examined, but from a peripheral queer perspective which questions the social assumptions of heteronormativity and gender conformity. Varela is also a Galician border-crossing director in between languages, cultures, and geopolitical territories. Originally from the peripheral neighborhood of Caranza in Ferrol (A Coruña), she has developed her career as a London-based filmmaker, although with one foot set in Galicia. She obtained a Masters in Animation Direction from the National Film and Television School in the UK and *1977* was her graduation project. The title of the film makes a personal and collective reference to particular time and space coordinates, as 1977 is the year she was born as well as the year that democracy was reinstated in Spain. The film has had enormous circulation, has been shown at many film festivals, including the prestigious Sundance and Clermont-Ferrand festivals, and is widely available on many platforms on the Internet. It has had great critical acclaim, having received more than 20 international awards. It is clever and poignant, conceptually and stylistically well designed, innovative, and thought provoking.

Varela's film, as her own trajectory, shows the blurring of periphery/center dichotomies and binary thinking, as seen in her own geographical mobility from the periphery to the center, and her ability to transcend borders

with her work and demolish hegemonic constructions from the margins. Technically, visually, and conceptually, 1977 is also a border-crossing film. It was partly made in Galicia and partly in the UK, with a Galician/UK team and the support of UK film institutions. Although it does not contain dialogue or voice narration, it mixes Galician, English, and Spanish through words and phrases seen on signs or blackboards, in books, and heard in songs.¹⁸ Musically, it incorporates Galician popular traditions (bagpipers and *pandereteiras*) with modern English indie rock. Visually it effectively mixes color and black-and-white, hand-drawn sketches, computer animation graphics, and real images with stop-play animation. Conceptually it questions the culturally constructed divide of male/female identities and heterosexuality/homosexuality, affirming gender non-conformity and defying sexual heteronormativity.

One of the most visually appealing aspects of the film is the creative use of graphic symbolism taken from the children's domain, which creates its own imaginative narrative logic. Thus, doodles are a constant visual reference throughout the film, marking the drifting into the imaginary, like the drawings in the margins of school notebooks or the internal untangled knot that represents the unresolved confusion in the protagonist's core. Similarly, the use of doll cut-outs (as a color-coded cultural imposition), paper boxes coming unglued, foosballs, boardgames, school blackboards, and calligraphy notebooks alert us to the enforced narrative of cultural conformity. In the same fashion, the film makes constant symbolic references to children's toys, sports, and games, all riddled with cultural rules. This is clearly the case when the protagonist imagines herself as part of a Playmobil figure set; playing games of football, basketball, and foosball; or living her life as a boardgame, such as Guess Who or Game of Life, which act as metaphors for society's cultural identity constructions and normative patterns. Thus the city of Ferrol is represented as the backdrop for the board of Game of Life, with María and her father in a car following a curving road around major locations—the neighborhood, the school, the church, and so on—while receiving rewards (in the form of accumulated money) for achieving societal expectations and good behavior. The Game of Life thus functions as an appropriate visual metaphor for the capitalist system of ideological subjectivation.

The storyline of 1977 is based on the autobiographical experience of the director growing up in Galicia. The film's protagonist is a young schoolgirl

18 This mixing of languages sometimes happens surprisingly in the same context, as in the math book page about subtraction, with the chapter title in English and the problems explanation in Spanish; perhaps a commentary on the politics of bilingual education.

from Ferrol named María, who we see struggling to reconcile herself with familiar and societal expectations as we follow her outward trajectory from her home, neighborhood, school, playground, and city, until her eventual coming out and final liberation. One significant sequence in the film takes place in María's classroom. The school, as Althusser has conceptualized, is a major part of the ideological state apparatus, which reinforces the dominant hegemonic ideology, and one of the central loci of interpellation for the constitution of subjectivity. The lesson of the day written on the blackboard is "resta o substración" (subtraction), described as "diferencia entre duas cantidades" ("difference between two quantities"). The writing on the school blackboard, also repeated in the young María's book, states that difference is the result of the operation of subtraction. It also suggests that cultural "difference" (gender/sexual) itself is subtracted in the school uniformity, an impression corroborated by María's somber face. In the next sequence, she "escapes" from the classroom by imagining the math problem (represented in the book as a set of balls inside a circle) turning into actual soccer balls that come out of the pages of the book and take us outside into the playing field. There María runs happy and free with other boys in pursuit of the ball. The free movement in the field ends, however, when she is trapped in what is now a foosball game, where the protagonist does not fit within the group of players uniformly aligned and attached to the bars. Laughter and insults about gender and sexual orientation non-conformity start to come out as written words from a group of girls watching the game (*machito*, *marimacho*, *tortillera*) while dehumanizing sounds are heard coming from their mouths (the sound of hens clucking). These offensive words become part of María's internal knot, as does the word *maricon*, pronounced by the boys when she rides her pink bicycle in a later sequence, and end up taking over the whole screen, which fades to black. The active knot, seen growing graphically throughout the film, visually represents the internalization of social normativity, the rules of the game, and the pressure to conform.

Similarly, the social construction of gender is allegorized by the Playmobil human figures, with the head of the protagonist trying different body parts that do not fit. This stop-play animation segment finally gives way to an outline drawing by numbers of her body that configures her own transformation from child to adolescent, with her first menstruation and consciousness of her own physicality and sexuality. In a similar way, as her struggle with gender identity was exemplified by toys and games, the discovery of her sexual orientation is shown through a color-coded card-matching game, which also ends with indecipherable words covering the whole screen to black. Finally, after a long internal struggle, she is able to untangle her knot and come out of the black social yarn that contains



Figure 22 Alternative visions from the mainstream margins, deconstructing heteronormativity and gender conformity. Image from the short film *1977* (2007), National Film and Television School, UK.

her, and turns the knot into a writing trace of seagulls that fly away free, and, with that, the last vestige of insulting words collapses in the end. The internal knot, graphic metaphor of the internalized anxiety, confusion, and self-doubt induced by the external pressures of a patriarchal and heteronormative social environment, finally comes out of her body and becomes a tool of empowerment, of creativity, and of constructing her own identity in a way not according to society's expectations.

Other provocative experimental Galician films that deconstruct received notions of gender roles are the creations of Lara Bacelo. Her film short *Varona* (2010) refocuses the old cultural binary divide that makes men the center and women the periphery, starting with the rewriting in its very title that appropriates and feminizes male centrality, deperipheralizing female subjectivity. The film reappropriates the patriarchal gaze and deconstructs sexist discourses of women through sound and vision disjunction. Thus it juxtaposes voice-over narration taken from biblical passages advocating the subjugation of women with modern images of women in pop art style and visual representations taken from media footage. The result is a subversive exploration of women's bodies and sexuality from a non-patriarchal position, appropriating the male gaze and symbolically the central phallus position.

Lara Bacelo's later short *Así falou Penélope* (Thus Spoke Penelope, 2013) also effectively opposes visual and written/aural discourses, in this case poetic and academic texts, echoing the growth of Galician women's writing and feminist discourses since the 1990s. The film revisits the myth of Penelope in

the modern Galician imagination, which has had a long history, particularly in the poetic tradition, from Rosalía de Castro to contemporary female writers Ana Romaní, Chus Pato, or María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar. The title of the film makes an explicit reference to Xohana Torres' feminist poem "Penélope," which rewrites the classical myth from a feminist perspective and ends with the lines "Así falou Penélope." The director appropriately calls her film a "videopoema" ("videopoem"), articulated with deconstructed poetic lines from Xohana Torres, Álvaro Cunqueiro, Rosalía de Castro, and X. Díaz Castro, all of whom have produced influential texts rewriting the Penelope myth.¹⁹ The film creates an intertextual palimpsest of representations of self-fulfilling women, from Rosalía's poem about the woman of an emigrant who has departed ("Tecín soía a miña tea" ["I wove my own fabric alone"]) to Torres's feminist rewriting ("Eu tamén navegar" ["I can also sail"]), which effectively deconstructs the image of the subservient and homebound female model in the mythical representation of Penelope, opposing the model of passivity and resigned waiting with the image of a woman who is also a traveler.

The film creates a suggestive visual and audio collage, mixing religious imagery of virgins and female saints with new and recycled found images of everyday women, from old movies to underwear advertising, who are seen sawing, knitting, ironing, and typing, or to inscriptions advocating silence. They are images of women waiting and creating, highlighted by the continuous sound of a clock ticking.²⁰ The overlay on the aural track of the voice-over from critic Manuel Forcadela, who is later seen in a video conference analyzing the different representations of Penelope in Galician literature, also creates a destabilizing effect. Through able editing, the voice-over narration of the lecturer appears to be the voice the women are listening to while they complete their domestic tasks, as if it was a traditionally "sedative" mainstream radio or television program, thus creating a powerful jarring effect in the narrative of female submission.²¹

19 For a critical reading of the myth of Penelope in Galician literature see Helena González Fernández, "La ausencia".

20 The clock ticking reminds us of the central place it occupies in *Mamasunción*, which also mobilizes the Penelope myth as a visual and acoustic metaphor for a lifetime of waiting for the return of the migrant son.

21 Some new documentaries that offer a female-centered perspective on Galician migration include the films *A cicatriz branca* (Dir. Margarita Ledo, 2012), about women migrating to Latin America; *12 horas con Piedad*, focusing on the plight of Piedad, an elderly woman who relocates from the countryside to the city; and *Bs. As.*, about the Galician diaspora in Argentina. Mobility and migration are also featured themes in *Tralas Luces* (Dir. Sandra Sánchez, 2011), which follows a family traveling around from fair to fair with their dodgems.

The manipulation of found images is an often employed technique for questioning the limits of filmic representation, as in the much acclaimed *Vikingland*, a neocompilation film made by manipulating found video footage shot by a Galician ferry worker in the North Sea 20 years earlier. Similar is the lesser known *Cousas do Kulechov* (Dir. Susana Rey, 2006), a mockumentary short with apocalyptic overtones about the popular resistance to an army invasion in Galicia made by recontextualizing through editing everyday images of Galician life and additional found footage: festivals, celebrations, political demonstrations, forest fires, ecological disasters, rural exodus: all become part of a war narrative. The film gives an implicit nod to Orson Welles and his experiments in blurring the limits of fiction and documentary and an explicit one to classic soviet cinema (Lev Kulechov's theoretical writings about narrative order and montage), demonstrating how our perspective of things can change through film editing. Everyday Galician realities are altered to create the effect of war newsreel footage through skillful audio and visual editing: from image selection, fragmentation, and decolorization to changes and additions in the music soundtrack and the overlay of voice-over narration. Thus *bateas* (mussel farm platforms) are magically transformed into naval flotillas, fire-fighting hydroplanes become bombers, and collective *festas gastronómicas* (gastronomy feasts) turn into war rationing lines. Cleverly, Rey's manipulated images suggest Galicia's internal cultural and political contradictions as well as the tensions between the local and the global, the nation and the state. Speaking from the double plane of the mock/documentary, over the realities of Galician culture—its festivities and celebrations, as well as its tragedies, ecological disasters, and political mobilizations—another level of the war narrative is superimposed. This duality creates a constant ironic tension between reality and fiction, the real and the symbolic, which offers a provocative and critical view of both the editing/montage of everyday reality and the media manipulation in the justification of war (which the final credits describe as “the most unjustified and cruel type of montage”). Through the cannibalization of everyday images of Galicia, the film thus offers a picture of Galicia's own cannibalization: ecological disasters, abandonment of the rural, deforestation, exodus, the depoliticization and passivity of the population, all wrapped in festivities and official celebrations, and its continuing peripheral/subservient status within the nation state.

One of the recurring elements of the NCG is the new ethnographic fiction focus on rural Galicia, but it is not a return to a folkloric or an essentialist vision of Galicia. The rural focus might seem perhaps somewhat paradoxical, taking into account Galicia's demographic transformation in the recent decades of fast urbanization and rurbanization, with increased migration

from the rural and general abandonment of farming and agricultural activities. Another aspect of this perplexing impression is that avant-garde experimental art is associated with modern city life, while tradition is associated with country life.²² Likewise, it may be even more puzzling given the fact that most of these young filmmakers are fundamentally urbanites.²³

It appears symptomatic of the times that for the most part this avant-garde cinema has its focus not on the modernity of urban life, technology, and its comforts but on the miraculous survival of ancestral traditions, the discontinuities of rural life, and its slow disappearance. Often the depictions of rural life transmit a strong sense of place, as if witnessing the last vestiges of a fast-disappearing reality or lamenting something that is already lost. Perhaps this attention to the rural reflects a new vision, with the will to cross the urban/rural borders defining tradition and modernity, old and new, local and global. There may be an even more profound vision, with a determination to scratch through the surface of modernity and see the inherent hybridity and porosity of contemporary Galician culture and the realization that there is a lot of the rural in the urban (and vice versa). An innovative aspect of these films that has attracted the attention of viewers internationally is precisely the new focus that they bring by using experimental film techniques which highlight the tensions underneath the surface of the urban/rural divide and offer a new and more profound vision of the periphery from the periphery. These underlying frictions are highlighted by the use of non-naturalist film approaches that produce breaches of continuity, sound and vision clashes, fades, unstable images, and fictional stagings, which reiterate the marks of their own construction as films. In every case, the new focus on the rural in these films functions as a metaphor for the reimagination of Galicia in the global age, with all its tensions and frictions.²⁴

Thus, common tropes in many of these films are isolation, uprootedness, and deracination, as seen in *Paris#1*, *Arraianos*, *12 noites*, and *Rural Pretérito*

22 We should remember, however, that the historical avant-garde used the rural space as a way of shocking the consciousness of bourgeois audiences. That is the case, in the Spanish context, of Luis Buñuel in *Las Hurdes, tierra sin pan*, which audiences and authorities found to be as provocative and subversive, and therefore subject to censorship, as the earlier surrealist experiments done in Paris.

23 Although some were born in the metropolitan diaspora, such as Oliver Laxe in Paris, and Marcos Nine in Hannover (Germany), or have developed their careers overseas, such as Peque Varela in London, their particular strain of cosmopolitanism might be inflected by their family background and their contact with the rural.

24 Mónica Delgado has reflected on this aspect of the NCG: "el espacio rural como cobijo natural, el único espacio de preservación de la tradición, y por ende de un estado del alma" ("the rural space as natural shelter, the only space where tradition is preserved, and by extension, a certain state of the soul").

(Dir. Sonia and Miriam Albert Sobrino, 2010). As indicated in its evocative title, the documentary fiction short *Rural Pretérito* focuses on a double temporal and spatial dislocation, a chronotope apparently removed from contemporary reality. It refers to a remote rural enclave that no longer exists, but the memory of the place is still strong in the people who left for the city, which creates tension and gives a spectral presence to the images. The voice-over commentary from two former inhabitants, reminiscing about what was lost and what was gained in the exchange, reveals contradictory feelings. The evocations of the peacefulness and tranquility of the remote village, without any of the comforts of modern life, clashes with memories of the repression of the *maquis* by Franco's forces, who killed the father of one of the informants. While they admit that they are better off now, with access to modern utilities and health care that they did not have in the past, for example, a certain uneasy emptiness invades the film frames, symbolized in the recurring images of dead trees and stumps. The tension between past and present, urban and rural, presence and absence, identity and loss, is reflected in the jagged instability and uncomfortable mobility of the camera, as the lenses try to apprehend the images of the abandoned forest, creating a somewhat phantasmagorical effect of that in-between time/space.

Similarly, *12 noites con Piedad* also focuses on rural/urban tension and temporal/spatial dislocation as it examines two overlapping forms of alienation merging in the figure of Piedad, the last inhabitant of the village, who is diagnosed with Alzheimers and must leave for A Coruña to live with her son. The film thus focuses on the disorienting experiences of forced migration (relocating in old age from the village to the city) and of illness, which creates an alienation from her own memory of her past. Both are dramatic forms of deterritorialization and uprootedness. The clash of tradition and modernity and the end of rural life are literally embodied in Piedad, who at the end is reunited with her young son in the city, but has lost crucial parts of her cultural identity.²⁵

These tensions are also palpable in *Arraianos*, an ambitious full-length documentary fiction film focusing on the cultural time/space capsule of A Raia, a rural border zone in Galicia between Spain and Portugal that has maintained its unique cultural hybridity and autarkic nature for centuries. Its strong sense of place and its border location on the periphery of the periphery

25 The focus of these films on the cultural problematics of old age is a repeated trope in other films, such as *Arraianos* and *Arrugas*, and earlier in *Mamasunción*, in part a reflection of Galicia's aging population, the traditional diaspora of young people from the rural to urban centers and beyond Galicia, and the situation of the Galician language, such a determinant of Galician cultural identity, which is commonly associated with both rural areas and old age.

strongly suggests a metaphorical reading of Galicia. Historically known as Couto Mixto, this remote and isolated area did not have any formal political or administrative alignment to either the Spanish or Portuguese states until the late nineteenth century. Couto Mixto was in practice comparable to a free trade zone or an independent state. The reality of this Galician microstate and its uniqueness is a powerful historical example that has captured the imagination of many Galician writers, such as Luís Manuel García Mañá, Jenaro Marinhas del Valle, and X.L. Méndez Ferrín. García Mañá has referred to the Couto Mixto as "unha república esquecida" ("a forgotten republic"), reminding us that Thomas More conceptualized his utopia as an imaginary republic. This forgotten island between Spain and Portugal, historical and legendary, resonates powerfully as a metaphor for the cultural uniqueness of Galicia and the power to imagine other alternative cartographic geographies.

The location in *A Raia* is of course not casual, as this is a film that is fundamentally defined by its constant crossing of borders. *Border cinema* and *frontier cinema* are terms often employed by many of the filmmakers and critics associated with the NCG to refer to their films, reflecting the crossing of traditional conceptual boundaries, the self-conscious awareness of their peripheral vision positioning, and their production on the fringes of the mainstream. *Arraianos* is a perfect example of the concept of border cinema that explores cultural tensions at the junctions. The film alters the perception of traditional time/space demarcations as fixed, immutable, and impermeable territorial and temporal boundaries. Instead it crosses the geopolitical boundaries of Spain, Galicia, and Portugal, the cultural borders marked by Spanish, Galician, and Portuguese languages, including non-normative and integrationist forms of Galician, and the temporal borders between past and present.

Likewise, the boundaries of the real and the imaginary, fiction and non-fiction, are constantly crossed. The film aims to reflect the duality of a community that exists in a border zone between a prominent enclosed physical world, deeply entrenched with the land, the forest, and the animals, and the no less powerful world of imagination, legends, and myths. In this regard, the director has stated his objective of making his film grounded "on two feet": one in the plane of the real and the other in the plane of the oneiric.²⁶

26 Director Eloy Enciso has expressed his goal of accentuating these tensions, rather than settling for harmonic synthesis, conscious that our cultural memory is already a mix of reality and the mythic construction of that reality: "Instead of working in the boundary of genres with a single hybrid language, I decided to explore two apparently antagonistic languages that have no other alternative but to coexist and to create a dialogue between them, as man and animals or reality and

As in the case of other filmmakers of the NCG, the references to the "non-reconciled cinema" postulates of Jean-Marie Straub and Daniele Huillet are recognizable in the use of anti-naturalist strategies that reveal the internal contradictions and frictions, such as non-professional actors, immobile takes, and the insert of literary fictions in the documentary film. Enciso frequently quotes one of their prescriptions as a guiding principle in his films: "Filmar las palabras para que sean como piedras y las piedras como palabras" ("to film words so that they appear as stones and stones as words") ("*La celebración del viajero*"), crossing the demarcations of sound and vision, orality and visuality.²⁷

The tension of reality and fiction in the film is mostly expressed through the clash of realist and anti-naturalist strategies, such as the friction between the naturalist documentary style and the visibly staged acting of non-professional actors who recite literary passages. Their lines are taken from the play *O Bosque* (The Forest), which depicted life in A Raia. It was written in the 1960s by Jenaro Marinhas del Valle, an anti-Franco avant-garde Galician playwright influenced by existentialism, symbolism, and the theatre of the absurd. This strategy creates a double temporal and visual dissonance that reveals glimpses of reality that would not be visible merely through traditional realist representation.²⁸

The exploration of these latent tensions through the use of disconcerting strategies is one of the characteristics that makes the NCG visually exciting and conceptually thought-provoking. This is the case of the frequent disjunction between natural settings and the sophisticated technical manipulation employed, as seen in *Arraianos*, *Costa da Morte*, *Montaña en sombra*, and *Eclipse*. One of the new Galician filmmakers who has experimented more

dream do. In this sense, *Arraianos* uses a geographical border just as a cover story to make a frontier film in the sense of the duality of reality and imagination: what is printed in our memory is the mixture of reality and a mythical construction of this reality. [...] My wish is to create a dialogue with memory, which is full of conflicts, contradictions and meanings that change over time. Overall, I tried not to embalm the images, but to make them porous enough so they keep alive after the film is finished" ("Director's Statement").

27 The Brechtian estrangement effect is consciously invoked by Straub and Huillet in their *Non Reconciled* film, which starts with a quote from Brecht: "Instead of wanting to create the impression that he is improvising, the actor should rather show what the truth is: he is quoting."

28 This idea of crossing borders is also reflected in the careful construction of the soundscape in the film, with the repeated use of sound crossfades and overlays, which transmit the idea of connection between apparently disconnected different scenes, planes, words and actions, the forest and inhabited spaces, and humans and nature.



Figure 23 Waves are born in the periphery. The lighthouse in Cabo Vilán, from *Costa da Morte*. Border zones of land/sea, day/night, light/darkness, visible/invisible, here/there, and reality/imagination, lighthouses appear as recurring motifs in Galician maritime culture that redraws these binaries and alters center/periphery demarcations, from Manuel Rivas or Luar na Lubre to Miguelanxo Prado and Xavier Villaverde.

profoundly with this type of sound and image disjunction in his films is Lois Patiño. By mixing naturalist and anti-naturalist techniques, his documentary fiction films aim to give a fuller picture of the relationship between the Galician natural world and its inhabitants. Patiño employs an unorthodox cinematographic approach in examining the interactions of nature and culture, the landscape and its people, and their mutual influence and effects. Through the use of anti-naturalist techniques he makes nature come alive in full force with an almost magical quality, focusing on the otherwise imperceptible movements and sounds in the landscape and the magnificent force of nature on the lives of the people.

In his acclaimed film *Costa da morte*, sound and vision clash in a large canvas of carefully composed natural scenery and sophisticated sound design, aiming to capture both the depth and the detail of the landscape and its inhabitants.²⁹ His visual approach to nature is therefore not simply

²⁹ *Costa da Morte* (Coast of Death) is the popular name of the coast in the traditional land's end of Galicia and the continent (Fisterra), where the sun sets, between the land and the sea, the end and beginning of the old known world. This legendary space between reality and fiction, life and death, with its rugged coast, heavy winds and mist, and long history of shipwrecks, has given it a magical, mysterious, and ghostly character in the Galician imagination, while its location in the hyper-periphery makes it an almost symbolic representation of Galicia.

naturalistic, but more as seen through the lens of a painter.³⁰ Thus his films create extraordinary estrangement effects through the repeated use of long and static shots of the Galician coastal scenery, the exaggerated dwarfing of human figures against stunning panoramic images, and the frequency of extreme high-angle shots from humanly impossible observation points. These techniques avoid the flat unidimensional central view of mainstream cinema, opting instead for a fuller and wider peripheral vision which offers a more complex approximation to reality.³¹

As an audiovisual experimental artist, his approach to sound is equally non-naturalistic. Patiño has explained his development of the technique of visual-sound dissonance as a "double distance" between the image and the sound. The filmic representation is visually distant, as seen through the panoramic camera lenses, but acoustically close, as heard through the amplified remote microphones:

I sought to relate the vastness of the natural space to the intimate experience of people through a double perceptual distance to the human figure (far in the image close in the sound). Eventually through the deep contemplation of the image we will dissolve in the whole and disappear into the landscape of Costa da Morte.

This "double distance" technique is employed to maximum effect in *Costa da Morte*, where distant opening shots of the immensity of the sea or the magnificence of a mountain are typically juxtaposed with the close-up of the voices, body noises, and tools of the humans in the far distance, which create visual-sound clashes aiming to capture "the voice of the landscape." A good example of the effective use of this technique is the panoramic image of the Galician forest wrapped in mist, which forcefully communicates the

30 In that regard, and for all its breathtaking natural images, the film is not simply a "postcard," as it has sometimes been described (Pagán, "Algumhas considerações sobre a língua de Costa da Morte"; Romero Suárez, "Idioma e identidade en el Novo Cinema Galego"). The director has admitted that his painter's perspective is a result of his own family background and education, as both his parents, the influential founders of the 1980s *Atlántica* movement Antón Patiño and Menchu Lamas, are painters. Likewise, in some of his shorts Patiño even experimented with distortion through the use of filters and petroleum jelly on the lenses to create non-realistic visual effects closer to abstract painting.

31 The peripheral vision shift could be seen as a recurring feature in the non-reconciled NCG, but it is a key visual component of *Costa da Morte*. The experimentation with non-central visions and the display of panoramic landscapes with decentralized human figures thus defy traditional visual notions of perspective and central vision established since the Renaissance, as was mentioned in Chapter 2 in reference to Brueghel and Bosch.



Figure 24 Wide-angle peripheral vision focusing on the margins of the frame, from *Costa da Morte* (2012), Zeitun Films. The foggy vision and magnified sound of the falling trees allow viewers to fully perceive the effect of the disappearing forest.

deforestation of the Galician habitat by unnaturally amplifying the sound of the logger's breathing and the menacing sound of the power saws barely seen in the distance.³²

This technique also adds multiple layers to the "texture" of the film. Different temporal layers are superimposed through the distant/close dialogues of the people commenting on events in the collective memory of the place, such as tragedies which occurred during the Spanish civil war or famous shipwrecks in the nineteenth century. As Patiño explains, "their voices breach through new strata of the landscape to shape the collective imaginary of that place and leave us in a timeless space." The ultimate goal of this multi-layered visual-sound representation is to build the collective imaginary and identity of this landscape.³³

Conceptual and technical disjunctions, cultural fissures, and temporal/spatial disruptions are also at the heart of *Vikingland*, one of the most

32 This image of the pine trees is the long opening shot of the film, which acquires special significance given the metaphoric importance of the pine trees as symbols of the nation, as has been previously discussed, and its correlation with the title of the film, *Coast of Death*.

33 The film has been criticized for the use of language, which reflects the actual speech of many working-class Galicians (using "castrapo," a Galicianized version of Spanish, with Galician vocabulary, syntax, and intonation). See Pagán ("Algumhas consideracións sobre a lingua de Costa da Morte"); Romero Suárez ("Idioma e identidade en el Novo Cinema Galego").

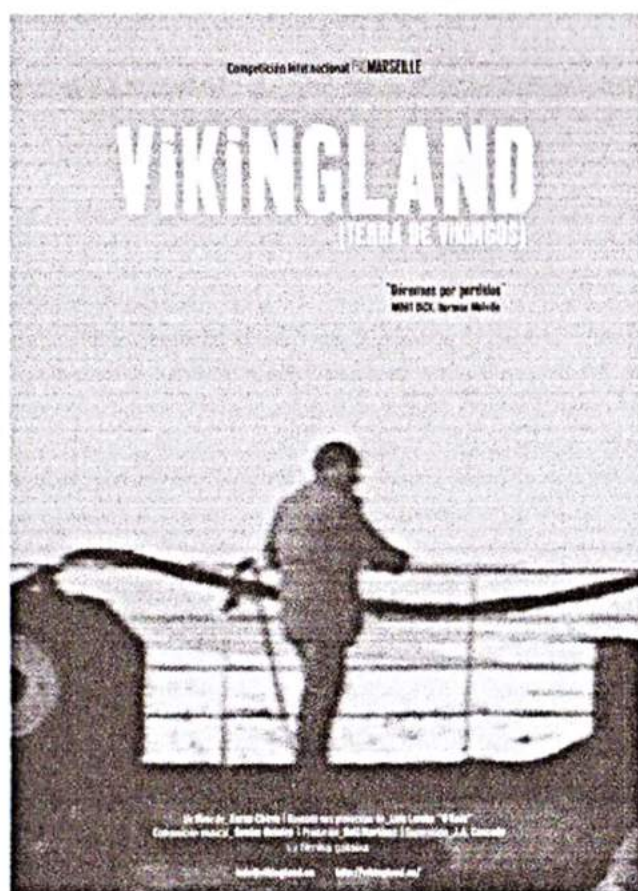


Figure 25 Found footage manipulation and the symbolic "rebirth" of Galician cinema. Blurred positioning between two lands in *Vikíngland* (2011), Filmika Galaika.

widely acclaimed documentary border films of the NCG. Here the territorial polarities of sea and land, home and abroad, function as reflectors of other tensions: between tradition and modernity, culture and nature, documentary reality and fiction, home video and professional production, as well as the local and the global. All these tensions converge in the film as it explores cultural mobility, migration, isolation, and deracination, which are central issues of Galician identity, as well as self-reflective issues of film language and visual representation. For these reasons *Vikíngland* has acquired a certain emblematic character in the NCG, and it could be seen to represent a filmic metaphor of Galicia in the global age.

The main locus of the film is a ferry boat in the North Sea, where some Galician sailors work as seasonal migrants.³⁴ The film employs real found footage, made by one of these workers with his newly bought camera to document the trip for his friends and family. This unique location/dislocation and the relationship of man and camera encapsulate the essence

34 Another director who has focused on Galician migration in Northern Europe is Eloy Domínguez Serén, in *Pettring* (2012) and *Ingen ko pá isen/No Cow on the Ice* (2015), where he explores his own experience as migrant and his relationship with Galicia.

of the film. All the cultural tensions seem to be metaphorized in the video images of the ferry boat, a chronotope of an interstitial space, in-between coasts, permanently dislocated. The idea of passage, the journey back and forth across the shores, also dramatizes a struggle for survival, cultural identity, and sense of (collective) self. This appears as a perfect metaphor for Galician diasporic mobility and hybrid cultural identity, also reflected in the mixing of Galician, Spanish, German, and Dutch in the film.³⁵ At the same time, the interrelationship of land, sea, boat, and man through the mediation of the camera represents the irruption of modern technologies and, metaphorically, Galicia's "discovery" of the cinematographic gaze.

Vikingland is a story of journeys and discoveries, essentially made by the careful manipulation of found footage. The director, Xurxo Chirro, discovered several old VHS tapes that contained original camera footage recorded by Luis Comba, a Galician sailor who had been working in the North Sea 20 years before. *Vikingland* was the name written on the transferred tapes, and the name of the ferry boat where Luis, the cameraman and main "actor" of the movies, worked, servicing the journey between the port of Rømø in Denmark and the German island of Sylt. There were more than 12 hours of unedited footage, which documented the daily lives of Luis and his working mates away from Galicia, his interactions with the surroundings, and his own experimentation with the camera. Chirro was fascinated with the intense raw power of the found images and the possibilities offered for further manipulation, and decided to use them to make his full length film. However, rather than using the found footage to recontextualize it and give it a new meaning, as is usually the case in other experimental films, he preferred to maintain it intact and expand the communicative power of the images. In spite of all the technical limitations, artistic deficiencies, and deterioration of old home video, Chirro's guiding idea was to respect the original significance of the found images. There was a personal proximity and an emotional charge to these tapes, as his background was similar to Luis Comba's. They were from the same coastal village of A Garda, both had been sailors—Chirro was on board a high-seas fishing vessel in the South Atlantic at the time when Luis was shooting his movie—and Chirro's father had been embarked on the same ferry as Luis, being one of the original intended recipients of the tapes. This gave him a close understanding of

35 This dislocation and in-between status is highlighted visually and musically in the powerful sequence in which the protagonist strikes different poses in front of the camera while listening to the edgy rock song "Entre dos tierras" ('Between two lands') by the Spanish band Héroes del silencio: "entre dos tierras estás, y no dejas aire que respirar" ("you are between two lands, and you leave no air to breathe").

the images and an appreciation of the uniqueness of the vision. He was also conscious of the rarity of a true worker's point of view in the history of cinema, without preconceived notions or intermediaries. And in this found footage he had the direct vision of a Galician working man behind the lens, who becomes the subject and protagonist of his story and not just the object of the camera. Thus Chirro initiated a process of filmic reconstruction, which was at the same time personal, familiar, and collective.

Chirro's purpose was not to rewrite Luis' story but to retell it with better means while amplifying its message. He defined his role as, rather than director, "manipulator" of Luis's original images, who receives credit as cinematographer in the movie. He worked on the montage continuously for four years, creating 12 different full edits. A fictional narrative structure was superimposed onto the original footage, inspired by the great novels of maritime travel in the tradition of Conrad and Melville, and in particular following the structure of *Moby Dick*, with the narrating role of the sea-wandering Luis/Ishmael, the different challenges experienced, the symbolic use of white and the fades to white. As a result of his manipulation, Luis's images are transferred from analog to digital format and passed from the small story to the big story, from the register of the personal to the collective, and from the realm of the domestic to the epic.

The technique of "found footage" manipulation offers many possibilities for experimental cinema. It is a low-cost material for production purposes and is conceptually exciting in its easy malleability for visual experimentation.³⁶ As in the case of the "finding" in other founding myths (such as Santiago, as we saw in Chapter 3), we could see this found footage also as an *inventio*, in the sense of being both a finding and a creation. The process is initiated with a discovery which generates a process of self-discovery: something that was invisible and was made visible. The found footage in *Vikíngland* generates a journey of identity discovery away from home as well as a journey of visual discoveries.

This finding, which Chirro has called a "magical" apparition, powerfully suggests the discovery of the magic of the reels and the preservation of the collective memory of a community.³⁷ The discovery of the visual

36 Found footage has been employed often in a number of NCG non-fiction films, such as Xurxo Chirro's earlier *Cellular Movie*, Marcos Nine's *Manuscritos* and *Aarón*, Magín Blanco and Otto Roca's *Memoria*, Susana Rey's *Cousas do Kulechov*, and Alberte Pagán's *Bs. As*.

37 As Chirro stated to the UK press, symbolically emphasizing the "magical" and "miraculous" nature of the finding: "that's why I say that *Vikíngland* is made from a miracle, that the images were on the point of being lost, the facts that they document forgotten, and something erased definitively from history" (Naughten).

reflection signifies the mirror-stage entrance into the symbolic order with the communal act of (self)-reflection on the big screen.³⁸ Luis's process of discovery is thus shared in Chirro's movie with the experience of the spectator, who follows the different stages of the metaphorical journey: the exploration and interaction with the camera, the possibilities of the new technology, and the experimentation with filmic language.

The found footage has also the quality of the primitive, raw, untouched, resembling in that sense the origins of visual representation. Although devoid of artistic ambitions, it has the innocence of the virginal gaze, as if contemplating reality for the first time, and the virginal materiality of the analog blank tape which captures the images in its magnetic reels. It has also been argued that *Vikingland* becomes a metacinematic reflection that narrates in parallel a dialogue with the history of cinema: starting at its very beginning, from the images of the workmen's exit at the Lumière factory and Méliès, primitive films, amateur movies, and proletarian cinema, to the spectacular scenery of John Ford and the avant-garde manipulation of experimental cinema, while summing up several decades of technological innovation (from analogue Hi8 and VHS tapes to digitalization in miniDV and DAT).³⁹ As the director has commented: "This technological evolution works as a metaphor for history where what happened to these men does not count for the 'History' written in capital letters" (Naughten).

We could say that *Vikingland* also encapsulates a history of Galician cinema: from its humble amateur beginnings, the cinema of the diaspora and of its later development, with all its discontinuities and holes, to its resurgence and growth and its latest transformation with the avant-garde documentary fictions of experimental cinema. Perhaps most significantly, the film reconstructs an important lost page of the history of Galician cinema: its unique origins as amateur epistolary cinema of migration

38 Delgado has also noted this important symbolic dimension of the film-within-the-film, which includes: "Tomas de lo cotidiano, del día laboral, del ingreso y salida de pasajeros y mercancías, y de ocio son capturados desde lo que se podría llamar un acto primigenio, y que encuentra una analogía perfecta en el juego del niño que por primera vez descubre su reflejo en el espejo, un símil del hallazgo del artefacto tecnológico con el estadio lacaniano, una celebración del encuentro del yo a través de la imagen." ("Shots of the everyday, the workday, the entry and exit of passengers and goods, and times of leisure are captured from the perspective of what could be called a primal act, with the perfect analogy of the child who for the first once discovers his reflection in the mirror, making a simile of the finding of a technological gadget with the Lacanian mirror stage, a celebration of the encounter of the self through image").

39 See Pagán, "Vikingland, película perfecta," for a detailed analysis of *Vikingland*'s creative dialogue with film history.

(discussed in Chapter 4).⁴⁰ Like the epistolary cinema of earlier decades, Luis Comba shot his film with the intention of sending it to the people "at home" so they could see what his life was like in the distant land where he worked and maintain alive the communicative emotional bond during the long absences. In that sense, *Vikingland* represents a return to the beginning, a return home, and a full closing of the circle.⁴¹

In essence, *Vikingland* narrates an experience which is at the core of Galician identity, marked by travel, migration, dislocation, and cultural hybridity. In that sense, Chirro's reassemblage and reconstruction of the loose tapes acquires a metaphorical quality, as a way of regenerating the fragmented identities and discontinuities of Galician culture and history. It is the great allegorical Galician movie of cultural mobility and emotional separation, of *morriña* and *saudade*, which portrays the anonymous life of Galician sailors, the experience of migration, and working at sea far away from home.⁴² *Vikingland* is a film in which we can say that the sea becomes a protagonist, as in other recent emblematic Galician films such as *Costa da Morte*, *Crebinsky*, and *De profundis*.⁴³ The sea is a recurring central element, uniting and separating, giving and taking lives. It has a historical and mythical significance for Galicia, a border zone between reality and imagination, with the powerful imagery of sunken and resurfacing treasures.

Perhaps it is true that waves are born on the periphery. The reappearance of the forgotten video tapes from the ferry in *Vikingland*, like the re-emergence of the sunken ship in *De Profundis*, then acquires a magical aura, which powerfully suggests the resurgence of the Galician visual imagination, coming out of the darkness into visibility. With the cannibalization of the old images and the long metaphorical voyage towards the home port, *Vikingland* could thus also be seen above all as an allegory of the rebirth of Galician cinema, rising from its ashes.

40 Also within the Galician epistolary cinema of migration are Pagán's *Bs. As.*, Domínguez Serén's *Pettring*, and his collaboration with Marcos Nine's *Carta 1* and *Carta 2* (2012), relying on the family/friend correspondence exchange as the main narrative structure.

41 Chirro accentuates the collective nature of the addressees by leaving out of focus the main intended recipient of the original video images, which Luis shot to send to his Mexican girlfriend Lupita, so that she could understand the nature of his work, the life at sea, and why he needed to be away from home for six months at a time. Chirro later recovered the discarded images for his short *Lupita* (2012).

42 See Cascudo for an analysis of *Vikingland* and the Galician migration cinema.

43 The sea has been a central motive in many films set in Galicia, from the old *gallegadas*, such as *Botón de ancla*, *Sabela de Cambados*, *Pollzón a bordo*, and *Mar aberto*, to the new commercial cinema made in Galicia in recent years, such as *Los lunes al sol*, *Mar adentro*, *Ilegal*, *A praia dos afogados*, and *Entre bateas*.