

## “My Mother’s Not an Actress.” Images of Intimacy in Galician Cinema

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In recent years, different disciplines have experienced what has been labelled as an “affective turn,” where intimate experiences and emotions have gained prominence in both academic research and creative practices. Cinema has not been an exception to this tendency, as digital technologies (and Internet culture) have eased access to self-expression and fostered a renewed interest in portraying previously marginalized and peripheral identities.

As a peripheral nation, Galician culture – and cinema in particular – has been substantially involved in processes that show the presence of this affective turn. Landmark films of Novo Cinema Galego (New Galician Cinema) address collective experiences, such as emigration, from a personal perspective. Many filmmakers, including Marta Valverde, Eloy Domínguez Serén, or Antía Carreira, have combined the traditions of personal cinema with new displays of intimacy like selfies and other social media techniques. This article examines the different modes of enunciation they employ to convey intimacy – diaries, correspondences, self-portraits, and the remixing of personal archive material – and explores how these practices relate to the prevailing production conditions in minor and small cinemas.

*Keywords:* cinema, intimacy, Galicia, diaries, correspondences, self-portrait.

## Introduction

At the beginning of her video essay *Muller personaxe* [*Woman Character*] (2018), Lucía Estévez states that the main character of her film is drawn from her personal life: “My mother’s not an actress.”<sup>1</sup> While this may seem evident, as we have just seen her in the family’s home movie footage, it is also significant. Because her mother is not an actress, Estévez asks her to create a character for the film, exploring what it means to be a female lead and, at the same time, raising the question of the representation of those closest to us on film and the issue of why they are not supposed to be protagonists in conventional cinema [Ill. 1].

This exploration of the self through intimacy with others has been a recurrent topic in art cinema over the last decades. Sara Ahmed<sup>2</sup> developed an approach to social life through the lens of affection, analysing how the production and circulation of affection can be transformative either in a reactionary or liberating way. Cinema, with its sensory appeal, can also be studied through the lens of this affective turn, as it serves as a key medium for producing and reproducing cultural affections, and both documentary and experimental film have increasingly incorporated the representation of emotions and the importance of intimate relations in the construction of the self.



1. Lucía Estévez, still from *Muller personaxe*, 2018

*Muller personaxe*, rež. Lucía Estévez

- 1 All quotes from non-English versions are translated by the authors.
- 2 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

In this paper, we will explore this tendency in Galician cinema, focusing on the relevant presence of modes of enunciation that convey intimacy, such as self-portraits, correspondences, home movies, and personal diaries. Given Galicia's peripheral position in Europe as a stateless nation, cut off from the cultural and political centres of both Spain and the EU, Galician cinema has been studied as an example of *small cinemas* by authors like Ledo Andión, López Gómez, and Pérez Pereiro.<sup>3</sup> This identity is also marked by the frequent use of Galician, a minoritized language. Precisely, in a related approach, Pérez Pereiro<sup>4</sup> has considered Galician cinema as a *minor* cinema: Deleuze and Guattari<sup>5</sup> applied the term "minor" to Kafka's literature, focusing on three characteristics: the deterritorialization of language, the inescapable political nature, and the fact that "in it, everything takes on a collective value." Bogue<sup>6</sup> further noted that these latter two aspects of minor literature have been applied to gay, lesbian, and women's literatures, as they "stress the inseparability of the personal and the political as well as the unavoidably collective dimension of any individual effort by members of a marginalized group." In our view, most of Galician cinema also occupies a marginal position on two levels: its peripheral cultural status and its common use of low-budget production modes, which are far from the hegemonic codes of industrial cinema. For these reasons, we consider Galician cinema a particularly relevant case for studying how filmmakers explore the self through images and whether it poses the possibility for political action through personal experience.

#### Low-budget production and marginal modes of enunciation

The production of cinema that examines and exposes the intimate is deeply connected to peripheral modes of production, particularly through accessible technologies and low-budget projects. These allow filmmakers

- 3 Margarita Ledo Andión, Antía María López Gómez, Marta Pérez Pereiro, "Cine europeo en lenguas de naciones sin estado y pequeñas naciones," *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social* 71 (2016): 309–331.
- 4 Marta Pérez Pereiro, "Paisaxe na néboa. Unha cartografía do cinema galego recente," *Galicia21 F* (2014): 77–91.
- 5 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature: The Components of Expression* (University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 16.
- 6 Ronald Bogue, "Refiguring Europe. Minor Writing and Minor Literature," *Symploke* 5 (1997): 99–118.

the freedom to maintain a distance from mainstream narratives and tropes. The production of the cinema of the self has also been related to the political propositions of marginal movements, such as feminism and the underground and avant-garde scenes. Feminist filmmaking, in particular, has focused on the invisible – the routines of everyday life and the often-neglected ideas and topics related to women. It has explored these themes through genres such as self-portraiture or correspondence films. Laura Rascaroli<sup>7</sup> relates these films based on first-person narration to three traditions: the personal cinema of the 1960s and 1970s avant-garde, European auteur cinema of the 1950s and 1960s, and what she calls the first-person documentary. Hence, films emerging from these alternative modes of production employ spurious and domestic modes of enunciation to express complex affections. Technological transformations have progressively facilitated access to film production, culminating in the contemporary development of digital images, and this technical evolution is directly connected with the explorations of the individual.

In this context, acts of self-representation are often carried out through a varied set of visual resources. For instance, digital culture privileges the remixing of sounds and images from diverse sources to create new pieces that attempt to portray the historical and social context of these works while frequently also addressing personal matters through the use of family footage. This presence of the self in remixes parallels other modes of enunciation, such as self-portraiture, intimate diary writing, the use of home movies, or the exchange of letters – whether on paper or through images. All these forms share a common need for what Lejeune called the “autobiographical pact,”<sup>8</sup> wherein the audience agrees to interpret the film in a certain manner. Just as the filmmaker’s subjectivity is inscribed into the text, the audience must bring their own subjectivity to the interpretation, as this is the only way to understand the complexities and contradictions of autobiographical texts.<sup>9</sup>

7 Laura Rascaroli, “Cinewriting the Self: The Letter-film as Self-portrait,” *From Self-portrait to Selfie. Representing the Self in the Moving Image*, ed. Muriel Tinel-Temple, Laura Busetta and Marlène Monteiro (London: Peter Lang, 2019).

8 Phillipe Lejeune, “El pacto autobiográfico,” *Suplementos Anthropos* 9 (1991): 47–61.

9 Estrella de Diego, *No soy yo. Autobiografía, performance y los nuevos espectadores* (Siruela, 2011).

Hence, although these modes have their own particular sets of rules, they are also closely linked. As Rascaroli observes, “both the epistolary exchange and the self-portrait (...) have repeatedly been compared to diaries, in so far as all these forms disclose something of the author’s intimacy sphere.”<sup>10</sup> At the same time, there is an important difference between correspondences and diaries: while the former is a mode of communication with others, the latter tends to function as a dialogue with oneself. Correspondences introduce the question of the double, “which is equally central to the self-portrait, for a double is what an artist produces when creating a self-image.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, as diaries are a device for producing self-images, the act of enunciating them is also an excision, because writing “an autobiography implies to place oneself in an inevitable narrative space, split in two, looking at oneself from outside.”<sup>12</sup> Film diaries are also connected with low-budget practices, as they are “frequently exploited to prove new media technology,”<sup>13</sup> with their individual and initially private nature providing a natural space for experimentation. Diaries, self-portraits, and correspondences are also linked to another low-budget practice: the use of home movies. Authors like Krstić<sup>14</sup> have explicitly related filmed diaries to home movies, treating both as forms of minor cinema. When filmmakers like Michelle Citron or Su Friedrich introduce domestic images into their work, these are filtered through the filmmaker’s subjective lens, “blending its status as recorded reality with that of artifice.”<sup>15</sup> The idea of artifice – and therefore of fiction – permeates all these modes of enunciation, mingling the intimate with the idea of “authenticity of the first-hand witness that obsesses contemporary thought.”<sup>16</sup>

The use of private materials, the emphasis on authenticity, and the adoption of digital technologies are also central to the different practices

10 Rascaroli, “Cinewriting the Self,” 16.

11 Rascaroli, “Cinewriting the Self,” 33.

12 De Diego, *No soy yo*, 37.

13 Christian Quendler, “A Series of Dated Traces: Diaries and Film,” *Biography* 36, no. 2 (2013), 340.

14 Igor Krstić, “A Foreigner in One’s Own Tongue: Jonas Mekas, Minor Cinema and the Philosophy of Autobiographical Documentary,” *New Cinemas. Journal of Contemporary Film* 15, Issue 1 (2017): 97–117.

15 Belinda Smail, “The Documentary: Female Subjectivity and the Problem of Realism,” in *The Routledge Companion to Cinema and Gender*, ed. Kristin Lené Hole, Dijana Jelača, E. Ann Kaplan and Patrice Petro (Routledge, 2017).

16 De Diego, *No soy yo*, 38.

of correspondences in cinema. These practices are mostly contemporary, as they are frequently linked to the development of digital technologies,<sup>17</sup> which have enabled not only an easy recording and editing of sound and images but also the exchange of archives between correspondents. Correspondences are also a manifestation of the transnational flows in contemporary cinema,<sup>18</sup> allowing for rich dialogues among different cinematic cultures. Letters written to/with film inherit the private/public nature of printed letters, which are defined by “permeable generic boundaries and in which the personal often mixes with the public, producing radical effects.”<sup>19</sup> The epistolary form “implies a relational portrait of the self,”<sup>20</sup> not only in terms of the abovementioned doubling of the self through inscription but also to the contemporary culture in which these letters are produced.

All of these modes of enunciation have proven useful in the context of Galician filmmaking, probably because its peripheral nature lends itself to forms that combine low-budget production approaches with non-hegemonic content. A brief account of the historical evolution of Galician cinema can demonstrate the suitability of this connection.

#### A brief account of Galician cinema

In some ways, one could argue that Galician cinema is currently at its peak. The last fifteen years have shown both a growing critical acclaim and significant industrial strength, with local companies such as Vaca Films or Portocabo delivering successful fiction products such as *El desconocido* (*Retribution*, Dani de la Torre, 2015), which was recently remade with Liam Neeson in the lead role. However, the history of Galician cinema has been marked, as Xan Gómez Viñas put it, by “a permanent questioning of its very existence.”<sup>21</sup> The first three Galician feature films in a professional format (35 mm) premiered in 1989. Hence, to understand the previous relationship between filmmaking and the territory, we have to focus on documentaries,

17 Lourdes Monterrubio Ibáñez, “Friends in Cinema. Filmic Correspondence. From Subjectivity to Intersubjectivity,” *Área abierta* 19, no. 3 (2019): 439–470.

18 Monterrubio Ibáñez, “Friends in Cinema,” 440.

19 Rascaroli, “Cinewriting the Self,” 25.

20 Rascaroli, “Cinewriting the Self,” 26.

21 Xan Gómez Viñas, “O cine en Galiza, un relato descontinuo,” in *Marcas na paisaxe. Para unha historia do cinema en lingua galega*, coord. Margarita Ledo Andión (Galaxia, 2018): 13.

short films, and amateur initiatives, which often operated with low budgets or no budget at all and usually had very limited distribution.

Since the 1980s, the trajectory of Galician cinema has shown more continuity. The Galician government has tried to promote Galician audiovisual culture through initiatives like the creation of a regional broadcasting company, a film archive, the establishment of training centres for image and sound, and various subsidy programmes. The most relevant of these initiatives was, arguably, the grants for talent launched in 2007, characterized by promoting “a search for alternative audiovisual languages” and easing access for new creators, who “could participate as natural persons, without the need of being supported by a production company.”<sup>22</sup> That made it possible for filmmakers like Oliver Laxe or Eloy Enciso to secure funding for their films during the early phase of their careers, which was crucial in the emergence of Novo Cinema Galego – a label that grouped authors working outside the industry and aligned with contemporary art trends.

In a way, the initial years of this group of filmmakers marked the beginning of a period where some Galician works – again, mostly documentaries, short films, and amateur initiatives – gained international circulation and attracted the attention of both festivals (with awards for Laxe in Cannes or Lois Patiño in Locarno) and critics. Belí Martínez<sup>23</sup> pointed out a number of key factors defining that group: the emergence of digital technology, amateurism, self-production, and cinephilia. The subsequent success of the movement has led to larger budgets, expanded teams, and the consolidation of several internationally relevant production companies, with many directors entering fiction filmmaking and, in some cases, achieving important box office results. However, amateurism and self-production remain central features of a substantial part of contemporary Galician cinema, likely due to their connection to minor modes of expression.

For instance, Margarita Ledo<sup>24</sup> pointed out that Novo Cinema Galego is closely linked to feminist cinema through common characteristics, such as the presence of autobiography, the use of the body as a narrative

22 Pérez Pereiro, “Paisaxe na néboa,” 88.

23 María Isabel Martínez Martínez, *O cine de non ficción no Novo Cinema Galego (2006–2012)* (Universidade de Vigo, 2015), 132.

24 Margarita Ledo Andión, “Acciones (in) diferentes, tensiones latentes. A propósito de feminismo y ‘novo cinema galego,’” *IC-Revista Científica de Información y Comunicación* 13 (2016): 67–84.

element, or the attention to everyday spaces. All of these features are deeply connected to the idea of intimacy and are also linked to low-budget and non-professional tools. Alexandra Juhasz<sup>25</sup> noted that “as technologies for making media become more affordable and easier to operate, more women are able to use them.” This creates a kind of catch-22: while non-industrial formats tend to be culturally marginalized, they simultaneously provide an avenue for culturally marginalized people (as it has happened historically with women in film) to express themselves. The characteristics of production within Novo Cinema Galego likely explain the notable presence of women in this movement, and the connections between different minor groups we have previously mentioned are evident in the important role of intimate images in recent Galician cinema, particularly in its evolution associated with Internet culture. In the following pages, we will analyse the representation of intimacy in Galician cinema by examining the traces of the aforementioned modes of enunciation related to that tradition: diaries, re-workings of previous intimate footage, correspondences, and self-portraits.

#### Diaries and their connections

Most of the history of Galician cinema can be found in documentaries, short films and amateur initiatives. One important example of this trend is the film work of painter Eugenio Granell, which is composed of shorts and home footage mostly made in the early 1960s during his exile in New York. In 2003, the Granell Museum showed these works for the first time. In films like *Middlebury* (1962) or Granell’s home movies, Alberte Pagán sees an early example of a diary – in Galician cinema and beyond, as it precedes pioneers like Jonas Mekas:

The group of images, in all its variety, forms (...) a film diary, a genre which, because of its editing in camera, its impressionism, its personal themes, the absence of tripod, and its technical limitations, could only have a place in the field of experimental cinema.<sup>26</sup>

- 25 Alexandra Juhasz, *Women of Vision: Histories in Feminist Film and Video* (University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 19.
- 26 Alberte Pagán, “Imágenes del sueño en libertad: Pulsaciones poéticas en el cine de Eugenio Granell,” *Litoral* 236 (2003): 246–252.

At that time, Pagán wrote that, following the public discovery of Granell's shorts, we had to rewrite the history of Galician cinema. A decade later, he explained that Granell's films filled "a gap in the paltry national cinema, becoming the first and unique experimental films of its history."<sup>27</sup> However, that is no longer the case. The use of diaries by Galician filmmakers in this century can prove this shift, as we now find many more works that combine the recording of daily life and experimental techniques.

One of the clearest examples is *No Cow On The Ice* (2015), Eloy Domínguez Serén's film about his life as an immigrant in Sweden. Regarding written diaries, Béatrice Didier<sup>28</sup> pointed out their open nature: "Anything could turn into a diary. The diarist can integrate in his text the laundry bills, newspaper clippings, fragments, drafts of texts in construction; ultimately, almost anything." *No Cow On The Ice* exemplifies this openness by gathering a wide variety of contents and resources in its 63 minutes: thematically, it primarily portrays the filmmaker's daily experience as an immigrant, focusing on his different jobs and his process of learning Swedish, but it also includes intimate moments with Serén's girlfriend and family. All of these topics intertwine with a number of visual and textual ideas that connect with Didier's take. One such idea is the use of references, with the filmmaker watching Mekas' *As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty* or packing a box of books that notably includes Castella's *Sempre en Galiza* [*Always in Galiza*] (1944) and Xosé Neira Vilas' *Historias de Emigrantes* [*Emigrants' Stories*] (1968) [Ill. 2]. By integrating their work in his own, Serén traces a link between his experience and the trauma of other migrant or exiled artists.

*No Cow On The Ice* is not only connected to the literary idea of the diary by often relying on words that can feel similar to diary entries. Serén explained that he documented his experience "both in pictures and written words, in such a way that my shooting was regularly accompanied by writing in my diary, and vice versa."<sup>29</sup> In this regard, texts are present not only through subtitles but also through filming the words themselves on notebooks. The openness of diaries also allows the director to embrace the

27 Alberte Pagán, "Vigência de Granell," *Novas da Galiza* 176 (2019): 30.

28 Béatrice Didier, *Le journal intime* (Presses universitaires de France, 1991), 187.

29 Eloy Domínguez Serén, "Director's Statement. No Cow On The Ice," no date, <https://www.elyodseren.com/NO-COW-ON-THE-ICE>



2. Eloy Domínguez Serén, still from *No Cow On The Ice*, 2015      *No Cow On The Ice*, rež. Eloy Domínguez Serén

occasional playful nature of the genre, even mixing different formats – for example, as the film turns from digital to Super 8 at the end.

The connection of *No Cow On The Ice* and written diaries is, hence, quite clear. As for its relationship with cinematic traditions, we could argue that Serén's film exemplifies what David E. James referred to as a "diary film" (as opposed to "film diaries," diaries made in film):

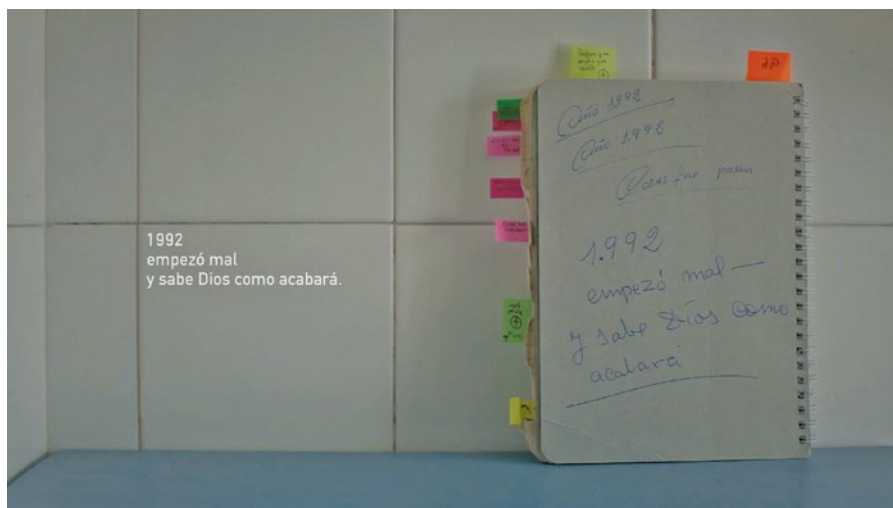
Just as much as a written one, a diary made in film privileges the author, the process and moment of composition, and the inorganic assembly of disarticulate, heterogenous parts rather than any aesthetic whole. It is a private event (the coded or locked diary) where consumption, especially consumption by others, is illicit: a pure use value.<sup>30</sup>

In this sense, *No Cow On The Ice* functions as a diary film that uses these so-called diary entries to construct an auteur film around the theme of transition. This can also be linked with the growing tendency to incorporate personal approaches and autobiographical works in the field of documentary, as noted by Efrén Cuevas in filmmakers like Ross McElwee, "who resort

30 David E. James, "Film Diary/Diary Film: Practice and Product in Walden," in *To Free the Cinema. Jonas Mekas & The New York Underground*, ed. David E. James (Princeton University Press, 1992), 147.

to a composition similar to the standard dramatic structure of fiction films, evolving around a personal crisis, with closure marked by its solution.”<sup>31</sup> This dramatic structure parallels that of coming-of-age films: the first part of *No Cow On The Ice* shows snippets of Domínguez Serén’s new life in a foreign country, ultimately concluding with the filmmaker reflecting on the positive outcomes of his time in Sweden, with the sense of longing for his family in Galicia serving as a key counterpoint in several parts of the film.

Being a feature film, *No Cow On The Ice* stands out as one of the examples of Galician diaries with a clear dramatic structure while also embodying some features of intimate modes of enunciation found in other films. For instance, written diaries are filmed through various techniques in Xacio Baño’s *Eco* [*Echo*] (2015). In this film, actor Xosé Barato discovers his mother’s diaries during a move, leading to a “projection of intimacy,” as Redondo sustains,<sup>32</sup> first through the reading of those texts aloud and then through the visual presence of the pages on the screen [Ill. 3].



3. Xacio Baño, still from *Eco*, 2015

*Eco*, rež. Xacio Baño

- 31 Efrén Cuevas, “The Immigrant Experience in Jonas Mekas’s Diary Films: A Chronotopic Analysis of *Lost, Lost, Lost*,” *Biography* 29, no. 1 (2006): 54–72.
- 32 Fernando Redondo Neira, “Escenarios del vacío y la desaparición. Ausencia y representación en *Eco* (Xacio Baño, 2015),” *Visualidades* 16, no. 2 (2018), 200.

Examples like Eco, however, seem to approach diaries placing the written diarist (rather than the director) at the centre of the film. Most of the uses of this form, in contrast, tend to privilege the presentation of intimacy through different forms of subjectivity. For instance, Marta Valverde's *16/11/2016 – 13/5/2017* uses recordings of the author's personal life while rejecting chronological order, dividing the screen to display usually three screens simultaneously. Subjectivity is conveyed not only through the identification of the camera's point of view with Valverde as the camerawoman but also through the editing, where the connections between the images in parallel mirror the links between memories that emerge when recounting an oral story.<sup>33</sup>

Antía Carreira's *Ola baby. Vídeo-ensaio sobre a miña depresión* [*Hello Baby. Video-essay About My Depression*] (2020) also uses the diary format while connecting it to new media. The different fragments that comprise the piece employ very diverse strategies and formats to express daily life's affective issues, including abstract animation, re-edited home movies filmed by the author's grandfather, and vertically oriented mobile phone images with Instagram filters, some of them overlaying Carreira's face. This technique involves the self-portrait strategy also present in *No Cow On The Ice*. Significantly, an important section of Domínguez Serén's film features him at work, where he frequently leaves the camera static in any place while using a drill or hammer. This can be interpreted as a gesture of minor cinema, showcasing a migrant worker making use of accessible digital technology to document his experience – one that has often remained overlooked or has been represented by outsiders.

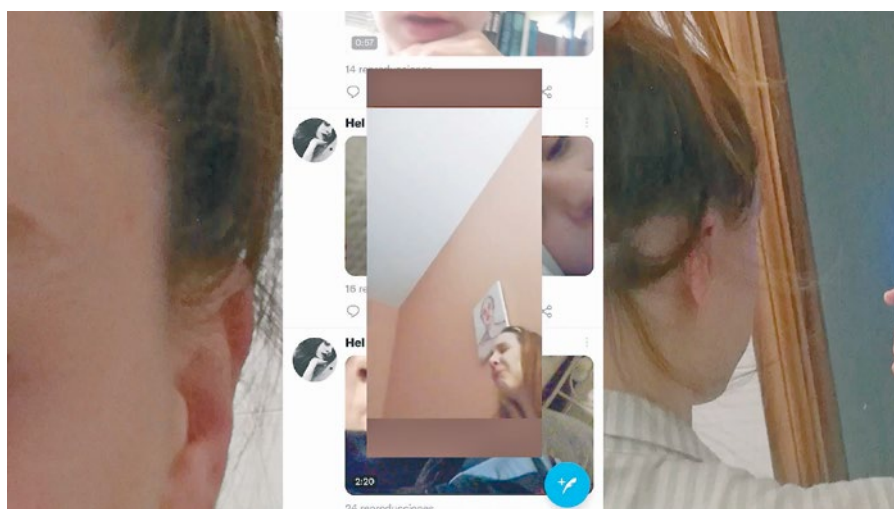
A similar approach also appears in Sol Mussa's *Ratatouille* (2020). The filmmaker uses the film diary technique to document her work in an industrial kitchen in London. The main tool for this project is the mobile phone and its camera, which Mussa sometimes holds in her hand, and sometimes she places it in various locations around the kitchen or on a moving trolley, as her hands are occupied with work. Notably, the credits of *Ratatouille* include the specific phone used and a list of applications used during filming: Instashot, Vivacut, Vidstitch, Shazam, Vimeo, Anti Mouse

33 Marta Valverde, "16-11-2016/13-5-2017," no date, <https://martavalverde.com/16-11-2016-13-5-3017/>

Repeller, Deliveroo, and Uber Eats. This list compilation of both video editing and food delivery apps illustrates how diaries and life intertwine in contemporary contexts, as the filmmaker's subjectivity is filtered by the smartphone – an essential tool much more integrated in everyday life than previous forms of handheld cameras.

A combination of professional cameras and mobile phones is another prevalent strategy among Galician filmmakers, as we can clearly see in *30'70 60'120* (2020), where Marta Valverde films herself working as a prostitute. She blends a very conscious mise-en-scène – comprising still lives of the objects she uses for her activity and her own presence – with on-screen text that narrates an encounter with a client, and the overlap of her WhatsApp conversations, where other clients inquire about services and prices.

Helena González Rubianes' *Minhameninha* (2022) further exemplifies the uses of different layers and visual sources, reflecting on the evolution of family images – and the idea of family itself – through the evolution of audiovisual tools. The film features an autobiographical voiceover that accompanies old family photographs, VHS tapes and, crucially, the archive of her online practices. These include selfies, chat logs, accumulated phone photographs, a video diary created on a private Twitter account [Ill. 4], and even images of her group of friends captured by a Google Street View car.



4. Helena González Rubianes, still from *Minhameninha*, 2022.

*Minhameninha*, rež. Helena González Rubianes

The use of the personal archives – composed of pictures, videos, and frequently WhatsApp audios – present in Mussa’s, Carreira’s or González Rubianes’ work also appears in Alba Gallego’s *O vídeo esquecido* [*The Forgotten Video*] (2020) and Sara Iglesias’ *Eres tú* [*It’s You*] (2021), as noted by Tenreiro Uzal.<sup>34</sup> This trend suggests that the practice of film diaries is more prominent than ever in works by young Galician filmmakers, probably due to the widespread use of mobile phones. However, this does not necessarily lead to an increase in diary films. Works like *Ola Baby* and *Minhameninha* are probably more identifiable as essays, wherein diaries serve, as we have seen, as one resource within a broader list that includes remixed personal content.

While Carreira and Rubianes incorporate both self-created footage and family films, a significant vein of Galician films addresses intimacy by remixing intimate material made by others to recontextualize it through their subjectivity. A prominent example of this practice is Xurxo Chirro’s *Vikingland* (2011). This film is another example of low-budget production, as the filmmaker’s role is credited simply as “idea and manipulation” of footage he did not personally film: Chirro discovered some old VHS tapes recorded in the early 1990s by Luis Lomba, a sailor who at that time worked with Chirro’s father on a ferry boat between Denmark and Germany. Lomba’s recordings include scenes of his work (sometimes using the same gesture Serén and Mussa would repeat years later), self-portraits [Ill. 5], and an emotionally resonant Christmas Eve dinner with fellow Galician sailors.



5. Xurxo Chirro, still from *Vikingland*, 2011

*Vikingland*, rež. Xurxo Chirro

34 Cibrán Tenreiro Uzal, “Faino ti mesma. Novas creadoras galegas, cinema do eu e cultura dixital,” *Galicia21*, K (2021).

In this context, the diary practice here is not that of Xurxo Chirro but rather that of Luis Lomba: the sailor experiments with an amateur tool, capturing images in the first person that remain largely absent from (industrial) cinema. On the other hand, Chirro is working in a different tradition of experimental filmmaking: found footage cinema. Jaimie Baron refers to these works as “appropriation films,” which appropriate previously recorded material to create an “archive effect” experience for the audience – “a sense that certain sounds and/or images within these films come from another time and served another function.”<sup>35</sup>

There are more examples of this tradition in Galician cinema.<sup>36</sup> Much like *Vikingland*, many of these films involve the public (re)distribution of *low-quality images* captured with amateur or semi-professional equipment. Notable works include Uqui Permui’s *Doli doli doli... coas conserveiras. Rexistro de traballo [Doli doli doli... With the Canning Industry Workers. Working Record]* (2011) and Ramiro Ledo Cordeiro’s *CCCV (Cine Clube Carlos Varela)* (2005). However, these footages were mostly intended for militant purposes related to trade unions and political parties, while *Vikingland* focuses on more personal material, connecting with the different modes of enunciation of intimacy discussed in this text. Chirro draws inspiration from *Moby Dick* to structure Lomba’s footage, and this idea, along with the initial dedication to Galician sailors, positions Lomba’s intimate material as a public document reflecting the shared experiences of (Galician) migrant workers.<sup>37</sup> Baron points out that “the use of home films expands the territory that we regard as historical, enabling personal micro-narratives to emerge as a significant element of our understanding of past events,”<sup>38</sup> and, indeed, Chirro’s subjective lens over Lomba’s footage alters the intentions of the original material, turning a private document into one with a collective appeal.

35 Jaimie Baron, *The Archive Effect. Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History* (Routledge, 2013), 11.

36 Cibrán Tenreiro Uzal, “Entre illas: reciclaxe e arquivo no cinema galego,” in *De illas e sereas. Para unha historia do cinema en lingua galega*, coord. Margarita Ledo Andión (Galaxia, 2020).

37 *Proxecto Socheo*, a participatory archive of the Low Miño region, co-promoted by Chirro, includes material from Luis Lomba alongside a collection of *videobitácoras* (video log-books) recorded by sailors during their time at sea; the presence of *Vikingland*’s materials in this context underlines its collective nature.

38 Baron. *The Archive Effect*, 13.

This practice of using private films to create new works is also evident in Lucía Estévez's *Muller personaxe* and Xisela Franco and Anxela Caramés' *Hyohakusha* [*Aimless Wanderer*] (2014). Estévez inserts family images of her mother into an essay film, combining them with her present images, and reuses images of female characters from various Galician productions. The private portrait of a specific woman is related to fictional portraits of women in general, raising politically charged questions: "What do female faces mean on a screen? Is it interesting that a woman leads a story? When creating lead female characters, does the appearance of women on the screen constitute a charitable action?" If Estévez clearly marks the difference between family footage and the rest of the sources, Franco and Caramés employ a different approach: they intertwine Super-8 footage of a Galician couple travelling to Japan in 1973 with their own Super-8 footage filmed in 2014, in which the filmmakers themselves appear in several portraits.

#### Letters and films, letters as films

Cinema has also used correspondence as a resource to convey intimacy, unravelling the affections among different people while intertwining personal narratives with the collective experience. Given that the emigration experience has been central to Galician history – particularly during the 19th and 20th centuries when one-third of the population migrated, mostly to South America – the exchange of letters can also be considered an inherent cultural expression. Galician cinema reflects this expression of longing evident in the emigrant letters. Manuel González<sup>39</sup> coined the term "cinema of correspondence" to describe a very specific form of film production and distribution wherein associations of emigrants sent home films showcasing their activities in America and commissioned films that depicted their beloved homeland, including landscapes, local festivals and the buildings they promoted from abroad.<sup>40</sup> Although these films that travelled across the Atlantic between the 1910s and the 1950s primarily consist of documentary images representing collective experiences, some could also be interpreted

39 Manuel González, "Cine e emigración," in *Historia do cine en Galicia*, ed. José Luis Castro de Paz (Vía Láctea Editorial, 1996).

40 Fernando Redondo Neira and Marta Pérez Pereiro, "Identidades buscadas e construídas: imaxes da emigración galega no cinema," in *Marcas na paisaxe. Para unha historia do cinema en lingua galega*, coord. Margarita Ledo Andión (Galaxia, 2018), 110.

as a form of professional home movies. Filmmakers like José Gil shot short domestic scenes of Galician families to send to their emigrated siblings.<sup>41</sup>

While the early correspondences in Galician cinema were not organized around the writing or filming of letters, films produced in the last decades, facilitated by digital tools, can be categorized under the concepts of film-letters and letter-films, as proposed by Hamid Naficy. While in film-letters, the epistolary element mostly serves as a diegetic device in the narrative, letter-films “are themselves epistles that do not necessarily inscribe epistolary media or epistolary production and reception.”<sup>42</sup> For instance, Eloy Domínguez Serén exchanged letters with experimental filmmaker Marcos Nine during his stay in Sweden, which are compiled in *Cartas/Letters* (2012–2013). Between 2020 and 2022, he developed another epistolary relationship, this time with Colombian filmmaker Samuel Moreno Álvarez, culminating in the film *Al otro lado del mar* [*On the Other Side of the Sea*] (2022). As an inevitable adaptation to contemporary life, the reason for the separation between these two friends was the COVID-19 pandemic. The letters unfold their memories, anxieties, and the parallel construction of their homes – one in the Colombian jungle and the other in a small village in Galicia.

The exchange of letter-films serves as the enunciative strategy in *Cienfuegos 1913* (2008), where Margarita Ledo invites filmmaker Belkis Vega to film the Cuban city where Ledo’s mother lived for decades before returning to her homeland in Galicia. In her letter, Ledo reflects intimately on the political commitment of her mother, contrasting the external imagery of Cienfuegos in the first letter with the interior of the Galician family household in the second. Another example of a letter-film is *Imágenes secretas* [*Secret Images*] (2013), in which Diana Toucedo travels to Puerto Deseado, the small town in Patagonia where her father has worked as a skipper for most of his life. Addressing her father, Toucedo seeks to understand what is so compelling about this remote location that kept him away from her during long fishing seasons and examines the alienating effect of his brief returns home, during which he “overwhelms everything.”

All these films illustrate how letter-films are suitable forms to portray the intimacy between distant voices, particularly those in diasporic

41 Manolo González, *Nos días encantados de agosto* (Galaxia, 2022), 239.

42 Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema. Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton University Press, 2011), 141.

destinations. In *Bs. As.* (2007), filmmaker and essayist Alberte Pagán not only visualizes the trauma of Galician emigration but also paves the way for expressions of affections in later Galician cinema. In this regard, *Bs. As.* is a foundational film that explores the intertwined relationship between the intimate and the collective, demonstrating the communitarian nature of epistolary media. Letters, as Naficy suggests, “are driven in part by scopophilia, but the object of the scopic drive is not solely another person; more often, it is one’s homeland or culture [...] and also driven by epistophilia, which often involves a burning desire to know and to tell about the causes, experiences, and consequences of disrupted personal and national histories.”<sup>43</sup> *Bs. As.* is an experimental film where the narration is constructed through the voiceover of the director’s mother and the letters written by Celia, one of Pagán’s cousins in Argentina. Celia’s letters are read aloud by another emigrant chosen for her strong foreign accent in Spanish, because “the accent is the first feature of the emigrant, what identifies him/her, what discriminates him/her.”<sup>44</sup> These two voices narrate a family experience filled with voids and misinterpretations. However, Pagán does not attempt to fill in the gaps of this memoir; instead, he allows the voices to recount their personal experience. This narration is illustrated with fixed shots of Buenos Aires [Ill. 6], archival images of the Argentinian dictatorship, and documentary footage of rallies and protests in the streets of the city, featuring political figures like the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo. Pagán encourages the audience not only to witness another story of Galician emigration but also to reinterpret it through multiple “layers of the personal and the political.”<sup>45</sup>

The dialogic form established by the correspondence in *Bs. As.* extends beyond the screen, as Pagán includes one of his email responses to Celia on his personal website. In this poetic letter, the filmmaker alludes to the half a century that “separates one escape to the next, one language from another,”<sup>46</sup> comparing the earlier Galician emigration to the contemporary Argentinian outflow, and Argentinian Spanish with Galician.

43 Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 105.

44 Alberte Pagán, “Bs. As.,” no date, <https://albertepagan.eu/cinema/filmografia/bs-as/>

45 Marta Pérez Pereiro, “Filmar a tribo, filmar o íntimo no cinema galego contemporáneo,” in *A foresta e as árbores. Para unha historia do cinema en lingua galega*, coord. Margarita Ledo Andión (Galaxia, 2019): 200.

46 Pagán, “Bs. As.”



6. Alberte Pagán, still from *Bs. As.*, 2007.

*Bs. As.*, rež. Alberte Pagán

### Conclusions

We consider *Bs. As.* a milestone in Galician cinema focused on intimacy, and several of its main features can summarize the characteristics of subsequent films that have followed its lead. As we have seen, the trauma of migration and exile is a recurrent theme in films like *Vikingland*, *No Cow on the Ice*, *Ratatouille*, and *Imágenes secretas*, showcasing both a longing for the homeland and a critique of the economic and political conditions that compelled the authors – or their characters – to leave the country. These films often address these issues by combining different modes of enunciation, as discussed in this article. It is rare to find a purely singular use of letters, diaries, or self-portraits; rather, these resources tend to intertwine, successfully conveying an affective turn in Galician cinema.

This focus on intimate matters marks a departure from the films made by previous generations and is fuelled by the emergence of digital technologies and low-budget production techniques related both to these tools and avant-garde practices. For instance, the idea of creating by recycling material exemplifies a democratization of access to art, and Galician films like *Vikingland*, *Muller personaxe*, and *Minhameninha* illustrate this clearly: images created with amateur tools and intended for private use are recontextualized, gaining new significance and a different position in the

history of different communities, particularly groups that tend to be marginalized and, hence, seen in minor forms of expression – such as women or migrant workers. The proliferation of digital technologies has facilitated the use of found footage techniques and the accumulation of personal audiovisual materials, mirroring the practice of film diaries or letters. As we have seen, these tendencies have frequently been used by Galician filmmakers in films centred on intimacy. The notable presence of these modes of enunciation in small cinema poses the question of whether this affective turn is a common trait of the cinema of nations lacking a robust audiovisual industry – an issue worthy of exploration through comparative analysis in future research.

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Santrauka

## „Mano mama ne aktorė“. Intymumo įvaizdžiai Galisijos kine

Cibrán Tenreiro Uzal ir Marta Pérez Pereiro

*Reikšminiai žodžiai:* kinas, intymumas, Galisija, dienoraščiai, susirašinėjimai, autoportretas.

Pastaraisiais dešimtmečiais intymios patirtys atsidūrė daugelio žinojimo sričių priešakyje – Sara Ahmed tai pavadino „afektiniu pokyčiu“. Šiame straipsnyje kalbama, kokį poveikį šis pokytis padarė kinui, ypač periferinės Europos kultūros – Galisijos – kinematografui.

Įžangoje pirmiausia pristatome bendrą afektinio pokyčio kontekstą ir ankstesnius Galisijos kino apibūdinimus kaip mažo ir mažai reikšmingo kinematografo pavyzdžius. Pagal apsibrėžtus teorinius rėmus tyrinėjame ryšius tarp mažo biudžeto kino gamybos būdų ir bendruomenių, kurios gali būti laikomos marginalinėmis kino pramonėje (pavyzdžiui, feministinių filmų kūrėjų ar avangardinių judėjimų), saviraiškos. Šių bendruomenių atstovai dažniau nei pagrindiniai kūrėjai tyrinėja intymumą kine, ir mūsų manymu, egzistuoja ryšys tarp autobiografinių ir asmeninių istorijų bei alternatyvių kino gamybos technikų ir neprofesionalių technologijų; trumpai aptariame šį ryšį, atsiskleidžiantį per dienoraščius, susirašinėjimus, autoportretus ir šeimyninių vaizdų pasisavinimą.

Kitame skirsnyje pateikiame glaustą istorinį Galisijos kino kontekstą. Atskirai aptariame, kaip viešoji politika paveikė Galisijos kino vystymąsi, nuo mėgėjiškos ir karingos pozicijos pereinant prie industrializacijos užuomazgų ir ženklus įsitraukimo į tarptautinių festivalių tinklą. Taip pat apibūdiname Galisijos kino padėtį ankstesniame skirsnyje aptartų marginalinių raiškos būdų atžvilgiu.

Toliau pradėdame dėstymą, kuris yra padalytas į dvi dalis. Pirmoji yra susijusi su dienoraščių naudojimu ir asmeninės medžiagos bei namų filmų remiksavimu, kuris būdingas tokiems filmams kaip *No Cow On The Ice* (*Nėra karvės ant ledo*, rež. Eloy Domínguez Serén), *Eco* (rež. Xacio Baño) ar *Ratatouille* (*Troškiny*, rež. Sol Mussa). Čia

daugiausia susitelkiame į rašytinių ir kino dienoraščių įtaką, ypatingą dėmesį skirdami autoportretams ir mobiliųjų telefonų naudojimo poveikiui šioms tradicijoms; taip pat tyrinėjame, kaip intymūs vaizdai yra perdirbami ir pritaikomi kuriant naujus filmus ir naudojant archyvinį efektą. Antroje dalyje daugiausia kalbame apie susirašinėjimo naudojimą Galisijos kine, susiedami primityvų emigracijos kiną, daugiausia kurtą XX a. pirmoje pusėje, su šiuolaikine epistoline praktika tokiuose filmuose kaip *Cienfuegos 1913*, (*Sjenfuegosas 1913*, rež. Margarita Ledo, Belkis Vega), *Imágenes secretas* (*Slapti vaizdai*, rež. Diana Toucedo) ar *Bs. As.* (rež. Alberte Pagan).

Straipsnio išvadose teigiame, kad Galisijos kinui, kaip mažam ir mažai reikšmingam kinui, iš esmės teko veikti neprofesionalios ir mažo biudžeto gamybos sąlygomis, o tai paskatino ryškia tendenciją tyrinėti intymumą kine, ypač atsiradus skaitmeninėms technologijoms. Galisijos kino temos neretai buvo susijusios su emigracijos traumomis ir identiteto problemomis; jam taip pat būdingas gausus moterų kino kūrėjų būrys. Savo straipsnį baigiame teigdami, kad panaši tendencija gali pasireikšti ir kituose mažuose kinematografuose, ir būtų įdomu tai patyrinėti atliekant lyginamąją analizę.