

The Itinerant Gaze: A Conversation with Filmmaker Margarita Ledo Andión.

One mere kilometer separates the towns of Iria Flavia and Padrón, closely linked to the authorial figures of Camilo José Cela and Rosalía de Castro, respectively. Nevertheless, the proximity of the authors is strictly geographic. Any traveller to the area will be struck by the deep contrast between the humble House-Museum of the Galician poet, Castro, and the Foundation that administers the extensive legacy of the Nobel Prize winner in Literature, Cela. These structures are silent symbols of their disparate status. Similar to many other writers in Galician, Margarita Ledo Andión, possibly the most important and prolific figure of the emergent Novo Cinema Galego, considers herself an intellectual descendent of Rosalía de Castro. Her cinema is profoundly personal and engaged; it recovers the journeys of Galician men and women and their involvement in political resistance, Galician identity, and emigration.

Through the following interview, conducted in person and virtually on July 5, 2017 and edited and translated with the objective of maximizing the effectiveness of its communication, we invite the readers of Gynocine to join us on a fascinating journey through the work of Margarita Ledo with the aim of exploring the characteristics of her cinematographic gaze. The point of departure of this trip will be from her autochthonous “small” cinema, conceived and filmed in Galician, that is enriched through intercultural, hybrid, and feminist comings and goings. This expedition, archaeological in spirit, aims to excavate the origins, materials, and tools of her cinema and to offer a road map of her future artistic paths.

Margarita Ledo Andión (Castro de Rei, 1951-)



*The writer, filmmaker and researcher Margarita Ledo was raised in Lugo in a family, on her mother's side, of Galician emigrants to Cuba. She began on a literary path at the age of nineteen with the publication of a collection of poems, *Parolar cun eu, cun intre, cun inseuto* (1970), which would be followed by *Mama-fe* (1983), *Porta blindada* (1990) y *Cine de fotógrafos* (2005), and others. After graduating in Journalism from the Official School in Barcelona in 1973, Ledo briefly worked in the editorial office of *El Ideal Gallego*. This journalistic work, which she would take up again later in other Galician-nationalist and feminist magazines and newspapers like *A Nosa Terra*, of which she was director, was interrupted for two years during her forced exile to Portugal on account of her political activism. In 1986 she defended her doctoral thesis at the University of Barcelona and, five years later, she returned to Galicia to found and work as a professor in the School of Communication Sciences at the University of Santiago de Compostela, where she*

*continues today as a tenured professor. As a filmmaker, she has directed a number of shorts, notably *Lavacolla*, 1939 (2005), *Cienfuegos*, 1913 (2008), *Illa* (2009) and *Noite do mundo**

(2014), in addition to full-length films *Santa Liberdade* (2004), *Liste, pronunciado Lister* (2007) y *A cicatriz branca* (2012). Her considerable trajectory as creator and scholar earned her the Galician government's National Cinema and Audiovisual Prize in 2008 and the position of archivist-librarian of the Galician Royal Academy, which admitted her in February 2009.

Points of Departure



NÓS, Galician Production Company (*Santa Liberdade*, 2004)

MARIA GARCIA PUENTE y ERIN K. HOGAN: What were your origins as a filmmaker and what are your cinematographic references?

MARGARITA LEDO: I got started with cinema through film clubs, a sphere beyond the control of Francisco Franco's dictatorship that was not very visible but was indeed very active, in particular in Compostela. My origin as a cinephile avant la lettre was through the so-called "new cinemas", especially Brazilian Cinema Novo, because it arrived at that time. Films like *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* (1964) de Glauber Rocha, *Os Fuzis* (1964) de Ruy Guerra and *Vidas secas* (1963) de Nelson Pereira dos Santos had such an impact on me, somewhere between trauma and fascination, given their depiction of abysmal existence. From thence on other films arrived, but what marked me was Brazilian Cinema Novo without a doubt and without knowing that I would later work as a researcher in the geopolitical space of the Lusophone world and that I would eventually found and participate in related professional organizations.¹

Nevertheless, my approach to the image was first through photography, by way of Cartier-Bresson and his work on the USSR influenced me initially. Through him I discovered the greatness of journalistic photography and the photographic gaze. From there I turned to William Klein, whose documentaries also interested me and whom I met later on. There is a sort of

¹ Currently, Margarita Ledo is the president of the Lusophone Federation of Communication Sciences (Federación Lusófona de Ciencias de la Comunicación, LUSOCOM).

layered palimpsest that remains with me and that influenced my trajectory as a creator and academic. In fact, I did my doctoral thesis in 1986 on Sebastião Salgado's photography at a moment when he was not well known in Spain, and dedicated myself more to photography.²

Later, coincidentally, we as a faculty had worked so hard vindicating the photograph's superior place in communication as documentary image that I became responsible for designing the first documentary film programs at the University of Santiago. Having worked on documentary and imparted theoretical and applied classes in which students were given filmmaking exercises, I felt that I had to take the next step and experience the making of a documentary. This is when, in 2003, I make *Santa Liberdade*. Before, in the eighties, I had sent to the Ministry of Culture another project called *Carta postal*. This project was about the creation of an imaginary through the postcard and, more concretely, about how middle class emigrant women, in the years prior to the Civil War (1936-1939), gained access to the world and to modernity through postcards that they sent to each other during their travels. The Ministry paid no attention to me but the seed of *Santa Liberdade* can be found there because it shared the travel motif and made reference to that history.

MGP y EKH: Returning to the metaphor of your last project, what does it mean to have a scarred gaze?

ML: When a gaze searches for healing, to close a wound, it is because behind it there is a collective or personal body that is injured or harmed. In my case, that wound, that I sometimes call a gap or a fracture, are the moments in which history, personal or social, or the capacity for expression are broken. That suture always requires an ethical stance, which in some ways is the gaze. That is, it is the consciousness that you are going to face a non-place and make it livable and accessible; something that will become a part of experience, of the materiality of existence. That's what most interests me.

Routes



NÓS, Galician Production Company (*Santa Liberdade*, 2004)

² Ledo wrote her doctoral thesis on Sebastião Salgado and shock photography as a dominant model in the press for the radically traumatic subject of death by starvation. As she notes, instead of focusing on photos that exploited the traumatic aspect of the phenomenon, she opted to work on active and dignifying images of the subject who was destined to disappear.

MGP y EKH: On many occasions you have mentioned that *Santa Liberdade* (2004), *Liste, pronunciado Lister* (2007) and *A cicatriz branca* (2012) can be considered a trilogy. What does it mean to film the century from Galicia and what role does each film play in your filmography?

I am able to recognize and localize that trilogy later when I function, so to speak, as a spectator of myself. Sometimes I make films but it isn't until later, when I see them or there is a discussion of them, that I notice many aspects. In this case, I happened to be in Paris in the late nineties and I attended a few sessions of a doctoral course given by the philosopher Alain Badiou. Badiou is an inspiring figure: he does theater, philosophy and he's a political activist; I immediately identify with that profile. His doctoral work was about *le siècle*, the twentieth century, that he categorizes as the "century of communism". The century revolved around wars. It was a period of total catastrophe and, it's said that, it was the shortest century because it began in 1914 with the World War I and ended in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin wall.

When I made *Santa Liberdade* I began on the hopeful side of the century, the decade of the sixties and the "years of dreams," the moment when countries weren't aligned, when people thought that another world was possible. I document the history of the occupation of an ordinary ship that was en route from Venezuela to Galicia by way of Portugal. This ship, that became known as Santa Liberdade for 13 days, was occupied in order to call attention to the dictatorships in Europe at the time, Franco's and Salazar's. The responsible parties belonged to the DRIL (Iberian Revolutionary Directory of Liberation), a small newfangled ad hoc organization that became inactive shortly thereafter.

I begin with this story with a happy ending, which is also a story of men. The leaders were a command unit of men who hijacked the ship and explained their motives in a political meeting on a daily basis, but also men who danced with the passengers and sang fados. Nevertheless, I was also concerned with researching the hidden or veiled side of the history and to discover what was behind those characters, so I interviewed women close to them (the wives of commander Jorge Sotomayor and Pepe Velo and the niece of Henrique Galvão). I was interested in studying the role that these female figures played and to reveal through them the hidden details that made it possible for a small formation with few resources like the DRIL to take such spectacular action for the time.

Santa Liberdade begins in 1961, the year in which the story of my next project ends, *Liste, pronunciado Lister*. Enrique Lister, head of the popular army and embodiment of Badiou's "century of communism," was for some one of the most well known, controversial, and hated men of the Spanish Civil War. I choose to document this history with the objective of exploring the brutal Francoist repression in Galicia, a place where one's only defense was to hide or flee, during the Civil War.³ On the other hand, there is no doubt that Lister is a cinematic character. At only 14 years old he immigrated to Cuba, where he worked in a quarry like all of the men in his family. He learns how to read in the Galician Center in Havana and joins the Communist

³ With regards to this topic, Ledo highlights the digital project "Nomes e voces" (www.nomesevoces.net), that has been composing a cartography of Francoist repression in Galicia for a decade. Likewise, Ledo has published a scholarly article on the only photograph that testifies to this bloody history in Galicia, "Fotografías desde donde el mundo se llama Galicia". Taken by a soldier beside the Hercules Tower (A Coruña) in November of 1937, this photograph portrays the execution of a group of men implicated in a military uprising against Franco.

Party in 1927, the year it was founded in Cuba. His socialist education continues in the USSR, where he worked in the early 1930s building the Moscow metro. Lister deeply believed in the so-called “new man” and around Lister arose a whole iconography of great interest that proved fundamental in the film. His fall from grace symbolizes in a way also the defeat of the century in my particular view of this period. In ideological conflict with Santiago Carrillo, he was expelled from the Spanish Communist Party, to which he returns after a series of public acts alongside La Pasionaria, ending his days with a humble pension as copy editor for *Mundo Obrero*. Even though the film is organized chronologically, it really ends with the homage to him in the Galician Center of Havana in 1961, where Che Guevara, emulating Antonio Machado, says the famous phrase: “If my pistol were worth anything, I would gladly fight in your column.”⁴

Finally, in my third film, *A cicatriz branca*, I explore another mark of the century, the constant movement of human masses (due to exile, war, famine, catastrophe, etc.). Specifically, I work on Galician emigration to Argentina, a centenary scourge documented since the second half of the eighteenth century when, by Charles III’s royal decree, the first Galician families depart for the River Plate. This reference is the point of departure for the documentary, *Apuntamentos para un filme*, and it appears again in *A cicatriz branca*. I approach this topic through the women who emigrated alone because it was an early phenomenon that, nevertheless, wasn’t studied until much later. During the 1920s, known as the “great migration” by scholars of Galician emigration, an infinite number of women and men left Galicia for Latin America. There were so many women who travelled alone that there was a specially reserved seat for them at the port of Vigo. Three decades later, in the fifties and sixties, the phenomenon returns, but with its sights set on Europe.

In sum, my trilogy of the century is this: the utopia of the century linked to the idea of the new man and of the new structures like socialism (*Lister*); the fight for liberation relating to the individual and the group (*Santa Liberdade*); and, traversing all of that, migration (*A cicatriz branca*). That is my view of the century.

MGP y EKH: In the resolution of *Santa Liberdade* one of the figures declares: “¡Viva Babel!” [Long Live Babel!]. This is a key phrase that connects clearly with your position as a creator of literature and cinema in Galician. Why did you decide to film in this language?

ML: To preface, I will say that I began to write poetry in my first course as a journalism student in Barcelona, and I did it to write in Galician. Why? Because on a latent level, I was hearing that there had been another world before the dictatorship in which Galicia lived through its literature, there was a commitment to political literature (in fact, the Galician nationalist party during the Second Republic [1931-36] was known as the “party of the writers”) and there was a great writer who was only known publicly as a “corny woman.” That “corny woman” was Rosalía de Castro, a woman who had a public life not only as a woman of letters but also as an activist that had decided to write in Galician. So, as an adolescent who wanted to stand out and who was tired of not being able to be the Parisian existentialist that she would like to be, I decided to write in Galician. In order to connect with a real person with my same concerns, I wrote a few poems and I sent them to an editor who happened to be Manuel María and my bridge to literature in Galician, from which I never parted. I always wrote in Galician, even my essays.

⁴ Antonio Machado’s *Hora de España* (1938) dedicated to Lister, is translated by Alun Kenwood as “If my pen were worth your captain’s pistol, I would die content” on page 112 of *The Spanish Civil War: A Cultural and Historical Reader* (Providence: Berg, 1993).

With regards to my decision to film in Galician, I'm sure there was a variety of reasons with different origins. If before I had made the decision to write in Galician, when I started to create in a different medium (the audiovisual), the logic was not to change language. The opposite would have meant subjecting myself to the logic of the market and the political domain. Moreover, when I began to make films, I had already adhered to the research of politics of diversity and I have always included language in this.

All of these issues are linked, but in reality my decision had a lot to do with my decade of political militancy. From the 1970s to the 1980s, even though I discontinued some of my efforts in activism, I did not abandon my beliefs; my activism now takes place in other areas and in everything that I do. If I have learned something from feminism, in particular from difference feminism (if we don't talk about waves), it is that there are certain values ingrained in us and a woman can choose to rebel against them or not reconcile herself with them in her way of thinking, it is much more difficult to turn this into action in daily life. I never learned Galician in formal schooling; what's more, I am of a generation whose education prohibited Galician. Therefore, writing in Galician in my case was entirely a choice as an activist. By making this decision, I was automatically labeled as anti-Francoist and, on that basis, they followed me and basically forced me into exile in Portugal. In other words, my trajectory has followed a line of non-reconciliation with the different faces of patriarchal power. I found this later in the theoretical vein of the sixties from Stuart Hall and cultural studies, when they said: "Don't speak for women but as a woman", and of course in *Notes Towards a Politics of Location* by Adrienne Rich, in which she updates the universalist thought of the first wave of feminism. In my case, I am Galician, white, I lived a dictatorship, and I insert myself into militancy, what does that mean?

I work from there, from diversity, especially through linguistic diversity, and that is where "¡Viva Babel!" appears.⁵ For me, that "Long Live Babel!" has to do with respect for self-determination, since the law of a nation cannot be measured by material resources. My decision to create in Galician meant a deconstruction from the inside of an incorporated idea that I take to the effective terrain in which I move, including cinema. Even though my films are occasionally polyglottal in their interior, all languages are on equal footing, and the language of the original version and the culture that conceives that cinema are always Galician.

MGP y EKH: You have said that your two favorite projects are your shorts *Cienfuegos, 1913* and *Illa*. Why do they stand out?

ML: My predilection for *Cienfuegos, 1913* is because it is a documentary about my mother, who was the daughter of emigrants to Cuba. It is a way to mourn her ten years after her death and an homage to her birth place, the city of Cienfuegos, Cuba in 1913. Moreover, this short was quite a challenge because it is the adaptation of one of the poems from my book *Linguas mortas: serial radiofónico* (1989), in which I collaborate with the photographer Anna Turbau. In fact, when I am invited to participate in events on literary adaptation I always offer this example, which is rather controversial.⁶ *Cienfuegos, 1913* stands out for me as well for its language and use of the

⁵ Curiously, the first festival in which *A cicatriz branca* was screened was a festival in Italy called Babel.

⁶ *A cicatriz branca* is another film Ledo based on her literature, *Porta blindada*. The film complements the novel by exploring what is not written, the Latin American part of the protagonist's biography. The protagonist ends up in a mental hospital.

camera. I realize that I organize everything around the embrace of my mother; I aimed for the spectator to embrace her, and I do it through a circular shot around a nursery, an image that had always been in our house.

With regards to *Illa*, it is a short in which I try to vindicate Republican women in exile and recuperate their voice. The words that one of these women, Teresa, says are so powerful: “They left me without a language, without a land, they left me...”. It is a voice that moved me so much that I could not use footage from the filming in the short. Instead, I chose to insert other images in order to give more importance to the voice and to allow for it to take us to that traumatic situation. Since *Illa*, I work a lot in the realm of the voice in my films and especially connecting it to the feminine.

Cross-border Travels



NÓS, Galician Production Company (*A cicatriz branca*, 2012)

MGP y EKH: On the subject of *Illa*, the web page novocinemagalego.info categorizes your shorts *Illa* and *Noite do mundo* and feature film *A cicatriz branca* within the so-called New Galician Cinema (Novo Cinema Galego or NCG). Do you agree with this classification? How does your cinema fit into this classification?

ML: This classification departs from a formalist itinerary because it is very present in the NCG but for me it is a taxonomy like any other. I basically agree; actually, it's something that I don't think much about.

I think, if we focus on formal elements, that it would be possible to include other projects as well. One of them would be without a doubt *Líster* and, in fact, there are critics who coincide with this idea. Another work that could also appear in this group is the short *Lavacolla*, 1939, that is part of a political film that came about due to the elections of 2006 *Hai que botalos*. The classification of Alberte Pagán and Xurxo González is justified, nevertheless, because those films explore original topics. In the case of *Cienfuegos*, 1913, we see a cinema of correspondence and family life that connects with the feminist tradition of that space that is

almost never represented in the public sphere. On the other hand, *Illa* was always considered experimental and the short *Noite do mundo*, in which I film the homonymous poem by Xosé María Díaz Castro, also has an experimental part. *Noite do mundo* was a commissioned work for the collective project *Nimbos*, that rendered homage to Díaz Castro for the Day of Galician Letters in 2014. I really like the work I did for *Nimbos* and it is one of the most viewed pieces in the project.

My entry into the NCG is obviously extra-generational since it is a cinema dominated by much younger directors, a generation that received their film education through communication schools or fine arts studios. All in all, my contribution to the NCG could be the awareness of the necessity to make political cinema. This approach is also due to form, destroying the canon, and utilizing the language of the medium in a certain way and focusing on veiled aspects and how they are represented. In other words, it is a certain politics of representation. That I learned from photography, most of all from the photographers from the United Kingdom. Connecting to the previous question about the scarred gaze of my cinema, I began to work on the injured body in the 1960s and 1970s. This is what interests me and I believe that it is what I represent in the NCG debate.

MGP y EKH: We noticed a trajectory in your cinema from the autochthonous, of a small cinema in Galician, to an intercultural sensibility that travels alongside the Galician diaspora. How would you define interculturality? Would you say that it is key to understanding the Galician condition?

ML: Interculturality only exists as an action, something realized. It is necessary to enter into contact with another culture in order for this phenomenon to occur, it isn't something preexisting. In this sense, all migrations, all diasporas, are intercultural and it is not necessarily a happy experience but rather it can be very painful, marginalizing, and even abusive. Likewise, interculturality links with the concept of hybridization or mixing; like all the creole-based languages, societies are hybrid in terms of languages and cultures.

In the framework of diversity politics, on the other hand, diversity only exists as interculturality. In other words, it is from the recognition of a territory (literary, social, political, etc.) and the resources to be able to express oneself from this space (sexually, creatively, etc.) that one enters into a relationship of alterity. The action of entering into this relationship of alterity re-produces interculturality. Obviously, interculturality implies a constant metamorphosis, it is a sort of voyage from which you return transformed.

In the case of the Galician condition, historically this has a lot to do with emigration and the search for self-confidence. Galicia is a nation without papers and, similarly, its citizens are citizens without papers, who are dispersed around the world. In the last twenty years we have observed the crisis of stateless nations and, in effect, people are speaking more and more about the "cinema of nations without a state". This is due to that fact that states are an absolute instrument of financial power and their public institutions, plagued by rampant corruption, have stopped representing their citizens. As a result of this loss of confidence, spaces for discussion have arisen to decry the difference. Galicia has to be there and so does Galician cinema.

MGP y EKH: In addition to creating intercultural bridges in your cinema through travel and dialogue, bridges are an element that is quite present in the mise-en-scène of many of

your films, like *Santa Liberdade* and *A cicatriz branca*. Why is it necessary to create these intercultural bridges?

ML: This is closely related to what we were talking about. Both from a material perspective and from our individual actions in the public sphere we always move from somewhere. Movement in this context implies displacement from inside out; that is, a movement toward oneself, toward the society, toward one's interests in certain realms, and, of course, towards an external physical space. This is very much a part of the case of a nation like Galicia that is criss-crossed by the culture of diaspora. I identify with that phrase that indicates to us that Galicia is closer to Latin America than Madrid and the "bridge" that unites both entities is the travel that is represented in *Santa Liberdade*. To this we would have to add the fact that diasporic cultures represent a special need for mutual aid and this is something that is quite characteristic of agrarian culture. This necessity made it possible for education and healthcare to advance in the great societies, most of all in the diaspora. In my films I try to knit all of these bridges in an explicit and implicit way through a framework of visible and invisible bonds.

MGP y EKH: A recent study that examines the characteristics of the NCG affirms that this cinema revels in fictional-documentary hybridity and underscores the *auteur's* signature (Gómez Viñas 153). Could you explain to us what sort of hybridity your cinema deals with?

ML: Significant note has been taken of the obliteration of the border between documentary and fiction in contemporary cinema and this is one of the territories of hybridity. With respect to my work, there are certain fictionalized elements of the documentary. There is already a timid beginning to this tendency in *Santa Liberdade* with that blank page and the sequence with the three women who attend a film screening at the Cangas pier to which a boat arrives. This more pronounced in *Líster*. Nevertheless, this leads to hybridity that progressively takes root in my work as I become more comfortable with visual expression. Therefore, *A cicatriz branca* is fiction that I often present as a film-document based on real events. The events are organized as a fiction but the film concludes almost more like a documentary because in the last 10 minutes there is an explicit reference to an actual interview that I conducted of Antón Moreda in 1987. Moreda appears in the film played by two actors: his younger self from when he was in a mental hospital and, like an alter ego, he repeats exactly the same words that he told me in the interview; and the character played by Xabier Deive, who is in Argentina and has an affair with Merce (Eva Veiga).

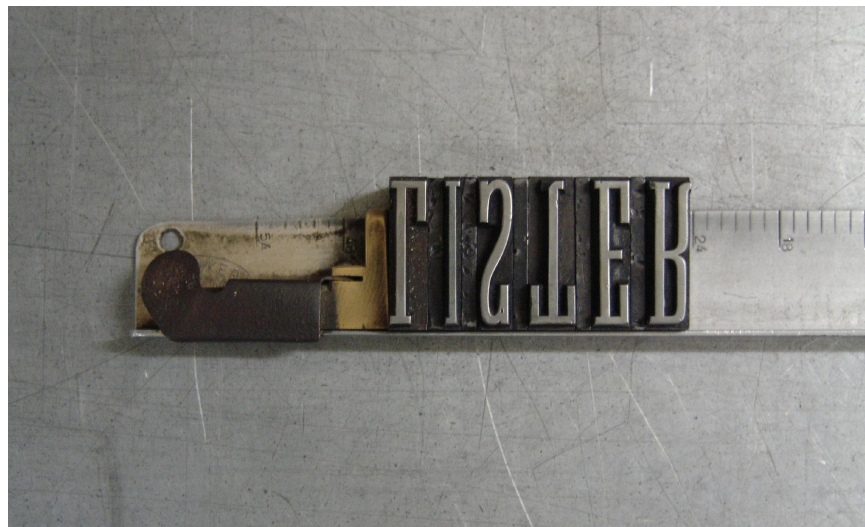
MGP y EKH: Similarly, your documentaries participate in the postmodern tradition of questioning the Truth. At the end of *Santa Liberdade* the same protagonists seem to recognize this when they say: "The important thing is that there isn't uniformity of views... that everyone has what they recognize as the truth of the subject. It isn't my truth, nor your truth... it's everyone's different truths". What is the relationship between truth, interculturality, and Babel?

ML: That's just it: the deconstruction of the official truth and, in many ways, of the dominant paradigm of knowledge, which means considering other knowledges that are not regulated and instead rely on their own internal systems. The problem stems from the fact that it is hard for us to access these kinds of knowledge for lack of familiarity with its systems. To do so it is

necessary to recognize not only the coexistence of different systems but also something more important: the impossibility of relating them to each other.

A work that inspired me while I was preparing the dossier for my promotion to full professorship and that I think is indispensable is *The Tree of Knowledge* by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela. This text made me reflect on the importance of respecting and knowing of the existence of different systems even when are not able to understand them because they have their own reasons and conditioning factors. In feminism, the work *Feminismos* (plural) by Olga Castro and María Reimóndez illustrates this very well because it deals with different feminist practices around the world.

Archaeology of a Voyage



NÓS, Galician Production Company, (*Liste*, pronunciado *Lister*, 2007)

MGP y EKH: Your films benefit from a meticulous assembly process in which you work with a variety of materials and sources, for example, poems, news articles, photographs, paintings, etc. Would you say that it is possible to connect this multiplicity of materials and sources with the Babelic chorality of your cinema?

ML: Exactly, it connects with the Babelic chorality and, again, with diversity and the occupation of territories that we've spoken about. I use the photo as a photo, the poem as a poem, the anecdote as an anecdote, and the body as a body. I am interested in how these different territories interact and produce what we would call interculturality.

Santa Liberdade begins with the free adaptation of a poem by Avilés de Taramancos: "The camellia exists because you say its name..." and in *A cicatriz branca* the first phrase spoken by the head of the house is inspired by Jean Genet's *The Maids*: "I am the reason, the only reason, that these maids exist." Moreover, the screenplay includes phrases from the Galician writer Eduardo Blanco Amor. In the chronicle published in *La nación* of his arrival to the port of Vigo from America, Blanco Amor writes: "Upon placing my foot on the ground, I took off my hat" (literally, in Spanish: "me descubrí"). This act of removing one's hat is the social gesture of

return, that it reproduced in *A cicatriz branca*. When the male character returns, he utters the same words as Blanco Amor but the “me descubri” to which he refers is doubly coded: it is, on the one hand, a ritual and at the same time a self discovery that allows him to see himself differently. The polysemy of the words is something that I manipulate constantly.

At the same time, my works dialogue with art and pictorial sources. John Berger, an author to whom I turn often for teaching the gaze and for photography, says that Rubens painted his wife Elena everyday. She cooperated off and on and this was apparent in his works. This anecdote translates perfectly to my creative process; sometimes Elena resists appearing in the drawing and I let it go. Although, I generally become obsessed with an idea and I try to follow-through because I’m not afraid of imperfection.⁷ In *A cicatriz branca* I make my own homage to Rubens through the invisible ties that link the female characters, “The Three Graces” of the film, and the sorority that they build. In the early sequences, the actress who is an announcer foretells: “I saw a woman at the station” (the same one who arrived by boat). Then the seamstress recuperates the “thread,” so to speak. She heads for the station with her suitcase and runs into the other woman.

Nevertheless, not all artistic allusions and influences in my work are intentional. For example, in a recent screening of *A cicatriz branca* at the Filmoteca (for the Documenta-Madrid retrospective) Antón Patiño, an artistic creator, mentioned to me that one of the film’s scenes reminded him of Edward Hopper. It was the scene in which the character Merce walked into her room, her first room of her own, and exactly where Castelao died in exile. I think that Hopper’s fingerprint was there yet it wasn’t premeditated but rather incorporated. What happens is that in my creative process, my references come out; even though they are latent, at a certain time they activate and appear in my work. In this sense, my cinema is hybrid, it arises from multiple origins, some conscious and some subconscious. Moreover, in the case of cinema by women I think that this is more particular because we constantly have to recognize ourselves as creators from the outside in, break with the imposed social role and the politics of institutional representation. That is exactly what the women of *A cicatriz branca* do when they recuperate their means of expression, their speech.

MGP y EKH: Earlier you mentioned your interest in the Brazilian Cinema Novo and you’ve just alluded to the imperfection of your cinema. Is it possible that *For an Imperfect Cinema* (1970) by Cuban filmmaker Julio García Espinosa has had an impact on your work?

ML: Imperfection is highly valued in the new cinema (showing the folds, the wrinkles, different textures, etc.), and like I said, not only am I not afraid of imperfection but I also seek it out sometimes. I think that I get this from feminine culture, but without a doubt García Espinosa’s essay, that we always study in my classes, just like Russian constructivism (Lissitzky, Rodchenko, Maiakovski) have had a profound impact on me. I think that it is very important to

⁷ This is evident at another moment in the conversation when the filmmaker comments on how she refused to conclude *Santa Liberdade* until she was able to secure permission from the Kennedy Library to reproduce the American president’s statements on the hijacking of the ship. This situation would repeat again in *Líster*, where she wouldn’t relent until she was able to include Che Guevara’s speech in homage to Líster. Both anecdotes are related to Ledo’s interest in recuperating the voice.

know how to work within a context: with the materials at your disposal and from your place, which connects to *Arte povera* (Pistoletto) and *Land art*. This approximation is fundamental for Galician cinema because it liberates it from Hollywood obsession. We cannot make that kind of cinema but we can make another kind. We don't have to fight Hollywood, Goliath. Our stories, since they are different, don't collide with theirs and, therefore, even Goliath can learn from us, as occurred in the past with Off Hollywood's incorporation of other tendencies.

MGP y EKH: Returning to the materials and sources of your cinema, what is the importance of vestiges and memory objects in your artistic creation?

ML: In my works, in general, I film in sites of memory. For example, many of the spaces depicted in *A cicatriz branca* are real scenarios from Galician emigration to Argentina: Constitution Station, The Federation of Galician Societies, the Galician Center where the dances were held, etc. I'm interested in these places because they have a trace of emigration and for me this emigration is a vestige, it is the index as something original that I then use to construct. In this sense, I consider myself Benjaminian: I understand that there is no aura without vestiges. Therefore, there is an index in everything that I do.

Interestingly, the artistic director of my films, Bernardo Tejeda, who works with installations and graphics (photographic supports or other kinds of materials) that always incorporate the index, has had an exhibit in Valencia about this very subject.⁸ That is what interests me to examine in all artistic expression thus far and my new object is the voice, which is more difficult to recover.⁹

MGP y EKH: We've noticed that your presence (vocal, physical, autobiographical, etc.) grows over your cinematic trajectory. This is another characteristic of the NCG: self-inscription. How do you explain this and what does it accomplish?

ML: I just got over my fear of inscribing myself. While in poetry there is always an inscription of the self, even when it is a chronicle of an event expressed in poetic form, it's different in cinema. In *Santa Liberdade*, for example, I was very present but behind the scenes; the history had interested me for years and it coincided in part with the reasons why I became an activist in the national left organization, but I do not physically appear in the documentary. Nevertheless, this tendency does increase over time. My own personal evolution pushed me to cross that invisible border and to materialize in my cinema. I always cite Vivian Sobchack's phrase: "documentary is less a thing than an *experience*". And I believe that it is in living this experience that self-inscription becomes another material in my work.

I would also add that on certain occasions my presence occurred somewhat by accident; that is, I appear in some of my films because something didn't work out. In *A cicatriz branca*, without going any further, the actress who was going to play the role couldn't travel to Buenos

⁸ Tejedo's installation, entitled "a trilogy of conduct," was on display in the Museu Valencià de la Il·lustració y la Modernitat from February 16 to May 23, 2017.

⁹ One of the voices that Ledo admires most is that of María Casares in the documentary *Guernica* (1950) by Alain Resnais. Ledo finds an index for the nostalgia for the the Galician coast in the voice of this French actress of Galician origin.

Aires due to a personal problem and, since I had rehearsed the story so much, I had to take her place. Nevertheless, I had been inspired for the character by a very dear person who introduced me to the world of the Galician diaspora in my first visit to Buenos Aires, Nélida Rodríguez Marqués, the widow of poet González Tuñón. She gave me some stamps that appear in the film and also the earrings I wear in that scene. I actually play Nélida in *A cicatriz branca* and the line that I utter, “While I’m here, I’m here”, was hers. This is just another example of how I work with index in my films, of how I bring aspects of real life to the fictionalized scene.

MGP y EKH: We see a rich relationship between the form and content of your documentaries. In *Líster*, to give an example, you trace the mythic construction of a hero, but the work also reveals its process of construction in unique ways. For instance, the camera sometimes imitates the lens of a microfilm machine. You have just said that a documentary is an experience. Would you say, then, that you invite your spectators to join you in the excavation of the materials that comprise your cinema? What would you say is the connection between form and content in your works?

ML: I think that they are closely related. In a certain way, traversing the unknown has to do with how you formalize it, how you make sense of the artwork. Decontextualizing also supposes traversing the unknown because it opens the gaze up to another horizon; by moving the piece to another place, we are forced to relate with it in another way.

In terms of political cinema, form is very important. Traditionally, the deconstruction of the canon is associated with changing the form and using different materials; innoble, poor, or common materials that aren’t considered worthy of being transformed into an artwork but that, nevertheless, have great symbolic power: letters, talismans, the family rosary, etc. When it’s time to incorporate the meaning, I really make an effort so that the form does not detach from the content, even though it is really difficult sometimes. Even so, it often occurs that detachment still leads to the most surprising conclusions by spectators. In some way, this fragment that isn’t fully understandable ends up being the most memorable part of the film and, as if it were the bead of a necklace, it requires us to link the story together.

I pay a lot of attention to editing, in general, and, in fact, I have go over and over again the relationship among images before finalizing their editing. I think that this connects to the process of excavation you refer to and that is clearly evident in *Líster*. I’m often told that my films have a circular structure and I answer that they are circular in their form: the ending could be at the beginning or both could be closely related. In the specific case of *Líster*, I aimed for any image to be relatable to another chronological moment. I wanted to construct the documentary as a spiral so that content would be related transversally and dialectically. Curiously enough, they screened *Líster* and Armand Mattelart’s *The Spiral* (1976) together at an event I attended at the UNESCO center in Malaga. In the debate with Mattelart following the screening, we realized that our films coincided conceptually in this kind of spiral editing.

New Horizons



NÓS, Galician Production Company, (*A cicatriz branca*, 2012)

MGP y EKH: In your last two films it is possible to see a shift towards topics dealing with women's experiences and with feminism. What is the reason for this shift? Do you plan on continuing to explore these subjects in your future projects?

ML: This shift occurred gradually and the reason for this is simple: I came across this material that could express so much with so little. I just submitted a draft of a multimedia project by singer Carmen Penín dedicated to Galician women in the Spanish Civil War. The project is titled *Herdeiras* and for the short I recycled my own material with a totally different formalization. I try to play with the image of these strong female figures, these role models that give us strength. They represent my interest for the voice and self-inscription (I appear reflected in a mirror). For my next work I will return to a project that I conceived two years ago but for various reasons I had to put aside temporarily. It will be called *Nación* and it will be a crystallization of my work over the last decade, since I directed *Cienfuegos*.

MGP y EKH: What is the place of Galician women creators in the emergent NCG? And why is it this way?

ML: The NCG flourished from the margins, and from the invisibility of that space a group of women directors, many of them are very talented, has emerged. However, instead of presenting ourselves in stilettos and demanding the terrain that we deserve, our entrance was by tip-toe, almost as if we were asking for permission. The first visible sign of this new batch of women directors within the NCG is a collective work called *Visions* and it came about thanks to the Project "Cinema e muller" that Beli Martínez and Xisela Fragua organized in 2015 under the auspices of Pontevedra's Provincial Council.¹⁰ In this choral piece the usual topics are explored,

¹⁰ For more information about "Cinema e muller", consult the page dedicated to the project on the Council of Pontevedra's website: www.depo.es/es/cinema-e-muller.

but as a first work, it was not possible to know what to expect from these first-time directors. What I think could become tricky, nevertheless, is treating all the projects the same. Some are amateur exercises for school or family and others are meant for a public audience and are made in collaboration with a producer. It also seems strange to me, and I would have to find out why, that all the works acknowledged the same men: Oliver Laxe, Eloy Enciso, Xurxo Chirro, etc. For someone like me, who has been through a few phrases of this journey, this surprises me and I see it is a step backwards. Not even my mother, who belonged to a generation without rights, thanked anyone. Hers was like the slave's "no," a "no" that was used sparingly.

Now that equipment is so cheap and easy to use and anyone can make films almost without needing a budget, women directors' films (like many in the NCG) are mostly self-produced. There is no doubt that this new horizon of creativity is generating great expectations. Even so, I think that women authors must articulate and advance our own discourse. If it is possible to work on the formal level with freedom and independence, with very different proposals, it is necessary to recognize that the work is configuring us. That is, I think it is very important that we know what kind of works we want to make, under what conditions and from what culture. I would like for these new directors to identify themselves as feminist filmmakers since eliding this would for me a loss of history. In the conversations and conference sessions that we have shared, I have been able to see that, in fact, it is the case of these directors, as it was for me, that they have been strongly influenced by Marguerite Duras and her work. Nevertheless, I think that, unfortunately, there is a clear loss of Galicia as a referent in the work of many of them. There are so few of us women who work on cinema in Galician and, in my perspective, this does not make for engaged Galician cinema. The fear of being discounted as a redneck, the social stigma of the script, still dominates and this contradicts contemporary views.

MGP y EKH: In the conference that you just mentioned, "Cinema e muller", you spoke about the relationship between the NCG and feminist cinema. You used an interesting metaphor: lovesickness. What are the "invisible ties" that connect both cinemas and why are they not recognized? What have been your thoughts on the debate surrounding the NCG?

ML: I think that the NCG has prospered thanks to something that has not been expressed, which is the influence of feminism, an imprint that has never been recognized. If it weren't so, autobiography would not be inscribed, there wouldn't be hybridization nor impure cinema. In fact, I have published an article, "Acciones (in) diferentes, tensiones latentes. A propósito del feminismo y 'novo cinema galego'", where I investigate this influence.

I have the impression that my argument was well-received by the attendees and creators. The male directors were not present at the "Cinema e muller" conference, even though some of them left me indirectly their works to publish. I should also say that the authors with whom I work have readily perceived this influence and they don't mind recognizing it. The reason for the invisibility of the ties that link the NCG and feminist cinema has a lot to do with power. Unfortunately, as the NCG phenomenon demonstrates, feminism and the Galician language are considered useless and powerless. And if you don't believe in them when you approach your work, you won't vindicate them or you will only do so in a trivial way. In my opinion, this is a mistake. I strongly believe that it is necessary to take a stance.

MGP y EKH: What is the question that no one has asked you and that you would like to answer?

ML: No one ever asks me about the relationship between cinema and nation and, specifically, why I always say that the NCG requires us to revisit and rethink our understanding of national cinema and the function of the term. If in the literary system, Galician literature is that which is written in Gallego, we should apply the same criterion to Galician cinema. We should call things by their name. Language is a great communal construction, it's what makes us exist in History. Therefore, Galician cinema (including the NCG) should be in Galician; if not, other labels should be used to identify it like (Novo) Cinema in Galicia. In the past, everyone was happy with European diversity and people spoke of Italian cinema (Neorealism) or New Polish Cinema. Why can't we at this moment use this word to allude to other kinds of cinema, like the Galician one?

On a practical level, diversity politics in Europe have been abused to the point that there is a disconnect between the declaration and its practice. For example, a film in Galician cannot be presented to Programa MEDIA in the category of small cinema because it competes through an institution, Spanish cinema, that is considered very strong. This is clearly a structural inequality. We should have the right to compete as cinema in Galicia if we want to. On the other hand, it's the opposite in Ibermedia. Since their programs are for cinema in Spanish or Portuguese, I cannot present *A cicatriz branca* in Galicia. This situation has made it necessary for us to work outside certain institutions, and we are achieving this through research programs because it is an independent terrain. So, the most recent projects of our research group aim to defend the original version (in Galician) of films.¹¹

In my opinion, Catalonia is a model to follow given its strong pro Catalan film policy. It's a nation with more power, with a different history, and with a more diverse social makeup, that has implemented a very coherent language policy, immersion, and has been able to extend it to its cinema. The Catalan government, without looking further, is financing the Cine Texas movie theater that only screens films in Catalan. Nevertheless, in Galicia the policies intended to energize Galician cinema are a trap. Anyone with a producer whose social domicile is in Galicia can receive public funds; this is why there are so many original versions in Spanish that are later dubbed shoddily for the archive but never screened publicly. What we vindicate is the original version in Galician with subtitles. To this end, we have created in Compostela a film cooperative, NUMAX, where only original versions are screened, and this year it was declared a model theater for all of Spain by Europa Cinemas.¹² It is very important that there are spaces where it is

¹¹ Two research projects by the Grupo de Estudos Audiovisuais de la Universidade de Santiago de Compostela (www.estudiosaudiovisuais.org) are *Cine, Diversidad y Redes. Pequeñas cinematografías, políticas de la diversidad y nuevos modos de consumo cultural* (2013) and *eDCINEMA: Cara o Espazo Dixital Europeo. O papel das cinematografías pequenas en v.o.* (2015). Both of which were directed by Margarita Ledo. Please consult the bibliography for the full references.

¹² Created in 2015, NUMAX is a non-profit cooperative in which Margarita Ledo collaborates. The organization has at its disposal a movie theater, a design studio and video post-production, and a specialized library. For more information on NUMAX, visit their web: <https://numax.org/>

possible to see cinema in Galician and, to achieve that, it is necessary to begin to transform society. As you can see, you've brought out my activist side with this last question.

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