

# RESTITUTION OF MEMORY: IMAGES AND TRACES IN GALICIAN CORRESPONDENCE FILMS\*

JOSÉ LUIS CASTRO DE PAZ  
HÉCTOR PAZ OTERO

Bereft of memory, a person becomes the prisoner of an illusory existence; falling out of time he is unable to seize his own link with the outside world—in other words he is doomed to madness.

(TARKOVSKY, 1989: 57-58)

But the direct time-image always gives us access to that Proustian dimension where people and things occupy a place in time which is incommensurable with the one they have in space.

(DELEUZE, 1986: 39)

## I. INTRODUCTION: CORPUS, METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

---

Just when Odysseus and his crew were on the point of reaching their homeland of Ithaca, a wild storm blew their ship off course to an unknown island. Odysseus sent some of his men to explore the island and gather information about its inhabitants. They thus came into contact with the natives, who welcomed them warmly and offered them a mysterious food: the sweet fruit of the lotus plant. Upon eating the plant, the men fell into a kind of lethargy that made them forget everything: their companions, their family, and their home. They thus lost their longing to return to Ithaca. When they didn't come back to the ship, Odysseus decided to go in search of them with the

rest of the crew, and on finding them he managed to drag them back by force.

The peril that Odysseus must face here is the danger of forgetting, interpreted in the epic poem as synonymous with death. Mircea Eliade (1968: 121) argues that "insofar as it is 'forgotten', the 'past'—historical or primordial—is homologized with death." The common colloquial expression "keeping a memory alive" hovers in the connotative margins of this interpretation, underlying humanity's ancestral determination to mitigate the devastating effects of the passage of time: "Proust also spoke of raising 'a vast edifice of memories', and that seems to me to be what cinema is called to do" (Tarkovsky, 1989: 59). In relation to the ontology of the photographic image, André Bazin argues that a portrait helps us to remember the

subject, and therefore rescues that subject from a second, spiritual death: “To preserve, artificially, his bodily appearance is to snatch it from the flow of time, to stow it away neatly, so to speak, in the hold of life” (Bazin, 2004: 9). Of course, in the context of this article’s object of study, i.e., films made for the wistful gaze of the émigré, this kind of “reincarnation” that Bazin describes should be understood as more of a “re-presentation”, an attempt to bring a trace of the past into the present:

This production by automatic means has radically affected our psychology of the image. The objective nature of photography confers on it a quality of credibility absent from all other picture-making. In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object re-produced, actually re-presented, set before us, that is to say, in time and space. (Bazin, 2004: 13-14)

In the title card that opens one of the films analysed here, *Nuestras fiestas de allá* [Our Festivities Over There] (José Gil, 1928), written the journalist and writer Jaime Solá,<sup>1</sup> the following line appears under the heading “EVOCATION”: “There, where our memories remain forever, is a lovely country called ‘Val Miñor’. It lives in our spirit and our eyes carry it before them. Its festivities are our festivities. It trembles with joy and pain and we tremble like absent children.” And it continues with a phrase that encapsulates the ultimate meaning of what is known as the correspondence film: “To see it (Val Miñor) drawn to us by the hand of art is to fly home to it.”<sup>2</sup> It is not merely to see the place but to be there. Solá’s text is founded on the certainty that “the outward appearance is more than an accessory; it is a point of access to the essence of things” (Esqueda Verano, 2019: 11). Like a Proustian madeleine, the film image triggers the memory (located on the temporal axis), which in turn triggers a longing to return (spatial axis), thereby combining the two dimensions of the nostalgia that the émigré projects onto the images while viewing them. It is not merely a question of not forgetting, but of

---

### IT IS NOT MERELY A QUESTION OF NOT FORGETTING, BUT OF RELIVING AN EXPERIENCE; REVIVING IT, LIVING IT AGAIN, BEING THERE AGAIN, RETURNING HOME

---

reliving an experience; reviving it, living it again, being there again, returning home.

For the purposes of delimiting the object of study analysed in this article, we believe it fitting to refer to Manuel González’s definition, and particularly to his label “correspondence cinema”, which he attributes to the

relatively wide range of visual, documentary and news footage related to migration processes [...] Grouped under this title is all visual footage made with an explicitly descriptive/denotative objective and produced especially either to serve as propaganda for the industrial-cultural territory of the metropolis in overseas countries or to remember the beloved people, customs and landscapes on either side of the ocean. (González, 2006: 5-6)<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, as is the case for written correspondence, correspondence cinema is defined by a two-way flow, which in general terms involves two types of material: footage filmed in the homeland (Galicia) at the request of emigrant communities in Latin America so that different filmed scenes of the land they left behind can be viewed in the host country; and film footage taken to show people in the country of origin the activities of the different emigrant communities scattered throughout Latin America.<sup>4</sup> In either case, the footage would “travel in the holds of the same steamships that transported émigrés or returnees, so that they could then be shown in the best film theatres in Buenos Aires, Havana, Vigo or A Coruña” (González, 2006: 5).<sup>5</sup> This brief study explores films made in Galicia for viewing by Galicians living overseas, since the objective here, as outlined above, is to analyse the gaze that revels in a wound left by a time and place left behind. This analysis must necessarily focus

on *traces*—the most suitable term to refer to images constructed as “paths once trod that will never be walked again”—which are what films of this kind largely consist of. The direct analysis of these traces will facilitate the development of some “plausible conjectures” (Hernández, 1995: 530).

Therefore, for the construction of these conjectures, this study will offer a filmic, historical and cultural analysis of three films shot in Galicia<sup>6</sup> for viewing by expats in their host countries. These films were made during the two biggest periods of Galician migration to Latin America: the first in the late 19th and early 20th century, and the second in the context of the Franco dictatorship in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Chronologically, the first of these films is the aforementioned *Nuestras fiestas de allá*, shot by José Gil<sup>7</sup> and released in 1928. Gil’s film was commissioned by the *Unión de Hijos de Morgadanes* [Children of Morgadans Association] based in Montevideo, Uruguay, and it documents festive, recreational, religious, social and culinary events in the Galician *comarca* (county) of Val Miñor, as well as the schools built with money donated by the Uruguayan expat association. The second film is *Un viaje por Galicia*<sup>8</sup> [A Trip around Galicia] (1958), by Manuel Arís,<sup>9</sup> made up of footage taken by the filmmaker on three trips he made around the region between 1953 and 1958. Arís’s camera revels in the beauty of the Galician landscape, with one slight digression into his family life, as will be discussed below. Finally, the third of the films included in this study is *Alma gallega* [Galician Soul], filmed and written by Amando Hermida Luaces<sup>10</sup> in 1966. According to its opening title card, this film was “shot in Galicia to extol its beauty and its customs, its monuments, and its industrial and commercial progress, with a script by Amando H. (Hermida) Luaces.”

Despite the time intervals between the films and the extraordinary aesthetic evolution of global filmmaking over the long period they cover, the obsession of an emotional filmmaker with recording the landscape, the period and other elements, along with the amateur nature of the filming,

serves to explain the striking formal similarity between them.

## 2. MODES OF REPRESENTATION: CAPTURE OR BIOSCOPIC RECORDING

Xosé Nogueira argues that in terms of production the first films made by Galician filmmakers in the first third of the 20th century were located “at the most basic level according to Janet Staiger’s categorisation: the ‘camera operator’ level” (Nogueira, 2004: 73),<sup>11</sup> characterised by a unified personal perspective whereby the cameraman was the one responsible for choosing the topic and filming it within the limits of his technical abilities. As noted above, this resulted in films whose finished products are somewhat amateur. Based on this premise, and with the aim of establishing a much more precise classification system for this type of film (which will place us in a better position to clarify the hypothetical subjectivities that might be experienced by the individual expat when viewing them), this study draws on a recent monograph on documentary authored by Santos Zuzunegui and Imanol Zumalde, titled *Ver para creer. Avatares de la verdad cinematográfica*.<sup>12</sup> These two authors borrow an expression from Jean-Marie Straub, using the terms “capture” and “bioscopic record” to refer to what is commonly known as a “document”, i.e., “an audiovisual fragment on which a series of sounds and images have been recorded” (Zuzunegui & Zumalde, 2019: 169). Among the wide range of bioscopic documents (or records), the purest of all would be images taken by security cameras. However, much closer to the films analysed in this article is the work of the Lumières’ camera operators, whose films are notable for “their ‘indexical intention’, their referential power, often quite deliberately reflected in the unusual nature of the framing” (Zuzunegui & Zumalde, 2019: 171), and which steer clear of any interference that might threaten the *truth-effect* inherent in the indexical image. In this sense, to maintain

its purity the ideal scopic document would only allow a static shot—established according to strictly functional criteria—with an invariable continuity, or at most broken only by a mechanical disruption, such as the flickering images of security cameras, for example. Of course, we must not overlook the fact that in practice there are documentary films which,

even while committing some of the aforementioned transgressions (camera movements, changes of point of view, editing, etc.), enable the spectator to view (strictly speaking, they successfully *make the spectator believe* that he or she is viewing) a real event directly and without mediation, and thus these external interferences do not undermine (on the contrary, in some cases they enhance) the factual, probative and referential foundation of the bioscopic document [...]. In short, we will assign the problematic label of *pure or raw bioscopic document* to that type of self-conscious text which, while dispensing with the most popular resources of cinematic language and conventional mechanisms of filmic veracity, clearly stresses the indexical nature of its raw material in order to produce a quintessential *truth-effect* in relation to a particular event. (Zunzunegui & Zumalde, 2019: 181-182)

Many of the films made by the Lumières' camera operators can be placed unproblematically in this category, although as will be shown below, not all of them fit into it quite so neatly.<sup>13</sup>

Based on this framework, which (as the analysis that follows will demonstrate) offers a flexible structure in which to place the three documentaries chosen for this study, we can begin to trace the contours of the evocation filmed by José Gil for his documentary *Nuestras fiestas de allá*.

### 3. FORMAL, HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL ANALYSIS: EVOCATION TOWARDS RESTITUTION

According to the Spanish language's most authoritative dictionary (Real Academia Española,

2014), the word *restituir* has three definitions, of which the second and third are of particular interest for this study: "2. To reinstate something or restore it to the state it had previously" and "3. Of a person: To return to the place that one departed from."<sup>14</sup> The combination of these two definitions establishes the essential parameters of a memory: "the state it had *previously* and the *place* that one departed from", i.e., recovering the past and returning to the place left behind. These dictionary definitions seem to suggest that the most effective way of evoking a memory is through its restitution rather than its (re)construction.

Constructing a memory implies a process of substitution, as it involves a new, clear, corporeal image intended to bury the image associated with the original memory stored in the spectator's mind. They are essentially two images in competition, one of them at a disadvantage, as the constructed image possesses the vibrancy of the present and of the visible stimulus that triggers it, while the other—the original memory—struggles to shake off the dust of time that shrouds it.<sup>15</sup> It would thus seem that the key to evocation consists in offering a *restitutive* image that can trigger the subjectivity of the audience, to help them rescue their own personal memory rather than the memory imposed by a *substitutive* image. And how is this process of restitution realised? José Manuel Mouriño Lorenzo offers an analysis that may help us form an approximate idea:

[I]f we examine the basic pattern that emerges from the way it operates, the systematic repetition of the substantial gesture represented by *recording a remote homeland in images to offer them to a community in exile*, we will obtain an ideal paradigm that could reveal numerous connections. Let us briefly return to the moment of filming and reconsider what the camera is really framing in that instant. It is not just a landscape that will be familiar to the expat's eyes. That image functions in practice as a "reactive principle" for the memory, an index that stimulates the memory of a past that is inevitably associated

with that location. Thus, through this submission *en masse* to the seduction of these images based on their status as evocative indices, the social event of the exhibition of these films ultimately shaped the collective memory of the group through the manifestation of and confrontation with the evoked memory. (Mouriño Lorenzo, 2008: 2-3)

The “reactive principle”, activated to help us remember, constitutes a constant in the correspondence films analysed here. In *Nuestras fiestas de allá*, for example, it is expressed in the wide shots that open each of the sequences, which are effectively blocks of images from the different villages recorded by José Gil’s camera [Figure 1]. Each block begins with an introductory title that informs us of the village that the expat will be able to “visit” next, along with some explanatory details—for example: “Vincios. There is the village wandered through in childhood days, strolled around on visits to the homeland, remembered always”<sup>16</sup>—that constitute the only connotative licence taken in an otherwise monolithically denotative and referential construction. Then the image appears: a wide shot in which a long, shaky pan—the kind that completes a 360° degree turn, or even begins panning back in the opposite direction after completing the first sweep around—explores a rural landscape from an elevated position. In this way, the image locates the émigré-spectator in a recognisable place, its presence prolonged on the screen to ensure the effectiveness of the “reactive principle” and to create an expectation. This is followed by shots of a somewhat closer range than the opening shot, where the villagers enter the scene to act out the ritual or event (a procession, dance, picnic, etc.), without losing the points of reference that help identify the exact location where the event is taking place [Figure 2]. These points of reference, in imitation of the tourist attractions filmed by the



Figure 1. *Nuestras fiestas de allá* (1928).

Lumières’ camera operators, are generally monuments—crosses, bell towers, theatres, façades of churches, etc.—that ensure that viewers will be able to identify a specific location. And finally, the third element of the compositions created by José Gil goes further into the desire to recognise, but this time it is the desire to recognise people:

When it appeared on screen it was a touching moment. As the camera made its first passes, the audience members opened their eyes as wide as possible so as not to miss a detail, and at the same time they picked out some acquaintance or relative among the characters of the film, as various viewers made occasional comments such as “hey, look at so-and-so,” or “there’s the alder tree we used to jump into the water from when we went swimming.” (González, 1996: 221)

The camera moves in closer to identify the people taking part in the events, in group shots or medium-long shots that allow the spectator to scrutinise their faces. José Gil’s compositional approach can thus be summed up as follows: a wide shot of a landscape (reactive principle); a wide or long establishing shot of places and people (search for recognisable places); group shots and medium-long shots of people (search for familiar individuals).

The ritual nature of the religious ceremonies and processions, along with the landscapes and monuments, convey a temporal immutability that lightens the sorrow of the émigré, who succumbs to the illusion that everything is still the same in their absence, that time has stopped, and that if they ever save up enough money to be able to return home they will find their past exactly as they left it:

The sense of arrested time in the landscapes seems to be a necessary requirement to express the émigré's loss. The landscape belongs to a time anchored in memory and the images will come to life once again in the emigrants' return for as long as they remain away from home. If their village and its human landscape were to undergo changes, the whole operation of the migration story, the whole sacrifice, would have been in vain and their identity would be wounded. (Barreiro, 2018: 73)<sup>17</sup>

It is important here to acknowledge certain footage filmed in the context of the *Noticiario Cinematográfico Español* (the Spanish newsreel service of the period, popularly known as *NO-DO*), especially its weekly magazine program *Imágenes* and the documentaries that would explore different parts of Galicia to present its scenery and its customs. This footage displays some similarities to the correspondence films analysed here in terms of their visual composition:

Figure 2. *Nuestras fiestas de allá* (1928).




---

**THESE POINTS OF REFERENCE, IN IMITATION OF THE TOURIST ATTRACTIONS FILMED BY THE LUMIÈRES' CAMERA OPERATORS, ARE GENERALLY MONUMENTS—CROSSES, BELL TOWERS, THEATRES, FAÇADES OF CHURCHES, ETC.—THAT ENSURE THAT VIEWERS WILL BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY A SPECIFIC LOCATION**

---

The idyllic longing for a country that exists outside time could not be separated from the desire to rediscover and celebrate the beatific peace of its people in its purest state (the countryside, the villages), honouring their traditions, with their loaves of bread under their arms, in the heat of the hearth, dancing their traditional dances and immersed in their most cherished and unchanging possession: the Catholic religion. (Tranche & Sánchez-Biosca, 2006: 529)

In short, these are images that offer us a sterile and atemporal *topos*: “The territory is turned into an abstract space in which nothing changes or can ever change, where there is no conflict or scars or struggle” (Barreiro, 2018: 58).<sup>18</sup> It is a faultless, carefree place, immune to the passage of time, and therefore ideal for inciting longing.<sup>19</sup>

At the same time, to keep the image from invading the subjectivity of the spectator and losing its evocative power, it must adhere strictly to its indexical purpose. This is where its bioscopic essence comes into play, an essential element for respecting that “degree zero” (or close to zero) where all traces of the narrative voice are rendered invisible. One of the parameters of the *mise-en-scène* that defines these documents, present in the first scenes filmed by the Lumière camera operators (and in correspondence cinema, partly thanks to its obviously amateur nature), is its capacity to generate unruly images, evident on a spatial level in shots “that are constantly overrun and/or over-



flowing with the people and objects that appear in them, sometimes instantaneously and fleetingly” (Zunzunegui & Zumalde, 2019: 185), and on a temporal level in the absence of a beginning or ending revealed in the shots when viewing them,<sup>20</sup> allowing chance to burst onto the scene and accentuate the *truth effect* of everything being recorded. It is precisely this element of chance that gives rise to another outstanding feature of these films: the gazes to camera, present in all of the titles studied here, although it is in José Gil’s documentary—either because in his images human figures appear in greater numbers and are generally closer to the camera, or because at the time he was filming (1928) film cameras were much more unusual than they would be decades later—that we find the most examples of this *anti-transparent* factor. If these were fiction films we might describe them in terms of what Noël Burch calls “forbidden gazes” that disrupt the *voyeurism* inherent in all film viewing and expose a “manipulative” presence; however, in the case of documentaries, the effect can actually contribute to the verisimilitude of the shot, as the dissonance between these appeals to the camera and all the profilmic elements that make absolutely no acknowledgement of the presence of the camera allows us to evaluate the shots “in terms of *truth*, as a sign, in short, that denotes the spontaneous and unplanned (and therefore authentic and *real*) nature of this behaviour, and by extension of the *possible world* in which it occurs” (Zunzunegui & Zumalde, 2019: 188). In other words, if these gazes to camera were not present, the final product may have raised suspicions of artificiality, offering evidence of an order given previously by the operator/filmmaker to the passers-by to pretend to ignore the existence of the device. Thus, as noted above, all three films analysed here present a continuous succession of individuals who, after passing in front of the camera, direct their gaze towards it, thereby establishing a bond with the spectators in the expat community, in addition to any connections that may already

exist due to family or community ties. There are some individuals who reinforce this link not only by gazing to camera but also by waving their hats in a very obvious greeting, while others react in a way that is quite distinct but just as effective in betraying the presence of the camera, concealing their faces as they come into the frame. There are even children and older individuals who step into the foreground with their backs to the event being filmed in the background to stare unabashedly straight at the camera operator while he is filming [Figure 3]. In their analysis of the composition of some of the Lumière scenes, Zunzunegui and Zumalde point out that their verisimilitude is reinforced by the gazes to camera “because they alert the spectator to the fact that the cameraman who is being looked at is on location and in plain view” (Zunzunegui & Zumalde, 2019: 188), like a special television news correspondent who offers the spectator an introduction to the story in front of an emblematic monument on the scene of the events, in an effort to give the impression of an eyewitness account.

*Alma gallega* (1966) gives the spectator a close-up of Amando Hermida Luaces, the camera operator, director and producer of the film [Figure 4]. He is carrying a camera and tripod on his shoulder as he walks over the rough terrain of Mount

Figure 3. *Nuestras fiestas de allá* (1928).



Santa Tegra, with the Miño river flowing into the Atlantic Ocean in view in the background, near the seaside village of A Guarda. The filmmaker, in his role as a character in the film, feigns fatigue from his climb to the mountaintop, reflecting the effort necessary to reach the perfect point to capture the spectacle of the estuary. Despite the aforementioned similarities to the other two films, this film is distinguished by a modern self-reflexive game that seems to defer the repetitious biographic records in the shots taken by José Gil and Manuel Arís, reflected in part by the wide shots of the Galician landscapes. Amando Hermida interferes in his documentary much more extensively by inserting brief, humorous sketches with very simple storylines—an innocent flirtation between a shepherd and a shepherdess after performing a Galician folk song, a fisherman who falls off a pier into the sea—and a voiceover that loads the film with connotative commentary. Nevertheless, as noted above, *Alma gallega* exhibits something of an indexical approach when Hermida focuses his camera on landscapes and celebrations. Here the amateur nature of the mise-en-scène becomes clear, bringing these sequences closer to the spatial and temporal instability of raw footage, with rudimentary editing of a succession of “tourist sights and folk scenes”: landscapes, monuments, celebrations, cuisine, processions, sporting events, workers in the fields and on the sea, urban traffic, traditions, etc., all without any narrative, as however much the voiceover may attempt to give the jumble of images some coherent meaning, it is left up to the spectator/expat to provide them with a story (“that is the chapel where I got married”; “there is where we used to play when we were kids”; “I went to that procession every year with my parents”; “my grandparents’ house is near that vineyard”). Otherwise, we would be viewing a substitutive image, rather than a restitutive image that effectively evokes a memory that can then be elaborated into a story. The memory is not shown on the screen but is elicited



Figure 4. *Alma gallega* (1966). Amado Hermida Luaces appears on screen with his film camera

by it, and this is where the essential value of the referential quality of the image and its objectivity, as raw images—like photo negatives—that need to be developed, to which end the elicited memory is the perfect darkroom.

However, there is one exception to the narrativity and objectivity—beyond Amando Hermida’s aforementioned sketches and some of the voiceover comments—that bursts wildly onto the scene in Manuel Arís’s *Un viaje por Galicia*. This is when the filmmaker arrives in his hometown, Poio, and we hear his voiceover say: “The village where I was born.” Then later, he points out “the thresh-er on my farm at home,”<sup>21</sup> and finally, he declares: “Allow me to introduce to you this lady working so hard: it is my mother” [Figure 5]. This narrative is personal—although, as will be explored below, not untransferable—for the filmmaker; it is uniquely his. There is no way for spectators to contribute their own story here. However, this sequence opens another option for the spectator to participate: through projection and identification. The voiceover narrative has taken the journey that every émigré longs to take: first arriving in his village, then at his house, and then finally at his mother’s side. It is also worth remembering that Arís’s film also offers images of the ship voyage across the Atlantic on its way the Galician port. In this way, the filmmaker depicts his return, satisfy-





Figure 5. *Un viaje por Galicia* (1958). Manuel Arís's mother

ing the spectator's desire to return through Arís's first-person narrative. The spectator's projection will ultimately evolve into identification through the figure of the mother.

This sequence features one of the decisive moments in the relationship between the audience and Arís's gaze. These family images assimilate the Galician emigrant community with his own family, and thus he shares the intimate space of his childhood, giving his personal journey a collective meaning; everything is still there, and the mother was waiting for him. The licence taken by Arís with these family scenes was criticised by Seoane, who considered it to be interference inappropriate to the conception of Galician cinema. Seoane may well be right, but Arís was not trying to offer a reflection of reality; rather, he recognised the myth that the emigrant community clung to. With the gift of the sequence with his mother, he invoked the mother of each spectator; she would become everyone's "mother" on the joyful occasion of the return to the mother and the motherland. (Barreiro, 2018: 69)<sup>22</sup>

The mother is essentially the image of the wait; a figure who, like Penelope, every expatriate longs to see once more.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The extreme historical circumstances surrounding Galician migration in the 20th century inadvertently turned José Gil (and those who came after him) into the precursor(s) to a trend of meaningful, complex appropriation of found home movie footage, with minimal manipulation, by documentary makers such as Péter Forgács with his praiseworthy *Private Hungary* series (1988-1997). As we have sought to demonstrate in this article, due to the almost complete absence of manipulation of filmed images, emigration films possess an intensely evocative power that facilitates the restitution rather than the substitution of memories.

However, in contrast to the dark and eerie tone that home movie footage acquires with the passage of time, in this case that tone is present in the image from the moment it is filmed—or, more precisely, from the moment it is engraved in the eyes of its first expatriate spectators—due to the enormous wound of a distance constituted by time (and money), and finally, almost always, death without ever returning home.

#### NOTES

\* This article is the result of research conducted in the context of the research project titled "*Cartografías del cine de movilidad en el Atlántico hispánico*" [Cinematic Cartographies of Mobility in the Hispanic Atlantic] (CSO2017-85290-P), financed by the Ministry of Science and Innovation - State Research Agency, and with funds from the ERDF.

- 1 Jaime Solá was the founder and editor of the magazine *Vida gallega* throughout the first period of its existence from 1909 to 1938. The publication featured extensive graphic material by José Gil. The cover to the first issue featured a painting by Castelao, an artist and politician considered to be one of the fathers of Galician nationalism.
- 2 The film, shot after the death of two of his daughters, bears witness to an old, tired and aching gaze that still

has faith in cinema as a powerful “machine of restitution”: “A person in a film (he wrote) never really dies” (Castro de Paz, Folgar de la Calle & Nogueira Otero, 2010: 387).

- 3 Original Galician: “*conxunto relativamente amplo de materiais visuais, documentais e reportaxes, relacionados cos procesos migratorios [...] Agrupamos baixo esta denominación todos os materiais visuais realizados con obxectivo explicitamente descritivo/denotativo e producidos especialmente, ben para a propaganda do territorio xeográfico industrial-cultural da metrópole nos países de ultramar, ou ben para a lembranza dos seres, costumes e paisaxes queridos dunha e doutra banda do mar.*”
- 4 Notable among these is *50 aniversario del Centro Galego de Buenos Aires* [50th Anniversary of the Buenos Aires Galician Centre] (1957), due to the presence of María Casares, the daughter of Santiago Casares Quiroga, who was Prime Minister of the Spanish Republic at the time of the military coup in 1936. The actress, who had trained in France, would draw on the pain of exile to create some of her best performances on stage and screen (cf. Castro de Paz, 2017: 107-122).
- 5 Original Galician: “*viaxaban nas bodegas dos mesmos barcos a vapor que transportaban emigrantes ou retornados, para logo ser proxectadas nos mellores cinematógrafos de Bos Aires, La Habana, Vigo ou Coruña.*”
- 6 For a more detailed exploration not only of the correspondence films produced for the Galician community but also for the rest of Spain’s expatriate communities, see the study by Rubén Sánchez Domínguez (2020: 79-121).
- 7 A prominent figure in early Galician cinema, José Gil (born in the village of Rubiós in the province of Pontevedra in 1870) started off, like so many filmmaking pioneers, in photography. In 1910, he bought a Gaumont film camera, which he used to record social and cultural events in the city of Vigo. He was responsible for the first fiction film ever made in Galicia, *Miss Ledyá* (1916). Together with Fausto Otero, he launched Galicia Films, the region’s first film production company, with the aim of making family films, industrial reports, and of course, films for overseas emigrant communities.

After several years of both personal and professional difficulties, he established his last company, Galicia Cinegráfica, where he would produce *Nuestras fiestas de allá* and another important title in correspondence cinema: *Galicia y Buenos Aires* (1931).

- 8 Not to be confused with the 1929 film of the same name by Luis R. Alonso, which was commissioned by the four Galician local councils for the Ibero-American Expo in Seville. Alonso’s film was an institutional production that has nothing to do with correspondence cinema.
- 9 Manuel Arís Torres (born in Poio, Pontevedra province, in 1920) experienced the pain of emigration first-hand when he sailed for Montevideo at the age of nine. In 1951, he began working for the emigrant community in the Uruguayan capital, making productions on 16mm film: *Caminos de España en el Uruguay* [Spanish Roads in Uruguay] (1954-1957), to which he would later add the films made during his trips around the Iberian Peninsula: *Por los caminos de España* [Along Spanish Roads] (1959) and *Tierra de nuestros mayores* [Land of Our Elders] (1960) complete the trilogy that he began with *Un viaje por Galicia*.
- 10 Amado Hermida Luaces (born in Ribadavia, Ourense province, in 1909) emigrated to Buenos Aires in 1929. After buying a 16mm camera and founding his own production studio (Hermifilms), he took advantage of his travels to make three films: *Galicia al día* [Galicia Today] (1959), *De Irún a Tuy* [From Irún to Tuy] (1958) and the aforementioned *Alma gallega*.
- 11 Original Galician: “*no nivel máis elemental se atendemos á clasificación de Janet Steiger: o de ‘operador de cámara’*”
- 12 Although we recognise the value of the classifications proposed by Bill Nichols, Zuzunegui and Zumalde’s work offers the opportunity to take a more nuanced approach to the films analysed in this study.
- 13 In addition to bioscopic capture, the taxonomy of documentaries proposed by Zuzunegui and Zumalde includes three other categories. The authors use the term “common (sense) documentary” to refer to what film historians classify as the documentary genre, consisting of films that aim to give their sounds and images a single, cohesive and ordered meaning. Per-

haps the best example of this type of documentary is the war propaganda film, created for a propagandistic purpose that it makes no effort to conceal. The third category, given the label “intervened or conceptual document”, involves an intervention in the footage that makes explicit the filmmakers intentions in the selection of the proflimic material, mise-en-scène, lighting, etc. This is an intervention that does not aim to erase the referential quality of the document, but enhances it in a different way, giving rise to a meaning that stems from the artist’s intention and not from the bioscopic document. The fourth and final type of documentary, referred to as the “sublimated documentary”, aims to divert the substantive indexicality of the bioscopic material in a new semantic direction.

- 14 Original Spanish: “2. Restablecer o poner algo en el estado que antes tenía; 3. Dicho de una persona: Volver al lugar de donde había salido.” It is worth noting the connection established between the latter definition and the line that opens José Gil’s film *Nuestras fiestas de allá*: “To see it drawn to us by the hand of art is to fly home to it.”
- 15 In his novel about Galician émigrés in London, *Virtudes (e misterios)* [Virtues and Mysteries], which recently won the Spanish National Literature Prize for Narrative, the writer Xesús Fraga describes a curious dispute between two images: a photograph that materialises the absence of the narrator’s grandfather, who emigrated to Venezuela, and his own face, which, according to everyone in his family, bears an extraordinary resemblance to the face of his forebear. The comparison arises from the placement of a passport-sized photo of his grandfather in the frame of a mirror that the narrator often looks at his reflection in: “At home, I would compare my resemblance to the only photograph of my grandfather that I knew of. Someone had stuck it in the bottom corner of the frame of the mirror, in which I saw my reflection twice: the image in the daguerreotype found a muffled echo in a youthful face, frozen decades earlier” [Original Galician: *Na casa, eu confrontaba as similitudes coa única fotografía do avó que coñecía. Alguén a colocara na esquina inferior do marco dun espello, no*

*que me reflectía por partida dobre: a imaxe que devolvía o azougue atopaba un eco amortecido nun rostro de xuventude, conxelado décadas atrás]* (Fraga, 2020: 26).

- 16 It is significant that to highlight the importance of place in the narrative of documentaries, Jaime Solá’s text constructs sentences that give space the status of the subject of the clause instead of a circumstantial complement of place.
- 17 Original Galician: “O tempo detido nas paisaxes semella una esixencia para a elaboración da perda. A paisaxe ten un tempo ancorado na memoria e as imaxes se animarán de novo á volta terma do traballador emigrado mentres segue fóra da casa. Se se produciran cambios na súa aldea, na súa paisaxe antropolóxica, toda a operación narrativa migratoria, todo o sacrificio, resultará en balde e a identidade ferida.”
- 18 Original Galician: “O territorio convértese nun espazo abstracto, no que nada cambia nin pode cambiar; no que non hai conflito nin cicatrices de loita.”
- 19 Both the visual and semantic dimensions of “postcard” images in correspondence cinema are based on the dominant Galician pictorial models of the 1940s. The principles of the regionalist movement persisted after the end of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), with a predominantly local, folkloric style promoted and awarded in national fine arts exhibitions. This was the case of prominent painters such as Fernando Álvarez Sotomayor, Carlos Sobrino Buhigas, and Francisco Lloréns before the war; and Julia Minguillón and Julio Prieto Nespereira, as heirs to this aesthetic, which was embraced after the conflict by the Franco regime in its efforts to extol human nobility, whereby Galicia, according to Carlos López Bernárdez, became an “idealised, pure territory, an Arcadia crowned with a halo of perfection (...) Galicia is a kind of refuge of spirituality, a humble and simple land” [Original Galician: “*territorio ideal e puro, unha Arcadia revestida dunha aureola immaculada (...) Galiza é unha especie de refuxio de espiritualidade, unha terra humilde e sinxela*”] (López, 2011: 29).
- 20 This premise requires a supporting argument, which is provided in detail by Santos Zuzunegui and Imanol Zumalde, who develop Henri Langlois’s theory on the

absence of chance in the scenes shot by the Lumières' first camera operators. While the organising principle explained by Langlois is certainly discernible in some scenes, in many others chance is clearly the predominant factor.

- 21 Original Galician: "A malladora na eira da miña casa."
- 22 Original Galician: "Nesta secuencia sitúa un dos momentos decisivos da relación do público coa súa mirada. Con esas imaxes familiares asimila a comunidade galega emigrada á súa propia comunidade familiar, e con ela comparte o espazo íntimo da súa infancia dándolle un sentido colectivo á súa volta persoal: todo permanece, a nai agardaba a chegada. Estas licencias familiares de Arís foron criticadas por Seoane, que as considerou coma interferencias inadecuadas na apreensión fílmica de Galiza. Pode que Seoane estivera no certo, pero Arís non buscaba o reflexo do real, senón que termaba do mito do que se dotara a comunidade emigrada. Co agasallo da secuencia da nai, invocaba a nai de cadaquén, ela convertérase na 'miña nai' de todos, na fortuna de retornar á matria e á nai."

## REFERENCES

- Barreiro González, M. S. (2018). Filmar a terra. A paisaxe como cuestión de clase. In M. Ledo (coord.), *Para una historia do cinema en lingua galega 1. Marcas na paisaxe* (pp. 43-79). Vigo: Galaxia.
- Bazin, A. (2004). *What Is Cinema? Volume I*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bazin, A. (2006). *¿Qué es el cine?* Madrid: Rialp.
- Castro de Paz, J. L., Folgar de la Calle, J. M., Nogueira Otero, X. (2010). Galicia años 10: hipótesis, tipologías y análisis del material conservado. In Lahoz Rodrigo, J. I. (ed.), *A propósito de Cuesta. Escritos sobre los comienzos del cine español 1896-1920* (pp. 383-388). Valencia: IVAC. Ediciones de la Filmoteca.
- Castro de Paz, J. L. (2017). *Cine y exilio. Forma(s) de la ausencia*. Santander: Shangrila.
- Deleuze, G. (1986). *Cinema: The Time-Image*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1996). *La imagen-tiempo: estudios sobre cine 2*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- Eliade, M. (1968). *Myth and Reality*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Eliade, M. (1978). *Mito y realidad*. Barcelona: Guadamara.
- Esqueda Verano, L. (2019). El cine como espejo diferido: el concepto de transferencia en A. Bazin y S. Cavell. *Palabra Clave*, 22(3), 1-27. <https://doi.org/10.5294/pa-cla.2019.22.3.4>
- Fraga, X. (2020). *Virtudes (e misterios)*. Vigo: Galaxia.
- González, M. (1996). Cine y emigración. In J. L. Castro de Paz (ed.), *Historia do cine en Galicia* (pp. 216-234). A Coruña: Vía Láctea.
- González, M. (2006). *Elixio González Estévez: Reporteiro gráfico da emigración*. Santiago de Compostela: Arquivo da Emigración Galega, Centro Galego de Artes da Imaxe.
- Hernández Sandoica, E. (1995). *Los caminos de la historia. Cuestiones de historiografía y método*. Berkeley: Síntesis.
- López, C. (2001). *Do idilio á diáspora. Modernidade e compromiso na pintura galega. De Castelao a Seoane*. Vigo: NigraTea.
- Mouriño Lorenzo, J. M. (2008). El regreso a casa a través de la (mágica) imagen cinematográfica. *F@ro: revista teórica del Departamento de Ciencias de la Comunicación*, 7, 1-5. Retrieved from <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/2784855.pdf>
- Nogueira, X. (2004). As temáticas. In Various Authors, *Libro branco de cinematografía e artes visuais en Galicia* (pp. 71-164). Santiago de Compostela: Consello da Cultura Galega, Santiago de Compostela.
- Real Academia Española (2014). *Diccionario de la lengua española* (23rd edition). Retrieved from <https://www.rae.es/>
- Sánchez Domínguez, R. (2020). A través del espejo. Memoria, re-presentación e identidad en el cine documental promovido por las asociaciones de emigrantes en América. *Americania. Revista de estudios latinoamericanos*, 12, 79-121. <https://doi.org/10.46661/americania.5161>
- Tarkovski, A. (1991). *Esculpir el tiempo*. Madrid: Rialp.
- Tarkovsky, A. (1989). *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Tranche, R. R., Sánchez-Biosca, V. (2006). *NO-DO. El tiempo y la memoria*. Madrid: Cátedra/Filmoteca Española.
- Zunzunegui, S., Zumalde, I. (2019). *Ver para creer. Avatares de la verdad cinematográfica*. Madrid: Cátedra.

## RESTITUTION OF MEMORY: IMAGES AND TRACES IN GALICIAN CORRESPONDENCE FILMS

### Abstract

The genre known as “correspondence cinema” is mainly determined by the spectator/émigré’s gaze. Constructed with obvious expressive and technical flaws that even approach the level of amateur cinema, this type of film was nevertheless capable of almost immediately triggering memories of a home and a time left behind. The restitution of a memory is made possible not only by the subjectivity of the spectator, but also by the *modus operandi* of the filmmakers who recorded this footage of local landscapes, faces, processions, rituals, work in the fields, etc. Based on a classification of these documentaries and an analysis of the mechanisms of their mise-en-scène, the aim of this article is to explore the reasons behind the extraordinary evocative power of the images filmed in Galicia, the homeland left behind, for screening at emigrant centres in host countries.

### Key words

Emigration; Memory; Galicia; Latin America; Correspondence cinema; Restitution; Nostalgia.

### Author

José Luis Castro de Paz (A Coruña, 1964) is a film historian and professor of communication studies at Universidade de Santiago de Compostela. He has published numerous articles in academic journals, contributed to anthologies, and edited books on various aspects and important figures of cinema. Notable among his many publications are *El surgimiento del telefilm* (1999), *Alfred Hitchcock* (2000), *Un cinema herido. Los turbios años cuarenta en el cine español* (2002), *Fernando Fernán-Gómez* (2010), *Del sainete al esperpento. Relecturas del cine español de los años 50* (2011), and *Sombras desoladas* (2012). Contact: joseluis.castro@usc.es.

Héctor Paz Otero holds a PhD in Communication from Universidade de Vigo. His dissertation was on the film adaptations of Wenceslao Fernández Florez. Among many other studies, he is the author of *Poética de la derrota: la literatura de Wenceslao Fernández Flórez en el cine*. He has worked on various research projects at Universidade de Santiago, including *Galicia en No-Do: comunicación, cultura e sociedade*; and *Hacia una reconsideración de la cultura posbélica: análisis de los Modos de Representación en el cine español (1939-1962) a partir de la impronta de Wenceslao Fernández Flórez*. Contact: hectorpazotero@edu.xunta.es.

## RESTITUIR EL RECUERDO. IMÁGENES Y HUELLAS EN EL CINE GALLEGO DE CORRESPONDENCIA

### Resumen

El conocido como «cine de correspondencia» viene determinado, sobre todo, por la mirada del espectador/emigrante. Construidos con evidentes carencias plásticas y gramaticales, cercanas incluso al cine *amateur*, este tipo de films, sin embargo, eran capaces de suscitar de un modo casi inmediato el recuerdo del hogar y del tiempo perdido. La capacidad para restituir un recuerdo no viene dada solo por la subjetividad del espectador, sino también por el *modus operandi* de los realizadores que registraban esas tomas compuestas por paisajes, rostros, romerías, ritos, tareas del campo, procesiones, etc. A partir de una catalogación de dichos documentales y del análisis de los mecanismos que conforman su puesta en escena, se pretende profundizar en las razones del fuerte poder evocador de las imágenes filmadas en Galicia, la tierra abandonada, para ser proyectadas en los centros de emigrantes de ultramar.

### Palabras clave

Emigración; recuerdo; Galicia; América; cine de correspondencia; restituir; nostalgia.

### Autores

José Luis Castro de Paz (A Coruña, 1964) es historiador del Cine y catedrático de Comunicación Audiovisual de la Universidade de Santiago de Compostela. Ha publicado numerosos artículos en revistas científicas, participado en obras colectivas y coordinado volúmenes sobre diversos aspectos y figuras vinculadas al arte cinematográfico. Entre sus numerosos libros, destacan *El surgimiento del telefilm* (1999), *Alfred Hitchcock* (2000), *Un cinema herido. Los turbios años cuarenta en el cine español* (2002), *Fernando Fernán-Gómez* (2010), *Del sainete al esperpento. Relecturas del cine español de los años 50* (2011) o *Sombras desoladas* (2012). Contacto: joseluis.castro@usc.es.

Héctor Paz Otero (Las Palmas, 1976) es doctor en Comunicación por la Universidade de Vigo, con una tesis sobre las adaptaciones cinematográficas de Wenceslao Fernández Flórez. Entre otros muchos estudios, es autor del libro *Poética de la derrota: la literatura de Wenceslao Fernández Flórez en el cine*. Formó parte de varios proyectos de investigación de la Universidade de Santiago: *Galicia en No-Do: comunicación, cultura e sociedade*; y *Hacia una reconsideración de la cultura posbélica: análisis de los Modos de Representación en el cine español (1939-1962) a partir de la impronta de Wenceslao Fernández Flórez*. Contacto: hectorpazotero@edu.xunta.es.



**Article reference**

Castro de Paz, J. L., Paz Otero, H. (2022). Restitution of Memory: Images and traces in Galician correspondence films. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 34, 41-54.

**Referencia de este artículo**

Castro de Paz, J. L., Paz Otero, H. (2022). Restituir el recuerdo. Imágenes y huellas en el cine gallego de correspondencia. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 34, 41-54.

recibido/received: 10.12.2021 | aceptado/accepted: 02.05.2022

Edita / Published by



Licencia / License



ISSN 1885-3730 (print) / 2340-6992 (digital) DL V-5340-2003 WEB [www.revistaatalante.com](http://www.revistaatalante.com) MAIL [info@revistaatalante.com](mailto:info@revistaatalante.com)