

SYNOPSIS

THE TREATMENT

1 ABOUT THE PLAGUE

2 TECHNICAL DATA

3 THE SPACE AS THEME

3.1 Peripheral spaces: Gallecs

3.2 The “banlieue” urban fringe housing estates:
The Barrio Sin Madre

3.3 The encounter

4 THE MAIN CHARACTERS

5 NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION AND FILMIC DEVICE

6 FORMAL TREATMENT

NOTE OF ARTISTIC INTENT

THE CREATIVE TEAM

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

1 *IMMERSIÓ*

2 SOME SHORT FILMS

Synopsis

Among industrial estates, motorways, rubbish tips and urbanisations, there are still people who work by cultivating the land. Though but a stone's throw from the big city, they live with their back to it: they are anchored to a rural landscape and a production system from the past. Right next to Gallecs, as this area is known, construction works are continually in progress: new urbanisations, zones of huge buildings, roads.....

One such person, Raul, a cigarette between his lips, is working the land on a tractor. From a distance, he looks like a contemporary cowboy. He works in the heat of the sun in the thick of summer, until at two o'clock in the afternoon he starts his other job. Until ten at night he loads and unloads crates of drinks in a warehouse in an industrial estate where you can never tell if it is day or night. When he finishes, he sleeps four or five hours before going back to the field early.

Work on the land has turned out complicated for Raul this summer. All the bean plants have been affected by a plague: the white fly. Apparently there was nothing that could save them. According to the more senior farmers, among them, his father, only a good storm could rid them of the plague. But in mid July, there is not a trace of a cloud in sight in the sky. From now on, the hours of work and the infernal heat begin to be unbearable for Raul.

A few metres from Gallecs fields, and a stone's throw from the industrial zone where he works is the Barrio Sin Madre (the "motherless neighbourhood"), a suburban housing estate where the poorest in the city try to eke out a living next to the mega-buildings. Sharing a flat with three others from Moldavia, Raul is trying to get his head round the fact that his girlfriend has left him by telephone from her country. He's tempted to go back there and get her back. But he can't; he paid 3.000 € to the mafias to leave and now he cannot return to Moldavia without the money. His only consolation is lucha libre wrestling, the one activity he carries out with passion in the neighbourhood gym. With such passion in fact, that he has had his nose and ear broken several times in the last few months.

For Raul, the idea of losing the entire summer's crop on account of a plague after all the effort he has put in is unbearable. One day, working with his head absorbed in all this, a young man appears in the field saying he wants to work. Only 23 years of age but enormous, stocky, strong and at the same time nice and chatty. Until now, he has been working in the construction of a huge motorway that passes nearby, but he has been made redundant and needs money. Raul, a rather closed and quiet type, knows that he could do with a hand on the land, but is not sure if he wants to work with anyone else as well as with his father. Finally he takes him on as a labourer.

Each with their own problems, they work elbow to elbow for a few days. With their minds on other things, they plant spring onions, gather tomatoes, prepare the cereal fields... Two solitary individuals, they each work occupied in their own thoughts, together but apart.

Julieta also lives in the Barrio Sin Madre, like Iurie. She is from Colombia and has been going to work for the last few days in a very elderly lady's house, in Gallecs. She helps her with the cleaning and most importantly, brings all the shopping that the lady needs from the supermarket. It's certainly a task that needs a car. But Julieta doesn't have a vehicle or a driver's licence and needs the work. So she makes her journey by foot on the road, sweating under the sun, laden down with several plastic bags of shopping in each hand. In spite of the effort, it is a good feeling to get out of the narrow, dirty, noisy streets of the Barrio Sin Madre. In Maria, the elderly lady's, house, communication is not easy. The lady only speaks Catalan and she only speaks Spanish. The dialogue is absurd. Besides which, the house is a disaster, full of animals that come and go freely, on the bed, on the tables or on the marble of the kitchen. It's difficult for Julieta to understand the dirty and disorganised life of the countrywoman. The only incentive for working there is that one of the cats has given birth to six beautiful kittens. When Maria is not watching, she tenderly observes them hidden in a corner of the storeroom. Alone in Barcelona, with all her family in her country, Julieta takes some consolation in seeing these six defenceless creatures.

Summer advances and still no rain. There's a blinding heat. Raul spends his days with his attention fixed on the weather forecast: in the warehouse, in the car, wherever he is. He's hoping that at some point soon they stop forecasting nice weather. Meanwhile, life goes on. Seeing Raul work fifteen hours a day and sleep four or five, one begins to wonder what the limits of the human body are. Knowing that he is a young man, one wonders if there is any place in his life for love or friendship. His private life is a mystery. We do not know if he is married, if he has children, if he is separated or indeed has never been married. The fact is that he is always working. This is the tool that he has to not think of what he may miss. In the short term, the crop may go to rack and ruin, but looking further ahead it's clear that his life is rooted in a rural area that has its days numbered. The threat is ever-present: buildings all around, the city surrounds him.

Iurie's situation is just as worrying, or more so; if he wants to go back to his own country, he has to find the 3.000 € he needs. Closed in the bathroom of his flat while his flatmates are not paying attention, he counts the 845 that he has saved. Meanwhile, his career in wrestling continues. In the gym, he competes with people from everywhere, Cubans, Russians, Dominicans...His escape is strength, strategy and blows. The physical suffering that it gives rise to alleviates his mental suffering. Unable to return to his country, Moldavian music accompanies him wherever he goes, always playing on his mobile.

Every day Raul arrives at Gallecs via one of the roads that come from the city. On his journey he always crosses paths with a prostitute whom he doesn't know and with some old people who are going for a walk. They are all now part of the landscape for him. Now, more recently, he also comes across a young woman carrying plastic bags who makes her way to Gallecs on foot, sweating under the baking sun. At first he looked at her each day wondering who she could be and where she was going. Now every time he sees her, he stops and accompanies her with the car to her destination. He knows now that her name is Julieta and that she is the girl who helps Maria. They are casual furtive encounters, in which hardly a word is spoken. But the girl is beginning to occupy some of his thoughts.

The end of summer is close and still it has not rained. One day, when he arrives to the fields, he sees that Iurie is not there. He remembers that the day before he had a big fight on. He takes the car and heads for the city. He enters the Barrio Sin Madre, looking for

lurie's place. Indeed, there he is, with a broken arm and full of bruises, sat on the sofa in front of a couple of electric fans. He sits on the sofa beside him and the boy tells him how he is. Nothing serious, but he can't work for a few days. The weather report comes on the television: it's going to rain.

That day, Julieta arrives at Maria's house to find her striking an iron bar. At first she doesn't understand what is happening. Then she sees that the old lady is killing all the kittens one by one. She is struck rigid, immobilised. When she is done, the old lady stands up, picks up the little bodies and goes out to the vegetable plot. Julieta follows her and sees how the lady digs a little hole and buries them. A moment later, it begins to rain.

The treatment

1. ABOUT THE PLAGUE

The Plague is the name of this documentary project that takes its basis from the story you have just read. After months of fieldwork and creative development, we have arrived at this story hypothesis. **All the characters involved are real and this is the story of their actual conflicts.** A *lucha libre* fighter who works as a farmer, an elderly lady who kills her cat's offspring, a plague that appals the farmers... We know that they seem like characters and deeds that emerge from an incredibly intricate mind. But the most fascinating thing is that they are completely real.

The smaller plots that we have described in the synopsis are also real, and continue to change day by day. By means of a narrative construction based on *mise-en-scene*, the characters themselves will represent their own daily reality and their relationships as they develop. We take our starting point from this working script, which will of course be open to the inclusion of variations both in the diverse situations and in their plots.

The idea of the project **came about over two years ago**, when we began having a great deal of contact with several people, particularly from Gallecs. Later, we discovered that this rural area was inseparable from the city that surrounds it. That is how we began to meet people who go from the Barrio Sin Madre to Gallecs every day, and we began to outline the idea in more detail. From 2008 onwards our research began to intensify, focusing above all on the relationships between characters who are living in exceptional situations and environments. This relationship of trust gave rise to the real possibility of counting on them to develop the documentary. Having shared their personal stories with us, we began to plot the events that were key to our story. **This creative process is characterised by having been realised in total cooperation with the characters and over a period of a very long time**, so that we now have all their support. All of this time of development has also helped us define more clearly both the thematic scope of the piece as well as the possible final shape it takes.

2. TECHNICAL DATA

Title: The Plague
Director: Neus Ballús
Script: Neus Ballús
Script-editor: Isaki Lacuesta
Director of photography: Diego Dussuel
Sound: Amanda Villavieja
Category: Documentary
Length: 52' / 90'
Production: El Kinògraf

3. THE SPACE AS THEME

On the stage of a Europe immersed in accelerated economic, demographic and cultural transformation, *The Plague* focuses on two phenomena related to the life and growth of cities. The first is their immense territorial expansion: in this process, cities have progressively swallowed up natural and agricultural areas in their surroundings, generating in some cases, little islands of rural space engulfed by a sea of industrial estates, buildings and a labyrinth of roads and railways. On the other hand, in the process of their internal transformation, many European cities have forced a very vulnerable part of their population to live in the peripheries. Poverty, drug addiction, or illegal immigration often take place in districts located on the margins of big cities. **These two phenomena in contemporary Europe have together generated a very unique clash: the meeting of the “banlieue” suburban housing estate with rural life. This is the setting that we take as our starting point.**

We begin with the idea that the space in which we live or traverse daily is a decisive factor that configures our character, our daily activities and therefore, our life style. Often our ability to choose or influence the environment in which we happen to live is very limited. This is what happens to the characters of *The Plague*, burdened down while they try to adapt to changes over which they have no control.

Some are farmers from Gallecs, an area where the land is still worked though it is surrounded by buildings, motorways and industrial zones. Right next to it is the Barrio Sin Madre, a suburban estate built around a train station. This is where the rest of the characters live.

European cinema, particularly since cinematographic modernity, has been especially sensitive to man's relationship to his environment and the spaces he crosses and it has been an important tool for the representation of these delicate, individual and subjective experiences. *The Plague* takes another step in this tradition, placing the way in which a space generates lifestyles and clashes between entirely unique individuals at its centre, focusing especially on the lives of a handful of characters obliged to be outsiders: those from the housing estate and those from the outskirts of the city. ***The Plague* is an account of this encounter: an encounter that generates conflicts, but also new, incredible, unimagined and sometimes beautiful relationships.**



3.1 PERIPHERAL SPACES: GALLECS

As we have gone advancing, one of the big changes that Europe has experienced is that of urban growth. In the period between the 1980s and the 1990s, the total growth of urban areas in Europe has covered more than 8.000 km² of land, an area the size of Luxemburg. And urban expansion looks set to continue its growth into the future. **Hence a large section of European metropolitan areas have ended up engulfing natural or rural areas within their network of constructions.** These areas have seen their surrounding cities grow until they have been left completely isolated. Some of these areas still occupy large extensions like the Sonian Forest in Brussels, or the Collserola Park in Barcelona. On the other hand some have been more reduced by the impact of cities, such as Gallecs in Barcelona with 700 hectares of land.¹

The latter space is precisely the space we take as one of the main axes of the story of the film. **It is one of the smallest and most damaged peripheral spaces in Europe. With only 700 hectares, immense urban pressure and an enormous human impact, it represents one of the cases where most conflicts within so small a territory are produced.** Particularly since the 80s to present times Gallecs has been losing territory little by little. Half the area of what this rural space once was is now urbanised. And the construction of new infrastructures is still on the cards and projected to be brought to completion within the next few years.



Like many other territories on the outskirts of cities, Gallecs is characterised by its lack of density, where large spaces are maintained between constructions and where fields still continue to be cultivated. In fact, in appearance it has preserved the same image that it must have had in former times: fields for cultivation, woods, occasional stone country houses and little rural settlements. In these spaces, ways of life that belong to past times continue. **The contrast between these ways of life and the surrounding context lends the whole place an appearance of “indeterminate time”.**

Gallecs however, like all outskirts of a cities, is strongly bound to the city. All spaces of this kind experience how changes in their morphology and uses are tied in with the needs and

¹European Federation of Metropolitan and Periurban Natural and Rural Spaces - www.fedenatur.org

demands of the city. They are relatively new realities, that studies still don't know what to call: influenced areas, urban fringes, rural urban outskirts, rural urbanisations.....**They are spaces that do not fit into the typologies that have existed until now. They are a kind of no man's land.** In the concrete case of Gallecs this is especially true due to its particular history: **none of the inhabitants own the land in which they live and work.**

Until the 70s, Gallecs was a lovely rural area the inhabitants of which all worked on the land. Then the government under Franco decided to expropriate the land in order to build a mega dormitory town to house those who had recently arrived in Barcelona from the rest of Spain. The landowners were forced to accept ridiculous prices for their lands and houses. Since the construction works had not started, many of the residents decided not to leave until they were thrown out by the diggers. This moment however never arrived. The project was put on hold at the beginning of the 80s, because of a big economic crisis and the social pressure of the time. Hence to this day, the lands where the farmers live and work are still the property of public administration. They find themselves, more than any one else, in a no man's land. This is why the houses are to be found in a state of deplorable dilapidation, and the residents think only of the day to day. Since they are expropriated lands, they know that at any moment they could be turfed out so that new motorways, railways or industrial zones can be built.

The conflicts that occur at present in Gallecs are the same as in most contemporary urban fringe areas. They are the core themes then that will be articulated in *The Plague*. The first problem is how the farmers and residents can continue to live as their ancestors did in the face of the evidence that the city (and urban mentality) is swallowing them up. The second problem is that of how the physical proximity of the Barrio Sin Madre means their increasing contact with its inhabitants and their activities: immigration, homelessness, prostitution... **The rural life of the residents and farmers comes up face to face with the inhabitants of the "banlieue" urban fringe housing estate which generates conflicts but also new relationships.**



3.2 THE “BANLIEUE” URBAN FRINGE HOUSING ESTATES: THE BARRIO SIN MADRE

We are used to connecting suburban housing estates with conflict and violence, especially in the last few years since events in the summer of 2005 shook France, in particular, the outskirts of Paris. But in the majority of European urban fringe areas this violence is not always evident. In many cases it remains latent in tensions of every kind. The enormous social contrast and the poverty of these districts generate unease, a kind of life on constant alert and a very uncertain future.

This contrast comes about because within the same fringe area there are many kinds of “banlieue”. The word “banlieue” is made up of “ban” (the authority of the lord) and “lieue” (a distance of some four kilometres). In the Middle Ages territory was designated under the power of such and such feudal lord. Etymologically then, we could think of the “banlieue” as the lands that stretch out from the environment of the feudal authority of the city. This includes the poor neighbourhoods densely populated by predominantly immigrants and the working class as well as the large residential single-family residences where some of the upper middle class live. In Barcelona both these cases exist side by side.



In the 60s, the metropolitan area of the Barcelona grew a great deal. Many neighbourhoods were created on the fringes to house the immigrants that were arriving from the rest of Spain. **A suburban housing estate grew up around a train station under the curious name of Barrio Sin Madre (the “Motherless Neighbourhood”),** within the second ring of the metropolitan area of the city. The area was mainly populated by immigrant workers with precarious jobs and difficult economic situations. In times before the standing bank order, various debt collectors could be seen going from door to door, reclaiming all kinds of payments. The residents at the time found a way to avoid payment: when the debt collector knocked at the door, the mothers would hide inside the flat and send their young children to open the door and say that their mother was away. This practice, known throughout the neighbourhood, ended up becoming its name, to the point that this extra-official nomenclature is now used more than any other.

Nowadays, the Barrio Sin Madre is populated by African, South American and Pakistani immigrants, who live together with the Spanish immigrants that arrived there years before. Hundreds of young men saunter the streets, chat on benches or street corners.

Unemployment has hit the lives of these residents hard and it has always been an area tending towards conflict, drugs trafficking, prostitution and all kinds of fighting. In recent years the lack of social resources has given rise to conflicts between senior and more recent arrivals arguing about who ought to receive the benefits. **Its proximity to Gallecs has meant that some activities belonging to the neighbourhood have been moved next to the fields:** many young immigrants ask the farmers for work and some prostitutes have decided to use the paths of the land as their patch. The distinction between the urban fringe estate and the rural areas are becoming unclear.



3.3 THE ENCOUNTER

Ultimately, the theme of *The Plague* is the encounter between these two worlds. The physical encounter on the borders of each area: motorway bridges beside rural paths: inhospitable industrial estates bordering allotments and fields of spelt. But primarily it is the encounter between people who, coming from one of the two spaces, go from one to the other, looking for a better life as they transform and are transformed by this encounter with what is but a stone's throw from their own home.

Even though the thematic universe in which *The Plague* moves is closely linked with urbanism, mobility and the economy, the treatment of the subject is always via the people who inhabit these worlds. Via their daily routines, their personal stories and transformations we measure the consequences of living on the margins, on the outskirts.

It should also be mentioned that the characters we have chosen, in spite of living in a difficult context, surrounded by needs and problems, do not confront their adversities in a community, but rather, individually. They are all people alone. Finding themselves in a difficult context, they are not able to identify who is responsible. To rebel against their realities is very difficult for them, hence they opt to play the game of the system: to work more in order to have a better life.

The big theme of *The Plague* then is the lives of these individuals and the fact that they are able to forge relationships between one another, to provide a space for the human condition within their difficult circumstances. **Only in this way will we discover if the clash between these characters of the housing estate and the rural world is more than a conflict of interests and if a hope for understanding and cooperation can be inferred.**

4. THE MAIN CHARACTERS

Raul is 39 years old. He was born in Gallecs and is a farmer. The son of one of the biggest families in the area, he has never left working in the field. But it does not provide enough for him to live on and he has to work in the afternoons loading drinks crates in a warehouse which is



located in the nearby industrial estate. He works 15 hours a day in total, and hardly ever takes holidays. His only hobby is football, Barça. During the course of this story he will encounter several new relationships. The first is the one he establishes by chance with Iurie, a youth from Moldavia who helps him in the field for the whole summer. The second is with a young Colombian woman who walks every day to Gallecs laden down with bags of shopping, arousing his curiosity.

Despite his reserved, closed character, thanks to these new relationships, he ends up realising that there is life beyond his vegetable allotment and that with his work alone he cannot prevent the invasion of the plague, nor the city swallowing up the rural landscape that he has always loved.



Iurie is 23 years old. He is from Moldavia and lives in the Barrio Sin Madre. He left his country by paying more than 3.000 Euros to the mafias and now he has to work off the debt although he has recently lost his job on the construction site where he was working. He met Raul and has been working with him since as a labourer.

What he would like to do is

to return to his country to win back his girlfriend but until he has managed to pay off the debt, he can't. In order not to think about it, Iurie engages in *lucha libre* fighting. He trains and fights with passion so as not to dwell upon his problems. But the fighting often ends up being a problem too: he often gets hurt in a fight and has to take a few days off work.

Julieta is a 34 year-old Colombian woman. She married when she was still very young and has two children who live with their grandmother. She decided to leave her country because her family fell into financial ruin. She arrived in Barcelona alone, and she got set up in the suburbs in the Barrio Sin Madre, where she found a flat with some other Colombian girls. When she was looking for work, she was told about an elderly lady in Gallecs, called Maria, who needed someone to help her clean and carry her shopping. Even though she didn't have a car, Julieta decided to take the work and do the job on foot, carrying all the shopping in the heat of the summer.



Maria was born in Gallecs and is 87 years old. She has spent her life farming and never wanted to marry. Born with a spinal malformation, she is badly hunchbacked and has difficulty moving. Besides this, she is very deaf and blind in one eye. In spite of this, she is an independent woman. She shares her house with three roosters, two cats, a dog and a cockerel. Every time the cat gives birth, Maria kills all the offspring and buries them in the garden. She had been looking for a while for someone to help her with her housework and that is how she met Julieta.



Maribel is a 50 year old from Barceloneta, a neighbourhood in the centre of Barcelona. Since she got separated, she has worked in prostitution. Every day she makes the journey on the train and by foot to Gallecs. Here she spends hours right next to the road, whatever the weather, waiting for a couple of regular clients to come looking for her. For the folk who cross between the Barrio Sin Madre and Gallecs, Maribel is practically part of the landscape.

5. NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION AND FILMIC DEVICE

At a narrative level, *The Plague* is founded on the development of several plots, several little minimal stories relating to the objectives and problems of the protagonists including the relationships that are established between them. In this sense, we diverge from the classical plot structure of the introduction, the crux and the unravelling where the situation at the outset of the film transforms until its resolution or conclusion. The idea is to create a firm, rigid structure that provides a skeleton for the film. In contrast to this, the construction of the rest of the narrative elements can be dealt with more freely.

For instance, even though the narrative is based on a linear unfolding of events, the relations between the events will not necessarily be of a causal nature such as we would have in a more classical narrative. The reason for this is that the thematic nature of the project does not have any obvious causes and consequences. Besides, the lives of the main characters are characterised by the incomprehension of the system that has taken them in and so their deeds have no direct effect on the transformation of this reality. This lends the plot lines of the film a sense of not always being linked, of not occurring in an altogether logical way. This often brings us to an idea of the absurd, to an idea of disharmony between the events that unfold on the screen.

The decision to move away from classical narrative devices as far as the construction of the story goes responds to a twofold desire. On the one hand, to transmit the idea that the world in which *The Plague* is situated does not respond to classical parameters: some events are not consequences of others, there are no clearly identifiable antagonists and the characters often find themselves in an absurd dead end. On the other hand, a narrative construction based on segments and detached pieces grants the viewer a very active role as they have to end up making sense of the filmic experience and therefore of the thematic universe we lay out before them. We believe this to be the richest and most gratifying approach both for the creators and the viewers of the documentary.

As for filmic devices, they are mainly based in the *mise-en-scene*, understood as the most basic cinematographic action of framing each element and character in the most appropriate way. We relate this kind of work with characters that creates a balance between intervention and observation quite directly with the device invented by Jean Rouch in the 60s with *cinéma vérité*. Rouch initiated a documentary cinema modality based on interventionist or interactive direction, in which he also relied on the characters for their own elaboration of the tale. This also refers to the idea of being open to the unexpected in spite of the existence of a script.

6. FORMAL TREATMENT

When the narration is a mosaic to be reconstructed by the spectator, a work of filling in gaps and looking for meanings, the filmic approach needs to be based in simplicity as its sole expressive recourse. A certain minimalism, the minimum intervention in the shot brings us to prioritise wherever possible, the sequence shot over the *decoupage*, and the fixed shot over camera movement. All the present-time value as well as the more sensitive aspects of reality is recuperated in the filmic material by means of the sequence shot where characters move freely through space and time.

This idea of recovering the value of real time to the detriment of cinematographic time (altered by the internal montage of sequences and scenes) brings us closer as viewers to the present time of the characters, to their emotional lives. They are people whose past we know little of and whose future we perceive as a very uncertain and unknown quantity. Since the characters of *The Plague* essentially live in the present, it is clear that the formal treatment of the film must respond to that reality.

As well as recovering the idea of the shot as the basic unit of sense, to lend the images a real time value, the experience is reinforced via a constant thermal sensation. *The Plague* is a story that unfolds during the course of a summer in which the possibility of rain and the extreme heat play a fundamental role. The fact that the viewer can share the physical experience of some very harsh weather conditions will allow for the creation of suspense, a tension around the possible storm that may save the characters from the plague. Thus the heat, the summer and the rain represent the element that is external to the characters, almost divine, that could release them from the situation in which they find themselves. The eventual rain, if it arrives, should transmit to the viewer the idea of salvation, of release, of physical refreshment that finally arrives after a long time of extreme heat. Therefore a filmic treatment that engages the viewer in the physical experience of the characters is required.

We pursue this same objective of coming close to the emotional experience of the characters by means of a certain return to silence as an aesthetic form. The idea of incommunicability, isolation and the solitude of the characters leads us to cast suspicion on any dialogue that is not essential to the development of their experiences. The possibility of communication and understanding between the characters, being the central idea of the film, is to be reflected in the use of sound.

To sum up, the filmic treatment opts for simplicity and stylistic emptiness, with the sequence shot as aesthetic and significant unit, highlighting real time and the emotional experience of the viewer. As in the case of its narrative construction, the viewer has an important role again, being invited to participate in the imaginative elaboration of the film by means of an aesthetic of the shot that does not impose what is and is not important. The scale of the shots is not necessarily that of classical cinema, based on the characters of the story, but rather another scale, in which each element deserves identical attention. Here we return to the initial idea of *The Plague*, that of the space as theme. Because here the setting is as important as the figures that inhabit it and are inhabited by it.

Note of artistic intent

We hope during the course of these pages of the project description to have transmitted via this bold filmic proposal our firm commitment to the story that is both unique and universal. It is essential for us that each project represents one step more in our possibilities and that this is unique and necessary within the context of cinema nowadays.

Throughout the history of cinema there have been numerous experiences that have stopped to describe the outskirts of the big metropolitan cities. But we believe that the margins continue to be a somewhat unexplored territory, a space that the vast majority of the population do not know. On a European level, one country that stands out for its representation of life on the margins is France. Under the name of *cinéma de banlieue*, several French filmmakers from the 90s onwards have turned their cameras on the outer circle of their cities to explore the context and the lives of the inhabitants of these neighbourhoods. With *The Plague*, we pick up the tradition of this young movement, which is representative on a thematic level and in terms of its social commitment.

On the other hand, there is hardly any European cinematography that has not dealt with the theme of the disappearance of rural life. With a certain melancholic tone, these films shape a portrait of how our rural areas have become depopulated or transformed as an effect of the general tendency to urbanisation. Recent examples of this tradition are *The Sky Turns* (Mercedes Álvarez, 2004), which documents the ruin and decadence of an inland Spanish town or the endearing *To Be and To Have* (Nicolas Philibert, 2002). Both are films that form part of a cinematographic trend to generate idealised or melancholic tales about rural life.

In contrast, *The Plague* has no intention of making an apologia of ruralism, nor of unbounded urbanism. What we are interested in is **what is produced when the countryside and the city clash in the same space, creating a completely new landscape and giving birth to unique human relations.** *The Plague* is located in a place on the frontiers, the outer circle, the industrial zones, the motorways and the remnants of rural life turn into the great stage where present-day society is transformed. Lifestyles and landscapes evolve and cinema must be a means both to reflect upon and to document this process.

In this sense, there are two filmmakers who have been key to the creative development of *The Plague*. One is the Chinese filmmaker, Jia Zhang-Ke, an author profoundly committed to showing the transformation of landscapes in his country and the consequences that this has in the lives of the individuals who live there, often victims of alienation and disorientation. *Still Life* (2006), for example, narrates the construction of the Three Gorges dam with the subsequent disappearance of numerous populations under its waters. The urban transformation becomes at the same time a social and individual transformation. We feel that the approach we have used in *The Plague* has quite a lot of similarity with the Chinese filmmaker's work.

The second filmmaker to whom we feel identified is the Portuguese author, Pedro Costa. We consider Costa to be the best modern-day European director to work on urban

fringes and the characters therein. The lives of these individuals have many things in common with the characters in *The Plague*: they are groups that established and opulent society has rejected and abandoned on the outskirts. They live in the margins and are aware that the taking of decisions that determines their lives takes place elsewhere. The reality of these people overflows with hardship, poverty, marginality. And precisely because their future is totally uncertain, the currency that reigns is to live the present moment with intensity. *The Plague* is born of the need to contemplate these characters in their lives, in their environments, in their realities. It is an observation made with as much intimacy as possible, side by side with them, from within if possible. It is, therefore, an approach undertaken with a certain humanistic commitment.

Beyond the affiliations described, this is a documentary project that aspires in short to be a document about the encounter between a few individuals in the spaces in which they live. We consider it essentially important to take as a basis the themes that affect mankind in contemporary European reality so that **the resulting piece is engaged with its own present. Although it is not a work of protest, it does aspire to be a politically and aesthetically daring proposal.**