



Blurring the Boundaries: Galician Cinematic Landscape as a Transnational Character

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This video essay focuses on the portrayal and construction of the landscape in several films of contemporary Galician cinema. The cinematographic landscape is constituted as a main character that functions as a symbol of identity and as a framework for the staging of plot lines of international interest.





Creator's statement

“Blurring the Boundaries: Galician Cinematic Landscape as a Transnational Character” focuses on several films of contemporary “Novo Cinema Galego” (“New Galician Cinema”). Built and developed outside the centralism of the Spanish state, this film production is often described as minor and peripheral (Colmeiro and Gabilondo 2012, Colmeiro 2017, Ledo 2016), not only because of its geographical location—northwest of the Iberian Peninsula—but also due to its frequent representation of Galician cultural tradition, identity, and language, as well as for its distinguished style that blends different film genres. Over the past decade, Galician cinema has gained popularity and wider recognition through its participation in various European film festivals, which have served as a space of attraction and recognition among specialized critics, and as a programming platform that has contributed to shape the movement (Redondo Neira 2021, 194).

The New Galician Cinema has been influenced by the global artistic trend of slowness in film, which contrasts with the “fast cinema” of Hollywood and the dominant film production in Spain. The use of non-professional actors to portray marginalized characters in spaces rendered invisible by the flows of global neoliberalism conforms to the distinctive aesthetic of slow cinema (Flanagan 2012, 118), as does its focus on stillness and “the quotidian, narratively insignificant everyday chores, recorded in minute detail and in real time” (De Luca and Barradas Jorge 2015, 2). But far from being a postcard cinema, the landscape exposed in the films of directors such as Oliver Laxe, Lois Patiño, Xacío Baño, or Diana Toucedo is constituted as a main character that functions as a symbol of identity and as a framework for the staging of plot lines of international interest.

As I approached this video essay, I intended to explore how I construct this landscape as a spectator from a very personal perspective. I am from Asturias, the region that borders Galicia in the north, so the landscapes of these films bear a striking resemblance to those I observed from the window of my childhood home, an image that I include as a picture in the video [00:00:58:10] and that fits harmoniously with the misty landscapes of these films. Both regions share a Celtic cultural heritage and a long history of transatlantic migration that has shaped a characteristic nostalgia (“morriña,” “saudade,” or “señaldá”) for the land that has always been part of our identity. This has been broadly explored in Galician literature by writers and philosophers such as the ones I include in this video essay (Daniel Castelao, Manuel Rivas, Miguel de Unamuno, or Rof Carballo), who have also pointed out the importance of the Galician landscape in the collective memory and in the construction of the cultural identity of this region.

Wondering what this landscape might mean to other viewers, I decided to explore the strategies that these filmmakers use in their purpose of showing the Galician rural landscape and making the viewer melt into it. To this end, my video essay ultimately reveals a message of preservation of the rural and coexistence with the environment. As Galician cultural critic José Colmeiro argues in his book *Peripheral Visions, Global Sounds: From Galicia to the World* (2017), this approach deterritorializes the periphery in which this cinema and the culture it represents are situated, blurring the boundaries, blending the local with the global and the real with the imagined, and forging new forms of connectedness with a transnational impact.

Works Cited

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Biography

Eva Álvarez-Vázquez is a PhD Candidate and Teaching Associate in the Hispanic Literature and Linguistics program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where she has also earned a Graduate certificate in Film Studies. Her research interests revolve around Iberian cultures, horror cinema, memory studies, gender studies, and videographic criticism.

Review by Samuel Amago, University of Virginia

This video essay by Eva Álvarez-Vázquez melds original images with clips from some of contemporary Galicia's most important directors, including Oliver Laxe, Lois Patiño, Xacio Baño, and Diana Toucedo, as a means of exploring the form and function of landscape in the Novo Cinema Galego. Two of the central features of the New Galician Cinema are its unique linkage of an aesthetics of slowness with a corresponding emphasis on the politics of space. The connection of what De Luca and Barradas call a "slow cinema" to document a Galician landscape marked by migration, memory, and—more recently—environmental despoliation, allows filmmakers of the NCG to convey a sense of the time and place of an evolving Galician identity in the global era.

As an Asturian observer, Álvarez-Vázquez is uniquely positioned to perceive and interpret the multiple meanings of Spain's northernmost landscapes. With their misty green mountains and high meadows and forests, Galicia and Asturias share an array of geographic features and a Celtic cultural heritage. Both regions have experienced long histories of transatlantic migration born of economic hardship and the historical neglect of the centrist State. As Álvarez-Vázquez perceptively notes, those histories of sometimes unwilling movement forged distinctive modes of feeling and attendant vocabularies for describing it: "morriña," "saudade," "señaldá." Galician writers and philosophers such as Daniel Castelao, Manuel Rivas, Miguel de Unamuno, and Rof Carballo have explored those notions in their work, tracing the contours of landscape and collective memory in Galicia. In the video essay, dramatic readings of these writers' thoughts can be heard and seen as painterly images gleaned from the films unspool onscreen. A poetic overlay of original critical insight, alongside evocative quotations from those writers and thinkers who have considered the Galician landscape historically, make this an aesthetically beautiful and intellectually compelling piece of intermedial analysis.

Review by Laura Lesta García, Middlebury College

Eva Álvarez-Vázquez's video essay delves into the significance of landscape in the Novo Cinema Galego (NCG) movement, exploring how this element takes on a central role in the narrative structure and visual style of Galician cinema. The essay highlights

the profound influence of landscape in evoking emotional states traditionally tied to Galician identity—such as melancholy, nostalgia, and a sense of timelessness. The video essay effectively captures the essence of the NCG’s aesthetic, characterized by slow, contemplative imagery and a focus on natural landscapes. Álvarez-Vázquez employs these cinematic techniques to evoke a sense of stillness and introspection, making time seem to pause. By combining cinematic techniques with critical analysis, she not only highlights the beauty of Galician landscapes but also challenges viewers to rethink the socio-cultural implications behind their representation.

The video essay engages critically with recurring themes in New Galician Cinema, such as the rural-urban divide, the gradual erosion of the rural, and the persistence of cultural myths (NCG filmmakers have been accused of idealizing and romanticizing the rural landscape while neglecting its challenges). By referencing specific films, like Lois Patiño’s exploration of labor in *Costa da morte* (2013), Álvarez-Vázquez underscores the tension between poetic representation and the authentic portrayal of Galician rural reality. Her work serves as a bridge between aesthetic appreciation and cultural critique, making it a contribution to discussions on contemporary Galician cinema.

