

*Review*

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# LEDO ANDIÓN, Margarita (ed.)

## *Para unha historia do cinema en lingua galega. [I] Marcas na paisaxe*

**José Colmeiro**  
The University  
of Auckland

Galician cinema has been the subject of a growing number of research publications in recent years, which is a reflection of the increasing importance of Galician audiovisual culture and the academic interest it has attained. This volume represents an important addition to the critical bibliography, as its focused object of study aims to fill several gaps, as it deals with important areas, such as amateur films and migration cinema, not sufficiently covered by existing literature.

This collective volume is a result of a research project undertaken by the Grupo de Estudos Audiovisuais associated with the Universidade de Santiago de Compostela directed by the audiovisual scholar, writer and director Margarita Ledo Andión, also the editor of this collection of essays. The project focuses on three related topics that are conceptualized as fundamental aspects in the definition of the notion of Galician cinema: the language, the land and its landscapes, and the diasporic dimension of Galician history.

The volume is conceived as the first part of a larger project on cinema in Galician language, which reportedly will be continued with a second volume about contemporary Galician cinema. This first part is more general and historical in scope. The different chapters in this volume focus on the cinema of migration as well as its cinematic representation, the idea of the land and its different depictions on screen, and the diverse efforts towards the formation of a national-popular cinema, including the tradition of amateur and militant cinema in Galicia.

The editor and the contributors are aware of the partially utopian dimension of their project, as a form of restitution and of retrieving the traces of an often invisible or forgotten tradition. The history of cinema in Galicia has not only been fragmented, disappeared, repressed,

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and discontinued, but Galician language has more often than not been marginalized in its cinema, and only in recent years, has it become more consistent and habitual, since the arrival of the *Novo Cinema Galego*. The 'marcas' in the title of the volume explicitly make reference to the endeavour of rediscovering and examining the traces of this tradition, the characteristic signs of its idiosyncrasy, and the signposts in the cinematic Galician landscape. It is slightly surprising not to see a more in-depth reflection upon the impact of human intervention on the landscape, with the exception of some documentaries about the Prestige oil spill and others such as *As Encrobas. A ceo aberto* or Llorenç Soler's *Autopista, unha navallada na nosa terra* and *O Monte é noso*.

The first chapter by Xan Gómez Viñas presents a general historical overview which contextualizes the discontinuous nature of cinema in Galician language, focusing on José Gil and the so called 'Cinema of migration', the pioneering work of Carlos Velo during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Republic, and the amateur tradition developed in the 1970s around the Ourense film encounters which tried to conceptualize a national popular Galician cinema. It follows a detailed analysis of the Lupa, Enroba and Imaxe cinema collectives; the foundation of a Galician cinema in the 1980s with CineGalicia, the subsequent standardization of the 1990s and 2000s; and the renovation with the successful branding of the Novo Cinema Galego, which the author sees as a preference for the creation of a way of seeing and a film language of one's own, rather than obtaining commercial or economic success. While not particularly innovative in methodology, it is an informative first chapter.

María Soliña Barreiro González makes a distinction between landscape and territory as divergent conceptualizations and representations of the land in her chapter 'Filmar a terra. A paisaxe como cuestión de clase'. From a class-conscious perspective, the author maintains that the landscape is an aesthetic object that comes into being when it distances itself from a working relationship with the land. These concepts represent therefore two different social classes, and in the history of Galician cinema, two different forms of representation, best exemplified by the two films bearing the same name, *Un viaxe por Galicia* (1929 and 1958). The first was a commissioned institutional project, the second an example of the 'cinema of migration'. While the first presents a topical tourist postcard of Galicia, the second is a community-inspired project based on the memories of migrant Galicians. However, both recur to a similar box of tools, such as archaism, linear editing, travel itinerary, influence of the literary tradition, particularly poetry, and landscape painting, which in the end result in a timeless and idealized landscape, which hides the real conditions of the territory from view.

Ledo Andión in her chapter 'O Amador no cinema militante' focuses on the tradition of amateur cinema in Galicia from the civil war up to the Transition, as a form of linguistic, cultural and political resistance against the dictatorship. Her analysis brings into view a number of forgotten or generally unavailable films from self-taught directors, between the documentary and the militant oppositional cinema, from the already mentioned groups Lupa, Enroba, and Imaxe as well as films from Carlos Varela Veiga and the Valencian director Llorenç Soler. The chapter in general follows a descriptive approach to the films studied, which is of great informational value, as most of them are not easily available for viewing. While the imperfections of these amateur films that aim to be public

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interventions appear obvious to the critical eye, they also reveal important political subtexts. Assuming and working through these imperfections, non-professional acting, and technical or narrative deficiencies, are also seen as marks that denounce the repressive conditions of their own making.

Fernando Redondo Neira and Marta Pérez Pereiro in 'Identidades buscadas e construídas: imaxes da emigración galega no cinema' examine the tradition of representation of migration in Galician films, from early examples such as *Carminha flor de Galicia* (1926) and *Canto de emigración* (1935), and especially its growth in recent decades, from *Sempre Xonxa* (1989) to *Bs. As.* (2006). Memories are the central instrument for the recovery of the past, and the experience of migration creates the main narrative thread of the filmic discourse. While the chapter is generally descriptive and informative, if somewhat choppy and uneven, most of the films analysed are not originally in Galician, which puts it at odds with the general claims of the volume.

Brais Romero Suárez 'Un debate arredor da lingua' is a succinct exploration of the use of Galician in films made in Galicia. It focuses on the centrality of Galician language in Galician cinema, from the theoretical elaborations in the Ourense film encounters, the importance of the establishment of TVG in the mid-1980s and the foundation cinema of CineGalicia for the normalization of cinema and audiovisual production in Galician, to the prevailing commercial coproduction scheme of the 1990s and 2000s, where films were generally shot in Spanish and dubbed in Galician in post-production in order to obtain official subsidies and be shown in Galician television.

José Luis Castro de Paz and Xosé Nogueira in 'Cinema nacional-popular: de *Fendetestas* até *A esmorga*' is the longest chapter of the volume at 55 pages, and also one of the strongest. Following Gramsci's notion of the national-popular, as the construction of a national-popular culture identified with the cultural traditions of the people, the authors analyse the difficulties in the development of a national-popular Galician cinema, from the 1970s until the present. The chapter offers an informative historical overview and a close reading of important films, particularly the 1970s amateur shorts, followed by the films of Chano Piñeiro, as well as a series of literary adaptations, culminating with a detailed and insightful analysis of Ignacio Vilar's *A esmorga*, which for the authors represents the best example of the possibilities of a Galician national-popular cinema, that is sponsored by Galician institutions and is favoured by both the Galician public and the critics alike.

The book is more descriptive than analytical in approach, and more illustrative than comprehensive in scope. Some of the limitations of the volume are dictated by its narrow focus. By exclusively dealing with cinema in Galician, the volume gives a partial and fragmented view of Galician cinema, already atomized enough, which leaves out important films, such as *Camiño das estrelas* or *De Profundis*. Also there is very little attention paid to Galician animation, which has had considerable public appeal in recent years. While it seems like the research on contemporary cinema will be the subject of the project second volume, the volume contains some elaborate analysis of some NCG films such as *Vikingland*, *Bs. As.* or *Gato encerrado*, but there are no references to some of the most important films of the NCG such as *Costa da Morte* or *Arraianos*, and Oliver Laxe's films are barely mentioned. Likewise, Juan Pinzás, creator of Dogma style films in Galician, is not examined, and a Galician social phenomenon such as *Pradolongo*, one of the

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most successful Galician language films of all time, is also conspicuously absent.

The volume examines at length a number of Galician amateur films, but almost no mention to video creations of the 1980s, when Galician audiovisual achieved a lot of public and critical attention within and outside of Galicia (Villaverde, Reixa) and there is no reference to the *Movida galega*. This absence points to a certain fetishization of the amateur model, and the non-professional film formats.

As in many collective volumes, the strength and weakness of the project depends on the various contributions of the different collaborators. The volume suffers from frequent overlaps and repetitions, as well as an uneven adherence to, or lack of, theoretical frameworks and critical paradigms. There is also a problematic lack of dialogue with critical literature on Galician cinema produced outside of Galicia, particularly in the Anglophone academia. Likewise, the minimalist introduction and lack of conclusions detracts from the conceptual coherence of the project. Finally, the absence of a general index makes it difficult for the researcher to find particular references to films or directors. Overall, the volume feels a bit like work in progress, important but relatively uneven and not fully developed.