

THE EMPTIED IMAGE: NEW APPROACHES TO DEAGRARIANISATION IN CONTEMPORARY SPANISH NON-FICTION CINEMA

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INTRODUCTION

Cinema has the evocative power to transport the spectator into a filmed landscape, a territory on the brink of disappearing or a climate crisis situation. This is not a speculation about the capacity of the cinematographic device, but an established fact of its potential. Scott MacDonald's article "Toward an Eco-cinema", published in 2004, explores the growing concern in documentary and experimental filmmaking about the human impact on the environment at the end of the last century. MacDonald bases his argument on the filmographies of James Benning, Diane Kitchen and Peter Hutton, who use filmmaking technology to create an illusion of preserving *Nature*, or more precisely, to provide a clear "evocation of the experience of being immersed in the natural world" (MacDonald, 2004: 108).

MacDonald argues that the representation of nature or the environment outside the human

world has been rendered obsolete by the New Climatic Regime, as this concept is defined by the theorist and philosopher Bruno Latour (2017). *Nature* is not something lifeless or exterior to us, as the effects of our activity on the planet are having repercussions on contemporary societies, as countless environmental disasters make clear. Thus, any description or enunciation based on different data or using images of any aspect of the climate crisis not only informs but also implicitly conveys "a movement, an alarm, a factual statement" (Latour, 2017: 41). In this respect, Latour suggests, we humans can do nothing to change or reverse the crisis, as the power to act belongs to the Earth itself, through non-human organisms as "new invisible characters capable of subverting the order and hierarchy of the agents" (2017: 107). Like Latour and other contemporary theorists, Donna Haraway (2016) points to this restructuring that needs to be carried out by "chthonic entities that can and do join in accelerating double

death provoked by the arrogance of industrializers, supertransporters, and capitalizers—in seas, lands, airs and waters” (Haraway, 2016: 294). Both Haraway and Latour thus posit a kind of invisible or microscopic force, micro-organisms as the agents charged with restoring the Earth and reversing the climate catastrophe.

From the industrialisation of the rural landscape to its total “polyphonic” capitalisation, as described by Anna Tsing (2021: 24), farming has come to a point where it is defined as “commercial agriculture” whose aim is “to segregate a single crop and work toward its simultaneous ripening for a coordinated harvest.” The frenetic pace of commercial agriculture has transformed the rural landscape in Spain over the past three decades. The socioeconomic theorist Fernando Collantes (2007: 251) point out that in Spain, “traditional agriculture, based on organic energy sources and low capital intensities” has been replaced “by an inorganic, capitalised agriculture whose fate became increasingly linked to a food system dominated by oligopolistic agribusinesses.” What is happening is thus not the consequence of an “empty Spain”¹ but a process of alteration of the rural landscape occurring in three transitions. The first involves the transformation of dietary regimens, the industrialisation of food production and the establishment of global chains supported by a regional division of labour. The second is a demographic transition resulting in ageing societies, expanding the gap between generations and requiring new forms of social organisation and interaction between generational groups. And the third transition forms part of the exponential growth in international mobility that is producing hyper-diverse societies (Camarero Rioja, 2019: 65-66). This article argues that the Catalan filmmakers Gerard Ortín Castellví and Lluís Escartín are products of these demographic and representational transformations, and that their work reflects the change to the agricultural model and the three transitions described by Camarero Rioja.

Both filmmakers place their focus on representing the change to the rural world of Spain. The transformation of dietary regimens, the demographic transition, and the mobility of the masses are all present in their filmographies. The documentaries of these two Catalan filmmakers analysed here are developed as works of “non-fiction”² with a highly unique use of formal language and of the filming device, employing a range of narrative and representational strategies to construct an evocation of an environment in the process of changing. Described by Cerdán & Labayen (2014) as “interstitial filmmakers”, Ortín and Escartín work outside the industry and their productions exist in a context that transcends their national borders, generating dialogues with other realities. Although both filmmakers have used digital technology in all their films, it is important to consider the relationship they establish with the materiality of the image in their work and its connection to the referent of that image (i.e., what the image depicts). This question is of vital importance because it defines the filmmakers’ *gesture* (Agamben, 2001) and shapes their representation of the rural landscape, as well as its relationship with the ecology of images.

There is a set of contemporary experimental filmmaking practices that aim to capture the state of a rural landscape through the mediality of the filming device; in other words, that make use of celluloid in a filmmaking without cameras. Contemporary filmmakers such as Karel Doing, David Gatten and Tomonari Nishikawa find ways to connect their work to *Nature*, “providing a means for the natural world to ‘speak’ through the medium” (Knowles, 2020: 114). This involves a form of attentive listening and a series of political gestures that facilitate a more effective vision through a “juxtaposition of the microscopic and macroscopic” (Knowles, 2020: 51) that constitutes the state of the planet we inhabit. In this way, these films connect the image to the microscopic elements discussed by Latour and Haraway, respec-

tively. It is therefore important to consider their ability to represent these micro-organisms. If this idea is directly tied to analogue technology, what other possibilities can digital filmmaking offer? Is it possible for the device to be in consonance with that which it represents in images? Images can be recycled, a practice based on archive footage that Catherine Russell (2018) labels using a contraction of the words “archaeology” and “archive” to create the term *archiveology*, which refers to the reuse of images made by other filmmakers in other eras, with a view to configuring a cultural and historical memory. On the other hand, as the German artist Hito Steyerl argues in her manifesto *In Defense of the Poor Image* (2009), compressed, low-resolution digital images “testify to the violent dislocation, transferrals and displacement of images; their acceleration and circulation within the vicious cycles of audiovisual capitalism.” Steyerl thus offers an example of how digital recordings, by being reused, shared or filmed in a standard resolution, can also approximate the constitution of a cinematographic device that can be conveyed in a coherent, connected way.

Adopting this view of the digital medium, the Finnish theorist Jussi Parikka (2011) proposes a study of the medium from a perspective of “*new materialism*”. To this end, he coins the term “*medianatures*” to describe how media technology transmits and processes “culture”, based on an interaction of physics, engineering and communication. Parikka thus suggests that the perceptions, actions, politics and meanings conveyed through digital media also belong to an ephemeral world: real, but in a non-solid state. *Medianatures* are also the product of objects that are not tangible, i.e., they contain electric and magnetic modulations and light energy into which power relations are also inserted in their control and capitalisation of these sources of absorption; in extractivist and energy politics. Parikka concludes that the digital medium functions by means of a combination of non-solid, intangible variables to generate an

image of something tangible (its referent). In this sense, the medium itself is solid because it contains a compound of transformed and assembled minerals used in visual and audio recording technologies to generate an ephemeral image. The placement of these technologies and the intentionality of connecting them to their referent will give these *medianatures* a material relationship with the intervention in the rural landscape through its recording, but also through its evocation. The filming stage involves an intervention in a tangible, material object from the distance of the medium to capture the rural landscape and create a representation of it.

2. PEOPLE AS EXTRAS AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY: FROM TERRA INCÒGNITA TO HASTA QUE LAS NUBES NOS UNAN, GUARDIOLA-DIOLA

In 2005, the Catalan filmmaker Lluís Escartín released a short documentary film titled *Terra incògnita*, which offers a mannerist filmed portrait to examine the disappearance of agriculture and of human contact with the earth. This process of deagrarianisation is the consequence of the technologisation of farming and has resulted in a complete restructuring of the traditional model, with the disappearance of manual labour and the intensive use of greenhouses. Escartín’s film shows us a part of Catalonia, specifically the Penedès region, a rural world and a community that is “exposed to disappearance” (Didi-Huberman, 2014: 11). Escartín explores the poetics established through an ethnographic gaze on otherness, documenting an “underexposed people” (Didi-Huberman, 2014: 14-15) to show a group of bodies in a disarticulated language, exposed to a future with no generation to succeed them, immersed in their everyday life of personal stories of the rural environment, offering a series of memories and longing for the past. According to Henri Lefebvre (1971: 30), in a rural community in the process of dissolution, even “in



Image 1. *Terra incògnita* (2005). Still frame of an abandoned farmhouse

the most individualised context, neighbourhood relationships are of utmost importance.”

The testimonies of the locals and residents of the neighbouring villages constitute a living record of an oral memory that is being lost. As Russell J. A. Kilbourn suggests in his book *Cinema, Memory, Modernity: The Representation of Memory from the Art Film to Transnational Cinema* (2010), in the post-modern era there is a clear debate over the representation of collective memory. *Terra incògnita* could be considered to some extent a form of “prosthetic memory”,³ but without representing the theory of postmemory associated with a conflict over the historical importance of the past, as the experiences and stories recorded in this film refer not to a past event but to the present. It is thanks to the technologies of memory (cinema and photography, among other media) that these intimate, experiential memories have been transferred to the collective memory “without access being limited to specific events in which one actually took part” (Kilbourn, 2010: 27-28). The cinematographic device thus allows memory to be reconstructed given that its preservation is not possible, as Jan Assmann argues (1995).

The oral history of the local residents creates a community in the same way that “family and nation are forms that arise, change, develop or perish in conditions determined by the level of the productive forces and the mode of production” (Lefebvre, 1971: 27). Escartín thus presents the gradual disappearance in a constant wandering through a small portion of Catalonia close to his own home, with a highly expressive use of sound. At certain moments, the filmmaker allows a “desonorisation” that allows the image to broaden and connect with other elements in a process of “reflexive expansion” (Català, 2012: 44). It is in this way that Escartín plays with the images and abstracts them from their verbalisation and from the diegetic sound, turning them into a series of silent pictures. He allows them to emerge repeatedly together with extradiegetic Asian music that takes the film into a meditative state of contemplation.

At various points in *Terra incògnita* we see a series of uninhabited landscapes, with abandoned or collapsing houses and farms (image 1). These images of ruins recall Walter Benjamin’s discussion in his *Thesis IX* (1940) of Paul Klee’s picture *Angelus Novus*, where he argues that the pile of wreckage observed by the Angel symbolises the rule of the oppressors, who push from the present into the future in a rush towards catastrophe. Like Escartín’s film, the Angel watches while moving away from what it is contemplating fixedly. The tempest pushes both *Angelus* and Escartín to redirect their gaze toward the fu-

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ture to which their backs are turned. The emptiness that is given shape in the bodies represented offers these ruins as a spectacle of absence that compels us to acknowledge the language that has disappeared, but without which none of what is recorded would be possible (Català, 2012: 211). *Terra incògnita* marked a shift in Escartín's filmography, where he turned his focus onto a change to the rural model in Spain, a question he would explore once again in his most recent documentary feature film, *Hasta que las nubes nos unan*, Guardiola-Diola (2019).

This later film is an ode to two opposing agricultural models: one that is in the process of disappearing, and another that has not yet been able to develop fully. These models operate in the film as a culmination and unification of two apparently opposite cultures. As the title suggests, Escartín connects his hometown, Guardiola, with Diola, a community in the Casamance region of Senegal, through sound, the presence of song, and his own absence. The filmmaker brings the transnational documentary back to a kind of filmmaking that wanders fitfully through two worlds that are very different but interconnected by a common crisis: the global consequences of geopolitics. He becomes an *ethnofilmmaker* because he alone joins in and observes, collecting information on the community, to film it and understand it from a holistic perspective, "filming whole processes" (Ardèvol, 2006: 149-150). In this case, the process is agriculture, and the gathering of the crops and the celebration of the harvest are the cycles that Escartín captures on film. This *ethnofilmmaker* takes part in the ritual and "films an act from beginning to end, situating that act in its context" (Ardèvol, 2006). Escartín expresses his *gesture* by invoking the bodies repre-

sented through his own. In *Hasta que las nubes nos unan*, Guardiola-Diola, he thus explores a very important question: through the people and their faces, he approaches "individual bodies to expose the peoples in a construction capable of sustaining their surrender to the fate of surrendering to the other, in the agony of alienation or in the ecstasy of an encounter" (Didi-Huberman, 2012: 54). In this way, the filmmaker (de)constructs the bodies, associating them with other activities and rituals present in his own culture, but without the use of an *I*, instead establishing the cinematographic device from a different angle. In this film, the filmmaker does not manage to expose both peoples equally. In fact, the Catalan people who also appear in his cycle (the cycle of the vineyard), in very short sequences throughout the film, take a position of underexposure in relation to the other. We might assume that the *ethnofilmmaker* already embodies the Catalan rural space in opposition to the other community, and thus a highly conspicuous absence serves as a symptom and expression of its disappearance.

The silence in the representation of work in the vineyard and the need of the inhabitants of this landscape to use words convey the idea that labour in the countryside is an economic manage-

Image 2. *Hasta que las nubes nos unan* Guardiola-Diola (2019).
Still frame of a newborn child in Diola



ment of space. However, the overexposure of the Diola people creates a group of bodies represented as “*figurants*” (extras) (Didi-Huberman, 2012: 156) who disappear over the course of the film. Their collective function is to appear and create a murmur, as in some scenes they are filmed more as an amorphous mass than as a community. The face of a newborn child (image 2) in the film’s final sequence opens a gap in the life cycle of the Diola people and contrasts with the complete disappearance of the human face in the village in Penedès, where there is no new generation to inhabit a landscape that needs one for its continuation. Lefebvre (2013 [1974]) uses the term “dominated space” to refer to the situation when capitalism has taken control of farming and the agricultural space has been conquered. When those in power exert pressure that affects the environment, the “dominated space” emerges. The village in Penedès occasionally presented by Escartín reflects this domination, as the extras who populate the landscape are gradually lost in *Terra incògnita*, giving way to the “polyphonic rhythms” of the commercial agriculture described by Anna Tsing (2021) and the accumulation of production.

Taken together, these two films point towards a change that is slowly revealed through formal strategies. The tensions in the representations expose the fragility of an environment and of its mutation. Although Escartín shows the bodies and constructs his work based on their representation, he makes use of the cinematographic device as a technology of memory to film the ruins of a collective memory out of which the emptiness emerges: a dematerialised image of the body to construct a contemplative space and time.

3. TOWARDS AN EMPTIED IMAGE: SIMULACRUM AND SILENCE

The result of the crisis mentioned above, the space between the fracture and the emptiness that emerges between these images, gives rise to ano-

ther type of image. A change to the gaze is introduced by the lack of a referent in reality that could aid the survival of that former world (the rural world) as it was perceived in so many films in the past. An analysis of the work of another Catalan filmmaker, Gerard Ortín Castellví, can shed some light on this reconfiguration of the image and its referents. His first documentary, the short film *Perrolobo* (*Lycisca*) released in 2017, foreshadows some key ideas that are developed in his subsequent films. *Perrolobo* offers a fragmented journey through the valley of Karrantza Harana; elements structuring the film include a catch dog breeding contest, an automated milking machine, the sound of a conch shell used by a shepherd to frighten the wolf away, and a tourist cave discovered by workers in a quarry. The setting, Karrantza Harana, is shown in two timeframes: the past and the future. The present no longer exists. Humans need the extension of dogs and machines to be able to carry out their work in the country. The wolf is depicted as a threat, but also as a victim, faced with the disappearance of the wooded landscape, into the depths of the earth.

In *Perrolobo*, the oral testimonies become a collective memory recorded using the “technology of memory” that is filmmaking (Landsberg, 2004), but the view of the people as extras is replaced with the constant appearance of the machine as an extension of the human and of the image, performing actions that were once performed by rural workers. The machine fills in for a human bodily absence; it is a “simulation” (Baudrillard, 1978: 8). Consequently, the *machinic* is represented in the image on a recurring basis, and the filming device as a *medianature* is articulated in opposition to another device attesting to the presence of the capitalist policies dominating the rural space. All the images are thus a simulation needed to stand in for the lack of human presence. In this *gesture*, images of the past and the future coexist. The fractured absence reveals the emptiness of these images. It is a process whereby the device turns



Image 3. *Perrolobo (Lycicsa)*, 2017. Still frame of the wolf shown in the final sequence of the film

the images into a continuous past, with no possibility of witnessing a humanised present in the same moment they were recorded, because when the device was placed there the people in question were no longer present, other than a few isolated bodies, scattered and on the verge of vanishing altogether.

The final sequence of *Perrolobo* is a fluid, slow-motion recording of a wolf running in the dark of night. Beyond recording this movement, the intention here is defined by a simulation. This wolf is in fact a tamed animal who, as noted in the credits, belongs to a company that hires out animals for film shoots. With these images, Ortín evokes the animals in latent movement captured on Muybridge's film strips, in a memory reconstructed through the film's oral testimonies, with images of memory that burn and "never stop burning because their aim is to survive over time" (Didi-Huberman, 2012: 42). Just like one of the few wolves that represent the end of the wild in a reenacted freedom, it is also a simulation that evokes an absence (image 3).

In his next film, *Reserve* (2020), the Catalan filmmaker would once again explore the languages of simulacrum, image and representation. *Reserve* constructs a story on the fragile balance of a

territory after the disappearance of the predator, where the complex coexistence of humans and non-humans constitutes an anthropogenic ecosystem clearly marked by human presence. In the first sequence of this short film, a drone hums over a black screen that eventually gives way to the appearance of a tree, by which point the shrill noise sounds like a swarm of wasps. The figure of the predator, the wolf, forms part of the film's imaginary, although it is never shown in images because it is a

ghost that does not exist in this region. *Reserve* is a story about the fragility of the land and the disappearance of the predator and of the landscape as we knew it before the creation of a realm of simulations.

These elements are not constructed through post-production or digital editing but form part of the film's diegesis. In contrast to *Perrolobo*, in *Reserve* the machine is not the representation of an absence that must somehow be filled; instead, artificial bodies, and the materials of the animal statues used for shooting practice in the film, take over the screen and are presented as traces of their animal referent and of the image. These images are comparable to digital filmmaking and the nature of "virtual images", which Ángel Quintana (2012) suggests are incapable of seeking out the truth of the world because they have renounced the laws of chance that rule nature; they cannot explore the ambiguity of reality because the world

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has become a “mere field of signs that can be turned into processed information” (Quintana, 2012: 274) (image 4). Beyond the question of the natural world or environmental impact, the space is perceived through its dematerialisation; in its complete disappearance without corporeal referents or representations of reality, it is only a space where energies and micro-organisms converge.

Conversely, Ortín's third film, *Future Foods* (2021), presents the culmination of the duality between manual labour and *machinic* reproduction. *Future Foods* revolves around the production of plastic food in the workshops of Replica LTD, one of the few companies based in the United Kingdom that still makes props for films, advertisements and displays. The perception of food items, whose appeal and palatability are based on a constructed image, comes into play in the observation of these artisanal production processes through the cinematographic device.

This tension in the *gesture* begins to create connections between serial production and human participation in the creation of plastic replicas of different foods for assorted uses on film sets. We are shown the creation process for these items while the audio features the filmmaker's

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conversation with the CEO of a Finnish company that used cutting-edge technology to develop Solein, a protein powder made using air, electricity, and carbon dioxide. Solein could facilitate a form of agriculture with no environmental consequences or impact on the countryside. Through this film, Ortín establishes a way of reimagining the future of agriculture and the rural space after its disappearance. It presents the artefacts that facilitate the simulacrum, which are picked apart, assembled, coloured and sorted into cabinets, but it also opens a field of vision on the intangibility and dematerialisation of agriculture itself and its representation. *Future Foods* places us in a frozen

Image 4. *Reserve* (2020). Still frame of the forest where shooting practice on fake animals takes place



time characterised by fluctuating elements of past and future that evoke Walter Benjamin's ruins discussed above.

Replicas materialise a physical referent in images and lose their organic nature entirely, as is the case with these images. The fact that such images of processed foods and meats are juxtaposed with the protein Solein points to the idea that agriculture can easily be de-localised and made feasible and profitable again anywhere in the world, in a tiny portion of suitably conditioned space. There is no impact on the landscape because it can exist without occupying or altering a space the same way that all the images in *Future Foods* are constructed. The cinematographic device is invoked in order to encapsulate questions of importance to the director: it shows us that the meat and all the foods created in the workshop's moulds made up of layers and traces found in the images (Bruno, 2014), opening up a range of focal points on social and environmental issues, and on the impact of these foods on the collective imaginary.

Ortín shows us a layer or stratum that consists of a food product that is not a food product, and an image that is not an image, understood from the perspective of the physical relationship between referent and medium in analogue filmmaking. Like the conception of the image in digital film, this relationship is inscribed in an iconosphere where "the substance of things has been confused with the surface of things" (Quintana, 2003: 295). The culmination of the *machinic* representation and the absence of any human being is of special interest in Ortín's most recent film, *Agrilogistics* (2021). In this film, he manages to transcend the transition of labour and agriculture towards a completely robotic conception of



Image 5. *Agrilogistics* (2021). Still frame from tracking shot that creates a temporal ellipsis

the process. There would not even be any sense in the appearance of a human in a totally automated environment. There is no room here for either the time of the human being or of human flows. Like an apocalyptic world in which only the computerised framework can operate due to its programmed function, *Agrilogistics* explores this idea that conceptualises agriculture in terms of a "Scopic Food Regime" (Ortín, 2022: 16). In this way, the filmmaker analyses the recent technological transformations in contemporary industrial agriculture. Tulip bulbs, chrysanthemum stems, and tomatoes on the vine are processed by the cameras, feeding datasets that regulate their own growth. The film is divided into two parts. The first occurs in the daytime, when the greenhouse is a cinematographic device, an automated film set optimised for the mass production of fruits and flowers. In the second part, at night, the factory stops: the greenhouse turns into an oneiric chamber where plants, animals and machines construct narratives.

The daytime part of the film contains the series of sequences that offer this initial approach to industrial technology: the camera takes a set of images that observe the movement, thanks to the lights, the constant fluid movements and the

hyper-surveillance technology operating in the greenhouse, which can be explored as much as its structure permits. The filmmaker lets the camera and machines in the greenhouse move together in two tracking shots taken using the technology that drives the automation, which in this case also includes cameras that monitor the production and growth of the plants up close. The space is constructed without spatial logic, through an appropriation permitted by the effect of the last tracking shot: to mark an ellipsis between day and night (image 5). The “Nocturnal Regime” operating in the night-time sequence of *Agrilogistics* is a feminine, carnal, cyclical world close to fantasy (Durand, 1981) with the appearance of the first animals, the pinkish twilight and a symbolic construction of space. What we see is a visual subconscious: a series of shadows, a deconstructed space as if the greenhouse had slipped beyond the limits of order and control. Domesticated animals populate these images, such as a llama, a couple of sheep, animals closely associated with domestication and the production of food and other products for humans.

The night comes to an end and the landscape is restructured. The tulips are ready to be sold, and then comes one of the sequences that makes *Agrilogistics* an ongoing study of the device: the medium and the *gesture* of a totality rewritten in each frame. The flickering towards the end of *Agrilogistics* is experienced and perceived; it takes the time it needs to develop before it disappears. It is nothing more than a kind of phantom projector, reminding us that cinema functions like a greenhouse, that films are made on plastic material and projected onto another surface; that this film was constructed in one greenhouse, but for the purpose of screening it in another one.

The greenhouse in *Agrilogistics* has a meaning related more to the camera and the shutter, in the sense that the image captured is created inside it and the world outside is delimited and dispossessed by the shot (Lynes, 2022: 31). In addition to screening *Agrilogistics* at numerous festivals, in-

cluding the Berlinale and Cinéma du Reel, Ortín worked in conjunction with the Goig architecture studio to install a polytunnel in the La Capella art centre in Barcelona. The structure occupied the central gallery of the centre and thus altered the route taken by visitors to the centre (image 6). With this installation, the loop projection of Ortín’s film was screened in the same way it had been constructed, inside a greenhouse, as if the spectator had been located inside the camera. In this way, the observer is also a creator of images, constructing them through the retina and when light and darkness are featured in the projection. Here and with digital technology, the spectator is transported directly to the landscape shot previously, so that this passage of time is in turn understood as a “passage of light” (Bruno, 2014: 116). The projection returns us to the filmed environment without ever leaving it, being there and going beyond the reconstructions of memory. The spectator engages with *paracinematic* elements like the greenhouse and constructs a fully immersive experience, with the opportunity to touch the referents of the images at the moment of the projection. The passage of light described by Giuliana Bruno is an atmospheric condition and a way of being in the environment, of weathering time (Bruno, 2014) in the same space where it has been filmed.

Image 6. Photograph from the *Agrilogistics* (2021) exhibition presented at La Capella, Barcelona



4. CONCLUSIONS

In the ongoing debate over the alteration of the rural landscape in contemporary Spain, the image is undergoing a process of being totally emptied. The representation of the bodies that populate the rural environment has been fractured by factors associated with the transformation of life in the countryside, by the capitalisation of the land and the New Climatic Regime, resulting in changes both to the paradigm for representing nature and to our relationship with it. In the absence of represented bodies, there is an upheaval, a factual statement that at the same time is also descriptive, as Bruno Latour (2017) suggests. What remains, vestiges and traces of the past that are admitted to the future, are ruins. The ruins exposed by Escartín shock while at the same time informing the spectator of a mutation of the rural landscape. Ortín, on the other hand, responds to the emptiness of the image by constantly filling it with simulacra, which assign a narrative, meta-referential value to that which they substitute.

Both filmmakers construct a dialogue that ultimately converges on the same point: the present and future of the rural landscape, but also the relationship of the human being with agriculture and the environment at a moment of fracture. In Escartín's case, digital filmmaking supports his aim to construct a collective memory, using a high-compression, low-resolution digital Beta-cam in *Terra incògnita* that offered greater freedom in filming and allowed him to approach Hito Steyerl's (2009) ideas in defence of a *poor image* that can attest to the violent dislocation of audiovisual capitalism. This idea is also present in the representation of the rural environment in the two communities portrayed in *Hasta que las nubes nos unan*, *Guardiola-Diola*. Conversely Ortín needs a more artificial formal aesthetic, visually closer to the language of fiction, as a series of post-produced images allow him to introduce the simulacrum operating in his films in a purely con-

templative act. Both directors engage strategies with their use of the cinematographic device that approach an ecology of images, although they use audio and visual technologies inevitably derived from industrialisation and extractivist politics. However, it is important to take into account that these are filmmaking approaches, as Nadia Bozak argues, framed in the practice of peripheral cinema, which demonstrate "how cinema and the image are and have always been determined (and determining)" and how film, like life, can be more proactively or "intentionally ecological" (Bozak, 2011: 8).

The approach that both filmmakers take to space and time is based on a conception of *media-natures* (Parikka, 2011). As they do not use a physical medium like celluloid, there is no mediality of film; instead, through a range of visual technologies involving the ephemeral and the non-solid, they manage to create a kind of ecological image. The filming device and its positioning in relation to these types of images will determine the filmmaker's *gesture*. While Escartín embraces an economy of resources in the filming, editing, and screening of his film, Ortín needs the aesthetic resources of fiction, as well as narrative and other similar strategies, to reveal the tactile nature of images and to convey the rural problem explored in his films and the factors behind the conflict they expose. However, although the films of these directors employ very different audiovisual languages and aesthetics, they share an approach to the filmed object characterised by respect, minimal intervention, and the use of technologies of memory and *medianatures* to offer a unique snapshot of the rural landscape. Ortín makes frequent use of the mechanisation present in the greenhouse to create tracking shots, and he also exploits these spaces to reuse the images created by the sensors and hyper-surveillance technologies or to record the *simulacra* present in the landscapes featured in his filmography. Through their *gesture*, both filmmakers effectively regenerate imaginaries and

convey a message that is cautionary but also informative about the state of the rural question—in Spain and throughout Europe—in the context of the New Climatic Regime. ■

NOTES

1. A concept developed by Sergio del Molino in his book *España vaciada*, published in 2016.
2. A term developed by the theorist Antonio Weinrichter in his book *Desvíos de lo real. El cine de no ficción* (2004), which defines non-fiction as “the extensive unmapped zone between conventional documentary, fiction and experimental film”.
3. Alison Landsberg (2004) associates the concept of *prosthetic memory* with cinema based on its power as a technology of memory that facilitates the reconstruction of stories and memories that were not directly experienced by those who recall them.

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THE EMPTIED IMAGE: NEW APPROACHES TO DEAGRARIANISATION IN CONTEMPORARY SPANISH NON-FICTION CINEMA

Abstract

In recent years, there has been a growing corpus of non-fiction films that explore rural landscapes and attempt to represent them as they disappear. The changes taking place in contemporary Spain and its reconfiguration by an oligopolistic food industry point to a need to explore the current relationship between the human being and agricultural labour. From the exposure of rural communities to their disappearance, a process of forcible emptying is affecting both the physical space and the territory of the image. In a move from absence to simulation, the empty spaces in the images are being filled with new forms replacing those that have been known up to now. This article offers a reflection on the change to the representation of the rural world in contemporary Spain based on the work of two contemporary documentary filmmakers: Lluís Escartín and Gerard Ortín Castellví. The focus of the analysis is on the representation of the rural world in a series of films by these directors, from *Terra incògnita* (2005) to *Agrilogistics* (2021), to explore the cinematographic device, the fracture, and the silence resulting from the change to the environment that is transferred to the images.

Key words

Deagrarianisation; Rural; Non-Fiction; Exposed Peoples; Simulacrum.

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LA IMAGEN VACIADA: NUEVAS APROXIMACIONES A LA DESAGRARIZACIÓN EN LA NO-FICCIÓN ESPAÑOLA CONTEMPORÁNEA

Resumen

Recientemente, ha emergido un conjunto de obras de la no-ficción que exploran los paisajes rurales y tratan de representarlos mientras estos están desapareciendo. Ante los cambios que están sucediendo en la España contemporánea y su reconfiguración ante una industria alimentaria oligopolista, existe una necesidad de explorar la relación actual entre el ser humano y el trabajo en el campo. Desde la exposición de los pueblos hasta su desaparición, un forzoso vaciado que afecta tanto el espacio físico como el territorio de la imagen. De la ausencia a la simulación, se rellenan los vacíos de las imágenes con nuevas formas que suplantán las conocidas hasta el momento. El presente artículo propone reflexionar sobre el cambio en la representación del mundo rural en la España contemporánea siguiendo las obras de dos documentalistas contemporáneos como son Lluís Escartín y Gerard Ortín Castellví. Se pondrá el foco de atención en la representación del mundo rural desde *Terra incògnita* (2005) a *Agrologistics* (2021) para poner en el foco el dispositivo cinematográfico y la fractura, el silencio, que surge del cambio del entorno que se traslada a las imágenes.

Palabras clave

Desagrarización; Rural; No-Ficción; Pueblos Expuestos; Simulacro.

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