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**English version**

## **Digital Technology and Contemporary Spanish Cinema (2000-2010). In Search of Lost Modernity**

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**Abstract:** Digital technology has allowed the development of a contemporary cinema that has freed itself from the conditioning of analogue cinema. This new technical reality makes possible the recovery of some of the artistic concerns of modern cinema around three of its defining characteristics: the hybridisation between documentary and fiction, the capture of time, and the materialisation of cinematic thinking. Contemporary digital modernity is configured as a transversal phenomenon that runs through the spaces of non-fiction, fiction and experimental cinema. This article aims to analyse the first manifestations of this new digital experience in Spanish cinema.

**Keywords:** contemporary Spanish cinema, digital technology, modern cinema, hybridisation, cinematic thinking.

### **1. Introduction**

The digital revolution has given filmmakers the autonomy and self-management of the necessary cinematic experience to generate works that start from new technology and production premises, which entail “a reflection on the possibilities of the tool and the filmmaker's own tendencies (his style, in short) when he uses it” (Prédal, 2008: 37). This technology means a reduction in costs and a reduction in filming machinery that breaks with the basic conditions of analogue cinema: the limit on the length of raw footage, the closed duration of shoot and the limitations of editing. These fractures provide new creative freedom in both the spaces in which to work and the filming times, as well as the

technical and human equipment necessary to carry out the cinematic experience: "In the reconversion of photochemical cinema into digital, the concept of a transcendent audiovisual vindicates the creative autonomy and formal independence of the artists, creating complex works far from the uniformity of commercial cinema" (La Ferla, 2009: 26). A significant proportion of contemporary Spanish cinema has instrumentalised digital technology in pursuit of a creative search that recovers some of the essential concerns that characterised the cinematic modernity of the 1960s and 1970s, and which did not have its own development in the Spanish cinematography of those years:

[I]n a cinema without true modernity or with a modernity that fell too short, it is logical that there is an abundance, in line with technological transformations that ultimately and paradoxically herald other paths for cinema [...] of proposals that they take up with intelligence and, sometimes with a certain innocence, the emblematic debates of when cinema acquired its maturity and began to think about its own history (Crespo, 2006: 12).

The "recovery of lost modernity" (Quintana, 2006:28) then embodies a practice that I will call contemporary digital modernity, initiated with the new century. I will analyse these beginnings, their development and evolution, establishing the first decade of this 21<sup>st</sup> century as the period of analysis since I consider that the consolidation of this contemporary digital modernity takes place during this time. The inclusion of some works that fall outside of this period aims to corroborate its consolidation, as well as the continuation of its evolution. To carry out this analysis, I take as an argumentative premise the text by Àngel Quintana, *Después del Cine. Imagen y realidad en la era digital* (2011), in which the author reveals how this technology has served to update the discourse of modernity about useful mechanisms to reveal the ambiguity of reality:

The great creators of contemporary cinema have unapologetically assimilated the changes introduced by digital technology as a possible way of recovering some stylistic signs of modernity. The digital emerges as a technique that allows filmmakers to conquer an image of the world that does not have to go through the many stereotypes generated from globalisation. This technique will perhaps make possible the search for a space of heterogeneity and heterodoxy open to plurality (Quintana, 2011: 194).

Therefore, I aim to select and analyse the digital works of contemporary Spanish cinema from this period that became the most significant for this new practice in order to determine what “modifies the aesthetics of cinema, or better, what can become fundamental” (Prédal, 2008: 130), concerning the elements and procedures of the updating of modernity. In order to do so, I will focus on three of its basic axes: the documentary-fiction hybridisation, the capture of time and the appearance of cinematic thinking within the work. Three essential aspects of the time-image of modernity defined by Deleuze (1986): “Cinema technology must function as a new creative instrument that helps to recompose the world to investigate its dark side, which allows for breaking down that ‘time-image’ enunciated by the philosopher Gilles Deleuze” (Quintana, 2011: 122). This decomposition of the time-image materialised by contemporary cinema can come to constitute the non-time image theorised by Sergi Sánchez: “The persistence of the time-image in contemporary cinema can make it ride or slow down on the formation of the new no-time image [...] a path not yet travelled that, I feel, is the future of cinema” (2013: 277). With the purpose of carrying out a cartography that allows us to visualise these cinematic practices and their evolution, I will analyse the digital territory from three starting points that, as we will see, will gradually become confused, as irrefutable proof of this desire for hybridisation, in all its possible aspects: non-fiction, fiction and experimental cinema.

Academic work, but also film criticism and curating from different authors have provided analysis and made this space of Spanish digital creation known over the years, based on that independence that places it on the industry's periphery. This eccentric cinema or off-cinema (Pena, 2005, 2015) opposes the phenomenon of audiovisual globalisation and also seeks other means of exhibition. This is also called Spanish audiovisual on the margins (Weinrichter, 2006, 2007) and responds to the lack of aesthetic renewal of commercial cinema. Thus, digital practice is included within the denomination of this other Spanish cinema (Losilla, 2005, 2015) to conform the *Miradas para un nuevo milenio* [Gazes for a new millennium] (Rodríguez, 2006).

Two films, still shot in 35mm, constitute foundational works of contemporary Spanish cinema and essential precedents for the concerns that the subsequent digital experience embodies. Both *El sol del mebrillo* (*Dream of Light*, 1992) by Víctor Erice—which will need to resort to digital technology in order to be completed—and *Tren de sombras* (1997) by José Luis Guerín manage to question that “tenuous border that

separates the fictional from the real” (Quintana, 2011: 81). Erice starts from the reality of the painter’s work and Guerin generates his speech from a fiction presented as a document. Cinema, reality, space, time and memory are the themes of both works, which respond to the concerns of cinematic modernity. It is no coincidence that both filmmakers continue their filmic activity within the digital sphere, as I will have the opportunity to analyse later. Finally, and already at the gates of the new century, Joaquim Jordà creates *Mones com la Becky* (1999), in which the analogue and digital formats are intermingled, and the hybridisation between fiction and reality is realised. The document leads to fiction, and the latter drifts again into the former, “showing how one and the other feed each other in an endless movement that the film makes its own as a stylistic engine” (Zunzunegui, 2001: 318). In this work, moreover, the filmmaker is part of the reality he captures, turning it into a “pioneering work in its articulation of the self in the Spanish documentary” (Cuevas, 2013: 118). Hybridisation and subjectivity favour the appearance of cinematic thinking, which makes Josep Maria Català place the film within the space of the essay film (2001: 38).

## **2. From non-fiction**

*En construcció* (José Luis Guerin, 2001) serves as an initial reference for this journey through contemporary digital modernity in Spain, since it is the first work that assumes, from its approach, a shoot extended over time (one year) with a reduced crew and, of course, with digital technology, to adapt to the phenomenon it wishes to capture: the metamorphosis of an urban and human landscape, focusing on the temporal evolution and its effects. For this, the static nature of the camera is established—fixed shot—which, through the re-appreciation of the “mise-en-frame”, seeks to capture the cadence of time inside the images. This formal expression coexists with a strong presence of the editing tools that encode the passage of time. The conversations between characters continue to be divided into a shot/reverse-shot facilitated by recording with more than one camera, which, as we will see, will gradually disappear later, replaced by the sequence shot or, at least, by a continuity-free montage that will allow us to revalue the concept of interstice. In addition, the fades to black and the cross-fades still remain, establishing a dialectic with the desire to capture time inside the images, since this procedure generates it from the exterior of the montage. This non-fiction cinema by Guerin does not assume the reproduction of reality but the creation of a “mise-en-situation” (Monterde, 2007: 137-138), which implies the presence of the camera. This practice would not respond to either

documentary or fiction, and Guerin describes it in these terms: “[...] I really like this idea of rethinking all cinema based on a tension between calculation and randomness: how the calculated affects the random and vice versa” (Monterde, 2007: 121). “The most intimate tension of the modern filmmaker” (Broullón, 2013: 82), analysed by Fernando Canet (2013), will have its most significant expressions in the author’s digital works.

Four years later, Mercedes Álvarez, one of the editors of *En construcción*, made her directorial debut with *El cielo gira* (*The Sky turns*, 2005). This proposal is born again from the need to document a disappearance, in this case, the rural environment in which the filmmaker was born, in a swing between the present reality and the past it reveals. The most notable evolution, in this case, is the genesis of the work from the first person of the enunciation, with the voice-over of the filmmaker herself, who not only singularise the gaze and reflects on the images from her perception of them: “Álvarez’s penetrating gaze is achieved precisely through distance” (Cuevas, 2012a: 87-88), but also from the cinematic meta-discourse, which makes *El cielo gira* one of the first experiences of inscription of the self and the fusion between history and autobiography, through a discourse close to diaristic one. This autobiographical documentary has been widely explored during this decade, as Efrén Cuevas (2012a,b) notes, thanks to the intimacy that digital technology makes possible, and which is organised around two perspectives: “the inquiry about places and spaces” and the “family portraits” (2012b: 121). Català adds the melodramatic aspect (2014b) to this documentary of subjectivity. As was the case with *En construcción*, the film presents montage devices in favour of continuity, on the one hand, and the apprehension of the passage of time, on the other, both encrypted in the heritage of the cinematic poetics of *El sol del membrillo*: “Exploring reality as narrative” (Reviriego, 2005), as the filmmaker states, does not refer to the orthodox idea of a reproduction of the former, but understands it as raw material for the latter, thus eliminating the documentary-fiction border in favour of the reality-narrative duality, which complements Guerin’s idea of “mise-en-situation” and his calculation-randomness dialectics: “[I]n the documentary, it is reality itself that is fictionalised [...] The new documentaries do nothing more than provoke the emergence of that index of fiction that the medium entails by nature and work reality through it” (Català, 2013: 97).

A year later, Isaki Lacuesta presents *La leyenda del tiempo* (2006), which already entails a certain crystallisation of the digital into an artistic tool of a cinema conceived as the path to an encounter, without knowing in advance what it will bring, what events will occur throughout filming. The realities of the protagonists, Isra and Makiko, and their

relationship with the figure of Camarón de la Isla, need the shoot to be defined (Cerdán, 2007: 246). In addition to ratifying Jordà and Guerin's formulation of a *mise-en-situation*, the hybridisation between reality and fiction occurs here within the story since the character of Joji, the link between Isra and Makiko, is invented and embodied by a non-professional actor. Therefore, reality and fiction advance in their hybridisation, inserting fictional objects of the dimension of a character into reality. Once again, and as in the two previous cases, the story is generated in the montage through an enormous task of selecting material, through a deep reflection on what reality has revealed in the images, as the core of the film to make. In this way, the shoot becomes a field of work that must be faced with the minimum prior conditions, attentive to what reality offers to capture it.

We then confirm how these three non-fiction films present new possibilities of hybridisation between reproduction and representation, randomness and calculation, reality and narrative, with the presence, still, of montage elements that generate temporality from the outside of the images. In this sense, it is relevant to point out that the last two also resort to external structuring through introduced through a text. Finally, it can be concluded that the essential notion common to all of them, which will enable a remarkable evolution in the practices of this contemporary digital modernity, is that of intimacy: "contemporary documentary discovers the interior space and sets out to explore it through exterior forms of technological character: contemporary audiovisual introspection develops through a technological extroversion" (Català, 2014b: 97). There is then access to the privacy of the people-characters filmed and also to that of the author, who will be able to generate the story from their subjectivity to start on the path that leads to the essay film, thanks to devices such as the diary or the letter, as we will have the opportunity to analyse in the projects *Erice – Kiarostami. Correspondencias* (2005-2007) and *Todas las cartas. Correspondencias filmicas* (2011)

Within this space of digital non-fiction, it is essential to mention the work of Joaquim Jordà after *Mones com la Becky. De nens* (2003), *Vint anys no és res* (2004) and *Més enllà del mirall* (2006) embody the practice of the *mise-en-situation* that the author defends and the hybridisation between reality and fiction. In this way, Jordà becomes the filmmaker *bricoleur* defined by Santos Zunzunegui, based on Claude Levi-Strauss' concept: "The filmmaker conceived as a manipulator, in a double sense: as a manipulator of heterogeneous materials, first; as the one who makes do [...], afterwards" (2007: 190). The filmmaker manages to destroy the identity of supposed documentary and fictional materials through the different dynamics they execute with them in the digital practice.

After *En construcción*, Guerin creates the digital-analogue diptych *Algunas fotos en la ciudad de Silvia* (2007) and *En la ciudad de Silvia* (2007). With the digital work, the filmmaker realises his first foray into intimate narration in the first person, through a silent diary in which different trips are described, through black-and-white still images and the author's texts inscribed on the screen: a journey in search of the memory of the encounter with a stranger twenty-two years earlier. This work of digital non-fiction gives way to the analogue fiction of *En la ciudad de Silvia*. A crucial dialogue then takes place between both spaces:

the two films converse through their differences, their different ways of constituting themselves as technological and aesthetic objects: from black-and-white to colour; from the absence to the presence of the main character; from the immobility of photography to the movement of cinema; from the intimate film that suggests a *film de famille* to the more or less conventional cinematic production [...] the filmmaker's search [...] is indissoluble from this dialogue (Zunzunegui, 2014: 28).

This dialogue, generated around the subjective gaze of the filmmaker, turns him into a "character strongly inscribed in the images" (Zunzunegui, 2014: 30). This experience of the digital-analogue diptych will also be explored by Lacuesta with *El cuaderno de barro* (2011) and *Los pasos dobles* (2011). Miquel Barceló's work in Mali and the representation of the performance *Paso Doble*, together with the choreographer Josef Nadj, is the event recorded in the digital work by the filmmaker, who is soon attracted by the surrounding reality, from where the analogue fiction of *Los pasos dobles* emerges. For his part, Guerin continues the development of the travelogue in *Guest* (2010), collecting his experiences in the cities of the festivals that he visits presenting his film *En la ciudad de Silvia*. On this occasion, a handheld camera is the tool that testifies to his experience, without voice-over, without external reflection, collecting fragments of what he witnessed and interacting spontaneously with that reality thanks to the small camera that, in the filmmaker's words, "influences how you relate to that person to extract things, to talk naturally [...] it allows you to create a situation of discretion" (Broullón, 2013: 80). The montage of the conversations of the people he meets does not intend to generate continuity but to document, synthesising (approximately 150 hours of recording), what happened. Thus, a dialectic is established between anonymous observation (the small

camera does not differentiate him from the tourist) and interaction with one of those observed people: “Guerin behaves like a *flâneur*, with the advantage that he can leave a visual record of his findings: the gaze of the *flâneur* crystallises in an image or imaginary form” (Català, 2013: 103). “Cinematic individualisation” (Prédal, 2008: 150), the new experience of the *filmeur*, determines “a way of being that consists in going through things rather than placing oneself before them” (Bouquet, 2000: 21). Finally, it is essential to point out the digital work of León Siminiani, in which documentary material is submitted with the task of building the narrative as its theme. After his series *Key Concepts of the Modern World* (*The Office, The Permit, Digital, The Transit*), the diptych *Zoom* (2005)–*Límites 1ª persona* (2009), generated from first-person narration, relates image and perception, thus building the desired story from the raw documentary material obtained, through procedures that the author himself describes as “traces of fiction with which I try to narratively tighten my non-fiction work” (Siminiani, 2012: 91), and deepening the notion of bricoleur. *Mapa* (2012), his first feature film, also enunciated in the first person of the travelogue, delves into the solitary experience of the filmmaker, his private space and the tension between non-fiction and fiction.

### **3. From fiction**

Once this contemporary digital modernity has already begun in the non-fiction space, different works are emerging, still to a lesser extent and mostly by first-time authors, that address these same issues from the fiction space, beginning with various forms of hybridisation fiction-documentary. In *Lola ven de cá* (2002) Llorenç Soler proposes the splitting of both spaces, making the presences of the film oscillate between their condition as fictional characters and the real testimonies of the documentary, instrumentalising the experience of the filming. *Sobre el arcoiris* (2004) provides us with the negative of *Mapa*'s diaristic experience. Gonzalo López-Gallego uses the same digital technology of the miniDV camera to create, in this case, the travelogue of a fictional character. The daily life of Ludwig's stay in Berlin is registered in recordings of abrupt images, sudden movements, which oppose the contemplation of the *filmeur*. What develops as the fictional recreation of the documentary and diaristic task of a tourist will suddenly, and finally, become the story of a murder whose montage then transgresses the previously respected in-camera editing. The work thus becomes a successful experiment in the possibilities of superimposition of both spaces.



Max Lemcke offers in his first feature film *Mundo fantástico* (2003) one of the first digital materialisations of the “emptying of fiction” (Weinrichter, 2007: 69) which, as I will analyse below, will be consolidated throughout the decade. The fictional narrative is transformed into an exercise in documentary observation, into situational portraits of the experiences of its two protagonists, generating a fictional practice from the already analysed mise-en-situation of the non-fiction. The film then favours the sequence shot as opposed to the shot/reverse-shot, and is capable of instrumentalising the slowing down and freezing of the image in pursuit, paradoxically, of the bareness of the image. *Honor de cavalleria* (2006) by Albert Serra is released the same year as *La leyenda del tiempo*. This fiction is generated, once again and to a greater extent, from the dissolution of story and the emptying of the narrative structures, in this case to (re)create the course of a few days in the relationship of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. This fiction has no script and uses non-professional actors to start an improvisation work in which the gestures and physicality of the characters will be crucial.

I have shot digitally because it is easier to serve the actors and my entire methodology is summed up in the principle that the technique must always be prepared to capture the actor’s inspiration, and that it can come at the most unexpected moment and circumstance. Whatever the form of this waiting, it produces a tension, and from something as simple as this the most refined staging arises, because it is latent (Serra, 2014: 94).

From the formal point of view, we observe how the sequence shot predominates, the continuity of montage weakens and all kinds of structuring tools external to the images are discarded, such as fades or the division into chapters. Consequently, the search for the temporal cadence inside the images is purified of artifice. Pere Gimferrer defines the film in this way: “*Honor de cavalleria* is the contemplation of a wandering [...] Its raw and last material is, therefore, the time and space of the shoot that have been retained in their final duration. The long and often static takes that digital video recording allows make possible an extraordinary condensation and intensification of the filmic space and time” (Serra, 2010: 8). A two-week shoot, with two miniDV cameras, then generates a large amount of material that will be processed in a selection and editing effort that lasts more than a year. Serra considers digital technology to be adequate for his work in all its facets, especially the one that refers to the capture of time: “The digital medium, with its defects,

its technical imperfections, its material effects, creates a much more alive time, past and present at the same time, the past as resurrected” (2010: 44). Regarding the filmmaker’s work with his actors, we observe how this is not far from the previous descriptions assigned to Guerin and Lacuesta. The *mise-en-situation* becomes here the modelling of the actor's improvisation, understood as the destruction of the border between documentary and fiction, production and reproduction, actor and character.

Two years later, a debut feature, once again, insists on this conception of fiction, underlining the value of emptying, silence and statism. *El brau blau* (2008) by Daniel V. Villamediana presents a single, silent character, who generates the rite of bullfighting without the presence of the animal. As in *Honor de cavalleria*, the digital texture reaches artistic entity in communion with the sequence shot inherent in the film, and in opposition to the few shots edited using classical continuity and to the two moments in which extra-diegetic music emerges. In addition, the reading and writing actions carried out by the character become a new element of experimentation, as they are generated as audiovisual interstices that interrupt the register of reality to insert the texts that the voice (of the character?) pronounces. Like Serra, Villamediana chooses a non-professional actor to focus his work on physicality and gesture in order to connect from that essentiality with the space of the unreal: “I was also interested in boosting that unreal side of the film. Starting from a documentary aesthetic to arrive at an aesthetic of the unreal or the oneiric” (Díaz, 2009). In this way, fiction becomes the hybridisation space between document and unreality.

*El cant dels ocells* (2008), Serra’s second film, premiered that same year, deepening the postulates of his filmic practice, mainly in the visual aspect. The filmmaker abandons the DV camera to film in HD in search of the abstraction of the landscapes through which the Three Wise Men, protagonists of his new fiction, travel, thus consolidating the mythical space of the film. To the emptying of the story and the improvisational work with non-professional actors, the film adds in this case a void in the psychology of the characters since, in this sense, these three religious icons lack that dimension. Serra affirms: “My wish is to make a cinema so simple that, inside it, there is no trace of humanism; a cinema in which human beings are figures, which do not have human connotations. The Three Wise Men do not have a name, nor do they have any psychological personality” (Quintana, 2008: 13). Suffice it to note, in terms of the dynamics of the shoot, that the final montage only uses 2% of the footage shot. Villamediana's second feature film, *La vida sublime* (2010), sends its protagonist on a

journey to the south, in search of the unknown story of his grandfather in that utopian land. The asceticism and restraint of *El brau blau* are transformed here into vitality and emotion. The filmmaker associates it with the nakedness of the image: “The image cannot only be the surface of things. You have to see what is behind [...] Hence my idea of stripping the image to return to the body” (Rodrigo Carmena, 2012).

In *Finisterrae* (2010), again a debut film, Sergio Caballero uses digital technology to make a suggestive parody of the different practices described here. The fictional work is hybridised with experimental cinema and surreal creation in an exploration of the experience of time and the passage of the characters through an oneiric limbo (the Way of Saint James) where space and time no longer attempt to generate meaning. The protagonists undergo a complete emptying, turned into ghosts on a white sheet whose faces we cannot see, and whose words, in Russian, do not come from direct sound. This narrative emptying is then confronted with successive sketches that generate a parody. The sound image makes possible this same confrontation between the silence of the journey and the multiple and eclectic insertions of extra-diegetic music and effects. The filming becomes a space for creative experimentation, to later build the story in the montage.

*Caracremada* (2010), the surprising debut feature by Lluís Galter, stands out as the culmination of the diverse exposed emptyings to become the perfect exemplification of what Antony Fiant called subtractive cinema (2014)—again in relation to the time-image defined by Deleuze—in which the author already includes Serra's films. Shot in HD, the film about the biography of the last years of life of the CNT militant Ramón Vila Capdevila, considered the last maquis in Catalonia, becomes an aesthetic experience of subtraction around two elements, fragmentation and ellipsis, which associates Galter's film with Bresson's work. Fiant considers these two procedures definitive of contemporary subtractive cinema: “the two main operations of subtraction [...] framing and editing [...] pursue a reduction of the world, a shaping and a narrative” (Fiant, 2014: 10).

Regarding the framing, the film alternates close-ups and extreme close-ups, mostly of objects, with the general shots of the natural environment of the Catalan pre-Pyrenean Mountain region: “The shot thus becomes the support for constant tensions between continuity and discontinuity, presence and absence, delivery and privation” (Thibaudeau, 2014: 280). Both sizes make it possible to leave much of the film's minimal narration out of the spectator's reach. Concerning the elliptical construction, in addition

to placing the action off-screen, Galter builds his speech using temporal ellipses that cause the opposite result to that generated by classical narration: “[T]emporal ellipses do not serve here to shorten time or speed up the rhythm of the action but rather the opposite, to keep it off-screen and prolong the intermediary moments” (Thibaudeau, 2014: 276). In the same way, both the dialogues and the psychology of the characters are also subtracted. The treatment of direct sound thus becomes a fundamental element of the film and also participates in the elliptical construction, allowing the spectator listen to actions that they do not visualise. The experience of time then becomes crucial: “[T]ime frays in a wait turned towards nothingness, repetition, exhaustion” (Thibaudeau, 2014: 278). The digital tool allows once again to “privilege contemplation, slowness, to the detriment of sustained rhythm, to reach indecisive dramaturgies instead of precise and finished ones, nevertheless allowing reflection on the contemporary world” (Fiant, 2014: 11).

#### **4. From experimentation**

Digital technology has favoured the presence of filmmakers in the immeasurable space defined as expanded cinema, whose practice and evolution have been analysed by different authors (Youngblood, 2012; Weibel, 2003; Abrams, Ball, Curtis, Rees and White, 2011). It is about an “expanded consciousness” (Youngblood, 1970: 41), an audiovisual practice with an experimental vocation, which is generated from the awareness of the medium and its contact with other artistic expressions, proposing different dynamics that integrate both aspects and continuing with the cinema of exhibition from the sixties and seventies analysed by Jean-Christophe Royoux (1999). In this cinema, associated with the museum, the fragmentation and malleability that define the digital image (Zunzunegui, 2012: 14) become essential elements of these practices to generate “the convergence of cinema and the plastic arts in the configuration of a space of representation that radically transforms the enunciation conditions of the image” (Royoux, 1999: 4). Guerin delves into this territory in two works: *Las mujeres que no conocemos* (2007) and *La dama de Corinto, un esbozo cinematográfico* (2011). The second includes the medium-length film *Dos cartas a Ana*: “The film establishes the comparison between the pictorial canvas, the audiovisual screen and the written page” (Puyal, 2012: 115), using epistolary enunciation to generate an essayistic form that undoubtedly is the consequence of the epistolary exchange with Jonas Mekas, which I will address in the following section: “a cinema that Guerin uses to question himself about

the very nature of the image” (2012: 118). The filmmaker associates this essayistic form with the sketch that digital technology makes possible:

[T]he idea of the sketch as a very free form of thought. And that is perhaps where digital culture intervenes the most with its small tools, to the extent that you can take an image and think about what the next one will be, park it on your desk, pick it up a few months later... In other words, a speculative possibility opens up equivalent to that of the writer [...] They enter into the logic of that versatility that the digital image has, to be abandoned, recovered, rethought (Broullón, 2013: 74-75).

Serra, for his part, starts out in this space with *Els noms de Crist* (2011), a work composed of fourteen episodes, inspired by the work by Fray Luis de León, *De los nombres de Cristo* (1572-1586), made for the exhibition *Esteu punt per a la televisió?* created by the Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona. The project continues the parodic perspective and the emptying of the narration typical of the filmmaker: “Serra attempts to empty the image of tradition. to leave [...] the empty and white background, the ruins or debris of a story open to interpretation [...] is not the image but its remains, not the character but the interval prior to his incarnation, it is not the distance between the cinema and the museum, but the point where they meet” (Balló & Pintor, 2014: 44).

Coming from the performing arts, Chus Domínguez has generated a work of great interest in the space of observation as consciousness, experimenting with filmic elements. His work, with a fixed camera and in the absence of voice-over—which he substitutes for the written text if there is one—interrelates different arts; dance, music and cinema itself. *Puerta beta* (2009), a four-minute piece, is an observational game about everyday life and randomness. *La danza de la codorniz* (2009) starts from the soundtrack of a scene from Godard’s *Vivre sa vie*, to generate the dance of the corpse of this animal and the search for its soul, in reference to the dialogue of the film about the chickens’ soul. *Notas de lo efímero* (2010) was born from a proposal by the Punto de Vista International Documentary Film Festival: “This notebook contains the daily notes recorded at the hostel and edited every night with only one condition: do not review the work of the previous days. One day, one page of the diary.” From inside the Pensión Eslava, Gutiérrez reveals a stratified geography of simultaneous universes. Its furniture is discovered as a wise and discreet witness of thousands of life experiences and its clients transmit, just by

silently looking at the camera, identities full of past, present and future. This search for the hidden essences of reality in the ephemeral moment, unique and unrepeatable, appears on its surface, so elusive that it only allows the cinematic writing in the form of an annotation, proof of an existence as fleeting as it is transcendent. This work of patient observation requires the expulsion of the construction elements in order to perceive the slight resonance of the pursued event, delving into the notion of the sketch referred to by Guerin.

I also circumscribe the short films by the collective Los Hijos. *El sol en el sol del membrillo* (2008) and *Ya viene, aguanta, riégume, mátame* (2009) arise as proposals based on pictorial and cinematic materials from other creators, used in spatial-temporal displacements, which once again demonstrate the duality reality-artifice, as its creators state regarding the first, which they consider “a kind of critical and humorous comment that sought to highlight how the most apparently non-intrusive representation of nature—reality—can be, deep down, a simple artifice” (Los Hijos, 2012: 119). Their first feature film, *Los materiales* (2009), confronts the silent reality captured by the camera with the supposed dialogues of the filmmakers who are recording it, inscribed on the image as subtitles. Their work therefore revolves around the concept of *décalage*: modifying the space-time coordinates of various artistic objects to create new ones, or confronting the realities of what is filmed with what is discussed: “The film delves into the inscription of the processes of construction of the cinematic discourse [...] involves the spectator in the construction of the discourse”, generating the “radical questioning of the work systems” (Pedro, 2012: 112-113). Finally, I must refer to the film *La casa Emak Bakia* (2012) by Oskar Alegria; an outstanding work that delves into this line of experimentation starting from artistic materials from other authors. In this case, the filmmaker immerses himself in the avant-garde *cinépoème Emak Bakia* (1926) by Man Ray to generate a kind of digital palimpsest (the images are shot with a photographic camera) that hybridises found footage with experimental cinema and the visual poem to “celebrate the random gifts of external reality and [...] demonstrate the ability of cinema to recover the life submerged by the passage of time” (Echart, 2013: 53).

The audiovisual expansion of the experimental practices in the space of videographic creation has developed at a dizzying rate since the end of the decade. *D-Generación. Experiencias secundarias de la no ficción española* (Cerdán y Weinrichter, 2007) (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria Film Festival) and the project *Heterodocsias* (Punto de Vista International Documentary Film Festival), both since 2007, or the two volumes

of *Territorios y fronteras* (Fernández and Gabantxo, 2012; Fernández, 2014), give a good account of the evolution of this digital generation. In this space, the experience of appropriation or found footage (Weinrichter, 2009) is one of the most explored territories, allowing experimentation around audiovisual thinking and essayistic form. However, and considering the absence of the authors' own filming experience, these creations are outside the scope of my study.

### **5. A new contemporary experience: the filmic correspondence**

The museum project *Correspondencias*, started in 2004 with the creation of an audiovisual correspondence between Víctor Erice and Abbas Kiarostami, and later expanded with *Todas las cartas. Correspondencias filmicas* to the epistolary exchange between Guerin and Mekas, Lacuesta and Kawase, Rosales and Wang Bing, Serra and Alonso, and Eimbcke and So Yong Kim, represents an optimal space for free creation in the digital format (in the vast majority of cases) based on a single premise: the exchange of audiovisual missives between two filmmakers. Then “a milestone in the shaping of exhibition cinema itself [...] arising from the crossroads between the museum and the filmmaking act” (Balló and Pintor, 2014: 39) emerges. This proposal allows different authors to generate their correspondence from any of the three territories already described, and even explore different domains from one letter to another. It becomes an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the interests of Spanish filmmakers in the digital territory (with the exception of Rosales who will choose to continue shooting in analogue). From the presupposition of the epistolary enunciation in the first person—which some authors avoid—non-fiction, fiction and experimentation come together and converse moving towards the form of the essay film: “The characteristic structure of the essay film is hybrid, a structure that goes from the personal-biographical to the reflective, philosophical, artistic, etc. Therefore, it has at least two levels: one through which an object, a theme (or several) is pursued, and another through which this theme is expressed aesthetically: the framework, the hybrid character is being expressed at the same time that the theme itself is expressed” (Català, 2005: 145).

In this way, the letter, together with the diary and the travelogue, are devices strongly vindicated thanks to this technology. These spaces, discovered by the modernity of the sixties as discursive tools of the essay films, can now expand and multiply. The audiovisual correspondence between filmmakers allows each one of them to experiment, through the deferred dialogue that the letter implies, with their aesthetic and narrative

concerns within the wide possibilities offered by the digital medium. It is necessary to highlight the two basic characteristics of the project that this epistolary exchange imposes: the temporary duration of the correspondence and its intimate but not private exchange.

The first correspondences, of up to two years in the case of Erice and Kiarostami, imply an enriching evolution of the epistolary relationship between their authors, evidenced within their works. This intimacy, moreover, is produced knowing the public nature that the correspondence will have. The project thus insists on the already exposed essential axes of this contemporary digital modernity: the hybridisation of images, the experience of temporality and cinematic thinking, on this occasion in the space of the author's privacy, who can turn the digital tool into "camera of the immersion" in the intimate space of the author (Prédal, 2008: 179). Regarding this creative challenge in solitude that the digital makes possible, Alain Bergala writes to Erice: "[...] I found a sentence that you pronounced several years ago: 'I have often been tempted to drift towards a fragmentary cinematic structuring, the intimate diary, the essay, the reflection, perhaps with a touch of fiction'" (2007: 48-49). We find here an accurate definition of the materialisation of his correspondence addressed to the Iranian filmmaker: an epistolary work that, once again, involves intense editing work. Erice's letters, therefore, will be gestated from the reflection inherent in the essay film, from "that touch of fiction" that he himself refers to. The project materialises then as a fertile work around the links that connect fiction, non-fiction, experimentation and reflection. Erice delves into this space for the first time thanks to this proposal and that continues with *La Morte Rouge* (2006), a medium-length film that also belongs to the exhibition.

Regarding Lacuesta, the correspondence with Naomi Kawase is the first work in which the filmmaker addresses his own intimacy as a cinematic space; a territory of shared intimacy thanks to the epistolary activity, of fraternity between filmmakers, which the author synthesises in the post script of his last letter through a compendium of correspondences between the identity universes of both interlocutors. Lacuesta offers the short film *Les Kiriki, acrobates japonais* (1907) by Segundo de Chomón, accompanied by a song by his admired Pascal Comelade performed by Pascals (a Japanese group that Kawase reveres), thus uniting the cultural, filmic and musical identities of both filmmakers. The correspondence between Guerin and Jonas Mekas is analysed by Nicole Brenez through the definition of a symbiosis between the image and the real that, again, is made possible by digital technology:



Just like the essays (on film and on paper) by Alberto Cavalcanti, Chris Marker or Jean-Luc Godard, the correspondence between Guerin and Mekas bears witness to this Mimesis 2, this Mimesis according to which the image and the real no longer come face to face, like two very distinct ontological states whose difference would make it possible to structure discernment, but which echo one another and are in a relationship of commensalism, parasitism, symbiosis and permanent exchange (2011: 284).

Finally, regarding Albert Serra and Lisandro Alonso, it is surprising that their two letters dispense with epistolary characterisation and are generated in the form of a film, which indicates that: “The creative act, the gesture of filming, is certainly more important than the reaction of the addressee, the need for a return” (Père, 2011: 291). Serra’s letter, *El Senyor ha fet en mi meravelles*, is constructed as a kind of diary that portrays the crew on his films, transforming the people who participate in the film into characters of a controlled non-fiction. In this way, the filmmaker finds the meaning of his filmic letter: to reveal the intimacy of his cinematic work.

## **6. Conclusions**

My analytical approach to the Spanish digital film creation of the first decade of the 21st century has allowed me to confirm how digital technology has enabled new creative searches in relation to the concerns of cinematic modernity—hybridisation, temporality and thinking—thus configuring a contemporary digital modernity that crosses transversely the spaces of fiction, non-fiction and experimental cinema to find in the filmic correspondence between filmmakers a new and fertile territory of expression. I present below its general characterisation, deduced from the previous analyses:

- The rejection of any notion of border.
- The interest in hybridisation between:
  - reality and image;
  - documentary and fiction;
  - reproduction and representation;
  - randomness and mise-en-scene;
  - analogue medium and digital medium;
  - actor and character.
- The re-appreciation of the mise-en-frame.

- Formal minimalism as a tool to focus attention on the act of seeing.
- The progressive disappearance of the elements of montage: re-appreciation of the sequence shot and the interstice between shots.
- Statism as a vehicle to capture the temporal cadence inside the images.
- The work of editing as a space for selection, for the search for the essentiality contained in the filmed images.
- The progressive individualisation of the filmic experience: the notion of the filmeur.
- The exploration of intimate space.
- The presence of the filmic meta-discourse.
- The shift towards the essay film

If we focus on each of the analysed spaces, we also find specific characterisations that develop different aspects of the general characteristics already exposed. I present these specificities synthesised in the following table:

### **Non-fiction**

The conception of the mise-en-situation as a substitute for the mise-en-scene

The mise-en-situation as the tension calculation-randomness

The exploration of reality as an account

Application of the narrative procedures of fiction on the documentary material

The appearance of the first-person enunciation of the filmmaker

Development of the autobiographical documentary – The exploration of the device of the intimate diary and the travelogue

The hegemony of the notion of intimacy

The conception of the filmmaker as bricoleur and flâneur

The appearance of the diptych digital-non-fiction and analogue-fiction

<h3><b>Fiction</b></h3> <p>The dissolution of the story</p> <p>The emptying of narrative structures</p> <p>Fragmentation and ellipsis as procedures of narrative subtraction</p> <p>The actor-character hybridisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shaping of the improvisation</li> <li>physicality and gesture</li> <li>emptying of the psychology of the actor-character</li> </ul>
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The improvisation of the actor-character as a source of the mise-en-scene

The nakedness of the image

The capture of the temporal cadence inside the images

The re-appreciation of silence

Fiction as a space of hybridisation document-unreality

### **Experimental cinema**

Fragmentation and malleability of the image: notion of sketch

Exhibition cinema – relationship with the museum experience

Observation as consciousness

The re-appreciation of the ephemeral moment

The showing of the construction of the cinematic discourse

The exploration of the concept of décalage between the different materials

Intertextuality and interaction:

with other cinematic works

with other artistic expressions

### **Filmic correspondence**

Space of the intimacy of the filmic work

Maximum hybridisation fiction-non-fiction-experimentation-reflection

Materialisation of the essayistic experience

The symbiosis between the image and the real

Table 1. Specific characteristics of the contemporary digital modernity  
in the different spaces.

The use of digital tools in pursuit of artistic research has resulted in the mobility of the filmmakers through different creative spaces and the displacement of their works towards the experimental and essayistic territory in relation to the museum experience: “The filmmaker of the 21st century is someone who works in multiple formats and registers, who tries new forms of writing and who expresses their point of view on the world and on the image in a wide territory that goes to the confines of contemporary art” (Quintana, 2009: 6). The filmmaker thus provokes the expansion of digital cinema through hybridisation and cinematic thinking, evidencing that “strong desire for thought”

already mentioned, in an “ongoing dialogue with other forms of art” (Zunzunegui, 2014: 23), and also with other filmmakers. Robert Bresson, Chris Marker, Jean-Luc Godard, Man Ray, Jonas Mekas or Abbas Kiarostami are some of the names that become real and/or figurative interlocutors of these Spanish filmmakers. Before these authors, the presence of a contemporary Spanish cinema that embodies that lost modernity thanks to the creative work developed with digital technology becomes evident.

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