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Enunciative Devices of the Contemporary Spanish Essay Film. Evolution of the Essayistic Subjectivity and its Thinking in Act

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Abstract

This article analyses the enunciative devices of the contemporary essay-film in Spain. It studies the most significant works, analysing their textual enunciative devices and their different functions: voice-over, voice in, subtitles, intertitles, and the disappearance of the text. It also analyses the relationship between these devices and intermedial forms (the diary, the letter, the self-portrait), audio-visual materials (author’s own filming, found footage, animation, photography, painting, etc.) and the rhetorical elements used (juxtaposition, black image, fade, overprint, deceleration, split screen, etc.). It concludes that the contemporary Spanish essay film generates a progressive deconstruction of essayistic subjectivity through procedures associated with the enunciative devices analysed – fictionalisation, subtraction, deautomatisation, objectivation, deintensification, decentring and erasure – which oscillate between the poles of rational and emotional reflection.

Keywords: essay film, contemporary Spanish cinema, enunciative devices, intermediality, cinematic thinking, subjectivity, film analysis

1. Introduction

This analysis of the enunciative devices of the contemporary Spanish essay film is based on the most demanding definition of this filmic form that would materialize the thinking process and the self-reflection of a subjectivity or subjectivities. Therefore, the ‘presence of the author’s self, of the essayist’ and ‘the revelation of a thinking in act’ (Moure 2004: 37) are necessary conditions that determine the enunciation of the film: the author is always linked to this process [of thinking] and it is not possible to flee from that presence, since the film itself is nothing other than the verification of it’ (Català 2014: 143).

It is therefore necessary to differentiate between the *filmic form* of the essay film thus defined and the enunciative devices of the subjectivity(ies) of the author(s) that generate(s) it, since both instances are often confused, placing the essay film among what I call *intermedial forms* of enunciation, such as the diary, the letter, the self-portrait, etc. Based on this clear differentiation of concepts, I will carry out a first study of the enunciative devices instrumentalized by the contemporary Spanish essay film and I will analyse their evolution in relation to their three defining characteristics: subjectivity, thinking process and self-reflexivity. Returning to the postulates of Gilles Deleuze (1985) on the *interstice*, and its condition as ‘germ of cinematic thinking’ (Monterrubio Ibáñez 2018: 94), I also assume Laura Rascaroli’s proposal of the materialisation of an ‘interstitial thinking’: ‘the essay film, as thinking cinema, thinks interstitially - and that, to understand how the essay film works, we must look at how it forges gaps, how it creates disjunction’ (2017: 190, 11). This interstitial and ‘parataxic thinking’ (Català 2014: 206) also responds to the concept of sentence-image defined by Jacques Rancière in relation to its audio-visual essence:

The sentence is not the sayable and the image is not the visible. By sentence-image I intend the combination of two functions that are to be defined aesthetically – that is, by the way in which they undo the representative relationship between text and image” (2009: 46)

The sentence-image will transit between the dialectical and symbolic poles: ‘between the clash that effects a division of systems of measurement and the analogy which gives shape to the great community; between the image that separates and the sentence which strives for continuous phrasing’ and both procedures can intermingle and ‘verge on the

indiscernible' (Rancière 2009: 58, 60). If we observe the birth and consolidation of the essay film in France, we verify that many of the reference works of this essayistic practice are generated through a clear codification of the enunciative device, through literary, pictorial and photographic intermedial forms. The letter: *Lettre de Sibérie/Letter from Siberia* (Marker, 1957), *Letter to Jane* (Godard, 1972), *News from Home* (Akerman, 1977), *Lettre à Freddy Buache/A Letter to Freddy Buache* (Godard, 1981), *Sans soleil/Sunless* (Marker, 1983). El diario: *Lettres d'amour en Somalie/From Somalia with Love* (Mitterrand, 1982), *Level 5* (Marker, 1997). The self-portrait: *Jane B. par Agnès V./Jane B. for Agnès V.* (Varda, 1988), *JLG/JLG Autoportrait de décembre/JLG/JLG Self-Portrait in December* (Godard, 1994). In addition, these enunciative devices are materialized by first the presence of the voice-over – *voix-off* following Michel Chion's nomenclature and definition (1985) – of the essayist (or of his *interpreter*, as in the case of Chris Marker), to evolve later to his presence in image and, therefore, to his voice *in*.

The advent of digital technology gives way to an 'electronic essay' (Renov 2004: 182–90) that implies an exponential increase of the tools and elements available for the essay film to generate filmic thinking, also transforming its enunciative devices: the greater ease to work with found footage, the endless possibilities of image manipulation, the different options for inscribing the text on the screen and, of course, the inscription of the essayist's self:

the video apparatus supplies a dual capability well suited to the essayistic project: it is both screen and mirror, providing the technological grounds for the surveillance of the palpable world, as well as a reflective surface on which to register the self. (Renov 2004: 186)

All the films included in this analysis already belong to this digital territory. The itinerary outlined here presents a reflection on the evolution of the enunciative devices used from the hypothesis of a progressive deconstruction of essayistic subjectivity and a weakening of their encoding in pursuit of the multiplication of the enunciative elements.

2. Voice-over and intermedial forms: Reaffirmation of subjectivity

Víctor Erice declared after the premiere of *El sur* (1984): 'I have often had the *temptation* of drifting towards a fragmentary cinematic structuring, the intimate diary,

the essay, the reflection, perhaps with a touch of fiction' (Molina Foix 1984: 50). This temptation becomes an attempt in *La Morte Rouge (soliloquio)* (2006) (Monterrubio Ibáñez 2019), generating the two polarities theorized by Alain Ménil (2004: 98-99), attempt-temptation and objectivity-subjectivity:

There is no essay which is not, in some way, the experience of its own adventure, which is not at the same time a recherche, an investigation or an inquiry *apropos of* or *on the occasion of*, the occasion of an invention, invention of its own method and its own path (Ménil 2004: 101, italics in the original)

Erice continues the characterisation of the modern essay film, in which the author-essayist's voice-over is enunciated from a clearly coded device, presented from the title: the soliloquy, thus defined in Spanish as: 'interior or aloud reflection made alone.' This textual device then becomes a 'tool of inquiry into the director's own cinematic memory' (Balló 2012: 14). But not only from the cinematic one, but also from the childhood and the historical, allowing the filmmaker to 'fuse, in a single gesture, the most intimate and personal memory with the density and weight of History' (Zunzunegui 2014: 57). The soliloquy is the perfect device to create a 'memory operations laboratory' (Berthet 2011: 86), understanding the latter as 'a practice and a semiotic-discursive process', 'a dynamic cognitive process that involves the symbolic construction of meaning, the semiosis' (Ricaurte 2014: 48, 53). It is then memory articulation – the creative, the emotional, the historical and the collective – that makes filmic thinking possible: 'renouncing the document to access to experience and truth, to the aesthetic gaze on one's own life' (González 2006: 200).

The author's intimate memory then travels to his childhood to reflect on his first cinematic experience, the screening of the film *The Scarlet Claw* (Neill, 1944) at the Kursaal cinema in San Sebastián on January 24th, 1946, at the age of five. Reflection is built through the alternation of different visual materials: present video images, colour and B/W; archive images of the time, photographic and filmic; filmmaker's personal photographs; the fictional recreation of the childhood experience in B/W; images from *The Scarlet Claw*, still and in motion. The filmmaker's voice-over passes through them generating their transformation. Cinematic thinking occurs by placing the intimate autobiography under the analytical scrutiny of the third person. The initial dialogue, the different resonances that arise among the different materials, become a fusion that

makes them indiscernible in children's perception during reflection. This fusion finds its perfect metaphor in the image of the casino spinning roulette wheel (the only fictional image that Erice includes in the showing of Kursaal's past), materializing a symbolic sentence-image, as defined by Rancière. Its rotating movement causes its image to dissolve, as the boundaries between fiction and reality dissolve in the child's mind.

The cross-fade, which slows down at key moments until superimposition, is the main rhetorical element of this thinking in act. The archival image of the genocide merges with the fiction of *The Scarlet Claw* – it is actually a still from *Dressed to Kill* (Neill, 1946) – (Figure 1) and this one in turn with the image of the child. These superimpositions manage to 'reveal what may be behind those holes that the action of time is opening both in the personal memory and in the records of History' (Erice 2009). Later, by means of this same rhetorical element, the hands on a piano that generate music at night become an imaginary claw, created by the child from the cinematic fiction. The dialectical sentence-image becomes a symbol. In the denouement, the digression achieves a last sentence-image, synthesis of the concluding search: the light of the film projector pierces the image of the five-year-old boy who will become a prominent filmmaker of Spanish cinema (Figure 2).





Figures 1 y 2: Superimposition as rhetorical element of the sentence-image.
Erice, *La Morte Rouge (soliloquio)*, 2006. Spain: Nautilus Films.

In *Las variaciones Marker* (2007) Isaki Lacuesta creates an essay film around the concept of artistic authorship based on the images of the French filmmaker. The author generates a meta-discursive collage using the materials belonging to whom was the ‘docteur en collages’ (Chevalier 1963: 4), understanding it as ‘a compositional procedure’ in which the montage reaches ‘an aesthetic dimension where an evident will underlies to emphasize the heterogeneity of the materials used, to make them come into conflict, to establish a dialectical relationship between them’ (García and Gómez 2009: 26). In this *collage of collages* the enunciative device is identified, but weakly encoded. Following the usual Markerian procedure, the I of Isaki Lacuesta is enunciated by Sergi Dies’ voice-over, reading some narrative texts that only refer to its epistolary nature on two occasions (2nd and 3rd fragment): ‘I write to you this email from Girona, my hometown’, ‘I write this email from Buenos Aires, the divided city’. The epistolary nature of the work does not make explicit or characterize its recipient in any way. However, the latent presence of this enunciative device allows Lacuesta to instrumentalize its possibilities, in the same sense that Marker did: the expression of subjectivity and imagination, humour and irony to generate reflection. This *collage in second degree* enhances its fragmentation and heterogeneity through different rhetorical elements that are used to create a reflection on intertextuality as a collage.

In the third fragment, *the forbidden cameras*, Lacuesta identifies Marker with other filmmakers, comparing their works through the split screen. This intertextual juxtaposition within the same image destroys the temporality and authorship of the works through the cohabitation of their images, turning cinema history into a collage (Figure 3). In the fifth fragment, *the Makiko mystery*, the intertextual collage is generated through the sound image. Lacuesta superimposes to Koumiko's voice in *Le Mystère Koumiko/The Koumiko Mystery* (Marker, 1965), answering Marker's questions, that of Makiko answering those same questions. In the last fragment, *the strokes*, the filmmaker instrumentalizes the literary intertext to generate a new reflective collage between the Chinese ideograms and Marker's work through the reading of *Idéogrammes en Chine* (Michaux, 1975): 'I like to think that Michaux's words about ideograms speak to us at the same time as Marker's images.' Michaux's text takes on a new meaning when it gets in touch with the filmmaker's work, as it already happened in *Lettre de Sibérie*.

Finally, I point out two materialisations of the sentence-image defined by Rancière, the first dialectical and the second symbolic. In the fourth fragment, *the fresh widows' variations*, the sentence-image comes from the voice-over:

It's been a while that I've pressed the 'random play' key to let my computer be the one that decides. To mix, whatever it wants, the pieces of this puzzle. I didn't edit these images. They are pure Chris Marker made by Chris Marker.

The text transforms both the image status and the place of the enunciator regarding it. He goes from being the audiovisual creator of the film we are seeing to becoming an observer of some random images. Thus, a dialectic sentence-image arises that not only undoes 'the representative relationship between text and image' (Rancière 2009: 46), but also deconstructs the audiovisual narrative: the sound image becomes an external comment to the film and the visual image is transformed into a random arrangement, thus questioning the spectator's interpretation. In the sixth fragment, *in the blinking moment*, a symbolic sentence-image emerges, revealing itself as self-reflective essence of this filmic form:

In Marker's film, the blink yields just at the half on the shot. And the spectator should appreciate and see the crucial moment of the cut. In each cut there is a time

trip [...] Marker's blinks do not want to hide anything from us. They want to open our eyes.

The image then shows the portrait of H  l  ne Chatelain in *La Jet  e* (Marker, 1962); three shots joined by two cross-fades showing her awakening; a first opening of the eyes followed by a blink. This symbolic sentence-image synthesizes the self-reflective consciousness of Marke's cinema (Figure 4). The unidentified addressee of this suggested letter thus reaches the spectator.



Figure 3: Images from *Sans soleil* are juxtaposed with others from *de Vakantie van de filmer/The Filmmaker's Holiday* (van der Keuken, 1974), turning cinema history into an intertextual collage.

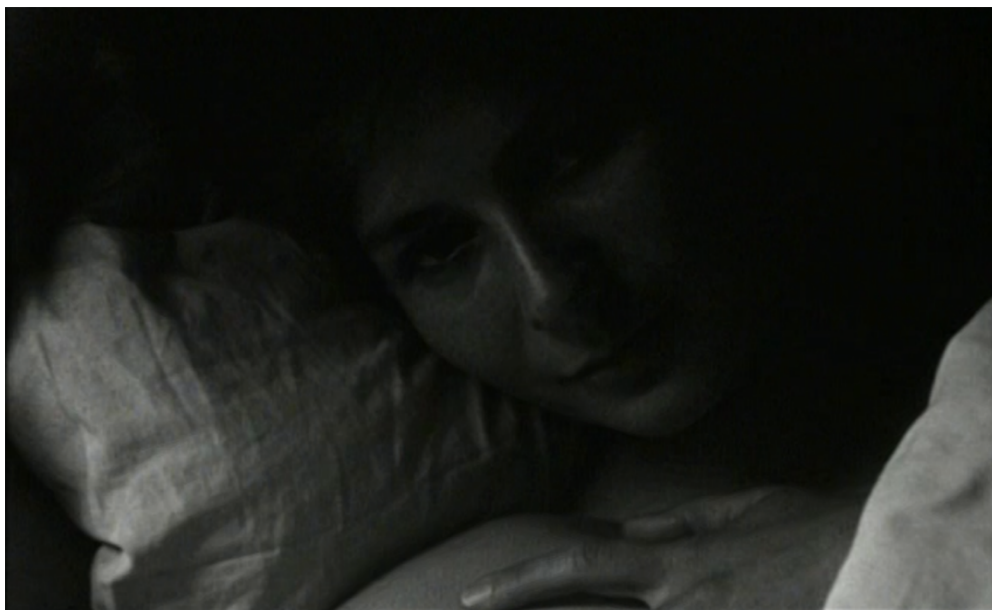


Figure 4: An image from *La Jet  e* is reused to generate a symbolic sentence-image about the essay film auto-reflectiveness.

Lacuesta, *Las variaciones Marker*, 2007. Spain: Prodimag.

In *Mapa* (2012), León Siminiani clearly encodes the enunciative device: a diary that will span two and a half years of his life. The work arises from the need to create a film, and life experience is put at the service of it: travelling to India to shoot a film-diary. Furthermore, this device is conflicted by the presence of the diarist in two different presents: the recording of the images and the construction of the film. Siminiani's voice-over then seeks the spontaneity of speech and moves away from the reading the written text, the first element of an exceptional intimacy that will be a key piece in the narrative construction.

This *dédoublement* of the self is the premise that enables the creation of multiple rhetorical elements, thus defined by the filmmaker: 'traces of fiction with which I try to narratively strain my non-fiction work' (Siminiani 2012: 91). The essay film that the spectator contemplates is in turn the diaristic reflection of the creation of a film. As Moure (2004: 36-37) indicates, the temporality of the essay film is the border between the accomplished oeuvre and the oeuvre to come. The diary advances through this splitting of the present of enunciation and the dialectics it generates: image manipulation; their ordering (flashbacks, montage sequence); use of music, both diegetic and extradiegetic; etc. Besides, an innovative enunciative element appears: *The Other*. It is the author's conscience, also enunciated in voice-over and split in both presents, which interrupts him at different times, whenever it considers that the task of film creation is at risk. This *second voice* becomes a new 'rhetorical-emotional' element (Català 2012: 74). Its first intervention, during the images of Varanasi, reveals this split presence:

Okay, enough about death, we get the point already. Let's see: fade to black. And now open to the rising sun. That's it [editing]- Get in, get on the boat. And film the Ganges but this time at dawn. No, not the crematoriums. Better downstream [filming].

In his second intervention, *the Other* reproaches him for recording a naked woman in the streets of Delhi. Siminiani then instrumentalizes the intertitle as an expression of the mutism into which he has plunged after the criticism of *the Other*. The silence is mitigated by inscribing the text on the image, and then the voice-over reappears. Its third intervention, a new recrimination on the protagonist's indecision, is followed, again, by the intertitle through which Siminiani communicates with the spectator. The

filmmaker decides, in the middle of the trip, and in the middle of the film, to turn the diary into a romance movie. After the love failure, the vital search becomes again a plot search to conclude the film.

The countryside day trip with Ainhoa shows again that controlling impulse by which life is a stage to be ordered through the *mise-en-scène*. Then, there is one of those moments that escape from it: Ainhoa's hands offering blackberries, as it previously happened with the boy from Leh claiming the shot in front of the filmed cow (Figure 5). The need to domesticate reality to respond to the needs of filmic creation are the epicentre of the work and of some of its sentence-images. In Delhi, the images of the rationalist buildings are revealed as an exercise of control by restoring their direct sound to them after the author's confession: 'life keeps boiling over off camera, but I avoid it by focusing on the buildings.' The vertical panorama of the building, with the volume variation of its direct sound, becomes a rhetorical-emotional element that also reveals its 'epistemological function' (Català 2012: 75).

The film, the diary, does not end, its continuation is placed in the conclusion of the unfinished trip to India, towards which the filmmaker leaves. The combination of the different textual enunciations – Siminiani's and the Other's voice-over, intertitles and subtitles – is accompanied by the progressive but timid appearance of the self-portrait. The filmmaker remains behind the camera during the trip to India, to emerge in the image in the second part of the work: first as an anxious shadow on the street, plunged into the gloom of his house then, until he portrays himself after the accident, to letting himself be filmed by Ainhoa in the denouement, thus renouncing control of the image and of the unfinished narration (Figure 6).



Figures 5 and 6: The essay film moves from the need for the control of the work in progress to the acceptance of its no conclusion. Siminiani, *Mapa*, 2012. Spain: Avalon, Pantalla Partida Producciones.

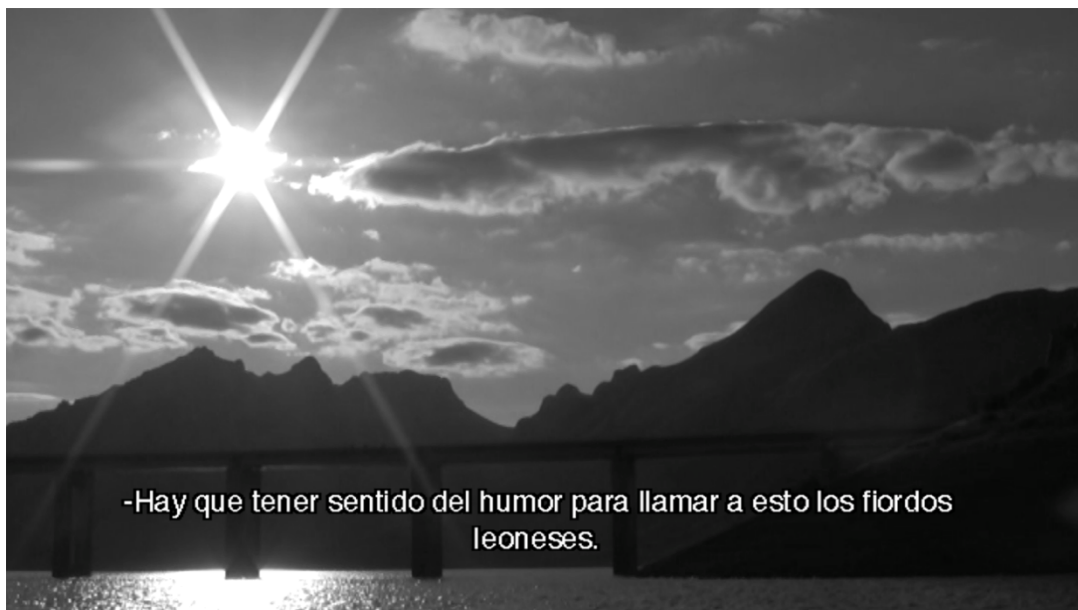
3. Subtitles: Fictionalisation- deautomatisation and deintensification

Los Hijos collective makes the shift from the subjectivity of their out-of-field voices in *El sol en El sol del membrillo* (2008) to the subtitles on the image in *Los materiales* (2009), also implementing dialogue as enunciative device. The film confronts the silent reality that the camera captures with the supposed dialogues of the filmmakers who are recording it. The transformation of voice into text weakens the presence of subjectivity while displacing it towards fiction:

Lacking intonations, voices tones or faces to incorporate them into, these floating texts became almost neutral, extremely malleable. This malleability multiplied with the early discovery that these transcribed dialogues could be complemented, nuanced and transformed by other texts completely invented by us in the editing room. (Los Hijos 2012: 120)

The fragments of real, manipulated or invented conversations in the form of subtitles also give to the out-of-field a new and very relevant presence, totally disconnected from the images recorded and, therefore, coming into conflict with them. Faced with the preconceived attention of the filmmaker's gaze on the landscape, in search of the revealing moment, *Los materiales* destroys this apriorism of observational cinema to show rejection, indifference, boredom, even mockery or lack of respect.

The filmic thinking, the sentence-image, then arises from the dialectic between a silent image that the spectator *decodes* automatically under the paradigm of observational cinema and subtitles that dynamite this reading through three levels that cause a progressive distancing and estrangement: the filmed image; the reality in which the filming takes place; realities unrelated to the work being done (Figures 7 and 8). The destruction of the automated discourse then becomes the showing of its *material construction*. The search for the frame, the recording of sound, the continuous decisions about what to film, how to work: 'The film delves into the inscription of the construction processes of the cinematic discourse', generating the 'radical questioning of the work systems' (Pedro 2012: 111–12). *Los materiales* reveals the strong automatised reading of these images by the spectator. Their questioning occurs in all its aspects: the static of the camera; the frames and their durations; work around silence and direct sound; nature motifs; and also the human testimonial element. The authors' subjectivities, fictionalised through subtitles, become a tool for questioning documentary observation.



Figures 7 and 8: Subtitles come into conflict with the aprioristic signification given to the images. Los Hijos, *Los materiales*, 2009. Spain: Colectivo Los Hijos.

En *Color perro que huye/Color Runway Dog* (2011) Andrés Duque also instrumentalizes subtitles to contribute to what Fernández Labayen and Oroz call the ‘deintensification effect’, with which the filmmaker ‘obliquely articulates his subjectivity’ (2013: 107). To the ordering of images extracted from his ‘memory boxes called Quicktime’, to the exercise of rereading the stored images, the filmmaker adds nine texts in the form of subtitles, which give an emotional, poetic or philosophical dimension to the reflection on the nature of contemporary memory in relation to the image. In addition, the filmmaker includes other nine intertitles through which to offer a personal and intimate notion of the ordering of the discourse at the same time that

emphasizes its fragmentation, also that of its title: Appetite for destruction; Run away: Colour; Neverlands; Peter Pans; Caicedo; Willmore; Tinker Bells; Dog.

The subtitles materialize a kind of annotations and micro-stories about the image around different motifs: virtual interaction through the Internet, the marginal reality of Barcelona or the memory of the hometown. In the first case (third text), the filmmaker's words are added to the image of one of those virtual interactions with a woman: 'The Internet is not, far from it, a utopia. But it seems to solve a fundamental problem. The dilemma of how to live together, putting distances in common' (Figure 9). His reflection on these virtual relationships manages to 'draw a tenuous communicative support, enough to connect the bodies and experiences of the director, the anonymous Internet users who appear on the screen and the spectators' (Fernández Labayen and Oroz 2015: 188). The fourth text, a micro-story about Barcelona, constitutes a fundamental element of 'a measured mise-en-scene' (Fernández Labayen and Oroz 2015: 188) in which the author's gaze acquires sociological, anthropological, and philosophical thickness:

Going down la Rambla de Santa Mónica, to the left, there was a strange erosion. It is a hole made by prostitutes who have waited there for their clients for years. We absent-mindedly put our feet and discover in those footprints one of the living moments of Barcelona. One of the few we can admire.

These fragmentary and tangential subtitles no longer support the weight of the subjectivity expression but without a doubt they respond to the notion of digression, a 'wandering of thinking' (Ménil 2004: 101), which generates allegorical interpretations of the image: 'The identity of the filmmaker is shown mediated by the technologies of representation [...] simultaneously generating a space of reflection from which to exercise cultural criticism in a changing context' (Fernández Labayen and Oroz 2013: 103). When approaching the intimate memory, that of his dog Roman, the image is manipulated: it freezes, repeats, slows down. Alongside it, two texts narrate his death and the author's feeling: 'Sometimes I imagine him flying and I shudder. I see a blur stain that falls into space. A stain that is difficult to describe, but which definitely is also a colour (Figure 10). The emotion caused by the absence seems to require the work on the image to enable the memory of the disappeared. The essayistic reflection is thus focused on the emotional space through the image manipulation. This final draft on the

emotion-image will be the central motif of his next work, *Ensayo final para utopia/ Dress Rehearsal for Utopia* (2012), which I analyse below.



Figures 9 and 10: Subtitles propose an essayistic digression about the images used.
Duque, *Color perro que huye*, 2012. Spain: Hamaca Media & Video Art.

4. Intertitles: Objectivation and fictionalisation-subtraction

In contrast to the previous subtitles, José Luis Guerin creates *Dos cartas a Ana* (2011) from the text inscription on the screen in the form of intertitles, which alternate with the B/W images. The epistolary device is clearly coded. Two letters addressed to Ana Portinari and dated November 2010. However, this known addressee does not modify the content of a letter that constructs a reflection on artistic creation: pictorial, literary,

choreographic and cinematic. The enunciation through the written text implies a clear rationalisation of the subjectivity expression, in which the subjective emotion disappears to reaffirm the clear exposition of reasoning. That is to say, a reflection on art as a process of ‘imagining the image’; a disappeared image that artistic creation re-materializes, starting from the fact that no work by Zeuxis, a Greek painter of the classical period, is preserved. The two letters are generated as two different moments of reflection. The first offers the theoretical exposition and the second the implementation of the previous one.

The first epistolary text presents the identification between the pictorial canvas and the cinematic screen, while the image materializes that idea by making the canvas a sort of translucent screen where the artist’s hand and brush are projected. The painting *Zeuxis Choosing his Models...* (François-André Vincent, 1786–96) makes Guerin reflect on the figure of the filmmaker as heir of those classic painters. Moving shadows then appear on the pictorial image: the cinematic spectre on the painting that will persist throughout the entire letter. The play of shadows and lights on the canvas comes to illuminate Zeuxis’ painting as if it were a cinematic screen. Guerin thus creates a new image that synthesizes the idea presented in the text, even more, that shows the moment of its revelation. The letter concludes with the formulation of the thesis that will materialize in the second letter, when speaking of Pliny: ‘His descriptions of disappeared paintings inspired the painters of the Renaissance. Descriptions of paintings that generate new paintings. As images without image [ekphrasis]. Fertile words that generate images. *Images to imagine*. It’s just an idea’ (italics are mine).

The second letter creates the filmic image of a first disappeared pictorial image, described by Pliny: that of the Lady of Corinth. Thus, an inverted ekphrasis is generated through dance, from the literary text to the filmic text. To carry out this thinking process, the epistolary filmmaker-addresser needs to inscribe himself in the enunciation: ‘I am writing to you from Parnassus, where I have come in search of an oracle to undertake your commission.’ This textual inscription is then made image and the shadow of the filmmaker is projected over Corinth, walking through space and filming the ground in his path. The image of the lady of Corinth then emerges from his imagination. Its filmic incarnation begins with the opening images of film projection, emphasizing the filmic nature of what follows. The candle is then revealed as the instrument that generates the shadows, as a symbol of the cinematic light that enables the moving image. Next, the shadows of two figures, male and female, are embodied in

the same shot, moving from projection to materialisation. She looks at the camera, thus breaking her own fiction by questioning the author and the spectator and revealing the filmic self-reflectiveness. She moves and the male shadow responds to those movements. There is a gestural communication between the two, that of the bond between painting and cinema: ‘the movement of a line to fix a shadow.’ A new female hand then creates the outline of the filmic landscape: Corinth, the Mount of Aphrodite. Movement restarts and the lady becomes a shadow again, now moving next to the immobile shadow of the absent man, which is transformed into a painting, in a fresco of the temple of Apollo (Figures 11 and 12). Faced with the dialectic and symbolic sentence-image defined by Rancière, it could perhaps be said that the one generated by Guerin reaches that limit of the indiscernible through a kind of synthesis sentence-image, in which filmic reflection results in the image materialisation of a reflection theorized through the text. After it, the filmmaker continues his walk through the ruins, turning himself into another shadow on them.





Figures 11 and 12: The moving shadow of the dancer becomes a painting on the stone. Guerin, *Dos cartas a Ana*, 2011. Spain: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Esteban Vicente.

La casa Emak Bakia/The Search for Emak Bakia (2012), by Oskar Alegria, establishes its enunciative device from a Man Ray's quote, with which the film begins: 'This work is made by a person and addressed to another person, to you, who is here'. From this premise of the author's message to the spectator, Alegria enunciates the filmic work through an extensive text that is interspersed throughout the film in the form of intertitles. Its content constitutes the notes of his research, in which the neutral enunciation in the first person reveals the events about it, without the author's emotional or intimate expression arising. These intertitles, however, reach a new significance when confronted with the intertitles of *Les Mystères du château du Dé* (1929), also by Man Ray. Then a first dialectic between the avant-garde and contemporary cinema takes place: between the analogical and digital intertitle, between poeticity and neutral information, between the need for the text in silent cinema and its choice in current contemporaneity.

The reflection generated by the film revolves around the intertextual relationship between *Emak Bakia* (Ray, 1926) and the search carried out by *La casa Emak Bakia*. It is a free digression on the artistic work and its re-insertion into the reality it was created: 'demonstrate the capacity of cinema to recover life submerged by the passage of time' (Echart 2013: 53). In this way, the essay film tries to decipher it, reinterpret it, reconstruct it, recreate it, compare it, revealing all the resonances that may arise

between that fiction and this reality, between that avant-garde and this contemporaneity. The evident intertextual nature of the work uses various rhetorical elements. In the first place, Alegria brings different moments of Man Ray's work into contact with the current reality through their juxtaposition one image after the other. The transformation of space and extradiegetic time, exterior to the work, is thus revealed: the display of the beach in both periods, of the city lights. or of dancing, between Charleston and Basque dance. In the latter, the filmmaker instrumentalizes a new element, generating continuity between the glass raised by the dancer and the one from which Man Ray drinks, thus creating a new game between both spaces. Second, the filmmaker recreates different shots of *Emak Bakia* and shows them simultaneously with the original through the split screen: the sea; the turn of the horizon; the house balcony; the images of the female protagonist; or the sleeping women. In this case, the direct contact between avant-garde fiction and contemporary recreation reveal the intradiegetic link between non-fiction and fiction; they contaminate each other, they shift their significance to the other side of the screen. This displacement is converted into fusion twice by superimposing both images: the fish and the feet that descend from the car. Fiction and non-fiction then give way to oneiric matter, to the territory in which both natures can be fused.

The intertextual relationship also occurs between Man Ray's intertitles and Alegria's images. In the first procedure, the intertitle acquires a new meaning in relation to the work in which it is inserted: it addresses the plastic glove carried through the air; it places the filmmaker in a new search space; it defines him, turning him into an intruder who spies on the pigs' dream; or it describes the filmmaker's chance encounter with the Romanian princess. In a second procedure, Alegria creates a new image that materializes a new meaning of Man Ray's intertitle: *étoile du jour*, *Minerve casquée*, *Ève sous-marine* (Figures 13 and 14).



Figures 13 and 14: The filmmaker creates a new visual referent for Man Ray's intertitle. Alegria, *La casa Emak Bakia*, 2012. Spain: Emak Bakia Films.

La casa Emak Bakia is also built as a reflection on the relationship of these spaces with the positions of author and spectator, as indicated by the initial quote from Man Ray, emphasizing the dialogistic nature of the essay film. From the author Man Ray to the spectators, among whom is Alegria, and from the latter again to the spectators. And as the thematic substrate of all this, the reflection on disappearance and the fight against oblivion arises, through two sentence-images that synthesize it. In the first, raindrops run over Man Ray's funeral photograph, turning his image into a fleeting art of his own work. In the second, the final image of the Emak Bakia plaque, finally designating the house found, recovers the name from oblivion.

In *Invisible* (2012) Víctor Iriarte instrumentalizes the intertitle to generate a space without image that simultaneously narrates fiction – a vampire movie – and non-fiction – the love/heartbreak story between the author and the protagonist: the musician Maite Arroita Jauregui, Mursego – through a written dialogue between the two that also includes the filmic meta-discourse. The author's voice-over appears only twice and we finally hear a minimal telephone dialogue between the protagonists.

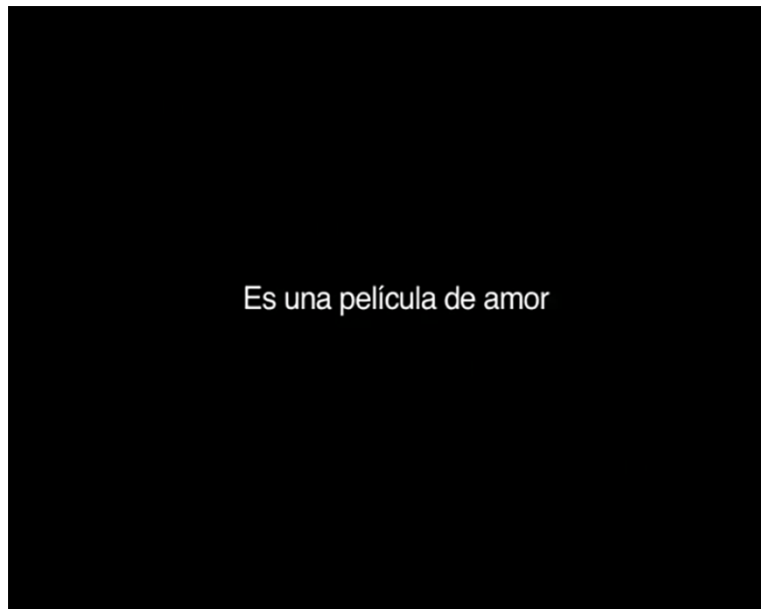
The enunciative splits of the intertitles (where both voices are distinguished by their colour: white for Víctor, yellow for Maite) alternate with the visual image of Maite working in the recording studio, filmed by a fixed camera, without any interaction with the audiovisual device. The filmic reflection is then generated among the artist's portrait at work, the intertitles in their different natures, and the black image as a mediating space between both. On the latter, the sound of the songs construction on which Maite works in the image emerges, as well as different sounds in relation to the texts enunciations. The black image is the field on which the work is built, the one imagined by each spectator; it is also the place where narration, dialogue and display converge.

The first intertitles already determine the nature and complexity of this reflection: 'At the end of this film *we die*' (author's voice); 'Nobody knows *your* secret' (italics are mine). The words of the protagonists appear here in quotation marks, while in the rest of the film they will appear with the dialogue dash. The author's voice-over then emerges to turn the dialogue into a past narration:

I told you that I was preparing a vampire movie and that I would like you to do the soundtrack. You asked me if it was a sad movie and I told you that a little. Then you asked me if it was a movie about us and I said it was.

At the same time, the intertitles show a direct dialogue about that future film. The work is already revealed as a contemporary intertext of different essay films of modernity: *Lettre de Sibérie*, in which the narration is addressed to the epistolary *vous*; *Letter to Jane*, another letter that, like Iriarte's film, emerges from the black image; *Le Camion* (Duras, 1977), in which the film is generated from the dialogue in image between the filmmaker and the actor about the possible film. The author himself expresses the epistolary nature of the work: 'I am very interested in the first person and I vindicate it. This film has something of an open letter [...] I wanted to tell my particular love/heartbreak song like this, in the first person' (Ortiz 2014).

This contemporary intertext is generated from the subtraction of contemporary cinema that Antony Fiant (2014) theorizes – of the image; of the narrative continuity – and from the enunciation complexity – author’s first person, protagonists-authors’ dialogue, third person of the narrative. The film thus generates the reflection on Maite’s musical creation and on the construction of an audiovisual work, unravelling the memory of a love relationship for this purpose. After another intertitle: ‘It’s a love movie’, Maite’s face is shown for the first time (Figures 15 and 16).



Figures 15 and 16: The intertitles of narration and dialogue are juxtaposed with the image of Maite Arroitajauregui’s musical work. Iriarte, *Invisible*, 2012. Spain: KREA Expresión Contemporánea Vital Kutxa, Cajaconcosasdentro.

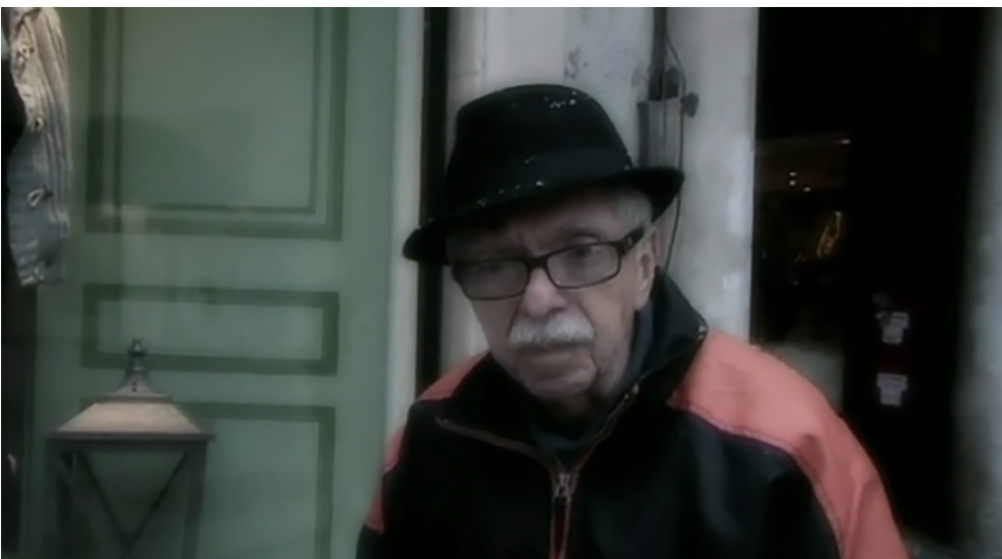
The ending of the film corroborates his creative hypothesis. For the first time, the dialogue between the two authors turns into voice, taking on identity by uttering their respective names. On the black image, we hear the phone tone, his voice-over: ‘Hello, Maite’, and her response: ‘Hello, Víctor.’ The telephone conversation continues again through intertitles. Next, the conclusion of the film generates a container-image capable of assuming all the non-visualized content of the film inhabiting a single shot. Several 8mm images show a snowy forest where a body lies on the snow: ‘Suddenly, thanks to the reverse action (thanks therefore to cinema) the body comes to life, stands up and, in reverse, walks backwards towards the camera, erasing their tracks. The resurrected is none other than Maite herself’ (Vilches 2014: 44). The last shot shows us Maite’s face looking at the camera, thus offering the spectator the visual contact between the author and the protagonist and, through it, also with him. Fiction and non-fiction crystallize in the same shot, in a single gaze.

5. Disappearance of the text: Emotional intensification and erasure

With the disappearance of all kinds of text, essayistic subjectivity loses one of its ways of expression, which then occurs directly only through the authorship of the images, as their filmmaker. This presence can also disappear in favour of the use of found footage, what will draw a progressive erasure of subjectivity.

In *Ensayo final para utopía* (2012), by Andrés Duque, the disappearance of the text in favour, mainly, of silence, and the authorship of images of absolute intimacy, in which the self-portrait continues to have a fleeting presence, generate an emotional intensification of subjectivity. Recorded entirely with a mobile phone, the filmmaker shows images of a trip to Mozambique and combines them with those of the last months of his father’s life. The reflection focuses on the emotional space. On how to turn the image into emotion around two opposite feelings: the celebration of life – the dances filmed in Mozambique – and the pain of loss – the death of the father. The film offers a first general manipulation of the image: ‘The D-Noise application, which blurs the image contours and saturates the colours, generates an estrangement effect that ends up giving the images the tenuous and ephemeral consistency of dreams’ (Fernández Labayen and Oroz 2013: 111). In my opinion, this new status of the image is closer to memory than dream, to the nature of the image as emotional memory. These memory images are also associated, in most cases, with the absence of sound, thus producing a general stylisation and stripping of the image. Starting from this premise, the reflection

on emotion develops in two opposite directions. The celebratory emotion, that of existential vitality, is worked through the image manipulation: slowing down, freezing, vibration, etc. The emotion around death and loss, however, redounds in this initial stripping, in the nakedness of the image which makes the absence of sound even more evident. This absence becomes a kind of materialisation of emotional shock, of impotence regarding loss. At the conclusion of the work, both procedures meet: the image, and with it the emotional expression, becomes a tool for overcoming mourning. The image manipulation that makes the human figures levitate and vibrate in the streets (Figure 17) would achieve to recover a memory freed from loss (Figure 18), that of the father before the illness.



Figures 17 and 18: The search and reflection on the emotion-image makes possible to overcome mourning. Duque, *Ensayo final para utopía*, 2012. Spain: Andrés Duque.

In this way, Duque achieves an emotional intensification in opposition to the subjectivity deintensification generated in *Color perro que huye*. In the latter, the use of subtitles, fragmentary and tangential, and of images of greater heterogeneity, which did not focus on the intimate space, created a reflection of a mainly social nature. On the contrary, *Ensayo final para utopía* reaches emotional intensification through a double procedure: stripping away the image through the absence of text and sound; its manipulation in search of emotional expression.

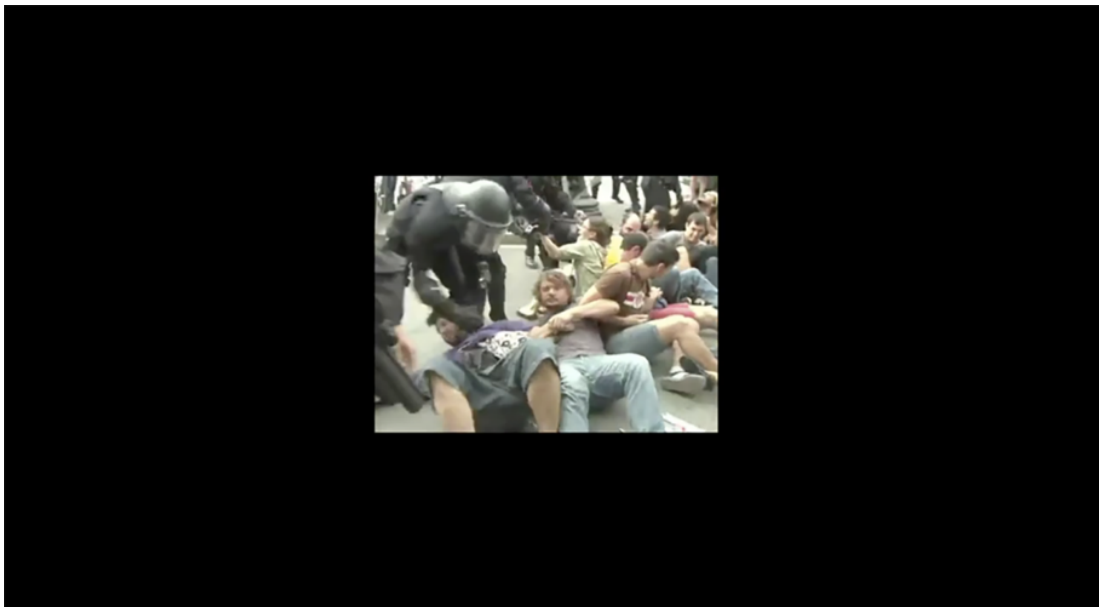
In *Las variaciones Guernica* (2012), by Guillermo G. Peydró, the text disappears in favour of juxtaposition, at different levels, and also as a consequence of subtraction. In the prologue of the film we hear the description of the historical event of the bombing of Guernica made by the art historian T. J. Clark, on a black image that shows the omission of any real image of the event. Faced with this void, a montage of partial images of Picasso's painting is then juxtaposed, and juxtaposed in turn to a musical composition that will accompany different fragments of the film (*Night Divison* by Samuel Andreyev). The last image of this prologue offers us the complete picture in its empty museum site.

After the title, the work is divided into eleven numbered fragments on the black screen, which propose two types of juxtapositions:

- Visual images of museum visitors contemplating the painting, filmed by the author, juxtaposed with different sound images around the different civil uprisings arisen from the Arab Spring (Fragments 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10).
- Archival visual images in relation to those same conflicts now juxtaposed with the musical composition already referred to (Fragments 2, 4 and 8).

The first type of juxtaposition 'puts Picasso icon in conflict with images of our present' (Peydró 2015: 265–66), subtracting the visitors' comments and the images from the narrations, mostly journalistic, about different events occurred in 2011 (Figure 19). The second form of juxtaposition offers a manipulated visual image in its presentation: the image is reduced to become a work exhibited on the black screen, like the painting on the white wall. Just as the visitors of the first juxtaposition observe *Guernica*, the film's spectators observe the archive images turned into museum pieces (Gaddafi reading the Libyan penal code, threatening the protesters with death, the repression of the protesters in Tahrir Square, and the evacuation of the 15M movement protesters from Plaza de Catalunya). This simple re-framing of the image, accompanied by the subtraction of its original sound in favour of the musical motif, generates a symbolic sentence-image

around the fusion-confusion between the aesthetic and the historical experience (Figure 20).



Figures 19 and 20: The visitor contemplates the painting as the spectator contemplates the film images converted into exposed paintings.
Peydró, *Las variaciones Guernica*, 2012. Spain: Guillermo G. Peydró.

In this way, and through these two juxtapositions-subtractions, audiovisual reflection abandons subjective expression to move towards the scientific method. The enunciative device is similar to that of the *experiment*, in which, to solve an unknown variable – the value of aesthetic experience for political and social reflection – different tests are carried out in order to reach an answer. Both juxtapositions-subtractions are finally

confronted with their opposite: the complete audiovisual document, with synchronous image and sound. This is the American air attack on civilians occurred in Iraq in 2010 and leaked by Wikileaks. Thanks to the previous juxtapositions-subtractions, the complete document now recovers its historical value, thus offering an update of the bombing of Guernica omitted in the prologue and symbolized in the painting. The signifier recovers its signified. The historical claim needs constant reflection in order not to empty itself of meaning.

When the authorship of the image also disappears in favour of found footage, both visual and sound, the only materialisation of essayistic subjectivity is its selection and manipulation. Throughout her work, María Cañas appropriates foreign materials to create a collage based on juxtaposition, both between visual images and between visual and sound image. *Sé villana. La Sevilla del diablo* (2013) is a clear example of how these juxtapositions generate the confrontation and decontextualisation of found footage and achieve ‘the elimination of all aesthetic hierarchy and ideology and the subsequent creation of a different aesthetic system’ (Oroz 2014: 69) that reflects on the ‘opposition between official discourse and popular practices’ (2014: 73).

As the author indicates: ‘I bet on appropriationism and the reassembly of foreign images to elaborate new meanings different from those of their original use’ (Cañas 2014: 89). In this way, all the identity signs of the official discourse on the city of Seville are destroyed through a confrontation that works on ‘resistencia’: resistance through humour ‘politically incorrect, hooligan, eccentric, outside of protocols and that on many occasions is transformed into a ruthless affront to social rituals’ (Cañas 2014: 89) (Figure 21). This appropriation and manipulation therefore instrumentalizes emotions, ‘which are visualized through archival materials’, offering an ‘exploration of both public and private emotional memory, that is, a type of memory that brings together both values and extracts from that combination some new visualities’ (Català 2009: 314–15).

The institutional image of La Feria de Sevilla, la Semana Santa, bullfighting or flamenco is confronted with the daily and real experience of these cultural expressions, turning the result into an expression of social protest (Figura 22). The work materializes as a reflection on the audiovisual procedures for creating the official discourse and on how to fight it through the same audiovisual practice. In this work around critical thinking, both the essayist and the spectator participate: ‘This pulls the spectators into

the film because it requires them to invest their meaning based on their relationship with the signifying elements or narratives' (Alter 2018: 7).



Figures 21 and 22: The erasure of direct subjectivity (absence of text and of one's own images) becomes a critical reflection on the official discourse and a space to fight it. Cañas, *Sé villana. La Sevilla del diablo*, 2013. Spain: UNIA arteypensamiento.

6. Conclusions

This itinerary through the contemporary Spanish essay film corroborates the hypothesis about a progressive deconstruction of essayistic subjectivity and a weakening of the encoding of its enunciative devices – of the use of intermedial forms – in favour of the multiplication of rhetorical elements that digital technology has made possible. I show a synthesis of the evolution of textual enunciative devices in relation to essayistic subjectivity:

- Absence of self-portrait and of the voice in.
- Presence of the voice-over:
 - encoding in intermedial forms (letter, diary, soliloquy).
 - reaffirmation of subjectivity.
- Subtitles:
 - fictionalisation and deautomatisation through dialogue.
 - deintensification through annotations and micro-stories.
- Intertitles:
 - objectivation and neutrality through informative and reflective text
 - fictionalisation and subtraction through dialogue
- Disappearance of the text:
 - emotional intensification: stripping and manipulation

- erasure of subjectivity: scientific experiment and social activism/critical thinking

In the first place, there is a clear absence of the self-portrait as an intermedial form of enunciation and even more so of the voice in as a textual device. Thus, a clear absence of exploration of the intimate space associated with the digital essay film of the 21st century. However, and following the practices of modernity, other intermedial forms are used, almost always associated with a voice-over that tends to encode the device (the letter, the diary, the soliloquy) and the essayistic subjectivity is reaffirmed. The latter undergoes a progressive deconstruction when the voice-over is replaced by subtitles and intertitles that show the dialogue and other more fragmentary forms of enunciation: annotations, micro-stories, etc. Two different procedures are generated by subtitles. On the one hand, through its instrumentalisation in the form of dialogue, a fictionalisation of subjectivities is generated and the decoding of the work is deautomatized (*Los materiales*). On the other, there is a deintensification of subjectivity through the fragmentation and synthesis of annotations and micro-stories (*Color perro que huye*). Intertitles, for their part, fictionalize subjectivities also through dialogue, but, in this case, the absence of image implies that this procedure is associated with subtraction (*Invisible*). In addition, there is an objectivation of subjectivity when the text offers neutral information or rational reflection (*La casa Emak Bakia, Dos cartas a Ana*). Finally, the disappearance of the text drives the essay film in two different, almost opposite directions. On the one hand, this absence is instrumentalized in favour of an emotional intensification of subjectivity focused on reflection about the emotion-image (*Ensayo final para utopía*). The absence of text favours an essentiality of the image in which the emotion finds two ways of materialisation: stripping and manipulation. On the other, the disappearance of the text provokes an erasure of subjectivity in favour of the materialisation of the scientific experiment and/or social activism through the juxtaposition of sounds and images (*Las variaciones Guernica, Sé villana*). The essay film is then linked more clearly to the development of critical thinking.

Regarding the visual materials used, films that use one's own images or combine them with found footage predominate over the ones that only use found footage. This fruitful hybridisation occurs mostly between moving images. The presence of other audiovisual materials is scarce, and it is reduced almost exclusively to photography, evidencing the absence of animation material or infographics. Besides, the notion of

collage materializes as an intertextual creation, either through the exclusive use of other people's material (*Las variaciones Marker*) or hybridisation with one's own images (*La casa Emak Bakia*). Finally, the rhetorical elements used are very numerous, and we can observe a certain tendency from the analysis carried out. The juxtaposition of images and sounds (and also of subtitles and intertitles) gravitates towards the pole of rational reflection while the image manipulation is linked to emotional reflection.

After all the above considerations, we can conclude how the essayistic subjectivity of the contemporary Spanish essay film and its thinking in act have undergone a great expansion in this beginning of the 21st century, instrumentalizing the audiovisual procedures developed by modern cinema and creating new ones. Thus, essayistic subjectivity has evolved from enunciative devices that reaffirmed its presence to a progressive deconstruction that greatly expands the epistemological and aesthetic possibilities of the essay film.

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