# TOWARDS A METAMODERN CINEMA: CRITICAL ELEMENTS FOR A DEBATE BETWEEN METAMODERNISM AND FILM WRITING*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of the last decade, the concept of *metamodernism* began finding its way into the field of the philosophy of art. Although its origins can be traced back to the 1970s, in literary theory (Zavarzadeh, 1975: 69) its development had been largely ignored until the publication of two seminal—and in some senses diametrically opposed—texts reignited public discussion about its relevance to the field.

The first of these texts was a monograph coordinated by Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons and Timotheus Vermeulen (2017) containing a remarkable collection of articles that sought to account for a shift in the nature of the artistic process, albeit with some internal contradictions and terminological confusions, in relation to what they described as a new "structure of feeling", as tentatively suggested (rather than theorised) by Robert Williams in a text related to film theory (Williams and Orrom, 1954: 40). At the risk of oversimplification, there was a general consensus among the various contributors to the 2017 publication that the technological changes of the last twenty years, in addition to the various crises (environmental and economic, as well as crises related to identity, gender, etc.) afflicting society since the beginning of this century, had given rise to a new cultural ecosystem, which in turn had fostered a new set of artistic strategies with their own identifiable characteristics that could now begin to be studied. To this end, they proposed three key questions for analysis: historicity, affect and depth.

The second text, which is no less important, is Jason Ananda Josephson Storm's exacting 2021 publication proposing no less than a complete reformulation of all the epistemological fields of knowledge based on a hypothetical new state of knowledge that he also gives the name "metamodernism",[1] which he characterises as a way of

overcoming the terminological dead ends that deconstruction leads us into, the ethical impasse of postmodern nihilism and the political blind alley that points to the need to reconfigure the relationship between reality, values and knowledge. Josephson Storm himself (2021: 289) seeks to dissociate his proposal from the aesthetic theory of Van den Akker et al., stressing that the problematic labels "modernity" and "postmodernity" used by other authors were largely inoperative and that their lack of terminological clarity doomed their efforts to the production of further confusion. Instead, rather than describing metamodernism as a current cultural condition, he proposes it as an entirely new paradigm for delimiting knowledge.

It should be noted that the main objective of this article is to interrogate both of these positions from the specific perspective of film theory, with the aim of leveraging the theoretical advantages of both approaches and connecting them to the legacy of previously established discussions within the field of film studies. Although the respective positions of van den Akker and Josephson Storm are effectively irreconcilable, they constitute two excellent theses for development in an effort to achieve a synthesis. After all, Josephson Storm himself explicitly draws on a method based on the Hegelian dialectic, suggesting that perhaps the endeavour I propose here is not entirely divorced from his particular analytical approach.

For the purpose of this analysis, it must first be accepted that a new condition of cultural existence has been gradually establishing itself in Western societies in recent years. This new condition encompasses the processes of constant acceleration (mechanistic, professional and environmental) that have eroded the most concrete aspects of our relationship with time (Tanner, 2022), our perception of the body, our symbolic frameworks (Català, 2016) and even the very essence of *audiovisual truth* as we understand it (Zunzunegui and Zumalde, 2019). The extent to which this affective landscape reflects a hypothetical "structure of feeling" is unclear, but it is evident that it has given rise to a new conceptualisation of images that has an impact on film language and the way stories are created and received. However, as Josephson Storm would argue, it is not enough merely to explain these developments according to a series of hermetic categories—quirky cinema (MacDowell, 2017), mumblecore (Bretal, Porta, & Zgaib, 2023), the "Other New Spanish Cinema Made by Women" (García Catalán, Rodríguez Serrano and Martín Núñez, 2022; Guillamón, 2020) or the "post-documentary" (Català, 2021), for example—that obviously operate autonomously and have already been successfully mapped. Instead, the complexities of the conceptual dance of our times require us to accept the instability of these labels and attempt to systematically categorise a range of features that blur into and contradict each other, and yet operate concretely within the films. This may seem paradoxical unless we accept the challenge of knowledge in our times: inevitably renouncing essentialist positions, but at the same time seeking out the connections and resonances between apparently isolated events which, in an objectifiable and analytical way (in this case,

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through film analysis), offer a complex, profound picture of the moment in which we are living.

On the other hand, the history of film theory has been unable to escape contradictory movements like these, which have eroded labels and generated all kinds of misunderstandings: Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (1997) had to leave masterpieces of Classical Hollywood cinema out of their celebrated canon to be able to identify common technical features. The ending to *Miracle in Milan* (Miracolo a Milano, Vittorio de Sica, 1951) forced André Bazin (2001) to rethink its relationship with realism. Christian Metz (2002) found that his *grande syntagmatique* was incapable of offering an accurate reading of *Pierrot Le Fou* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1965). These felicitous stumbling blocks, rather than exposing errors in a theoretical system, demonstrate the enormous complexity of the realities of cinema and the fact that films are always, so to speak, a step ahead of the analysts who try to make sense of them. It would hardly be surprising if the same were true of a hypothetical "metamodernist cinema" whose features can begin to be mapped here, even while acknowledging the difficulties that such a task involves.

It is also important to point out a small detail regarding the selection of the corpus of films analysed in this article. As will become clear, contemporary Spanish films are the main focus here, with brief references to other peripheral film industries that are rarely considered for the purpose of establishing canons and proposing assorted essentialist features of cinema. This focus on the Spanish context has both an ethical objective, to affirm contemporary Spanish cinema as a sufficiently powerful player to participate actively in international theoretical debates, and a political one, to challenge the habit of citing the film movements and theoretical approaches of the English-speaking world as the definitive points of reference for our times. Indeed, scholars have already begun studying American metamodernist cinema, based on a corpus obviously composed of filmmakers they believe best fit the category (Wes Anderson, Miranda July, Greta Gerwig, etc.). However, it may be interesting to expand on these initial studies with a consideration of films of different origins. There is also clearly a need for research on the specific relationship between metamodernism and Spanish cinema based on the traditions, sources, developments and contrasts that characterise Spanish film history and theory, but given the complexities of such an undertaking, I will leave it for a future (and hopefully imminent) study.

## 2. WHAT IS METAMODERNIST CINEMA?

To begin, it is important to clear up a terminological error with a long history, related to the difference between what could be classified as "modern thought", referring to the sum of overarching concepts or grand narratives that emerged, for better or worse, in the centuries from the establishment of the Cartesian notion of the self through to the supposed triumph of Western capitalism, and "modern cinema", designating the period of film history from the late 1950s to the early 1980s, which was characterised by the development of stylistic features and thematic and technical operations that subverted the institutional mode of representation, often using formulas that reflect the politics of the filmmakers (Font, 2002; Martin, 2008). A similar distinction must be made between "postmodern thought", which may encompass the Heideggerian project of the destruction of metaphysics and the concept of deconstruction (or the understanding of it in pop culture, which ironically challenged any possibility of attaining truth), and "postmodern cinema", with its obsession with hybridisation, pastiche and intertextual references as discursive strategies. This is where the problems begin, as much of the existing literature on postmodern cinema tends to focus its attention not so much on the technical mechanisms used to construct meaning

as on the "content" or thematic elements that the label seems to imply, albeit from ideological perspectives as diverse as secular humanism (Imbert, 2018), film theology (Orellana and Martínez Lucena, 2010) and cultural studies (Deleyto, 2003). It could be argued that this lack of consideration of the specific features of postmodern film form is simply a logical consequence of the dominance of approaches to film analysis based on post-structuralism and its particular interest in reading (for or against) the ideological messages of the film rather than the particular formal processes used to construct meaning. There are notable exceptions of course, such as the materialist approaches of Roberto Aaba (2019) and Mariel Manrique's essays on contemporary cinema (2024).

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the literature published to date on metamodernism is the confusion resulting from the exclusive attention given to "thought" as the foundation on which to explore the arts, whereby cinema is considered either an "example" for the purpose of supporting an argument or a mere consequence of the battle of ideas being waged in a hypothetical higher sphere. In other words, the literature fails entirely to take into account specifically cinematographic elements (film form), instead subjecting cinema yet again to the inevitable discursive logocentrism of the philosophy of art.

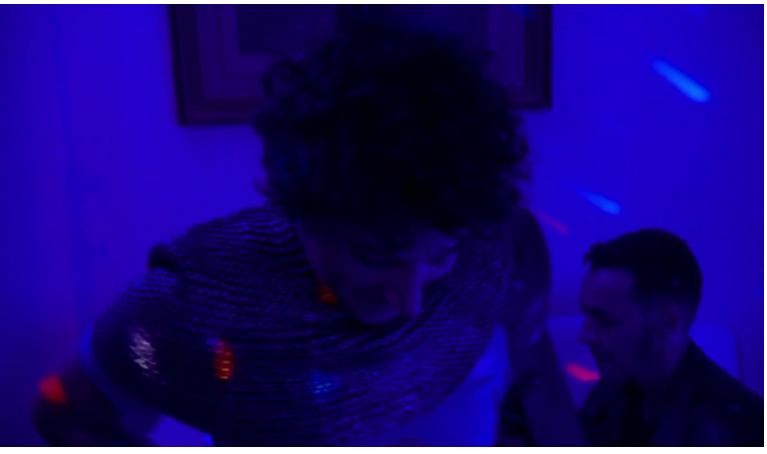
Although these problems are generally overlooked in the field of philosophy, in the field of film studies the situation is quite different. The labels *modern cinema* and *postmodern cinema* and the ways they have been used have been actively questioned for the last thirty years. For example, Iván Bort and Francisco Javier Gómez Tarín (2012) rejected the very possibility of the evolution of modern cinema, citing the rarefaction of stylistic features and the inevitable consistency of the filmmakers' politics. That same year, Carlos Losilla (2012) analysed the interstices of classicism to debunk the narrative of linear evolution, concluding with his notion of cinematic "anti-history" (Losilla, 2023). More recently, Marta Piñol (Piñol Lloret, 2022) connected the main stylistic aspects of the emptiness of modern cinema to a movement that clearly exceeds the paradigms of postmodernity, i.e., slow cinema (Ferragut and Sharp-Casas, 2023). The notions of these authors tie in with parallel concepts such as Annalisa Mirizio's new "romantic cinema" (2023), Howard Finn's "international modernism" (2022) and other theories that all hint at what the very core idea of the metamodernist project, that a bridge, connection, or dialogue has been established between the thematic and formal features of modern cinema and postmodern cinema.

It is worth considering here the particular meaning that van den Akker et al. give to the prefix *meta-*, which is not used so much in the usual sense of reflection on the concept to which it applies (as in *metacinema*, for example), but to the Platonic notion of *metaxis* (*μεταξύ*). In film studies, this *meta-* functions as an attempt to subvert the binary implicitly established in film history between *modernity* and *postmodernity*.

Although the dismantling of conceptual binaries has its origins in Derrida's deconstruction project, in the case of cinema it necessarily requires reflection not only on the film's content, but also on the specific question of its form. For example, *Orlando, My Political Biography* (Orlando, Ma Biographie Politique, Paul B. Preciado, 2023) is a film located precisely at the intersection between the legacies of the modern political pamphlet and the ironic mechanisms of postmodern cinema. Preciado's film is uncompromising in its attempt to turn its underlying theme of overcoming gender binaries into a specific aesthetic proposal that *translates* the essentialist impossibilities of film history itself. To do this, Preciado unhesitatingly hybridises characteristic mechanisms of the essay film style of the late 1960s and 1970s (the gaze direct to camera [Figure 1] and the use of a voice-over that imposes a thesis development) with purely postmodern features such as the vin-







**Figures 1, 2 and 3. *Orlando, My Political Biography* (*Orlando, Ma Biographie Politique*, Paul B. Preciado, 2023)**

dication of kitsch (e.g., the shots of statues with their hyper-emphasised composition [Figure 2]) and camp styles (the clumsy, ugly filming of the party in the office [Figure 3]).

As the above clearly shows, metamodernism is not simply a matter of *subjects* (the *body*, *identity*) or even of *labels/styles* (quirky cinema or women's cinema, a label explicitly incompatible with the supposed rejection of binaries); instead, it directly targets the most fundamental problem of film writing. It is therefore worth attempting to identify and classify certain notions of contemporary cinema for the purposes of this new conceptual framework.

## 3. THE QUESTION OF METAMODERNIST WRITING STYLES

The question of the "return of modernity" has inevitably made recurring appearances in the literature in this field since the 1990s. On the global scene, it was already present in the "new cinephilia" movements (Rosenbaum and Martin, 2011) and their vindication of the writing styles of Kiarostami, Jafar Panahi and Hou Hsiao-Hsien. But it could also be found in studies of film production closer to home, such as the anthologies of articles exploring the phenomenon in European cinema (Font and Losilla, 2007) and, more recently, specifically in Spain (Cornejo, 2021). There is abundant evidence that the so-called "emerging film industries" kept alive a certain way of relating to the theoretical issue of realism or authorship, although the question remains open for its relevance today.

On the one hand, there have been numerous criticisms—often from within—of "festival cinema" (Guillot, 2021), and of the problems associated with script labs and the hypothetical homogenisation of certain approaches to film writing that lead to what is usually described—often disparagingly—as "formalism". On the other, it is equally true that if it were not for the institutional mechanisms that foster and protect marginalised film industries, many of the films that challenge the prevailing cinematic canon would have no possibility of reaching a wider audience. The question that arises between these two tensions directly touches on the nature of film writing: have a set of

stylistic features that are inevitably characteristic of so-called "festival cinema" today (the gaze to camera, enhancement of the "reality effect", dead time, the aimlessness of the protagonists, the disruption of enunciative transparency, etc.) simply atrophied, or conversely, is there really a definitive evolution that reflects the changing times?

There is no doubt that digital technologies have altered the possibilities of global distribution (Quintana, 2011), although cinema has now been effectively displaced both in terms of the preservation of individual subjectivities (largely fulfilled by social media, with its vast repositories of video clips that mark the passage of each individual's time) and in terms of the political expectations it embodies.[2] It is also true that alterations to exhibition mechanisms in the post-pandemic era are bringing about a range of sociological changes: cinemas, in the few urban centres where they still exist, are today also repositories of *content*—live broadcasts, video game competitions, motivational talks for companies—in which the screening of films is marked by a homogenising tendency and a habitual domination of theatres solely on the weekend of their première.

The idea of cinema as expressed in successive notions of modernity—from Bazinian realism with its constant commitment to showing the world, to the modern cinema that served as a tool for social reflection in the context of the upheavals of the 1960s—has been effectively abolished, leaving a kind of cinema floating in a void of meaning in which each film seems to have to account for its own existence. In other words, according to its boldest theorists, modern cinema seemed to acquire a kind of essentialist, fundamental purpose that was inevitably doomed to failure. In terms of its capacity to capture reality, one need only consider how any Hollywood production today makes use of completely distorted, manipulated digital sequence shots that dramatically dismantle Bazin's famous dictum of "editing prohibited". And its power to convey memories has been rendered irrelevant by the fact that any individual with a degree of technological ability can now compose their own little archive of experiences irrespective of their gender, class, race or identity. This has confirmed that the old dream of visibility as a form of emancipation and a call to social commitment[3] was partly mistaken: in very many cases, the images of the workers reveal their aspirations to climb the turbo-capitalist ladder.

Metamodernist film writing is thus based on the acceptance of this failure and the explicit need to overcome this constant *remoteness* from reality. On the one hand, it seems clear that cinema can no longer aspire to a hypothetical status of truth that was once assumed to be practically intrinsic to the ontological projects of realism. Moreover, the imposition of a completely artificial and distorted postmodern image[4]—not to mention the subsequent incorporation of shots generated entirely by AI, with the inevitably sinister sense of estrangement this elicits—has ultimately resulted in a deficiency of the gaze, the sensation that an inhospitable abyss exists between the real world and the world shown on screen. This is why the first identifiable action of this new movement is a questioning of the very mechanisms of filmmak-

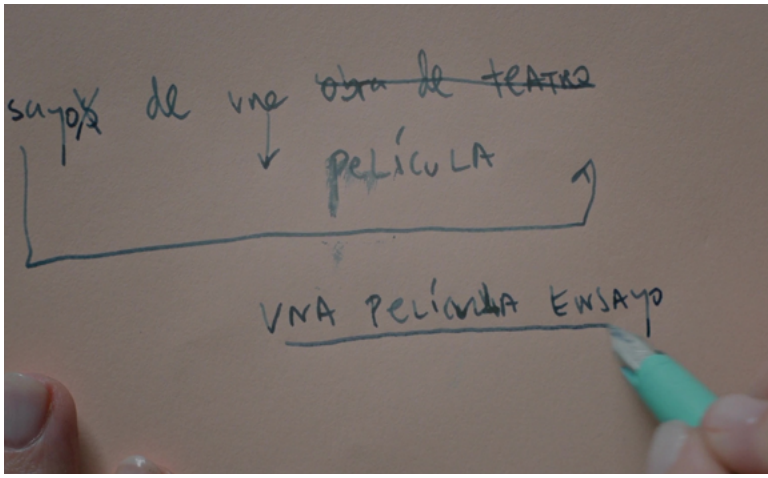
THE IDEA OF CINEMA AS EXPRESSED IN SUCCESSIVE NOTIONS OF MODERNITY—FROM BAZINIAN REALISM WITH ITS CONSTANT COMMITMENT TO SHOWING THE WORLD, TO THE MODERN CINEMA THAT SERVED AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL REFLECTION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE UPHEAVALS OF THE 1960S—HAS BEEN EFFECTIVELY ABOLISHED, LEAVING A KIND OF CINEMA FLOATING IN A VOID OF MEANING IN WHICH EACH FILM SEEMS TO HAVE TO ACCOUNT FOR ITS OWN EXISTENCE.

ing, albeit always in favour of a writing style that aspires (in vain) to endow the world with meaning.

A simple example can illustrate this more clearly. The film *The Girls Are Alright* (Las chicas están bien, Itsaso Arana, 2023) consciously adopts certain features of modernity: it is presented as an essay film ("*una película ensayo*") (Figure 4); it breaks the fourth wall with one of the protagonists explicitly addressing "the camera" (Figure 5); and it distorts the different narrative levels to generate a dislocation of time-frames and spaces that seems to blur the lines between the rehearsal of a play and life itself (Figure 6). The film is constructed entirely upon its flirtation with extra-textual truth: the actors use their real names and participate in the creation by improvising the scenes, the barely sketched plots are based on personal experiences, and Barbara Lennie even reflects on her pregnancy while the camera captures it in real time.

This mixture of real, rehearsed, fictionalised and manipulated elements ultimately creates an appealing combination of ideas, emotions, conversations and deviations that unabashedly challenge the "structure of feeling" mentioned above: through a purging of narrative elements and a deliberately light (but never ingenuous) atmosphere that brings it into dialogue with the basic principles of eccentric cinema, Arana offers a film that straddles the line between the (modern) commitment to presenting reality and (postmodern) playfulness.

At the same time, it is interesting to note that Arana herself uses the term "essay" to describe her own work. In his monograph on the essay film, Josep Català (2014: 199) points out that films included in this category explicitly reject both the closed work method characteristic of objective science and the parataxis of its structure. Indeed, Arana's film is more of an exploration of the everyday and the ephemeral, evident in the accumulation of meaningful material that constitutes its structure: the different fragments of the








**Figures 4, 5 and 6.** *The Girls Are Alright* **(*Las chicas están bien*, Itsaso Arana, 2023)**

rehearsals, but also of games, intimate exchanges and parties that overlap organically rather than in any pre-designed way, where the pleasure of aimlessness and the vitality of the unexpected

construct a unique experience. In opposition to conventional documentary methods with their thematic and formal rigidity, and equally in contrast to self-contained, controlled fiction narratives, Arana's film benefits from an airiness that blurs the line between the traditional fiction/non-fiction binary.

*The Girls Are Alright* also offers a sense of the distance Spanish cinema has taken from the proposals of developing countries that have shaped the canon of the "New Cinephilia", evident in a comparison of the strategy of disruption used by Abbas Kiarostami in the exquisite *Taste of Cherry* (Ta'm e guilass, Abbas Kiarostami, 1997) with the reformulation operated by Arana's body in the equally praiseworthy *You Have to Come and See It* (Tenéis que venir a verla, Jonás Trueba, 2022) and finally, with the magical and sweetly ironic tone of the ending to Arana's own film. In the first film, the disruptive strategy relies on the aimlessness of a character who wishes to die, based on which Kiarostami offers an alluring and complex reflection on family, religion, politics and science. In short, the weight of death imposes its bleakness on all of the material until the whole enunciative framework literally collapses, unable to resolve the larger ethical dilemma posed by the film (Figures 7 and 8).



**Figures 7 and 8.** ***The Taste of Cherry*** **(*Ta'm e guilass*, Abbas Kiarostami, 1997)**

Jonás Trueba's decision to reformulate this strategy 18 years later resulted in a film far removed from the clichés of modern cinema: with a much humbler approach and a sweet, wistful and humane atmosphere that replaces the frigidity of the distancing method, Trueba's film is structured exclusively around four characters behind whom lies a latent question of lost youth and the mechanisms of acceptance of the future. The characters exist in an immense smallness of commuter trains, suburban flats and thwarted expectations. At the end of the film, when Itsaso Arana's character is shown urinating, laughing and then being captured by the whole film crew, the reflection is tinged with an inevitably bitter irony (Figures 9 and 10). We are still in the terrain of the big questions (about the future, lost time, etc.) but the tone is necessarily introspective and pensive.

However, *The Girls Are Alright* employs this strategy of disrupting the mechanisms of enunciation right from the first minute, constantly hybridising genres and positions in what can only be expressed as an explicit quest for a future. In their monologues the characters do not shy away from worries about death, or uneasiness about the future, or any of the other topics identified above in Kiarostami's and Trueba films. The difference here is simply the ability to propose different, clearly positive perspectives in every age group: sexual desire, artistic creation, love, motherhood and overcoming grief are possible answers that the actors *rehearse*—the similarity between the





Figures 9 and 10. *You Have to Come and See It* (*Tenéis que venir a verla*, Jonah Trueba, 2022)

Spanish words *ensayar* ("rehearse") and *ensayo* (essay) reminds us that this is explicitly presented as an *essay film*—to the various hardships they face in their lives.

This wilfully optimistic (and, as noted above, never ingenuous) approach is taken to its ultimate consequences with the fusion of the fairy tale and the end of the film itself: "Can I give you a movie kiss?" one of the protagonists asks the hypothetical "prince", who is holding a toad. And shortly after this, before the credits roll, we hear other voices: "It looks like the end... are you sure you're alright? / I've never been asked so many times whether I'm alright on a film shoot." Once again, the whole operation hybridises modernity and postmodernity in a quest for new territories where what is written is clearly the possibility of a future.

## 4. THE PROBLEM OF THE FUTURE: METAMODERNISM AS OVERCOMING

If we accept that one of the main problems in metamodernist cinema is its relationship with the vectors of reality, the material and the mechanisms used to erase the marks of enunciation, the next step is to consider this whole relationship in relation to the problem of openness to the future. This is especially necessary given the contemporary tendency to assign excessive importance to a perspective imported from the English-speaking world, represented in particular by theorists like Mark Fisher, who have conflated criticism of capitalism with a supposed inability to imagine futures within the social frameworks in which they themselves wrote. During the final decades of the 20th century, thinkers of this kind—almost always white men living in powerful nations who found it extremely difficult to take an intersectional approach—developed a sort of apocalyptic tendency which, despite their various insightful contributions, put them at risk of running into a

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theoretical (political, aesthetic, existential) cul-de-sac that was completely incompatible with the wondrous discoveries of metamodernist cinema.

Indeed, the return to simplicity, to the concrete question of intimacy or the "structure of feelings", cannot be given over entirely to a sort of narcissistic daze. This is one of the risks present in many cases of so-called "contemporary autofiction", which are often characterised by easily identifiable clichés (members of wealthy families, the exposure of family scars, a kind of solipsism in discourses on identity, etc.) that prove rather ineffective for *imagining possible futures*. To put it as clearly as possible, the return to the past that characterises metamodernism is not reduced to a mere *settling of scores* with the suffering of each individual (in the end, to some extent we all have our own little wounds and unfinished business); rather, it is clearly projected into the future, in some way shaping a better global society *for the whole world*. And it does this, of course, by means of an exploration of specific audiovisual strategies.

The earliest outlines of this kind of approach began to emerge years ago in the work of the most gifted postmodern directors: Nanni Moretti's *Aprile* (1998) is an early example of a film constructed according to the postulates of autofiction (Mendieta Rodríguez, 2017) with a twist in which a private event (the birth of his son) ends up serving as a vehicle for the projection of a possible victory for progressive forces in Italy. The subsequent emergence of female filmmakers associated with fourth-wave feminism took up this heritage and configured a crucible of possibilities in which dialogues about intimacy, the body, the need to create a new shared story, or in many cases simply the ability to seize the opportunity to *make films* triggered all kinds of reflections on the societies we could be building in the future.

Examples of this include recent Spanish films such as *20,000 Species of Bees* (Estíbaliz Urresola Solaguren, 2023) and *La maternal* (Pilar Palomero, 2022), which encapsulate Shaila García Catalán's concise definition of a film as a potential "listening device" (2024: 31). This is an idea that can be taken further, as this "listening" is not merely an act of archiving, of memory, or of restoration of the past (it is well known that an *excess of memory* has often had a counterproductive, atrophying effect in our societies); it also functions as the only key that can open up a possible future: in the parent's listening are the pieces on which we can build our own relationships with others. This is the journey taken in *Lullaby* (Cinco lobitos, Alauda Ruiz de Azúa, 2022), with Amaia's (Laia Costa) last words to her daughter ("Let's go home, my love"), Ana's (Luna Pamiés) final monologue in *The Water* (El agua, Elena López Riera, 2022), and of course Celia's (Andrea Fandos) decision to sing with her own voice at the end of *Schoolgirls* (Las niñas, Pilar Palomero, 2020). These are gestures, words, textual operators that never give into Fisher's political and existential defeatism; instead, by being filmed and inserted into a particular fictional universe, they radically alter our expectations of the future.

This is perhaps one of the greatest assets of metamodernist cinema: its conscious confrontation of the inevitable paralysis that emerges out of certain fragments of Fisher's work with the positive possibilities of nostalgia that were already present in Tanner's. The return to the past—to the childhood home, to the parent's reconsideration, to the repressed content of an ideologically shaped past—hardly ever has a paralysing effect; on the contrary, it sets off specific mechanisms of political and social action, and even of affective and personal care. Examples can be found in two films that use the same technique (the split screen): *The Year of Discovery* (El año del descubrimiento, Luis López Carrasco, 2020) and *Cabala Caníbal* (Daniel V. Villamediana, 2014). In both films, listening and the use of archives support the exploration of a particular social and personal upheaval that calls for a response in the present. The first film offers an estranged, embittered look at workers' tensions in a Spain dressed up in tri-

umphalism, while the second proposes a dream-like labyrinth of family fantasies that clash with sparks of everyday life set in a very extreme present, even to the point of being symbolically embodied in the timeline of the film itself. Both cases seem to underscore Tanner's suggestion that it is unwise to leave the handling of folklore, nostalgia or elements associated with a hypothetical shared past in the hands of the far right.

However, such assertions should always be taken with caution. The search for future possibilities necessarily involves avoiding any kind of thematic and formal conventionalism; the moment that *recognisable* stylistic features can be attributed to a whole *generation*, it runs the risk of becoming a predictable, hackneyed and hollow formula. Films of this kind are constructed in a context of structural fragility in Spain, which involves a level of support for their creators that is constant but prone to errors. These films stand out for their complex diversity and richness, despite the malice of certain critics who try to reduce their achievements to a set of categories that are often used pejoratively ("feminism", "sensibility", "intimacy"), overlooking the fact that each film takes its own particular position, and in so doing, perfectly embodies the metamodernist project, as an active, positive contribution to the meticulous construction of a complex symbolic framework that can open up the possibility of a better future for those yet to come.

## 5. A FEW CONCLUSIONS

In this article, I have sought to offer some preliminary insights into the slippery classification of "metamodernist cinema", which will require further development and refinement in the future. However, the basic idea outlined here is clear, that a new approach to filmmaking has been developing since the early 2000s, and that its main features include a reconsideration of the body and the affects, a complex relationship with the past and a call for greater thematic and formal complexity.

Building on some of the more felicitous ideas that other authors have proposed in relation to bodies and affects (Checa Bañuz, 2018), metamodernism seems to constitute a vindication of the most specific aspects of each individual experience insofar, paradoxically, as it can be communicated and even shared. In an era when binary essentialism is being challenged, the bodies presented are split between the unavoidable weight of their identities or labels ("woman", "racialised", "trans", "Catalan", "Spanish", "immigrant", "documentary maker") and the specific weight of their personal experience, which they convey as best as they can through a collection of stylistic strategies and themes halfway between auteur signatures and new models of technological audiovisual communication. In a context of excessive social media exposure and the weight of discourses on identity, each metamodernist film strives to find an individual (but not narcissistic) voice.

HOWEVER, THE BASIC IDEA OUTLINED HERE IS CLEAR, THAT A NEW APPROACH TO FILMMAKING HAS BEEN DEVELOPING SINCE THE EARLY 2000S, AND THAT ITS MAIN FEATURES INCLUDE A RECONSIDERATION OF THE BODY AND THE AFFECTS, A COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PAST AND A CALL FOR GREATER THEMATIC AND FORMAL COMPLEXITY.

On the question of historicity, it has been made clear here that the weight of nostalgia can be abrasive. This is reflected in the abuse of Fisher's notion of *hauntology* (as opposed to Derrida's original understanding of the concept, which points in a very different direction, toward the possibility of a future), which has already been subject to sensitive corrections and extensions

by authors such as the aforementioned Grafton Tanner or, in the Spanish context, Brunella Tedesco (2022), Ana Carrasco Conde (2017) and Pablo Sánchez (Sánchez Blasco, 2023). The idea that the contemporary ecosystem of film production is anaesthetised with mechanisms of nostalgia, repetition and euphoric recall is actually a legacy of postmodernity that needs to be balanced by an acknowledgement of the success of films as diverse as *A Brighter Tomorrow* (Il sol dell'avvenire, Nanni Moretti, 2023) or *Love and Revolution* (Te estoy amando locamente, Alejandro Marin, 2023), which engage in a radical and optimistic reconsideration of past suffering that is neither victimising nor indulgent, but that points directly towards the possibility of a better future.

Finally, in relation to depth, this article has shown that by embracing airiness or fragility, films such as *The Girls Are Alright* never veer off into enunciative simplicity or gawky ingenuousness. On the contrary, the paradox of metamodernism is that the filmmakers who flirt with quirkiness are at the same time able to vest their creations with an immense thematic and formal depth. This strategy offers an exciting opportunity to appropriate and overcome the camp and kitsch postures that dominated postmodern approaches, without necessarily collapsing into an otherwise ineffective evocation of the *auteurial* mechanisms of modernity.

The triple mapping offered in this article can serve as a preliminary blueprint for a reinterpretation of the films being made today. What it offers, from a constructive perspective free of apocalyptic gloom, is a vision of cinema that is not paralysed by its "deaths" or its "melancholy" (a nostalgic posture that often runs the risk of leading to reactionary stances), but instead is in perpetual movement toward a future that neither conceals nor succumbs to its shadows. By overcoming angst and irony, metamodernist cinema takes up its commitments to reality, the individual and the world, to start its history all over again as often as necessary. Moreover, while "analysis and interpretation [...] constitute a practice that involves the subject who reads and puts the truth of the enunciation into play" (González Hortigüela & Canga Sosa, 2023: 312), the question of how to conduct a metamodernist film analysis or interpretation remains in the air. But that is undoubtedly a question that will have to be answered in the years to come.■

## NOTES

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1 I am aware of the potential for confusion surrounding the possible uses of "metamodernism" and "metamodernity". I have chosen to use "metamodernism" here based on its use in van den Akker, Gibbons and Vermeulen's text, although this question has been examined previously by authors such as Dina Stoev (2022), and even in the Spanish-speaking world by Elena Oliveras (2019) and Luis Freites (2018).

2 For example, in the first edition of *The Routledge Companion to Narrative Theory* (Dawson & Mäkelä, 2022), references dedicated to cinema are extremely limited compared to the countless texts dedicated to political storytelling, fake news, *infoxication* and other fields of study that have been fashionable among academics for some time now. It is also worth noting that the Routledge volume contains no contributions from Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking authors, which also raises questions about the insistent, reductionist and biased configuration of narratological knowledge proposed by the Anglosphere.

3 It is worth remembering that this dream was present both in accounts of cinema with marks of Catholic phenomenology, such as Andre Bazin's, and in the materialist, progressive perspective of Jonas Mekas.

4 See Shaila García Catalán's theoretical reflection on post-classical cinema and sinister contemplation (2019: 28-30).

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## TOWARDS A METAMODERN CINEMA: CRITICAL ELEMENTS FOR A DEBATE BETWEEN METAMODERNISM AND FILM WRITING


### Abstract

This article offers a reflection on the hypothetical existence of a metamodernist cinema, with reference to the three key ideas proposed by Van den Akker, Gibbons and Vermeulen: affects, historicity and depth. It explores the possibility of a type of cinema that during the last two decades has participated in the questioning of the clichés of postmodernity in search of a "between" space, recovering certain legacies of modernity. This idea is located in the general context of film theories in the wake of the New Cinephilia, which have pointed to the resurgence of a certain notion of "international modernity" that itself coincided with the emergence of a whole range of new styles, categories and schools: from mumblecore to quirky cinema, from the Other New Spanish Cinema Made by Women to the rise of autofiction. Characteristics and concepts common to these movements are proposed here in an effort to clarify these developments on the basis of two key features: the way metamodernist cinema reflects on film writing itself; and the way it configures and proposes different possible worlds that avoid the trap of nostalgia by projecting themselves into the future.



### Key words

Metamodernity; Spanish Cinema; Film Critic; Theories of Cinema; Nostalgia.



### Bio Note

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## HACIA UN CINE METAMODERNO: ELEMENTOS CRÍTICOS PARA EL DEBATE ENTRE METAMODERNISMO Y ESCRITURA FÍLMICA


### Resumen

El artículo propone una reflexión en torno a la hipotética existencia de un cine metamodernista, tomando como referencia los tres campos propuestos en el trabajo de den Akker, Gibbons y Vermeulen: los afectos, la historicidad y la complejidad. Exploraremos la posibilidad de un cine que durante las dos últimas décadas ha participado en el cuestionamiento de los lugares comunes de la posmodernidad en busca de un «entre», una recuperación de ciertas herencias de la modernidad. Esta idea queda situada en el contexto general de las teorías del cine posteriores a la Nueva Cinefilia, que ya apuntaban al resurgimiento de una cierta idea de «modernidad internacional» que coincidía, a su vez, con el surgimiento de toda una serie de nuevos estilos, categorías y escuelas: del *Mumblecore* al *Cine Quirky*, del Otro Nuevo Cine Español Femenino al auge de la autoficción. Proponemos aquí rasgos e ideas comunes a dichos movimientos que permiten clarificar lo que ocurre a partir de dos grandes hitos: la reflexión sobre la propia escritura cinematográfica y la manera en la que, al proyectarse hacia el futuro, configura y propone diferentes mundos posibles que esquivan la trampa de la nostalgia.



### Palabras clave

Metamodernidad; Cine español; Crítica de cine; Teorías del Cine; Nostalgia.



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