

**ZINE03**

# ZINE03

**Title:** ZINE03

**Publication date:** Spring 2022

**Coordination:** Elías Querejeta Zine Eskola

**Editor:** Pablo La Parra Pérez

**Editorial Committee:** Maialen Beloki, Joxean Fernández, Carlos Muguiro, Pablo La Parra Pérez

**Editorial correction:** Pablo La Parra Pérez, Felipe M. Retamal

**Graphic design and layout:** Sara Zamorro

**ISSN:** 2792-677X

**License:** CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

**Publishers:**



**Collaborator:**



\* The opinions expressed in ZINE are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial Committee, the institutional editors, or the institution to which the authors are affiliated.

<b>01 A DIFFERENT GRAMMAR OF DISENCHANTMENT: KOLDO IZAGIRRE'S LAST FILMS (1989-1992)</b>	05
Beñat Sarasola	
<b>02 CAN'T YOU SEE? A DOUBTFUL JOURNEY THROUGH THE PERSONAL ARCHIVES OF ANTXON ECEIZA</b>	32
Maialen Beloki Berasategui	
THE PSYCHIATRIST WHO (UN) WROTE A FILM	39
Irati Crespo	
DEAR ANTONIO: ANTZON! ANTCHON? ANTÓN	44
Maialen Beloki Berasategui	

**A DIFFERENT GRAMMAR OF DISENCHANTMENT:  
KOLDO IZAGIRRE'S LAST FILMS (1989-1992)**

01

# A DIFFERENT GRAMMAR OF DISENCHANTMENT: KOLDO IZAGIRRE'S LAST FILMS (1989-1992)

**Beñat Sarasola**

University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU

This paper analyses the films made by Koldo Izagirre outside the field of animation, and linked to the concept of disillusionment. Disillusionment is a recurring and well-known concept in the Spanish cultural context, and based on this characteristic, the paper argues that films propose a new grammar of disillusionment. In Spanish works on disillusionment, the concept is understood in its existential sense (Labrador 2007), or in terms of large-scale politics (Vilarós 2018), as a particular kind of post-Franco nostalgia. However, in the Basque Country, there is another way of conceptualising disillusionment, because the reform, consensus and paradigm of forgetting that are present in this nostalgia did not work here in the same way as they did in the Spanish territories. In this sense, the film *Ke arteko egunak* (1989), directed by Antxon Ezeiza (with Koldo Izagirre as scriptwriter) and *Off-eko maitasuna* (1992), directed by Izagirre himself, are clear examples of how disillusionment generated another type of cultural expression in the Basque Country. In both these works, the disillusionment derived from the Transition and Post-transition (symbolised by the year 1992) is presented in political terms; in other words, as a sense of dissatisfaction with a conflictive political situation. Similarly, the films explore the contaminated dynamics that arose in the heart of transformational and revolutionary movements, which in turn reveal other traces left by disillusionment. For the analysis, we compare these works by Izagirre with other literary productions from the same era, establishing links between them. All the elements of these works together constitute a grammar of disillusionment that is vital to understanding the political-cultural context in the Basque Country, as well as some of its artistic expressions.

**Keywords:** Koldo Izagirre, Antxon Ezeiza, Disenchantment, Basque Conflict, Basque Cinema.

**Translation:** Kristin Addis

**Date of Reception:** February 28th, 2022

**Date of Acceptance:** April 28th, 2022

**License:** CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 [Hyperlink: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.es>]

**ISSN:** 2792-677

**How to cite this article:** Sarasola, Beñat. "A different grammar or disenchantment: Koldo Izagirre's last films (1989-1992)". *ZINE: Film Research Series* 3 (2022): 5-27.

“Happy be the day I made the worst movie in the world,” Koldo Izagirre told Hasier Etxeberria in an interview for his book, *Bost idazle Hasier Etxeberriarekin berbetan* (*Five Writers Speak with Hasier Etxeberria*) (Etxeberria 2002, 73). It goes without saying that he was talking about his film *Off-eko maitasuna* (*Love Offstage*), released ten years before the interview. When Etxeberria asked why, Izagirre responded, “Because it pushed me to take writing in a completely professional and independent way” (Izagirre, in Etxeberria 2002, 74). *Off-eko maitasuna*, Izagirre’s only full-length film (other than animated films), was the symbolic end of a career that had begun twenty years earlier.

Izagirre took his first steps in filmmaking with Juanba Berasategi and Josetxo Alberdi in 1972 (Izagirre 2021a). The three had often watched Jose Antonio Sistiaga’s film *Ere erera baleibu izik subua aruaren* (*From the Moon to the Basque Country*) (1970), and Berasategi began to experiment with heating Super8 celluloid. Before long, they began working on cartoons (Berasategi and Alberdi were illustrators), and this is how the first cartoons in the Basque language came about. In 1977, Berasategi made the animated short film, *Ekialdeko izarra* (*Star of the East*), for which Izagirre wrote the script. A few years later, Josetxo Alberdi made the animated short film *Pitxu, alfer haundi* (*Pitxu the Lazy*) (1987).

From that starting point, Berasategi and Izagirre had a fruitful career and, together with Alberdi, were pioneers in Basque animation. With Berasategi responsible for the animation and Izagirre for the script, they made

short films *Fernando Amezketarra* (*Fernando of Amezketa*) (1979)<sup>1</sup> and *Kukubiltxo*, (1983), and full-length film *Kalabaza tripontzia* (*The Greedy Pumpkin*) (1985), as well as a series on bertsolaritza, Basque ad-lib verse-making, made for ETB in the 1990s (*Fernando Amezketarra, Txirrita, Lazkao Txiki*).

In the meantime, however, Izagirre met Antxon Eceiza and they cultivated another fruitful collaboration outside of animation. They first met in early 1978. Izagirre, having finished working on the literary journal *Ustela*,<sup>2</sup> began collaborating with Ramon Saizarbitoria on *Zeruko Argia*, writing a weekly column called “Baitz astea gaizki bukatu” (“I bet the week will end badly”). Not only did they publish articles with an ironic-satirical touch in the series, commenting on daily cultural and political life, but they also interviewed a number of people who were interesting but not necessarily famous at the time, for a column entitled “Pertsonaia, pertsonaiaren pertsonaltasuna, gure pertsona” (“Our personal personage’s personality”). Their interview with Eceiza appeared in the 779th issue of the journal, published on March 26, 1978, and it was at that interview that they first met.

The interview is interesting, and some of the elements examined in later research on Eceiza (Beloki 2010) already appear, including the following (Izagirre and Saizarbitoria 1978):

- The interruption of the transmission of the Basque language in his family and, as a result, the fact that Eceiza himself did not learn Basque.
- Spanish Communist Party (PCE, Partido Comunista de España) militancy in Madrid in the 1960s
- The influence of national liberation movements and Third Worldism
- The aesthetic tension between existentialism and political engagement
- The visceral patriotism sparked in him by exile
- The contradiction between revolutionary

<sup>1</sup> In this case, Ramon Etxezarreta also worked on the script with Izagirre (Junguitu 2019, 231).

<sup>2</sup> Bernardo Atxaga and Koldo Izagirre founded the journal in 1975. They published three issues. Atxaga left the group at the second issue (he went to Bilbao and founded the journal *Pott* in 1978) and Ramon Saizarbitoria joined. It was the beginning of a literary and personal relationship between Izagirre and Saizarbitoria that would last for years.

content and epic-commercial form (as it relates to the film *Mina, viento de libertad* (*Mina, Wind of Freedom*) (1976)).

From then on, Izagirre (and through him, Berasategi) began to collaborate on Eceiza's projects. In fact, Eceiza was already working on the *Ikuska* project, and Izagirre and Berasategi began participating in it as well.

In late 1973, Eceiza fled Madrid, where he had lived since 1959, because he was implicated in *Operation Ogro*, which killed Luis Carrero Blanco (Beloki 2010, 200) and, after spending some time in Paris, went into exile in Mexico. After four years there, he returned to the Basque Country in 1978, and devoted himself to theorizing about the Basque National Cinema, which was the subject of repeated debate in Basque cinema from the 1970s to the 1990s. Eceiza participated passionately in the debate, after complaining that there was a "clamor of criteria" to define the concept; for him, there were three criteria that were central to the Basque National Cinema: it should be in the Basque language, have its own identity/aesthetic, and be at the service of some political content (Beloki 2010, 253-253).

The *Ikuska* project, which produced 21 short documentary films, falls along these lines. In 1979, Eceiza made the short documentary *Erreferenduma* (*Referendum*), also known as *Ikuska o*, and set out to implement his three-pronged theory of Basque National Cinema. It is true that the *Ikuska* project went somewhat beyond a single-person project and, as a result, it cannot be strictly classified under these criteria (among other reasons, because some of these films were made in Spanish). With good reason, for Eceiza, *Ke arteko egunak* (*Days of Smoke*) (Antxon Eceiza, 1989) would be the only film to fully qualify as representing the Basque National Cinema (Beloki 2010, 259). In any case, the aim of *Ikuska* was to record on film the social reality of the Basque Country at the time, to some extent along the same lines as the Catalanian *Noticiari* series, and in response to NO-DO

(*Noticiario y Documentales*, News and Documentaries) (Beloki 2010, 306). It was produced by Bertan Filmeak, which had been founded by Eceiza, with funding from the Laboral Kutxa credit union (encouraged by Head of Advertising and Marketing Luis Iriondo) and the Faustino Orbeago Foundation.<sup>3</sup>

Eceiza did not know Basque, which was an obstacle to the realization of his conception of the Basque National Cinema. As mentioned above, it was traumatic enough for him that previous generations of his family knew the language while he did not. To overcome this problem, Izagirre was key, and it was thanks to him that Eceiza was able to carry out his plans smoothly in the *Ikuska* series and especially in *Ke arteko egunak*. Izagirre was Eceiza's right hand man in writing scripts in the 1980s, and their collaboration continued for many years.<sup>4</sup>

## Disenchantments

Theoretical works on disillusionment have been many in the Spanish context (*desencanto*, in Spanish), and they experienced a revival in 2011 when, as part of the return of the 15-M movement, a framework was developed for the review and critique of the so-called Spanish Transition. An example of this revival would be Teresa M. Vilarós' landmark book, *El mono del desencanto: una crítica cultural de la transición española (1973-1993)* (*The Monkey of Disenchantment: A Cultural Critique of the Spanish Transition (1973-1993)*), which

<sup>3</sup> Beginning with the 10<sup>th</sup> *Ikuska* documentary, the project would be financed by the Gegasa company (instead of the Orbeago Foundation), while the last two episodes would also receive funding from the Bayonne Basque Center (Beloki 2010, 313).

<sup>4</sup> For example, Izagirre asked Eceiza for help revising his Spanish texts. There is a typewritten copy of the Spanish translation of *Agirre zaharraren kartzelaldi berriak* (*Old Agirre's New Imprisonments*) (1999) in Eceiza's archives. The translation, *Nuevas prisiones del viejo Aguirre*, was published in 2001 by the Ttarttalo publishing house.

was reissued by publishing house Siglo XXI in 2018, twenty years after it was first published. It is surely the most profound work on the Hispanic understanding of disenchantment. In Spain, the concept has enjoyed exceptional fame, especially after film director Jaime Chávarri's film *El desencanto* (*Disenchantment*) (1976), with which a certain way of understanding the idea has developed. Disenchantment in a more general sense is associated with a particular Western cultural feeling or mindset, with a feeling that goes hand in hand with modernity. Many different words have been used to express this feeling since the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>5</sup> but it was Charles Baudelaire who gave it a profound poetic meaning and who radically affected later literary and cultural forms: *spleen, ennui*. In Spanish, the word is generally translated as *tedio*, but also as *hastío*.<sup>6</sup> In Basque, translator Patxi Apalategi mainly uses the concept of boredom. We understand it to be the offspring of the concept of disenchantment, but one that has other nuances in the context of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, all the more so if it is brought into the domain of the Spanish State.

Conceptualizations about disenchantment can be divided into two lines: on the one hand, those that lead to an existential disenchantment, and on the other, those that

lead to political disenchantment. In truth, most proposals tend to fall between these two lines, but the contrast between the two lines is striking. The first line could be quite directly related to the above-mentioned concepts of *spleen, ennui*. It is associated with a particular lifestyle and view of life, one that has a touch of the fatalistic, with a certain *pathos* of the art world. In connection with the myth of destruction associated with it, writer Andrés Trapiello portrays a neighbor in one of his diaries (dated 1990), an unsuccessful writer, whom he calls V., who lives in a state of intoxication and goes from the euphoria of drinking to the ensuing decadence: "Then disenchantment and ennui soon returned" (Trapiello, 2000, 253). Going beyond mere anecdote, Germán Labrador (2007) uses it as an example of a generation, relating the case of V. to that of the Panero brothers.<sup>8</sup> These are cases that lie at the crossroads of literature and real life, in which a decadent life is seen as an opportunity to create literature (bad literature, in Trapiello's opinion); hence the fascination with the disenchantment characterized by Labrador. We would have a generation that emerged during the so-called Spanish Transition, a generation that wanted to escape the gray Francoist reality by embracing the charm of literature (and art), but with the establishment of the new order (beginning in 1981), the fallacy of this plan becomes apparent: "With the passage of time, the mortality, illness, old age and misery that affect a large part of this generation come to highlight the falsity of anti-deterministic doctrines and finally recognize reality as an undeniable truth"<sup>9</sup> (Labrador 2007).

The other distinct line of disenchantment has a more political slant, and is directly linked to the crisis of revolutionary political projects in the leftist tradition that took place in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Generally speaking, the idea of revolution that followed the 1968 cycle of struggle and had expanded from the French Revolution

<sup>5</sup> Theorizations about melancholy would likewise be related to this. To explore its relationship with film, see Santos Zunzunegui's *Bajo el signo de la melancolía* (2017).

<sup>6</sup> The word *hastío* is used in Luis Martínez de Merlo's translation of *Les Fleurs du mal*.

<sup>7</sup> "Luego no tardaba en volver la desilusión y el tedio."

<sup>8</sup> In any case, the film *El desencanto* does not belong in the purely existential line of disenchantment, even though in a rather subtle way, its political background is also quite remarkable.

<sup>9</sup> "Con el paso de los años, la mortalidad, la enfermedad, la vejez y la miseria que afecta a una gran parte de esta generación viene a señalar la falsedad de las doctrinas antideterministas y acaba por reconocer la realidad como una verdad innegable."



to the Russian Revolution was gradually weakening. That cycle of struggle did not overthrow the regime, and some thinkers on the left (Theodor Adorno, for example), had theorized several years earlier about the difficulty of overthrowing post-industrial capitalism.<sup>10</sup> The most powerful symbolic event of this crisis was the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989; the collapse of the Soviet Union and its associated political space seemed to confirm the indisputable victory of capitalism.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the debate that arose around disenchantment in Spain was in full swing in the period from 1968 to 1989, and in the political sense, it was bathed in skepticism about the political revolution that was intensifying at that time. Of course, another key event to take into consideration in the case of Spain was the death of Franco in 1975, and the political reform that followed.<sup>12</sup> Claudio Magris described the atmosphere of the early 1990s quite well in his article, "Utopía y desencanto" ("Utopia and disenchantment") (2001). The article was originally written in 1995 and, in addition to criticizing declarations of the end of Fukuyama-style History, it tried to create a space between the absolute victory of liberalism that that entailed and totalitarianism. "The end of the myth of the Revolution and the Great Plan should give greater specific strength to the ideals of justice than that myth had strongly expressed, though corrupting them with its absolutization and instrumentalization"<sup>13</sup> (Magris 2001, 10). Magris' proposal is supposedly based on a contradiction, that is, on a combination of utopia and disenchantment. On the one hand, to maintain the impetus for change proclaimed by utopia, and on the other, to consider what disenchantment tells us, that is, that there is no Second Coming and no Messiah: "Utopía and disenchantment, rather than being in opposition, must support and correct each other"<sup>14</sup> (Magris 2001, 11).

Thus, the issue of disenchantment, in this political sense, goes beyond the Spanish con-

text; it is at the root of political thought in Western culture. However, it is also true that it took on its own profile in Spain, mainly due to the aforementioned supposed turmoil of the end of the Franco regime and subsequent so-called Transition. In any case, disenchantment in Spain took on two quite different, even antithetical political meanings. On the one hand, to refer to an inherent political-cultural influence, "not so much because of the transition to a democratic-liberal regime, as because of the very fact of the end of the Franco dictatorship"<sup>15</sup> (Vilarós 2018, 60). That is, this disenchantment would be associated with a Spanish peculiarity, with

<sup>10</sup> In the case of Adorno himself, the controversy he entered surrounding the student rebel movement before his death is quite significant. In the face of the enthusiasm for the movement expressed by his Frankfurt School companion Marcuse, Adorno took a much more skeptical position (Adorno and Marcuse 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Hence, for example, the success in the 1990s of theorizations along the lines of Francis Fukuyama's book, *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), which predicted the complete victory of the democratic-liberal regime with no alternatives.

<sup>12</sup> In any case, with an eye to periodization, we will favor Vilarós' proposal and set the main break in 1973, with the assassination of Carrero Blanco. In fact, this break allows us to take into consideration a number of milestone events that occurred between 1973 and 1975, in particular, the executions toward the end of that period of anti-Franco militants Salvador Puig Antich, Humberto Baena, Ramón García, Angel Otaegi, Juan Paredes and José Luis Sánchez.

<sup>13</sup> "El fin del mito de la Revolución y el Gran Proyecto debería, al revés, dar mayor fuerza concreta a los ideales de justicia que aquel mito había expresado con potencia, aunque pervirtiéndolos con su absolutización y su instrumentalización."

<sup>14</sup> "Utopía y desencanto, aunque contrapuestos, deben someterse y corregirse mutuamente.": English translation from Bini, Daniela, "Carlo Michelstaedter Today: The Burden of Truth and the Proliferation of Rhetoric", in Valerio Cappozzo, ed. *Storia e storiografia de Carlo Michelstaedter*. The University of Mississippi, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> "Más que por la transición a un régimen democrático-liberal, por el mismo hecho del fin de la dictadura franquista."

Francoism, and with the special type of nostalgia created by its end. One of the more obvious examples of this would be the film *El desencanto*. Released in 1976, members of the Panero family express sincere nostalgia for a lost past, as shown so clearly in the emblematic sentence spoken by Michi Panero, “we were so happy.” But the nostalgia that this line creates is, in fact, more complex than it seems, according to Vilarós. The end of Francoism led to the repression of the recent past, in a psychoanalytic sense, which led to consensus, reform and forgetfulness (Vilarós 2018, 47). The transition, then, is understood as a great abstinence syndrome of this repression (*the Big Monkey*), which would, in fact, activate a special form of disenchantment (Vilarós 2018, 311). The disenchantment would not arise from some lost great Francoist past,<sup>16</sup> but from the repression brought about by the end of Francoism.

It must not be forgotten, however, that in parallel, another kind of disenchantment unfolded in the Spanish State, though research on the issue often overlooks it (even sometimes due to the power of the film *El desencanto*). This disenchantment is directly related to the more general Western disenchantment mentioned above, but includes the effect of the impossibility of the revolution, and in that particular context the feeling deepened, born of the absence of a rupture at the end of Francoism. That is, there is another type of disenchantment that arose in leftist revolutionary

movements (ones to the left of the PCE, Partido Comunista de España (Spanish Communist Party)) and in peripheral independence movements (specifically around ETA, Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque Homeland and Freedom, a Basque separatist organization) in the Basque Country). This disenchantment has nothing to do with post-Franco psychoanalytic repression; on the contrary, instead of embracing consensus, reform and forgetfulness, it will promulgate struggle, rupture and memory. That is to say that disenchantment essentially pertained to the reformist and institutionalist form taken by the Transition, and was reflected in many political and cultural movements, even though it has been repressed by many Spanish historiographies and cultural research studies. This disenchantment would have manifested itself in many different ways in the late 1980s and 1990s. Some of these ways led to despair and a political-cultural retreat, others stubbornly adhered to revolutionary ethics and practice (as in the case of ETA), while yet others stuck to other paths that fell between these two options. In any case, all shared the same disenchantment, which had little to do with existential disenchantment or nostalgic-paradoxical disenchantment.

## Disenchantment in the Basque Country

Because of all this, it would be inaccurate to look at the manifestations of disenchantment in the Basque Country between 1973 and 1992<sup>17</sup> from a purely Spanish point of view. The political context of the Basque Country cannot be reduced to that of the other areas of the Spanish State during this period, and as such, cultural manifestations related to disenchantment have other aspects. Sociologist and historian Emmanuel Rodríguez talks about “the Basque exception” to explain this peculiarity (during that period of time)<sup>18</sup>: “In

<sup>16</sup> This type of disenchantment would be very residual at that time, reduced to a far-right minority and culturally irrelevant.

<sup>17</sup> The starting point of this periodization would be Carrero Blanco's death, while its end would be marked by the release of the most recent film considered in this study, *Off-eko maitasuna*. The year 1992 was another landmark year in the Spanish State, and a year that is also quite relevant to our subject: the Barcelona Olympics and Seville Expo '92.

<sup>18</sup> Another exception would be Catalonia, though he did not think it had the same significant political consequences as the Basque Country (Rodríguez 2015, 309).

the Basque Autonomous Community and in Navarre – the southern Basque Country or Hegoalde – the political pacts that ended in the 1978 Constitution and subsequent statutes of autonomy did not achieve the pacification and social consensus achieved in the rest of the State”<sup>19</sup> (Rodríguez 2015, 309). This anomaly spread disenchantment with the Transition throughout the Basque Country; although in 1977-1978 in the other territories of the State, the possibility of any revolutionary project had already been ruled out, in the Basque Country this possibility continued to exist “until well into the 1980s” (Rodríguez 2015, 310). Therefore, Rodríguez believes that we can talk about the “Basque revolution” (in quotation marks) in the period from 1976 to 1982 (Rodríguez 2015, 311). In left-wing movements in the Basque Country, then, disenchantment with the Transition did not come to an end, at least not until several years later. However, a new political disenchantment began to emerge in the 1980s, when in the Basque Country as well the opportunity for revolution was frustrated. That disenchantment, which is also part of the dynamics of revolutionary movements, will be essential in order to understand various cultural manifestations in the Basque Country in the 1980s and 1990s, including Koldo Izagirre’s works.

Juan Gorostidi, in his book *Zazpigarren heriotza* (*The Seventh Death* (2016)), which is based on personal experiences, also places the beginning of disenchantment with political struggle in the same period in the early 1980s mentioned by Rodríguez. The movement against the Lemoiz nuclear power plant culminated in the successful march in the summer of 1979, but subsequent political actions, especially the campaign of disobedience against Iberduero, failed, and brought about the weakening of the popular movement; and to the weakening caused by that failure we must add ETA’s phagocytic strategy (Gorostidi 2016, 51). Gorostidi left active

political militancy in 1980, but this feeling of disenchantment was not limited to his own personal experience.

Frustration and despair were evident in many in the 1980s: we could not understand the demobilization that took place after we stirred things up in the latter half of the 1970s; we didn’t know what to think about the removal and destruction of those who were five or ten years younger than us – all the drugs were allegedly a result of State malice – there was also the suspicion that we were going to do everything (Gorostidi 2016, 93).

At the same time, we must not forget one of the key events of the Basque left during this period: the division between ETA military (m) and ETA political-military (pm). Although they had separated in 1974, the effect of the division lasted a long time and had a profound effect on the next generations of the Basque left. One need only look at the results in the 1979 elections of the Herri Batasuna (HB, Popular Unity) and Basque Left parties, which were their political manifestations, to see the strength of this broad political sector: combined, they won almost as many as the 275,000 votes that the PNV (Partido Nacionalista Vasco, Basque Nationalist Party) received (Rodríguez 2015, 312). However, there was a growing rift between these two political traditions. In 1982, ETA (pm) laid down its arms and disbanded, and the Basque Left party ended up joining the PSE (Partido Socialista de Euskadi, Socialist Party of the Basque Country) in 1993. During this period, other political traditions, such as ETA (m) and HB, did not renounce political rupture, even though from the paradigm of revolutionary violence at the beginning of

<sup>19</sup> “Ni en Vascongadas, ni en Navarra – Euskal Herria sur o Hegoalde – los pactos políticos que concluyeron en la Constituyente de 1978 y en los posteriores estatutos de autonomía lograron la pacificación y el consenso social que se logró en el resto del Estado.”

ETA, violence had come to be understood as an element of pressure for political negotiation.<sup>20</sup> All of these processes, together with the destruction of the international Soviet bloc, spread the disenchantment of the revolution in many left-wing sectors of the Basque Country, and *Ke arteko egunak* and *Off-eko maitasuna* are both examples of this.

## Koldo Izagirre in the 1980s

Gorostidi is more or less a member of Izagirre's generation (Izagirre is three years older) and they were raised in similar geographical environments, Gorostidi in Errenteria and Izagirre in Pasai Antxo. Izagirre's full name appears in the acknowledgements in Gorostidi's book. They come from different political traditions, Gorostidi from autonomous movements, and Izagirre from the so-called "nationalist left" of the 1970s.<sup>21</sup> However, the highly marked political atmosphere that Gorostidi characterizes and the disenchantment(s) caused by it are also evident in Izagirre's works from the 1980s and early 1990s. Izagirre himself has often said that his work at that time was quite political because "times were like that" (2021b). His political-literary education was also profoundly influenced by various revolutionary political examples.

<sup>20</sup> The beginning of this path is marked by the 1989 Algiers negotiations. Although these negotiations failed, for the first time, ETA and HB opened political negotiation with the Spanish government (Felipe González's PSOE, Partido Socialista Obrero Español, Spanish Socialist Workers' Party), whose aim was not to overthrow the '78 Regime with revolutionary violence.

<sup>21</sup> At that time, the broad movement that included both ETA military and ETA political-military was known as the "nationalist left"; that is, both of these traditions were included in the denomination. Later, as is well known, following the illegalization of HB and its successors, it has been used to refer only to a political framework along the lines of Batasuna.

<sup>22</sup> Izagirre, together with Ramon Saizarbitoria, co-founded this magazine in which, among others, Juanba Berasategi, Gotzon Egia, Joxan Elozegi, Ramon Etxezarreta and Joxean Muñoz took part.

What do you want me to say? I was fifteen in 1968. Txabi Etxebarrieta was dead, Sarasqueta sentenced to death, the Burgos Trial two years later... all of that had a direct impact on my education. And Che Guevara, the Bolivian guerillas, the Vietnamese... they shaped my whole adolescence. The world placed me there and I still believe in those ideals today (Izagirre, in Etxeberria 2002, 110).

Politics affected everything at that time; this is how Izagirre explains, for example, the break-up of the group that emerged upon the return of the literary journal *Oh! Euzkadi*,<sup>22</sup> which lasted from 1979 to 1983: "In general, politics in the Basque Country had a direct impact on friends, circles of friends, couples... the same thing happened to us. Fatigue is also a difficult political process" (Izagirre, in Etxeberria 2002, 92). Izagirre links the end of the journal to a disagreement over an ETA action: "That was the excuse to think about what we needed to do there, was it possible to write about the milis and the polimilis? It was suggested that we publish an issue about violence, but only one article was submitted. No one wanted to start writing about that" (Izagirre, in Etxeberria 2002, 93). The break-up of the *Oh! Euzkadi* group and the end of the journal itself, however, sent Izagirre into a profound literary crisis, the biggest crisis he had ever suffered.

I spent a pretty long time, from 1984 to 1989, with no desire to write about it, in a profession that needed me night and day and in which I saw no bright future. But I didn't have the courage to break the daily dynamic. I was not happy at all, I spent some tough years looking at it from all sides (...) My book of poems, *Balizko erroten Erresuma* (*The Kingdom of Potential Mills*), marks the beginning of the end of this crisis, that's where my adolescence ended or, as I said, the prehistory of the writer Izagirre (Izagirre, in Etxeberria 2002, 118).

This crisis is particularly relevant because it came about just before the two films under

consideration. Izagirre marks 1989 as the beginning of the end of his crisis, and it was in that year that *Ke arteko egunak* was released. This is not to say that these films would bring about the end of the crisis; on the contrary, it can be said that they are the most obvious manifestations of it, and the ones that will lead him to straighten out the direction of his literary and professional career.<sup>23</sup> In any case, in the midst of this crisis, he published *Mendekuak* (*Acts of Revenge*), a collection of short stories, which is interesting in order to understand Izagirre's later literary and film production. Paradoxically, neither the writer nor the critics gave any particular importance to the book, and it has remained in the shadow of several other books.

It was Izagirre's first collection of short stories<sup>24</sup> and in the reviews when it came out, one of the main features of the stories was their political profile, especially as it related to the recent history of the Basque Country (Aldazabal 1988; Mendiguren 1988). The back cover mentioned a topic in the criticism of the time: that Basque writers avoided the subject of the political situation. *Mendekuak*, then, was a book that went against this supposed trend, because in most of the stories in the book it was "the raw material and the subject" (Izagirre 1987). Political conflict is at the heart of almost every story: "these stories are steeped in the very recent history of the Basque Country" (Aldazabal 1988). When the book was published, the author himself pointed out that the book was made up of "small acts of revenge on revenge" (Izagirre, in Mendiguren 1988). Some of them show clashes and conflicts among members of the militancy (*Babarruna* (*Bean*), *Kristal txehetua* (*Broken Glass*)), often linked to a lack of understanding between different generations. Of particular interest are the stories *Kristal txehetua* and *Saturren eskuak* (*Satur's Hands*), which together form a diptych. In the former, the narrator is a militant girl, who tells about the dinner and poster preparation of a mili-

tant group the night before in an association. Satur is the leader of this group, older than the new militants (including the narrator), and whose political distance from them stands out. He describes the impetuous actions of the young people (in the last demonstration one of the young people broke the glass window at a bank) as "adventuring," and calls for more cynical behavior in the name of pragmatism. In fact, along with putting up posters for their own political group, he encourages them to take down those of other groups. The narrator states that this is not democratic, and Satur responds cynically. It is a story with an obvious ironic touch, and critiques the internal tensions and debates within the militant group. The second story is about Satur's arrest. Camouflaged police officers surprise him in the shower at home. At first he tricks them and manages to escape naked from the balcony. However, the police have taken over the whole town and arrest him shortly.

It is appropriate to link these two stories to Izagirre's later film production. In particular, the conflicts inside the militancy in *Kristal txehetua* would become the main topic of *Off-eko maitasuna*, but they also appear in *Ke arteko egunak*. A stiff militancy and an ironic distance from epic narratives are found in many of Izagirre's works from that time, which are steeped in political conflict. These internal conflicts do not appear in the stories with the same rawness found in *Off-eko maitasuna*, but it can be said that these stories are important precedents for the film. The stories also show

<sup>23</sup> Remember that it was after *Off-eko maitasuna* that he started writing professionally. His audiovisual works that follow this film would remain in the background, and he would also set aside the professional career that was launched within this framework (in the Trenbideko Filmak production company). In fact, until that point, filmmaking was his livelihood.

<sup>24</sup> He had previously published some books of an experimental nature and consisting of various narratives, *Zergatik bai* (*Just Because*) and *Gauzetan* (*In Things*), but these could not be said to be collections of stories in the strict sense.

the rawness of the violence of reality, its painful and bitter side (Aldazabal 1988), and this aspect was also developed in both films. Some of the stories in *Mendekuak* can be considered fragments, as if they were parts of a longer narrative; the author appears to be making narrative attempts, trying out different styles and types writing, and the unclassical and not-too-classical nature of the stories caused misunderstandings in their time: “More than one person has told me that these are not stories” (Mendiguren 1988). In this sense, these stories can be understood as the seeds of other stories that would come later. Within the narrative, one can find the seed of the books that depict the return of the character Metxa, *Metxa esaten dioten agirretar baten ibili herrenak* (*The Lame Wanderings of an Agirre Called Metxa*) (1991) and *Agirre zaharraren kartzelaldi berriak* (2001),<sup>25</sup> although a significant turnaround is also felt in these works, in particular because they move away from raw realism and create a new voice, even though the thematic context is similar. Taking a bigger leap, it is interesting to read the trio of books *Sua nahi Mr. Churchill?* (*Need a Light, Mr. Churchill?*) (2005), *Egarri egunak portualdean* (*Thirsty Days at the Harbor*) (2011) and *Franco hil zuten egunak* (*The Days They Killed Franco*) (2016) in comparison with *Mendekuak*, to see to what extent these three books expand the various issues and proposals that appeared in *Mendekuak*.

In any case, the works that are closest to *Mendekuak* in both time and aesthetically are the two films under consideration here. The relationship is not only thematic and related to the political dilemmas in question, but also formal. In this case, however, it can be said that the relationship has come and gone.

<sup>25</sup> The story *Iparragirre rides again* in *Mendekuak* especially can be considered the forerunner of the character Agirre. Both show a willingness to break the veracity of the historical narrative by using anachronism, and the destructive and iconoclastic attitude of the Iparragirre in the story shapes the character of Agirre.

Additionally, the presence of cinematic writing in this book is noteworthy, as it is rare in Izagirre’s literature; he later used other forms of writing. In addition to the two stories we highlight, this tendency is also evident in the story *Itxialdia* (*Closure*). When we talk about cinematic writing, with the strict use of external focusing, we are essentially talking about the presence of ellipses and the use of a script-like form. The similarity to script-writing is especially noticeable in *Saturren eskuak*, where we find sequence titles, scene descriptions, characters and dialogues. In any case, in other stories as well, telegraphic writing which is common in screenwriting descriptions, predominates, seasoned with precise external focus. Additionally, the use of ellipsis in Izagirre’s literature is a feature that has been much highlighted, to the point of becoming almost topical, and a source of potential difficulty in his literature: “In general, the opinion that has prevailed among my readers, or the one that has reached my ears at least, is that I am difficult. Perhaps because of the ellipses I mentioned earlier” (Izagirre, in Etxeberria 2002, 126). In general, Izagirre has been quite reluctant to acknowledge the potential influence of cinema on his literature; for him, the two occupations have been separate, though he has acknowledged that it has had the greatest effect on the formulation of dialogues (Izagirre, in Etxeberria 2002, 125; Izagirre 2021). However, in an interview with Etxeberria, he did not rule out the possibility that the use of ellipsis may also have an effect:

It’s not essential to have worked [in film] for it to have an effect, but to tell the truth, I did a lot of exercises at one time, when I was filming with Antton Eceiza. We were always in favor of conciseness and the inclusion of additional information in dialogues. It’s likely, yes, that I have been influenced by film. But I’ve always been a fan of ellipsis; I cannot show what seems obvious to me (Izagirre, in Etxeberria 2002, 125).

Thus, the three aspects mentioned above represent Izagirre's approach to cinema in the 1980s. As stated, Izagirre's screenwriting work was abundant in the 1980s, and he immersed himself in the audiovisual field to the point of creating the Trenbideko Filmak production company together with Luis Goya. The impact of this approach to audiovisuals is evident in these stories, and paves the way for *Ke arteko egunak* and *Off-eko maitasuna*.

### *Ke arteko egunak* (1989)

As we have seen, Izagirre and Eceiza had been collaborating since the time of the *Ikuska* films, and during this time they also filmed a series entitled "Euskara eta kirolak" ("The Basque Language and Sports") (1980):<sup>26</sup> *Euskara eta arrauna* (*The Basque Language and Rowing*), *Euskara eta mendia* (*The Basque Language and Mountaineering*), and *Euskara eta futbola* (*The Basque Language and Soccer*). It was a project funded by soccer player José Luis Iribar in his retirement, to show the reality of Basque sports and promote the Basque language. It is relevant to mention this series because some locations in the short film *Euskara eta arrauna* include a picture of the world constructed by Izagirre's literature (especially that starting with the story collection *Sua nahi Mr. Churchill?*): the sea, the coast and the area around Pasaia (the port, the estuary, Jaizkibel). The locations in *Ke arteko egunak* come from the same world (Pasai Antxo, Pasai San Pedro, Trintxerpe), indicating that Izagirre's involvement went beyond the script and that he was also involved in siting (Izagirre 2021b).

*Ke arteko egunak* is considered to be Eceiza's most personal work. The screenplay was credited to both Eceiza and Izagirre, however the core of the story was Eceiza's.<sup>27</sup> It was Izagirre's responsibility to adapt the idea for the screen together with Eceiza and translate it into Basque. The parallels between the main character in the film, Pedro Sansinenea (Pedro

Armendáriz, Jr.) and Eceiza's biography are obvious. It is no coincidence that Eceiza's second surname was Sansinenea. Sansinenea left the Basque Country during the Franco years (leaving behind his wife, Koro, and daughter, Paula) and settled in Mexico, and the film tells the story of the rift caused by his return to the Basque Country. His daughter is in prison and he decides to return to the land of his birth after many years, having recently broken up with Blanca, his girlfriend in Mexico. In the Basque Country, he finds a violent social and political situation, and his resultant feeling of suffocation intersects his own existential suffocation. As mentioned above, Eceiza himself returned to the Basque Country in 1978, after having lived in Mexico for five years. However, the differences between Eceiza and the protagonist of the film are also noteworthy: Eceiza had to go into exile for events directly related to political militancy, while Sansinenea's profile is not so politicized.<sup>28</sup>

Politically, Sansinenea falls between the two sides: on the one hand, there are militants from the nationalist left, including poet Kepa (Iro Landaluze) and his circle (in addition to his daughter in prison); on the other, the old friends he left behind in the Basque Country, who now stand apart from the nationalist left and even from patriotism. Some of the latter are now "old friends in government," and Sansinenea will need to talk to them so that his daughter can receive prison

<sup>26</sup> Other members of the *Ikuska* group took part as well: Xabier Aguirresarobe, José Luis Ejea, Daniel Gil, Bixente Karda, Alberto Magán, Joxean Muñoz and Eduardo Urkia (Beloki 2010, 374).

<sup>27</sup> Izagirre also appears in the credits as the "Basque language manager."

<sup>28</sup> In this regard, Beloki (2010, 382) makes a significant point: that some studies and reviews of the film state that Sansinenea is a political exile even though he is not. Confusing the character in the film with director Eceiza, they attribute this characteristic of the latter to the former.

benefits. One of the highlights of the film is when Sansinenea arranges to play a game of soccer with his old friends. The meeting ends bitterly, with Sansinenea arguing about politics with his old friend Arruti (who belongs to the PSOE). This last point also comes from Eceiza's biography: some of his companions who started out in the communist militancy ended up in the PSOE, while he himself turned to the nationalist left; the clearest example of this would be Enrique Múgica Herzog, Eceiza's close childhood friend, who was the Minister of Justice in the Spanish Government when the film was released.

The stifling political atmosphere in the film directly affects the characters, their nature and their behavior. It is no coincidence, then, that researchers on the film have turned to the concept of disenchantment to characterize the film (Angulo et al. 2009; Beloki 2010, 248). More specifically, Beloki states that the disenchantment that appears in *Ke arteko egunak* is "with the democratic transition in the Basque Country"<sup>29</sup> (Beloki 2010, 258) (Fig. 1).

Sansinenea is a character in the middle of a life crisis. Reviews have emphasized the "uprooted nature" of the character (Angulo et al. 2009, 87), his "disenchanted" and "skeptical" look (Angulo et al. 2009, 85). Having failed in love, Sansinenea is deeply lonely when he returns to the Basque Country, and his loneliness only continues once he arrives. The ex-wife he left in the Basque Country wants nothing to do with him, and asks only that he use old contacts to get their daughter out of prison. Except for his daughter in prison and his old friends (in life and politics), an atmosphere of abandonment prevails around him: he lives in a hotel, constantly needs alcohol, and goes out only to morning dance halls. The sequence that best represents this

lonely and empty existential situation is the last in the film. Sansinenea's daughter is coming home from prison and a welcome has been arranged for her at the North Station in San Sebastian.<sup>30</sup> Immediately, however, the police set upon and disperse the welcome party. The demonstrators run away from the station however they can: some up the stairs toward the neighborhood of Egia, others across the bridge toward the city center. Kepa takes Sansinenea to the station from his hotel, and they watch the chaos from a distance.

SANSINENEA: Why are you doing this? Individual dignity or collective?

KEPA: I value your friendship, that's all.

SANSINENEA: I value your friendship too.

Then Sansinenea, unexpectedly but decisively, starts running in the opposite direction to the protesters, toward the area held by the police, toward the station. He pushes forward through demonstrators being beaten and the smoke of tear gas, until he reaches the main entrance of the station. He sees a police officer ripping up a poster in support of his daughter and his ex-wife showing her identification to another police officer so she can be reunited with her daughter. Through the station window he sees the mother and daughter hugging each other. Instead of going into the station, he turns and crosses the bridge: the road is deserted and he makes his way to the city center. From there he will cross paths with protesters coming to oppose the police, again moving in the opposite direction and alone. And the film ends there (Fig. 2).

This sequence is an excellent depiction of the rift that is opening between the protagonist and the world, not only with relatives but also with everyone else. And the dark and misty lighting that pervades the entire film – perfectly represented by the smoke of the last sequence – only deepens the atmosphere of loneliness and isolation.

Taking the story as a whole, the only thing that breaks Sansinenea's loneliness is his re-

<sup>29</sup> "Sobre la Transición democrática en el País Vasco."

<sup>30</sup> These local references are extradiegetic. The story is not set in any specific town.



relationship with Kepa and Lurdes. Immediately after arriving in the Basque Country, Sansinenea is half drunk and wandering at night, and Kepa drives him to his ex-wife's house. His wife refuses to take him in and they return to Kepa's car, ending up in a gastronomic association. This is where the relationship between Sansinenea and Kepa begins, and before long Sansinenea will also meet Kepa's girlfriend, Lurdes (Elena Lizarralde), falling into a strange love triangle.

The film, then, is linked to an existential disenchantment in Sansinenea's cracked sense of life. The connection is not fully consistent with this conceptualization, unlike in the strict existential sense of disenchantment, because there is no malady caused by literature or art in the film. Though Labrador (2007) takes this existential disenchantment as a literary excess, literature and art have no responsibility for Sansinenea's internal rupture. The existential crisis embodied by Sansinenea, however, is fraught with disenchantment, both in his use of alcohol and in his difficulty with human relationships. The origin of this disenchantment therefore lies elsewhere, specifically, in the social and political aspect. In this sense, what we find in *Ke arteko egunak* is a special junction between existential disenchantment and political disenchantment. On the one hand, there is the existential gap that comes with the return to one's homeland, but at the same time, disenchantment with the political situation in the Basque Country in the 1980s is also very much present. This political disenchantment has nothing to do with the disenchantment based on repression that Vilarós so accurately theorized, but rather reflects revolutionary impotence. The epic of the revolution is hidden from Kepa and his circle, an old sense of utopia as Magris would say, but this does not mean that the political interpretation of the film can be limited to that possibility. Indeed, on the one hand, the character of Sansinenea reveals a deep despair over the

social and political situation in the Basque Country. In one of the sequences, Lurdes is driving Sansinenea in her car through protesters and barricades on a day when there is a strike. Sansinenea says, "Fuck this! I bring nothing but disaster. I can't live or love in this town either." On the other hand, the choice to fight symbolized by Kepa has its counterpart in Sansinenea's crisis with the character of Lurdes and in the political issues that Sansinenea himself discusses (Fig. 3).

When *Ke arteko egunak* was first released, its reception was controversial. It competed in the Official Selection of the San Sebastian International Film Festival, where it won the San Sebastian Award. Although it was praised in some reviews, others criticized it harshly, mainly because of the film's political profile: "close to nationalist radicalism", "close to Basque independentist radicalism," and so on (cited in Beloki 2010, 385-386). Eceiza immediately denied these interpretations: "political negotiation is not one of the central topics in *Ke arteko egunak* (...) it is a documentary about contemporary suffering, which narrates the existential trajectory of the characters, rather than their political trajectory" (cited in Beloki 2010, 386). This quotation clearly shows the distinction between the existential and political lines, but the film's critical reception read it primarily as a political film, and specifically as a film that supported the ideology and political project of the nationalist left.<sup>31</sup> As mentioned by Izagirre (2021b), the marked political profile of director Eceiza condemned the film to being interpreted in that sense. Eceiza's personal and political career, from Madrid

<sup>31</sup> It is quite strange from the present point of view that Eceiza's apology refers to political negotiation. In 1989, negotiations took place in Algiers between ETA and the Spanish Government, and this context led some critics to read the film in that strict sense, even though there is no mention of it in the film. The context of the film's reception is a good example of the kind of crooked reading that overwhelms the artwork itself.

to the Basque Country and from communism to Basque independence, was quite problematic for many critics and intellectuals in the Spanish State and the film was therefore politically marked from the beginning.

Another part of the criticism would unleash actual persecution against the film, a real witch hunt, because its focus was concentrated on the most superficial part of the film, emphasizing its strictly political aspect, its positive view of patriotic ideology, and because it was incapable of discovering and accepting the film's undeniable cinematic values (Angulo et al. 2009, 89).<sup>32</sup>

Driven by this reception, the political profile of the film has been exaggerated more than it should have been. Nevertheless, as Angulo et al. (2009, 85) correctly point out, the strongest and most detailed storyline of the film is related to politics, compared to the love story, which is notably weaker. In any case, taking note of its reception, it is clear that the film having a political profile was considered problematic enough for a good number of critics, all the more so if it were to spread an allegedly pro-independence nationalist ideology. Eceiza's defense was to soften this political profile, emphasizing the existential side of the film. The cultural context, which broadened the dichotomous and simplistic way of un-

derstanding the relationship between politics and art, is directly related to the forgetfulness that prevailed in the second part of the Transition (1982-1992) (Vilarós 2018), to the so-called Culture of Transition (Martínez et al. 2012), to the fetishized apolitical culture and, in general, and to the late influence of French structuralism and its immanentist basis on the Spanish cultural framework, starting in the 1970s (Nieto 2015, 147).

As the most rigorous research on the film (Angulo et al. 2009; Beloki 2010) has well explained, the film moves in a dialectic between two positions: on the one hand, Sansinenea, who has a skeptical view of the struggle that goes hand in hand with disenchantment; and on the other hand, Kepa, who puts commitment to the people above individual commitment, with an heroic sacrifice.<sup>33</sup> The film does not favor either of the two extremes – apparently “Eceiza, even with contradictions, seems to be in favor of both” (Beloki 2010, 388) – and the lack of resolution of the contradiction in fact leads to the atmosphere of disenchantment. In Eceiza's own words: “Politics have entered our lives. Not Parliamentary politicking, but politics that mean death, prison... from one side or the other. Nowhere in the film does it say that one side is completely right”<sup>34</sup> (Beloki 2010, 387). The film sketches a continuity between the Spanish Civil War and the Basque Country in the 1980s: as prologue and epilogue, Sansinenea appears as a child, waiting at the train station for his father, who is being taken away by two Civil Guards. This image merges with the end of the film, where, as noted above, the same image appears: this time he waits for his daughter at the station, but on the other side of the window, and does not manage to reach her. In this sense, skepticism over the perpetuation of the fierce conflict prevails in Sansinenea's consciousness and, in addition to the fate of the fight (symbolized by Kepa), and perhaps more importantly, it is also a film about the futility of the suffering caused

<sup>32</sup> “Otra parte de la crítica desataría una verdadera persecución contra la película, una auténtica caza de brujas, al concentrar su visión en la parte más superficial de ésta, destacando su vertiente estrictamente política, su visión positiva de la ideología abertzale, y al mostrarse incapaz de descubrir y de reconocer sus innegables valores cinematográficos.”

<sup>33</sup> Critics have pointed out that Kepa is the name Pedro in Basque, and that somehow, the two characters, dialectically, synthesize Eceiza's own character and point of view (Angulo et al. 2009; Beloki 2010).

<sup>34</sup> La política se ha metido en nuestras vidas. No la politiquería de los Parlamentos, sino la política que significa muerte, cárcel... de un bando y de otro. Nunca se dice en la película que toda la razón la tenga uno solo.

by the struggle. According to Beloki (2010, 392), there is no longer any trace of the existentialism from early in Eceiza's career, "The existentialism of the film *Las secretas intenciones* (*Secret Intentions*) has disappeared, making way for politics.<sup>35</sup> Also, the film ultimately rules in favor of "the struggle, commitment and collective dignity"<sup>36</sup> (Beloki 2010, 392). This, however, is not a solution that the film as a whole offers, but rather an initiative undertaken by Kepa, which leads to the break-up of his relationship with Lurdes. In truth, it is a film that offers no solution (synthesis), one that reveals a blind social and political failure that is well represented by disenchantment. The ending also offers no clear resolution, because the character is as isolated, and the political conflict as complicated, as they were at the beginning. To fully see that *Ke arteko egunak* still has a noticeable existential charge, it should be viewed in parallel with *Off-eko maitasuna* (Fig. 4).

### *Off-eko maitasuna* (1992)

Koldo Izagirre and Usoa Urbietta met during the filming of *Ke arteko egunak*, for which Urbietta was working as film secretary. Urbietta had experience in the world of cinema, having worked as co-scriptwriter on *Hama-seigarrenean aidanez* (*Apparently, the Sixteenth Time*) (1985) and *Ehun metro* (*Hundred Meter*) (1986), among other films (Nerekan and Fresneda 2017), and she had a direct relationship with the network of the world of Madrid cinema (Izagirre 2021b).

Between the two of them, they wrote the script, and Izagirre was the director. *Off-eko maitasuna* was the first (and last) full-length film that Izagirre directed. The producer was also the same as for *Ke arteko egunak*: Izagirre's colleague from *Trenbideko Filmak*, Luis Goya. Thus, the two films were closely linked in the technical and production sense; as we will see, this was true in terms of the script as well, although there were key dif-

ferences. Allowing these similarities and differences to seed is essential to expanding and making more complicated the grammar of disenchantment.

Compared with *Ke arteko egunak*, *Off-eko maitasuna* is a much lesser known and more forgotten film. Until the release of *Aupa Etxebeste!* (*Hello, Etxebeste!*) in 2005, there was a big gap in Basque language cinema. In the thirteen years between *Off-eko maitasuna* and *Aupa Etxebeste!*, *Urte ilunak* (*Dark Years*) (1993) was the only film made entirely in Basque (Nerekan and Fresneda 2017, 272).<sup>37</sup> The reception for *Off-eko maitasuna* was also very cold,<sup>38</sup> with a polemic when it was newly released sparked by *Egin* newspaper's film critic Mikel Insausti. In general, it is a film that is hardly mentioned in later research on Basque cinema, and when it is mentioned, its "poor transcendence" (de Pablo, 1996, 119) is often highlighted. However, it was a milestone in Izagirre's career; as stated above, from that point on, he stopped making films (or slowed down, at least) and decided to devote himself entirely to literature.

As in the case of *Ke arteko egunak*, *Off-eko maitasuna* can be considered a realistic and urban film. This is not a trivial matter; in fact, as Izagirre would point out several years later in his book *Gure zinemaren historia petrala* (*The Insolent History of Our Cinema*), there had been a strong trend in Basque culture toward *Costumbrismo*, and Izagirre wanted to avoid

<sup>35</sup> "El existencialismo de *Las secretas intenciones* ha desaparecido dando paso a la política."

<sup>36</sup> "Aboga por la lucha, por el compromiso y por la dignidad colectiva."

<sup>37</sup> Film production fell in the 1990s in the Basque Autonomous Community, and the Basque Government's Decree of June 26, 1990 in response changed the support system for Basque film (de Pablo 1996, 105-106).

<sup>38</sup> A total of 26,961 viewers saw it at the cinema, a number that was quite low for the time (de Pablo 2017, 303).

that, following his partner's lead: "Eceiza showed many things like this, all of which were well-known in other art forms, but not too noticeable in films made by Basque people: a film made in the Basque language does not have to be rural or ethnic" (Izagirre 1996).

The central issue in *Off-eko maitasuna* is the clash between individual freedom and collective commitment. The lyrics of the main song on the soundtrack (written by Izagirre and performed by Oskorri), heard with the opening credits, make this clear from the start: "I don't want to love a captive: no one should be held captive. The one who captivates me is being held captive by others, and she can't come to see me. It's hard to be free if you've never been free before."<sup>39</sup> Many symbolic elements point the same direction. The film begins with the flight of a stork, and more than once in the film we see a postcard with a picture of a flying stork on it, sent by Ana (Mónica Molina) to Tomás (Fernando Guillén Cuervo) in prison. While Luis (Patxi Bisquert) is working in the factory, he sings Mikel Laboa's song, *Hegoak ebaki banizkio* [*If I Had Cut Its Wings*]. As we have seen, one of the subthemes of *Ke arteko egunak* is that of individual freedom, but in that case, the core subject was the protagonist's disenchantment or existential failure, while in this case the contradictions created by individual liberties lie at the heart of the matter. Ana is the main character in the film. A surveyor by profession, she carries out measurements for building sites and lives in a town in the Basque Country.<sup>40</sup> Her partner, Tomás, is in prison, and Ana's entire circle belongs to the

nationalist left, even though she herself never expresses any specific political bent. Ana has just begun a love affair with Luis, a friend of Tomás', and the entire film turns around that controversy: the conflicts that this love triangle creates, and especially the social pressure that Ana and Luis face. In addition to these three characters, Bego (Klara Badiola) and her partner (José Ramón Soroiz) are also important. Bego is Tomás' sister and a close friend of Ana's, and she works as a town councillor in the village. Her partner, also a town councillor, works in a factory.

Tomás finds himself in a painful situation. On the one hand, he loves Ana, but on the other, he doesn't want to tie her down to a love affair while he's in prison. The prisoner is depicted in a quite tormented way in the film, probably exaggerated, and speaks not a word until the final sequence in the film. It seems as if his situation has taken him into a deep silence that is his way of isolating himself from his surroundings and especially from Ana. In this sense, it is especially significant that in Tomás' exchange of letters with Ana, Luis sends him nothing but drawings, often an expressionist and quite dark portrait of Ana.<sup>41</sup> At the beginning of the film, Luis goes to the jail to visit, but does not take his friend; although it is not clear, it is suggested that Tomás is aware of the relationship between Luis and Ana. However, instead of taking a stand against Luis or Ana, he chooses to suffer and tries to set Ana free. On one of Ana's visits to the prison, Tomás hands her a handwritten message (without saying anything): "I love you, don't come." This contradiction or paradox is one of the engines of the film, and will not be clearly resolved at the end (Figs. 5-6).

On the other hand, Luis is also frustrated because he cannot completely normalize his relationship with Ana. As mentioned, Tomás refuses to receive her visits; furthermore, Ana's own doubts make it difficult to progress in their relationship. Pertinent to this is the story of the answering machine, which

<sup>39</sup> English translation from [http://postdata.elkar.eus/oskorri/img/OSKORRI\\_HAUXE\\_DA\\_DESPIDIDIA](http://postdata.elkar.eus/oskorri/img/OSKORRI_HAUXE_DA_DESPIDIDIA).

<sup>40</sup> Most of the village scenes were filmed in Hernani, and Ana's house was in Oiartzun. In the plot, however, no specific town is mentioned.

<sup>41</sup> José Luis Zumeta contributed the drawings, and the illustrations in the credits are also his.

has great symbolic resonance in the film. Ana has an answering machine on her phone at home, but it still plays a message recorded by Tomás before he was arrested. This situation leads Luis to complain that every time he calls her, he hears Tomás' voice: "It's like leaving a message for a dead person." This will be a recurring element throughout the film – at another point Luis calls him the "voice of conscience" – until at the end of the film, Ana changes the message and records a new one in her own voice, a highly significant moment, symbolically (Fig. 7).

Finally, and above all, there is social pressure. As soon as they hear about the relationship between Ana and Luis, many of their friends and family members reject the relationship, considering them unfaithful (both personally and politically). This pressure steps up a level when a militant in their circle (Ramon Agirre) soaks Luis' locker in the rugby changing room with diesel oil. Understanding the threat, Luis quickly goes to Bego's councillor partner for help, but his response is not at all empathetic: "You must know what you've gotten yourself into." Others in their circle will argue about the event: Bego and her partner on the one hand, and later, Bego's partner and the militant who carried out the attack. Although this is the main aspect of the pressure that Ana and Luis are under, there are other elements of pressure as well: people's gossip, and especially the attitude of Tomás' (and Bego's) mother, María, who does not understand how Ana could have started another relationship on the outside, while Tomás is in prison. It also makes her angry that Ana has stopped visiting Tomás. She explains this to her daughter, Bego, who defends Ana's individual decision:

MARÍA: I'm worried I'm losing her.

BEGO: Let her be, it's normal.

MARÍA: Is it also normal for there to be a third person involved?

BEGO: Everyone has to live their own life.

MARÍA: Yes, that's true, but my son can't, can he?

Later, in a different sequence, Ana and Luis run into María at the market. When they see her at a distance, Luis asks Ana if she wants to separate so María won't see them together. Ana says no decisively, and heads toward María to greet her with Luis at her side. It's a cold encounter, though polite, and María says only that Tomás sends his regards from prison: "Goodbye, Ana. You know where we live."

Another key character is Bego, Ana's only ally (apart from Luis), and the one who defends Ana's personal decision to her friends and family. She takes part in the first of the two most important dialogue sequences about Ana and Luis' relationship, arguing with her partner. Bego asks him if he had anything to do with the attack on Luis; her partner denies it, but justifies the act: "As an accusation, I didn't think it was wrong."

BEGO: A denunciation/accusation? Of what?

BEGO'S PARTNER: Lack of solidarity.

BEGO: Oh, of course, Luis is a traitor.

BEGO'S PARTNER: That's not what I said.

(...)

BEGO: You think Luis is unsupportive.

BEGO'S PARTNER: Yes.

BEGO: And what about Ana? Is she not unsupportive then?

BEGO'S PARTNER: She must have her reasons, I don't care. I'm only judging Luis' behavior.

BEGO: You don't dare say what you think of Ana? Because you'll look like a complete sexist.

BEGO'S PARTNER: As long as Tomás is not free, his friends cannot be totally free.

BEGO: Why are you telling me this?

BEGO'S PARTNER: You should have reminded Luis.

BEGO: You know that Luis and Ana are nothing new. And Tomás knows about them too.

BEGO'S PARTNER: You don't sound like a sister.

BEGO: So that's what's bugging you. Tomás respecting Ana. You don't like it at all. (...) Bed

loyalty. That's a woman's solidarity for you. Why not threaten Ana? You haven't got the balls. You have no right to think for Tomás.

The gender aspect of the case is also seen explicitly in this sequence. Putting the issue in context, it should be noted that the issue of personal decision was at the center of political debate at the time. In 1986, ETA killed former member Dolores González Katarain (nicknamed *Yoyes*) when she decided to return to the Basque Country from exile against the will of the ETA leadership. In addition, there was tension between personal and collective decisions in the discussion of the possibility of inmates receiving prison benefits (this topic is touched on indirectly in *Ke arteko egunak*). Izagirre and Urbieta's screenplay revisits the subject, in this case focusing on a prisoner's female partner and reflecting on her right to start a new life apart from him.

The other important sequence that deals directly with the main issue takes place between Begoña's partner and the militant who carried out the diesel oil attack. Begoña's partner, despite justifying the act to Luis and Begoña, blames the militant:

BEGO'S PARTNER: I'm sick of defending you.  
 MILITANT: You know, sometimes there are things you just have to do.  
 BEGO'S PARTNER: If you have something to say, let's hear it. You don't represent anyone.  
 MILITANT: Would you mind telling me what court I'm being tried in?  
 BEGO'S PARTNER: What you did to Luis is just childish.  
 MILITANT: I won't deny it. But in any case, it was a warning. Are you a lawyer?  
 BEGO'S PARTNER: Stupidity like this can often have serious consequences.

<sup>42</sup> Often using the formula used in patriotic militant environments: keep your dirty laundry to yourself.

<sup>43</sup> Including, for example, the construction of the Anoeta stadium and other sites in the area that were under construction at the time.

MILITANT: You always keep your nose clean, you never wanted to do any dirty work.

BEGO'S PARTNER: No, and you do too much.

MILITANT: I think Luis will understand better than you. It'll make him think. That was the point.

BEGO'S PARTNER: Ana has the right to live her own life, even if we don't like it. (...) You think cheating on Tomás means betraying his ideas.

MILITANT: Not necessarily, but a prisoner stands for something, right?

BEGO'S PARTNER: We have no right to think for Tomás.

MILITANT: Tomás is there and we're here. The people demanded that I do what I did.

BEGO'S PARTNER: I'll denounce you.

MILITANT: To the town commission or the national one?

The dialogue is quite fierce and focuses on a certain matter; it very clearly puts the issue of individual decision on the table, both in this case and regarding Ana and Tomás' decision. In addition, another issue is also emerging, portraying standard operations in collective-militant settings. Bego's partner changes his position based on whom he's with. His behavior can be praised by internal criticism;<sup>42</sup> he's capable of criticizing within the nucleus of power (with Luis' attacker), but outside of that nucleus (with Luis and Bego) he justifies acts done in the name of the group.

There is another relevant subtheme that appears in this film and is one of the original elements of the film (compared to other Basque productions of the time), as well as one that distinguishes it from *Ke arteko egunak*. *Off-eko maitasuna* shows the developmentalism of the Spanish State. As Ana is a surveyor by profession, she moves from job to job, often working on large infrastructure projects (highways) or in new housing developments, and large-scale public construction works are featured throughout the film.<sup>43</sup> The beginning of the film, which was

shot in Cáceres, is particularly significant, and shows a sequence set at a highway under construction in which shots of huge highway beams predominate. These are very bright shots that are the polar opposite of the dark and murky atmosphere of *Ke arteko egunak*, and that symbolically bring a different issue to the discussion. Later, this subject will be a cause of conflict with some of the villagers: when Ana and her colleague are taking measurements on a plot of land, a group of villagers approach them, asking what they're doing. When told they're going to build a new highway, the villagers force the workers out. Along the same lines, there is also a small subplot about corruption. Ana's boss asks her to send Bego a message: if the town hall allows apartment buildings to be built on certain plots of land, it will receive "a large consideration." Later, Bego's partner notes, "they too, whether they have permission or not, they do what they want." (Fig. 8).

This subtopic also has a direct bearing on the issue of disenchantment. The years 1992 (Barcelona Olympics) and 1993 (Maastricht Treaty) have been taken to mark the end of the Transition, and the full political normalization and democratic homologation of the Spanish State would begin at that point. However, the real estate bubble that would begin in the mid-1990s and burst in 2007 would be one of the biggest economic and political problems in the post-Transition period, being directly linked to corruption. This problem, together with the huge deindustrialization processes of the 1990s,<sup>44</sup> shatters the hegemonic triumphalist narrative of 1992, and *Off-eko maitasuna* manages to convey that message as well. Developmentalism and its associated corruption are seen as the malady or flip side of the normalization process. Thus, the unique articulation and problematization of freedom that appear in the film are especially interesting: on the one hand, we have the proclamation of individual freedom, but on the other hand, we see the misery brought to various commu-

nities by liberalization and economic development. In the literary journals that Izagirre took part in in the 1970s and 1980s, skepticism was frequently expressed about the normalization proposed by the Transition (Sarasola 2015), which stabilized the process but turned into disenchantment as the possibility of rupture receded. Regarding filmmaking, Izagirre considers it particularly problematic that, after his amateur beginnings, ETB was created and began to regulate the field of audiovisuals (Izagirre 2021a). The symbolic high point of the normalization process, then, occurred in 1992-1993, and *Off-eko maitasuna* also shows a clear disenchantment with it.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning the outcry caused by the film when it was first released. If, in the case of *Ke arteko egunak*, some Spanish critics sparked controversy over the film's alleged ideological closeness to the nationalist left, the harsh criticism of *Off-eko maitasuna* by *Egin* newspaper's Mikel Insausti caused an uproar. He published it on May 7, 1992, the day before the film's official release, under the title "Ni contigo sin ti," ("Neither with you nor without you") and it was remarkably severe. After summarizing the story and the main theme in the first few lines, the rest of the review was devoted to invalidating the film: "Koldo Izagirre reminds one of a preschool child writing his first composition, with the difference that to do his erasures and rough drafts, he oversees an entire film crew (...) *Off-eko maitasuna* is inadvertently an excellent lesson on how not to make a film"<sup>45</sup> (Insausti 1992, 50). The review was largely filmic, except for the last paragraph, in which

<sup>44</sup> Among the other films that deal with this issue in detail, Luis López Carrasco's *El año del descubrimiento* (*The Year of the Discovery*) (2020) deserves particular mention.

<sup>45</sup> "Koldo Izagirre recuerda a un niño de preescolar haciendo su primera redacción, con la diferencia de que para hacer sus tachaduras y borrones ha manejado todo un equipo de cine. (...) *Off-eko maitasuna* contiene involuntariamente una buena lección de cómo no se debe hacer una película."

by referring to the town of Hernani (Insausti is from Hernani (Izagirre 2021b)), Insausti referred indirectly to the political intent of the film: “Everything is up in the air, like the rest of the problems that are touched on very much in passing, and that in Hernani, the town in which most of the story is set, have no reason not to be captured by an attentive camera, unless one doesn’t know how to place it”<sup>46</sup> (Insausti 1992, 50). This quotation, the unusual harshness of the criticism and the editorial policy of *Egin* suggested that one of the reasons for this contempt for the film was its treatment of politics; or at least that was the prevailing idea among later researchers. The next day, May 8, the skirmish continued. Izagirre was invited to *Egin Irratia* to give an interview about the film, and before the interview, a speaker (Insausti himself, according to Izagirre (2021b)) spoke poorly of the film, saying that it was very bad (and using the word *garbage*). In addition, the speaker accused them of filling their pockets with public money to make this *garbage*, which was especially painful for Izagirre. He was about to cancel the interview, or give it in Spanish (since the review in the newspaper and the radio commentary were both in Spanish), but in the end he gave the interview in Basque. On May 10, *Egin* published a full-page response to the two events by Izagirre and producer Luis Goya. This controversy continued until the end of the century. In the year 2000, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> issue of *Bazka* magazine,

<sup>46</sup> “Todo queda en el aire, al igual que el resto de problemáticas que se tocan muy de pasada, y que en Hernani, pueblo en el que se ambienta el grueso del relato, no tienen por qué escapar a una cámara atenta, salvo que no se sepa colocarla en su sitio.”

<sup>47</sup> “Así, aunque de forma algo críptica, *Egin* se posicionó contra el filme por abordar la intolerancia del ambiente familiar y social del entorno de ETA, que consideraba a la novia del activista atada de por vida a su compañero, negándose a reconocer su derecho a recomponer su vida mientras él siguiera en la cárcel.”

Koldo Izagirre published an article strongly criticizing the newspaper *Gara*, and the same issue contained a response from the newspaper’s management. Written in the form of 10 points, the fourth said the following:

4. Like Izagirre, we also had friends “in high places” in EGIN at the time, and from their mouths we have learned the cause of Izagirre’s heartbreak. Apparently, many years ago, EGIN’s film critic angered Izagirre with his harsh criticism of a film directed by Izagirre – “Amor en off”, if we’re not mistaken. He still remembers that incident and recounts it with resentment, not only among his friends who are trying to spread the word, but also among up and coming union and political representatives, according to what several people have told us (*Bazka* 2000).

The controversy and its harshness clearly show the rift created by the film between Izagirre and the nationalist left media. Later, critics considered the political content of the film to be the main cause of this disagreement.

Thus, albeit somewhat cryptically, *Egin* took a stance against the film for addressing the intolerance of the family and social environment surrounding ETA, which considered the activist’s girlfriend to be bound to her partner for life, refusing to recognize her right to go on with her life while he was still in prison<sup>47</sup> (de Pablo 2017, 303).

In any case, regardless of the quality of the film, these political interpretations underscore an important point; that is, the subject matter of the film and its obvious political approach were problematic for some members of the nationalist left, even though the creators more or less placed them within that ideology. The film reveals a disenchantment with certain behaviors that were rooted in certain political groups and militant environments, which was consistent with the content of some of the stories in *Mendekuak*. For many, however, touching on these issues



publicly and in a film was quite problematic (not to no avail, however: we have seen how the film brought the issue of self-criticism to the fore), although this position, paradoxically, confirms one of the theses proposed by the film itself (the limits placed on individual freedom in the name of a group). *Off-eko maitasuna*, then, shares disenchantment with the political Transition with *Ke arteko egunak*, even if this is expressed differently, however, the former does not show the existential disenchantment of the latter; on the contrary, in the midst of a violent political conflict, the dominant logic of certain political groups is further refined.

## A different grammar of disenchantment

In the context of *El desencanto*, various conceptualizations of disenchantment have been developed in the Spanish context, especially in the field of cinema. In a more existential or political sense, it has served to characterize the main cultural productions of the Spanish Transition. However, works that call for a different grammar of disenchantment have been left out. Directly associated with the way we relate to the political Transition, discourses and works that do not take on this process and that arise in political traditions that have been challenged cannot be reduced to the hegemonic grammar of disenchantment. These traditions have had to coexist with two simultaneous political disenchantments or, in other words, with two variants of political disenchantment: on the one hand, the predominance of the Transition over rupture and the process of political normalization brought about by it; and on the other hand, with the crisis of the idea of an international revolution and with the awareness of the lack of an alternative to capitalism, which prevailed from 1989 onwards. All of these factors opened the door, among other

things, to considering reflections, critiques and disenchantments regarding some of the internal logics of revolutionary movements. Nevertheless, the so-called Culture of Transition, and the hegemonic disenchantment so well characterized by Vilarós (2018) have hidden these patterns for many years. Therefore, considering these other grammars of disenchantment can lead us to recognize and reinterpret the various works and discourses that emerged in the context of the Spanish State in the 1980s and 1990s.

*Ke arteko egunak* and *Off-eko maitasuna* are two of these. In the Basque Country, furthermore, there was a special paradox that began in the 1980s: although the flames of revolution burned longer than in other territories of the Spanish State (Rodríguez 2015), political disenchantment soon spread even to militant movements. This sentiment, however, would continue in parallel with the initiative of an armed enterprise (until 2011), and lead to a paradox: on the one hand, a supposedly unstoppable process of political normalization; on the other, a violent military strategy, which was originally revolutionary but would gradually shift to a strategy of attrition, while in the eyes of the majority of society, it is considered to exist outside of time. Various works produced along this route touch on many different political facets, suggesting a different grammar of disenchantment. It is not surprising, then, that these works, when first released, sparked a crude aesthetic-political controversy. Despite their cinematic quality, some problematic elements emerged, contributing to the development of their own grammar of disenchantment.

Recognition of these different grammars is essential in both movements: first, to highlight and enrich explanations of the political processes of the 1980s and 1990s, which were originally revolutionary but would gradually shift to a strategy of attrition; and second, to look with a different perspective at the different cultural productions that were

created or characterized at that time. This is one way we can appreciate the many works that have so far been left in the shadows, or look at other works that are well placed in the historiography of art from a different perspective. As mentioned above, *Ke arteko egunak* and *Off-eko maitasuna* are just two examples of this, rooted in the special context of the Basque Country, but in addition to these, many other specimens can be found, even outside the Basque Country. In fact, this special grammar of disenchantment that we have characterized both calls for processes particular to the Basque Country and, at the same time, for a broader international process that is deeply rooted in the crisis of the idea of revolution.

## References

- Adorno, Theodor and Herbert Marcuse. 1999.** "Correspondence on the German student movement." *New Left Review* 1(233): 123-136.
- Aldazabal, Jokin. 1988.** "Mendekoaren tragedia (mendez mendetako mendekoaren mendekua)." *Egin*, March 22. <https://kritikak.armiarma.eus/?p=5606>.
- Angulo, Jesús; Maialen Beloki, José Luis Rebordinos, Antonio Santamarina. 2009.** *Antonio, Antxon Eceiza: Cine, existencialismo y dialéctica*. San Sebastian: FilMOTECA Vasca.
- Baudelaire, Charles. 2006.** *Las flores del mal*. Trans. Luis Martínez de Merlo. Madrid: Cátedra.
- Bazka. 2000.** "Koldo Izagirreri erantzuna." *Gara* management, May.
- Beloki, Maialen. 2010.** *Entre Antonio y Antxon Eceiza. Cine y política*. PhD thesis. University of the Basque Country.
- de Pablo, Santiago. 1996.** *Cien años de cine en el País Vasco (1896-1995)*. Vitoria: Diputación Foral de Álava.
- . 2017. *Creadores de sombras: ETA y el nacionalismo vasco a través del cine*. Madrid: Tecnos.
- Etxeberria, Hasier. 2002.** *Bost idazle Hasier Etxeberriarekin berbetan*. Irun: Alberdania.
- Eceiza, Antxon, director. 1989.** *Ke arteko egunak*. Bertan Filmeak S.A. and Trenbideko Filmeak, 105 min.
- Fukuyama, Francis. 1992.** *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press.
- Gorostidi, Juan. 2016.** *Zazpigarren heriotza*. San Sebastian: Erein.
- Insausti, Mikel. 1992.** "Ni contigo ni sin ti." *Egin*, May 7.
- Izagirre, Koldo. 1987** *Mendekuak*. Zarautz: Susa.
- . 1991. *Metxa esaten dioten agirretar baten ibili herrenak*. San Sebastian: Elkar.
- . 1996. *Gure zinemaren historia petrala*. Zarautz: Susa. <http://www.susa-literatura.eus/liburuak/best0430>.
- . 1999. *Agirre zaharren kartzelaldi berriak*. San Sebastian: Elkar.
- . 2005. *Sua nahi Mr. Churchill?* Zarautz: Susa.
- . 2021a. Personal interview conducted by Beñat Sarasola. San Sebastian, July 7.
- . 2021b. Personal interview conducted by Beñat Sarasola. San Sebastian, December 27.
- . director. 1992. *Off-eko maitasuna*. Trenbideko Filmeak, 87 min.
- Izagirre, Koldo and Ramon Saizarbitoria. 1978.** "Antxon Eceiza." *Zeruko Argia* 779: 21-24.
- Junguitu, Maitane. 2019.** *Kalabaza planeta eta Juanba Bera-sategi*. Panorámica de la animación comercial vasca. Doctoral dissertation. University of the Basque Country.
- Labrador, Germán. 2007** "El encanto de *El desencanto*. Cine, literatura e identidad en la Transición Española." *CiberLetras: revista de crítica literaria y de cultura* 18.
- Magris, Claudio. 2001.** *Utopía y desencanto. Historias, esperanzas e ilusiones de la modernidad*. Barcelona: Anagrama.
- Martínez, Guillem et al. 2012.** *CT o la Cultura de la Transición*. Madrid: Debolsillo.

**Mendiguren, Xabier.** "Mendekuak." 1988 *Argia*, January 3. <https://kritikak.armiarma.eus/?p=316>.

**Nerekan, Amaia and Iratxe Fresneda.** 2017. "Glocal cinema: el caso de Loreak, embajadora mundial del cine en euskera." *Área abierta* 17(3): 267-289.

**Nieto, Jorge.** 2015. "De las 'stars' al estructuralismo. Evolución de la crítica y la prensa cinematográfica en Barcelona bajo el franquismo." *Estudios sobre el Mensaje Periodístico* 21(1):145-160.

**Rodríguez, Emmanuel.** 2015. *Por qué fracasó la democracia en España. La Transición y el Régimen del 78*. Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños.

**Sarasola, Beñat.** 2015. *Bainaren belaunaldia: Ustela, Pott eta Oh! Euzkadi*. Bilbo: Labayru.

**Trapiello, Andrés.** 2000. *Salón de pasos perdidos. 4. Las nubes por dentro*. Barcelona: Destino.

**Vilarós, Teresa.** 2018. *El mono del desencanto: una crítica cultural de la transición española (1973-1993)*. Madrid: Siglo XXI.

**Zunzunegui, Santos.** 2017. *Bajo el signo de la melancolía. Cine, desencanto y aflicción*. Madrid: Cátedra.

## Biography

Beñat Sarasola (San Sebastian, 1984). After graduating in Philosophy from the University of the Basque Country (UPV-EHU), he graduated in Literary Theory and Comparative Literature from the University of Barcelona and received his PhD from the same university in 2014. His thesis won the Special PhD Award (*Premio Especial de Doctorado*) and he is currently a professor in the Faculty of Education, Philosophy and Anthropology at the UPV-EHU. He has been editor of the *Munduko Poesia Kaierak* collection of the Susa publishing house for eight years and, for four years, he worked in the Sautrela program of the Basque public television as a scriptwriter and director. Throughout these years he has collaborated in various media (*Berria*, *Argia*).

As a researcher, he is a member of the research group Historical Memory in Iberian Literatures and has published academic articles in high-level journals: *Revista de Literatura* (CSIC), *Revista de Filosofía*, *Hispanic Research Journal*, etc. In 2015 he published the essay *Bainaren belaunaldia: Ustela, Pott, eta Oh! Euzkadi* after obtaining the Santi Onaindia grant. In this book he analyzes three fundamental literary journals of the 1970s and 1980s, focusing on the figures of Bernardo Atxaga, Koldo Izagirre and Ramón Saizarbitoria.

He has published two books of poems, *Kaxa huts bat* (Susa, 2007) and *Alea* (Susa, 2009), and a novel, *Deklaratzekorik ez* (Susa, 2019). In the field of translation, in 2011 he translated Philip Roth's novel *Nemesis* into Basque, published by Meettok.

## Figures



Fig. 1: *Ke arteko egunak/Days of Smoke* (Antxon Eceiza, 1989).



Fig. 2: *Ke arteko egunak/Days of Smoke* (Antxon Eceiza, 1989).



Fig. 3: *Ke arteko egunak/Days of Smoke* (Antxon Eceiza, 1989).



Fig. 4: *Ke arteko egunak/Days of Smoke* (Antxon Eceiza, 1989).

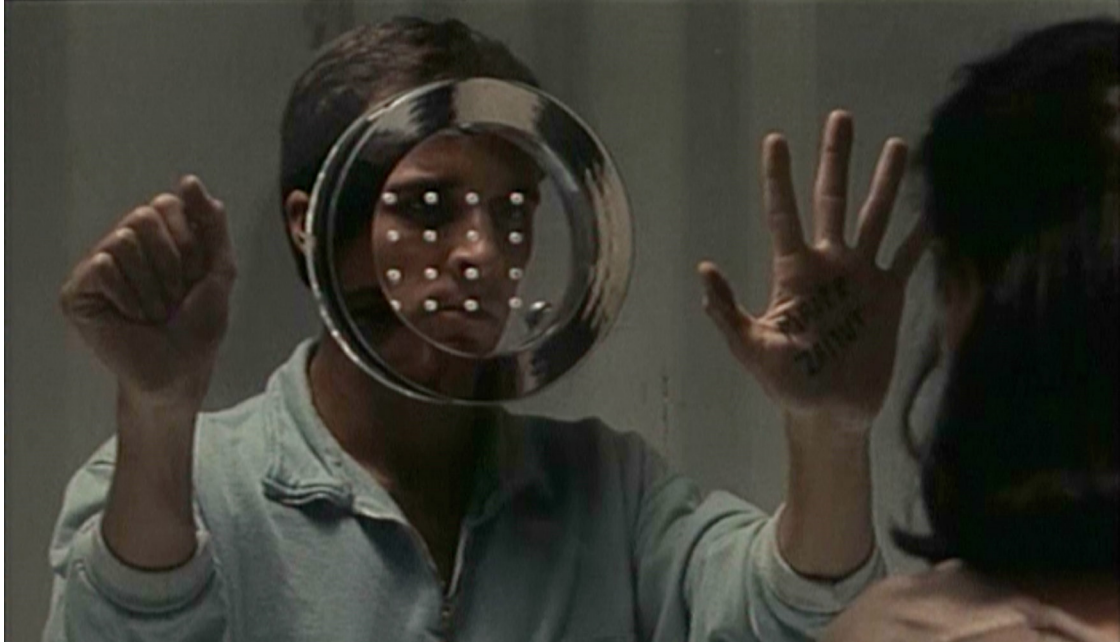


Fig. 5: *Off-eko maitasuna/Love Offstage* (Koldo Izagirre, 1992).

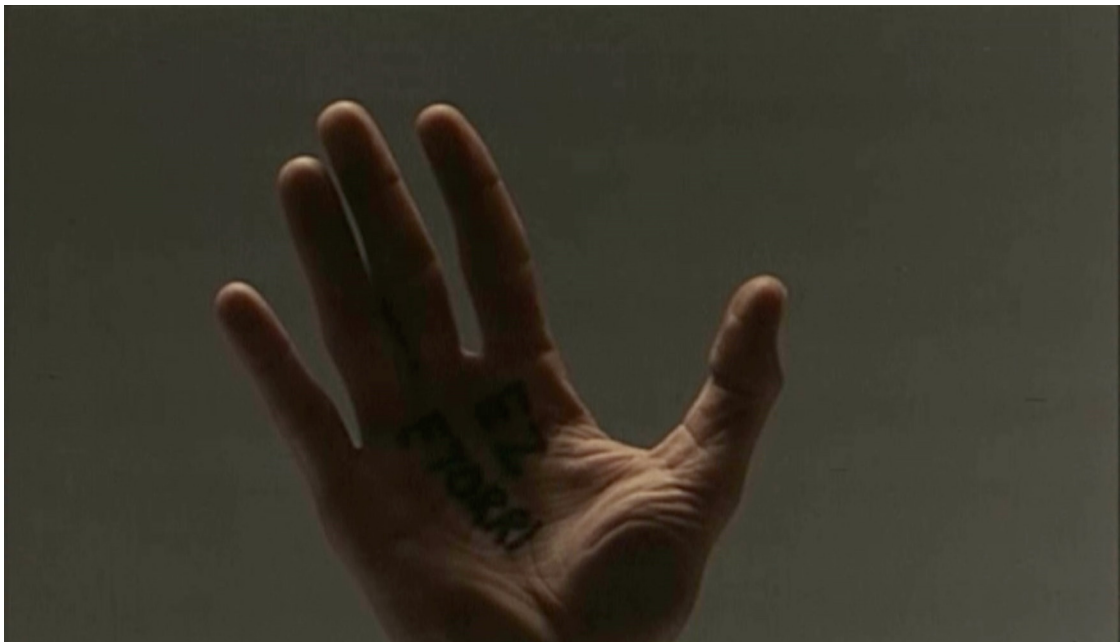


Fig. 6: *Off-eko maitasuna/Love Offstage* (Koldo Izagirre, 1992).



Fig. 7: *Off-eko maitasuna/Love Offstage* (Koldo Izagirre, 1992).



Fig. 8: *Off-eko maitasuna/Love Offstage* (Koldo Izagirre, 1992).

**CAN'T YOU SEE?**  
**A DOUBTFUL JOURNEY THROUGH THE PERSONAL ARCHIVES OF ANTXON ECEIZA** 02



## CAN'T YOU SEE? A DOUBTFUL JOURNEY THROUGH THE PERSONAL ARCHIVES OF ANTXON ECEIZA

**Maialen Beloki Berasategui**

San Sebastian Festival

### INTRODUCTION

Throughout 2021, the personal archives of the filmmaker from San Sebastian, Antxon Eceiza, were gradually moved to the Basque Film Archive. The dossier that follows this introductory text aims to revisit the bio-filmography of this key figure in the recent history of Basque cinema, based on a selection of materials from those archives.

The starting point, the seed from which this dossier has grown, is a letter (a facsimile of which is included in this issue) written by Eceiza's personal friend, psychiatrist and writer, Luis Martín-Santos, also from San Sebastian. His figure, thinking and narrative, entitled "Condenada belleza del mundo", are crucial to understanding the story told below.

But let's start at the beginning. The proposed journey begins in San Sebastian, Madrid and Almería, between 1961 and 1963, and stars a group of young Basque filmmakers who decided to put into practice "a complete theory of aesthetic criticism" (García de Dueñas 1963), which *Nuestro Cine*, the specialist film magazine, had been advocating during the two years of its existence in the form of critical or dialectic realism.

The title of the resulting film, *El próximo otoño/The Next Autumn* (1963), was inspired by a storyline developed by Elías Querejeta and Antonio Eceiza, and the script was written by Víctor Erice, Santiago San Miguel and José Luis Egea. The initial title of the film was *El primer verano* (The First Summer). Eceiza decided to participate in the rewriting of the script, and

the result was renamed (*The Next Autumn*). The film constituted a particularly representative case, being the work of many of those who helped guide the ideological-aesthetic approach adopted by *Nuestro Cine*. Eceiza described the origins of the film as follows:

In reality, everything stemmed from the fact that we were living, as were Regueiro, Angelino Fons, Revuelta and others, in some apartments in Padre Xifré Street, which became known in the world of aspiring filmmakers as "El Xifré Supremo". When Querejeta had the idea of us making a film together, the four of us started to write the script, without Elías's participation at any moment (Angulo et al. 2009, 134).

*The Next Autumn* was the start of what would later be known as the "Querejeta team", even though it was actually Eceiza who had brought this group of people together for the first time around the production of *A través de San Sebastián/Across San Sebastian* (1960). The photography, which was awarded a prize by the Circle of Cinematographic Writers, was the work of L. Enrique Torán, with Luis Cuadrado as assistant. Luis de Pablo was responsible for the music and Pablo G. del Amo was in charge of editing.

Luis-Martín Santos was present during the shooting, and his reflections gave rise to the literary text entitled "Condenada belleza del mundo" (Condemned Beauty of the World) and were a decisive factor later on in the radical change of tack shown by the filmmaker from San Sebastian in his next film: *De cuerpo presente/In the Flesh* (1965).

This dossier starts, then, with a section entitled "Can't you see? (doubtful memories) 1935-200...", which features Eceiza's hitherto unpublished and unfinished memoirs, including Martín-Santos narrative "Condenada belleza del mundo".

Next, in the essay entitled "The Psychiatrist Who (Un)wrote a Film", Irati Crespo illustrates and captures a snapshot of this

moment in the personal and professional life of this group of filmmaker friends, as shown also in the photograph taken during the shooting of *The Next Autumn*.

But the story does not end in 1963. Nor does it focus solely on the protagonists of that particular tale. We still have to travel with Eceiza from Madrid to Mexico and Cuba, and later on back to the Basque Country, because the leap from *The Next Autumn* to *In the Flesh* was not the only change that occurred in the filmmaker's personal and professional life.

My text "Dear Antonio: Antzon! Antchon? Antón?", the title of which I borrowed from the letter written by Martín-Santos, seeks to narrate this journey by taking a look through the filmmaker's bio-filmography, which is full of personal and historic landmarks.

Eceiza was a diverse and, to a certain extent, contradictory figure in many fields, not just the film world. The series of photographs, specific date unknown, taken by Antxon Eceiza in Cuba during one of Fidel Castro's rallies aim to illustrate the ideological evolution and discovery of this new world, which had such a transcendental impact on the filmmaker. As Eceiza himself put it:

On the one hand, the Cuban revolution had a major impact on me. I started to approach people at the embassy because they would attend cultural events. I assume they were also there for recruiting purposes. I would receive visits from those in the film world who would come once a year to Spain to buy Spanish films to screen in Cuba. Because ... what will they show? Godard? Anything from Sarita Montiel's films to my own. I started to look after those who came, one of whom was the General Director of the ICAIC [Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry]. I was invited to go for the first time in '66. I screened *In the Flesh*. *The Next Autumn* also premiered at Sierra. Naturally, from then on, whenever there was a party at the embassy, I would be

invited. And I started to make friends there. Pablito Milanés, Tito [Tomás] Gutiérrez Alea... who were just like friends I could have in Spain or the Basque Country. Just like, in the Basque Country, I was friends with Mikel Laboa, Rafa [Ruiz] Balerdi, Zumeta and Chirlida, there, it was the same. Since the Cubans trusted me in general, my house was like a retreat for them. People came to my house. Glauber Rocha, the other one... because they knew they were not going to be raked over the ideological coals there. So, I gradually made more and more friends (Eceiza, 2007).

The dossier closes with a second fragment of "Can't you see? (Doubtful memories) 1935-200...." entitled "Madrid, VITORIA 19-20 January, 1964", which recounts the announcement of the death of Eceiza's friend, Martín-Santos.

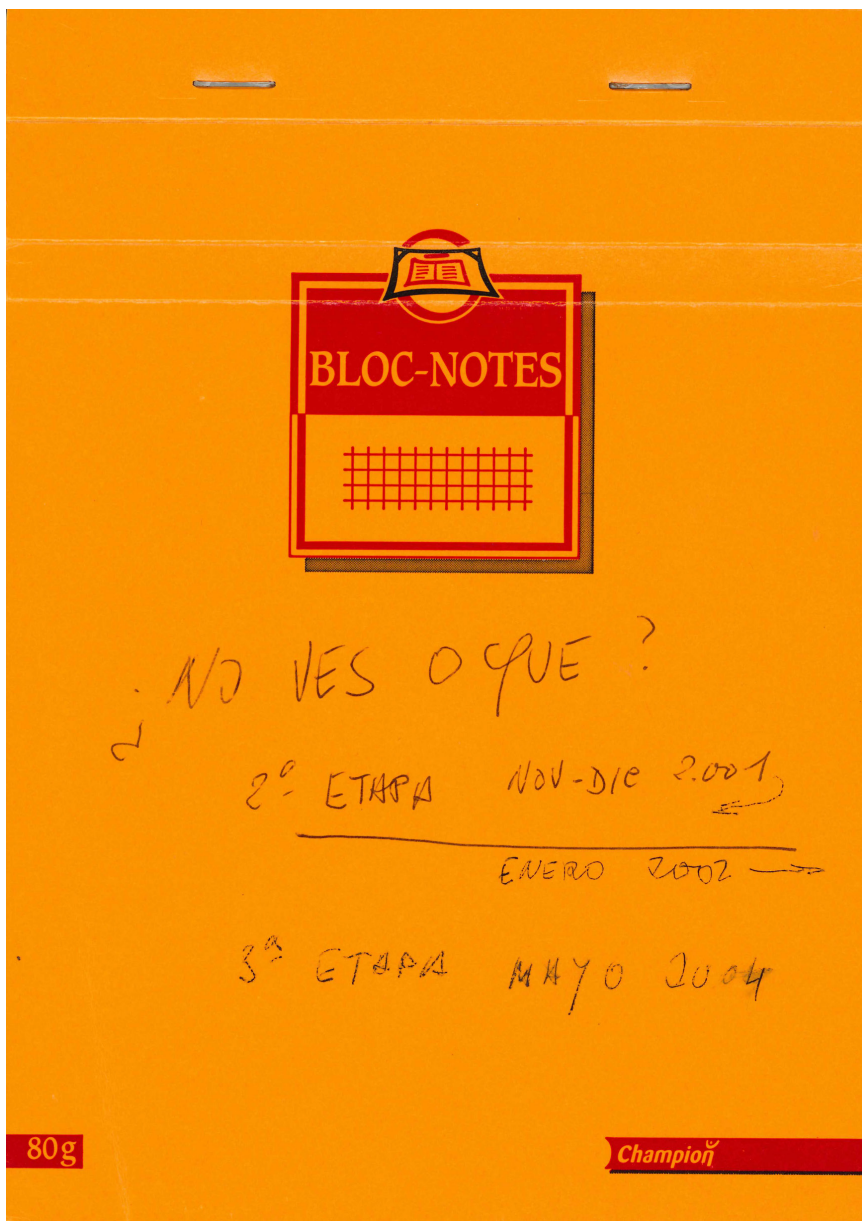
**Translation:** Diana Draper

## References

**Angulo, Jesús; Maialen Beloki, José Luis Rebordinos, Antonio Santamarina. 2009.** *Antonio, Antxon Eceiza: Cine, existencialismo y dialéctica*. San Sebastian: Filmoteca Vasca.

**Eceiza, Antxon. 2007.** Personal interview conducted by Maialen Beloki Berasategui. 25 May.

**García de Dueñas, Jesús. 1963.** *Nuestro Cine* 25.



Hand-written cover of a notebook used by Antxon Eceiza to make notes about his unfinished memoirs, "Can't you see? (doubtful memories) 1935-200..." This object forms part of Eceiza's personal archives, which are now held in the Basque Film Archive.

## EXPLICACION DEL TITULO Y DEL SUBTITULO

“Todo empezó cuando...

Centenares de personajes, en las grandes películas negras, arrancan su relato autobiográfico con esta frase.

A mí siempre me ha encantado, hasta el punto de que, sin miedo a las connotaciones, he decidido iniciar con ella este mosaico de recuerdos que, agrupados en “jirones” (prefiero llamar así a los “capítulos”, término demasiado serio...), van a constituir mis MEMORIAS DUDOSAS...

El último adjetivo <sup>“dudosas”</sup> viene exigido por la dificultad, natural o voluntaria, de determinar cuándo un recuerdo es real, inducido, prearrado, o simplemente falso...

La <sup>dificultad</sup> natural hay que atribuirla a los fallos de la memoria, con mayor razón si se tiene en cuenta que estoy escribiendo después de cumplir 65 años y cuando la lucha contra el “alemán” (apodo exorcista para el terrible Alzheimer) y, sobre todo, el miedo a la derrota frente a él se apoderan de mi mente. (Hace poco he leído una novela que emblematiza – en su título, no en su contenido – la situación que tanto temo: “Se me olvidó que te olvidé”...)

Para la <sup>dificultad</sup> voluntaria también hay razones de peso. Ion Idigoras plantea en su entrañable libro de recuerdos, “El hijo de Juanita Gerrikabeitia”, una norma cautelar para los excesos de la sinceridad.

Y lo hace, más o menos, en estos términos: “Contar secretos de los demás es una canallada...contar los propios, una gilipollez...”

En homenaje a la clarividencia de esta afirmación, he decidido crear la ENMIENDA IDIGORAS (E.I.) y me acogeré a ella cuantas veces no esté dispuesto a decir toda la verdad, ni sólo la verdad, ni, desde luego, nada más que la verdad.

Hay que tener en cuenta además lo difícil en todos los sentidos que resulta “pasear por una guerra antigua” (son palabras de J.A.Bardem – in <sup>guerra</sup> memoriam y volveré - en su reciente libro de Memorias para referirse a la del 36 y a su experiencia <sup>de los primeros</sup> comunista bajo el franquismo) cuando la que ha marcado fuertemente tu vida <sup>una guerra</sup> no es antigua, sino que persiste viva y tremenda con sus secuelas de ilegalidades y sufrimiento generalizado.

Reproduction of the first pages of the unfinished memoirs of Antxon Eceiza, with hand-written notes by the author himself. This document forms part of Eceiza's personal archives, which are now held in the Basque Film Archive.

A lo largo de estas páginas habrá numerosos ejemplos de todos esos tipos de recuerdos “dudosos”. He aquí algunos :

Todo debería empezar por el principio, es decir por mi nacimiento, el 4 de Setiembre de 1.935...; Pero yo no guardo el menor recuerdo de ese suceso ! Alternativamente, debería iniciarse con mi primer recuerdo...

Mi gran amigo Luis Martín Santos, socialista y siquiatra – volveré – me decía que los primeros recuerdos suelen ser traumas...y yo, obediente, me acuerdo que a los 4 años me caí en Alderdi Eder y me hice sangre en las rodillas...;; Pero no me da la gana de incluir aquí ese recuerdo, ni de empezar por él el relato ! !

Así es que prefiero hacerlo por otro trauma mucho menos infantil – tenía yo casi 50 años – que fué decisivo en mi voluntad de escribir esta porrusalda - ¡jojo! no es un término despectivo, sino musical - y sobre todo de titularla como lo he hecho:

¿ NO VES O QUE ?

Biarritz. 1.983, 1.984

“ Todo empezó cuando...

...las palomas, convertidas en proyectiles, ametrallaron, o más suavemente, para no adelantar acontecimientos, tamborilearon contra los cristales de la casa donde vivía yo en Biarritz.

Hasta la segunda vez que ocurrió, días más tarde, no comprendí que venían impulsadas por la onda expansiva. Las dos veces, enseguida llegó el estampido.

En la primera, estaba yo hablando por teléfono con un amable señor parisino que me ofrecía trabajo en la televisión por cable de Biarritz...

Le transmití, creo que tartamudeé, mi sobresalto por la explosión.

Me tranquilizó inmediatamente:

- Ah... ces petits basques qui nous enquiinent...Ce n'est rien...

Sin saberlo, dió por bueno, con 13 años de anticipación, el argumento del Tribunal Supremo (Caso Marey... “por qué el Gal no es banda armada: Las acciones de los GAL no creaban alarma en la Población...”)

Al que sí le crearon alarma, si no social, al menos personal, fué al propietario de la pierna que resbalaba dejando un rastro de sangre por la pared rosada del edificio cercano a los restos humeantes del coche bomba...(Fué lo primero que ví al llegar <sup>más</sup> tras 4 pisos y 300 metros de angustiosa carrera).

Aunque tal vez no pueda afirmarse ese hecho porque el resto de su cuerpo estaba en esos momentos siendo recogido ¡con pinzas, literalmente! por unos afanosos Policías...

Y además, no hubiera debido almarle una explosión que él mismo había

la creación de alarma

Sin obedecerle del todo, aunque confortados por su solidaridad, nos lanzamos al ruedo, dispuestos a hacer una película dialéctica, geométrica ( sin salto de eje ), raigambarrera, poética...y, además de todo, Zurliniana ( Había un homenaje expreso a LA CHICA CON LA MALETA )...

Los Títulos de Crédito de EL PROXIMO OTOÑO están llenos de nombres de debutantes, muchos de los cuales resultaron después cineastas ilustres :

La escribimos Egea, Erice, San Miguel y yo mismo...Victor era además, ayudante de Dirección...La produjo Querejeta...Ya entonces le ayudaba Primi...La música era de Luis de Pablo...el montaje de Pablito del Amo...La fotografía de Torán...En la cámara, indispensable, llorado, LUIS CUADRADO ( " ¿ Quién escogió tus ojos para que a nosotros no nos faltara la luz ? " ).

#### V ~~7~~ CONDENADA BELLEZA DEL MUNDO

Por primera vez en estas páginas, el Título del "capítulo" no corresponde a una película sino que es el de la novela que Luis Martín Santos dejó inacabada y que trataba del rodaje de EL PROXIMO OTOÑO, al que asistió...

Y es que cuando das el paso, cuando dejas de ser promesa y te enzarzas en la pelea de hacer, todo debe cambiar.

De nada te vale ser anónimo, o saber que los Reyes son los padres, ni amar o detestar a John Ford, ni esforzarte en decir tus certezas con más o menos gracia o lucidez...

" El mar no tiene ramas " dicen en euskera. El hacer películas, tampoco. Se trata de dar la cara, de poner la otra mejilla, la otra crisma si se tuvieran dos, de responder sólo - y solo - con la obra.

La palabra hay que cedérsela al público, a los críticos...

Lo tuyo es desde ahora hacer.

Y cuando, <sup>como</sup> en este caso, te piden que ~~una~~ escribas sobre tí, lo mejor es callarse, desde que tu primera película existe, y recurrir a la frase hecha, que es a la vez tímido desafío y orgullosa defensa :

ALLA PELICULAS.....

Antxon Ezeiza Enero 96

Reproduction of page 7 of the appendix to Antxon Eceiza's unfinished memoirs, with hand-written notes by the author himself. This document forms part of Eceiza's personal archives, which are now held in the Basque Film Archive.

## THE PSYCHIATRIST WHO (UN) WROTE A FILM

**Irati Crespo**

San Sebastian Festival

The Director smiles and buys everyone a round. The Director, with his long yellowish hair, which falls about his ears, would try to adopt a leonine posture, if he were not still a cub. The lion cub must be sure of his claws before going head to head with the arch enemy of all Directors: chaos. He must learn to give shape to the elements (Martín-Santos 2004, 31).

In 1962, a young Antxon Eceiza (known at the time as Antonio) embarked on a voyage south, alongside Víctor Erice, the cameraman Luis Cuadrado and the director of photography Luis Enrique Torán. Together with José Luis Egea and Santiago San Miguel, Víctor Erice, who was there also in his capacity as first assistant director, wrote the script of what was to be Eceiza's first feature film, produced by Elías Querejeta.

As they journeyed to the whitewashed and as yet unpaved town of Almuñécar, the curious band (which made up almost half the editing team of the first stage of the magazine *Nuestro Cine*)<sup>1</sup> was joined by the writer and psychiatrist Luis Martín-Santos who, at the invitation of the yellow-haired filmmaker, accompanied them during the first days of the shoot, always slightly at a distance and

always with his notebook in hand.

Something unique occurs when a writer, who is less familiar with the structures that operate during a shoot, witnesses what goes on with fresh eyes, like a fishing village before being "desecrated by European caravans" (Martín-Santos 2004, 8), his attention will not be drawn solely by the aesthetic decisions made by the team, but will also pierce the individual psyche of each of its members, interpreting, as an omniscient narrator, the social dynamics of a film crew.

When the scriptwriter is at the same time the Assistant Director, he is subject to an especially subtle intellectual torment. Given that, by genius virtue, he feels he is more capable than the Director himself, each of his stylistic interpretations astound him by failing to correspond to the original scheme. (...) Like an immobile and silent soul in torment, he drifts around the technicians and equipment and with a broken and almost imperceptible voice, answers the questions of the volunteer extras (Martín-Santos 2004, 43-44).

The only two scenes that in a sharply selective manner immortalise the pen of the writer of *Time of Silence* are significant to understanding the theoretical concerns shared by the members of the New Spanish Cinema movement: the idea of film based on critical realism that aspired to transform reality.

In line with the ideological and aesthetic postulates of *Nuestro Cine*, the film, which was a tribute to *La ragazza con la valigia/ Girl with a Suitcase* (Valerio Zurlini, 1961), was presented to society as the flagship of the theories shared by a group of friends who had found 'the matter of their dreams and the decalogue of their commitment in Italian realism' (Riambau 2007). The evident weight of responsibility attributed to the film, mainly due to the magazine, proved a burden in terms of the expectations raised following its premiere. According to

<sup>1</sup> In addition to Eceiza, Egea, Erice and San Miguel, the editing board of the *Nuestro Cine*, the magazine, founded in 1961, was also made up of José Monleón, Jesús García de Dueñas and Román Gubern (Trenzado Romero 1999, 252). Iván Tubau (1983) identified three stages in the life of the publication: "From critical realism in search of" (1961-65), "The Monleón lad and New Spanish Cinema" (1965-67) and "The enemy at home" (1967-70).

different sources,<sup>2</sup> the thinking that accompanied the premiere was more like a conclusion reached a posteriori than a deliberate proposal developed beforehand.

Similar reflections were engendered in Eceiza by the insightful and discerning psychiatrist, whose bird's eye view of the shooting set would prove decisive, in subsequent years, in the "radical change of tack shown by the filmmaker in his next film: *In the Flesh* (1965)" (Beloki Berasategui 2010, 139).

The first scene described in the tale is the sequence that opens the film and introduces the protagonists who, linked by an inter-class romance, were used by the group of "Basque Marxist-Leninist filmmakers"<sup>3</sup> to show the two worlds that began to collide in Spain during the developmental period characterised by the arrival of foreign tourism. Juan, the only son of a family of fisher folk spends his first summer outside the se-

minary working on the summer vessel of a family from the capital. Monique is a young French woman who is enjoying the Spanish sun for the first time as a guest of the family that is employing Juan, before starting university the following autumn.

The planning of the sequence<sup>4</sup> is subtle, but the time the writer invests in admiringly discovering the technical marvels that make it possible are revealing, and point to a talent that is able to look beyond. Employer and employee enter into a face-to-face dialogue, separated by the family vessel. When the owner moves away, the camera, anchored to a dolly, rises up above the head of the young fisherman and accompanies the owner back to the heart of the family, in a short travelling. The sequence emphasises the invisible lines that divide the opportunistic bourgeoisie who have profited from real estate speculation and the inhabitants who continue to live in accordance with local fishing customs.

The second and last scene described by Martín-Santos makes up almost half of the story. Monique decides at the last minute, and on a capricious whim, to extend her stay and does not get on the bus that was due to whisk her away to her Parisian autumn. Not realising, Juan goes to find her at the station, full of uncertainty. Just like at the start of the film, the scene unfolds in a dolly-mounted travelling sequence and emphasises, once again, the insurmountable barriers of a romance that will not change either one of the two protagonists: Monique will end up in the French capital and Juan will spend another year inside the walls of the seminary.

For someone who is witnessing first-hand the disjointed making of a film (given that it has yet to be cut and edited), the choice to hang the entire story on two specific scenes is a powerful discovery. The writer intuitively generates his own cut by association, capturing (in an embryonic phase) the cinemat-

<sup>2</sup> Antxon [Eceiza] called us to make a film, not to be standard bearers for anything. That was how we worked. What happened is that it had an influence. First, because the team was made up of a load of people from *Nuestro Cine*. And second, because our influences were more or less similar. This was why it was presented as a manifesto. But it wasn't. It wasn't. We never thought: 'let's make a manifesto of this; this is the application of the principles we advocate' or anything like that, because we weren't really sure about what principles we were advocating." (San Miguel 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Term used by Eceiza himself (2007).

<sup>4</sup> In Eceiza's own words: "During the shoot, Víctor [Erice] followed all the scenes through a visor that he had somehow managed to get hold of. A visor in the form of a CinemaScope. I didn't know at the time that Víctor was following the film through this format, so it happened that, when I was going to film a shot, I would look through the camera lens and tell the actors to get a little closer together, whereas he would say there was no need, that they were both in the shot. And so they were in the visor of his CinemaScope! In the end, we realised what was going on, but we ended up with two different films, mine and the one Erice had in his head." (Angulo et al. 2009, 135-136).



graphic intentions of the budding filmmaker.

On 21 January, 1964, one year after leaving behind the “condemned beauty of the world”, the eagle-eyed writer passed away in Vitoria as the result of a traffic accident. Five months after the event, the Basque man with a thousand names released *The Next Autumn*, of which, without knowing it, Luis Martín-Santos left a unique eye-witness account, a kind of *the making of* testimony of the writing of a film that would never be finished. A privileged prose analysis that, among many other things, traced the early steps of a cub that would grow up to be the political lion of Basque and Spanish film.

**Translation:** Diana Draper.

## References

**Angulo, Jesús, Maialen Beloki, José Luis Rebordinos and Antonio Santamarina. 2009.** *Antxon Eceiza: cine, existencia-lismo y dialéctica*. San Sebastian: Filmoteca Vasca.

**Beloki Berasategui, Maialen. 2010.** “Entre Antonio y Antxon Eceiza, Cine y Política”. PhD thesis, University of the Basque Country.

**Eceiza, Antxon. 2007.** Personal interview conducted by Maialen Beloki Berasategui. 3 May.

**Martín-Santos, Luis. 2004 [1963].** *Condenada belleza del mundo*. Barcelona: Seix Barral.

**Riambau, Esteve. 2007.** *Ricardo Muñoz Suay. Una vida en sombras*. Barcelona: Tusquets.

**San Miguel, Santiago. 2007.** Personal interview conducted by Maialen Beloki Berasategui. 4 May.

**Trenzado Romero, Iván. 1999.** *Cultura de masas y cambio*

*político: El cine español de la transición*. Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas.

**Tubau, Iván. 1983.** *Crítica cinematográfica española. Bazin contra Aristarco: la gran controversia de los años sesenta*. Barcelona: Publicacions Edicions Universitat de Barcelona.

## Biography

### Irati Crespo

Irati Crespo (Errenteria, 1996) has a Bachelor's degree in Audiovisual Communication from the University of Mondragón. In 2019, she completed a Master's degree in Film Criticism run by the magazine *Caimán Cuadernos de Cine* at the ECAM (Madrid) and in 2020 did a master's degree in Film Curating Studies at Elías Querejeta Zine Eskola, where she participated with an unpublished research paper within the research project *Zinemaldia 70: All Possible Histories*. That same year, she sat on the jury in the Zinemira section during 68th San Sebastian International Film Festival (SSIFF). In 2021, she was a member of the Spanish Film jury at the 59th Gijón Festival. She has also helped with the programming of series run by the Basque Film Archive, and currently works in the Z365 strategic area, the “Year-round Festival” of the SSIFF, which, among other activities, combines the Z70 project (the festival's historic archives), the Ikusmira Berriak artistic residencies and the ongoing film screening programme at Tabakalera.

CAN'T YOU SEE?  
A DOUBTFUL JOURNEY THROUGH THE PERSONAL ARCHIVES OF ANTXON ECEIZA



Photograph from the filming of *El próximo otoño/The Next Autumn* taken on the beach of La Velilla (Almuñécar) in 1963. In the image are Antxon Eceiza, actors Sonia Bruno and Manuel Manzanque, filmmaker Víctor Erice, director of photography Luis Enrique Torán and camera operator Luis Cuadrado among others. This photograph (ECE / F-2 / 38) is part of Eceiza's personal archive deposited at the Basque Film Archive.

Dr. LUIS MARTIN-SANTOS RIVERA

Sr. D. Antonio Eceiza  
Madrid

Querido Antonio:

Después de tu simpática conferencia y de la llamada telefónica de tu madre no puedo menos de escribirte y empezar a preocuparme yo mismo de la cuestión. Efectivamente me gustaría ayudar a mi traductor poniéndole en claro los párrafos que encuentre más oscuros, o bien traduciendo al castellano corriente lo que hay en "caliente" y sobre todo leyendo el resultado de sus esfuerzos antes de la publicación para descubrir los posibles y casi inevitables errores. Dado que la única traducción extranjera que podré controlar es la francesa, el asunto me interesa más puesto que su traducción podrá servir de ayuda a los traductores al alemán, inglés e italiano que son las lenguas que hasta ahora tiene apalabradas el astuto Barral. Por tanto puedes decir a tu amigo que me escriba o darme tú las señas para que le escriba yo. Muchas gracias.

¿Qué es de tu vida? Tengo verdaderos deseos de volver a verte para cambiar de sitio algunos tiestos, volcar algunos toldos, arrancar algunos llamadores de puertas, perder cierta cantidad de boinas, ingurjitar ~~me~~ determinados hectolitros de uisqui y cambiar en general de hombre a hombre weltanschauung por weltanschauung. Me gustaría saber qué demonios de películas haces y por qué no apareces por la vernácula tierra natal. Acuérdate de que debes trabajar frenéticamente y sobre todo de mi consejo fundamental tantas veces reptido y que te mo que, aunque sin duda tomado en consideración, todavía no has puesto en práctica.

La tribuna de la plebe está bien y también te echa de menos. No dejes pasar las conmovedoras fechas sin aparecer como el comendador, aunque sea por un hueco entre dos ladrillos y a ser posible con el pelo arreglado a la navaja y un buen etc, etc.

Me parece que soy impertinente hasta por carta. O sea que te dejo sin otro consejo alguno.

Un abrazo

*Antxon?*  
*Antxon?*  
*Antxon*

*Luis*

Typed letter from Luis Martín-Santos to Antxon Eceiza, with hand-written notes by the author himself. Not dated. This document forms part of Eceiza's personal archives, which are now held in the Basque Film Archive.

## DEAR ANTONIO: ANTXON! ANTCHON? ANTÓN?

**Maialen Beloki Berasategui**

San Sebastian Festival

At some point between 1961 and 1963,<sup>1</sup> the writer from San Sebastian, Luis Martín-Santos, wrote a letter to his friend, the filmmaker from the same city, Antxon Eceiza. Between 1962 and 1963, Martín-Santos wrote a story entitled “Condenada belleza del mundo” (“Condemned beauty of the world”),<sup>2</sup> which was based on his experiences during the shooting of Eceiza’s debut feature, *El próximo otoño/The Next Autumn* (1963). The typed letter addressed to “Antonio Eceiza” features a handwritten note by Martín-Santos himself in which he questions, in a kind of internal monologue, how he should refer to his friend: “Dear Antonio: Antxon! Antchon? Antón?”

Antxon Eceiza (the official name and surname of the filmmaker during the last years of his professional life) is a key creative figure in recent Spanish and Basque film history. His fame stems from his work, but also from his significant presence in many of the most important movements and events in the evolution of what is known as New Spanish Cinema, since its beginnings during the nineteen-sixties.

<sup>1</sup> The letter, which is currently held in the Basque Film Archive as part of Eceiza’s personal collection, is not dated.

<sup>2</sup> Prior to its publication in *Seix Barral* in 2004, the story had come to light on two occasions. First, in December and January 1965, in two copies of issues 3 and 4 of the film magazine *Griffith*. And later, on 1 May 1986, during the first issue of the second era of the magazine *El Urogallo*. The text published in *Griffith* is not exactly the same as that published later in *Seix Barral*.

Eceiza was a founding partner of Laponia Films, Elías Querejeta’s first production company. He was co-director, again alongside Querejeta, of *A través de San Sebastián/Across San Sebastian* (1961), the first Spanish short film to compete at the Tours International Short Film Festival. He was the international representative of New Spanish Cinema at the Cannes International Film Festival with *Último encuentro/The Last Meeting* (1967). He directed *Mina, viento de Libertad/Mina, Wind of Freedom* (1976), a Mexican-Cuban super-production, and coordinated *Ikuska* (1979–1983), the first series of documentary short films in the Basque language, shot during the transition era. He directed *Ke arteko egunak/Days of Smoke* (1989), the first film in the Basque language to compete in the Official Section of an international film festival (in this case, the San Sebastian Festival) and won the Ama Lur prize for achievements throughout his career in that same competition in 2003.

Antxon Eceiza is, however, a name that is almost entirely absent from the historical memory of this Spanish cinema movement, in which he played such a vital part. He is an almost forgotten figure.

There seem to be several reasons for the lack of attention paid to Antxon Eceiza himself and his prolific work in the written history of Spanish film, which covers the period from the nineteen-sixties to the present day: he had a reputation for being a “cursed” filmmaker, he was a somewhat controversial figure, and he never really managed to produce works that earned him indisputable timeless recognition. In short, he was a filmmaker whose value largely resided in the way in which he was able to locate himself and operate in the different political and cultural contexts that characterised the period in which he lived and worked.

So who exactly was Antonio/Antxon, “Antxon! Antchon? Antón?”? What is the

meaning of the amalgam of names attached to him in this personal letter from his friend, Martín-Santos? Antonio Eceiza was a Spanish filmmaker and the standard bearer of New Spanish Cinema and dialectic realism, who mutated, over the years, into Antxon Ezeiza, a Basque filmmaker and the standard bearer of Basque National Cinema, before locating himself, towards the end of his professional career, at a kind of midway point between the two, becoming simply Antxon Eceiza, filmmaker.

But, above all, Eceiza was a film enthusiast and a vocational filmmaker. Proof of this early vocation, which constituted the overriding passion of his entire life, lies in his early interest in cinema, which he could hear from his house;<sup>4</sup> his endless conversations with Elías Querejeta;<sup>4</sup> his diverse and significant experiences with different film clubs;<sup>5</sup> his critiques in *Film Ideal*, *Cinema Universitario*, *Cuadernos de Arte y Pensamiento*, and *Nuestro Cine*; his studies at the Instituto de Investigaciones y Experiencias Cinematográficas (IIEC, Institute of Film Research and Experiences, predecessor of the Official School of Film); and his gradual and hard-won entry into the film world (with the odd paradigmatic episode, such as his time at the UNINCI and the shooting of *Viridiana* (Luis Buñuel, 1961)). He dedicated practically all his efforts and work to film, until he managed to turn it into the only profession in his life. All this is more than enough grounds to state that Antxon Eceiza was a filmmaker who succeeded in his chosen profession thanks to hard work and effort, as well as to his vocation and passion (perhaps even obsession) with film.

His work focused both on production (eight feature films and two fictional short films, nine documentary short films, one corporate mid-length feature and documentary series for television) and on the development of a more or less theoretical corpus. Indeed, as well as being a filmmaker dedicated to

making films and promoting other types of initiatives in the cinema industry, Eceiza also theorised about a wide range of different issues, mainly linked to realism and national cinema. He engaged in (often) intense and passionate debates on these issues, although his contributions (both quantitatively and qualitatively speaking) were not particularly

<sup>3</sup> "I lived opposite the Bellas Artes cinema on Prim Street, and in summer, of course, the windows of our house and those of the cinema would be open and we could hear the films being screened every day. Hear, but not see. I heard *Bicycle Thieves* sixteen times, *Miracle in Milan* about as many; I heard *Duel in the Sun* but couldn't go and see it because it was only rated for adults. That's where my love of film began." (Angulo et al. 2009, 114).

<sup>4</sup> Elías Querejeta, who was one of Eceiza's closest friends during their teenage years, provided Eceiza with financial support, sending him part of the money he earned as a football player with Real Sociedad in San Sebastian in exchange for the notes he took at the IIEC.

<sup>5</sup> Eceiza's experience with film clubs began with his collaboration with the Cine Club San Sebastián founded in 1956 by the Diocesan Board of Catholic Action. That same year, the film club participated for the first time in the organisation of a Film Studies Course (an experience it repeated during the following two years). The course featured classes taught by filmmakers and critics such as Luis García Berlanga, Juan Antonio Bardem, José María García Escudero, Florentino Soria and Pascual Cebollada, and in addition to Eceiza and Querejeta, the student body included other future filmmakers, such as Víctor Erice, Santiago San Miguel, Javier Aguirre and Antonio Mercero. Although Eceiza denied ever having been involved in the organisation of the film club, there is evidence that he collaborated actively with it, presenting films alongside Aguirre and occasionally writing pieces for the newsletter. But Eceiza's work with film clubs was not limited to his (supposedly) occasional collaboration with the Cine Club San Sebastián. During that period, Querejeta and Eceiza also helped establish the (rather short-lived) Cantábrico film club. Based at the Union headquarters, right from the very beginning, this film club had a decidedly left-wing orientation. Querejeta and Eceiza were responsible for programming at the Cantábrico film club, and were also called upon often by other film clubs in the province to chair debates and discussions.

significant. This is not to say that there were no moments or circumstances in which his opinions had a wider impact, such as in the case of the debate on cinematographic realism, with its famous and paradigmatic war cry “John Ford disgusts us”<sup>6</sup> (Eceiza 1963), or on Basque National Cinema.

Mostly, however, his cinematographic works (both theoretical and practical) were more closely linked to his other great passion: politics. No matter where he went or what he did, from a very early age and throughout his whole life, Eceiza was an intensely ideological and politicised figure. Politics was a key driving force, not only in his films and other cinematographic activities, but in his private life as well. But beyond his ideological convictions (and their evolution), it is important to note another influence that, alongside cinema, would accompany him throughout his life.

Eceiza's basic nature was clearly nonconformist. His very instinct pushed him to be a dissident, to go against. Rupture for rupture's sake. One meaningful story about him is connected to his *donostiarrism*.<sup>7</sup> His particular brand of *donostiarrism* prompted him, one day, to declare with yearning that “what I wanted was to return, to be at home, in the *tamborrada* procession ... but not in the Guanajuato one.” However, it was this same *donostiarrism* that

had, years earlier, prompted him to describe his longed-for city as, quite simply, “uninhabitable”, in line with the financiers (Real Sociedad soccer players) who reflected it in the short film *Across San Sebastian*. Eceiza was also profoundly nonconformist in relation to his *donostiarrism*. As he himself so accurately expressed it: “I hate it always, but I am a true donostiarra [son of Donostia]” (Eceiza, 2007a).

There are many more examples of Eceiza's nonconformism. One which is particularly worth mentioning is linked to his political life and convictions. His father had told him he could be anything in life except “a Basque nationalist or a communist.” “So you see,” adds Eceiza, “I ended up a Basque communist.” It was most likely his rebel nonconformist attitude that prompted him to join the Spanish Communist Party at a very early age. And it was probably this same trait that prompted him to break away from that party, after having said to himself “here one must get involved.” And again, it was this nonconformism that pushed him to join different break-away movements, including the Left-wing Basque Nationalists (also known as the Abertzale Left). A good example of this nonconformism, as well as of its type and scope, is the utterance: “I've never been a member of a political organisation which expected its members to attend meetings at 8 o'clock in the morning” (Eceiza 2007c).

The nonconformism practised by Eceiza was, in all cases and at all times, and according to Román Gubern (2003, 71), a type of “controlled dissent”, i.e., that espoused by the critical realists of the era in which it was their lot to live, and of which, in a certain sense, Eceiza was a standard bearer. As Iván Tubau (1983, 125) described it: “We were radicals to the extent that censorship deemed it acceptable to let us be radicals.” But this “controlled dissent” or “possibilism” was not just constrained by censorship, but also

<sup>6</sup> The phrase “This is why, respect lost, spirit free, we can say that John Ford disgusts us”, published on 19 January 1963 in an article entitled “Río Grande, de John Ford” in *Nuestro Cine* (Critiques Section n. 22), pursued Eceiza in the same way as “‘I'm an atheist, thanks be to God' persecuted Buñuel, 'tied up and well tied up' haunted Franco and 'all power to the soviets' haunted Lenin. (You will observe that, at least as far as quotes are concerned, I may be a little immodest, but despite what they say, I'm also tolerant and a pluralist ...).” (Eceiza 2002, 65).

<sup>7</sup> His emotional ties and commitment to his native city, San Sebastian - known as Donostia in the Basque language (translator's note).

by all kinds of entities, institutions and circumstances in general, as evident, for example, in the case of the negotiations with the financial backers of *Ikuska o Erreferenduma/Ikuska o Referendum*.<sup>8</sup> Eceiza's adaptability and commitment to possibilism were also traits evident in his life, in a wide range of moments and circumstances.

Eceiza lived his life as a varied and notable series of ideological evolutions (or revolutions). The common thread linking all of them was a permanent, constant trait: his commitment to the political field generically known as "left-wing". It is also true, however, that his view of and approach to ideology were those of a "romantic of revolution and radicalism". It can be said of Eceiza (albeit with many qualifications) that his Marxism, his rupturism, his internationalism, his Third-Worldism and his anti-imperialism formed part of a kind of magna made up of a Marxist-Leninist foundation, combined with elements of different European "revolutionary" and national liberation movements (especially in South America), that emerged during the nineteen-seventies. And mixed also, of course, with movements that had arisen and developed during the convulsive moments of Franco's regime and the Transition, including ETA and the political movement that accompanied it.

To understand his ideology, as well as its evolution and his political commitments, it is important to bear in mind the fact that he was a man closely tied to and dependent on his era. So much so, in fact, that it is not possible to understand these (and other) aspects without taking into consideration the circumstances (of all types) in which he lived and which affected and influenced his professional life: he was born on the losing side of the war<sup>9</sup> and had suffered the consequences; he had started his professional life within the framework of a society (the Spanish one)

that, on Eceiza's side, leaned very strongly towards political rupture with Franco's regime; he belonged to a European generation that was also, to a certain extent, a worldwide one (at least as far as the developed world was concerned) and experienced years and movements imbued with utopianism and radicalism, such as those generally ascribed to the so-called generation of '68; he came into contact with the national liberation movements of the Sixties, mainly focused on South America, and particularly in Cuba; and he participated in the terms under which the Transition to democracy took place. Consequently, the influence of the political, social and cultural movements of his generation had a major, if not conclusive, impact on Eceiza's life and profession. And not only in

<sup>8</sup> The final result of the short film that was touted to be the first of an entire series failed to satisfy the project's backers due to its marked ideology. As Eceiza himself put it: 'All hell broke loose once again. People went to see the screening at the laboratory with stopwatches in order to be able to say that Telesforo got two seconds longer than Felipe González. The arguments were beyond belief. In the end, I had to negotiate a new formula with Ardanza, who was a legal advisor with Caja Laboral at the time.' And then, precisely as a result of all the controversy, what Eceiza described as a 'gentlemen's agreement' was reached between Bertan Filmeak, Caja Laboral Popular and the Faustino Orbegozo Foundation. Antxon Eceiza's version of all this was as follows: 'There were some things I wasn't going to budge on. And I suppose there were some elements they were simply not going to budge on either. First, it all had to be in the Basque language. Second, the Basque Country is a nation. Third, a nation that extends from the Adour to the Ebro. And this is true regardless of whether or not it is a political film about territoriality. But it should be established: when they say 'I'm going to Navarre', they don't say 'I'm leaving the Basque Country'. All this is important when selecting the issues to be dealt with. It was a generic agreement.' (Eceiza 2007a).

<sup>9</sup> Or "the wars" as Eceiza said in relation to Juan, lead character in *Las leyes de la herencia/The Laws of Heritage* (a project that was never actually made): "A Basque who has lost five wars: the Basque Country, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and the fall of the Berlin Wall."

terms of politics. The same thing occurred on the cultural plane, with movements such as dialectic realism, New Spanish Cinema and Basque National Cinema. It was as if Eceiza had found himself in the midst of all of this and let himself be carried along (or away) by the events that transpired in his two vocations: film and politics.

The evolution in general (and specifically the political evolution) underwent by Eceiza in his life and work is open to various different interpretations: José Luis Egea claimed to detect “a line of continuism.” Santiago San Miguel, on the other hand, believed that “Antxon, in both his films and all else, has lurched from stance to stance, volte-faces prompted not by themselves, but by the situation.”<sup>10</sup>

Another striking trait of the filmmaker

Antxon Eceiza was his love of controversy. Eceiza often adopted a way of seeing (and reacting to) the world that was reminiscent of trench warfare. He forged himself a paradigm from which he observed, judged and criticised all cinematographic creation. A paradigm that, as is so often the case, needed another opposing paradigm to clash with, as if defending one's own view made no sense without an opposing way of thinking to confront and dispute with. The aforementioned statement “John Ford disgusts us” and the phobias and philiias professed by the “*raigambres* in opposition to the *globists*”<sup>11</sup> are illustrative examples of this way outlook.

Eceiza was also an extremely lucid person, who saw sides to things that are generally difficult to see, such as observations about one's own life and one's own work. This trait is linked to the cuttingly insightful autobiographical tone of some of his last films, such as *Days of Smoke* and *Felicidades, Tovarich/ Happy Birthday, Tovarich* (1995), as well as some of the projects he started but never finished. It is also evident in his oft self-confessed “stutter syndrome”.<sup>12</sup>

Given the focus of many of his films on murders, suicides and death in general, an analysis of his film production may suggest a proclivity towards “tragicism”. He was a filmmaker who liked unhappy endings: *De cuerpo presente/In the Flesh* (1965) and *Las secretas intenciones/Secret Intentions* (1969) both ended with the murder-suicide of the lead character. And in *Último encuentro/The Last Meeting* (1966), it was the lead character himself who ends up becoming a murderer. Tragedy is evident also in *The Next Autumn*, in the form of the murder of Juan's grandfather and, above all, in the fact that the main character is unable to continue his romantic relationship with Monique. Francisco Javier Mina was shot by realist troops in *Mina, Wind of Freedom*. The main character's love

<sup>10</sup> “For me, Antxon can be summed up in just a few things he said to me during a trip from San Sebastian to Madrid, that were harshly critical of the Basque Country,” confessed San Miguel, who then added: “but not from the perspective of what was happening there, but rather in relation to the Basque Country itself, its landscape and all that ... and his admiration for Castilla. That is almost the last thing about our conversations that has stayed with me.” (San Miguel, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> “We are divided into two antagonistic groups: the GLOBISTS (from the film *Le ballon rouge/The Red Balloon*, Albert Lamorisse, 1956), who admire the ‘sensitivity’ of ‘individual values’ and ‘fantasy’ ... Their idols include Fellini, post-neorealist Rossellini, Truffaut, Hitchcock, Ford, etc., and the RAIGAMBRES, enthusiasts of critical realism (those who, after viewing any film, say that it ‘lacks social *raigambre*’ [roots and traditions]). We are fervent devotees of Francesco Rosi (*Salvatore Giuliano*, 1961), Visconti, Zurlini..., and are fair admirers of the quality of Resnais and Antonioni, as well as various Americans (...).” (Eceiza 2002, 167).

<sup>12</sup> “During my school years, jokes about stuttering became very popular. A man with a stutter bumps into a friend and says: ‘He-he-hey, y-you k-k-know I b-b-been ch-ch-chucked o-o-out of the N-N-National Radio Station for being a c-c-communist?’ We were always left with this niggling doubt: is what I've done really that terrible or is there something against it?.” (Eceiza, 2007a).



interest was murdered in *Complot mongol/Mongol Complot* (1977). Days of Smoke ended with the main character's desolation, disorientation and loneliness and with none of the other characters being able to establish intimate relations with anyone in their immediate environment. In *Happy Birthday, Tovarich*, one of the main characters commits suicide by self-immolation in the Valley of the Fallen. Similar doses of tragedy are present also in many of his failed projects: *Los justos* (1959), *Nuestra Querida Elena* (date unknown), *Los inocentes* (1963), *Los cien caballeros* (1965), *Un indio andaluz* (1990, with Alfonso Sastre as co-scenarist), *Rojo sangre* (1992, with Vicente Leñero as co-scriptwriter), *Jai Alai* (1997), *Las leyes de la herencia* (1999), *Cuaderno de bitácora* (2005) and *Querido padre* (2006).

One might always wonder whether this trait, which is so evident in Eceiza's films, was the result of his inherent pessimistic or even fatalist nature, or whether it was sparked by experience, a sort of lesson taught by life's hard knocks.

The trait that, in any case, is most striking in Eceiza's life is his capacity for transformation, his ability to reveal himself as an eminently diverse figure. It is as if, throughout his 76 years, he had lived various different lives that may even seem contradictory. In both the field of film and in the political arena, the filmmaker from San Sebastian combined and reconciled times, visions, approaches and works that, at first glance at least, seem utterly incompatible. Eceiza was a man of volte-faces, abrupt turnabouts and apparently brusque changes of tack: between his radical declarations and his possibilist behaviour; between his defence of critical realism in film and his films themselves, which fell into diverse genres; between his categorical expressions of disgust, for example, for the films and work of John Ford and his nods to that same filmmaker in some of his

own movies, such as *De cuerpo presente*, for example, and his later (somewhat extravagant) explanations of these expressions of revulsion; and between his defence of a radical theory about Basque National Cinema and his much more compromising practice.

But in no other field can so many of Eceiza's different selves and lives be detected as in the field of political ideology. Eceiza saw-between feeling and defining himself as "Spanish" and feeling and defining himself (alternatively and even somewhat contradictorily) as "Basque". Although it may seem excessive to state it so bluntly, it certainly seems that the identity with which the "self that was Antonio Eceiza" perceived itself living and working in Madrid during the nineteen-sixties was quite different from that of the "self that was Antxon Ezeiza", who returned to the Basque Country in 1978. Indeed, if we take a closer look at some of his manifestations, we see a clear, even radical, turning point with regard to these two selves, which took place towards the end of his time in Madrid and his exile in Mexico. Without this turning point, how can we explain the fact that Antonio Eceiza expressed harsh criticism of the Basque Country to Santiago San Miguel, who remembers it as being a criticism of "the Basque Country, but not from the perspective of what was happening there, but rather in relation to the Basque Country itself, its landscape and all that ... and his admiration for Castilla", and then just years later, Antxon Ezeiza talked about "the need to create a Basque cinema, in our own language, as a testament to our history and an instrument of our pathway towards the full reality of our identity, towards a Basque Country that is independent, socialist, reunified and Basque-speaking" (Ezeiza, 1978)?

Other more nuanced, less categorical interpretations of Eceiza's different lives and selves are, of course, possible. These are clearly alluded to in the "description" offered by his friend Luis Martín-Santos when,

upon writing to the filmmaker, wondered on paper how exactly to address him: “Antonio, Antxon? Antchon? Antón?”.

Whatever the scope and variety of Eceiza’s lives, there can be no doubt that finding convincing explanations for the specific contents of his different variations, and particularly the reasons for their occurrence, is no easy task.

How exactly did Antonio/Antxon Eceiza/Eceiza view his “Spanish self” or his “Basque self”? Were they primitive sentiments? Or were they more emotional in nature? What type of conceptual or ideological contents or vision prompted them? Everything suggests that they are options or explanations rooted mainly in the field of politics. Simply put: it was politics that first sparked and oriented his cinematographic vocation towards the “self of critical realism and the fostering of New Spanish Cinema”, and it was politics also (although of a completely different persuasion) that, at another moment in his life, prompted him to proclaim his “Basque self and the defence and development, theoretical and practical, of Basque National Cinema,” understood as the cinema that would “rescue our national identity.” His eventual return to Spanish cinema suggests that it was not so much a case of dividing the single self that was Antxon Eceiza into two different selves that mutually denied each other in a radical manner, but rather a question of combining (with all the difficulties and contradictions this entailed) his diverse selves, which, like in all of us, coexisted in harmony and/or in dispute throughout the life and professional career of Antonio, Antxon? Antchon? Antón?, the filmmaker from San Sebastian.

**Translation:** Diana Draper.

## References

**Angulo, Jesús; Maialen Beloki, José Luis Rebordinos, Antonio Santamarina. 2009.** *Antonio, Antxon Eceiza: Cine, existencialismo y dialéctica*. San Sebastian: Filmoteca Vasca.

**Eceiza, Antonio. 1963.** “Río Grande, de John Ford”. *Nuestro Cine* 22:66.

**Eceiza, Antxon. 2007a.** Personal interview conducted by Maialen Beloki Berasategui. 17 January.

---. 2007b. Personal interview conducted by Maialen Beloki Berasategui. 04 May.

---. 2007c. Personal interview conducted by Maialen Beloki Berasategui. 25 May.

---. April 2002. “El joven John Ford”. *Nosferatu* 40: 65-71

**Eceiza, Antxon. 22 October 1978.** In ‘Bases para la creación de un cine vasco’, *Egin*, 22 october.

**Gubern, Román. 2003.** “El forcejeo entre censura y reformismo. ¿La primera apertura?”. In *Los Nuevos Cines en España. Ilusiones y desencantos de los años sesenta*, edited by Carlos F. Heredero and José Enrique Monterde, 69-79. Valencia: Institut Valencià de Cinematografia Ricardo Muñoz Suay, Festival Internacional de Cine de Gijón, Centro Galego de Artes da Imaxe, Filmoteca de Andalucía, Filmoteca Española.

**Martín-Santos, Luis. 2004.** *Condenada belleza del mundo*. Barcelona: Seix Barral.

**San Miguel, Santiago. 2007.** Personal interview conducted by Maialen Beloki Berasategui. 04 May.

**Tubau, Iván. 1983.** *Crítica cinematográfica española. Bazin contra Aristarco: la gran controversia de los años sesenta*. Barcelona: Publicacions Edicions Universitat de Barcelona.

## Biography

### **Maialen Beloki Berasategui**

Deputy Director of the San Sebastian Festival since 2016. Coordinator of the "Festival all year round", the institution's major strategic commitment combining its fundamental lines of action in the 21st century: the search for, accompaniment and development of new talents (Ikusmira Berriak, Nest); training and knowledge transfer on the subject of film (Elías Querejeta Zine Eskola, Zinemaldia +); and cinematic research and thinking (the Z70 project, the Zine publication). Graduate in Audiovisual Communication from the University of Navarra (Pamplona) 2002-2005. Doctor in Film Theory, Analysis and Documentation (doctoral thesis *Between Antonio and Antxon Eceiza. Cinema and politics*) from the Public University of the Basque Country, Leioa, 2006-2010. She collaborated in setting the Elías Querejeta Zine Eskola film school in motion and is a member of its Academic Directorate. She was a lecturer in communication at the HUHEZI faculty of Mondragon University. She participated in the book *Antxon Eceiza, cine existencialismo y dialéctica* (Jesús Angulo, Maialen Beloki, José Luis Rebordinos, Antonio Santamarina, Filmoteca Vasca, 2010) and *Cine vasco: tres generaciones de cineastas* (Filmoteca Vasca, 2015). She participated in the selection of projects for the Luis García Berlanga research grants of Spanish Academy of Arts and Cinematographic Sciences (2020). She participated in the short film selection Kimuak, the Basque government programme for the international promotion and distribution of Basque short films (2012, 2013), and is a member of the Basque Government Council on Culture.

CAN'T YOU SEE?  
A DOUBTFUL JOURNEY THROUGH THE PERSONAL ARCHIVES OF ANTIXON ECEIZA



Series of photographs taken at one of Fidel Castro's rallies in Cuba, with Antxon Eceiza in the foreground. Not dated. These photographs (ECE / F-2 / 01) form part of Eceiza's personal archives, which are now held in the Basque Film Archive.

CAN'T YOU SEE?  
A DOUBTFUL JOURNEY THROUGH THE PERSONAL ARCHIVES OF ANTIXON ECEIZA



CAN'T YOU SEE?  
A DOUBTFUL JOURNEY THROUGH THE PERSONAL ARCHIVES OF ANTXON ECEIZA



CAN'T YOU SEE?  
A DOUBTFUL JOURNEY THROUGH THE PERSONAL ARCHIVES OF ANTXON ECEIZA



### Madrid, VITORIA 19-20 de Enero 1.964

Nuestro buen amigo Luis Martín Santos vivía el mal momento de su viudez reciente...compartía, ignoro en qué medida, ese malvivir con la también reciente viuda Pepa Rezola...eran los supervivientes – ellos y sus hijos respectivos – de un grupo, dos parejas, estrechamente unido por la amistad y trágicamente destruído...Los otros dos cónyuges habían muerto en terribles circunstancias...sendos accidentes de coche y de horno...

Se acercaba el día de San Sebastián (20 de Enero). Luis me llama y me dice que preferiría pasar la “noche de fiesta” lejos de tamborras y recuerdos lacerantes... Me plantea viajar a Madrid y que cenemos juntos...Acepto...Incorporo a Rafa a la cena...

Cenamos. Hablamos – sobre todo, Luis, y no era fácil la competencia con los otros dos rivales – pasamos un rato con Terele (un gran abrazo), entonces compañera de Rafa, cumplimos a rajatabla el “programa” de Luis para estas ocasiones: cabaret, hablar con putas - no es timidez mojigata, a Luis le encantaba cuando estábamos juntos dos o tres amigos “charlar con mujeres que practican el movimiento pendular no deambulatorio” - así las llamaba él con su insoportable, y a la vez seductora, pedantería – bebimos, sobre todo, bebimos muchísimo...

En el transcurso de la larguísima noche fue creciendo la idea de que Rafa y yo nos fuéramos con Luis en su viaje de regreso a Donosti...

Lo terminamos decidiendo, después de chocar con un par de aceras...nos citamos en el portal de mi casa, a las 9 y media, con las maletas...Serían las 5 ó 6 de la mañana...

El iba a darse una ducha, a recuperarse y pasaría a buscarnos...No lo hizo...no sé si se duchó...no vino a recogernos...

Rafa y yo esperamos, en el portal, con las maletas, hasta más de las 11...

Rafa se fue para su casa...Yo subí a la mía... Allí, horas más tarde, me llegó la llamada, el llanto, de Rafa, llorándome que había oído por la radio la trágica noticia: Luis se había matado en las proximidades de Vitoria.

Yo también lloré mi respuesta y, luego, durante un rato larguísimo seguí llorando pensamientos...todos del tipo...¿ Qué hubiera pasado si nosotros hubiéramos...?

¿Fue accidente o...?...¿Nos quiso preservar...? – muchas de estas interrogantes perdieron después sentido: Luis viajaba, nosotros lo ignorábamos, con su padre y un amigo, Paco Ciriquiain....

Y sólo nos quedó el desolador sentimiento de la inmensa pérdida.



**zine**

1 iz.(Heg.) h. zinema, cine, cinema

**zine**

noun

: *MAGAZINE especially*: a noncommercial often homemade or online publication usually devoted to specialized and often unconventional subject matter



With the participation of

