The Photographs and Films of Valentín and Ramón de Zubiaurre

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The Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, in collaboration with the Basque Museum, also in Bilbao, has assembled an important collection of photographs and films related to Valentín and Ramón de Zubiaurre. These materials from the family archives reveal that the two celebrated painters worked with both photography and film at different times in their lives. More than one thousand two hundred photographs—glass plate negatives and positive prints, bound or loose—and twenty-seven films have stood the test of time. The majority were made by the brothers themselves, although the collection also includes images taken by other photographers (mostly studio portraits and photo reports on their artistic lives) and eleven commercial films. Additionally, the archive contains a considerable number of ‘circulated’ postcards sent or received by the Zubiaurre families, which document the family’s connection to another important social use of photography in the early twentieth century.1

As family archives are generally quite heterogeneous, the first task when undertaking a study of this nature is to identify the different characteristics of that particular photographic and cinematographic practice: the subjects each brother chose to portray, and the intentions behind this production. Therefore, in addition to analysing the material itself, this text will also draw on written references to the artists’ photographic activity that facilitate a clearer interpretation and understanding of the archive: the Zubiaurre brothers’ own writings, texts by other authors, or information printed in newspapers and magazines. The fact that both painters were deaf gives special significance to the captions that accompany most of the album photographs, making us wonder if this practice was somehow related to their communicative possibilities in social interactions.

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1 This study will not attempt to analyse the postcard phenomenon or the relevance of printed images as vehicles for the transmission of cultural values. With a few rare exceptions, such images were not taken by the Zubiaurre families, nor do they conform to the logic of a collection; therefore, this text will merely examine the textual information they contain.
[The Zubiaurre family at their home in Madrid]
This study aims to offer a coherent explanation of these still and moving images by discussing their different thematic, visual and textual components and analysing the context in which they were made. It will also examine their correlation with the cultural customs of that period and, above all, attempt to determine how the practice of amateur photographers in general was governed and organised, noting the differences and similarities between the Zubiaurres and their contemporaries. The entire study is guided by a theoretical approach that pays special attention to the social class or group to which the Zubiaurre family belonged, the possible meanings attributed to the photographic act in that setting, the value system that underpinned this practice, and the use made of the materials that were produced. The additional meaning that these images ‘reveal’, beyond what the photographers themselves ‘state’ in their pictures and films, is likewise important, to the extent that they reflect the symbolism of a particular era, place, social class or artistic group. It is also necessary to review the concept of authorship in light of the difficulty of identifying the material authors of most of the images, as the photographs are not signed. Another important part of this study is concerned with the relationships between photography, film and painting. There is a close correlation between the brothers’ photographic and cinematographic production, apparent primarily in the choice of similar themes but also in the use of both media to create fictions—a tendency already visible in the early photographs of their youth, some of which have a pre-cinematographic air. These two disciplines, in turn, are connected their pictorial œuvre in several ways.

Consequently, the Zubiaurres constitute a case study that may have relevant implications for the history of photography, with the potential to expand and enrich our definition of what is generically referred to as amateur photography. For years, historiography has taken an overly generalised view of amateur photographers in Spain, almost automatically associating them with the importance of the aesthetic or artistic model. Several recent studies have identified another class of amateur photographer, one primarily devoted to scientific and documentary projects. As a result, the world of amateur photography has often been reduced to the coexistence of two schools: artistic and documentary. The problem is that a considerable number of amateur photographers do not fit into either category, and their work has not received the attention it deserves. The ‘democratisation’ of photography, which numerous studies attribute to photographic amateurism, brought cameras into the private realm of family life. The spread of private photography served to dramatise and ritualise the domestic space, placing the emphasis on entertainment, free time and idleness. This fact goes a long way towards explaining the photographic and cinematographic activity we will see here, for the work of these painters acquires its true value in the context of photography’s social uses, as part of the collective construction of a shared visual culture, not governed by the logics of the medium’s artistic or documentary validation.

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4 Ibid.
The Zubiaurre family’s main residence was in Madrid, although they spent long periods of time in Garai, Bizkaia, during the summer. They belonged to the bourgeoisie, a social class which, in the final quarter of the nineteenth century, had already made photography one of its social customs, as a pastime and a consumer product, and, more importantly, had a visual culture abounding in shared points of reference. Consequently, Valentín and Ramón grew up in a family where photographic products were quite common: studio portraits, carte de visite collections with portraits of relatives and celebrities, views of cities, monuments and comical scenes, stereo viewers and postcards. In those days, this use of photography was habitual among many bourgeois families in Spain’s larger cities. In fact, that social class produced the first great generation of Spanish amateur photographers, which also included a few members of the aristocracy, in the final years of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. A key factor in this process was the pressure of the photography industry, which saw the affluence of these large social classes as an opportunity to expand their business.  

The Zubiaurre brothers embraced amateur photography at a time when this novel activity was taking the Spanish capital by storm, a fad that eventually led to the creation of the Photographic Society of Madrid in 1899. Valentín and Ramón were undoubtedly influenced in this matter by two complementary spheres, each with its own cultural practices: their family and their educational context. Aside from what they had already seen at home, where there was probably ample proof of the increasing prevalence of photography among Madrid’s bourgeois families, their art studies brought them into contact with budding groups of photography buffs. Several of their fellow art school students were amateur photographers, and the practice of photography was widely accepted in certain artistic circles of late nineteenth-century Madrid. This tendency is ex-
emplified by Alejandro Ferrant, a prestigious painter and teacher at the Special School of Painting, Sculpture and Engraving of San Fernando, who sat on the jury of the first major competition held by the Photographic Society of Madrid in 1901, to which both brothers submitted works.8

The siblings’ photographic endeavours were limited to a very specific period in their youth, which began around 1898—when Valentín was 19 years old and Ramón 16—and ended in or about 1910. The first four years were undoubtedly the most productive. Although the archive does contain photographs dated after 1910, they do not appear to have been taken by the Zubiaurres. These are positive prints mounted in albums, without their accompanying negatives, or photo reports by other professionals. Everything seems to indicate that, by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, when their painting careers began to take off, their interest in photography waned. They would not resume the habit of recording their own lives, this time with a cine-camera, until 1928, nearly twenty years later.

Valentín and Ramón’s photographic production can be divided into four major thematic categories, each of which reflect different interests or motivations and, moreover, can be associated with different social and cultural customs of their day. In any event, readers should be forewarned that this study advocates an interpretation of the Zubiaurres’ work from the perspective of the private use of their photographs and films, although more will be said on this later. The four main categories are individual or group portraits, photographs taken during their travels, fictions or capriccios, and images taken in the Basque Country. Special attention is given to their work in the provinces of Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa, given the profound impact that these Basque regions had on the photographic, cinematographic and pictorial activity of both brothers, as well as the fact that these images undoubtedly constitute the most fascinating part of the collection. However, due to the logic that underpins the present study, this category encompasses everything they made in those two provinces, not just the physical territory of the Basque Country, and therefore includes many examples of the other three general themes: portraits, trips and, of course, fictions.

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8 La fotografía: revista mensual ilustrada, year I, no. 4 (1 January 1902), 120–130.
Portraits

The first large group of images consists of portraits of relatives, friends and classmates. It is well-known that portraiture, more than any other early use of this invention, was the format which allowed a financially viable photography industry to emerge. It was also instrumental in assigning photography a relevant role in the processes of constructing and preserving family memories. Photography studios sprang up in every Spanish city in the early twentieth century, and studio portraits became a widespread social phenomenon in those years. Established in the nineteenth century as a symbol of social status and wealth, and later as an indication of the desire for upward social mobility, the ritual performed in photography studios attempted to reflect the desired status with symbolic elements such as the sitter’s attire, the setting (often a replica of a bourgeois salon) and attributes that underscored the value of education and refinement: books or other objects related to erudite activities. Portraits taken by amateur photographers did not presume to compete with studio portraits,9 and in fact those bourgeois citizens still flocked to the studios to have their pictures taken. Ultimately, however, the activity of those amateurs did challenge the pre-eminence of the professionals. The technical convenience offered by the major photographic supply companies was giving new meaning to photography for people who had never even used a camera before.10 The attack on the dominant photographic structures was orchestrated by creating new institutions that advocated a ‘domestic version of history’, introducing concepts such as the ‘snapshot’ and ‘spontaneity’ and playing up the fun side of photography.11 Thus, portraiture was undoubtedly the main use of amateur photography in its infancy, starting a major trend which these two amateurs also followed.

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9 In addition to their own photographs, this family, like so many other amateurs, kept countless portraits taken at the most prestigious Madrid studios (Debas, Franzen, Alviach, Amador, Vandel and Biedma).
11 Ibid.
Family portraits make up the largest group within this category of the archive. At home, about town, in the country or on an outing, the camera captured their activities in moments of leisure, ever mindful of the need to perpetuate the family institution and its memory. Another interesting and numerous group of portraits is devoted to the artistic lives of the two brothers, chiefly at different moments in their education and early careers as painters. Amusing group photos posing with fellow San Fernando students, at the Royal Academy run by Alejandro Ferrant or in the Paris studio they shared with the American artist Roy Culver Carpenter paint an interesting picture of their school environment and constitute an invaluable record of the beginning of their creative careers. Bearing in mind that Valentín and Ramón’s photographic exercises were primarily used to chronicle relevant events in their family’s life, the weight of this theme in their photographs and films is hardly surprising. In the Zubiaurre family, few things were more important than Ramón and Valentín’s pictorial careers. Every member of the family was actively involved in this endeavour, probably because of the additional difficulties the two brothers faced when trying to establish themselves as painters owing to their deafness.

It is immediately apparent that the Zubiaurre family figures prominently in most of their photographs—a constant in all of their photographic and cinematographic work, as we shall see. In many cases, the photographer also appears in the image, most notably in several portraits of their family members and artistic

12 Rebecca Guerra, op. cit.
acquaintances. Photographic self-portraiture became a technical possibility in the late nineteenth century thanks to the invention of a pneumatic release that opened the camera’s shutter by means of a rubber tube and a bulb, which the photographer would squeeze once he was in position. The only drawback was that the thin tube showed up in the photograph. However, the interesting thing about this practice is not its technical peculiarity or the presence of a foreign object in the picture, but rather the fact that it is symptomatic of the photographer’s increasing proximity to the photographic act, inserting himself in the process of recording an image. Practically all of the Zubiaurre brothers’ photographs and films present a vision of the world that includes them, a territory explained through their presence. In this way, they challenged the traditional role of the photographer, who usually remained on ‘this side’ of the reality he was portraying, without crossing the line that would allow him to be a part of it. Yet it actually makes sense when we consider that, essentially, most of the images we see here are exercises in familial self-representation.
Trips

The second theme is the trips that the two brothers, accompanied by other family members, made to different locations in Spain and Europe. In the early twentieth century, travel was a luxury that only the upper classes could afford, the same social groups who had taken an interest in photography. Over time, this custom became more widespread and led to the mass tourism we know today. The relationship between travel and photography dates back to the invention of the camera, given the capacity of this graphic medium to produce ‘true’ representations of reality, infallible records of one’s travels. And so photography assumed the role of graphic memory, chronicle of the everyday, and visual diary of places visited.13 Cameras offered a different approach to travel; each journey became an imaginary modern entity where the traveller’s gaze was anything but passive, actually leaving an autobiographical stamp on the places it passed through.14 Travel photographs have therefore always been pure constructs which, though stemming from an individual experience, appeal to a collective recognition, a shared experience for which the travel album proved to be the perfect means of arranging and ordering the different steps of that experience.15

In this respect, our photographers were not unlike the countless other bourgeois and aristocratic travellers who, camera in hand, roamed Europe at the dawn of the twentieth century. The bulk of their travel photographs, excepting those taken in Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa (which we will examine in another section), document their youthful adventures in Europe. In 1905, having completed their studies in Madrid, the two brothers left for Paris with their mother to continue their artistic training. In the summer of 1906, the five members of the Zubiaurre family toured Italy and Switzerland. After that trip, their father and sister returned to Madrid, while Ramón, Valentín and their mother embarked on another tour that took them to Belgium, Holland, England, Germany, Austria and Hungary.16 These were short trips that followed the pattern typical of nineteenth-century travellers, primarily interested in seeing the artistic and monumental heritage of the cities they visited. In the Zubiaures’ case, their artistic inclinations led them to visit the main European picture galleries as well. The photographic products of these journeys are, as mentioned above, a kind of visual diary or chronicle of the places they stopped, usually with a family member in the picture. The graphic record of that experience, ensuring that it will be remembered in years to come, combines ‘this is’ with a declaration that ‘I was there’.

The appearance of the first home movie camera in 1924 was such an exciting novelty that it rekindled the two brothers’ interest in documenting their leisure and recreational activities. In 1929, the year of the Ibero-American Exposition in Seville and the International Exposition in Barcelona, they shot extensive footage of their travels and stays in both cities. Family outings to Ávila, Segovia, Zamora, Toro or Candeleda and a trip to Denmark to attend one of their exhibitions and a conference for the deaf were also filmed by Ramón and Valentín from a traveller’s perspective. In the early days of amateur cinema—which was silent—the difference between film and photography was basically the ‘moving picture’ or *imagen en movimiento*, as

15 Ibid.
16 Rebecca Guerra, op. cit. On some pages of the photo albums assembled to commemorate these trips, the date 1907 is written by hand, although it is impossible to ascertain the identity of the writer or the reliability of this information with regard to the research conducted for the thesis quoted here.
the first cinematographic experiences in Spain were called. We can see that these films revive a certain ‘innocence of the eyes’ found in the photographs of their youth, as if using the cine-camera had taken them back to their first photographic experiences of the late nineteenth century. Yet in essence, their travel films follow the same lines as the albums dedicated to their European jaunts: a chronicle of the places they visited which, of course, also includes the chroniclers. The most obvious difference is motion, but there is also the fact that the journey itself becomes part of the narrative, thanks to the appearance of the mode of transport used or the deviation from a conventional point of view with footage shot from the air or a moving motor car.

Fictions

Among the photographs of Valentín and Ramón de Zubiaurre, we find several which might be described as ‘fictions’ or ‘photographic capriccios’. Here, the term “fiction” is used in the sense of something feigned or invented by the imagination, but it also refers to the simulation of reality found in literature, cinema or other creative media that present audiences with an imaginary world. Capriccio, the term the brothers themselves used, borrowed from the vocabulary of painting, is defined as a work of art in which invention or fantasy breaks the established rules. The capriccios comprise a not overly large group of pictures taken in the early days of their photographic activity—between 1898 and 1901—which are undoubtedly related to various photographic practices of their time. They also hint at an inclination that would become more pronounced later in life, undoubtedly the most remarkable facet of their production, where we observe a greater difference from the practices of other amateur photographers. We must remember that in 1898, Valentín and Ramón were just 19 and 16 years old, respectively, still in their formative years and open to all sorts of artistic interests. They were therefore easily swayed by different trends in both painting and photography. Indeed, the explanation for this fascinating aspect of their photographic work lies precisely in the combination of these two disciplines. On the one hand, their pictorial education at San Fernando and Ferrant’s Royal Academy exposed them to the National Fine Arts Exhibitions, a series of competitive biennial shows that were held chiefly in Madrid, beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was the greatest official showcase for living Spanish artists, and the prize-winning works were widely circulated as they appeared in the pages of La Ilustración Española y Americana. Both brothers participated in the competition on different occasions and were undoubtedly aware of the works selected for display and awards at each exhibition. However, aside from the information that Ramón and Valentín gleaned from this pictorial repertoire, the most pertinent aspect for our purposes is the impact of those genre paintings and depictions of trivial themes on the amateur photography movement associated with ‘salonism’. In fact, the type of photography practised in photographic societies, especially in the context of competitions, was greatly indebted to Spanish academic painting, although European photography also had a degree of influence. The point is that the fictions discussed in this section clearly fit into the scheme of the various photographic genres pursued by Madrid’s small community of amateur photographers. And the interesting thing is that, like our painters, this photographic practice sought different ways of meeting the need to tell stories through still images. Thus, in the final decade of the nineteenth century, a significant number of Madrid’s amateurs embraced this tendency influenced by pictorial genre scenes, which reached its climax in certain works by Antonio Cánovas del Castillo, aka ‘Kaulak’. Initially known only to a small circle of amateurs, this photographer was catapulted to national fame when his collection of seventeen doloras photographs were printed as postcards. This series, along with another ten postcards on “Los Baños del Sardinero” [Sea Baths at El Sardinero], published in 1902, clearly illustrated how photography could be used to tell a story. In both cases, the photographer used the compositions in the series to develop the plot. Within this movement,

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18 ‘Salonism’ refers to a practice adopted in certain photographic societies or associations, which took a formalist approach to photography with the sole aim of winning prizes at photography salons.
20 Antonio Cánovas del Castillo y Vallejo was the nephew of the conservative politician by the same name and a photographer, politician and lawyer. He was something of a legend among amateur photographers in Madrid and many other locations across Spain. He was editor of La Fotografía, the official magazine of the Royal Photographic Society of Madrid, during its initial phase (1901–1914), and his photographs printed in postcard format were an unprecedented success.
21 After the writer Ramón de Campoamor died in February 1901, Blanco y Negro magazine announced a photography competition with a single theme: each submission had to be a photographic illustration of one of Campoamor’s famous doloras. Kaulak won all five prizes in this competition. In 1905, the French firm P. Dujardin published ¡Quién supiera escribir!, a dolora illustrated by the photographs of Antonio Cánovas, with rotogravures of the seventeen illustrations Cánovas had submitted to the contest. The publication was a best-seller.
we also find solitary photographs related to the Zubiaurre’s fictions, like the tableaux vivants\textsuperscript{22} at which Kaulak also excelled. Two good examples of this practice are the recreations that Valentín and Ramón made of Gonzalo Bilbao’s painting La Esclava [The Slave Girl] and Jean-Léon Gérôme’s Pollice Verso [Thumbs Down]. Another similar genre was the so-called ‘photographic fantasies’\textsuperscript{23} created by some amateur groups on their photographic outings.

These different uses of the photographic medium, typical of the final quarter of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, allow us to identify the setting in which the brothers lived and moved; moreover, they clearly show that Ramón and Valentín’s fictions are related to certain photographic and cultural customs of their time. Indeed, examples of all the above-mentioned genres and formats can be found among their photographs: series of images that tell a story, single pictures that also try to construct a fiction, tableaux vivants that represent paintings in a satirical or humorous way, photo-collages that attempt to create paradoxical contrasts to the size of the people pictured in the image, and surprising effects achieved by multiple exposures. And all this points to something that permeated the two painters’ entire relationship with photography and film: a fondness for storytelling. That inclination was accentuated by Valentín’s love of caricature and comedy,\textsuperscript{24} which is quite obvious in many of his photographs.

The vast majority of the images assembled under the heading of ‘fictions’ were taken at or near Garai during their summer holidays. The Zubiaurre brothers, then still newcomers to amateur photography, no doubt saw this place as a perfect open-air studio where they could experiment freely and let their creativity run wild. We must recall that, in this tiny village, their family’s social standing made it easy to enlist the cooperation and involvement of many local residents, and it also gave them access to a wide variety of potential settings for their scenes. They therefore had their pick of actors and backdrops. In this regard, it is important to bear in mind that, when organising photo sessions, the brothers’ deafness probably made it necessary for another family member to assist them. The sitters had to be told what roles they would play and how they should act.

\textsuperscript{22} Manuela Alonso Laza, op. cit. ‘The custom of organising shows whose primary theme was the representation of a tableau vivant—also occasionally called a living picture—reached the height of its popularity in the nineteenth century. These scenes might be staged in the street, the theatre or the private festive settings favoured by the nobility, and their intended audience could be common or aristocratic. The motif or theme of the picture tended to vary, primarily drawing on literary, pictorial, musical, religious and historical sources.’

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid. ‘The Marquis of Santa María del Villar described an outing to La Pedriza with the aim of photographing models dressed as Valkyries [...] and other excursions to the gardens at Aranjuez to recreate Goyaesque scenes.’

\textsuperscript{24} Rebecca Guerra, op. cit.
in these scenes, and Ramón and Valentín probably would have had a difficult time communicating with the country folk of Garai, so it seems likely that their hearing relatives—who knew sign language and could understand what the brothers wanted—were brought in to serve as interpreters and convey their instructions. We know of these communication problems from the testimony of the Marquis of Lozoya, who narrated his travels with Valentín in the Segovian countryside some years later:

There was one difficulty: dealing with the peasants who were to serve as his models. Valentín had no trouble communicating with his Madrid studio companions: Juan Ramón Jiménez, Azorín, Carmen Baroja, Juan de la Encina, but he could neither understand the villagers’ speech nor make himself understood by them. I, though hardly more than an adolescent—back around 1910—as a result of my fraternal friendship with the Count [of Cheste], understood the language of the deaf-mutes as well as their lightning-fast finger shorthand. This made me an ideal interpreter, as one already thoroughly acquainted with my native land, and I performed this duty with genuine pride.

In the sphere of fiction, Valentín and Ramón used a wide variety of narrative devices. As we shall see, the captions accompanying the photographs were often important in the construction of these stories—in fact, at times they constituted the supporting structure of the narrative. Some are tales with a moral, featuring the brothers and their friends and told in a sequence of several photographs: *Un jardinero ingenioso* [A Clever Gardener], three images where the hero uses deception to outwit his assailants; and *Ladrones burlados* [Outwitted Thieves], six photographs in which the thieves who set upon a group of country picnickers receive their comeuppance. They also created short comical or humorous stories, although in these they only appear in one or two images: *Travesuras a orillas del mar* [Mischief at the Seashore], *Tremendo combate* [Tremendous Fight] and *Un cazador equivocado (historia muda)* [A Mistaken Hunter (silent story)]. A large group of ‘fictions’ features the villagers, and another set of images revolves round daily activities in the rural world. One might even say that the entire circle of life is represented here: birth and old age, often in juxtaposition (*El primer diente y la última muela* [The First Tooth and the Last Molar], *Velar hilando* [The Spinner’s Vigil], *El

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25. *Dibujos de Valentín de Zubiaurre por el Marqués de Lozoya*, Maestros contemporáneos del dibujo y la pintura, vol. 41 (Madrid: Ibérico Europa, 1975), 2. It should also be noted that the Garai photographs were taken at least ten years prior to the episode narrated by the marquis, when Valentín’s communication skills were probably even less developed than in his Segovian period.
tocado de la aldeanita [The Little Village Girl’s Headdress]; children’s games and pranks (Un escolar castigado [Punished Schoolboy], No llegará la sangre al río [It Won’t Go That Far], Enmienda imposible [Impossible Correction], Un modelo rebelde [A Rebellious Model], ¿Quién soy? [Who Am I?]); courtship and engagement (Una respuesta difícil [A Difficult Answer], Pelando la pava [Sweet Nothings], Despedida de novios [Lovers’ Farewell], Un celoso [A Jealous Man] and Amores del nuevo matrimonio y viceversa [Loves of the Newly-weds and Vice Versa]); children leaving home, absence and return (Adiós madre querida [Goodbye, Mother Dearest], La vuelta del hijo soldado [The Soldier Son Returns], La carta del hijo [The Son’s Letter]); the elderly (El cuento del abuelo [Grandfather’s Tale], Dulce ayuda [Sweet Succour], La carta del nieto [The Grandson’s Letter]; a few allegorical themes (Remordimiento [Remorse], Arrepentimiento [Repentance], Dar de comer al hambriento [Feeding the Hungry]); and, finally, death (Requiescant in pace [Rest in Peace], Huerfanitos [Little Orphans]). Combining familiar devices and motifs from the pictorial iconography of fine art salons with the amateur practices mentioned above, this series of photographs manages to construct a fiction about a rural world in perfect harmony.

The brothers’ fictional tendencies were most apparent when they began to use the cine-camera around 1928. It seems clear that both were fond of telling stories, and even the early photographs we have just seen, taken at the dawn of the twentieth century, hint at their ‘cinematic aspirations’. Many of the photos from Garai included in this section have a pre-cinematographic quality, which would resurface years later when they took up the cine-camera. However, this will be discussed in greater detail in the chapter that explores the relationship between their photographs and films, where we will also look at the footage that Valentín and Ramón shot in the Basque Country.
The Basque Country

There is no question that this family had a strong attachment to the land of their roots. Valentín María de Zubiaurre was born in Garai and Paz Aguirrezabal in the nearby town of Bergara. Their children Ramón and Pilar were also born in Garai, and although the Zubiaurres lived in Madrid, they always maintained close ties to their ‘family seat’. Both parents could trace their Basque ancestry back several generations, and all three children spent long periods at Garai from infancy. Consequently, for them the Basque Country was not just their family’s ancestral home but a land they knew and loved, and it gave all of them a strong sense of belonging to a community.  

In order to better understand Ramón and Valentín’s photographic practice in the Basque Country, we must widen our focus and consider the impact of certain traits of bourgeois culture on the family’s activities. In the final quarter of the nineteenth century, the notion of a ‘common culture’ formulated by bourgeois society came to signify something more concrete: a growing taste for exploring and knowing the land, historical, geographical and monumental erudition, and a budding interest in ethnography. At the same time, we must also consider the profound impact that the ideas of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza or Free Learning Institution had on certain sectors of late nineteenth-century Spanish society. In both its founding philosophy and pedagogical practice, this school advocated outings as an exceptional way to learn about and experience reality and history, as well as an excellent means of identifying the characteristic traits of a community and, in the process, revealing the key elements of collective identity. The purpose of these outings was to come into direct contact with nature and with Spain’s historical and artistic heritage, and to this end the Institución Libre de Enseñanza introduced several significant novelties, one of which was the photographic camera as an essential piece of equipment on any excursion. In their heritage-orientated view of the landscape, the ‘institutionalists’ differentiated between nature and historical/artistic features—in other words, they made a distinction between the natural and cultural components of the landscape. Therefore, documenting the territory was, for them, a means of showing certain identifying features according to a system of symbolic representation with three major categories: historical and artistic heritage (Culture with a capital C), landscape and popular culture.

These were the general principles that underpinned and guided the family’s activities in the Basque Country. Yet their outings and interest in geography, heritage and ethnography had little to do with the scientific and documentary projects advocated by the Institución Libre de Enseñanza. Ramón and Valentín’s approach to photography was much more subjective and often reverted to certain Romantic postulates, with a rather rhetorical and sentimental orientation that resulted in an obvious tendency towards the picturesque.

For Ramón and Valentín de Zubiaurre, this part of the Basque Country became a photographic territory and, over time, a photographed space with dual significance: a context associated with family and memory, but also a specific geographical location with a natural and cultural landscape inhabited by types with particu-

26 Although this sense of belonging never led them to embrace Basque nationalism, some of their photographs do indicate that they took an interest in symbols of Basque identity. On the general subject of nationalism, see Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1983).
lar customs. This familial territory was very important in their early photographs and paintings and would remain so for the rest of their lives. If we observe their first steps in the art world, we see that both brothers already had a strong partiality to Basque themes and motifs, as evidenced by their early submissions to exhibitions and competitions held in the capital.

With regard to their photographic output in the Basque Country, we can say that, fictions and a few family portraits aside, outings were the true catalyst and mortar of their entire practice. In these images, photography is once again used to chronicle and remember an activity, but we also find evidence of their emotional ties to this land. When a beloved subject is approached from a position of empathy, the result is a different landscape imbued with other meanings. Ramón and Valentín gained a deeper knowledge of this familiar setting on their hikes and outings in the provinces of Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa. The garden outside their house at Garai is a veritable balcony, with stunning views of the Durangaldea district’s lofty mountain ridges that must have impressed the young brothers and probably explains why their some of their first excursions involving climbing the same peaks they saw every day: Oiz, Untzillatx, Anboto or the Santa Lucía cliff. They also travelled further afield, to locations like San Sebastián and Hondarribia, and, above all, hiked through the forests and fields of Garai. The Zubiaurre residence in that village near Durango was the base camp from

29 In the photography competition organised by La Ilustración Española y Americana in 1899, Valentín presented his photographs under the title ‘Oiz’, and both brothers submitted their work to the 1901 contest held by the Photographic Society of Madrid under the titles ‘Amboto’ and ‘Udala’. All three peaks are visible from their house in Garai. The subjects of the photographs were also related to that Basque village and the surrounding countryside. Almost all the works that Ramón and Valentín entered in painting competitions in the early twentieth century had themes related to this part of the Basque Country.
which they set out on countless trips and longer journeys. They also spent time at Ondarroa and Mundaka, where they relaxed by the seashore, organised ocean or river boating trips, and travelled to nearby coastal towns. Photographs show them sailing in the tidal inlets of those two towns or to Cape Ogoño and Izaro Island. They travelled by cart or on foot to numerous villages and spots in the Durangaldea district, taking an interest in religious heritage and vernacular architecture (tower houses, farmhouses and mills) and capturing views of rural settlements and natural scenery. Festive occasions, both religious and secular, in the villages they passed through did not escape their attention, either. Their pictures hint at an ambition to reconnoitre every last corner of this land, which in a way the family considered their own, not seeing it as a mere alternative to the city but as a kind of parallel topography, an object/place plucked from the present and the past to be used for contemplation and nostalgic reminiscence. Despite being the exception in their work, it is also important to note that they did document the odd visit to what we might call the hub of modernity: the industrial area of Portugalete and the Altos Hornos ironworks in the province of Bizkaia.

The qualitative and quantitative importance of Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa in their photographic output is sufficient grounds for treating the Basque Country as a separate theme, though it logically includes the other motifs present in the archive. In that region, they took portraits, created fictions and, of course, documented trips and outings. We must recall that a landscape is merely a natural setting captured by a subjectivity that explores, fragments and names it, giving it new and different meanings in the process. The Zubiaurres’ activity within that territory transformed it into a landscape, used in some cases as a backdrop and in others as the main subject. Many of these images were composed in a manner typical of early photography: using the surroundings of the chosen subject to turn a building, monument or village into picturesque scenery, creating a fusion that presented the theme as both monument and landscape. Sometimes even the mountains of this region were photographed as monuments. The truth is that their pictures could not be further

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30 Paola Cortés-Rocca, _El tiempo de la máquina: retratos, paisajes y otras imágenes de la nación_ (Buenos Aires: Colihue, 2011).
31 Ibid.
32 Jean-François Chevrier, “La fotografía en la cultura del paisaje”, in _La fotografía entre las bellas artes y los medios de comunicación_ (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 2007), 49–50. Charles Nègre, _photographe, 1820-1880_, catalogue of the exhibition held in Arlés, Musée Réattu, and Paris, Musée du Luxembourg (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1980). In the latter publication, Françoise Heilbrun quotes from an 1854 text by Nègre where he refers to the principles on which he based his work in 1852, following the example of the Missions Héliographiques, and remarks that in some of those photographs he sacrificed detail in order to achieve an effect that would reveal the monument’s true character and the poetic charm surrounding it.
removed from the tenets of documentary photography, which call for descriptive, systematic images that aim to be faithful copies of reality, detailed frontal views focused solely on the subject in question. The purpose implicit in such scientific endeavours was to ‘know’ the social world and forms of territorial occupation, but Valentín and Ramón took a different approach, viewing the world—a world of which they themselves were a part—with an aesthetic eye. In fact, they articulated the narrative and account of what they had seen and experienced by inserting themselves in their pictures, at times even treating nature as a setting for games and amusement.

In concluding this section, it must be noted that the majority of this family’s photographic output can only be understood as something intended for private use. In a way, the term ‘private’ narrows the range of possible readings of these images, eschewing their interpretation from an artistic or documentary perspective or as photographs intended for public display.\(^{33}\) In a broader sense, the primary benefit of photography’s penetration into the private sphere was the fact that it gave people a material tool for managing memory and oblivion, as a superior means of preserving vestiges of the past.\(^{34}\) And this is undoubtedly the primordial function of this collection of images: to piece together the story of certain moments in the family’s life, reinforcing its self-perception and sense of unity.\(^{35}\) However, it is also true that most people do not photograph the things they see every day and, like most other members of their social class, the Zubiaurrets were far more likely to take up the camera during holidays or trips, which were undoubtedly some of the high points in their lives. And the use of all these materials, in addition to those already mentioned with regard to building and preserving the family legacy, extended to the social relations of the entire group and the two brothers in particular. People often share the things they have seen and experienced with friends and classmates, and for this purpose images would have been particularly useful to the Zubiaurre brothers, considering the challenges that two deaf individuals would have faced when attempting to step outside their inner circle and communicate with the hearing world.

\(^{33}\) Certain photographs which the brothers submitted to competitions in 1899 and 1901 are an exception to this general observation. They chiefly presented fictions and landscapes, which also appear in the family albums.

\(^{34}\) Christian Joschke, op. cit.

\(^{35}\) Pierre Bourdieu, op. cit.
The Photographic Album

The Zubiaurres used albums to organise these photographs and make them easier to share with friends and family. A photo album is much more than the sum of its parts, and its structure forms a whole out of its fragments. Meaning is conveyed by how the images are grouped, and their sequential presentation and relation to one another require an implicit or explicit narrative, an ordered visual itinerary. In this respect, it has rightly been noted that one must first understand the origin of an album’s composition in order to decipher the message told by the sequence of images, their grouping or the spatiotemporal relationships between the photographs. First of all, it must be acknowledged that the photo album was a format typical of a certain type of professional photography in the second half of the nineteenth century. Numerous collections of photographs were bound in large, lavish albums and presented as gifts to the Crown or other state institutions. However, this text is concerned with photo albums made by amateurs, which were intended for private use and differed from the nineteenth-century album in several respects. These amateur albums generally contain autobiographical photographs that capture the family’s private life in casual scenes and moments of leisure, focusing on the simplicity of the everyday. The photo album had two basic functions: firstly, it served as a repository of memory and an archive of family occasions; and secondly, it was a means of displaying those experiences. The album was more than just a useful way to organise, protect and keep family photographs together, the compilation of those images also served to tell a story. As Carmelo Vega has explained, many such albums attest to how the amateur photographer became a chronicler of his own experience, which was ultimately quite similar to everyone else’s, yet claimed the distinction of the individual: ‘This is my life.’

The Zubiaurres assembled various albums in their lifetime, including the aforementioned tomes dedicated to their travels in Europe, but the most interesting for our present purpose are the albums that document their activity in the Basque Country between 1899 and 1901. This is because the traits of bourgeois culture which shaped amateur photography are easier to identify in these albums: the outing or trip as the nexus of amateur photography exercises, and the interest in heritage in its broadest sense. In these four albums, Ramón and Valentín defined a familiar photographic territory to which they were obviously bound by ties of identity and affection, and those ties construct a narrative that is a kind of alternate reality, a genuine fiction

38 Carmelo Vega, ‘Ficciones fotográficas del álbum de viaje’, op. cit. The author provides a very lucid explanation of this dual purpose of the photographic album. On the other hand, Langford elucidates its social function when she writes that ‘the album is a meeting place, not an encyclopaedia’, a constantly changing space in which we advance, retreat and turn things round, but always within a narrative determined by the compiler. Martha Langford, ‘Speaking the Album: An Application of the Oral-Photographic Framework’, in Annette Kuhn and Kirsten Emiko McAllister, Locating Memory: Photographic Acts (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 223–246.
39 ‘La utilidad de un álbum’, Revista Kodak, Madrid, no. 10 (1918), 8. ‘The best advice one can give an amateur photographer is to collect his prints in an album. Nothing is more disheartening than stacks of positives strewn about in drawers or inserted between book pages [...] A Kodak album is a family book that every home should have.’ Although this advertisement was printed in 1918, from the late nineteenth century the industry and market that targeted amateur photographers had promoted photo albums as the ideal format for preserving and organising photographs.
40 Carmelo Vega, ‘Ficciones fotográficas del álbum de viaje’, op. cit.
41 The archive also contains two other albums that document the Zubiaurres’ summer holidays in the Basque Country as well as visits to other Spanish cities, although these were made much later (circa 1928 or 1929) than the ones discussed here. Those compilations lack the structure, originality and captions found in the four albums from their youth. They consist of small photographs with no negatives filed behind them, which casts doubt on their authorship, and reflect a photographic practice more in keeping with the custom of most bourgeois families at the time, recording places and events which also appear in their films from those years.
based on their lives. All four were compiled not long after the photographs were taken (two of them are dated in 1900 and 1901) and unquestionably follow the general pattern described above. M. Langford considers the album as a closed text, and it is in this light that we must attempt to understand the original function of this mnemonic device used to tell their stories. Two of these albums appear to have been conceived from the outset as picture showcases, with a more meticulous, custom-made binding, while the others are of the prefabricated type sold at photographic establishments, with generic titles in the language of the country from which they had been imported—‘Photographie’ in one case and ‘Photographien’ in the other—where all they had to do was paste in the photographs. The two more carefully crafted albums are titled ‘Vistas de Vizcaya y Guipúzcoa’ [Views of Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa], another sign that they may have been intended for viewers outside the family circle. This hypothesis is supported by the Zubiaurres’ choice of the word ‘vistas’ to designate a repository of amateur photographs that largely chronicle family activities. This term often appeared in nineteenth-century photographic albums devoted to public works and historical monuments, and the decision to adopt a title typical of commercial or professional publications is indicative of how the family planned to use these albums: as instruments of social performance. The same interpretation can be made of the fact that the photographs which open and close these two albums allude to symbols of regional identity: references to Bizkaia, the famous tree of Gernika and the provincial coat of arms. Yet these albums were still items for private use, although the circle of intimacy may have been extended to include family friends or the brothers’ colleagues. Once again, we must ask ourselves if this might somehow be related to Ramón and Valentín’s deafness and gaining access to the hearing world in order to expand their social and professional networks. In their youth, we know that both brothers did use photography to engage with

42 Martha Langford, op. cit.
43 Ibid.
friends, showing off their albums and sharing pictures of their summer holidays in the Basque Country: ‘Be sure to bring me ... photographs of Bermeo I took two years ago for two friends of mine,’ or ‘Don’t forget to take photographs of Anboto for Ercilla.’ When they visited some of those places near Garai, they probably met with a less than satisfactory reception at times, as the correspondence between the brothers seems to suggest: ‘I went to Durango on Sunday, just a quick jaunt there and back, and there I found a very warm welcome, better than in past years.’ Consequently, their skill with the camera was probably helpful for engaging and integrating with the Basque society they joined summer after summer.

This formal singularity aside, the four albums dedicated to the Basque Country reveal an underlying organisational principle and a specific constructive and thematic pattern that weaves the stories together in a kind of visual itinerary. All of them denote an intention to identify a beginning and an end, following the logic of the journey, where one greets the new territory upon arrival and says goodbye when leaving. The starting points are represented by images like Viva Vizcaya [Long Live Bizkaia], El árbol de Guernica, símbolo de la libertad del país vasco [The Tree of Gernika, Symbol of the Basque Country’s Freedom] and Familia de labradores [Family of Field Workers]. The conclusions are even more explicit: Adiós, adiós, Querido Durango, Adiós [Farewell, Farewell, Beloved Durango, Farewell] and Se le invita a V. a saludar a Vizcaya [You Are Hereby Invited to Salute Bizkaia]. One of the albums is more metaphorical in this aspect, beginning and ending with a field of flowers. All contain one or more sections devoted to the natural, cultural or human features of the territory, another dedicated to fictions or capriccios, and a third featuring the family. As a general rule, they begin with a series of images of the landscape and country folk going about their work; after that point, fictions are interspersed with pictures of trips and family portraits in different arrangements. The leitmotif running through all the images is the travellers themselves, who pose casually against this backdrop and whose vision of the landscape is also represented. These trips were often documented in the same order as the travellers’ itinerary. In this way, they organised a series of stories that enshrine the family’s memories of their stays in the Basque Country, which is singled out and highlighted in this context, but those stories are also interspersed with symbolic elements and their fictional creations.

44 Two postcards sent by Valentín from Mundaka in July 1902.
The Zubiaurre brothers owned several different cameras and used them interchangeably, so there is no way of knowing who took which photographs, forcing us to examine their images from the perspective of co-authorship. However, the compilation of the albums was an even more collective effort, as the mother also participated in this task. Multiple authorship is fairly common in the general panorama of family albums, as certain studies have noted. The four albums of the Zubiaurre family contain numerous written texts, all added by Mrs Paz Aguirrezabal. The numbers indicating the sequence of the images in the album, the titles and the captions beneath the photographs are all in her handwriting. Though this may seem like a trivial detail, it actually has a direct bearing on the interpretation of the albums and therefore merits closer attention. At the crux of the matter is the polysemic nature of photography—in other words, its ability to have many different meanings. And that polysemy of the image is usually controlled by juxtaposing it with a written text. Everything stems from the particular statute of the photographic image, which some semioticians

45 Martha Langford, op. cit.
46 Deaf people often have difficulty expressing themselves correctly in writing. The inclusion of texts alongside the images in these family albums, and the fact that they were written by the mother, may be related to how these objects were used in the social interactions of the family in general and Ramón and Valentín in particular. This resource was no doubt tremendously useful in the brothers’ attempts to socialise with non-deaf people.
have defined as a message without a code, a mechanical analogue of reality. But in photography, some messages do have a code, and one of them is the written text that accompanies the image. This is what is known in semiotics as 'connotation', a process that codes images by imposing a second meaning on the photographic message proper. Thus, the text produces—invents—a totally new meaning for the image. Consequently, everything the members of this family wrote in these albums is essential to deciphering the significance of the images. With regard to the iconic message, language almost always provides a more or less direct answer to the question, 'What is this?' In its most basic formulation, it therefore serves to identify the elements in the scene. The four albums that Valentín and Ramón dedicated to the Basque Country are filled with examples of the different levels on which a photograph can be coded through writing. The most elementary level is established by the text's denotative function, which in many cases also serves as a guide for identification. These are the captions that name the subject appearing in the image: Bosque de Garay [Forest of Garai], Caserío de Mañaria [Mañaria Farmhouse], Puente de Ondárroa [Ondaroa Bridge], Paisaje de Abadiño [Abadiño Landscape], Torre de Echaburu [Echaburu Tower], Procesión en Garay [Procession in Garai], Mercado en Durango [Market in Durango], Cargando trigo [Hauling Wheat] or Vista de Lekeitio [View of Leikeitio]. Other more complex texts, instead of simply naming and identifying the theme, attempt to help viewers interpret the image. Most of the fictions or capriccios consisting of a single photograph are accompanied by this type of caption. Sometimes the text expands on connotations already present in the image, and at other times it invents an entirely new meaning. Without the clues provided by the written text, it would be impossible to interpret the image as intended: La carta del nieto [The Grandson's Letter], El cuento del abuelo [Grandfather's Story], Efecto de luz [Light Effect], Peces de tierra [Land Fish], Adiós, madre querida [Goodbye, Mother Dearest], El arte y el trabajo [Art and Work], El árbol de Guernica, símbolo de la libertad del país vasco [The Tree of Gernika, Symbol of the Basque Country's Freedom], Amores del nuevo matrimonio y viceversa [Loves of the Newly-weds and Vice Versa], Una respuesta difícil [A Difficult Answer], Tremendo combate [Tremendous Fight], etc. Finally, we also find examples of the most complex type.

49 Ibid.
of relationship between text and image, in which a complementary association is established to drive the narrative, using the text to convey meanings which are not in the photograph yet vital to the comprehension of the story being told. Some of these fictions are constructed around a single image, but most of the stories included in this third category are told in several photographs: in *Un jardinero ingenioso* [A Clever Gardener] and *Ladrones burlados* [Outwitted Thieves], for instance, each photograph is accompanied by a text that invents a meaning for that image and links it to the next photo in the sequence. In other cases, the caption carries the full weight of the narrative that gives meaning to the image: ‘The altar boy goes running to ask the housekeeper for wine, because the priest is waiting at the altar’, ‘Father, my little brother has gotten lost in the hills’, or ‘What will my mother do when she learns I’ve broken the vase’. Finally, there are captions that add a layer of allegorical significance, such as *Arrepentimiento* [Repentance] or *Remordimiento* [Remorse].

However, it should be noted that these photographers printed a considerable number of their photographs for purposes other than including them in albums. This archive contains over two hundred and fifty positives that were in the family’s possession for years, few of which appear in the four compilations. The decision to print a separate copy of a photograph on paper undoubtedly says something about the importance of that image in the task of building the family’s graphic legacy. We must therefore assume that there is a story behind these loose prints, albeit one that differs substantially from the tale told in the albums. It is true that both the loose and bound photographs constitute a record of the Zubiaurres’ adventures and private life which ultimately make up the family’s collective memory. However, while images in the albums tell a complete, closed story limited to the specific timeframe of their youthful sojourns in the Basque Country, the loose photographs range over a much longer period of time, from the brothers’ youth to adulthood, and show them in all the different recreational, professional and geographical settings they frequented. They are therefore a tale told in fragments, lacking the logic of the travel itinerary as well as the fictions and identity-related allusions we find in the albums.

In summing up the importance of these albums for understanding this body of photographic work, it must be said that these containers are the most significant items in the entire archive, made by the authors themselves to ensure that their photographs would be read properly. They were put together by the family, who chose some of the many images at their disposal and used them to construct a series of closed stories, including several especially remarkable narratives featuring the Basque Country. In the process, they deliberately placed the images in a certain order, numbering the cards onto which the photographs are pasted to establish a sequence and thereby create a visual itinerary and tell a specific story. The albums were used to articulate a chronicle of this family’s life, but they also define a related territory and a space for memory, expressed in a narrative pattern that juxtaposes part of the Basque Country—represented in its natural, cultural and human aspects—with fictions and images of the family and their activities.
The Relationship between Film and Photography

More than a quarter of a century after making the albums we have just discussed, Ramón and Valentín found a new hobby in film when they purchased a Pathé Baby camera. Amateur cinematography had existed since this medium was first invented, but it did not become truly widespread in Europe until the advent of this machine, sold by the French firm Pathé Frères between 1922 and 1946. Around 1928, the Zubiaurre’s’ passion for visually recording their lives was rekindled, this time in the form of moving pictures. Remarkably, despite the years that had passed, their films depicted the same themes and motifs found in the family albums, though naturally mediatised by the technical and narrative constraints of the language of cinema. Readers will recall that our earlier discussion of photographic fictions mentioned a certain pre-cinematographic quality in those photographs, a desire to achieve through still images what they finally managed do with the cine-camera: tell stories. But many years had passed, and this fact is evident in the film footage, where we see the brothers leading a life typical of middle-aged men; by this time there were 49 and 46, thirty years older than in the photo albums of their youth. Both had become painters of some repute and had developed other recreational habits and other friendships, but they remained interested in the same old themes, which they again chose to narrate through the family’s presence. That presence had changed with their father’s death and the new members added by marriage: their sister Pilar’s husband, Ricardo Gutiérrez Abascal, who went by the pseudonym Juan de la Encina, and her son Leopoldo, and Ramón’s wife, Isolina Gallego.

Considering that the end goal was still to create a chronicle of family activities, these films necessarily feature the same subjects seen in their photographs. Once again, we find that recording their outings and travels in Spain and abroad was practically the only thing they did outside the Basque Country. Most of the themes they captured on film, with the exception of trips, are set in this region. The wanderlust of their youth had abated over the years, and as adults they shot scenes in the vicinity of their two principal places of residence in the Basque Country: Garai and Ondarroa. The peaks they had climbed as young men were now captured from afar as the mountain landscape framing that familiar territory, always visible from their garden. The thematic composition of their films in Basque lands consists of family scenes and trips to some of the places seen in the photographic archive, evidence of customs that had been repeated every summer since early childhood. They also continued to depict the natural, cultural and human landscape of the territory of Garai, the Durangaldea district and Ondarroa. And, of course, they still created fictions with the participation of relatives and a few local residents.

As in the photographic albums, many of the films are preceded by texts indicating the theme or place featured in the images. In the fictions, texts are used to drive the plot. The titles of many of these home movies, again as in the albums, have connotations of regional identity: Puertas de Vizcaya [Gates of Bizkaia], Tierra Vizcaína [Bizkaia Land], El árbol de Guernica [The Tree of Gernika] and A la tierra vasca [To the Basque Land]. Others focus on specific locations: Escenas de Garay [Scenes of Garai], Ría de Ondarreta [Ondarroa Inlet] and Garay, sus caseríos y sus campos [Garai, Its Farmhouses and Fields]. Finally, there are those that describe a particular event: Alegre romería vasca [Lively Basque Pilgrimage], Un entierro [A Funeral], El partido de pelota [The Basque Pelota Match], Fiesta religiosa [Religious Festival], Espatadantzaris [Basque Sword

50 José Antonio Ruiz Rojo, ‘El cine Pathé Baby en Guadalajara’, in José Antonio Ruiz Rojo, ed., Encuentro de historiadores en torno al cine aficionado (Guadalajara: Centro de la Fotografía y la Imagen Histórica de Guadalajara, 2004), 69–80. From 1924 to the mid-1930s, when the 8mm Kodak camera became popular, the Pathé Baby was the home movie camera par excellence in Europe. It used film made of cellulose diacetate, a non-flammable plastic that solved the spontaneous combustion problems of earlier materials like cellulose nitrate.
Dancers] and Aurrresku [Basque Ceremonial Dance]. And, of course, all these films, like the albums, are filled with images of the family. They even created an entire film about their residence at Garai: Casa y jardín de Zubiaurre [Zubiaurre House and Garden]. Many of these pieces open with Valentín, his siblings Ramón and Pilar, or even their mother giving a kind of introduction, using sign language or speech and gestures,\(^5\) which precedes the written titles that announce what will appear in the following frames. The brothers showed a truly remarkable interest, in both their albums and films, in using every resource at their disposal to give their photographs and movies as precise a meaning as possible. The captions in the albums, which we saw in the previous section, and the titles and spoken or signed introductions in the films attempt to delimit and define the possible interpretations of the images. Most of these films follow a constructive and thematic pattern similar to that of the albums, where family scenes are juxtaposed with the landscape, life and traditional customs of the rural world, trips and festive occasions.

\(^5\) In their films, Ramón and Valentín sometimes address viewers in sign language, and in other cases they speak and gesticulate. Their sister and mother only use speech. Over the course of their lives, the Zubiaurre brothers became highly skilled at expressing themselves in both sign language and oral speech. In his memoirs, the Marquis of Lozoya indicates that Valentín was able to speak normally in both Spanish and French, although to put this statement in context, we must consider that deafness tends to impose certain limitations with regard to vocal quality and phonetic intelligibility. Juan de Contreras y López de Ayala, Marquis of Lozoya, Memorias (1893-1923), Isabel de Ceballos-Escalera, ed., (Segovia: Torreón de la Marquesa, 1992).
But the great common theme in the brothers’ cinema and photography is that of fictions, which attained a high degree of sophistication on film. Again we find a connection to the past: the most original fiction film in their archive, *El cuento del abuelo* [Grandfather’s Story], has the same title and opening scene as one of the photographs from their youthful series. The image of a grandfather telling a story to a group of children is used to begin a story in which several family members have starring roles. The film’s plot revolves around the abduction of Polín, a young boy played by Pilar’s son, Leopoldo Gutiérrez de Zubiaurre, by an old woman with the idea of forcing him to beg. The boy’s family, played by his real-life family—his mother Pilar, grandmother Paz and uncle Valentín—agonise over the absence of the abducted child until Valentín, in a stroke of luck, discovers where his nephew is and goes to rescue him with the mother, his sister Pilar. The old woman confesses her heinous crime and begs forgiveness before dying. In a flashback to five years earlier, we see how the child was kidnapped when his caretaker was distracted from her duty by the arrival of a suitor. The family’s sorrow turns to joy, and they all give thanks to Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Ramón and Valentín star in another film that is a kind of montage of different footage they had shot in the vicinity of Garai: *Viene alegre, canta y piensa en ...*, *Viene misteriosamente, habla y piensa en ...* [He Comes Joyfully, Singing and Thinking of ..., He Comes Mysteriously, Talking and Thinking of ...]. This composition contrasts an optimistic view of life with a pessimistic one against the backdrop of the Basque Country and its people. Valentín offers a pleasant vision of the fields, mountains, flowers, animals, seascapes, cheerful boon companions, pretty girls, the game of Basque pelota, sport by the sea, traditional dances and lively pilgrimages. In contrast, Ramón focuses on melancholic landscapes, ‘mystics’, lonely graveyards, solitude and death, all shot in dark tones or backlit scenes. In the struggle between dark and light, the optimistic view of life eventually triumphs thanks to the love of two young peasants: ‘Only life is love, see ...’ Valentín says, while the sombre character, Ramón, weeps and is comforted by a peasant girl. The film closes with a repetition of images of the triumphant vision. In *Angelus*, another short fiction film, a priest visiting the family home, the mother and a few peasants enact the Catholic tradition of praying when the bell tolls a reminder of the Annunciation.

In light of all this, we can conclude that there is a close connection between the Zubiaurres’ films and photographs, most apparent in their thematic, geographical and conceptual similarities. The narrative pattern that determined the organisation of the albums is repeated in many of the films. It is only logical that elements common to both media—ties to the Basque Country, records of family life and an interest in creating fictions—ended up establishing a connection between their films and photographs, despite the intervening years. The family also used their cinematographic and photographic productions in the same way, circulating them in the private sphere of family and close friends.

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52 The Angelus, apparently introduced sometime around the thirteenth century, is a call to pray or recite the antiphon that begins ‘The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary’ when the bells are rung at twilight. This tradition has been depicted on numerous occasions throughout the history of art.
Amateurs

When attempting to classify the photographic endeavours of these two brothers, the term ‘amateur’ seems too generic, as it does not allow us to specify or define the particular traits of their practice. In a broad sense, amateur photography can be defined as a recreational pursuit, practised in one’s leisure time and with no thought of financial gain. These two aspects made it particularly appealing to those who, seeking a loftier form of self-improvement or amusement, practised a sport or an art in their free time. The term ‘amateur photographer’ therefore encompasses a wide variety of profiles, each with different interests: art photographers, scientists, ethnographers and dilettantes for whom photography was a hobby or pastime. So what type of amateurs were the Zubiaurre brothers? Ramón and Valentín fall under the heading of those who used photography as a form of entertainment, but even within this group they were not ordinary amateurs, as their pictorial education had given them a broad visual culture and an ability to see reality and produce images far superior to those of the average amateur of their day. A reporter for La Fotografía noted this in his commentary on the works submitted by a 19-year-old Ramón to the competition organised by the Photographic Society of Madrid in 1901:

In the Figure and Composition category, the gold medal went to Mr Ramón de Zubiaurre. This distinguished amateur has shown a commendable determination not to present vulgarities, instead proffering small, nicely composed and well-thought-out pictures. The eye is irresistibly drawn to the scene of an old woman playing with little girls who cover her eyes, another old woman keeping vigil by a cradle where a wee tyke slumbers [the best one in my opinion], an old man entertaining a childish audience with stories, and the departure of a young lad who, carrying a bundle on his shoulder, waves and says, ‘Goodbye, Mother! …’ If only the feeling of the models matched the thought that went into this theme, this photograph would be THE BEST in the Exhibition [...]. But the mother seeing her son off is more concerned with leaning against the door than with expressing emotion, and the boy is posing. In any event, Mr Zubiaurre is to be greatly commended for having imagined that scene. He is a good photographer and an artist.

Another defining feature of the amateur was a tendency to form or join associations. In the early twentieth century, amateur photography was closely linked to photographic societies or outing clubs, and belonging to such entities was actually a hallmark of Spanish amateur photographers, a fact that also provides insight into the interpretation of their works. In this, too, the brothers were atypical; there is no evidence that they

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53 The social status of amateur photographers in Spain changed rapidly in the early twentieth century. At first, they met with some opposition from professional photographers, who did not look kindly on novices entering a field which had hitherto been their exclusive purview. However, that distance from the professionals was precisely what distinguished the practice of amateur photography. Despite instances of aristocratic patronage, bourgeois culture was the true milieu of amateur photographers.

54 The technical quality of Ramón and Valentín’s negatives and prints is also superior to that of many of their fellow amateurs, although we cannot rule out the possibility that the Zubiaurrees used professional laboratories to process their negative plates and develop prints. In any case, it is important to recall that technological advances allowed a large number of individuals with hardly any technical training to take up photography, in part owing to the simplification of the chemical procedures traditionally performed by professional photographers (developing negatives, producing contact prints, enlargements, etc.). This led to the appearance of countless new photographers, who were able to wield the camera with unprecedented freedom. Photographic apparatuses became increasingly smaller and more manageable, ready-to-use film was sold at various establishments, and lenses became brighter and exposure times increasingly shorter, making it possible to take photographs in any place or circumstance. Amateur photography equipment was easy to carry and could be used under any lighting conditions. The Pathé Baby cine-camera was also quite simple to use, and the films could be developed and printed at commercial establishments.

55 La fotografía: revista mensual ilustrada, year I, no. 5 (! February 1902), 131.

56 In addition to photography-specific organisations like the Royal Photographic Society of Madrid, others such as the Outing Club of Catalonia or the Spanish Outing Society were also essentially photographic societies, giving thousands of amateur photographers a chance to explore their interests on excursions and other activities. These associations gave members technical training and also showed them how to ‘train’ the eye.
moved in the social circles frequented by Madrid’s amateur photographers or participated in the photographic outings frequently organised by members of such societies. Their contact with this ‘club community’ was probably limited to their participation in a few photography competitions. It seems that most of their photographic endeavours were, as we have already seen, limited to the private sphere. However, there is one detail that might seem to contradict this statement: their work was eminently private, within the social uses of photography, and yet they also took part in public competitions. To see this in perspective, we must first concede that all of Valentín and Ramón de Zubiaurre’s photographic output is perfectly consistent with the idea of private use. More than the aesthetic aspirations of their images, the intention behind their photographic work and how they used the bulk of it are the determining factors that tell us whether their photographs should be situated in the public or private sphere. The fact is that the brothers only submitted a fraction of the fictions and landscapes in their archive to these two competitions, and there is no evidence of any other attempt to publicise their photographs. It therefore seems that the photos were not originally taken for this purpose, and submitting them was probably a decision taken after the fact in an attempt to gain artistic and social recognition. They may have been urged to do so by their acquaintances at the Royal Academy, including Ferrant, who judged one of the photography contests in which the brothers participated.

57 It is unclear whether they belonged to the Photographic Society of Madrid or received instruction in photographic technique. In her doctoral thesis, Manuela Alonso states that both brothers were members of the Madrid photography club, but we found no information to support this claim in the course of our research (see Manuela Alonso Laza, op. cit.). The brothers’ only confirmed connection with the community of amateur photographers is their participation in the 1899 photography contest organised by La Ilustración Española y Americana and the Photographic Society of Madrid’s first competition in 1901. Valentín entered the former contest with six landscapes and seascapes, nine landscapes with comical groups and figures, and a procession in Garai, earning a special mention for his entire portfolio. Both brothers submitted photographs to the 1901 competition, where Ramón won the gold medal in the Figure and Composition category, and Valentín received a mention in the Landscapes and Seascapes section. See La Ilustración Española y Americana, year XLIII, no. 48 (30 December 1899); La fotografía: revista mensual ilustrada, year I, no. 4 (1 January 1902), 120-130.
Their quest for social recognition was not limited to the field of photography, for since 1899 the siblings had also been sending paintings to a variety of exhibitions held in Madrid. The archive includes a postcard sent from Mundaka, in which Valentín asks his brother Ramón to bring the photo albums because everyone there wants to see the prize-winning photographs. This indicates that the narrative of the albums was already complete at the time, and we must not forget that it was there, on those carefully assembled pages, where the Zubiaurres made their true photographic statement.

Valentín and Ramón used at least four different cameras in their lifetime. Most of the images discussed in this study were taken with two of them: a field camera consisting of a wooden box and bellows, which used 13 x 18 cm plates, and a handheld snapshot camera that fit inside a leather-lined case and used 9 x 12 cm glass plates. Both were mounted on a tripod to ensure a clear, sharp image. To photograph their artworks, they used a view camera with 18 x 24 cm plates, as they wanted the negatives to be as large as possible for the purpose of creating photomechanical prints or documenting their pictorial creations. Finally, on rare occasions they used a stereo camera that produced 4.5 x 10.7 cm negatives. All their films were shot with a Pathé Baby camera that used 9.5 cm cellulose diacetate film with centre-aligned perforations. The original photographs that have survived were all developed as contact prints, the majority—the four Basque Country albums—on printing-out paper or POP. Most of the prints in the 1906 travel albums were developed using a chemical process. All are three-layer gelatin or collodion prints. Certain information appearing in their films indicates that the footage was probably developed, printed and edited at the Madrid establishment of Pathé Baby S.A.E., located at 14 and 16 Calle Peligros. We do not know if Ramón and Valentín had a photography lab and were able to develop their own negative plates and print positives, or if they used professional labs to handle such tasks. In any case, it should be noted that many amateur photographers of the early twentieth century had this work done at specialised establishments.

58 Postcard sent in 1902 from Mundaka, written by Valentín to his brother Ramón.
59 All these materials, including the 9 x 12 camera case pictured in many of the photos in this archive, appear in the 1899 catalogue of the Carlos Salvi firm, located at 17 Calle Espoz y Mina, Madrid. This establishment played an important role in the formation of the capital’s first group of amateur photographers. In 1898, approximately twenty-five amateurs gathered around Salvi’s photography shops. One year later, the Fine Arts Circle accepted them as members to form a new art photography section. On 24 December 1899, an agreement was signed placing them under the aegis of the circle, and eventually that group became the Royal Photographic Society of Madrid.
60 Industrial production of collodion and gelatin-based printing-out paper or POP began in the 1880s and started to wane around 1905. The term is used to describe all silver printing processes where the image is obtained by direct exposure to sunlight, without the use of developing chemicals. Gelatin-based black-and-white developing-out paper or DOP became the most widely used option after 1905. In the DOP process, the chemical action of a developer causes the image to appear, making it much more sensitive to light. DOP was more suitable for enlargements with incandescent or gas light. Luis Pavao, Conservación de colecciones de fotografía (Andalusia: Instituto Andaluz de Patrimonio Histórico, Centro Andaluz de la Fotografía, 2001).
The Zubiaurre's Contemporaries in Bizkaia

As we have seen, Valentín and Ramón took a considerable number of photographs in the Basque Country, and their social circle almost certainly included other amateur photographers. During their summer holidays, they came into contact with fellow amateurs from Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa, although this does not mean that they ever collaborated or worked together or joined them on photographic outings. As noted in the section on amateurs, the Zubiaurre family was not inclined to be ‘clubby’ in matters related to their photographic activity.

Yet outside their circle of acquaintances, there were a few amateur photographers active in Bizkaia at the dawn of the twentieth century who, as contemporaries of the Zubiaurre family, are worth mentioning for the sake of comparing their photographic practice with that of the two brothers. Three photographers stand out among them: Eulalia Abaitua, Enrique Areilza and Felipe Manterola. The first two belonged to the same social class as the Zubiaurre family, the bourgeoisie, while Manterola came from a family of rural shopkeepers. For at least part of their photographic careers, all three coincided both chronologically and geographically with Ramón and Valentín. However, there is no evidence that they knew each other and, as we shall see, their respective photographic approaches were quite different.

Eulalia Abaitua had some of the same bourgeois photographic habits as Ramón and Valentín, such as using the camera to record her travel experiences in Europe, the Maghreb and Palestine, or assembling photo albums to preserve her family’s graphic memory. In the final years of the nineteenth century, Eulalia also took many photographs in the province of Bizkaia, focusing primarily on the city of Bilbao, nearby towns like Sestao, Portugalete, Santurtzi and Las Arenas, and above all the parish of Begoña, then an independent municipality, where her family lived. Additionally, her camera captured the rural world of Bizkaia, producing a remarkably extensive visual record of the Arratia valley. Abaitua used the amateur’s equipment of choice, the stereo camera, to produce her most personal work, and in this her output differed radically from what Ramón and Valentín were doing at the same time in the same territory of Bizkaia. While the Zubiaurre family conveyed an aesthetic vision of a world that included their family members, Eulalia Abaitua gradually shifted towards a quest for knowledge about the social world. Part of that personal work was almost ethnographic in nature, treating types and customs associated with the concept of tradition as a heritage element that must be preserved. Ethnography has conventionally situated this reality in the countryside, considering the inhabitants of towns and villages—especially the elderly—as carriers of traditional heritage, perhaps the ‘last link’ in that weakened or broken chain of tradition. However, Eulalia Abaitua’s efforts to record what was in danger of disappearing also extended to the city of Bilbao, the surrounding towns and the pilgrims of Begoña. Unlike the Zubiaurre and Areilza, this photographer did not depict landscapes that included locals; instead, she tightened the frame to focus primarily on people. Her images of the rural world are less concerned with documenting the land or ways of life of those communities than with portraying its inhabitants.
We find peasant families at the entrance to their farmhouses, groups of women, men and children, portraits of couples and individuals, spinners and field labourers. Occasionally she used makeshift backdrops of black cloth to completely isolate them from their surroundings. Her work in the Arratia valley mostly features local types, whom she sometimes photographed in typical regional dress; she even documented the men’s characteristic hairstyle, short in front and long in back. She also seems to have taken an interest in the physical features of certain local residents. Abaitua moved past the standard nineteenth-century treatment of types and customs based on stereotypical portrayals, instead using her images to record specific cases with a patently documentary approach.

Enrique Areilza shared the Zubiaurre’s passion for outings and trips, but in his case this activity was conducted in accordance with the tradition of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza, which many of his colleagues in the Generation of ‘98 also followed. Miguel de Unamuno, Telesforo Aranzadi, Ricardo Baroja, Darío de Regoyos, Ignacio Zuloaga, and Ricardo and Leopoldo Gutiérrez Abascal were just some of his travelling companions. Interestingly, Pilar de Zubiaurre’s husband, Ricardo Gutiérrez Abascal, went on outings with Dr Areilza, although this does not necessarily mean that Ramón and Valentín knew him. A prestigious physician from Bilbao, Areilza was a learned man whose amateur photographic activity was aligned with the intellectual philosophy of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza, founded by Giner de los Ríos, and the ‘institutionalists’. For them, as we have already seen, country rambles were one of the best ways to learn about the land and its history and discover the essence of national identity. The outings which, in keeping with this school of thought, were organised in Spain in the early decades of the twentieth century sought a personal experience in different manifestations of the landscape, and the photographic camera played an important role in this, as it encouraged a type of documentation based on the objective, systematic description of reality. Like Eulalia Abaitua, Dr Areilza used a stereo camera, and his photographic activity primarily focused on recording the physical geography, settlements, monumental heritage, people and other salient aspects of the places he visited on his outings. Fifteen of his photographs illustrated an article by Miguel de Unamuno about the Arribes del Duero region, published in Hojas Selectas in January 1905. Areilza also took photographs of a visit to Silos, again with Unamuno and other excursionists.

There is a world of difference between Areilza’s photos and those taken by the Zubiaurre brothers, even though all three were amateurs and used their cameras on outings, because they had different ideas about how and why a camera should be used. Areilza used photography to produce a chronicle of the journey and the places he visited by recording the physical and cultural elements of that territory, whereas Ramón and Valentín used it to commemorate and narrate their personal and family experiences in the course of an outing. Formally, Areilza’s photographs are taken from a wide perspective, at times even somewhat distant from the subject, though this is not at odds with the documentary intention of his work. Here again we find mixed intentions in a photographer who, even in pictures with an obviously documentary focus, introduces an element of the picturesque.

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64 Manuel Vitoria Ortiz, Vida y obra del doctor Areilza (Bilbao: La Gran Enciclopedia Vasca, 1975), 258.
66 Miguel Ángel Jaramillo Guerreira, ‘Las fotografías de Unamuno’, in Miguel de Unamuno y la fotografía: ¡imaginar lo que se ve!, catalogue of the exhibition held in Salamanca, Patio de Escuelas and Cielo de Salamanca galleries (Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2012), 306–327. This text identifies fifteen photographs by Areilza as those used to illustrate Unamuno’s text about their travels along the Spanish-Portuguese border in May 1902. The report was published in Hojas selectas: revista para todos, Barcelona, year IV (January 1905), 19–31.
67 Miguel Ángel Jaramillo Guerreira, op. cit.
Eulalia Abaltua
Anciano con guedeja
(Old Man with Long Hair), c. 1900

Felipe Manterola
Niños en el barrio de Undurraga
(Children in the Undurraga neighbourhood)
Of all these Bizkaia-based amateur photographers, Felipe Manterola is perhaps the most atypical. Not only was he not a member of the bourgeoisie, but he did not fit the profile of amateur photographer as defined in this essay. He was the only one in this group who used the camera for professional purposes, a decision probably motivated by his social background, although it seems that photography was only a sporadic source of income for him. He installed a portrait gallery at his house where he worked as a studio photographer, sent photo reports of events in Zeanuri to *Novedades* magazine in San Sebastián, photographed furniture for catalogues, published several collections of postcards with his photographs, and produced images that were used to illustrate publications on Basque folklore and traditions. In any case, photography was not his sole occupation, and some of his photographic work—perhaps the most interesting part—was based on what we might call amateur premises. Like the Zubiaurres, he worked with more professional cameras; in contrast to Abaitua and Areilza, he did not use the stereo format; and his brief foray into cinematography around 1928 coincided with Ramón and Valentín’s. He and Eulalia Abaitua shared a common photographic territory: the Arratia valley. It was there in Zeanuri, the village where he was born and lived, that he took most of his photographs—the same place where Abaitua took some of her photographs of the rural world. This geographical coincidence allows us to appreciate how differently these two photographers approached the same setting. While Abaitua went there to capture the traits of Basque culture and tradition, identifiable in the types that inhabited this part of the Bizkaia countryside, Manterola’s vision of this place was coloured by an aesthetic filter, producing pictures that denote modest artistic ambitions, more in line with many of the Zubiaurre brothers’ photographs. The excellent technical quality of his images and his remarkable ability to organise the different elements that make up each photograph were other things he had in common with Ramón and Valentín. Most of Manterola’s work revolves round the axis of Zeanuri. While the Zubiaurres, Abaitua and Areilza travelled to different locations in the Basque Country and Spain to produce their respective images, Manterola documented practically everything that transpired in a single place, his village, creating a valuable record of rural Bizkaia: social and religious life, illustrated in processions, pilgrimages, dances, festivities and other events; the farmhouses, their occupants and rural labours; summer holiday-makers in the village, and their contrast with the locals; and, above all, portraits in myriad formats and arrangements. Manterola favoured outdoor settings for his most personal portraits and pictures of country folk at work, which are undoubtedly the most remarkable aspects of his production. In these photographs, the author somehow created scenes in which local residents participated consciously, posing for the camera. When portraying rural life, he was not merely content to capture existing reality; he organised and directed every shot, sometimes even doing additional takes of group portraits, rearranging the subjects or having children or adults dress up as villagers. Some of the images in his archive can therefore be considered staged visions of the rural world in the Arratia valley. Although he did portray numerous elements of traditional Basque culture in much of his production, Manterola’s approach has little to do with the documentary and ethnographic intentions observed in the work of other Bizkaia amateurs.

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69 Most of the information used to interpret Manterola’s life and work came from Josu Bilbao Fullaondo, op. cit.

70 Lluís Calvo i Calvo, *El ‘Arxiu d’Etnografia y Folklore de Catalunya’ y la antropología catalana* (Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1991). The Manual per a recerques d’etnografia de Catalunya published by the Arxiu d’Etnografia y Folklore de Catalunya in 1922 stated, ‘Ethnographic photographs must be an exact copy of reality, and one should therefore never attempt to form artistic groups or stage the scene ….’
These five cases clearly illustrate the wide variety of approaches to amateur photography that existed within the same geographical and chronological framework. And this brings us back to the topic of the different profiles found within amateur photographic practice in the early twentieth century. It also forces us to acknowledge the diverse intentions with which photography was used, even in a single category. Indeed, we must admit that the photographic documentation lacks neutrality, and that the authority of photography depends less on the camera than on the agents who make use of it, insofar as ‘its products are meaningful and legible only within the particular currencies they have’. 71 The photographic work of Eulalia Abaitua and Enrique Areilza can be classified as what is generically termed ‘documentary photography’, and within this category some of Eulalia’s images can even be said to adopt an ethnographic approach. In contrast, Felipe Manterola’s photographs have more aesthetic ambitions and reveal his attempts to exert some control over the setting and the different elements featured in his images. As for Ramón and Valentín, their works reflect what has been termed here the ‘social uses’ of photography, more uniquely expressed in their fictions, and can all be explained in light of the private use for which their images were intended.

The Relationship between Photography and Film and Their Painting

We must begin by clarifying that Ramón and Valentín de Zubiaurre did not use photography in their pictorial processes. The Marquis of Lozoya, who had personally observed Valentín at work in Segovia, makes this quite plain:

Unforgettable days in the quarter of San Lorenzo, the villas of Sepúlveda and Pedraza, and the villages of the plains and hills, Valentín in a state of perpetual astonishment. He wanted to take it all away, men and landscapes, in his sketchbook. [...] He never used photography. His incredibly swift sketches—he never spent more than five minutes on each one—had a ‘super-photographic’ accuracy.  

Only one painting by Valentín, Velar hilando [The Spinner’s Vigil], was literally lifted from a photograph by the same name. The rest of the two brothers’ pictorial oeuvre, as we shall see, depicts the same themes found in their photographs and films, but there is no direct or functional relationship between the latter and their artistic work.  

The truth of this statement is supported not only by the marquis’s unequivocal denial that Valentín used photography when painting, but also by what we know of how the two brothers went about their artistic work. Once again, the Marquis of Lozoya is an invaluable witness:

He used to paint in his studio with live models or still lifes, drawing on his memories and sketches for the setting and landscape. In Castile, I never saw once him set up his easel outdoors to take a direct impression of the landscape.

In other words, they relied on previously made sketches or their memories to construct the settings and background scenery of their paintings, and even the subjects themselves in many Basque-themed works. The use of memory in the painting process is the link between their photographic and artistic work, which helps to explain the thematic coincidence and other similarities between their photographs and films and their paintings. We must not forget that photography plays a relevant role in constructing personal memory and is even more important in this case, considering what we know about the albums this family compiled. The primary purpose of those objects was to serve as a repository and archive of family moments and, in the case of Ramón and Valentín’s four Basque albums, to define a familiar territory bound to them by obvious ties of identity and affection. It is no coincidence that the bulk of the two brothers’ artistic output, like their photographs and films, are centred on Basque themes.

Consequently, much of what we find in Ramón and Valentín’s paintings is familiar to us, a reality we have already seen in their photographs and films, because it is all part of a family imagery constructed from their childhood, a graphic memory gradually built up around a land they would return to time and again through-

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73 This statement must be qualified by noting that both Valentín and Ramón did use cameras to photograph their finished paintings. This photographic archive contains a considerable number of reproductions of their pictorial work which appear to have been taken by the brothers themselves. However, this does not contradict the statement that the Zubiaurre never used photography in the process of making their paintings.

74 Dibujos de Valentín de Zubiaurre por el Marqués de Lozoya, Maestros contemporáneos del dibujo y la pintura, vol. 41 (Madrid: Ibérico Europa, 1975), 2. There are, however, some photographs in the collection that show a very young Valentín painting outdoors, in the meadows of Garai or before the church of Mañaria, although this does not seem to contradict what Juan Contreras is saying here. Those photos are probably staged for the camera, showing Valentín in his role as a budding painter, fictions that underscore the contrast between art and labour (a painter beside several peasants), capture different and occasionally comical situations between a painter and his models, or show the locals crowding in to watch him paint.
out their lives. The coincidences begin with physical geography; both brothers painted pictures—*Paisaje de montaña* [Mountain Landscape], Valentín, and *Vista desde Garay* [View from Garai], Ramón—depicting the impressive ridge of the Durangaldea district, visible from the garden of their house at Garai. Another oil painting by Valentín, *Puerta de Vizcaya* [Gateway of Bizkaia], has the same title as one of his films and, like the moving picture, describes this mountain landscape whose presence permeated his work in every medium: photography, cinema and painting. One of the most prominent local peaks is Mount Udalatx, the backdrop for numerous country scenes and portraits in the oeuvre of both painters. Garai and its environs, farmhouses, farm work, pilgrimages and popular festivals, processions, dances, *zantzolaris* and *espata-dantzaris*, the game of Basque pelota, spinners and card players are other pictorial motifs that echo what they photographed in youth and filmed in adulthood. The same can be said of themes related to the sea, the Basque coastal landscape, regattas and above all Ondarroa: port activity, fishermen and the town’s historic bridge, featured in numerous paintings and in the background of several portraits. And, of course, the family, a constant presence in the films and photographs we have already seen, also appears in many of their paintings: the garden and family residence at Garai, and portraits of their father, mother, sister or nephew Leopoldo. This obvious thematic connection between their pictorial and photographic production can be traced back to their first public appearances on the Madrid art scene. Ramón presented three pictures at the National Fine Arts Exhibition of 1899: *Puesta de sol en Garay* [Sunset at Garai], *Paisaje de Mañaria* [Mañaria Landscape] and *Paisaje de Garay* [Garai Landscape]. And in 1901 he participated with *Paisaje de Durango* [Durango Landscape], *Paisaje de Garay* [Garai Landscape], *Cabo Ogoño en Bermeo* [Cape Ogoño at Bermeo], *Un Caserío de Mañaria* [A Mañaria Farmhouse], *Ría de Mundaca* [Mundaka Inlet] and *Un trozo de montañas*...
de Mañaria [A Piece of the Mañaria Mountains]. Valentín also presented works to the latter exhibition: *Paisaje de Mañaria* [Mañaria Landscape], *Paisaje de Durango* [Durango Landscape], *Altos hornos* [Blast Furnaces], *Velar hilando* [The Spinner’s Vigil], *Cabo Machichaco* [Cape Matxitxako], *Un caserío en Vizcaya* [A Farmhouse in Bizkaia], *Marina de Bermeo* [Bermea Seascape], *Un mosquetero* [A Musketeer], *Retrato de su señor padre, D. Valentín María de Zubiaurre* [Portrait of the Artist’s Father, Don Valentín María de Zubiaurre], *Retrato de su Sra. Madre, Doña Paz Aguirrezabal* [Portrait of the Artist’s Mother, Doña Paz Aguirrezabal] and *Estudios de paisaje de Vizcaya* [Bizkaia Landscape Studies]. There is a striking parallel between what the two brothers were painting and submitting to pictorial competitions and the photographs they chose to include in the albums which the family was compiling around that same time. This correspondence is even apparent in the sequence that combines the landscape of their outings with a few fictions and family portraits, something quite similar to what we saw in the photographic albums dedicated to the family territory.

The Zubiaurres used their images to create a closed, self-referential world, gradually constructed in the different media of representation they used throughout their lives, which ultimately defined the thematic universe in which most of their artistic oeuvre is rooted. Naturally, they depicted other geographical locations, such as Segovia, Salamanca or Flanders, but only in the Basque Country did it all come together in a coherent whole. The existence of these photographic and cinematographic materials gives us a better understanding of the genesis and development of their artistic work. Aside from the intrinsic merits of their photographs and films, explained here in detail, this material provides invaluable insight into Ramón and Valentín’s pictorial output. Their photographs and films shed light on the relationship between their life and their work, a connection articulated in the construction of family memories and of an imagery in which the Basque Country figured prominently.
Summary

The photographic and cinematographic legacy of Valentín and Ramón de Zubiaurre comes into focus when we examine it from the perspective of the social uses of photography, adopting a historiographical approach that provides a solid interpretation of the social and cultural phenomenon of photography’s penetration in the private sphere. This process went hand-in-hand with the rise of amateur photography and was instrumental in facilitating the appearance of chronicles of family life, primarily focused on leisure and recreational activities. The amateur practice of these two renowned painters cannot be satisfactorily explained in terms of other conventional approaches, such as documentary or art photography, but it makes perfect sense when viewed in connection with the private uses this family made of their photographs and films. In this respect, the Zubiaurres differed considerably from other amateurs active in Bizkaia at the time, who were exploring various documentary or artistic approaches to amateur photography.

Of all their extensive photographic production, it was in certain albums assembled by the family in the early twentieth century where these photographers chose to declare their intentions, their true photographic discourse. The four albums from their youth that document their sojourns in the Basque Country construct a territory of family and memory through narratives that chronicle and commemorate their activities while also composing a kind of fiction based on their lives. In these narratives, great importance is attached to the family’s place of origin and the fictions constructed there. From early youth, the Zubiaurre brothers showed a strong predilection for telling stories through still photographs, a pre-cinematographic interest that multiplied their expressive possibilities in this field with the help of the texts their mother wrote beneath the photographs inserted in their albums. A quarter of a century later, Ramón and Valentín began recording their family life again, this time with an amateur cine-camera, whose moving pictures allowed them to fulfil the story-telling ambitions of their youth. Surprisingly, even after all that time, they chose to film practically the same things they had photographed as young men. There is a clear sense of thematic, geographical and even conceptual continuity between their photographic and cinematographic output.

Thus, through the graphic memory constructed in their photographs and films, both brothers articulated an imagery that links these two media to their pictorial production. All three facets have the same social, cultural and natural source, a reality frequented by the Zubiaurre family throughout their lives which ultimately shaped the thematic universe that inspired much of Valentín and Ramón’s artistic oeuvre.