

Sports Episodes from Top to Bottom and from Bottom Up

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Goitibera participants go uphill in a pick-up truck—their faces in the wind, gazing over landscape, cars, other participants, and the road. A radio-controlled airplane model pilot waits for the right wind gust and sends his plane into the sky; it takes off like a bird and hovers over the land. Wide-angle, slow shots at times alternate with long close-ups. This is how *Goitik behera, behetik gora* (by weareQQ, and translated into English as "Top Down and Bottom Up") weaves together sequences of interdependent events and makes them come together in a rhythmic score, bringing the eye from the foot of the hill to the top, from a plateau to the sky, from the hillside to the valley, from the top of the hill to the bottom, etc. If one were to draw a score of these movements, the outcome would be a meticulous alternation between contrasting up and down vectors. This film, through its editing into an episodic structure, doubles the directionality of the registered activities (all related to *goitiberas*, car rallies and radio-controlled airplane model flying). Each episode forms a system in itself, depicting a self-contained direction.

Plot, as is to be expected from weareQQ, is absent. The film seems to string together a series of discreet events in a loosely linear form—that is, there is setting up at the beginning and storing at the end—but, beyond that, it does not propose a division between protagonists or minor characters, a central action or a particular narrative that develops against the backdrop of the summery Basque mountainside.

Coincidentally, music and dialogue always come from diegetic sound, emphasizing the unity of the episode over the development of a linguistic or sound-structure weaving all parts together. Each of these episode-movements operates as an actor-network, that is, as a tight and periodic assemblage of agents who, together, make the movement.

Stated in the most basic of terms, *Goitik behera*, *behetik gora*, weareQQ's latest film made in the summer of 2011, records three sports meet-ups that regularly take place during the summer in the Basque Country, more specifically in the Navarra and Urdaibai (Biscay) areas. It's a work that homes in on outdoor, communal hobbies: car races, *goitiberas*, and radio-controlled airplane model flying.¹ The latter two are, by lack of a better term, downgrade, "low-fi" versions of professional, "high-fi" activities—car racing and real plane combats—and they stand out for their use and invention.

Not insignificantly, *goitibera* races and radio-controlled airplane model flying have been present for about 30 years in this area and came about by a do-it-yourself assembly of leftovers or waste, but also of gadgets to be adapted to specific usages. A fair amount of these materials used in the artifacts came (and come) from factories still (or until recently) active in the same area. The long take of the Cementos Portland silos at the end of the film suffices to remind one of this reality. Similarly, the players and organizers often also work at, or, more indirectly, for, these factories.² The film doesn't make this aspect explicit, yet by focusing on slow gestures in the act of making and performing, one realizes that this type of leisure is closely entwined with everyday activity and, indeed, with labor. The time spent with the airplane aficionados executing simple actions (putting in screws, adjusting and tightening parts) and the close-ups of the tools bring forward this point. In fact, when considering the relation between "production" assembly and "leisure" assembly, a term such as "recycling" falls short. Instead of understanding the latter as the supplement of the further, which would suggest that sports is a form of recycling the extra energies and

¹ Notably, in the town of Urbasa, where weareQQ filmed the rally, the *goitibera* championships are held at yearly town celebrations and followed, on the next day, by a car rally. As such, the audiences and participants mix, diffusing any clear delineations between viewer and participant-actor, an element that occurs frequently in these meet-ups.

² Some RC pilots, for instance, build the aeolic windmills that also appear in the film; some *goitivera* participants work at SKF in Tudela, which produces bearings also used in the *goitivera* cars, or others work at the Seat car plant in Pamplona—the Seat 124 and 127 is, in fact, a very popular car in these local rallies.

materials of work, in *Goitik behera, behetik gora* these activities and labor come forward as part of a singular organism. If in a regular sports or leisure broadcast all attention goes to the narrative and heat of the actual competition, weareQQ's (Vicente Vázquez and Usué Arrieta) close eye on the process at large—the preparations, pauses, waiting, or the taking down—talks about making, assembling and participating, all of which relate to specific economies of means that are part and parcel of the region's larger economic system. In other words: the where of these activities is fully entangled with the how and when of their particular place. Note how the relaxed and joking conversation by the straw bales mixes talk about actual logistics and method (who will go in which van, etc.) with references to music improvisation and to the town's characteristic labor history. Or consider how the model airplanes share the sky with windmills, an industry that employs several of the RC pilots.

Though weareQQ have certainly placed an emphasis on such entangled processes of making in other work (consider, for instance, *Canedo* from 2010), in *Goitik behera, behetik gora* they've come to further understand these processes in an expanded manner. A work that, already in its title, refers to topography and relief brings, through seeming simplicity and zero adornment, the viewer's attention to a host of productive forces such as gravity, light, wind, weight, and, of course, duration. This film doesn't need any extra-filmic prompts (as is partially the case in *Canedo*) to set the action in motion: it highlights recurring occurrences and dwells on their different components. Interestingly, *goitiberas* and radio-controlled airplane model flying thrive on opposite dynamic forces, as one goes from top to bottom and the other from bottom to top. Where the *goitibera* championship consists of cars racing downhill propelled by their own weight as accelerator, the model kit planes start in the plane track, a fixed piece of land, to then gain altitude and strength thanks to wind currents. Their remote and abstract steering contrasts the gravity and surface friction crucial for the *goitibera*'s acceleration. Where *goitiberas* and car rallies make an exceptional use of

existing roads and roadsides nearby villages, the radio controlled airplane community has a distinct relation to the land. For them, there are municipal and regional rules limiting the use of these planes. As such, they often go out further into agricultural areas and rent or sometimes even purchase land. As such, they have borders from and up to where one can roam the sky (notice how the "pines" are mentioned repeatedly in one of the last episodes) and are also confined to the land to which they have access. In comparison, *goitiberas* and rallies occur throughout the area and participants (and viewers) go from one place to the other.

Despite these distinctions in the mobility (and potential mixing) of amateur communities, radio-controlled airplane model flying, *goitiberas* and rallies each operate thanks to their immediate physical surroundings and in a specific time-space. They each form an auto-poetic system that becomes periodically visible. This auto-poetic (or self-propelling) system consists of organizational relations between the different physical, logistic and affective agencies. In other words, this focus on system and agencies proposes that we're not dealing with a case of one actor doing something against the backdrop of a scenery that contains and defines the outcome of the action; rather, it's a field of relations that becomes manifest thanks to the resonating involvement of the distinct actants.

Though the championships certainly celebrate specific winners or losers, what becomes clear in the approach of Arrieta and Vázquez is that a pilot's skill or an instrument's quality isn't the sole factor that makes the race. The film moves away from the subjectivity and ego-factory that the sports media sets into gear. In this sequence of discrete long moments, not one person or artifact has protagonial presence: faces make space for clouds, straw, the road surface, focus for blurs, etc., etc. Because of the way in which *weareQQ* depicts the events, we see a dynamic system comprised of highly different entities (with the human and non-human on equal footing) that come together and

affect each other through inner-relations to finally make a winner and a loser (who, notably, is never featured as such in the film).³

Instead, *Goitik behera, behetik gora* presents the whole *in medias res*—as it happens. And it is not only natural forces combined with craftsmanship and luck that produce the race. The fact that Arrieta and Vázquez focus on a specific region, the Basque Country, and, moreover, on its inner distinctions, cannot be neglected. This landscape is undoubtedly charged with inherited culture, ideology, history, preconceived notions, as well as traditions. Unlike other films about Basque "regional" activities,⁴ we are QQ's work doesn't propose an explanatory narrative or chronicle about the origins or reasons for the persistence of the regional events. As mentioned, in this film, the physical environment is not a pre-determining given, but rather something that emerges as part of a dynamic field, of an event-in-the-making. Similarly, the human actants don't predefine the action either. As such, the way in which environment/region play out in the events depicted is equally in flux, instead of being fully circumscribed by certain ideological pre-fixed structures. The relation to the land and local regulation of RC pilots *vis à vis* that of a rally pilot is, for instance, crucial when it comes to understanding the distinction between "the regional" as category, and "a regional activity," which stands out for mutations and a particular actualization (or "local manifestation") contingent upon the specifics of its time-space. As such, *Goitik behera, behetik gora* primarily registers how local manifestations come to the foreground in a time that's supposedly "free," and unburdened by work or professional obligation. A crucial scene in this respect is the evening gathering at a local bar, where a

³ Consider, in this light, how the Basque mountains fill with summery crowds of people to watch (and co-produce) the race. The season also has agency as it molds experience. In a sense, *Goitik behera, behetik gora* could remind of Eric Rohmer's film *A Summer Tale* (1996), a troubled love story between a young man and three girls. As in *A Summer Tale*, *Goitik behera, behetik gora* (needless to say, without the profoundly psychological lens of Rohmer) presents a fraction of moments specific to this very time of year.

⁴ Consider, for instance, Julio Medem's feature films *La Pelota Vasca* (2003) or *Vacas* (1992).

traditional song blending both Spanish and Basque is continually re-adapted to address contemporary issues, some more frivolous or incendiary and political than others. This episode presents particular relations, imaginary and actual, and shows how, while active and enacted, they are continually in translation. Improvisation of this kind resists identity or representation, yet it nevertheless suggests how forms of collective subjectivity are produced: through affect (before classified emotion), intensity, cultural legacy, and modes of technical production. WeareQQ has family and personal connections to Basque area and, through these, has achieved a keen understanding of how life unfolds in the region. Whereas many contemporary artists seek another "outsider" to register on film, weareQQ are unique in their persistent attention to both local and foreign activity.⁵ And it is thanks to this lived proximity that they position themselves as makers alongside the spectators, wind, model plane builders, racers, etc. (It is a decision that also shapes how we, the viewers, relate to the images.) Through the attention to mechanical and affective build up (ex. the straw bales, or the young spectators' excitement), the physical vectors of movements (ex. planes going up), and in the experience of duration (ex. the slowness of getting the racers to the top), the film talks as much about certain regional sports as about its own process.

Arrieta and Vázquez's artistic practice, then, finds its image in leisure, but a leisure whose understanding has been exploded in order to make visible the creative and affective elements present in assembling things as well as people. Each assembly differs from the other. In this sense, it may share an initial interest with artists of a previous generation, such as Jeremy Deller or Marysia Lewandowska & Neil Cummings. Where Lewandowska's and Cummings's *Enthusiasts* project, started in 2002, aimed to bring together existing film material made by amateur filmmaker clubs in socialist Poland (between 1955-85) that were facilitated by the employers and so traced a history of leisure parallel to

⁵ As example of the "foreign" activities they've registered, consider *Going in Circles*, a project made in 2011 around Keirin indoor cycling in South Korea.

the history of factory work, weareQQ operate in a landscape in which the divisions between work and leisure are less clearly demarcated and where self-organization is a major force behind so-called "hobbies." Deller, in projects such as *Social Parade* (2004) or *Our Hobby is Depeche Mode* (2012), gives carte blanche to fan culture looking at its complex manifestations and variety of local expressions. With *Social Parade*, produced for Manifesta in San Sebastián, the artist invited local clubs to join a city-wide parade. In his latest film, *Our Hobby is Depeche Mode*, he accompanies and interviews DM fans from Russia to the UK highlighting individual as well as shared traits, thus reverting common prejudices against the cultural industry as rendering their consumers into passive followers. While Dellers's perspective prioritizes the fans as protagonists telling and consciously performing their own story, weareQQ's films integrate those actors into a larger productive ecosystem, with an eye to make a film (and never a reportage) that deliberately reflects the dynamics traced by the aficionados in action.