

Jon Mikel Euba & Peio Aguirre

*In this conversation, Jon Mikel Euba & Peio Aguirre discuss Euba's project 'One Minute of Silence', consisting of a book and six videos that were shot in Spain, Turkey and Korea between 2003 and 2005.*

PA: People might be wondering what they have seen. So maybe we should start talking about the process of making. Sometimes you like to describe your works as rehearsals. Jean-Luc Godard used to say that there is fiction and everything else is documentary. Your work, we could say, is neither fiction, nor documentary. What we may say is that it is 'real, real' action, a 'real' thing. It would be good to talk about your idea of the rehearsal, to discuss the way you work with the people in your videos.

JME: One important thing for me is to let you know that the people that worked in those videos didn't know at all what they were doing. I asked volunteers to work with me. Every time I did a new shooting, I used another cameraman, another model and another team, because when people think they know what they are doing, the result is totally flat. When they don't know what they are doing, you can feel that they are really fighting; they have to negotiate to create 'the thing'. When I gather and instruct the volunteers, I always use the example of a bus crash. During such an experience, the people involved become a team all of a sudden. Only seconds after participating in an accident, relations between people change because of that experience. My experiences are the same: from the moment we are doing the shooting, we become a team. When we have finished, we are prepared to rob a bank together.

The series of videos called *One Minute Of Silence* took off after reading an interview with the Velvet Underground, in which they recount that Andy Warhol proposed to do the rehearsals of the band 'live' on stage. Warhol wanted to intensify the attention of the audience by relaying the mistakes and sudden brakes typical of rehearsals. It is very interesting when you try to play a song and suddenly someone says: "no it's not that way". You stop and the audience has to jump into that mistake, which causes a real experience of the rehearsal. Most people do rehearsals and re-present in front of the audience afterwards.

In the first video of the *One Minute Of Silence* project, called *Neska* (2003), I had a lot of time to talk with the participating volunteers about art works from the sixties and seventies, so they were really into it. But when I moved to Korea, where I made *One Minute In Busan* (2005), I had only one week to do the whole project (scouting locations, casting, etc.), so it was totally impossible to talk about art or performance in public spaces, especially because the volunteering art students were doing traditional drawing. To deal with this situation, I proposed them to think about the recording, the shooting as a drawing, made in real time. When you draw, you make a

line and you see what you are doing. To look for things and find them at the same time; this, for me, is performative.

PA: It is good to explain that the project *One Minute Of Silence* comes from this book *Un Minuto de Silencio* published in 2003, which forms the starting point for the six videos shot in Spain, Korea and Turkey. The book contains collages of images of rock stars posing on stage, copied from magazines. You seem to use these collages as a kind of score or script for making the videos.

JME: The idea of the book was to create an instrument, a tool. This is what the book is. When you travel all over the world, you spend much time translating with a translator. This book was a system I created, to have a universal structure for making my videos, it functioned as a score. For the shooting we needed six people, one person as the instrument, or the object, two people as musicians, manipulating the 'instrument' and one person as the director, me in this case, showing the score generated by the pictures in the book. I showed the images of the rock stars to the people who had to guide the body of another person to imitate the picture. One other person mirrors the score to the cameraman. He had to look at it and try to mimic the frame of the picture.

The focus on the bodily movements of rock stars started in 2002, when I wanted to make a video about success. When I was a kid, everybody in my town wanted to be a musician or a football player. For us, those stereotypes of rock stars were examples of success, examples of people expressing themselves. At the time, a Spanish television programme on how to become a star was popular. For many young or poor people, the only way out is to go on TV, to try to sing and become a star. I felt really sorry for them and I started collecting all the images related to the idea of the body, the body on the stage and the body expressing freedom. But the material, resulting from that shooting, was really bad. So I decided that I was maybe not able to make a video again. Then what I did, was to put together all the ideas I had about this project, image by image, thinking that maybe I could make a video without using a videotape. When I did it, I noticed that everything in the book was pointing to a very particular direction: my interest in the body, poses of the body.

PA: It is important to emphasize the conscious way in which you avoid the usual cinematographic mode of production; you make your own rules. How do you use the camera in terms of economy and production?

JME: Over the course of ten years, when I was working in the Basque country, I got used to working very fast because you have to anticipate surveillance and police control everywhere. If you do a strange shoot outside in public space, it's a matter of very little time before the police arrive. Therefore I decided to do something radical, using only a really cheap camera and a few people, no lighting, no permissions...

PA: Can you elaborate on your particular use of the camera? In the past you have mentioned the idea of the 'camera as a microphone', and you illustrated this method with a metaphor of a fisherman that throws a net, looks in and sees what has been recorded.

JME: In Spain in the eighties, the highest point to reach for my friends was to make a film, a *réal* (maybe italics) film. But the reality was that the only possibility to make a story, filmed, was by video, which was really hard for them; they only used it because they couldn't get hold of film, actually they hated video. They wanted an auratic medium and they ended up with this shit coming from video, which is absolutely not auratic. For me it's clear: video doesn't give you anything. You record, and what you get is never better than reality.

Cinema is a system that comes from photography. The film is a support, there is a light, and afterwards you develop the thing. The video, on the other hand, historically is an extension of the microphone. It doesn't come from the tradition of photography. It is something that is created to record something at the same time that it is happening. This was really important when I started working on this project.

PA: I'm interested to know more about your use of light. The recording at night is very dark, because you use the headlights of the cars that transported the people to the rehearsal as the only source of light, together with occasional flashes of cameras.

JME: The thing is that for ten years I've been working in the Basque context, trying to avoid the context. Sometimes when you go to psychoanalysis or whatever therapy, you can spend three years talking about your mother or your father. Let's say you talk about your mother. Then obviously the analyst will say that the problem is your father. So sometimes, the things that you avoid mentioning appear to be the most important. In the nineties, I developed a way of working that tries to avoid context all the time, yet the experience or rehearsal takes place in the real context. What happened was that the last ten years I've found myself representing the Basque artist, talking about the Basque context. Funny isn't it?

PA: Politics.

JME: Politics.

An example of this is the video from Istanbul. I was living there for three months and during those three months I wrote down all the issues that I was not going to talk about. Because I'm a foreigner, I don't know anything about Istanbul. I always hate foreigners that come to my country and try to explain my own political situation to me and try to give me solutions. But as an artist I am invited to go to places, one

week, five months. Right now I am in Amsterdam for five months and I need to have a solution, I need to have a critical approach. I have to have a solution about things I don't give a shit about. I think it's not really ethical to have a conclusion in two weeks or five months.

When I was in Istanbul I met a German artist. He was so fascinated by one street full of gypsies. Then people start asking why he didn't make a documentary about this street. I was so pissed off, because nobody would dare to say: "Why don't you write a novel about this street"? Everybody knows that for writing a novel you need certain 'technique'. But nowadays nobody thinks that for shooting a video you need certain techniques too. The fact that you know how to write doesn't mean that you can make a novel does it? The same with producing images; the fact that you record a horse doesn't mean you can create an image of it. But nowadays everybody is becoming kind of analphabetic.

PA: For your work in Istanbul, the role of sound was very important; sound that comes like this idea of throwing the net. Afterwards you found some surprises on the material you recorded.

JME: In Istanbul I tried to find a place that could have equally been a place in Spain or Amsterdam. I wanted to work with people who were from that place, but not especially Turkish looking. I tried to create something that totally avoided context, the Istanbul context. Avoiding the context, but knowing that the result will get all the energy from the fact that it happened in that context. When I went back to Spain I heard that the camera recorded the sound of the mosque, transmitting praying, which gave me the structure to edit the images in relation to that rhythm. This is the perfect example of how by creating certain conditions even the unexpected or the mistake gets integrated in the structure. I really tried not to make an issue of the place, but if you are able to create an open structure, the work gets all the potential from the fact that it happened in this particular context. Now you couldn't imagine this video was shot in a different country, it only could have happened in that place.

PA: Now going back to light and sound, could you mention some of your sources of inspiration for the *One Minute Of Silence* project, such as the references to José Val del Omar?

JME: The only thing we really thought about while shooting the daylight videos was the time of the shoot, because the light was important, the sun had to be in a very precise position. When bodies move, the light makes you consider the volume, the idea of the volume. Val del Omar, an incredible filmmaker from the fifties, worked with the traditional religious iconography of Spain, with flamenco as well, but with an avant-garde approach to these issues. He has some pieces in which you can almost feel, you can almost touch the volume of the objects. Val del Omar says that if you are blind and you touch a surface of a table, the information to your finger has a

ninety degrees angle. So if I touch the top surface of a table, the information comes in a ninety degrees angle. If you later touch the side of the table, you get another bit of information in a ninety degrees angle. Those two sources of information together create the perception of volume in your mind.

Val del Omar created a stroboscopic light that moved around the statue of a virgin, while a special lens deformed the perspective. The effect is that you can almost feel the three dimensions of this traditional Spanish religious sculpture. His movies are incredible, better than mine. He made a movie called *Portrait of Spain*. In Spain, it is tradition to carry statues of virgins or Jesus Christ and to cry and pray while walking through the city. In the north, it rains a lot and they have to cover the statues with plastic. You see something really geometrical through the movement of the carriers, which can give you, at times, a real experience of space. The idea in my videos was to push the cameraman up and down all the time. It will make you think of a statue, of a painting or of an abstract sculpture.

P: There are more references. There is a certain religious iconography in the work.

JME: *Rock my religion* was a piece of someone... Very good, don't you think?

I'm really interested in the ideas of Jerzy Grotowski right now. He thought about the idea of imitating. For proper acting, he said, it is better to look at the body (the form) and to try to reproduce all the movements, than to try to feel the pain. And only through the movements you can arrive at the real. This is how I use my rock star images as a score. By imitating the image, I can think about what is going on in that image. By analysing the images I create real experiences and those real experiences produce images. I really like this kind of idea. What I did in this project was to create a factory of images that was totally autonomous from the context, moving from one country to another.

I always wanted to have in mind the kind of performances or actions that took place in reality, because when they happen in reality it's not the same as doing something in a studio, like Bruce Nauman for example. In Spain when we studied art, we always thought that performance art was to be naked and to paint the floor with your body. In the nineties I created some works that happen in reality and where really charged by the tension of that reality. It is like that in my video with the girl, *Neska* (2005). It is called 'chick': neska means chick in Basque. After a girl was attacked in the Bilbao, a collective of women created a painting saying 'Chick, the street and the night belong to you'. What we did in the first exercise was to see if this was really true. That's why we shot the same action during the day and during the night. By changing merely the context, your approach to the night situation becomes totally emotional.

PA: I would like to know more about the way you create a feeling of unease in the viewer.

J: Nowadays people don't have time to experience real time. They find everything so boring. I really loved it when I experienced real time in Warhol movies for example, the really boring ones. With this project, I started working directly with the idea of 'I'm not going to give you any chance to enjoy'. (Perhaps some people are like me and they love to suffer). I love to suffer 'time'; I went to church many years as a kid and I got used to seeing a ritual that I never understood.

PA: It would be good to mention the idea of limits in your work; how you try to meet self-imposed rules and how you use this idea of the mistakes.

JME: For me it is really important to think about limits. When I don't have limits, I cannot do anything. After having decided that I wanted to make a book, the first limit I set was that I was not going to use the computer to make it, as the ideology of computers is that you can control everything. For this book, I only used a photocopy machine. I had two friends, musicians, they had a great collection of music magazines from the seventies, eighties and nineties. So my second limit was that this collection would be my field. I photocopied all the images that I found interesting in those magazines. The third limit was the length of the video. The videotapes are so cheap that nobody thinks about the limit of the support anymore; usually the important thing is what you are going to shoot, not really the length or the characteristics of the support that you are using. The limit was a standard sixty minute videotape.

Nowadays, video cameras are designed to avoid mistakes. They all have this built-in anti-movement stuff. In Istanbul, the most important mistake in the night version was that the camera recorded the sound of prayers from the mosque. The second video, in which I didn't use enough light, I only had the light of people flashing cameras. Some drunk guys entered the shooting and they started shouting at us, you can hear it. Another time, we planned a certain shooting and the wind started moving the plastic. Then the cameraperson got confused. We were continuously forced to improvise. Thanks to all those 'mistakes' the videos are now perfect. The structure of the shooting was so open that it embraced all of them and it's through this that the videos are created.

These collages, these images could represent a certain identity that we consumed in Spain, coming from England and America, that was what we wanted to be. It's a certain idea of individuality and freedom. When I draw, the reason to draw is because I want to see something. It's not that I want to say something. Many people get confused and they really think that when they draw, they want to say something. This

is not true. I like to say that I don't have anything to say. When you want to see, if you follow your desire, the act of doing it will express something. Be sure about that.