

# ON PRODUCTION OVERDOSE OVERPRODUCING

or - OVERPRODUCTION MATERIAL -  
overproduction (a tendency to control  
and overproduce)

JON MIKEL EUBA

## Control-Selection

In my childhood, I would spend a part of my summers on my aunt and uncle's farm in Muxika. As a guest, there were certain farm chores I wasn't allowed to do and others I was. Sometimes, we would have to go looking for all the newborn kittens, to avoid the house becoming overrun by cats. That was part of my job. I recall the tension and fear of being attacked by the mother cat if I found her with her litter. My aunt would grant me the "honour" of making the selection; we could spare a single kitten from each litter, and I got to pick. I relished the responsibility. I was fully confident in my ability to always choose the best kitten. If I chose a brown one, that one would live. The rest were thrown into the river.

## Selecting Reproduction

My obsession was always to choose a three-coloured kitten if there was one, because no two were alike. There was something unique about their multiple combinations –with their variations of ginger, white, tabby and black– that made each cat's coat an unrepeatable sign. It was later in my teens that I discovered that only female cats ever have three-colour coats; i.e., any cat can be a single colour, but if you see a three-coloured cat, it is bound to be female. This is due to the fact that the gene that determines the colour ginger and its variations is connected to the X chromosome. Approximately 1 out of 3,000 three-coloured cats will be male and only 1 in 10,000 will be fertile. Therefore, if I always chose female cats, our whole selection process intended for population control would generate the opposite effect.

All my work in recent years, given the markedly subtractive character of the technique I apply, reveals an extreme determination to control and select, whilst at the same time generating a proliferation of images that tend towards infinity. This overproduction technique is ultimately an empowerment strategy whereby I transform myself into an uncontrollable productive entity, carving myself out more space and time to progress at my own pace and thus subjecting the outside world to my own needs. I have no interest in building a myth around the ongoing process or the endless project. I'm just interested in demonstrating this overproduction strategy as a mere tool and explaining it to you.

### (A 15 MINUTE ACTION: AN INTRODUCTION)

(This introductory text must be read fast enough for the whole thing to fit into 15 minutes).

In terms of production, over the past few years I have been constantly and consciously experimenting with this idea of EXCESS. Thus, since the material I have been given is an hour in which I can do whatever I want, I have decided to create a HYPERHOUR where I will attempt to provide at least one idea per minute. We will begin with an action lasting approximately 15 minutes.

I always hated scripted talks because they are generally/ always badly delivered. Much like knowing how to write does not mean one can write a book, knowing how to read does not mean one is equipped, for instance, to read out a conference. On the basis of this assumption, and given that I don't vocalise too well, I will now go on to read one.

This could be called an "INTRODUCTION TO *WHAT I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT*" (an introduction for people who are and are not productive), an introduction aimed towards artists and non-artists, an introduction also for the benefit of managers and editors.

I have been invited today, as a producer, to talk about artistic production.

I'm here today to represent the producer. Having internalised this identity as a producer in a ratio of one to three, I have also decided to be generous and gear my presentation towards those of you here today who were not considered producers. This action is based on the prejudices I have detected regarding the meaning of *production* and in the *sphere* from which I have been invited to *talk*. Hence the title: introduction to "*what I don't want to talk about*".

I honestly believe that A PRESENTATION IN THE CONTEXT OF A GATHERING SUCH AS THIS SHOULD ACTUALLY PRODUCE something.

I would like to use (not waste) this exchange to *produce*. I hate it when, under a given format, a gathering or a talk, we merely comply with convention and nothing happens, nothing is produced. I feel that it's a wasted opportunity and, above all, a waste of money. And I ask myself, who am I producing for: for the people who invited me, or for the people who attend? At home, I asked myself: who will attend? My first issue when I'm thinking at home is that I don't know who I will be talking to. And then, who do I really want to talk to? Who are my interlocutors?

Now I am seeing you and you aren't quite the people I was expecting, there's really more of you than I was expecting. I was thinking this was going to be something limited and now it's too late, i.e., it's time. NOW IS THE TIME!

The first question I ask myself is: what does *eremuak* mean? *eremua-k*, I'm intrigued by that *k*,<sup>1</sup> I understand (and you can correct me later if I'm wrong) that it's the outcome of something that was going to be called the "Basque Culture Plan" and later, for reasons beyond the scope of my imagination, the *Basque* was dropped from the title and then it became "Citizens' Contract for Cultures". As you can see, the only element shared by both names is "Cultures", no reference to art, though in the end we wind up with a word in Basque that I don't understand.

I ask: How does one translate *eremuak*? Or, what is it a translation of? I come up with four answers (here I don't need you to correct me), of which I immediately pick *sphere* (I have no idea why they retained the plural form, I'm intrigued by that *k*). I'm sure at the end of my talk someone will be eager to let me know. For the time being, I will obviate the plural, which I'm pretty sure is a projected shadow of "the (Cultures)".

Within this *sphere* I'm invited into, I ask myself: What is production? What are we referring to when we talk about production? If I am to produce something here today, I will have to think about the methodology I intend to apply, what my technique will be. If we're working in the sphere of art, we should consider what methodology we're going to apply in order to produce what we want to produce within that sphere. What would be different if we were working in the sphere of Culture? Would we be able to appreciate a difference? What sphere will I be speaking from? Am I really free to decide what sphere I'm speaking from or is the sphere a given? If the sphere is a given, is there a *reason* or a *purpose* for it? Am I in the sphere of Art right now? Or in the sphere of debate? Is this the appropriate table for generating production? Is this the way to achieve it? These are some of the questions you have to ask yourself before you start.

They say Art is what one *does*, Culture what is *received*. Culture is a standardising effect.

I always hesitate between *making* and *saying*, **make-say**: someone else once said, "to me culture is the norm and art is the exception, culture is dissemination and art is production. The 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony is art, the 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony directed by von Karajan could have an element of the artistic to it, but the 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony as disseminated by Philips or Sony Pictures is culture. Unfortunately we are in a derive towards culture, the Europe of Culture wants the death of art. There was a place in Bosnia where Muslims got on perfectly well with Turks

and Serbians – a rare occurrence we could describe as the art of living. Alas, the Europe of Culture wants the death of that art of living". That same person used to say that, "going to the cinema used to be making a critique, and then chatting amongst ourselves was making cinema. Now we see a derive towards a cultural bog and nobody is making cinema. That's the difference".

If I now were to play a video of mine for you to watch, according to the aforementioned definition, would that be *production* or *dissemination*? It depends on *how* I did it. I could do it merely to give myself some time and space to search my non-formalised database (the body) for information which, in standing before you (and precisely because I am facing you) I don't have the time to recall; perhaps I could stand behind you, in order to be closer to you. Production does not require confrontation. Or perhaps production *does* require confrontation.

As for producing something here today, it should be enough for what I'm going to say to be interesting to me, regardless of who turns up. The second question I constantly grapple with is/was: Am I going to talk about production or am I going to produce something? (I think that's the third time I've said it so far). For instance, I could produce a sense of unease today. Would that be enough? Would that be production or just a reaction, the expression or a mere effect that is not necessarily constructive? Am I allowed, in this context I've been invited into, to produce something? Or am I, in this context, capable of producing something? It remains to be seen. Today we prefer, perhaps unwittingly, to *talk* about it. If I'm expected just to talk about it, I have to explore the issues surrounding "talking about".

### Talking about

#### Anecdote 1: A Talking Museum

A very practical anecdote: a few years ago at the Natural History Museum in Berlin I came across something that was attempting to represent and communicate the life of a pigeon. In other words, a person or group of people, an institution, the Museum, wanted to *talk about* the life of a pigeon. Why would a Museum ever attempt to talk? So, for children and adults to understand what the life of a pigeon is all about, they *did* the following: first they displayed an image of a pigeon's nest with some eggs in it; to the right of that, they displayed one or two week-old chicks in the nest; next on down, there was another image of a larger chick with its feathers starting to bud; the last of a sequence of 5 images or so, I don't recall exactly, showed a adult pigeon standing outside the nest. I forgot to mention

1. TN: -k is the plural marker in Euskera.

that all these images were part of a diorama! So, in order to communicate this idea of the “life cycle”, they had stuffed a week-old chick and placed it in a nest, then stuffed another three week-old chick... all different chicks of course. What’s the problem here? Well, whoever generated the format was so confident, or so focused on what they wanted to *say*, that they neglected or lost track of what they were *saying* (*displaying*). What any remotely sensitive person saw on entering the room, in a sequence from left to right, from small to large (from egg to chicken), was a display of five discontinuities, five interruptions in the lives of those birds at the point when they decided to kill them in order to incorporate them into a diorama. By displaying five lives cut short, disrupted, what you saw was five deaths attempting to talk about a life. I’m sure that wasn’t what they were trying to “say”. The problem arises when you don’t have a technique to help you understand what you’re handling. Perhaps they should have incorporated death in order to be able to talk about life. They could have added a stuffed old pigeon, past its prime, after the adult sample; then a stuffed “dead” pigeon playing dead; then a rotting pigeon. Perhaps that way we could have begun to relate to the complexity of life in terms of death, the earth, animals and their rebirth, etc. The diorama faced the same issue raised in that joke about the grandma who was *afraid* that her granddaughter might ever experience *fear* or dread. So in order to protect her, she would hide a newspaper if it carried a picture of a car crash, or she would hide her Little Red Riding Hood storybook... Naturally, the girl ended up developing a fear of her grandmother.

If we want to produce something (language) it’s important to bear in mind that whatever we attempt to hide is always expressed. The poetry inherent to language claims its right of place. At the museum in Berlin they weren’t necessarily attempting to hide the pigeons’ deaths. We could put it down to a Major Oversight; a *lapsus linguae* – literally “a slip of the tongue”. We must, however, reflect upon the language we’re using to *speak*. In the second case, the grandmother is clearly guilty of malicious poetic intent.

#### Anecdote 2: Fleeing in order to talk about 18 stories

The second anecdote is hard to explain and I want to move on fast, since I’m still talking about *what I don’t want to talk about*. As you can imagine, I’m a lot more interested in talking about *what I want to talk about*, which comes later. A group of curators recently invited me to contribute a text for a project that also involved

another 18 producing agents. Crafting that textual piece turned out to be a challenging exercise in style. Between 2001 and 2012 I had been compiling samples of different styles of attack. For this piece I focused essentially on the techniques/manner applied by two specific male artists in their writing. A key practical consideration in their attack technique is that, in order to avoid the angst of not knowing whom one is addressing, or lacking a physical counterpart in one’s writing process, everything one writes is always addressed to somebody. (You all know that sometimes when you’re writing you digress so far that suddenly you realise you’re all alone or, what’s worse, you find yourself arguing with a non-existent ghost). In other words, it’s all about operating *as if* you were talking to someone. I faced the added challenge and contradiction that my text was addressed to a faceless entity: the “curatorial institution”. Under this attack technique that I’m talking about, words are used (or rather hurled) in such a way that they could potentially touch or even injure a body. It’s a confrontational approach to acquiring knowledge through a destructive technique that is typically a “boy’s thing”.

To make things even trickier, I wanted to see if I could combine the technique I described above with another; not an attack tactic this time, but a flight tactic, which I identify better with and was more in line with the invitation’s subject/object of analysis; far less phallic and offensive in style. Under this tactic, words are used to establish a neutral (i.e., unloaded) recollection/report of what happens during a given production process. In technical terms, that neutrality or detachment is deployed as if one were playing chess: it isn’t so much about attacking your opponent in emotional terms, as about playing strategically in order to put them on the spot, in such a way that your adversary/target feels exposed only at the very end.

The text I submitted was the outcome of applying the style of those “others” which, in combination, yielded the representation of a character: Jon Mikel Euba. Having done that, the final exercise was to explore the character’s range of expressive possibilities. What I liked the most about my submission was the fact that, by paying attention to the writing process, Jon Mikel (i.e. myself) was able to discover what was wrong (in my view) with the invitation. If you were to read the text now, you might get the impression that I had a critical opinion from the very outset, which I merely communicated. On the contrary, my “opinion” emerged from the technique I applied. My opinion was

the solution I found to *my* issues with the invitation. Thus, it was the text that did the thinking for me, for I generally have no preconceived opinions on anything. It so happened that there was an inherent tension to the proposal, which was expressed through art and certain technical procedures. But it all happened while drafting the text, never starting out from the *content* I wanted to communicate.

So I finally submitted my text piece, a little bomb as it were, a direct critique that implied an amendment to the whole of the project, to the approach itself that I had been invited to join, which I essentially deconstructed by challenging it. A few months later I was invited to conduct a workshop and, in order to also challenge the text's purist posturing, I decided to pervert the piece and use it, "instrumentalise" it, as my material for a workshop with students. All this guided by the spurious intention of testing out whether or not I would be able to use that material as a basis for a freestanding video. It turned out that some of the people who had issued the invitation to write the text, on learning that said text would be used as working material for a workshop, felt – in good faith, I should note – that they ought to face up to their responsibility for what I was criticising and were therefore eager to contribute and communicate their perspective in the educational context I was going to create. Funnily enough, after a 90-minute phone conversation with these people, I still didn't quite understand what they intended to do. In other words, I had been invited by them to submit a text piece, which I did, but I did not need, nor was I asking for, any further material for my workshop. (...) In light of our difficulties in understanding each other over the phone, I realised they were under the impression that what I intended to do at the workshop was to hold a kind of parish meeting where we would be *talking* (!) about the piece's *thematic contents*. In fact, all I meant to *do* was take the material in its entirety and tackle it face on, not address the *content* as if it were something separable or distinct. Today I wanted to explicitly bring to the fore everything that was *contained*, on a technical (i.e., artistic) level, in the piece I submitted, in order to reveal what some don't see or tend to ignore these days. It's as if a painting critic only saw *what* is displayed on a canvas, not *how* it is displayed (can you imagine?). Or, in more literal terms, as if we analysed a poem or a work of literature by looking only at what the author names, *what* she says and not *how* she says it. As you can see, even the professional art world (and not only the Natural History Museum, where they aren't expected to know about art) betrays a

subconscious need to break out of the *sphere* of art and into the parish hall. (Perhaps into the Academy, but I wonder, the Academy of what? Not the Academy of Literature... nor the Academy of Art, clearly).

In the sphere of art we face this issue more and more. I think we should be *talking* less and *doing* more. If we agree that it's all about talking, I have no objection to talking, and also thinking, about what system or sphere we come together in. If *eremua-k* are (and mean) *spheres*, then I ask myself: When we talk about *production* at *eremua-k*, are we expected to talk about art or about money? In the film world, when they say *production* they mean funding; by contrast, musical *production* refers to art direction.

Next I wanted to give you four examples connected to production, where we think we're in the sphere of art but where the true sphere, the one that attempts to subject us to its rules, for some reason, remains hidden. The sphere is the space, the context that limits what you can and can't do. For some reason, nowadays talking about those limits is frowned upon. It may be due to the fact that some spheres have a heavy conscience and tend to conceal themselves. One must therefore remain vigilant and ask: where, in what sphere am I working?

#### Four Spheres: Law, Order, Art and Money

**Example 1:** I recently sat on the jury for the Basque Government's Production Grants. In the run up to the meeting, when I was reviewing the dossiers at home, I realised that if I merely rated each artist on the checklist provided, there was absolutely no way that my opinion would influence the final outcome, which was the reason I felt I had been hired in the first place. Then, as now on this panel, I represented one third (the other two jury members were art critics and I was the only artist). I was a one-in-three minority... Nowadays these people from the professional world have such blind faith in the notion of the Project; i.e., in what someone *says*, that you could get away with saying you were going to come up with a production of... how can I put this without naming names? ... They seemed willing to consider the interest of the project itself. They might find a given project interesting regardless of the person's capabilities; it seemed impossible to convince them that the interest generated by certain projects was often due to mere opportunism. If someone came along and said: I need € 18,000 for a free-fall flight because

I'm working on the idea of destruction and weightlessness, they might find the idea compelling even if that person had never worked in that direction. I suggested that we look at the person's dossier to see what they were actually able to do, on the basis of intra-artistic criteria, instead of just taking their word for what they intended to do... If you go up to your mother and say: *I need € 18,000 for schoolbooks*, any mother in the world would tell you to get lost. The art world is falling prey to the problem that people actually believe what you tell them; or worse still, you are required to talk about what you intend to do, and later about what you have actually done. I also became extremely irritated in the course of the week I spent working at home, because I realised that, if I provided a partial assessment by filling out the boxes assigned to each person, the scholarships would end up going to the most detestable projects imaginable from an ideological point of view. Why? Because some of these people had assimilated the "institutional thinking" to such an extent that it would be impossible not to give them the grants. I felt hamstrung in my own home.

Picture this, I had to grade the value of their proposal, then their professional career, then their approach to women's issues, to the Basque language, etc. My only choice was to go off on a tangent. So, for instance, I might be asked to rate an artist's professional career on a scale of 8. She might have put on a single show in her life, but I felt it was the best show I had seen all year, so I would have to find a way to place this person ahead of someone else who had put on 18 consistently lousy shows over the course of 18 years. It was utterly impossible to do so within the parameters we were expected to apply. So I called the Culture Department of the Basque Government and told them the whole system was flawed... (*When you feel uncomfortable, it's usually because there is a "sphere" that is controlling you*). In this specific case, I spoke to them in advance to voice my reservations and later I wrote them a letter with some suggestions for improving the selection process the following year, explaining that I felt it was totally inadequate that the call for entries requested only a Project Description and a CV, for if the Visual Arts grants were attributed mainly on the strength of a written Project, then the discursive was taking the upper hand over the visual, etc. (In addition, the fact that applicants are not required to submit a dossier of earlier work makes the selection process slower, since all projects are standardised. In project form, any proposal might appear more or less interesting. It's always easier to make a selection on the basis of what each person is able to do or has done in the past. If you ask each person to submit a PDF file with pictures of their earlier work, you can

carry out a very straightforward first screening just by looking at the pictures in a dossier, after which you can go into a more detailed collective conversation on the merits of each pre-screened person's proposal).

They suggested I read my letter out to the full jury to see if we could make any changes, but once we sat down at the meeting, the sphere emerged. It turned out that the anti-artistic method we were confined to was designed by the legal sphere – it was all the lawyers' doing! As an institution that must protect itself from individual people's challenges, the Basque Government had generated a protective mechanism. That way, when the professional bore who has been around for 20 years sees that we've granted the scholarship to someone with talent but only one show under their belt, decides to challenge the decision and demands that the Basque Government review the jury's report, they will be in a position to defend themselves. The system I was meant to work within was not going to let me do the job I had come to do. Here we see an example of how the institution's fear had generated a system under which it was impossible for artistic criteria to prevail over a structure dominated by a terrified legal sphere... because this wasn't a legal sphere working in our favour, to ensure we all had expanded rights and more freedom. On the contrary, it was a clear case of "I don't want to get beaten up", which naturally leads to "just in case, I will throw the first punch" or, as far as I was concerned: "I will tie your hands behind your back". This is an example of an instance where you're in a legal *sphere*, though in appearance you think you're in the sphere of art or (artistic) production.

**Example 2:** For a recent project, *Primer Proforma*, carried out by Txomin Badiola, Sergio Prego and myself at MUSAC in León, we were forced to manage, or at least closely oversee the financial side of things, since we had decided that, with the money usually spent on a single MUSAC exhibition, we were going to do three things: two openings for three solo shows, a 40-day lockdown to produce works with 15 participants; and a publication to record the whole project. The fact that all this was to be done at no extra cost compelled us to gradually drag the Museum into the *sphere* of art (of artistic production, as embodied in an organic process), by rejecting certain inertias both in the sphere of art and in the sphere of management. Throughout the process we discovered how the politician of the day at some point needs a museum, so the architect of the day designs the architecture of the day, in such a way that every time you want to put on an exhibition in the building of the



day, half your funding goes on building partition walls, for instance. From the outset, we decided we wouldn't be building any walls and would instead use that money to produce art. And so on and so forth. Gradually, as we developed the Project, we submitted the Museum to a kind of unintended auditing process; a form of institutional critique that turned out to be quite constructive. This was not something we initially intended to do, but were drawn into. Once we started working at the Museum during the quarantine, on occasions we found ourselves swayed by different spheres, but they remained hidden from our view. (I have worked in Korea in the past. Often in Korea, when you talk to someone you get the impression, more so than in other places, that the person you're talking to isn't a person at all. When you ask them for something and they don't move, don't react, don't even reply, you ask yourself: Why isn't he moving? It's due to the fact that the person can't act because they are inscribed in a machinery, in a relatively immobile hierarchical system, as is the nature of any institution, which as such remains static). In the case of *Proforma*, I recall that during our lockdown with the project participants, we held weekly meetings with the Museum to move ahead with production and coordinate with the various actors involved.

Despite the fact that the project was guided by a strict programme, it was absolutely organic. The Museum displayed an immense degree of flexibility. However, we would sometimes find ourselves sitting in a meeting going over an issue for an hour, discussing a problem that we couldn't quite pin down, until we finally understood that we were being dominated, or attempted to be dominated, by different trades and their respective spheres. It might be the museum guides, it might be the cleaning staff who were furious, or security, but it always took a while to understand, and it was sometimes even hard to believe, that an organisation as powerful as a Museum could be held hostage to something so basic, in the sense that an issue was raised at a meeting in conceptual terms, when in fact the criteria and underlying logic were entirely pragmatic, or even insignificant. One issue might be that on a given day we had decided to close off a whole gallery and on that very day a worker, one of the guides, had decided that her job was to give a talk in that room. An issue like that, a momentary, private and individual inconvenience, would generate what appeared to be a wholesale confrontation between the Museum and the Project. These situations would arise because the Museum was being dominated by the cleaners' sphere, or whoever it was. But most of all because they were attempting

to hide the fact. The pains that were taken to conceal the real complaint (the fear of expressing it) generated a nonsensical situation, which is frequently the case when dealing with any institution. But I won't dwell on this example, because I want to move on.

**Example 3:** A positive example would be Arteleku,<sup>2</sup> which not coincidentally means by definition the territory or place for art. When I worked for Arteleku I was able to see from within that it was the sole example I ever encountered of a dialogue between the spheres of finance and management on the hand and production on the other. This institution, devoted to artistic training and production, truly understood the importance of adapting one to the other. I will never forget my conversations with Izaskun Irizar, who worked not on the institution's programming or conceptual side of things, but in management; i.e. on praxis, which ultimately is theory as yet unstated. Thanks to their closeness and efficient communication with the people at the provincial administration, they were able to transform and articulate the financial system in line with real needs, helping them understand that you couldn't apply project-based criteria when artists don't yet know what they are going to do, when they are just starting out on their process.

I'm sure the people working for the Basque Government are also subject to this kind of tension, juggling and building bridges between both spheres. Arteleku was a good example of communication between both fields, which in turns creates the possibility of generating *production*.

**Example 4:** To wrap up, I would like to touch on the most horrifying historic example of art subjected to a financial system. Namely, when the film industry standardised the notion of the screenplay as a production blueprint, which became enshrined as a convention. The artist then internalised the convention as a tool, when in fact it was dictated by the people holding the purse strings. In that person's mind: we need ten cows tomorrow; ten cows equal \$300. That process gradually led to the establishment of today's pervasive conventional screenplay format. One of the reasons for the demise of filmmaking was that the author or productive artist was unable to create or adapt a financing system to his or her own needs. Instead, they accepted,

2. Editor's note: Arteleku is a contemporary arts centre founded in San Sebastian in 1987. The centre provides a platform for creative production in context and for the transmission of creative practices through an ongoing programme of workshops and seminars conducted by artists and academics.

they swallowed a system imposed from a sphere that was totally counterproductive to creation, resulting in a burdensome, rigid and submissive system. That's how we've ended up with the cinema we have today. Bergman once said that there's nothing more dangerous than an artist who knows how to express himself, for that creates the risk of the personal becoming universal.

In the sphere of artistic practice, we should be able to generate new structures designed for production. If we prioritise criteria from the financial, management, academic or even discursive spheres, we might end up going the way of filmmaking. And you all know what that means. Dead. We can't start without a diagnosis, but the diagnosis is just the start.

We have to be very careful with words. Words are dangerous. DON'T FORGET THAT **"ACTIONS UNITE, WORDS DIVIDE"**.

That is/was all *I didn't want to talk about*, now I will move on to what I do want to talk about, which, as you will see, is a lot better. I want to use the time I have left to share a sketch, some notes that stemmed from this invitation. As such, they are unfinished and I would beg your indulgence, for I will continue to read, except for a few minor things.

(Whenever you see fit, when my hour is up, let me know and I will wrap up).

I called this section:

**"HOW TO GENERATE ONE'S OWN PRODUCTION SYSTEM TODAY" OR "A BRIEF HANDBOOK FOR ARTISTS AND ANYBODY WISHING TO BE PRODUCTIVE"**

As you can see, I am addressing those who are producers. You have to decide which side you're on. Here indeed, production is transformation.

(I won't expand on it for lack of time, but there is an emerging problem in that the re-production techniques we work with are generating a degree of confusion in terms of production, for precisely what they do is skip the *production* and take us straight to the effect; the outcome of which is "*Nothing*", for there is no transformation, merely transmission, recording. We could talk about this at length, but I just wanted to flag it here).

Artistic practice consists in defining a processing technique that allows you to transform any material, be it emotional, contextual, affective, biographical, financial

or productive, by synthesis. The producing artist person's identity requires taking on a type of social identity that demands (at least for me) the effort of an ongoing construction process. This is due to the fact that I don't consider myself an artist, but I trust that, if I work that way, some day I will become one. I have trouble, clearly in life, and of course in art as well, being truly myself: particularly in life, I find it easier to pass off as somebody else – which in art makes no sense whatsoever. Therefore, if I want to achieve a projection of myself in the sphere of art, through acts or actions that I also feel to be pertinent and productive, I need to resort to a great many strategies and techniques that allow me to dodge or incorporate certain materials that I must address.

I could also title what follows: *BRIEF GENERAL SUMMARY OF A TECHNICAL APPROACH TO PRODUCTION, or HOW I HAVE PROGRESSIVELY DEFINED MY PERSONAL AND INDIVIDUAL PRODUCTION TECHNIQUE*. If we have time, we can look into the link between the aforementioned (i.e. my own) individuality and other individualities, for in the Basque production context we witness a specific form of mutual empowerment amongst the various productive agents based, amongst other things, on a scrupulous respect for what is individual, and on having for many years avoided a "representation" of the collective. Meyerhold said that in art we always have to deal with organising our materials. I now have some time available and I have decided to try to incorporate as much material as I can in the time we have. That way you will see what my style looks like, the style I am attempting to apply from the outset under this idea of overproduction. In line with Godard's definition, style is nothing more than the outcome of an obligation performed in a limited timeframe.

Given my specific character traits mentioned above, over the past 18 years I have devoted great attention to developing my own production system, while also incorporating materials and methods from other sources.

**Basic Production Structure (not to be confused with the product)**

first, one requires an initial need, a drive to process that may or may not end up being "productive".

second, an awareness of one's own character and limitations.

third, adapting one's need to process to the foreseeable limitations, thus defining a processing technique.

fourth, the ability to carry out an objective analysis



of the facts, of “what has been done”; not what one intended to do, but what one has *done*. Here is where authorship steps in; the author who, according to Sergio Prego, is simply the person who takes responsibility for what he or she has done.

### 1) The Material (key to me are Limitations or Incapabilities)

Here the first thing is to define one’s own limitations: technical, character traits, etc. If this process is carried out correctly, our in-capabilities, once inscribed in the productive process, shed the in-.

Second, always work from an awareness of them, even if you choose to avoid them, but never ignore them.

Drawing/directing. I recall how, 15 years ago, under the weight of various traditions (the Fine Arts tradition amongst others), I experienced a considerable pressure in the sense that a true artist should be able to work alone and in full control of his medium, which at the time I took to be his technique. I found myself attempting to make my first photographs and film shoots, but my interaction with technology was, and still is, quite nefarious. I came across a definition of filmmaking by a director who tried to explain his trade to his son in the following terms: *the director is the only person who does absolutely nothing during the entire shoot*. That nuance allowed me to break free from the idea of the author who actively masters his medium; to set aside my issues with technology and arrive at my own technique. I was able to redefine the task of directing vis-à-vis drawing, which was the practice I had worked on the most until then. In conceptual terms, drawing implies searching and finding at the same time. Directing any collective action, whether it be a film or photo shoot, consisted in verifying in real time and in reality what I already knew I might like to see. Thus, the performative nature of drawing allowed me to shift and stretch a notion of “technique”, whilst avoiding a symbolic place that I had issues with at the time.

If you become aware of the problem, if you state it and, above all, if you incorporate it into your process, even in negative terms, it becomes a solution, it dissolves (in a reverse process to the story about the scary grandmother I told you earlier). In order to do so effectively it is essential to be aware of and respect one’s own character traits. Something as basic as knowing whether you are patient or impatient, if you need a degree of freedom or specific constraints in which to carry out your work.

### 2) Abundance and Scarcity Material

a - As a starting point, I find it essential to succeed in creating an illusion of *Abundance*. It’s a key factor, whether it be *Abundance* in terms of materials, ideas, desires, etc. (In a way that allows me to exercise *Greed*, a lust for more; and certainly avoid facing a *Lack* in terms of the activity I am going to carry out: what remains to be done...)

b - if, to *Abundance* in terms of the *Scarcity* of real materials you’re working with, you add,

c - a *Limitation* of your possibilities by establishing a set or restrictions, I can assure you that production is under way.

### 3) Fear Material

(In the anecdote about the Basque Government I shared earlier, Fear Material was the main material; in general it is the axis that moves most systems).

Fear, as you all know, is an emotion, an adaptation pattern grounded in a system for preserving an animal’s physical integrity, expressed as a virtual impression, not a real one. Danger can be real (or not), but fear is entirely virtual. Fear, however, is a key material to bear in mind when it comes to producing – while panic, for instance, can be highly problematic. When one is gripped by fear, one becomes unproductive. There are therefore two key points to take into consideration:

First, design technologies that allow you to administer production with the lowest possible degree of *Suffering* and, on the other hand,

Second, the *Duty* to include *Enjoyment* in the productive creative process. It is the artist’s responsibility to define and stake out a tailored technology allowing her to produce with a degree of pleasure.

Faced with fear, one can conventionally react in one of two ways: freeze or move (flee); **concentrate or dis-sipate**; crystallise or disintegrate. Personally, I am the type that would run away, but since I believe that’s a pretty ridiculous thing to do, I have developed a technique to instrumentalise fear, whereby every impulse to flee (as vital material) is recovered and channelled towards a material activity or action (as in an internal combustion engine), in such a way that I accumulate a great many impulses that are transformed into actions, and in turn into material, thus establishing what we would call a process. The accumulation of these materials in turn defines a project, which bears the potential of imposing itself on reality and on one’s own means. I recall an anecdote I heard about a man who worked his entire life at a Renault plant, until he was suddenly

made redundant. How did the man react to that situation? He committed suicide. As the person telling the story said, it helps to feel a bit of fear every day, otherwise you run the risk of facing all your fear at once.

It is not infrequent for artist producers to slip into a professionalization process whereby they embrace their career to the point of placing it above their experimental development process, and in so doing they lose touch with the joy of making. Here we often find a concurrent fear of failure that drags them into paralysis and procrastination. I feel a duty to enjoy any productive process; if you don't, retire! I suffer immensely when I see people suffer, doormen for instance, or civil servants who hate their job and feel the need to make you suffer too. You feel like screaming at them: *why don't you just quit?*

(I'm at home now, listening to my own words and reading the transcript, and I also feel that use of "retire!" is a little hurtful. Why must I be so harsh? I don't know if it's really "productive" or the opposite. Where am I going with that? I feel the need to be impeccable in my use of words, but I can't delete it just out of caution. I would like to be fairer, but it's too late now).

I suggest **two ideological alternatives to address fear material with regards to the power implicit in any invitation**. Two techniques for administering the symbolic capital linked to the invitation: **concordance** and **counterpoint**.

Here I specifically want to talk about two artists I know. They have in common that they are both somewhere in their seventies and that when they receive an invitation the first thing they do is try to determine if the INVITATION's context is a context of **Power** or a **shoddy** context. On that basis, they decide on their degree of commitment and thus the intensity of what they are going to do. (I say shoddy because that's the word one of the artists uses himself). I know that one of them, the one I'm interested in, chooses a proposal or invitation when he sees the context is a bit shoddy. In those cases, he gives it his very best. By contrast, the other artist, who I am not the least bit interested in –but I suspect is often moved by interest– is greedy and therefore reluctant to miss out on any context, no matter how shoddy. The latter is the conventional type who, in a context of "less power" will tend to offer insignificance, whereas he will display a greater involvement with a higher degree of POWER, in order to be able to execute/exercise (power) from a position of power. Gender **concordance**, as a friend of mine would say –and I can see her sitting here in the front

row– is an utter bore. People who (often unawares) resort to what I call *concordance* are generally moved by their fear of not being present and an implicit belief that *you don't exist if you aren't present*. That in turn makes them want to be everywhere at any price; but in general what that creates is unproductive for everyone else. In other words, you're present, but what you produce is of no interest to us. Why? Because the author of what we see (who is ultimately responsible) is fear, not you.

In contrast to this first pattern, today I would like to glamorise the approach adopted by the other artist, who is also weak and perhaps lazy too, but is certainly no fool. The positive aspect of his practice is that, in order to avoid having to deal with the fear generated by the power implicit in an invitation, he only ever commits to what he knows will be out of the limelight, and therefore not a source of pressure. He will always be left wondering: if I'm surrounded by shoddiness, does that not make me shoddy too? However, I believe that discordance or counterpoint, when embraced consistently and with all the risks it implies, is highly productive. From that perspective, I think it's important to bear in mind that no invitation or venue is ever important: the whole notion of a "career" is a total bluff. What's *important* is what you are able to make of that invitation. It's common knowledge that if you don't work with overly expensive media, you will enjoy a greater degree of freedom. That's a good example of rescaling your production conditions to your needs and in-capabilities that, as I said, then become capabilities. (For instance, academic practice... If you have time later on you should ask me about academic practice and non-academic practice. I've been thinking about it lately. The issue is that non-academic practice, which I describe as artistic, consists in you being able to re-scale all your production conditions, including reality, to your needs and in-capabilities). By contrast, academic practice, as befits its machoness, faces you with a constant lack; hence their insistence on "*re-searching*", telling you to explore this a little further, to look into that author again, thus perpetuating immaturity, always putting off maturity for later... All in all, it places you in a sphere that is defensive, where what you know only seems to serve the purpose of defending yourself. A non-academic artist in my view would be the more European artist, who doesn't carry a gun; the other always feels the need to be armed – though I'm afraid by now guns are pretty much compulsory wherever you go. But I'm not going to talk about that now. I think it's more important to touch on more general issues.

#### 4) Fear (of oneself) Material and the Ego

One of the least productive and most paralyzing materials is self-judgment, which often includes internalising the judgment of others. Self-criticism is indispensable, but on occasions it becomes paralyzing. What I do, and I feel is always effective, is to work in excess (once again, overproduction). I then proceed to compare and contrast, which spares me the effort of looking at myself from without. That is something I literally do through other people. I always felt that assessing work was a waste of time, particularly one's own. I have no trouble assessing other people's; I could assess a piece of work by any of you, it wouldn't take me a second. But it takes up a lot of time, and particularly energy, to take an outside perspective on oneself. There's no point in wasting that time. I truly believe that in order to produce, you have to focus on producing. To that end:

a- What you have to do is work hard, in order to generate so much that it can be up to others to select "what's good". This method is based on *contrasting*; a common practice is science. You contrast with other people (other egos) and choose what you want to use, without a shadow of a doubt that what you have chosen is yourself, represents you (and I say this because many people fear their ego getting lost in the process, so they avoid sharing anything for fear of not recognising themselves in the final outcome). By working in this way, as I say, I avoid having to bring my production to a halt just to take a look from the outside. But beware!

b- It is necessary to have previously built up an affinity group whose opinions you wholeheartedly accept and respect. It requires configuring a *Context*, which is no mean feat.

And, on the other hand (not apt for the lazy), you need enough to choose from, in other words:

c- Have a considerable *Quantity* of material that provides for and invites selection. It's not enough with making just one thing. This stage is part of the illusion of abundance that I mentioned earlier, but put into practice.

#### 5) Accomplices Material. (Strangers and Adversaries) and their Transformation

You can work with accomplices provided by a given situation or you can consciously manufacture them on an industrial scale. In the Basque context, given its nature, for years it was very easy to find accomplices. We were coming from a given historical and social situation where complicities occurred naturally, thanks for

instance to Arteleku's many years of work in promoting such a situation. Since I arrived here in '93 and up to 2001, my work was based exclusively on instrumentalising that capital, which I would describe as emotional. After my first trip and brief stay in the USA around 1996, and on the basis of my readings of Jean Renoir's book *My Life and My Films*, upon my return to Europe I defined a technique that allowed me to transform my reality, the reality I belonged to, and convert it into images. That same year I obtained my first results. In 2001, after spending a year in Berlin, I attempted to apply that same technique over there. Naturally it didn't work, since that reality to me was still an "image". My first conclusion was that *image* did not equal *image* (*image ≠ image*), for there was no transformation. It wasn't until 2003 that I was able to define and satisfactorily apply the technique I had adopted for transforming into images (language-images) realities that were not my own, any reality I did not belong to. Inevitably, this technique for transforming aspects of other realities also required a technique for transforming strangers into accomplices.

In 2003, frustrated by the angle my work was being seen from, I began to analyse the technique I had developed so naturally in the peripheral Basque context, and for the first time began to wonder if it might not be possible to manufacture accomplices on an "industrial" scale. Proliferating, a bit like the Opus Dei. Around that time, I was invited to conduct a workshop in Murcia. That was the first time I consciously took something that was a *given* over here, and applied it as a *goal* over there. In the Basque context, being a periphery, the production of affective material was always propitiated by the existence of a specific ideological context. Now, the idea was to apply a political approach, first gaining an awareness of the implicit mechanisms of context generation, then applying them to the production of "affections" in any analogous periphery. I started in Murcia and continued in Korea, Luxembourg, Istanbul, Belgium and Holland. When you're working on a production that requires other people, the main problem lies in finding a way to involve them in something they don't necessarily find interesting.

#### 6) Human Material

Premise: I always strive to ensure that the people who work with me will want to work with me again. (Though it sometimes seems like we embark on certain productions to make sure that whoever has to leave will do so as soon as possible. Some people will always approach you for all the wrong reasons).

When I work with other people, what I do in terms of this idea of overproduction is to overwhelm them with so much emotional and referential material that, by sheer excess, it becomes impossible to process. If you add to that specific actions involving the body, the combined effect is that nobody involved in one of my productions has a clue what they're doing, myself included. Once we reach that point, we're fully engaged. It's important to avoid working with professionals, amateurs are always preferable. You know *amateur* comes from lover, which brings us back to affection... Through work you develop a relationship where none existed at the outset.

### **Transformation in extremis or Non-transformation of materials.**

It's not the same to work with accomplices as it is to work with strangers, nor is it the same exercise to attempt to transform someone who is willing to be transformed, i.e., a *stranger* who freely decides to become an *accomplice*, as it is to incorporate someone as they are, with no transformation. However, it's something we often need to do. The exercise here consists in transforming the "material" conceptually, without affecting the material itself, thus making the "Adversary" material as such become productive.

I recently held an exhibition at a gallery. The person in charge had huge difficulties in understanding the proposal I wanted to execute. (I understand my work is increasingly complex, but something I never do is explain it; as you can see, I talk a lot, I can talk about methods, but I never reveal anything about the substance). Convention required that I explain what I was going to do, but it felt so complicated and painful that it was putting me off showing altogether; I was sure it wouldn't work. Thanks, once again, to context, I was able to explain to a colleague where my reluctance was coming from. As I verbalised the problem, a solution emerged: I needed to acknowledge and incorporate the obstacle, making it the very theme of the exhibition (a hidden theme, of course). Essentially what I did, in identifying this person as a potential "adversary", was to incorporate her as such into a creative structure. Ultimately, the entire proposal was structured in such a way that it revolved "around" that "material". By gaining awareness of that adverse situation, I succeeded in transforming it into inadvertent *accomplice* material. From my own perspective it was a major exercise in flexibility, in terms of incorporating what to me was unacceptable. The material, thus "taken into consideration", was neutralised as a potentially paralysing material. I think the exhibition, which was

built around the idea of the impossibility of communicating, made much more sense than if I had been able to count on an accomplice from the outset.

### **7) Dialogue and Invitation Material**

Make any Invitation Productive. As anyone who has been to a biennial or any other major group show will know, that kind of context is the worst possible context for producing anything. The structure is so vast and complex that its sole concern is self-perpetuation. There is no space or time left for art. Museum exhibitions, given the structure's rigidity, are generally not particularly interesting either. Shows at galleries, which in fact... are meant to be shops, but don't sell... So it's also tricky to put yourself in the position of saying, "ok, if this is a shop then fine, sell me". A priori, there's not much room for art, but there isn't any trade going on either. It's tricky doing something that has to do with art in a place that has nothing to do with art... A university workshop, for instance, will confront you with the saddest side of reality, and at a round table like this we run the risk of just talking and talking and talking... This doesn't strike one as the ideal environment for art either. All in all, we could arrive at the conclusion that there is no ideal place for art, and that might be just as well: you have to carve it out for yourself or, if that sounds like too much responsibility, art must carve a place out for itself. However, as a member of my own private Opus Dei, I'm pretty sure I will recruit a new son or daughter here today. It's therefore important not to dismiss or disparage anything; everything is susceptible of becoming Material. Nothing *interesting* ever stems from an interesting invitation, it's like the image crafting process I was telling you about earlier, where the image is never equal to the image. In the context of any invitation: *interesting* never equals *interesting*, a transformation is always required. However, it is important to abide by one's own conditions, for there are really very few productive agents (artists) who have succeeded in defining a set of production conditions that everyone who comes near will succumb to. It's truly challenging because it somehow requires building a reality that is more powerful than reality itself... And after all we are weak... All the more so when we're alone... I know very few people who really get it right. Plus, getting it right today doesn't mean you will get it right tomorrow.

Should I tell you or abbreviate? ... I'm going to leave it there with the list of Materials and will read you two more anecdotes. Recently, from 2006 to 2010, I was

doing a performance in Belgium and a few towns in Holland that included a horse... and...

(Is my hour up? No... OK).

...the question is this is a performance I had done before, it's a performance called *Re:horse*, which involves putting a horse behind a 3x4m grid and the horse standing still. This is another example of how I exercise *flexibility*, but only when I'm forced to. The text itself is all about succeeding in turning something around that is initially problematic, transforming an emotional-traumatic material into a norm.

I will now read: The first time we built the physical grid in Genk, Belgium, in 2006, I used pre-stressed steel wire. I executed *Re:horse* on two consecutive days with no problems whatsoever. The second time, in Utrecht in 2007, I requested to have the steel wire ready on my arrival. The person in charge of building the wooden frame was meant to buy the 3 mm steel wire for building the grid. For some strange reason, the first time he turned up with a very soft fluorescent orange string, about 3 mm in diameter. I knew my English wasn't very good, but "steel cable" isn't that far off, is it? Later on I learned that he refused, he objected to buying it out of concern that the horse might get injured. Personally, I felt he should be responsible for his professional field, and I would take responsibility for mine. I tried to explain that I was the person executing the performance, that it was the second time I was doing it and that I knew what was going to happen this time around: the horse wouldn't budge, it would come nowhere near the wire, and even if it did, the wire was coated in protective clear plastic. Days later, on the very day of the performance, he turned up with an extremely soft white string, adamant and totally overstepping his role as a builder or carpenter or assembly technician... (here we see the sphere again). Usually, when you're going to perform (I used to do a lot of concert tours), you go up to the guy who controls the equipment, whether it's the lighting or the sound technician, you approach him (as an outsider) and say: "Hey, I need..." The initial response is usually either a lie "No, that can't be done" or, from a guy who has never met you before, a rebuke: "You should have told me earlier". These responses stem from an inertia on the part of people who have, who own "things", like technology. In the example from Holland, it was the sphere of carpentry in the context of a theatre, but all the same... The fact is he came back with this soft white string... Over and above the job he was getting paid to do, was his civic sensibility, his subjectivity as a citizen. That day, in order to make myself understood, and for him to grasp what his place was and what mine was, I explained that at the end of

the performance I was meant to strangle the horse by hanging it from the rafters, which I couldn't do with the string he had brought me because it would snap. I needed 3 MM STEEL WIRE! Beyond the pleasure of seeing the utter shock in his eyes, I was unable to impose my authority. Clearly, that performance would happen over his dead Dutch body. In the end we used the white string. From then on, it has become the norm. Now I always ask for 4mm white string. I can't afford to waste so much energy!

The ideological aspect implicit in that anecdote involved an overwhelming reflective exercise. I hope you were able to savour it... You can't imagine how uncomfortable I was in that situation. (Though his obstinacy ultimately demonstrated that I didn't actually need the 3mm steel wire, since I was able to do it, and continue to do it, with the flimsy white string). Now I'm going to tell you another anecdote. In the former case I was faced with an individual, personal inertia. The following is an example of "inertia" stemming from "dynamics" in the creative sphere of film, as incorporated and misrepresented in the sphere of art. (This is an extract of something I'm writing):

#### **"Inconvenient Conventions regarding the Concept of Location"**

In any organisational sphere –exhibition, biennial or a round table like this– there is always a degree of systemisation or a set of production methods that are sometimes borrowed from other spheres, other industries such as film, marketing or even advertising. I usually try to avoid getting involved in the kind of "counterproductive" dynamic, where you say you need a place to shoot and someone replies, "Oh yes, I have an excellent location!" More often than not, what the person has in mind is an image of the place, because they don't know the first thing about crafting images; they don't know that I'm the one who has to create the image. All I'm asking for is a space to work in, a space I will transform into an image. So in Korea, at the Busan Biennial, in order to avoid operating within the conventions of film production, every time they asked me, "What kind of spaces do you want?" (the question always referred to the image; my answer to the uses of the space), I would reply, "I want a place where I can kill someone without being disturbed and that I can get to (and escape from if necessary) by car". Picture their faces. If I were to say, "I need an exterior day location and an interior night", I know where that would take me. I want you (who knows the area) to carry out



an exercise in visualisation, a projection, like Cicero used to do. The idea is for you to think: well, there's a parking lot up there (whenever I had sex in a car I was always scared someone would turn up...) I also asked then, now I remember, to imagine they were going to have sex in secret with someone who wasn't their partner. They didn't get what I meant. The whole concept of pleasure linked to guilt was alien to them... I understood there wasn't an issue with it that would force them to hide. They drive up to a hotel, walk straight in, swipe their visa card at a machine and have sex. It's all about context, of course.

So here is a short text I wrote to explain the collision between spheres:

Despite my best efforts to be clear and direct (if somewhat extravagant, in order to overcome convention) when I request that a venue for any given activity be chosen without regard to its image, it often happens that I get the exact opposite of what I asked for, due to the fact that places tend to be codified by image, according to conventions established by the film production system. People seem to think that, since filmmaking works with images, their job is to supply the industry's vast demand with said images. Under that logic, they tend to classify reality by typecast images. On one occasion, and despite having expressly told them three times that I wanted no contact with the film industry's image production system, the organisers of a certain Korean biennial insisted on taking me straight on arrival for an interview at the Busan film studios. I had to give way, in the face of an apparent cultural clash, and attempted to play along (these people are obstinate, nearly as much as the Basques). I was with Inazio Escudero, my cameraman and assistant on that occasion. We had travelled to Korea to find locations, recruit volunteers and shoot, all in 6 days. On the first day, as I say, they took me to an office, which was the last thing I wanted, since I wouldn't be shooting anything in an office. What am I doing here? They dump forty fat photo albums in front of me and, resigned to accepting that's how things work here, I choose a number of images out of each folder. The problem is that each folder is structured by theme; i.e., this is the "interior student dorm room" folder, that's the "exterior with trees" folder, and so on up to forty. I choose eight images for eight places I want to check out within the day. What is my surprise when we move on to the map of Korea to "locate" and pinpoint each of the spots, and discover that each of the images we have chosen is indeed an image, but it's also associated to a place, and each of these places obviously has its own geographic coordinates. The organisers are shocked and bewildered! It turns out there's a

thousand kilometres between one place and the next. Eight times a thousand, eight thousand.

If at that point we had insisted, if we had played along with their "professional" game, we would have needed a whole week just to see the locations, to see where they were "located", at a cost that nobody could shoulder. It would be as costly and absurd to see those places as it must have been to compile those folders in the first place. The time you save by browsing images, you waste on actually getting there. Godard was right in saying that the film industry is a system designed to waste money. He said that the film industry was the only link connecting the spheres of night and day, because the illegal proceeds of nightlife were laundered during the day. The sphere of art today is adopting that kind of inertia, forgetting that any artistic process that we want to carry out with a measure of dedication must be professionally amateur. I truly detest that drift. My suggestion regarding the issue of locations within the industrial production system, which appears to be based on the film industry's model, would be to try to compile a different type of catalogue by geographical area, one that displays the largest number of location images all within the same neighbourhood, if possible. The catalogue would include a breakdown of the place: the neighbourhood butchered up like a carcass on the rack. The places would be approached as a structure with a meaning, as a portrait that still makes sense after it's been divided into its smallest parts. Not images that take the outcome as their starting point, the outcome of an image as cliché, but rather as stemming from a structure. I'm convinced that, even if nothing were ever shot, at least each folder in itself would be interesting and make sense. For *Re:horse* we always need to go against the film world convention and work from a certain periphery, operating like a guerrilla system or a more domestic, less structured attack system. The professional systems they offer us make absolutely no sense, unless our intention was strictly to launder money or extend our stay (time) in the country, at the location (space) in question.

So, moving on with materials, I'm going to read a text I found this morning, because I knew a certain person would be coming...

**8) Improvisation Material** (putting things in situation to elucidate what was obscure)

The murkiness, the lack of clarity in someone's intentions or approach can be resolved by improvising, by taking action. Sometimes, a given approach can only be resolved in the realm of reality. In order to do so, you



must provide a certain space for the uncontrollable, for the unfamiliar, for improvisation (which is precisely what I'm doing today; I have about 20 Materials and I won't be able to read more than five or six of them, we'll see). When our need for order can no longer be resolved through a mere approach; when we can no longer remain on the speculative level, forever postponing direct action; we need to establish a situation with real elements, linked to our ideal ones. What was previously inconceivable as a solution to a problem only becomes perceptible, apparent and understandable when we immerse ourselves in the real. It's often no more than the tension between holding up and attempting to connect a number of ideal elements (emotional for the most part), and their collapse, a surrender that I experience as a release when they merge and come to rest on elements of the real. It's a bottom-up supportive tension provided by the producing agent, against the elements' own downward pull caused by gravity. For years I have practiced myself in causing a certain precipitation with other agents who feel more comfortable in the face of the *fait accompli*. I, on the other hand, always tend to postpone the real action, for if it doesn't take place at just the right moment, I might find it too demoralising to tackle the material anew or to attempt a second assault. That's why I always attempt to postpone it for as long as I can get away with. Over the years I have achieved a greater leeway. For instance, if I had an extra week, this text might be better, or might be altogether different, but I decided to put it out there. I will have time to rewrite it later if I need to.

There is another material I find particularly interesting, which is:

### 9) Independence Material

Nowadays I feel it is essential, for the sake of a producing person's integrity, to be able to stake out and define a field of experimentation that is independent from the invitation. It may sound like I'm talking about the traditional idea of a physical studio space, but I personally have enough with a simple sketchbook that, by way of an external appendix, allows me to gather and organise materials that I would otherwise forget (some will say that's something you can do in your head; I very much doubt it). Lately I've been calling it my "vegetable patch", because for a long while I was unable to work on it regularly or with dedication. However, in my "visits" I confirmed that the conditions I had created in that "test field" were so favourable that, even if I only turned up now and again, the Project material would continue to develop. It was enough to keep an eye on the signs and materials. (In a later chapter where I talk

about *money material* I will develop the idea of the vegetable patch-sketchbook as a magnet, which once consciously established, unconsciously attracts to itself everything you need).

Funnily enough, I come from an environment that was very close to the countryside, and I always detested working on the real plot. My father would take me along and I hated being there. He would say, "Do this!" I would do it as fast and joylessly as I could. As soon as I finished, I would say, "I'm done! Can I go now?" My father would reply, "Of course not! Do that over there!" And I would say, "Done! Anything else?" Once he'd had enough of me, he would always wind up with, "There's always something more that needs doing here". I was exhausted and distressed by that idea of cultivating nature, which always required taming, containing and arranging. Now, as an artist or producing agent, I uphold the need to first and foremost create or define an ongoing process whereby your subsequent work will only require taming, containing and arranging.

Jorge Oteiza used to say that human beings face an existential problem when, in convergence with nature's continuity, we confront the idea of death and feel the need to break away from reality, to which end we need to generate a technique that allows us to grasp reality itself and find our place in the world. The way to *find certainty in the immovable*, according to Oteiza, is to achieve an *art object* that halts our search for existential stability. My garden would be a space and tool for intermediation, a station, a *third realm* that one could pre-inhabit. Today we don't face that angst with regards to nature-as-reality, but with regards to culture. It is against culture, now more than ever, that we must enclose a private, artificial test field. Culture in the sense of "cultivation", as a real-virtual place that allows you to effectively extract/separate materials from your body whilst sifting and stepping aside from the flow of reality we're a part of. Nowadays I see many artists suffer because they are permanently at the service of an invitation. They would appear incapable of producing unless somebody calls them, as if they were on a salary. It would be disturbing to realise one day that you're a hired hand on someone else's farm. Here again, it's a question of finding the happy medium. You also have to be careful not to become too impermeable and self-sufficient, for that leads to the familiar problem of someone becoming so aloof that they lose all contact with reality and its issues. Most people who attain professional "success" end up merely meeting the huge demand for their products or services and have no time left to think. As an artist, not doing too well pro-

professionally is the best way to ensure you will continue to produce semi-decent work.

Should I wrap up? Yes? Ok, perfect...

I just wanted to mention that I also planned on telling you about **Activity-Inactivity Material**. It's essential not to make any distinction between *labouring* and *working*. Major discoveries sometimes happen when you stop doing things, like Newton, who had his greatest breakthrough while taking a break.

I wanted to talk at greater length about **Flexibility Material**; I also had **Inertia Material**, where I was going to tell a story that would embarrass someone who's here today; **Money Material** and how to generate inertias to produce it; **Pressure Material**, or how to take on pressures that are a given and then decide if you accept them or pass them on, and if so to whom. And many ideas more.

Well that's all. That was it. Sixty minutes – sixty ideas.

(Applause)

**Beatriz Herrez:** Thank you, any questions? I would like to come back to your last point, which brought to mind a quote I often use from an artist and professor. He once said he was surprised by the fact that, when he asked other artists what they were working on, the answer was always an endless list of exhibitions, biennials and gallery shows they would be taking part in over the coming months. Their answers to questions asked by other people became the work itself, became production. He was concerned that nobody, in their answers, ever mentioned other materials, a book, a text...

**Jon Mikel Euba:** Well, to start with, while I understand your friend's question, I also think it's a trick question. I'm afraid when he asked "what are you *doing*?" he was really asking "what is what you're doing *about*?" The fact that you mentioned the word 'book' (in your example) gives him away... unless your project is specifically to write a book. From experience I know that very few people actually want to hear about *what you're actually doing* in any detail. Firstly, and understandably, because it's none of their business. Nowadays merely talking about work seems tedious to the listener, who prefers the role of a consumer over that of worker/producer. And secondly, the answer to that question could turn out to be too specific/technical, and so long it would be boring. On the other hand, the question "what is what you're doing *about*?", which is utterly su-

perficial but very common and maybe even necessary, allows the person asking to remain in the breezy and uncommitted world of abstract ideas, of the generic, a terrain I'm not very good in.

With regards to your comment, an Argentinean artist friend who's been living in London for a few years now, once told me that before she moved, whenever an artist or curator came up to her at a bar at 2 a.m. and asked her "What are you doing? What are you working on?", she would reply with a, "Bah, nothing much, just some ceramics and stuff". She told me that in England she had learned that *that* was precisely her moment. Precisely at *that* moment, even if it was 2 a.m., was when she had to be as serious and engaged as she was when she was working.

As you can see, she has chosen to accept or incorporate the banality of the night, the situation and the question, in all seriousness, as part of her daily (daytime) work.

I'm still very far from that in terms of my work. I've always had an issue (in life as well) with language applied to banal conversations. I recall the first time a stranger came up to me at an opening in Berlin and made the equally banal comment of "I would like to see your work", to which I replied "I would like you see your underwear!" (which, to be honest, I absolutely did not want to see). I have the same issue in life, like when I used to find myself in the toilets at 2am with a complete stranger, in that awkward forced intimacy, like you're in a lift, that happens when you're sharing drugs. In a situation like that I know that if I open my mouth and say something, I will absolutely shatter the superficiality required to keep the whole thing flowing. I was never drunk enough to enter or incorporate that kind of conversation without generating a certain awkwardness; like when someone (or I myself) wants to go from words to actions, in a more intimate, sexual approximation. As long as I don't speak, it might work; but if I'm asked a question, or I come up with one myself, we're screwed... The minute I say a single word it's as if they had turned on all the white lights in the club (not in vain do they call them "working lights") for everyone to leave, or to start sweeping the floor; which leads me to conclude that, despite myself, I am way too serious about things that aren't serious.

The same goes for talking about my work, I need to know there is a serious interest in the work. Of course one shouldn't be so rigid, but I just can't go into specifics about what I'm doing, as a topic of conversation; not for any ideological reason, but because I'm incapable of talking about the superficial, or if you prefer, about *what*

is on the surface. Funnily enough, creating a work of art is fundamentally an exercise in synthesising (language), but despite what you might infer, I am totally inarticulate with words, I find it impossible and unnatural to synthesise. Given my incapability regarding the act of conventional verbal communication, I have managed to develop a specific form of Explanation and to distil my Project design as a form of mediation in that communication. I configure a project that creates/provides professionals and other agents with the illusion that they can instrumentalise it, thus involving them without them having to understand (what it's about).

As for explaining my work, I apply the technique I developed for students and volunteers to any other agent. I give them the longest possible list of elements I'm working with for a project, in the highest possible detail (as you can imagine, that's a lot), with the rather primary intent of dragging them in, as if they were another material I needed to incorporate into the chaotic flow of countless materials (references and desires) I'm dealing with at a given moment, making them as confused and overwhelmed as I am myself. It's not about providing them with information, it's about making them part of the problem. To avoid the process becoming too dry or painful, I try to transmit the same intensity as I'm experiencing myself; an intensity that often turns out to be excessive and scares off the hordes of dilettantes that one encounters out there.

(That might be why some people choose to just list the exhibitions they have in the pipeline...)

It's also true that it's becoming compulsory... at a certain professional level, to be able to provide an efficient reply, and I won't deny that I'm increasingly reluctant to do so. Nowadays it seems unacceptable to say in public that you don't know what you're going to do. It equates you to a monkey with a gun. And honestly, I don't know what they're so afraid of. Where's the risk? Who's taking the risk and what's at risk? Why can't you (fully aware of the risk) tell a curator, a museum or an institution, that you don't know what you're going to do. For fear. In art, to quote Ángel Bados, what you risk is what you get in return. If we, as productive agents, are taking risks, then the other agents involved should also push themselves to take a risk. (I remember one terrified curator calling me on the same day I was due to show a performance for the first time to say, "It has to be good!" Great encouragement, that...) So we're being forced to operate on a level of monumental hypocrisy, *saying* one thing and *doing* another (which is something I might find compelling as a strategy). Or even worse: anyone who has internalised, who has

learnt to provide an answer tailored to the system, feels that once they've come up with an answer, they're off to a good start. But then you actually have to *do* something. That's what worries me. In the short term, if you give them the answer they want, the whole system works nicely, but it's only a matter of time before it becomes apparent that there's no substance. That you're empty-handed.

In terms of the project design, part of the idea is to say one thing and do something different, but in a positive way. In any conversation there's a coexistence between what is being said and what is really happening. In fact, in any relationship or communication there's an underlying, implicit misunderstanding. I work on the premise that what I *say* paralyses any chance of communication... When I'm in a conversation, I feel the more is said, the more "product" is added, the further you are from an "understanding" and the greater the distance grows. Touch, on the other hand, is a medium capable of transmitting a larger volume of information in a shorter time and, more importantly, making it flow. That (unspoken) element of exchange that can be transmitted is what my Project has become (in the best cases). When you work on new productions with different agents, what matters is not talking and reaching an understanding, but moving things along. Once again, it's about customising an incapability.

90% of the times you're invited to take part in an exhibition or anything else, what the invitation is trying to do, consciously or unconsciously, is to represent itself, to instrumentalise your practice, the same way that Popes, the Clergy, or the Crown used to do. Nowadays, all the hosting *Venue* generally needs is for you to provide a more or less realistic portrait of the context you're invited to join, or for the curator to represent himself by selecting you. Once again, there aren't any spaces for art. On the other hand, Velazquez didn't have them either. Our only option is to see if we can instrumentalise and optimise those situations, and to what extent. Producing outside my safety zone, outside my studio or my familiar context, has forced me to sophisticate the process I use to empty out my Project, in such a way that it becomes *neutral* enough to operate as a trap, wherever I need it. That's the same process I apply in my work. This *Trap-Project* isn't something you can rationally comprehend, but when you encounter it you *understand* that you can somehow use it, because it contains a certain machinery. That's how I see cars or computers: I don't understand their inner workings, but I use them. It would be foolish to expect someone

(much less a curator) to appreciate what you do for the same reasons you appreciate it yourself. It would be tantamount to expecting every sexual encounter to be a loving experience. It doesn't make sense. If it happens, so much the better, but it's not an approach you can take. As in any relationship between two parties, you want one thing, they want another. You don't logically expect both interests to mutually converge. What matters is that what my interests have shaped might be of use to others in pursuing their own interests. I have my own needs. In fact, when you like someone, it's usually for all the wrong reasons, which have more to do with them than with you. The same applies here, you have to keep things moving. I have somehow managed to avoid the issue of language you were talking about earlier, if you will, by becoming more radical in my awkwardness and thus achieving a satisfactory degree of sophistication.

**BH:** How does that process of *emptying out* the Project occur in your work? Could you explain it?

**JME:** Specifically, the technique I developed in the Basque Country –in terms of the idea of transforming a reality I belong to into images (language), as I was saying earlier– consisted in focusing my obsession, in a hyper-signified context like the Basque context, on not *talking* about anything, I mean in my work. For 10 years I strove to only do things that showed something, in the sense of revealing something or rendering it visible, but not *talking* about anything. Paradoxically, by the late '90 I had become the artist who *talked about* the Basque context. Why did that happen? Because, in developing that technique within that specific context, I had to be very careful not to be instrumentalised by any of the “conventions” that might be exerting pressure at the time. I don't touch on this, I don't touch on that... until I eventually shape a kind of skeleton-structure that lets the context speak, not me. I wouldn't say it's the work that's speaking either, it's the context that's *expressing* itself through the work. You could think that making art / art practice, given its inherent ambiguity, wouldn't make sense in such a polarised real context. On the contrary, it's the best place, because reality itself forces you, by working within constraints, to play with language. It was about creating a space, the space I needed to carry out my practice. By developing that technique and applying it within that reality, the Basque context became the theme itself, but not from that metaphorical perspective it was seen from in the 90s... It was more complex than that... When I presented *K.Y.D. Kill'em all* at Manifesta 4 in Frankfurt, I

recall a Spanish journalist asking me from the audience (perfectly in line with the Latin and literary tradition, I think Spain suffers from a natural inability to understand images...) if the people in the car were terrorists! He might just as well have asked me about their sexual preferences. What did I know? To which I had to reply: “as far as I was concerned, No”, they were simply Basque artists I was personally acquainted with. (In the same way as I haven't yet reached the point of killing somebody in order to portray them as a corpse).

From an anthropological or science-based perspective, you look at that piece and you have to think about what you're seeing, not what you think it might be referencing or what the media *say* it might be referencing. It's interesting to see how the seeing process works. At the time –just like now with other issues– everything contained in that work that had to do with the body, with proxemics, the sculptural, sexuality, blending cinematic language with the conventional registers of art... in the 90s all that was utterly invisible, imperceptible from the period's “trendy” perspective, which was the social, political, etc. But it's that *situation*, the *material* quality of that situation that I work from, that I use as a pre-text, and where the work draws its strength from, that tension. The central position once held by “censorship” is now held by convention. Our job is to dodge it, and a given “moment” naturally can't see or pinpoint *what will last*. It only sees what is banal, transient, variable, contextual, etc. From 2000 on, people only see what they are told they should be seeing. In Germany people heard the clicking sound of a camera on the video and said, “Wow, what about that bit at the end when you hear the gun go click, clack!” When I took that same video to Chile, some people left the room because they couldn't endure 14 minutes of people being manhandled, of bodies whose faces you couldn't see. In North America, on the other hand, faced with the same video, they see fiction: they ask you if you've seen such and such a movie it reminded them of, about those students who set up a commune and end up eating each other, for instance.

So it turns out that what I had generated, that empty work, is an entity that works like a trap. The emptier the signs (and it's hard to empty out a sign), the greater its reloading potential. For that to work you need to have defined a trap structure in advance that, once placed within a given reality, will draw that reality in. That's what I do *technically*, that's what my work *is*

about at that point. First I define a structure (I build the trap), I place it in a given trial context, and some fragmented aspects of that reality are drawn in. Once they are trapped within the structure, they are reedited and they rebuild the piece. That's when we can say reality is expressing itself. I have nothing to express, nothing. I'm not an expressive artist, but reality wants to express itself all the time. For that to happen, you need to generate a form that can put up some resistance, otherwise it would be engulfed by the flow. In so far as it holds up, it's art. The artistic object/*aesthetic being* is art in so far as it is irreducible.

I made some adjustments to this technique in 2003 in order to make it applicable to any context. I remember I spent three months in Istanbul, just noting down all the don'ts, telling myself: "don't touch on the Istanbul-as-Europe issue" which in 2005 was all the rage; "*don't talk about* the secular state created by Atatürk"... After living in that context for three months, I was able to be much more precise in defining an empty structure. When they called me for the Istanbul Biennial, I brought along that structure, which had nothing to do with the context, but was more of an approach. I lay down my device and it was like a crab trap. Do you know what a crab trap looks like? It's made of two rings connected by a net that you lay down flat on the riverbed. You put your bait in the middle and when a crab crawls in you tug on the string and the trap becomes a cylinder that catches whatever lies within the perimeter... If, on drawing the trap, it comes up with a lighter, I take the lighter. I would never expect a lighter to fall into my trap, but would I discard a lighter in a place where I know people burn down houses, for instance? Clearly not.

So I discovered I had the ability to generate a system that is relatively infallible. I've designed a tool that, first and foremost, can be understood by anyone who sees it (a curator, an art professional, a gallerist), they feel they can grasp it; they don't rationally *understand* anything, but I explore that issue of not understanding to the very end. We're talking about placing empty structures in specific locations; objectively collecting and analysing what's there, what you obtain; and on that basis, editing, constructing and shaping the work.

If the structure weren't well built, it wouldn't catch anything, and would therefore be useless in terms of building anything. The challenge lies in building empty structures, hollow spaces that can capture whatever turns up. And if you know how to bide your time, you

will always catch what you need. It's anything but accidental.

That was a great example of a non-synthetic answer.

TRANSCRIPTION OF A LECTURE GIVEN BY JON MIKEL EUBA IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE “PUBLISHING, PRODUCING, PROGRAMMING” SEMINAR HOSTED BY THE EREMUAK PROGRAMME ON 25 AND 26 JULY 2013 AT ARTELEKU (SAN SEBASTIAN)

(WWW.EREMUAK.NET/ES/FILES/EREMUAK-JON-MIKEL-EUBA)



**EREMUAK**

ELSKO JAUERARITZA

HEZKUNTZA, ENUNTZIA POLITIKA  
ETA KULTURAREN ARLOAN

GOBIERNO VASCO

DEPARTAMENTO DE EDUCACIÓN,  
CULTURA Y TURISMO