

One & Other Project

[The transcription text has been deliberately corrected from recurrent grammatical errors in the spoken version to ease the reading process]

My name is Verusca Calabria and I am here today to interview Silvia Antolin, on the 7th of March 2010 at 10.15 a.m. And we are in Brixton as we just found out we are neighbours, so we are carrying out the interview together at my place. So Silvia thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed again.

Thank you.

I've listened to your previous interview before you went on the plinth. And we are here today to learn a bit more about your time on the plinth, straight after the plinth and since the time of the plinth.

I see, ok.

So you told us in the previous interview that you were going to raise awareness about domestic violence against women, and you did a performance about that.

Yes that's right.

Can I ask you more about that time, when you went on the plinth do you remember how you planned your performance?

Well, the thing is that I have done that performance before, or something similar and it's like a persona, this kind of goddess that I've been working with for quite a long time. And it's been developing with me and because I just was walking by Trafalgar square and I see somebody and on the plinth and I asked and they told me this man, I can't remember, this man who was kind of like a Mr Captain, a funny man with a captain's hat, he told me 'You go right there and ask how to get into the One & Other project' and they told me to apply through the internet and do whatever I had to do and so I did it. Suppose that I did it today, so you call me tomorrow to be there after tomorrow and I was like oh so fast, what am I going to do up there and I was thinking because to me the space is very important, the energy of the space and the meaning of where I'm working and performing, the place, the space, you are working with a space so you have to think a lot about it. And it was Trafalgar square, I mean Nelson and this battle with the Spanish and I'm Spanish and it was like, 'wow I could do something politically incorrect'. [giggles] But I liked to think about and I really had no time so I just came from a performance festival in Finland, the anti festival it's called and I took this persona with me; this goddess from the domestic violence thing and that's why I just went up there with this kind of idea, performance.

So why do you call that persona the goddess?

Because it's a kind of, [incomp] it's like, what is it called? A woman can have, it's like the opposite points the highest and lowest of human feeling, or a human, a kind of woman's experience. I don't know how can I say it, it's a mix, [chuckles] imagine that you have two ways in life and one takes you to the top of the mountain and the other one takes you down, deeply down like when a woman has been physically and

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mentally attacked and put down. But the other side we've got this goddess inside us, that it's like the light and the shadow and a kind of that thing. So I wanted to work with that, [incomp] because although the idea is a painful one, it's a real thing that I want to show and I feel that I need to. But also I don't want just to take out all the bad things that there are already in the world and I want to leave an open door for a kind of light to get in there, so everything can be or you can go over it, in a way, although you have been suffering a lot that kind of thing. I don't know if I expressed myself very well [chuckles].

Thank you.

It's that mixed feelings in this persona.

And you mentioned you got the idea about doing something, or a persona about domestic violence from a town that you had lived in Spain where you had read a lot about domestic violence in the newspapers.

Yes, yes.

Can you tell me more about that, in terms of your idea developing?

Well I have seen, here in London you don't see it very often, but I read the other day and I'm starting to see it on television, that British government is now spending a lot of money in information about domestic violence and how to inform teenagers more than everything about it. You've got about 25% of the teenagers, women, they say they have been hit or abused by their boyfriends and I think that's quite an important *cifra* [number in Spanish]. And in Spain we are now very conscious, very aware about it and I'm from the north of Spain, but I went to live in Valencia and in Valencia it's one of the most, one of the regions in Spain that has a lot of women that have been killed because of this kind of abuse. And yes it was day after day in the news and it really surprised me because the north of Spain is very, more, it has a history of *matriarcado*, do you know *matriarcado* [matriarchy]?

Yes.

The power of the women is stronger, I think we are stronger, but when to live in Valencia I was surprised how women were treated by men in a way that I couldn't, it was very different and I don't know it's many things, it's education, culture. You could use Valencia; they call themselves they are a mixed of Christian and Moors that came to live there. So they have this mixed thing, which is still there I don't know whether everything is so hot they can't think, [chuckles] and many things that I suppose it's the energy of the place, I don't know.

When did you become first aware of the problem of domestic violence?

Aware of it, maybe when [pause] as a woman when we are, you know, we are chatting having a tea or a coffee with some friends, you start talking about it everything, as we like to do and you start to talk about when you are a child and you've been abused and it's unbelievable, how if we are 5, more than 50%, 70% of

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us has a history there, to say at many different levels but always there is something there, a kind of male abuse as a child or even when you are older and that, really well I've got my own history also and that is something that obviously started to worry me. And yes, since I've been working with the body as a performance, I had this necessity of taking out and also show it to others to see if I could help in a way. Maybe the first idea was helping myself, but then I realised that you can help others too and I didn't know or have any other way to do it [chuckles]. That's my way.

Thanks, about the performance itself when you were going on the plinth and I saw what you did on the plinth at certain times, can you explain some of the acts within the act, for example when you were shackling the pole and using your hands in what looked like two animals fighting or chasing each other, if you could elaborate about what your original meaning was?

Well yes in performance art we don't like to explain much about it because it's like, we say that performance has no sense but it makes sense on you when you see it. Your imagination or your history or background and everything that you live in this life is in you, so if you see something it makes sense for you but for other people it can have other meaning and both are perfectly correct. So if I say to you; this means this to me, for other people can mean another thing, so we don't like that. I mean I don't really like to explain what I do, I just like to do it and also with the performance art you work a lot with your intuition, not the rational part of your brain; the other door, you open the other door at the same time as it happened on the plinth. I forgot one prop that I had to work with a lot and at the beginning I was really upset [chuckles] because I wanted to show that it was a very strong thing to me, but then I found this, I had this iron thing [pole] on the plinth for not to fall down, so I used that. I started to play with it and improvising a lot because I had one hour without props [chuckles], but I had this new thing so I enjoyed it a lot, it was fantastic because in performance art once you have strong idea, something you have been working and you know what you want it to mean, then it's like creating your own games. You put your own rules and then you play and everything is fine and yes I play a lot with the metal thing, I don't know what it is called, anyway.

What prop was it that you had forgotten?

It was, what is it called? [she pretends to sew]

A needle.

A needle and ..

Thread.

Thread yes, I worked with the idea of [incomp], especially in Africa in some religious that they cut the female....

Genitalia.

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Genitalis [Spanish for genitalia]. Great, thank you and that kind of thing. That also terrifies me because I work a lot with this, the duality for me is very important. It is something I work a lot with; I try to put them together. That's why I also work with abused women and domestic violence because in a sense to me the solution is trying to put this duality of male and female together in one; the men realise there is woman inside them and also there is also man inside of us and put them together to feel that we are one, I don't know how I got to this [chuckles].

That's very good, thank you. Also I noticed that you had something that was gagging you across the mouth.

Yes, yes that's a very personal thing too because I'm very good talking with my body, I feel very free and comfortable talking with my body, letting my body talk and express but I'm very shy at letting my voice come out and if I have to talk in front of people I just, I can't, my voice starts to [makes rolling r sound] go like that and it's something that I'm working on, that I have to go through, something that is an energy point that I struggle with. This chakra [points to the throat] it doesn't work really well and it's this kind of thing you want to talk, but you don't talk because you have fear or you don't know how, where, what to say or they don't let you or listen to you. Even if you want to talk nobody hears you, that kind of thing that's the idea of it and it really hurts me, it hurts my lips but you don't suffer when you are performing because when are in it you go so high [giggles], that you don't realise about pain until you finish anyway.

How were you feeling when you went on the plinth?

I'm always very nervous the previous hours or even days, I feel really nervous because I'm very shy. I think I do this to overcome this fear, I can be even ill or physically bad the previous hours but when I'm performing it's not me anymore it's not me, the everyday Silvia who is my alter ego, sometimes I think it's the real me with no fears, with no worries I feel my energy expanded so much that I just feel great, secure and happy to be there and happy to do what I do. I enjoy it a lot [chuckles], it's my drug.

And what happened straight after when you came off the plinth?

When you come off the plinth you start rationalizing what you've done, you start analysing and to learn from it the experiences and the people, what you have found and what you have left in the others. And questions come to your mind and people come and tell you this and that it's been good and that normally they don't tell you if it's been rubbish, but yes I suppose when you live in the here and now, in the performance, that's what happens, you are so conscious of the here and now it's like a lesson of life, you feel happy and proud to have done that.

Talking about the time in which you were there raising awareness of domestic violence do you think that worked with the immediate audience in the square?

Yes you can feel that very easily, it's like you feel the energy. When I'm performing it's like you are more conscious of everything at that moment, in that place and it's

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like you are connected, it's a kind of a web that you feel connected with the others and what you do has an immediate impact in the other and you are very aware of that. You can feel that very easily, that's why I worry a lot about this kind of performance that makes you feel uncomfortable, which is not that bad but you make them feel this pain and this suffering and then you leave and say what's the point? Well I've seen these women suffering and was it good, what's the point of it? We've got so much suffering in this world, that if I get the attention from other people for a few minutes and I put more suffering into their lives then I realise that maybe it's not a nice thing to see, it's better to, what is it called [pause], to elevate the spirits of the people which I think is more important than putting them down. That's why the performances I do now try to work this other side of us, but also that's if I work with this painful real thing. I always finish with a nice feeling like I did this performance; flying like a bird, feeling free at the end.

You mentioned flying in the previous interview, what do you really mean by that from your own personal perspective?

Flying is free, it's like you can go up. To me a bird is a symbol of freedom, you've got wings, you can fly, you can go wherever you want to, no frontiers, no barriers, no limits.

Thank you, you mentioned about the physical audience in the square did you have any other communication with people apart from having a feeling it was having an impact.

From the plinth not really, because you are quite high up there, because I don't talk. I had a visual contact with people and funny things [chuckles], I can say now Diaspora? Only visual contact and energetic contact, like when I was lying on the floor asking for help with my hand, standing like that and then a young boy came and looked at me and we looked at each other and he just waved hello and goodbye, having fun and I was there like please I'm dying, I need some help. Or I was just there on the plinth, turned around and a tourist bus came around the corner, you know this bus without roof and there were tourists with the camera going look [makes noise of cameras clicking] and I was there you know in my mood with this, suffering [giggles] and these people like, I was looking like something exotic in the city, I don't know what they think but this kind of opposite points of view are really surprising.

How about from the online audience, I noticed you had some comments on the One & Other website.

Yes that's a nice webpage. Really I enjoyed the comments, but again the first comment I had I really enjoyed it because I'm not a very complicated person, it's quite clear what I do and this man that talked about it, it was a really nice comment, he appreciated it but in the end it was a kind of, I don't know if I understood right or wrong, that really upsets me because if it touches you, if you had images in your mind that makes sense to you; that's perfect. Even if it's so different from the one that is next to you, if they have different points of view from the thing they are watching then it works even more because you create a discussion there, a dialogue between them and something and that's normal life, you and I can be looking at

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something and for you it means, it means one thing and for me it means another and that's life, that's communication. Also I can tell you something, even in my propose Spanish, trying to make you understand what I feel or what I see and you will understand something different, so does communication exist or not? But working with the body, to me it's more real; your body doesn't lie when it talks. I can lie with my words but not with my body and that's why what you see and what it means to you is perfect, there is nothing to complain about that and I had another comment from a friend of mine, that was nice, the one that is in Spanish.

How about Flickr, I know you had photographs on Flickr of yourself, did you know that?

Flicker is the photographer?

It's a social networking site, on your profile there's a link that says there are 67 photographs of your performance on Flickr.

Oh yes, I really like them.

Who took them?

Oh, it's this man, I wrote to him about the photographs because I would like to do something with them in an artistic way, or just to have them for my book but I can't remember his name, I'm very bad with names.

Did you know him before you went on the plinth?

No, but I was so surprised because he answered me right away and he said I've got your photographs there are about 1000 or something, how do you want them? And I was like, what are you talking about, did you take 3 photographs per second, have you gone mad or what kind of camera do you have? [chuckles] He took so many photographs and he said he chose some of them put them on the web, he offered me all of them, I was really impressed and surprised. All the people I met through this project were very nice and the thing is that, to tell you the truth we arranged, if you don't feel comfortable about giving me your address to send you the photos you can give me any other address that you want to, and I said what I want is to meet you, have a coffee and something because I hate computers. I'm very *arcaica* [archaic in Spanish], old fashioned maybe or old [chuckles]. I don't like modern technology, I like to be one to one, face to face, feeling you, talking by telephone or computers I don't really enjoy it so I wanted to meet him and give him my, what is it? Thank him for his job, but then I went back to Spain and then I've just come back from Spain now and I haven't written to him, I haven't had this meeting yet so it's something I must do.

Ok thank you so just to go back to the experience as a whole do you think it changed you in any way and if so how?

[Pause] how did it change me? In a personal way it was an experience of [incomp]? When you are here [demonstrates dropping into the void].

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The abyss.

The abyss, yes because I was just new in town, just arrived and being up there it's like I'm in a new phase of my life, being up there was the feeling that I had down the plinth, but up there you materialise it even more, I really would have enjoyed it much more without the web, I understand that it had to be up there because it was quite dangerous once you are up there it's quite high it is quite dangerous taking people up there you don't know which could do crazy things [chuckles]. Oh I remember now, my sister Sonya was there watching me and there was a man next to her and when I was up there with my prop, my crown and everything and I started to do my performance, he went to Sonya and said we have a weird one up there [giggles]. I didn't hear it but I know somebody said it.

What did your sister say to them do you know?

Nothing, she didn't say anything, my sister said 'if you only knew', I don't know, I think she didn't say anything.

So you think it was an experience that had a positive impact on you.

Yes, it was positive in many ways, because of the people that I met it made me feel a little more as part of the city, as part of something working here and also because of this domestic violence and this painful performance they reaffirm me with the things I told you before.

When you mentioned about realising there is some work to be done on your throat chakra, when did you become aware of that?

Well, don't really know, maybe a few years ago. I came back from Mexico and I feel the energy of that place, the *Pacha Mama*, it was so powerful and natural that I said this exists and I don't have to fear it, I just need to know more about it. And then I asked the universe for a master [chuckles] and the master became in the name of *Narciso*, who was a Reiki master. I wanted to do Reiki, he worked within Mexican shamanism and he was living in Valencia at that time and I was there too so we made a group of 5 people and we started to study Reiki. And I wanted to do it because I had the initiation level one of Reiki 8 years before or so. I had that open door but I had forgotten about it because the experiences I had, it wasn't something you can touch. I think I just got afraid of it and forgot it, but when I got back from Mexico I said I must return to this and work at it more, so we started to study Reiki with this man, for 3 years non-stop until we get the Master's level too, then I got more conscious of how my energy flows.

What impact has Reiki had on your life?

[Pause] I suppose it has made me more conscious of everything. I can see now from outside of me, I can see a bit further now, so I feel more on earth and more conscious of, how can I say it, of our limitations, but with no limitations, I don't know how to explain it. And I think I'm aware also of this European education, there is a very strong rational and intellectual point of view, but we don't have one brain, we have two brains and we don't work the female part of it; the intuitive intelligence,

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which is so important or as important as the other one. In oriental culture they work with these energies since before, I don't know, before Jesus Christ and they still do it. That's something natural for them, but here I found that you can't talk about this kind of thing with everybody because they look at you like a freaky or weird one, they just don't want to know about it, it's so sad in a way that we don't want to know about what we are. And also the experiences that I have had doing performance art sometimes they are psycho-magic, they really transform me, make me see or give me, it's just a healthy exercise for your mind spirit and body. In this kind of psycho-magic performances that working with Reiki, is also the same in a way and you can see it's like when I did a performance and it really was something healing, sorry, how can I say it? It's like I had the same experience in two different points of view it's like through the performance I had an experience, that I don't really know what happened, but my intuition recognised it and so I heal from that but without knowing in a rational way. But then through the Reiki, I could have studied it from a different point of view, recognise it, become aware of it and now what I want to do is put this two things together trying to perform with the body in a healing way.

You mentioned you came to London because you'd like to explore art therapy and the only course you found in Spain was in Barcelona, you said this in the previous interview by the way, can you tell what kind of courses or groups of people you'd like to join or perhaps you already have?

Yes I'm doing this art therapy foundation course, but what I really want to do is the Master in art therapy, but then I realised that I thought it was all together but it's not and I understand why now; there are two Masters one with art therapy and one is dance movement therapy so one works more with painting, clay, sculpture etc. and the other one you are the material, you work with your own body through your body, you create something and you try to find a healing way with it. And to do this Master they asked me to have work experience with mental disease or mental and physical problems, and I'm working at a playground now with children and teenagers with mental and physical problems and I'm really happy to go through. I'm learning so much from this kids it's unbelievable. And the people I know through this door are also very nice and happy people, but I don't really know a lot of people. I find it a bit difficult to get in contact with people, maybe I'm not that good at it, maybe I just prefer playing with kids [chuckles] that having serious conversations with mature people.

Where are you doing the Master?

I'm not doing that yet.

The foundation?

At Hertfordshire [university]. But yes, because I came at the end of August here and it was very late because here you start in January to apply for a new course and I had no idea of it. So when I came I was quite late with all the application forms and all that, so that's the only thing I got there. But now I've got Goldsmith and what's the other, my memory, anyway I know I've got 2 universities quite close to where I live now.

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Ok what would you say is important to you right now?

What's important to me is I suppose what's important for everybody; being alive and trying to improve myself, trying to be a very good person; for me and others. That's what I'm interested in and the way I'm going through is this: I had so many experiences that changed my life and opened my mind and made me see and realise what I've got inside and what I can give and all that through the performance, that I need to show the others that anybody can do if I can do it. Like yes, I think it's just the difference between a performance artist and a non-performance artist is that one does it and the other doesn't, it's just that. So now what I want to do is working the healing part of the art, that I think is so important and necessary in these days where we are.

Thank you very much, have you enjoyed being interviewed?

Yes, well I would have enjoyed it a lot more if I could have expressed myself properly [chuckles], but anyway it was very nice to be here in your house, really nice. You are very nice and made it very easy for me, it was a nice tea, thank you very much.

Thank you.

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