



Tira tu reloj al agua

Variaciones sobre una cinegrafía intuida de José Val del Omar

Throw your watch to the water. Variations on an intuited cinematography by José Val del Omar

Un film de Eugeni Bonet

Una producción de Tráfico de ideas



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Throw Your Watch to the Water

Tira tu reloj al agua

Variations on an Intuited
Cinegraphy by José Val del Omar

Variaciones sobre una cinegrafía
intuida de José Val del Omar

direction, (un)script and montage: Eugeni Bonet
soundtrack: FMOL Trio (Pelayo F. Arrizabalaga, Cristina Casanova, Sergi Jordà)
featuring Òscar Celma and Jan Schacher, and excerpts from sound recordings by José Val del Omar
voices: José María Blanco, José Val del Omar (ca. 1960)
assistant director: Carlos Gil Santa Eugenia
sound engineer: José Lozano Granés
executive producer: Piluca Baquero Val del Omar
production adviser: Gonzalo Sáenz de Buruaga
production delegates: Adela Batalla, Modesto Pérez Redondo
laboratory: Image Film
english translations: Graham A. Thomson

A Tráfico de Ideas production
in association with the María José Val del Omar-Gonzalo Sáenz de Buruaga Archive

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In Medias Res

Format: 35mm, 1.85:1
Running time: 91 minutes
Spain, 2003-2004

Synopsis

A free approach to the missing last link with which the Andalusian filmmaker José Val del Omar intended to culminate his life's work, made up of what he described as lyrical documentaries, cinegraphies or elementaries. The elementary is a powerfully poetic declension of the documentary. After the elementaries of water, fire and earth that go to make up his *Tríptico Elemental de España* [Elementary Triptych of Spain], Val del Omar was preparing to add a fourth film that would be the vertex and vortex of his entire work.

New visions of Granada – the counterpoint of the Arab-Andalusian culture that Val del Omar felt in his veins and the hurried glances of the hordes of tourists strolling between the closed paradise of the Alhambra and the open gardens of the Generalife – give way to the dynamic, increasingly abstract and profuse ecstasy of images, of a time without clocks, without space, without feet or ground to stand on... Only to return once again to the everyday and the mundane in the form of film footage by Val del Omar that is more private or diaristic in character, before coming at last to the primordial spring or water-mirror of life.

Some remarks by the director

A hybrid film by virtue of being put together digitally and of constituting an interpretation of the truncated work of another artist: this would be a possible definition of the artefact that has kept me busy for two years. It seems to me that José Val del Omar, with whom I was briefly acquainted, was not a eccentric or avant-garde filmmaker but neither more nor less than an amateur. I use the term with the greatest respect, as Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage or Jean Cocteau did, in the sense of a lover or, as Val del Omar himself suggested, a 'believer in the cinema', with the soul of the 'beloved transformed into the Lover', to cite St John of the Cross, a volume of whom he always kept by his bedside.

Val del Omar was an amateur filmmaker who shot his best known and most widely admired works in 35mm, and at the same time made a considerable number of technical and mechanical innovations that he addressed to the area of industrial cinema and audio-visual production. However, during the 1970s he became increasingly involved with Super-8 and video, and in areas that are now thought of as multimedia, much as we amateurs who were learning and starting out then did; and however much we rejected the epithet it is, I insist, a term of distinction more than opprobrium.

Hence the sense of proximity that gave me the courage to take Val del Omar's images as my own: not to give a posthumous conclusion to the 'vortex' with which he sought to crown his oeuvre – 'slight, but of high tension', as film historian Román Gubern has written – but in a free yet devoutly faithful interpretation of materials that were raw (or only partially orderly) and for the most part never previously screened. These include footage in 35mm, 16mm and Super-8 and the slides that he brought to life with the techniques he called PLAT (Picto-Luminic-Audio-Tactile).

As for guide elements, there was little more than a ten-minute workprint in black and white, identified by the title *Ojala* (that is to say, 'if Allah or God wills'), one of those considered by Val del Omar for the vortex film I mentioned earlier, although this montage was surely no more than a first draft in relation to the far more complex idea of the film as I heard it from his own lips; but, above all, the thing that has served me best in building up these 'variations on a intuited cinegraphy' is the mass of annotations by Val del Omar himself, mostly handwritten on a great variety of notebooks and sheets of paper.

The film is structured in four sections or movements, plus an introductory segment, and the following list of



Val del Omarian 'embers' may perhaps serve as a peculiar synopsis:

- Open gardens. Delirious low sky. Granada-a blaze.
- Closed paradise. Garden with eyes. Tourists drifting.
- Pulses of light. Visionary grace. Taste of grenadine.
- Diluted worlds. Handfuls of time. Miracle of water.

And yet, far from constituting a mosaic or compendium of distinct, autonomous segments, I believe I have arrived at an overall cohesion – an atonal harmony of apparently opposing, disparate or dissonant elements – that is faithful in its turn to one of the premises noted by Val del Omar: 'the leap from the documentary to total craziness'. So I would say that it is by own intuition that I have approached what he foresaw as 'a dream of unusual intuited cinematography, in that its images float around with no apparent coherence'.

Finally, the matter of the film is something that everyone who sees it will have to discover for themselves, given the constant sliding between the objective and the abstract. However, by way of prelude there is Val del Omar's voice expounding a number of considerations that, even although these refer to other of his cinegraphies, also strike me as relevant to my apocryphal variations. This is so, for instance, when he speaks of a 'poetic elementary on the force of gravity' and of 'visions of dynamic ecstasy that might accompany a short manual of exercises for reaching a higher plane'.

Eugeni Bonet

On the background and the guts of the project

Throw Your Watch to the Water is a creative work constructed on the basis of several unfinished projects by the Granada filmmaker José Val del Omar. These projects date from 1968 until 1982, the year of Val del Omar's death, and he referred to them in his notebooks in a manner somewhere between concise and oblique, and also with different titles and premises.

The director of the film, Eugeni Bonet, met Val del Omar in 1980, had a hand in his rediscovery by the public as one of the pioneers of experimental and documentary cinema in Spain, and has subsequently worked devotedly on this free interpretation and recombination of the material that Val del Omar put together over fifteen years as a work in constant progress.

Val del Omar never intended to make a full-length film with the elements used in this work, which in no way claims to be the reconstruction of any concrete and properly delineated project, since the Granada-born filmmaker always rejected the straitjacket of detailed storylines and scripts. This being so, the subtitle of the film describes its nature fairly precisely, as a series of 'Variations on an Intuited Cinegraphy by José Val del Omar'.

When he came to explore Val del Omar's intentions by way of the notes and images he left behind, Eugeni Bonet intuited a way of giving new life to the images, techniques and abandoned projects of a great artist who produced only a small body of work. At the same time he avoided the impossible role of medium, recalling Dziga Vertov's generative precept about films that stimulate and generate other films; that said, the ideas of the Russian filmmaker present numerous affinities with those of Val del Omar.

The film, Bonet notes, is a kind of remix of a work that never had a first mix. The soundtrack, with the electro-acoustic music of the FMOL Trio – some of it composed and scored, some largely improvised – further reinforces this conception. Nevertheless, a number of sequences and elements are very close to the original material.

This is true, for example, of the 'whirlwind of ecstasy' that breaks out near the middle of the film and goes on for more than twenty vertiginous minutes, containing several grafts of and various variations on the picto-luminic experiences of the late and always surprising Val del Omar, taking as a source some Super-8 footage that provided documental testimony to those experiences.

This same section culminates with the three-minute piece entitled *Variaciones sobre una Granada* [Variations on a Pomegranate], with hardly any retouching of the original: rough material straight from the camera but with an identity of its own in its incorporation of all a whole parade of techniques (tactilevision, picto-luminic, laser, stop motion, etc).

The section with the 'snap-happy tourists', on the other hand, has a tight montage, increasingly abrupt and jocular, that was already intuitively present in the way Val del Omar had assembled those images. In this case, the soundtrack includes a recording made by Val del Omar himself, which features some snatches of grotesquely accelerated Flamenco singing, and the at times cacophonous jondo rhythms of Flamenco dancer Vicente Escudero (almost certainly extra takes supplementing the ones Val del Omar used in his *Fuego en Castilla* [Fire in Castile]).

Bonet also notes that the late viewing of the workprint entitled *Ojala* (late because of the precarious condition in which the footage was found) enabled him to rescue a number of images he had at first discarded because he could see no way of fitting them in. Thus, it is no mere whim of Bonet's that the Flamenco dancers turn in moving forward and back – in a kind of proto-scratch – or that images are inverted 'without feet or ground' – and not only in their spatial co-ordinates, but also in time: these details faithfully reproduce the jolts intuited by Val del Omar. (One of his notes reveals that he even thought of issuing the audience with special overshoes that would transmit electric shocks at certain moments.)

All in all, it is clear that *Throw Your Watch to the Water* does not appear to be a film 'by' Val del Omar; unscreened, posthumous, patiently reconstructed from indicative elements over the course of more than two years work. Only these last two data are entirely certain, and in fact Eugeni Bonet is actually amused at the idea of the confusions, discussions and digressions that might arise in relation to the authorship of such a peculiar film, which he prefers to think of as a work that belongs to no one.

When, after several delays in the completion of his *Triptico Elemental* and other interspersed projects, Val del Omar conceived the idea of a fourth elementary as a final rounding-off of the trilogy, we have to assume that he also intuited the film as a testament. And, as if this bearing this out, the film culminates in the finality of death – albeit a death devoid of any funereal, tragic sense: at most it is melancholy – and implicitly contains within it a new 'without end', like the films he completed himself.

Mara Villas





Eugeni Bonet, born in Barcelona in 1954, works in the fields of film, video and digital media as an artist, curator and writer. From 1973 until the early 80s he created a number of experimental works in film and video, which have been shown in cinematheques, museums and festivals in Europe and America, including the following spaces and events: 13th New York Avant-Garde Festival (1977), 3rd International Avant-Garde Film Festival in London (1979), XI Biennale de Paris (1980), XVI Bienal de São Paulo (1981), Collective for Living Cinema in New York (1981), Musée National d'Art Moderne-Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris (1982), Das Kino in Karlsruhe (1983), ARC/Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (1987), European Media Art Festival in Osnabrück (1988), the cinematheques of Madrid, Barcelona and Zaragoza, etc.

Since then he has written and directed various audio-visual works (video, television and slide shows) on aspects of contemporary art such as the life and work of Marcel Duchamp, the experimental poetry of Juan-Eduardo Cirlot (a multi-award winning series) and the electronic music of Eduardo Polonio (a project still in progress). His increasing commitment to digital video and the interactive media has allowed him to resume his creative audio-visual work and his interest in the expanded forms, and to link this to his other main activity as a writer, art historian and docent specializing in the new media. From 1999 to 2003 he was Associate Professor in the Faculty of Fine Arts at the Universitat de Barcelona, where among other subjects he taught History and Theory of Experimental Film, the only course of its kind in Spain.

Selected filmovideography

2003-04

Tira tu reloj al agua (Variaciones sobre una cinegrafía intuida de José Val del Omar) - 91 min. film - music by FMOL Trio

2002

U-Session - 7 min. video and multiple-screen installation - music by Eduardo Polonio

2001

Mecanica (retard digital) - 5 min. video and installation

1997-98

Lecturas de Cirlot, a five-part series:

- **Cristo Cristal** - 11 min. video - music by Barbara Held

- **Homenaje a Bécquer** - 13:30 min. video

- **INGER permutaciones** - 18 min. video - music and performance by Empar Rosselló

- **EINAI** - 12 min. video - music by Eduardo Polonio

- **Visio Smaragdina** - 11 min. video - music by Miquel Jordà

1986-87

Duchamp (retard en vídeo) - 61 min. video

1978-79

I33 - 45 min. film (co-directed by Eugènia Balcells)

1978

Toma-Vistas I - 4 min. twin-screen film

1976

Photomatons - 3 min. film and multiple-screen loop projection

En la ciudad... - 65 min. collective film (producer-impulsor)

1974

V-2 - 12 min. film

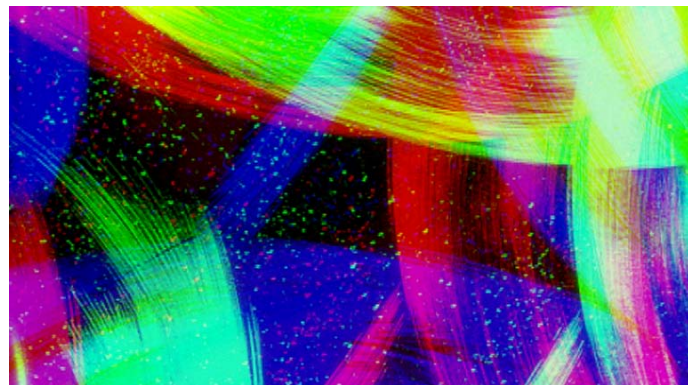
The soundtrack and its creators

Eugeni Bonet came to one of our concerts in La Capella in Barcelona in 2002. He must have liked what he heard because a few months later he contacted us with a proposal to do the soundtrack for the film *Throw Your Watch to the Water*. We knew nothing at all about Val del Omar. Eugeni gave us videos of some of Val del Omar's work, which surprised and delighted us. He also showed us some twenty minutes or so of the first part of the film, already edited, and explained his idea about the general structure, approximate times, key themes and the kind of montage he intended to apply to the different parts.

At first we worked at a distance, by e-mail, phone and conventional mail. We divided up the tasks corresponding to the different parts: each of us was entrusted with accomplishing an open general structure of the themes we were assigned, drawing on the instrumental and creative potential of the rest of the members and taking account of the fact that the music would be generated in the actual moment of recording. Our preparations involved sampled sound material ranging from Falla to Japanese improvised music; we manipulated discs by everyone from Miles Davis to Enrique Morente; we recorded acousmatic material, water, voices, and so on, and we had sound recordings of Val del Omar himself, previously selected by Eugeni. We wrote motives and graphic scores for our improvisations. The compositional results took shape in the recording sessions we did in May 2003. After an appalling first take, it all came together at once. We recorded intensively over three whole days. As a novelty, in addition to our usual instruments, Pelayo brought along a violin, Sergi a set of glasses and a toy piano, and Cristina her Tibetan bell and some cans that we incorporated spontaneously. Óscar Celma played Spanish guitar on several themes and Jan Schacher provided some samples and additional sounds for the theme 'Granada'. The recording technician was José Lozano, who also helped us with the final mastering in a highly creative way.

In June 2003 we gave Eugeni some first mixes to use as a support in his visual montage. About a year later Eugeni sent us a workprint that astounded us by its visual richness and the tremendous subtlety and empathy of the interaction between images and music. On the basis of this version, during May and June 2004, we produced the final master in 5:1.

FMOL Trio



The **FMOL Trio** is an electronic improvisation group formed in 1999 that takes its name from the FMOL virtual synthesizer, developed in 1997 by Sergi Jordà as an instrument for collective composition on the Internet. The FMOL Trio are: Cristina Casanova and Sergi Jordà (FMOL synth), with Pelayo F. Arrizabalaga (saxes, bass clarinet and turntables), founder of the group Clónicos with which Jordà also worked for a number of years. The FMOL Trio's approach is based on cutting, mixing and traversing the frontiers between the electronic and the acoustic, combining digital improvisation with the force and lyricism of Arrizabalaga's wind instruments and turntables. Far removed from electro-acoustic purism, the FMOL Trio conceives and creates a visceral music whose references embrace 1960s free jazz (Eric Dolphy and Albert Ayler, among others), Xenakis' electronic compositions, Japanese noise music and the New York No-Wave.

Discography:

FMOL Trio: *Live at Metrònom* (Hazard Records 010, 2000)
 FMOL Trio: *The Köln Concert* (Hazard Records 028, 2001)
 FMOL Trio: *Night in The Chapel* (Hazard Records 025, 2002)
 Computer Music Journal Volume 26 CD (2002)

FMOL Trio website:

www.arrakis.es/~ccs/hazardrecords/artists/fmoltrio.htm

On José Val del Omar

José Val del Omar was born in Granada on October 27th, 1904. From early childhood he amused himself by projecting images magic-lantern fashion, and after a stay in Paris in 1921 he discovered his vocation in the cinema. In 1925 he made his first full-length film, *En un rincón de Andalucía* [In a Corner of Andalusia], which he subsequently destroyed, considering it an artistic failure.

In 1928 he used the specialized press to publicise his astonishingly precocious ideas for a variable-angle lens, for concave screens and for achieving relief effects by means of lighting, effectively prefiguring some of the most significant lines of his later researches and discoveries.

After moving to Madrid he became involved in the film scene and in progressive educational circles there, and from 1931 to 1936 he was active in various branches of the Spanish Republic's Pedagogic Missions such as the People's Travelling Museum, the instruction of country people and cultural anthropology. During those years he made a large number of documentaries – more than forty, according to some sources – of which, unfortunately, only a few have survived.

During the Spanish Civil War he worked with Josep Renau, an artist renowned for his activist posters and photomontages, and helped to save some of the most valuable works in the Prado museum and the National Library. Trapped in Valencia when the city fell to the rebels, he was forced to collaborate in audio-visual propaganda, an experience he would later recall with bitterness.

After the Civil War he concentrated much of his researches in the field of sound, including radio and experiments with electro-acoustics, and in 1944 he registered the first patent for a diaphonic or binaural sound system, a forerunner of the surround-sound systems that go beyond mere stereo effects, and further developed this over the next few years.

Between 1953 and 1955 he made the film *Aguaspejo granadino* [Water-mirror of Granada], 'a short audio-visual essay in lyrical art', conceived in part as a showcase for his technical innovations. Its screening at the Berlin Film Festival in 1956 and the International Experimental Film Competition in Brussels during Expo 1958 caused a considerable stir and generated a warm response and enthusiastic reviews.



He went on to make *Fuego en Castilla* [Fire in Castile], whose lengthy gestation extended from 1956 to 1959, in which he introduced the fundamentals of his TactileVision or pulsatory tactile lighting. The power of his images and his electro-acoustic soundtrack earned him a number of awards at film festivals: Cannes 1961 (the year that Buñuel received the Palme d'Or for *Viridiana*), Bilbao 1961 and Melbourne 1962.

In 1961 he went to Galicia to shoot a third 'elementary' – a form he conceived of as an 'abstract or lyrical documentary' – but left the film unfinished, only returning to it towards the end of his life and giving it the title of *Acariño galaico (De barro)* [Galician Warmth (Of Mud)] with a view to including it with the two previous films in the series he called *Tríptico Elemental de España* [Elementary Triptych of Spain]. The artist and filmmaker Javier Codesal eventually completed the film in 1996, after Val del Omar's death.

From the late 50s he worked on the development of new formats and technical improvements for the cinema and television, and for educational uses of audio-visual media. These things left him little time for his genuinely creative work, and in general proved deeply disappointing. As of 1968, however, he undertook new film projects which he reprocessed mentally over the course of time.

In the last period of his life, preferably surrounded by young people and artists who had nothing to do with the entertainment industry, he reconciled his poetic and artistic mentality with his insatiable interest in technical matters. He expanded his repertoire of resources with the laser, video, premonitions of cybernetics and his PLAT (or Picto-Luminic-Audio-Tactile) techniques. Still full of life in those years, as those who knew him have attested, he died on August 4th, 1982, as a result of a car crash.

tira tú reloj al agua

throw your watch to the water

