



Omer Fast, *The Casting*, 2007 - courtesy: g3 agency, Paris, Postmasters, New York, Arrafa Beer, Berlin. Production photo: Nicolas Tricaic



Omer Fast, *Take a Deep Breath*, 2008 - courtesy: g3 agency, Paris, Postmasters, New York, Arrafa Beer, Berlin. Videoclip: Yon Thonax



Omer Fast, *Looking Pretty for God (After GW)*, 2008 - courtesy: g3 agency, Paris, Postmasters, New York, Arrafa Beer, Berlin. Production photos: Jill Frank

poi uccisa e data alle fiamme insieme alla sua famiglia. Sembra girato per buona parte da Salazar, che si arruola per pagarsi al ritorno la scuola di cinema, mescolando il proprio ad altro *found footage*. Invece tutto è ricostruito ad hoc: gli attori reinterpretano frasi, filmati, brani di blog, video da YouTube e Al Jazeera che il regista ha trovato online. Le uniche immagini vere sono quelle che compaiono alla fine, mostrando i civili iracheni uccisi. Paradossalmente, sono state le uniche censurate (*il redacting* è il lavoro di "editing" e ripulitura con cui i militari vagliano documenti, notizie e immagini), dalla produzione, rendendole irriconoscibili, per evitare azioni legali. Micidiale invece l'attacco di *Diary of the Dead* di George A. Romero (2008), in cui una troupe di studenti di cinema si trasforma in zombie girando un film dell'orrore: le vittime di un massacro tornano in vita, aggredendo soccorritori e giornalisti e sabotando così un servizio televisivo in corso...

Omer Fast explores war and the media's interpretation of conflicts. He does this by subverting its languages with editing taken to an extreme, such as in "CCN Concatenated", in which each single word is spoken by a different reporter, composing an obscure prophecy of death. Or he mixes war reporting and private memories, as in "The Casting", where traumas of completely different scopes (the accidental killing of an Iraqi civilian and a relationship with a girl who cuts herself) mix in the memory of an American soldier, forming a schizophrenic geography of the psyche.

In *Zang Tumb Tumb* (1914), Marinetti gave an account of warfare, rebroadcasting it like a subjective POV shot. The bombing of Adrianople, which he had witnessed a few years before, was turned into a sampling of sounds, images, and onomatopoeias, syncopated by enjambments: *on the head shaack staggering / flames / flames / flames / flames / flames / flames / flames (floodlights of the forts over there) flames / flames / Shukri Pasha phones his orders to 27 forts / in Turkish in German hello Ibrahim Rudolf hello hello / actors parts echoes- / prompters scenes of smoke forests / applause.* (Translated by Elizabeth R. Napier and Barbara R. Studholme in *Selected Poems and Related Prose*, Filippo Marinetti, Yale University Press, 2002). A theatrical remix, with dramatic editing. A few years later, signing the Manifesto of Futurist Cinematography along with Corra, Ginna, Balla, Chiti, and Sestimelli, he would declare, "We decompose and recompose the universe according to our marvellous whims". Omer Fast, who seems to know all the rules of découpage (the classic editing technique of Hollywood movies, but also the method of critical film analysis that deconstructs directorial narration), might agree. One need only look at a tour de force of compulsive editing like his *CNN Concatenated* (2002, visible on YouTube), in which dozens of talking heads, each pronouncing an isolated word, address the viewer personally with an unanticipated message, somewhere between subliminal hypnosis and salvific irony. *Listen / to / me / i / want / to / tell / you / something / come / closer / don't / be / upset / and / don't / get / emotional / just / get / near / me / and / pay / attention... Don't talk / don't move / don't / even / react / actually / don't / do / anything / at / all...* An 18-minute-long sermon that presents phobic temptations, but at the same time discourages wallowing in fear, self-pity and last-minute faith, or accusing one's parents of irreparable offences, and tells the viewer it is time to get off his ass. And as this panegyric rattles on in stutters, like the voice of a robot operator, one's residual attention become fixed on the images, which up until then seem almost out of the frame. They are all familiar ones, since they were broadcast around the globe just after September 11: the smoking towers (*flames / flames / flames / flames / flames / flames / flames*), the Capitol, the word LIVE in block letters, subtitles that run along the bottom naming Bin Laden, Bush, Afghanistan, Al Qaeda, the War on Terror, the casualty count. Elements on our cathode tubes that have become everyday apparitions, and thus almost invisible. As this text stretches on,

Israel is invading Gaza, the TV is spewing out images of warfare, missiles are being launched, civilians are dying. These are what one of the CNN anchors calls "heartbreaking images", capable of provoking charged bursts of cathartic emotion, but without triggering any concrete reaction, or shaking us out of passivity. In *Critique de la séparation* (1961, visible on UbuWeb), Guy Debord uses his own 18 minutes to undermine the documentary genre, cutting and pasting news segments, photos, amateur footage and voiceover comments, attacking not so much the medium in itself as the conditions in which its mechanisms are employed and assimilated, adopting the dissolution of the subject as a strategy for not giving in to laissez-faire, and turning viewers into active participants.

The freedom with which Fast uses the language of video, taking advantage of its vast resources and subverting its routines. In 2000 he secretly altered the soundtrack of several copies of the film *The Terminator*, inserting a male voice that recounts memories of childhood discipline by his father at the very moment that Schwarzenegger pulls the trigger, and then returned these rental tapes to video stores. This project, *T3-AEON*, shows the same desire to throw a wrench into the device of passive absorption from a safe distance, of mass catharsis, though without taking a didactic stance. Born in Jerusalem in '72 (his grandmother, as is narrated in the video *Berlin-Hura*, 2002, fled Nazi persecution in Berlin and took refuge in Palestine, only to discover that the promised land was a barren patch of the Negev), he moved to New York with his entire family as a teenager, studied at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (1995), then at CUNY's Hunter College (2000), and now lives in Berlin. He doesn't like his work to be interpreted biographically, but it is hard not to see a connection between his resume and the obstinacy with which he probes our perception of current affairs, bypassing the media to approach events through eye-witness accounts, filtered only by the subjectivity of their source. He consciously asserts his position in the construction of the narrative: he often appears in his work, with his own voice and face, or through an alter ego. Interviewed by Joanna Fiduccia in *Uovo*, he explains: "Immediately after the tragic event, its survivors, its witnesses and even its perpetrators start mutating into dramatic personae, into authors and actors, tasked with making sense of their own experience for themselves and for others".

So mise-en-scène is the terrain Fast digs into when he decides to narrate the horrific. Casting is one of his recurrent themes. In *Spielberg's List* (2003), he visits Krakow a decade after the making of the Hollywood epic *Schindler's List*, goes on guided tours of the still-intact concentration camp sets, and interviews several extras. As they describe the selection criteria for the roles of Poles and Jews, or what it felt like to walk into a gas chamber, their memories of working on the film, the oldest ones interweave personal memories of the Forties, mingling the tenses of the distant and recent past. The translator was the one who brought this to his attention. So the artist produced two side-by-side video projections: the images are identical, but the subtitles diverge in almost imperceptible variations, corresponding to reality and fiction. *The Casting* (2007), his most famous piece (14', winner of the Bucksbaum Award at the Whitney Biennial), also uses two screens: seen from the front, they present tableaux vivants/still shots featuring actors who translate the words of a voiceover into images. In the background are Fast himself and a young American soldier just back from the Iraqi front, whose story he is listening to - we imagine them sitting face-to-face, in accordance with the golden rule of 180° space, another illusory keystone of découpage. Actually, the interview has been edited so much that the story of an accidental checkpoint killing is jumbled together with the protagonist's memory of a love affair, creating a visual mishmash that follows the non-linear thread of inner perception. There's no sleight-of-hand here: Fast underscores his radical jump cuts by leaving evident breaks, almost scars, between one scene and the next. In a previous work, *A Tank Translated* (2002), he interviewed four draftees in Jerusalem, the only soldiers on a tank in the Gaza Strip. The words in Hebrew, on four monitors, are juxtaposed with intentionally inaccurate English subtitles that twist their story of action into a film epic. As Jennifer Allen writes (in *Artforum*, September 2003), "While effecting a metamorphosis, Fast's stuttering subtitles point to other moments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict where less conspicuous errors of translation may occur: from the civilian to the soldier, from the occupied territories to the television set, from a war zone to the art world". In *Take a Deep Breath*, 2008, after the initial scene (an Israeli medic enters a Tel Aviv falafel

shop that has just been blown up and tries to no avail to save a wounded man, then discovers that it is the suicide bomber), an entire film crew is brought into play: the director (the actor playing Fast), explains to two armed cops that he is just making a movie about making a movie about an attack, in the style of Truffaut's *Day for Night*. In the video projection *Looking Pretty for God (After GW)*, 2008, 27', shown at Manifesta in the Trento section curated by Anselm Franke and Hila Peleg, the artist takes on the mother of all taboos, death. He doesn't depict it; he lets it be described through the words of undertakers, and be evoked by just a few shots of mortuaries and coffins (those of soldiers killed in Iraq, due to censorship expressly imposed by the American government, cannot be shown), intercut with a photo shoot of child models for an advertisement. At several disturbing points, the adult voices seem to be possessing them or talking about their makeup. The GW in the title refers not only to George W., but to Gillian Wearing, in a citation of *10-16*, a video from '97 in which adult actors lip-synched to the rambling fantasies of a group of teenagers.

The combination of death and children is a media taboo taken to the nth power, another phobia that Fast, who recently became a father, tries to exorcise through a homeopathic dose of horror. While we cannot vaccinate ourselves against the raw atrocity of Beslan, Khost, Baquba, Kabul, or Jabalya, we can train ourselves to reflect on how we assimilate it. Among artists working on the analytical deconstruction of time-based media, including news that is in some way "embedded", Fast is in good company. One could cite Seth Price (*Digital Video Effect: Editions*, 2006), Melik Ohanian (*September 11, 1973*, 2007, which reconstructs the entire story of another American September 11, that of the Pinochet coup in Chile), Paul Chan (*Ae: The Operation*, 2002, a caustic cut-and-paste that portrays the members of the Bush administration as wounded, disoriented soldiers at the front, juxtaposing animation with real snapshots), Jonathan Horowitz (who in his '07 show at Galerie Barbara Weiss in Berlin, "People Like War Movies", juxtaposed the death of American football star Pat Tillman with propagandandistic manipulation of Elvis Presley's draft service, and reminded us that the Pulitzer Prize-winning photo of the Vietnamese girl Kim Phuc fleeing from napalm was taken by Nick Ut, the same photojournalist who ended up on front pages around the world 35 years later with a shot of Paris Hilton in tears, sitting in the back seat of an LA County police car. Aspiring directors who deal with pirate uploads and editing that is somewhere between fiction and non-fiction are also featured in two recent "protest" films about reporting (see "Soggettive sull'orrore" by Patrizio Giuffredì, www.indie-eye.it). *Redacted*, which Brian De Palma presented at the last Venice Film Festival, winning a Silver Lion award, reconstructs the gang rape of a fourteen-year-old by US soldiers, who then kill and burn her along with her family. Most of it seems filmed by the character Salazar, who enlists in order to pay for film school on his return, and mixes his own material with other found footage. Instead it is all specially reconstructed: the actors reenact phrases, film footage, bits of blogs, and videos from YouTube and Al Jazeera that the director found online. The only real images are the ones that appear at the end, showing the Iraqi civilians who were killed. Paradoxically, these were the only ones censured (redacting is the "editing" and "sanitizing" process in which the military screens documents, news, and pictures) by the producers, who rendered them unrecognizable in order to avoid lawsuits. On the other hand, there is the Finnish opening scene in *Diary of the Dead* by George A. Romero (2008), in which a crew of film students turn into zombies shooting a horror movie: the victims of a massacre come back to life, attacking rescuers and journalists and sabotaging the TV report of the event...