

Art

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Omer Fast
Interviewed by Marcus Verhagen

Art & Politics
Mark Prince

Istanbul Biennial
Teresa Gleadowe

Nasreen Mohamedi
Coline Milliard



I don't know what to say.



Everytime I try to speak carefully



I fuck up and make



a big mess of it all.

Pleasure & Pain

Omer Fast interviewed by Marcus Verhagen



Omer Fast Take a Deep Breath 2008 video still

MARCUS VERHAGEN: *YOU REGULARLY USE THE FORMAT OF THE INTERVIEW IN YOUR WORK, for instance in pieces like The Casting, 2007, and Spielberg's List, 2003. Can you say a bit about how it works for you?*

Omer Fast: I don't always start a work with interviews but the interview is one possibility. When I sit at home and have ideas, very often they're contingent on some encounter and on seeing how an idea is activated by people who can start a dialogue with me about it. I've never been happy just making work at home or in the studio – that always feels to me like a navel-gazing pursuit – so there is a collaborative aspect to what I do, and that aspect doesn't necessarily stop with the interview.



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Omer Fast CNN Concatenated 2002 image sequence from video

MV: *That collaborative dimension is something that your work has in common with other forms of production, like film and TV, and you occasionally refer to reality TV in your use of the confession, for instance, as well as to the news media and, of course, to fictional productions. Can you talk about how you position yourself in relation to those forms?*

OF: Compared to reality, television is very attractive to me. I'm not at all put off by the reference to the talk show or the reality show, they're obviously very popular forms. But in terms of venue and format what I do is different. When you show work in a space you can play with the installation and the spatial coordinates. The other difference is that reality TV tends to develop and ossify into particular formats that are televisual and fairly generic. What I try to do is to articulate the confession on two levels. We take this encounter with a person, we call this person the real person – just like the TV shows do. They bring their guests in front of the camera and I do the same thing. But then the work also begins to narrate itself and to create its own confession, articulating for the viewer something about how it is constructed, the motivations and anxieties that underlie it. I present a kind of counter-figure to the confessing guest in the form of the confessing

host or confessing actor-creator-artist-interviewer, who is sometimes me and sometimes an actor playing me. It doesn't even have to be as theatrical as that. The work can also just turn on itself and create inside it a dynamic where the narrative of its own structure is part of the story that it tells.

MV: *So you make the confession confess.*

OF: In a way it is like articulating the dynamics of the confession. We're bracketing the confession, we're saying yes, there is this content that the work is trying to articulate and you can trace that content to events in the world. But things happen to narratives as they take shape, and those things are explicitly shown in the work to give people an understanding of what may happen to a narrative or a memory or an experience as it is adapted in a short film, say, or in the media.

MV: *You are constantly inviting the viewer to consider your technical manipulations, your sources, your groundwork and so on. Is that right?*

OF: This notion of manipulation is one that I don't care for. It implies a sinister operation and a cynical understanding of the media and I don't really have that because I accept that the media presents narratives – that is what it does – and in

order to present a narrative you have to form it. Of course there are political dimensions and commercial interests that shape narratives but I want to set the notion of manipulation aside. In *The Casting*, when you see the edits in the screens on the back, you become aware that the flawless, fluid narrative that you hear in the space or see in the front is made up of these different bits and bobs that have been stitched together. It is not about removing a veil from people's eyes and suggesting that what they see in the media is constructed. I think people know that, so for me the notion of manipulation is not very interesting, manipulation is part of what you do even when you talk, when you tell a story. When you're editing, you're manipulating footage even when you're trying to make it as linear and honest as possible.

MV: *I meant manipulation in a dispassionate sense.*

OF: Sure. It is just something I wanted to flag up because it is important to me. I keep getting asked, is this work media critique? As if that would help in any way: 'Oh yes, it's media critique, let's all breathe a deep sigh of relief.' But that is not what it is. Of course these critical analyses have been important in fashioning our understanding of the media, but I think all that talk tends to obscure something which is extremely important in the media, and that is pleasure. It took me a while to be comfortable with that and to say that I want to make things that are pleasurable, regardless of their relationship to social dynamics and to current events, to history and to the media.

MV: *Let's stay with pleasure. In your work you play a variety of different roles. You and your stand-ins figure in Take a Deep Breath, 2008, and The Casting, so you're a participant, but you're also a writer, a director and an editor – and it seems to me that the role of editor is really fundamental and that editing, in your work, is often a means of bringing pleasure.*

OF: I think editing is a beautiful way to approach a narrative and I do think of editing as writing, so all the writing I do before a piece is shot and made is a prelude to editing. Editing allows you to deal with words and images and sounds but also to give a temporality to the work – and being able to step out of the conventions of linear time or the time of the body is for me a very pleasurable experience. It

