

FIELD REPORT

**AN AXIS OF
INTENSITY**

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EXT – BAGHDAD STREET – DAY

We are watching a video recording of the Reuters cameraman Mazen Dana in Baghdad.

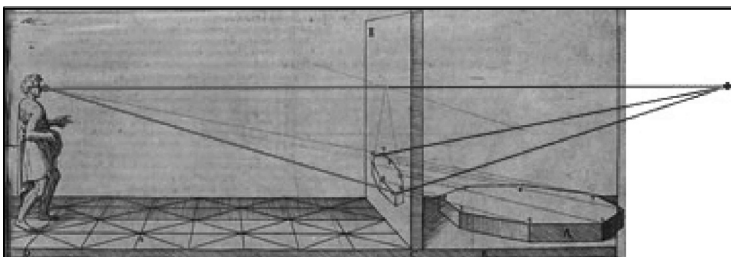
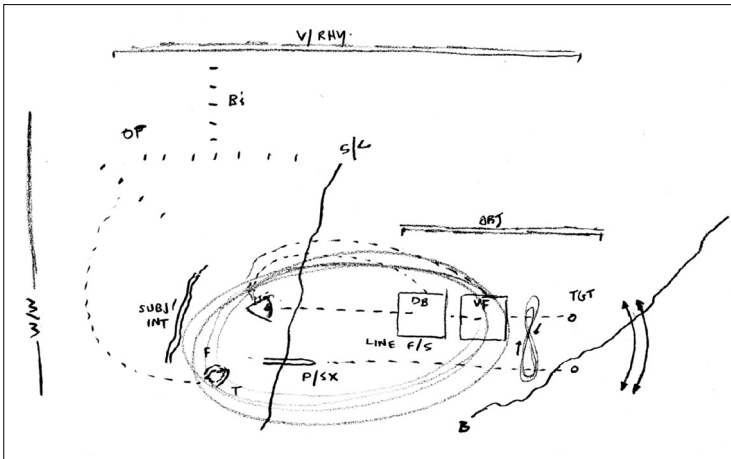
We see a US Army tank approaching Dana.

Suddenly –

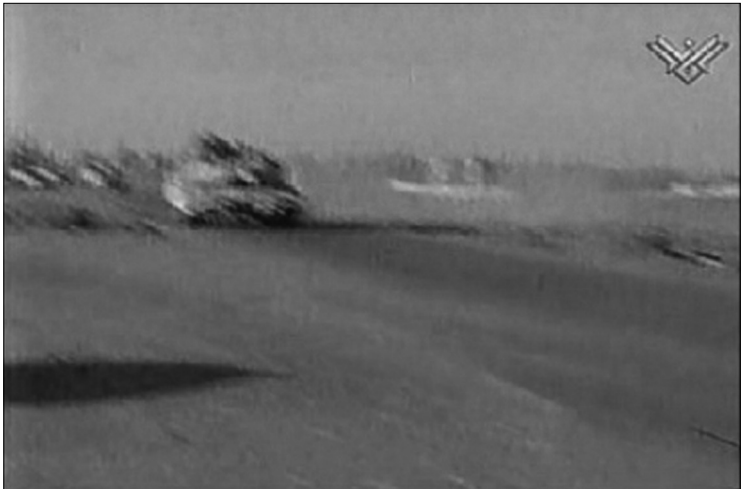


as eye, camera and weapon align

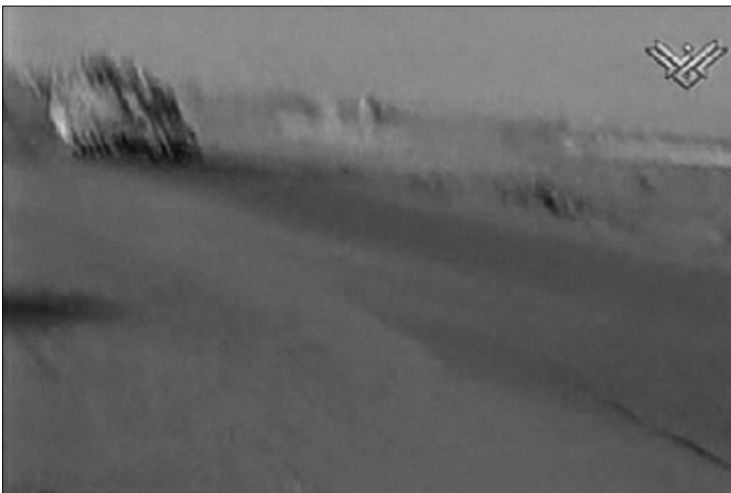
and a shot traverses the image screen –



we



feel

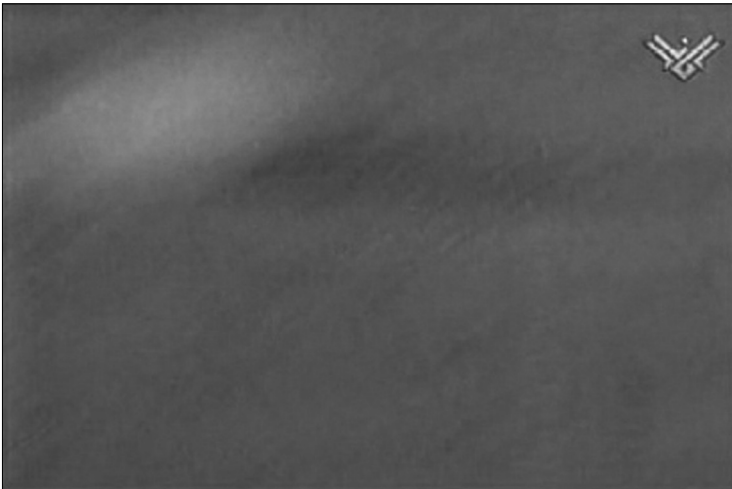


the camera-body

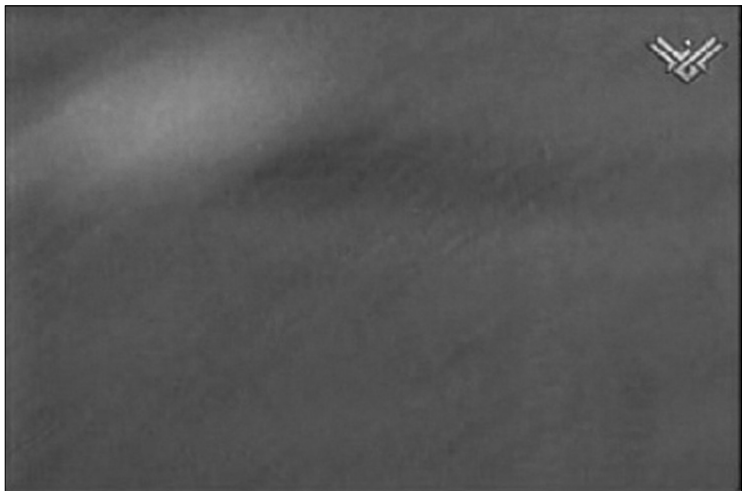
tumble to the ground,

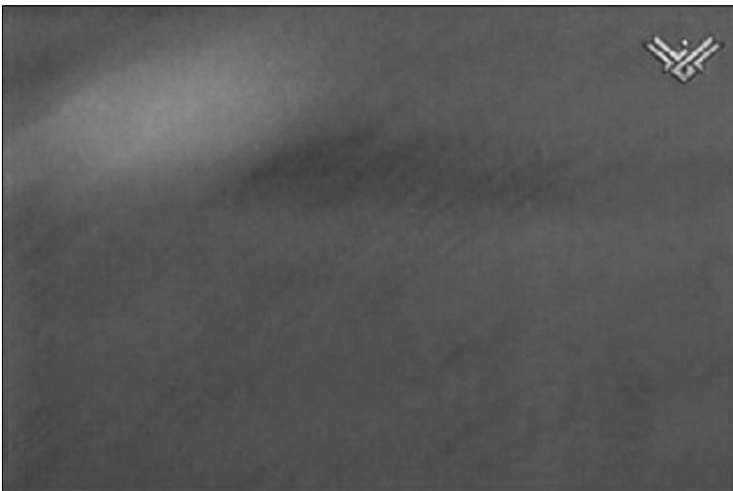


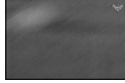
collapsing into an extreme closeup.



Seconds of pure ground, uncomposed.







We reproduce an artifact, and we harness a gaze that is particular to a way of seeing. We refer to the vulnerabilities that hover around a seemingly stable representational event. Who is *here*, on the “safe side” of this image-shield? Who is its subject?

We claim such images, use them as our own materiel. We point to them, publish them, deploy them in our art. I use the above image as a video artwork. This one shot, extracted from the flow, is subsequently mobilized along a new trajectory of viewing. It runs as a film in a darkened room, where it becomes an *immobile moving image*.

With this work, I aim to construct a place between seeing and shooting. Between sensing and shielding. A precarious site where a subject is both obliterated and reintroduced, and around which a form of embodiment coheres. A location of viewing that belongs to everyone and no one. A place where we are deployed to serve a need within the workings of the camera-weapon device: a place where we look for something to reinforce us, through an agonistic or acquisitory impulse.

Defense and attraction. Conflict and commodification. Everywhere around us, we witness the emergence of a new modality of spectacle. It is characterized by a shift toward real-time engagements and continuous, heightened states of alertness and preparedness, in such a way as to generate a state of extreme readiness for both conflict and libidinous consumption. It blends combat and commodity, and functions as a link between war and consumerism.

What has helped to give rise to this new modality? How can we understand its material effects? We can begin with an apparatus of engagement that has emerged out of the mid-century political economy of warfare: a tracking and targeting assemblage that has gradually become a dominant organizational paradigm, continually reshaping the urban at groundlevel. We can call it the *real-time tracking interface*.

In mapping the ascendance of this new paradigm, it is important to take an archeological approach, looking at this apparatus not only in terms of technological history, but in terms of assumptions, beliefs, orientations, and “mind-sets.” It is important to understand it as both symbolic and material, functioning at the level of language, practice, and belief. We are not simply speaking of a technology, but of the structures of knowledge and power that have organized its fields of attention and readiness, and the set of material practices and effects that have accompanied it.

The real-time tracking assemblage has played an important role in the development of new economies of organization, optimization, and vigilance. It is a product of the drive to augment and automate human capabilities; to develop new human-machine composites; to shorten time and space intervals; and to eliminate gaps between symbol and event. It has contributed to an ideal of integrated control and panoptic oversight, where reality is seen as “manageable” through the manipulation of data, and where space is produced according to the logics of the database and the organizational supply chain.

It is often thought that this apparatus has contributed to the evacuation of geographical space, overriding the vagaries of place and distance. However, it has simultaneously contributed to the resurgence of **locational specificity**: a precision-landscape where communication is tagged with position, movement-flows are quantified, and new location-aware relationships are generated among actors, objects, and spaces. In other words, this apparatus has not only propelled a one-way delocalization or deterritorialization, as is often suggested, but rather a volatile combination of the diffused and the positioned, or the placeless and the place-coded.

This has enormous repercussions for thinking the urban. It is **a new condition of the urban**.

The key terms in this journey are: attention, agency, and arousal. For this emerging spectacular mechanism of conflict and desire is bound up in the production of a “state of readiness,” whether for conflict or acquisition. It is a state of heightened attentivity and arousal that operates at the level of both perception and corporeality – where one is not only cognitively but *affectively* engaged. A form of alertness on the edge of action, where the vigilant and optimized machine-body is roused and poised to act. It is a condensation of potential motion, in which the sensorial body is restrained, which produces an illusory sense of movement. A micro-accumulation at the threshold of action, which offers, but does not deliver upon, the promise of release.

In order to articulate this state, we must avoid concentrating solely on signification and linguistic meaning, and instead rely equally on an axis of intensity – acknowledging a material reality that cannot be captured within the scrims of representation. A traversal-circuit that functions somehow like the moment of the “shot” on these pages, which mobilizes, corporealizes, and courts the changing of roles.

