

FABULATION AND PERFORMANCE OF THE KILLER IN JOSHUA OPPENHEIMER'S DOCUMENTARIES

BRUNO HACHERO HERNÁNDEZ

I. INTRODUCTION: REPRESENTATION AND ANNIHILATION: THE CASE OF THE INDONESIAN GENOCIDE

The physical destruction wrought by genocide is preceded, or accompanied, by a symbolic destruction of the *other* who is the target of the extermination. This is why representation is of crucial importance to the process. According to Frigolé (2003: 12), the symbolic destruction of the humanity of the *other* “is a prerequisite for the other’s annihilation. Genocide is the most dramatic and extreme manifestation of the denial of resemblance. Neither resemblance, nor ties, nor proximity.” Taking the Nazi genocide as the paradigm of horror in modern Europe, Jean-Luc Nancy (2005: 34) suggests that “what the camps will have brought about is, above all, a complete devastation of representation or even of the possibility of representing.” On the dilemma of whether it is appropriate to represent certain aspects of horror, Nancy asks

directly: “What became of representation itself at Auschwitz?”

This question is crucial, on the one hand, to understand the problems posed for art by the representation of horror; and on the other, to identify the representative logic that is brought into play to perpetrate the massacre. In short, what representative processes come into action to dehumanise the other to such an extent that extermination becomes possible, overcoming any hint of empathy?

With the diptych that comprises the films *The Act of Killing* (2012) and *The Look of Silence* (2014), Joshua Oppenheimer and his collaborators create a full portrait of present-day Indonesia, where the ghosts of the genocide that took the lives of more than half a million people (with some estimates placing the figure above one million) still linger. The filmmaker asserts (in HACHERO, 2015) that neither of his films attempt to represent the genocide. Instead, they explore the vestiges that Indonesia’s



The Act of Killing (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2012)

traumatic past has left in an ailing present, or how the present is founded on a recent past that still quakes in its memory. And they do this through the traces left behind: in the director's statement¹ for *The Act of Killing*, Oppenheimer recounts how he filmed two leaders of the death squads in North Sumatra for the first time in 2004—a decade later, these recordings constituted the starting point for *The Look of Silence*. On camera, the two men appeared keen to explain in full detail how they had killed more than 10,000 people in the very place where they were standing. After filming, to Oppenheimer's surprise, one of the killers took out a small camera and asked to have the moment immortalised in a snapshot with the help of a film crew member acting as photographer. Oppenheimer filmed them posing: the owner of the camera first gave a thumb's up, and then proudly made the victory sign. In the same statement, the filmmaker connects this anecdote to the heinous images of prisoners humiliated and tortured by

US soldiers at Abu Ghraib² military prison, which came out two months later. On all this, he reflects:

The most unsettling thing about these images is not the violence they document, but rather what they suggest to us about how these people wanted, in that moment, to be seen. And how they thought, in that moment, they would want to remember themselves. Moreover, performing, acting, posing appear to be part of the procedures of humiliation.

These images seem to suggest that the depiction of the violence is intimately related to its most extreme manifestations, and its assimilation by society. This idea was the seed for the two-film project in which Oppenheimer and his collaborators sought to delve beneath the surface of Indonesia's present: on the one hand, *The Act of Killing* puts into play a strategy that turns around on itself to reflect how the perpetrators of the killings see themselves and want to be seen, of how they weave a whole web of moulded stories, fantasies and memories that enable them to live with their

past; on the other, *The Look of Silence* adds to this strategy a view that is censored in Indonesian society: the view of the victim, which it juxtaposes against those of the perpetrators in encounters that are only possible thanks to cinema and the presence of the director himself. Both films, their differences notwithstanding, are based on the *fabulated* (or imaginatively reconstructed) testimony of the perpetrator, out of which a particular construction of reality is structured.

2. THE FABULATION OF THE PERPETRATOR

The crimes committed in Indonesia in the context of the coup led by General Suharto were perpetrated with US support and celebrated in the US and European media at the time. These crimes remain unpunished, many of those responsible are still in power, and there have been no initiatives for reparations, victim assistance or debate and recovery of the country's historical memory. On a few occasions (see Stevens, 2015) Oppenheimer has compared the situation to an alternate history of Europe in which the Nazis won. In such a situation, what can cinema do to restore the memory of the tragedy?

After numerous interviews³ with members of the death squads that perpetrated the genocide, the filmmaker met Anwar Congo, who would become the main character in *The Act of Killing*. The film's cinematic strategy operates on two main levels. On one level, Anwar and his companions are given the chance to stage a film in which they themselves recreate their acts, and review it on screen (while the camera films their own opinions of the footage they are watching). Cinema, as a visual imaginary, forms part of their lives and even of their killing techniques, and thus proves to be a natural vehicle for recovering their past through dramatisations, a strategy that evokes the collaborative poetics employed by Jean Rouch with his subjects in films like *I, a Negro* (Moi, un noir, 1958) or *Chronicle of a Summer* (Chronique



The look of silence (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2014)

d'un été, 1961). On the other level, Oppenheimer is concerned with the present, with teasing out how these people see themselves, and how they want to be seen in contemporary Indonesia; in short, how they can live with what they have done, and how they give meaning to their lives based on it. To this end, the director complements these scenes with an interactive filming of their conversations, demonstrations, and different moments of their everyday lives. However, this strategy is based on an intense and intimate relationship with them—in the tradition of Robert Flaherty and his method of living with his subjects for an extended period—to produce a dramatic work that involves months of filming and the filmmaker's manifest involvement in what he is filming.

The first image of *The Act of Killing* is of a huge building in the shape of a fish, out of which emerges a line of women dancing in synchrony. The next shot shows Anwar Congo and Herman Koto, two men directly responsible for the extermination of thousands of people in North Sumatra, under a majestic waterfall, their arms outstretched and their expressions evoking relief and serenity. A voice, amplified by a megaphone, gives orders to the women who are positioned around them to smile and express peace and happiness on their faces. "These are the first shots!" barks the voice. "Don't let the cameras catch you with a long

face! Smile! Real joy, not just pleasure! And natural beauty! This isn't a farce!" The shot then changes, the film shoot is over and some assistants are giving out towels to the actresses, who are visibly distressed by the extreme humidity of the place. The farce is exposed. From this point, a distance is revealed that is partly comical, partly critical, which Francisco Montero (2013) has astutely explained as follows: "the whole film is founded on the contrast between the high level of awareness of its creators and the aberrant lack of awareness of its protagonists."



The Act of Killing (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2012)

This level of self-exhibition, of celebration of a heinous past, is what differentiates the Indonesian situation from other genocides whose perpetrators were defeated and neutralised, or whose societies have engaged in reparations processes. The Shoah constitutes the paradigmatic case, and Claude Lanzmann established a canon that has become a moral benchmark for the treatment of such horrors in documentary cinema. In his film *Shoah* (1985), Lanzmann resorts to the word as the only legitimate way of recounting the horror without showing what has no possible image. However, he uses a hidden camera to interview the former SS soldier Franz Suchomel while he explains the operation of Auschwitz. The executioner's testimony is not only meticulously or-

chestrated; it is also obtained without his consent, with Lanzmann promising, in front of the camera, that his identity will be protected.

Rithy Panh is a somewhat different case, and also more honest with his interview subjects. In *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (2003), he films the memory of the Cambodian genocide, including prison guards at the S-21 extermination camp, recreating the actions and words of the Khmer horror of which they were the perpetrators. Panh's film was shot at the camp itself, now converted into a memorial to the tragedy, with special attention to gestures as a means of accessing the past. There is a crucial difference here from Lanzmann's approach: for Panh, the question of the executioner's humanity is clear: "He's human at every instant; that's the reason why he can be judged and condemned. No one can rightly authorize himself to humanize or dehumanize anyone" (PANH, 2013: 54). Based on this recognition, the executioner's testimony can constitute a privileged source of information on the routines and practices of the extermination, as the French-Cambodian filmmaker himself explains:

Often, during the filming of *S21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*, I ask the "comrade guards" to "make the gestures" of the period for my camera. I specify that I am not asking them to "act" but to "make the gestures", a way of extending their words. If necessary they start, stop, and start again ten or twenty times. Their reflexes return; I see what really happened. Or what's impossible. *The method and the truth of the extermination appear* (PANH, 2013: 80, italics added).

These perpetrators cannot live in their own past (note Panh's clarification: he did not ask them to "act", but to "make the gestures"), nor are they given the opportunity to do so in either of the two films. There is a distance marked by the filmmaker himself from the staging that conditions the scope of the testimonies to a particular ethics of representation. With Panh or Lanzmann, the executioners cannot be free, although Panh opens up

their expressive possibilities more, offering a new path for exploring the testimony of the tragedy from the point of view of the perpetrator. Even a filmmaker like Avi Mograbi feels the need to complete the killer's testimony in *Z32* (2008) with his own reflections interspersed with Brechtian digressions distanced from and problematising the film itself, conveying to the spectator the moral dilemma posited by the filmmaker. Oppenheimer himself criticizes Lanzmann's position in the following terms:

Lanzmann draws a red line around the question of why the perpetrators did what they did. I don't draw that line. By approaching them as human beings, I try to understand how. Through the question of how they live with what they've done, how they narrate what they've done, how they want to be seen, and how they see themselves, I then try to glimpse why they did what they did at the time. Lanzmann famously said that it's obscene to ask that question "why." I utterly disagree. I think if we want to understand how human beings do this to each other—because every act of evil in our history has been committed by human beings—we have to look at the people who do it as human beings and understand how and why they do this (Oppenheimer, quoted in LUSZTIG, 2013: 52).

The difference in Oppenheimer's treatment of the executioner compared with these earlier filmmakers is basically twofold. First of all, the heroic nature of genocide in contemporary Indonesian society allows for a range of different approaches that prove particularly interesting for exploring human evil in a context where it has been celebrated rather than repressed. Anwar Congo, in this sense, is not merely a mass murderer. From the outset, he declares with a sense of martyrdom that he has nightmares about what he did. His conception of himself, at least at the beginning of the film, is that of a kind of tragic hero who sacrificed himself for his country, and thus he constitutes an opportunity to explore in depth whether a human being can live in peace after committing

such heinous acts. In this way, both films examine a country whose society has been built on genocide, celebrating the massacre as a foundational act and, therefore, introducing into its imaginary an acceptance of the annihilation of many of its compatriots, fellow Indonesians labelled with an intolerable otherness whose representation has been meticulously shaped by the regime itself: in *The Act of Killing*, Anwar Congo is seen sitting in front of a television set showing a film produced by the government on the killings of communists, in which the victims are depicted as horrendously as possible in an effort to justify their extermination. Anwar explains that some children were traumatised by the film—which is compulsory viewing in schools—but despite it all he felt proud to have killed "the communists, who look so cruel in the film." These are stories that shape the conscience.



The Act of Killing (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2012)

The second difference in Oppenheimer's treatment of the executioner lies in the filmmaker's development of a sympathetic relationship with him, giving him his own voice and creative freedom, and the design of a whole dramatic process extended over time in order to explore how the killer assimilates his past and expresses his identity in the film's representation. In short, the ethical approach arising from Oppenheimer's film aesthetic, dramatic work and mise-en-scène, creates a horizontal relationship and an intimacy with the killer resulting from an intense en-

agement with him, based on a genuine desire to understand. In this way, the filmmaker explores the need to tell that sometimes afflicts those who have committed such heinous acts: apart from Anwar's verbosity, perhaps the most paradigmatic case in the two films is Amir Hasan, the art teacher in *The Look of Silence* who illustrated a book about the killings he committed on Snake River. Oppenheimer, however, explores these acts by questioning the official story through the words of the executioner, but also questioning the words of the executioner through the cinematic medium and the performance for the camera, to offer us an image as problematic as the reality he is filming. Into this intimacy with his subject Oppenheimer inserts small digressions that contrast with the discourse of the executioners: the opinions expressed in the control room while Anwar appears on a television program in *The Act of Killing*, or the first shots of shopkeepers clearly being extorted by one of them. It is paradoxical that the counterpoint that most clearly reveals the inconsistencies of Anwar's discourse is also one of the most cynical and transparent killers in the film: Adi Zulkadry, whose extreme cynicism arises precisely from a rejection of all these stories and fantasies that others seem to need in order to live with what they've done.

In his landmark study of documentary filmmaking, Bill Nichols (1991: 34) suggests that "if there is one overriding ethical/political/ideological question to documentary filmmaking, it may be, What to do with people? How can people and issues be represented appropriately?" Taking this question to the representational limit constituted by the horror, and the moral limit constituted by giving a voice to the killer (mass killer, in this case), Oppenheimer's diptych represents a milestone in documentary filmmaking that follows in the tradition of filmmakers like Rithy Panh or Avi Mograbi to take their idea even further: while Panh confronts executioners and survivors at the very heart of the Khmer horror in *S21: The Khmer*

Rouge Killing Machine, and Mograbi inserted the on-camera testimonials of a killer in *Z32* (a reflective, essay-style documentary that turns back on itself to assess its own moral burden), Oppenheimer literally brings the killer's mind to the screen in order to reassess it from his own perspective, to explore it and illuminate it through dramatisation in a strategy that turns around on itself, and that has Anwar Congo himself as its active, conscious subject. Throughout this process, Oppenheimer maintains his position as an outside observer who provides a clear point of view in contrast with the delusional dramatisations directed by Congo, and who vests the documentary with meaning through the editing process. In spite of all this, his intimacy with Congo is manifest and evident, and constitutes one of the choices—perhaps one of the riskiest in ethical terms—made by the filmmaker.

On numerous occasions, Oppenheimer has identified Jean Rouch as his biggest filmmaking influence, and it is no accident that we can find

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features in Rouch's poetics that serve to better understand the relationship established by Oppenheimer in his films with the Indonesian reality, and more specifically with the people who appear in his film. In *Moi, un noir* Rouch portrays the lives of young Nigerians in the city of Abidjan, in Ivory Coast. In the film's opening words, Rouch explains how he proposed to them "to shoot a film where they would play their own roles, where they would have the right to do and say whatever

they wanted.” Thus, Rouch films Oumarou Ganda and Petit Touré, who in turn create two fictitious characters through which to *fabulate* a particular story: Edward G. Robinson and Eddie Constantine. To bring us closer to the lives of Ganda and Touré, Rouch allows them to invent two identities through which to create a particular story which, in fact, will ultimately speak to us of their reality, of how they both perceive the world around them and inscribe themselves in it:

Fabulation reaffirms the reality of the character precisely because the character is real and does not use fabulation as a model but as a power. In the course of this fabulation the character becomes another, is another, and takes his people with him: fiction drawn from reality modulates the voice of the people (SÁNCHEZ, 2013: 220).

In the section of his book *Cinema II: The Time-Image* dedicated to Jean Rouch, the philosopher Gilles Deleuze outlines the concept of “simulation of a story”, and suggests that this is when “cinema can call itself *cinéma vérité*, all the more because it will have destroyed every model of the true so as to become creator and producer of truth” (2013: 156). This idea of the simulated story alludes to the abandonment of the *true form* in the search for another truth that can only be attained through cinematic investigation, through a different conception of film depiction.

If we return to Montero’s idea of the contrast between the high level of awareness of the filmmakers and the aberrant lack of awareness of the protagonists in *The Act of Killing*, we can see clearly that the involvement that Oppenheimer allows to Anwar and the other killers is different from the freedom that Rouch gave his subjects. While Rouch sought to build bridges towards a shared ethnography in cinema, Oppenheimer maintains a critical view, a final judgement with respect to what is being filmed, that does not leave the film entirely in the hands of his subjects. In the words of Benedict Anderson (in TEN BRINK and OPPEN-

HEIMER, 2012: 284), “he is not part of their film but they are part of his.”

The discursive tools conceived by Rouch are brought into play here through different technical possibilities—and, therefore, a different relationship with the subject based on those possibilities. In the publication that accompanies the critical edition of Rouch’s films produced by Intermedio, Fran Benavente offers an overview of his work that unpacks different elements of his personal poetics. Thus, he proposes the concept of “double movement” (2009: 34), which blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction and allows characters to wander freely across it. It is precisely this double movement that offers such a complex image of Anwar Congo in one of the last staged scenes in *The Act of Killing*, when the *noir* fiction re-enactment causes him to collapse in an unusual moment of empathy. Benavente (2009: 43) expands on the explanation of this concept as a “double movement between the one filming and the one filmed: a kind of feedback loop.” This mechanism finds its maximum expression in digital technology, which allows Anwar to see himself on screen and assess his own performance for the camera. In this way, Oppenheimer’s strategy creates a dual space which, on the one hand, contains the representation conceived by the killer himself, while on the other, turns around to include the killer assessing himself, questioning his own representation and, in this way, questioning the whole representation offered by the film. It will be this same contortion of the strategy that makes it possible to turn the space around again for the creation of *The Look of Silence*, a film in which this time it is the victim who assesses the killer’s “performance”.

3. PERFORMANCE AND TRUTH

To understand how non-fiction film works, and why, as a medium, it is one of the most insightful ways that we humans have for exploring our na-

ture, the key lies in the fact that we are performative beings. We are inhabiting languages and stories. And if we work with the natural performance that comes when anyone is being filmed, that can be even more insightful. Situations can be created where extraordinary things happen that you never would have dreamed of (Oppenheimer in HACHERO, 2015).

In his theorisation on the observational documentary, Nichols (1991: 42) introduces the concept of the *social actor* “to stress the degree to which individuals represent themselves to others.” In this way, the researcher identifies an equivalence between the performative processes of the individuals who appear in a documentary and the processes brought into play in fiction films. “Social actors, people, retain the capacity to act within the historical arena where they perform.” In this sense, what kind of truth does the documentary offer?

In the ending to *Chronicle of a Summer*, Rouch and Morin screen the rough cut of the film for its protagonists, together with a diverse group of other people. After the screening, and with the camera filming them, they ask them what they thought of the movie. Conflicting positions emerge between those who connected intimately with the characters, those who criticise them for an obscene or immodest sincerity, and those who comment precisely on a lack of naturalness. Morin reduces this to two diametrically opposed poles, between the excess or lack of sincerity of the subjects. In any case, this scene raises a substantial doubt about the film. In response to what the filmmakers view as the brutal sincerity of their subjects, Morin suggests that the audience viewed them either as comedians or as exhibitionists, and therefore their film was a failure, because they were neither one of these. Rouch concludes by problematising the matter even further: “we cannot know, and nor can they.”

A little earlier, one of the children in the audience had responded emphatically to the dilemma of what they had seen on the screen: “it’s true; you

can’t lie to the camera.” This categorical assertion by a child may seem naive, but behind it lies an equally categorical truth: there is a trace of reality that is revealed to the camera, related to what Jean-Louis Comolli once insightfully observed:

The filmmaking process proves that there is in each person an unconscious awareness of the gaze of the other, and that this awareness is expressed in the adoption of a posture, because it incites and seeks that posture and because it records it, because it inscribes its mark. Inevitably, the filmed subject identifies the round black eye of the camera as a materialised gaze of the other. With an unconscious but certain knowledge, the subject knows that being filmed means exposing oneself to the other (COMOLLI, 2002: 135).

In front of the camera, we make a particular choice in our own self-portrayal. Beyond the question of whether the performance is consistent with the person who performs it or the topic explored by the documentary, in itself it constitutes a gaze, and therefore a truth. Comolli explores this further, criticising the idea of *mise-en-scène* as a single gaze, the director’s, realised from the camera to the filmed subject. For Comolli (2002: 136), “each one, filmmaker included, is under the gaze of the others and even objects, when they return our gaze, return it to us charged with them, altered by them.” In this sense, the performative documentary conceived by Oppenheimer includes the gazes of his subjects by giving them performative space and creative freedom.

Anyone I film also comes to the filmic encounter with his (her) habitus, that tightly woven fabric, that network of learned gestures, acquired reflexes, assimilated postures, to the point of having become unconscious, which make him (her), depending on the field involved [...], appear compromised and caught off guard in the *mise-en-scène* [...] (COMOLLI, 2002: 138).

This performative space that Oppenheimer constructs thus becomes a strategy that gives the perpetrator the freedom to fabulate or dramatise



The look of silence (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2014)

his past while at the same time critically assessing his gaze. Through the editing process, Oppenheimer places images constructed by the perpetrators into relation with one another, images from the propaganda film produced by the authorities about the massacres, images of the terrorised masses, images of conversations that expose the fallacies being presented, images of victims viewing the statements of the perpetrators... In short, the portrait covers a range of gazes that reflect the real identity of Indonesia, and above all the fictional nature of its manipulated history and the false myths that the killers have constructed about the massacre. The performances and fabrications of the perpetrators of the Indonesian genocide are inscribed in a wider filmic discourse that places them in context.

But it goes further still, as it also assesses the gaze of the spectator. By refusing to include his own moral dilemmas in the film, as Mograbi did, Oppenheimer leaves the spectator to be the one who tackles the dilemma, furthermore confronted by modes of representation that bring into play codes as diverse as performance, interviewing, archive footage or the blunt confrontation filmed (and facilitated) by the camera. In his reflections on Rouch, Sergi Sánchez (2013: 224) considers how digital technology facilitated an evolution of his ethnographic poetics towards a different relationship with the filmed subject:

How does this “I am other” that seemed to govern Rouch’s ethnographic work change with the rise of digital technology? We could say that the formula becomes more specific: the “anyone” is specified as a second person singular that includes the individual and the collective, that retains the influence of the foreign culture and condenses it into the all-encompassing ‘you’, that speaks with the voice of a complex and multifaceted ‘I’. From the “I am other” that Godard and Deleuze associated with Rouch’s project we move to this “I am you” imposed by digital technology.

It is an intimate and specific relationship with the filmed subject that could take shape in those encounters between victim and perpetrator that structure *The Look of Silence*, where Oppenheimer opens up a whole new possibility of dialogue and confrontation unimaginable until then in a society like Indonesia’s. Cinema as intervention in reality, as a form of thought that unravels the false stories to move towards a particular truth which, in turn, makes political action possible.

When, at the end of *The Act of Killing*, Anwar returns to the rooftop and tries to reproduce his testimony at the beginning of the film, shot months earlier, his body doubles over and he seems to want to vomit itself up. There is a psychosomatic reaction to his own testimony, to the place and, in short, to the traumatic past. There is an identity crisis in the subject, who doesn’t know how to perform there where months earlier he had explained and re-enacted his killing method in full detail, ending the demonstration with an obscene final dance in the same place where he had taken the lives of a thousand people. After the experience of filming *The Act of Killing*, Anwar is *the other*. Empathy has blurred his personal fantasies, and his *character* falls apart on camera. The fantasies that permit Anwar to deal with his past are no longer sustained even in his story. Cinema thus reveals its capacity to travel to the place of the other through performance itself. The processes of representation that the perpetrators



The Act of Killing (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2012)

bring into place are exposed as fragile by a cinema that *writes* in that same code, speaks the same language and, for this very reason, can unravel the intricacies of the images, the gestures, the words and the faces, and tease out the truth they offer through a particular critical mise-en-scène. In front of the camera, Anwar's body cannot lie, nor can the sweaty faces of the killer's family in the confrontation with Adi in *The Look of Silence*.

In an interview conducted by Joshua Oppenheimer and Joram ten Brink with Rithy Panh (in TEN BRINK and OPPENHEIMER, 2012: 248), the Cambodian filmmaker refers to the incomparable capacity of cinema to express what happens to a face when it confesses "I have killed." The power of filmmaking to explore the unspeakable. This is a key feature of the films that have explored such horrors, from Lanzmann to Panh, Mograbi and Oppenheimer themselves, and which, through the poetics of performance, assumes a different ontology, penetrating the killer's own mind to pose the question to the spectator of what the truth is. While Rithy Panh discovered the method and the truth of the Cambodian extermination in the expressions of the prison guards in *S-21*, Joshua Oppenheimer orients his film methodology towards the staging of the mythical story that made the Indonesian genocide possible, and that even today sustains its memory upon those who perpetrated it. In their obscene celebration lies the same symbolic destruction of the other that makes all



genocide possible, and which Oppenheimer is able to explore through the cinematic medium. Through the codes of a simulated story, Oppenheimer offers us that truth referred to by Deleuze (2013: 156) as "not a cinema of truth, but *the truth of cinema*." ■

NOTES

- 1 The director's statement can be consulted on the "Statements" page of the film's website: <http://theactofkilling.com/statements/>
- 2 These images are interrogated and problematised in the documentary *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008), in which Errol Morris explores the (self-)portrayal of soldiers in the pictures they took and how the violence of torture is also deployed in performative codes.
- 3 These interviews were conducted from 2003 to 2005, when Oppenheimer first met the protagonists of *The Act of Killing*. More information on this process can be found in the press notes for the film (p. 14), which can be downloaded from the film's website.

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FABULATION AND PERFORMANCE OF THE KILLER IN JOSHUA OPPENHEIMER'S DOCUMENTARIES

Abstract

With the diptych that comprises the films *The Act of Killing* (2012) and *The Look of Silence* (2014), Joshua Oppenheimer and his collaborators create a full portrait of present-day Indonesia, where the ghosts of the genocide that took the lives of more than half a million people still linger. The filmmaker asserts that neither of his films attempt to represent the genocide. Instead, they explore the vestiges that Indonesia's traumatic past has left in an ailing present, through two strategies: first, *The Act of Killing* examines the stories, fantasies and false myths that the perpetrators create to be able to live with their heinous past, and how they see themselves and want to be seen; and then, *The Look of Silence* uses the perpetrators' testimonies to instigate a kind of political intervention in Indonesian society that would allow the victims to finally confront the killers. It is a dual story that poses various dilemmas for the spectator, ranging from the ethics of the filmmaker to the ontology of the documentary making itself.

Key words

Fabulation; Performance; Genocide and Film; Perpetrator; Indonesian Genocide; Documentary Film; Ethnography.

Author

Bruno Hachero Hernández (b. 1988) is a predoctoral fellow at Universitat Pompeu Fabra, as well as a film critic and essayist. He is member of the Centre for Aesthetic Research on Audiovisual Media (CINEMA), where he is pursuing his doctoral thesis on the documenting of horror in contemporary documentary film. Contact: bruno.hachero@upf.edu.

Article reference

HACHERO HERNÁNDEZ, Bruno (2016). Fabulation and Performance of the Killer in Joshua Oppenheimer's Documentaries. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 23, 159-170.

FABULACIÓN Y PERFORMANCE DEL ASESINO EN LOS DOCUMENTALES DE JOSHUA OPPENHEIMER

Resumen

Con el díptico que componen *The Act of Killing* (2012) y *La mirada del silencio* (The Look of Silence, 2014) Joshua Oppenheimer y sus colaboradores crean un completo retrato del presente de Indonesia, donde aún permanecen los fantasmas del genocidio que acabó con más de medio millón de personas. El realizador mantiene que ninguno de sus filmes pretende representar el genocidio. En lugar de eso, sus películas exploran los residuos que el pasado traumático de Indonesia ha dejado en un presente enfermo a través de dos estrategias: por un lado, *The Act of Killing* profundiza en las historias, fantasías y falsos mitos que los perpetradores elaboran para vivir con su pasado abyecto, y en cómo se ven a sí mismos y quieren ser vistos; por otro, *La mirada del silencio* parte de los testimonios de los perpetradores para generar una intervención política en la sociedad indonesia que permita a las víctimas confrontar, por fin, a los asesinos. Un doble relato que plantea diversos dilemas al espectador, que van desde la ética del cineasta hasta la propia ontología del documental.

Palabras clave

Fabulación; performance; genocidio y cine; perpetrador; genocidio indonesio; documental; etnografía.

Autor

Bruno Hachero Hernández (1988) es investigador predoctoral en la Universitat Pompeu Fabra, crítico y ensayista cinematográfico. Es miembro del Colectivo de Investigación Estética de los Medios Audiovisuales (CINEMA), grupo de investigación desde el que desarrolla su tesis doctoral sobre la memoria del horror en el cine documental contemporáneo. Contacto: bruno.hachero@upf.edu.

Referencia de este artículo

HACHERO HERNÁNDEZ, Bruno (2016). Fabulación y performance del asesino en los documentales de Joshua Oppenheimer. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 23, 159-170.

Edita / Published by



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ISSN 1885-3730 (print) / 2340-6992 (digital) DL V-5340-2003 WEB www.revistaatalante.com MAIL info@revistaatalante.com
