

TEN BRINK, Joram and OPPENHEIMER, Joshua (eds.) *Killer Images. Documentary Film, Memory and the Performance of Violence*

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Bruno Hachero Hernández

‘Cinema has long shaped not only how political violence, from torture to warfare to genocide, is perceived, but also how it is performed’

With this original idea, written by the editors in the introduction of *Killer Images*, it is easy to see the deep bonds that connect this theoretical-analytical work with the Indonesian film diptych by Joshua Oppenheimer that includes *The Act of Killing* (2012) and *The Look of Silence* (2015). Both the production of the two films and the editing of this volume are part of the project *Genocide and Genre* of the University of Westminster, directed by Joram ten Brink himself. It suggests ‘developing innovative cinematographic methodologies to explore the memory, the stories and the performance of genocidal violence’. A project that develops towards the cinematographic intervention, but also towards the theoretical reflection that explores the links between horror, memory and cinema. In it, both theorists and filmmakers take part, because of the double condition of the editors – academic and cinematographic. With the certainty that cinema has a fundamental role in these violent practices, ten Brink and Oppenheimer suggest in this volume a collective approach to the possibilities, limits and questions that the cinematographic image sets out nowadays in relation to political violence.

From healing images to killing images, the collection of works analyzed in this volume deals not only with cinema, but also with television image, animation, video activism or photography. The result is a corpus that shows different possibilities image has to document violence, and also a possible cinematographic journey that takes us from Glauber Rocha, Jean Rouch, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Lanzmann or Peter Watkins to several contemporary filmmakers who have faced this issue from problematic and innovative perspectives: Harun Farocki, Avi Mograbi, Rithy Panh, Errol Morris and Joshua Oppenheimer himself.

In the study that introduces the volume, Thomas Keenaan reveals how the image can become a field of action for violence just by being there; a TV camera during the Bosnian War could kill. A key idea to understand Avi Mograbi’s cinema in Israeli checkpoints, or the video resistance of collectives like Burma VJ or of the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, to mention an example that does not appear in the book. Because of this, the use of virtual images for the training or post-traumatic treatment for soldiers reveals a double potentiality of images to access horror. Thinking along the same lines with the research on documentaries about the Nazi genocide, Brian Winston analyses how the limits of representation that Lanzmann wanted to set in his *Shoah* (1985) are surpassed by animation as a way to visually reach *ostranenie* in front of horror. On the other hand, Joram ten Brink deals with the re-enactment in cinema as a process of critical thinking borrowed from historiography. Ten Brink wonders about the possibilities of this method, whose cinematographic referent is *La Commune (Paris, 1971)* (2000) by Peter Watkins, in order to reach a new knowledge of violence. In the last contributions several film possibilities close to this idea take form: Rithy Panh, witness and archive of the Cambodian genocide; Avi Mograbi and the killing soldier of Z32 (2008); Errol Morris and the images of Abu Ghraib, and Joshua Oppenheimer, who in a reflection alongside Michael Uwemedino, introduces the concept of *archaeological performance* as a cinematographic method that works with gestures, routines and rituals from the past to stage it in the present. The method consists of two processes: on the one hand, the *historical excavation*, which requires different strata through which we can go deep, and the *histrionic reconstruction*, which adds layers of meaning through the performance and the stage, and which is the base of the cinematographic *dispositif* of *The Act of Killing*.

As a whole, *Killer Images* presents itself to the public as a plural reflection that, based on a careful hermeneutics of the images, inquires into new possibilities of dealing with political violence

through cinema. The body and the word are, while being performative, ways of writing reality. Thus, cinema, as a way of operating through body and image, can be a powerful line of research about evil to restore a memory in which there are too many silences. Oppenheimer's films are a good example of this, of how the cinematographic research can be transferred to practice, and of how the main value of these pages lies in their

willingness to make way to cinematographic creation. By that, he sets the bases of a whole contemporary cinema movement around horror and its practices, which, along the way, seems to want to reinvent documentary cinema, with a foot in practice and another beyond, in some place where theory appears. •