

This Time with Feeling: Impunity and the Play of Fantasy in *The Act of Killing*

Zahid R. Chaudhary

1. Tabled

In one of the shocking moments in the documentary *The Act of Killing* (2012), a former death squad leader, Anwar Congo, rumored to have killed close to a thousand people in the 1965–66 Cold War pogrom against “communists” in Indonesia, recalls, “It was like we were killing happily.” He describes one of his killing methods: the victim would be placed on the floor, with a table leg positioned on their neck. Anwar and other male youth would then sit on the table, bopping up and down, sometimes singing, and as he puts it, “having fun.” Anwar’s admission is shocking because it evokes wonder at how one could be playing, singing, and “having fun” while committing atrocities. Such shock might rise to disgust for spectators, an affect that appears singularly missing in Anwar’s own account. How could they knowingly do this?

I am grateful to many readers, in particular Leo Bersani, Simon Gikandi, Natalie Melas, Sarah Rivett, Gayle Salamon, Diana Fuss, and the brilliant interlocutors on the Committee on Globalization and Social Change at CUNY Grad Center, especially Anthony Alesandrini, Susan Buck-Morss, Grace Davie, Joan Scott, and Gary Wilder.

boundary 2 45:4 (2018) DOI 10.1215/01903659-7142729 © 2018 by Duke University Press

Such knowledge is, of course, hardly a straightforward affair: psychoanalysis teaches us that being aware of something is not the same as being conscious of it. In Jacques Lacan's seminar on ethics, he writes, "We would be quite wrong to think that [. . .] men are incapable of transgressing given limits without knowing what they are doing" (Lacan 1992: 199).¹ Lacan's seminar is an extended meditation on the implications of that reality for ethical action. Yet the scene that Anwar Congo describes involves more than the fact of knowledge or its distortion—it involves feeling and emotion alongside knowledge (including self-knowledge): "having fun" instead of horror and disgust. Killing with impunity seems to entail its own affective economy. *The Act of Killing* documents the feints and contortions of self-knowledge on the part of genocidal perpetrators, knowledge that, like the emotions that might attend it, remains detectable in the forms of its distortions. Psychoanalysis provides us with an account not only of the place of knowledge but also of drives, affects, and desires, each susceptible to a degree of transformation in the passage across the conscious and unconscious realms, and each bearing upon the possibility of ethical action. In this essay, I will explore the psychology of impunity, including its affects and the ethical claims these affects engage. How to understand the abyss that lies between what is and what ought to be when the destructive energies that underwrite our relations with others are so intimately tied to the good that might emerge from those relations? How might our notions of what ought to be take stock of the negativity that has not ceased haunting our relations with others?² Such questions require opening up the very domain of ethical action by refusing to assume a normative ethical subject in advance. My aim is not to enfold extreme cases like mass killings in an aura of ambiguity or in any way suggest that the perpetrators are off the hook but to explore what else the table—the very figure of philosophical object lessons from Plato to Marx—teaches. That is, I aim to consider how such cases become possible.

Regarding the normative subject of ethics, it was too hasty an assumption on my part to generalize a spectator of the documentary, who would feel the disgust missing on the part of Anwar Congo and his friends. What might it mean to bracket, even temporarily, the forms of spectatorship solicited by the human rights formation of atrocity, of images of suffering intended to spark a properly placed emotion (whether disgust, outrage,

1. Bracketed ellipses here and throughout are mine.

2. Leo Bersani's work remains the most sustained elaboration of the violence that underlies intimate relations. See, especially, Bersani and Phillips 2008; Bersani 2015, 1986.

sympathy, horror)?³ What might it mean to learn from *The Act of Killing* by holding in abeyance liberal humanist assumptions about the “we” that constitute its audience? Psychoanalysis can be deployed as a form of social critique and as an optic; as a reading practice, it allows me simultaneously to preserve the sense of horror concerning the mass killings of 1965–66 and at the same time trace the operations of fantasy that outlive that horror. While psychoanalysis, like most conceptual frames emerging out of a European tradition, has been criticized by some for being inadequate to non-European realities,⁴ it is also the case that psychoanalysis itself has been significantly transformed by its non-European practices: from Frantz Fanon’s clinic in colonial Algeria to Robert Lemelson’s contemporary work on trauma in Indonesia.⁵ Psychoanalysis is insightful or durable only insofar as its categories may be transformed, emphasized differently, or discarded along the way. Whether this essay succeeds in deploying psychoanalysis in a way that is generative for understanding the postcolonial realities I consider here will be up to the reader to judge. The layered vocabulary that psychoanalysis provides for thinking about desire, fantasy, affects, and the comportment toward death is what I find insightful when considering the complex performances and reenactments in *The Act of Killing*.

Fantasy, for example, underwrites the operations of disgust, which itself, in any case, carries its own form of fascination, secretly bidding the disgusting object to seep more of its effluvium. Perhaps this is why revulsion feels so immediate, natural, and decisive. Yet revulsion at one’s own deeds would have to be socially mediated, like all experiences of disgust insofar as disgust regulates the social. Such regulation cannot, of course, in itself assure ethical certitude. From Georges Bataille’s valorization of disgust (Bataille and Hollier 1988), to Mary Douglas’s classic study *Purity and Danger* (Douglas 1966), to Aurel Kolnai’s phenomenological meditations on disgust (Kolnai 2004), to Julia Kristeva’s reflections on the abject (Kristeva 1982), to more recent accounts of the operations of disgust (Miller 1997; Brinkema 2014; McGinn 2011; Menninghaus 2003), a common thread

3. The scholarship on violence and its representation is a vast and rich field of its own. For particularly insightful work on the intersection of human rights discourse with images of atrocity, see Azoulay 2014; Linfield 2012; Rangan 2017; Sliwinski 2011.

4. This critique can often feel predictable, but Gayatri Spivak’s variant of this critique is productive because it does more than level an accusation of Eurocentrism (Spivak 1993).

5. Lemelson is a scholar and a filmmaker. See, in particular, his films *40 Years of Silence* (2009) and *Afflictions: Culture and Mental Illness in Indonesia* (2010). Also see Lemelson et al. 2010.

emerges in the consideration of disgust: an unsteady oscillation between intimacy and distance, repression and acknowledgment, revulsion and attraction. Disgust arises from that which cannot be easily metabolized, assimilated, or incorporated. In “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,” Freud notes that “the sexual instinct in its strength enjoys overriding this disgust” evoked by genitals of the other (Freud 1953e: 152). Pleasure is not outside the ambit of disgust but is instead its secret sharer. Disgust seems on the surface to be an unequivocal affect, yet the simplicity of turning away from the disgusting object in no way resolves disgust’s fundamental ambivalences, ambivalences that unfold in politically divergent forms. For example, if police brutality against black people is one form of disgust in action, then Black Lives Matter as a movement is a response to that disgust, based as it is on a fundamental disgust with the fact that black lives are deemed not to matter. Black Lives Matter’s political charge stems, in part, from mirroring the original disgust and calling attention to it.⁶ Disgust attends the killing of black citizens with impunity, and in the reflecting mirror of the social reaction against that impunity disgust reemerges as a supreme ethical imperative. In that mirroring, critical changes also take place that transmute disgust into outrage, anger, and empathy. Such displacements of affect, whether by means of social formations or by means of performance and media are what concern me here in this exploration of the psychology of impunity. Although deeply enmeshed in the history of violence we inherit, disgust itself casts a wider net. Antiwar movements, anti-torture movements in general, and Joshua Oppenheimer’s films in particular, rely on the operations of disgust. And yet the execution videos released online by Daesh also rely on disgust for their terrorizing effects,⁷ and in the increasingly mediated forms of contemporary drone warfare the foreclosure of disgust marks the inhumanity of digital war that is all too real elsewhere—disgust, in its absence too, can enable violence.⁸

6. Thanks to Gayle Salamon for drawing attention to this as a form of mirroring. The mirroring process continues in the reactionary slogans “Blue Lives Matter” or “All Lives Matter.”

7. Roxanne Euben (2015) astutely analyzes Daesh execution videos as fantasies of masculine domination.

8. Whether disgust leads to violence or to nonviolence, as an affect it assumes proximity, even intimacy. Aurel Kolnai notes that “one particular aspect of proximity constitutes—though by no means alone—the character of disgust. This is its will to be near, its non-self-containedness, or as I would rather put it, its shameless and unrestrained forcing itself upon us” (2004: 41).

2. Impunity

For Anwar's part, the conditions that lead up to the scene of killing, and that extend into the present time of his narration, are conditions of impunity that he and his compatriots have enjoyed since the atrocities were committed. That impunity was made possible socially by an overlapping set of geopolitical and local processes, represented in the documentary by means of metaphor and metonymy. In the sequence where Anwar speaks of the table used as a weapon, he is dressed in a cowboy outfit and wears a large pink hat, and this disclosure is intended as information for the reenactment. So the former killers sit again on the table, dressed in Wild West outfits, a filled sack near the table leg signifying a human body, and begin singing the well-known Indonesian song "Halo Halo Bandung," which contains the telling line "city of memories" (*kota kenang-kenangan*). The song, composed during the revolutionary war by Ismail Marzuki, commemorates the self-sacrifice of the city's residents who burned the city instead of allowing it to be reinvaded by colonial forces. The juxtaposition with the previous disclosure signals the distance between the hopes of a decolonial politics—hopes that would crystallize in the Bandung Conference of 1955—and the state of Indonesia in 1965, when Cold War games had already put into play the processes that would render the hopes of decolonization a distant fantasy, a mere scrim on the surface of upheavals that would prepare the world for emerging orders of neoliberal rationality. So much for the 1955 plans for cooperation between Asia and Africa, of the scope for cultural and economic experimentation that the demise of colonialism seemed to open up.

The Cold War is the mediating and transitional link between the promises of Bandung and the continued impunity the death squad leaders and the Indonesian state enjoy. A June 19, 1966, headline in the *New York Times* reported the atrocities in Indonesia as "A Gleam of Light in Asia" (Reston 1966), and *Time* magazine, in a cheery cover story, celebrated the atrocities even as the magazine noted that scores of people were decapitated, and that "so many bodies were thrown into the Brantas River that Kediri townsfolk are still afraid to eat fish—and communities downstream had to take emergency measures to prevent an outbreak of the plague" (*Time* 1966, 23). The magazine presents these details as triumphal, not tragic, concluding that the killings are "the West's Best News for Years in Asia" (26). Within the scope of the documentary, the United States is intimately proximate to Indonesia. While the documentary does not explicitly address the extent of US involvement in the mass killings, America makes several appearances in the diegesis: the abstract shots of American-style malls with their fluo-

rescent lighting (with one mall lobby displaying a replica of Paul Manship's golden Prometheus statue from Rockefeller Center); the McDonald's sign on which the camera lingers repeatedly; the exhortation by one of the death squad leaders to the amateur actors assembled for a critical scene depicting the rape, pillage, and burning of a village: "Think positive! Think positive!"

In 1965, General Suharto, with the support of Western governments, had led a successful coup in Indonesia against left-leaning president Sukarno and began the mass killings immediately upon his assumption of power, a period designated by him as the New Order. The coup was a response to the killing of six army generals by elite guards connected to President Sukarno, a group known as the 30 September Movement. Whether this event signified a mutiny internal to the army or had some other origin (including the CIA) remains open to debate, but it is clear that the army leaders in charge of the coup, with the barely concealed help of the CIA and the Pentagon, used the opportunity to destroy the Communist Party of Indonesia (the PKI). Not only did the army spearhead a media campaign that saturated the airwaves and the newspapers with grisly tales of violent communist excess, but with assistance from its auxiliaries, including a paramilitary group populated by petty gangsters known as the Pemuda Pancasila, the army carried out mass killings, targeting "communists," a label that included intellectuals, members of the communist party, as well as the ethnic Chinese. The death toll is contested, hovering between 500,000 and over two million dead. Eventually, October 1 was proclaimed a national day of celebration, of the victory over communism. In 1984, the government released a four-hour propaganda film, entitled *The Treachery of the September 30th Movement of the Indonesian Communist Party (Pengkhiantan G 30 S/PKI)*; dir. Noer). The film was mandatory viewing in schools and played around the clock on television until Suharto's resignation in 1998. It depicted the immensity of the communist threat, through a combination of thriller, detective, and slasher film codes, and lingered on all manner of violence in all its gory excess. Communists burn bodies with cigarette butts, wield razor blades on unsuspecting victims, kill parents in front of their children and vice versa, et cetera. In the film, violence is committed largely by communists, but the film does not depict the mass killings of "communists" it is intended to justify. That unspoken justification *is* the film's message, a message that crystallized the official narrative of the New Order as a triumphant period following the communist threat.⁹

9. I have drawn on Benedict Anderson's and Joshua Oppenheimer and Michael Uwememo's contributions in Brink and Oppenheimer 2013. Also see Lane 2008.

In 2004, filmmaker Joshua Oppenheimer set out to make a film about the survivors of the genocide, the victims' families, and the silence in Indonesia surrounding the events of 1965–66. While working on this project, Oppenheimer and Anonymous, his codirector, learned from the families of victims that the death squad leaders were alive and well, and when he interviewed them, they were happy to discuss what they had done, even boasting to Oppenheimer about the number of people they had killed. Secrecy was unnecessary for them since they were on the side of the victors, and as hired assassins, they had killed with an impunity that had never been questioned. However, survivors and victims' families have not enjoyed such a privilege, not only because such narration is always beset with psychological difficulties for those affected by such immense losses but survivors and the victims' families have been silenced in official and unofficial ways. The boastful volubility of one side resides, sometimes literally, right next door to the difficult silence of the other.

This is not to imply that the Indonesian state openly embraces the perpetrators. As Benedict Anderson notes in an essay concerning the death squad leaders based in Medan (the area of Indonesia featured in *The Act of Killing* and also in Oppenheimer's follow-up documentary about the victims, *The Look of Silence* [2014]), these individual perpetrators were not without their disappointments: "One of these must have been lack of national-level recognition for their role in the massacres, the one moment in their otherwise humdrum criminal lives where they could imagine themselves as among the saviors of their country" (Anderson 2013: 281). The reigning national narrative was a paradoxical one: because communists were a threat, they needed to be crushed, and because they were a threat, the public at large sought to kill them, and the army merely tried to "secure" them from the anger demonstrated by the masses. In direct contradiction to actual events, the postgenocide national narrative cast the army in the role of the protector, its propaganda painting the army as the only bulwark against the waves of spontaneous violence unleashed by the killings of the six generals. No room in this narrative, therefore, for heroes who kill. The death squad leaders, who proudly refer to themselves as gangsters (more on this below), erected their own monuments: a thirty-foot chrome "66" near the railway station in Medan and an obelisk in the village, Kampung Kolam. Receiving neither wealth nor glory, the gangsters are aging nobodies—as Anderson writes, "They are not 'in national history,' in a country where national history is very important, and national heroes abundant" (282).

Hence the gusto with which the gangsters engage in conversation about their violent deeds and the thrill with which they follow through on

Oppenheimer and the anonymous codirector's suggestion that they restage their acts. *The Act of Killing* was originally screened in Indonesia privately on university campuses before its appearance at international film festivals in 2012, and it eventually obtained a general release within Indonesia, under the title *Jagal* (Indonesian for "killer" or "butcher").¹⁰ Its initial screenings inspired Indonesian journalists to probe further into perpetrators' narratives, and the prestigious Indonesian news magazine *Tempo* released a special issue on the massacres of 1965–66 (*Tempo* 2012). Within Indonesia itself, since the atrocities took place, there have been ongoing and diverse investigations into the massacres, including by Indonesia's Human Rights Commission and the Coalition for Truth and Justice (a national network of forty-five organizations). After Suharto's fall in 1998, there were some state efforts to acknowledge the past, including a call from the Upper House of Parliament for a truth and reconciliation commission; the law calling for this commission passed in 2004 but was annulled in 2006. In addition, the attorney general stopped the efforts to rethink the school curriculum to present a more diverse account of Indonesian history. The four-year investigation by the Indonesian Human Rights Commission faced a stern denial by the head of the military in 2012 (see Wandita, n.d.).

While *The Act of Killing* is not the first exposé of the atrocities, it does bring an oft-forgotten history to a global spectatorship, and in doing so the film's intervention is critical. Still, as Indonesian scholar Ariel Heryanto has remarked in his discussion of the film,

Truth and justice do not always prevail, and they do not necessarily arrive in the form or at a time desired by those who struggle in earnest for them. It is important for those who participate in the commendable struggle to resist the seductive myth about the power of information, or the familiar assumptions about moral attributes of human beings in abstract and ideal terms—as if a truthful revelation about a massacre will galvanize a critical mass of people into action to demand justice. (Heryanto 2014: 163–64)

Heryanto notes that while whistle-blowers such as Chelsea Manning, Edward Snowden, and Julian Assange have garnered much sympathy, the

10. Oppenheimer's second film about the massacres, *The Look of Silence*, initially opened in Indonesia through large public screenings before the army banned such screenings. But, as in all parts of Asia, most film is circulated through informal networks of distribution and both films have been seen widely. Within Indonesia, the films are available for a free download through the distribution company (Drafthouse Films) website (O'Falt 2016).

information released has hardly driven a groundswell of support for dismantling global military-industrial complexes, or much of anything else for that matter. Heryanto points to the strange relationship to knowledge that Indonesia shares with the globe: the scandal is not that these atrocious things happened or are still happening and we do not know about them, but that we *do* know they are happening and we get on with our days nevertheless. As for Indonesia, while the country was subject to extreme censorship in the decades after the massacre, the Attorney General's Office is no longer permitted to ban books or artworks without a trial. The activist-judicial struggle to excavate evidence for linking the massacres to state agents is an enormously important political struggle, and it happens against the background of a general tendency toward a "knowing unawareness" that characterizes contemporary global politics.

Given this context in which knowledge does not necessarily prevent violence, the very meaning of *exposé* has to be rethought. The documentary helps us with this kind of rethinking, in part, by staging atrocity with all of its affective complexity. *The Act of Killing* condenses three frames of representation: (1) a documentary about the making of a film concerning the genocide; (2) the film within the film being made by the death squad leaders; (3) the genocide itself, the referent for both the first and the second frame.¹¹ There are moments within the documentary, especially in its second half, where the reenactments of the genocide carry the diegesis. In these scenes, the framing device signaling a film within a film disappears, and even though the documentary had made it clear that we are watching a scene that we had earlier seen being rehearsed, the combination of sound, close-ups, and medium shots thrusts the viewer directly in the midst of the action, making the reenactment "real." The documentary establishes early on that we are watching reenactments, but then it invites the spectator to be taken in by the playacting. During these moments, when the reassurance of a frame does not keep the reenacted scenes at a remove, the boundary between the past and the present thins out. This happens in the documentary at the narrative turn when the reenactments start to become increasingly disturbing for Anwar Congo; his experience and the audience's experience are, formally, paralleled. Oppenheimer has referred to this film as a "fever dream" (Kiang 2015), an apt phrase to describe this effect of diegetic blurring—the film within the film becoming all too real—one in which

11. The criticism to date on this film tends to shuttle across these three frames as well. See Rich, ed. 2013; Tyson 2015.

the past is reanimated and the effects of this reanimation resonate long after the credits roll.

Throughout, and more prominently in the longer “director’s cut” version, transitions between critical scenes of the documentary take on an abstract character: a view of Medan’s rooftops at dusk, with a single figure climbing a pole; a tableau depicting a crashed plane in Indonesia; lonely windows of an American-style mall lit at night with an incidental McDonald’s sign promising halal food in the lower right-hand corner; countless flitting birds that could be bats, feeding in crepuscular light; the same shot again as the documentary becomes more dreamlike, this time without the reassurance of a horizon line and with a darkening of the evening light. These transitional sequences are welcome respites in a documentary that reveals one horrific disclosure after another, often verbally or only by means of the gangsters playing dress-up. Yet in their abstraction, these sequences signal the work of metaphor so critical for Oppenheimer’s work; in *The Look of Silence*, a repeated image of seeds that seem to jump and tremble on a palm becomes a metaphor for the unrest and the possibility of speech for the survivors of the genocide, and even for the victims of the genocide. Metaphor plumbs the depths overwritten by time, depths that might have been overlooked but are not erased. Metaphor also becomes an ethics of representation, representing the dead (or more accurately, “presencing” them) without speaking for them. Moreover, it ranges across all three frames of representation I listed above, becoming a fourth that encompasses them all.

In all four cases, the aim is retrieval of the past, but not in the sense normally associated with the dictum “never forget.” Our voluble protagonists, the gangsters, seek to reveal all, to narrate in stunning detail the different methods of killing efficiently, cleanly, and with speed, and to act out once again their atrocities, this time (as Anwar Congo discovers) with feeling. The work of retrieval and recovery is doubled in Oppenheimer’s documentaries concerning the genocide, attending as they do to the silences of fact in the Indonesian national narrative, but also to the recovery of emotions previously unfelt by the perpetrators and the survivors alike. Both retrievals are within the ambit of politics, the former attempted by performative means (the existence and dissemination of the documentary itself, the opening up of a dialogue in Indonesia and globally about the genocide) and the latter by means of reenactment and play (the killers playing dress-up, a survivor disclosing the story of his murdered father then playing a victim in a scene). The complexity of this documentary requires a combination of

a theoretico-historiographical approach as well as an approach attuned to its aesthetics.

Probing the realm of fantasy is critical for both approaches, as it was fantasy itself that had underwritten the forms of violence originally committed and that underwrites the imaginative representation of the violence. This includes the fantasy of a masculinist will to power. Not only are the gangsters fashioning themselves after sadistic filmic types, but, more importantly, even when they are not “performing,” they are engaged in gendered bravado or posturing: relating misogynist jokes, reminiscing about their excitement in 1965–66 at finding a young girl to rape, making patently sexual comments to women who are not in a position to complain about them (e.g., an assistant to the leader of Pamuda Pancasila who is carrying his golf equipment and needs to keep her job). This masculinist posturing is a layer of performance naturalized through repetition; it is a performance that continues with or without the camera. It suggests an underlying continuity in two directions: between the time of the genocide and the present time of the documentary; in front of the camera and in situations where there is no camera.

These reaffirmations of masculinity seem a little anxious in their investments in pushing masculinist logics to the extreme. Such a naturalized performance, too, relies on operations of fantasy. How to account for this element of the fantastical, whether in gender performance or in fantastical play, within the space of a genocidal history? The brilliance of *The Act of Killing* lies in inventing a whole new visual language for the representation of unspeakable acts, and this visual language is attuned to restoring perceptibility in a televisual realm set to the rhythm of Twitter feeds and rife with images of grisly violence that often leave no lasting trace. It turns out that some of what is foreclosed by the psyche and never allowed to enter consciousness, and that which was once consciously experienced but then repressed—something of that which is tabled—can reemerge in new forms, affective and political, personal and collective. Not merely performance and play but screens themselves can become vehicles for such transmutation.

3. This Time with Feeling

Screens and screening are at the heart of this documentary: not only the televisual screen but also other forms of mediation, including fantasy. In the death squad leaders’ own accounts, they styled themselves after Holly-

wood heroes and villains. At the time of the mass killings, they worked as hired thugs in connection with cinemas, in charge of selling scalped tickets and committing a host of petty crimes, available as mercenaries for all kinds of dirty work, including for organizations, such as Pemuda Pancasila, that continue to the present day to have informal links to the state. Alarmed by communist rhetoric against the importation of American films and the resulting threat to their livelihood, the young gangsters heeded the call to kill “communists” with impunity. In *The Act of Killing*, they emphasize that in 1965–66, they found inspiration in various Hollywood types, such as the gangster, the cowboy, the outlaw, and the film noir detective, and in the reenactments, they dress themselves up in elaborate costumes recalling these stock figures. At one point, Anwar Congo explains that they sought, in 1965–66, to outdo the most violent Hollywood films. Over the course of the documentary, we see scenes shifting from the reenactment of the atrocities to one of the killers watching that very reenactment on the television screen. The play of mediation works at multiple levels: Hollywood archetypes and stock figures originally emulated by death squad leaders in 1965; the remake of their acts by means of playing dress-up and performing; the watching of this reenactment on the television screen; and finally for the spectators of this documentary itself.

The documentary’s opening quickly highlights the sensuous, fantastical nature of screens. We watch a slightly surreal sequence of a group of female dancers dressed identically, moving sinuously while emerging out of the mouth of an enormous fish-shaped building onto a platform, with a lake in the background. The camera cuts to additional dancers nearby, ranged in feathery regalia around a waterfall. All colors are overly saturated, emphasizing their jewel-like character, and the scene is rendered in soft focus, lending the spray from the waterfall an ethereal quality. It would be transporting, especially given the sing-song humming on the soundtrack over the sounds of the waterfall, except a commanding voice intervenes, giving direction: “Peace! Happiness! Smile!”; “1, 2, 3, 4! Smile! More Teeth!”; “These are close-ups! Don’t let the camera catch you looking bad!”; “Real joy, not just pleasure!”; “And natural beauty! This isn’t fake!” The camera pans across the different dancers, each looking peaceful with open, outstretched arms, feathers astir, and settles on two central figures, also with outstretched arms: a man in drag and another man (we will come to know them, respectively, as Herman Koto and Anwar Congo). Suddenly everyone breaks pose and set hands distribute blankets to the actors to warm themselves. The film cuts to one of its abstract transitional shots (a street



Figure 1. *The Act of Killing*, still from opening sequence. Courtesy of Final Cut for Real.

scene, then a mall's exterior at night), with text giving us the skeletal information about 1965–66: the military coup, the mass killings supported by the West, the use of paramilitaries and gangsters to carry out the mass killings, and the documentary's central conceit: "When we met the killers, they proudly told us stories about what they did. To understand why, we asked them to create scenes about the killings in whatever ways they wished."

Through these shots, and thus far with no real introduction to the gangsters, the documentary partakes of the surrealist logic of interruption: the scene at the waterfall is so vivid and being taken so seriously by the actors that it is difficult not to be taken in by its phantasmagoric visual pleasure, jewel colors and feathered headdresses included. Yet the emergence from the mouth of a fish feels distinctly bizarre, and the injunctions to smile and show teeth only makes one curious about the kind of documentary being made. The text signaling that this sequence is in a film "about the killings" only heightens curiosity about how this sequence might be connected to those events. We receive an answer, rather powerfully, in a scene filmed early in Oppenheimer's acquaintance with Anwar Congo, when Congo takes Oppenheimer to the rooftop of what is now a shop that sells cheap handbags and backpacks. Standing on the roof, Anwar explains, "There are many ghosts here, because many people were killed here. They died unnatural deaths." He then proceeds to demonstrate the most efficient

method of killing people. “At first, we beat them to death, but there was too much blood,” Anwar explains, and then shows his preferred method of garroting, using a piano wire, a stick, and an immobile pole. Anwar asks his friend to sit by the pole with his hands behind him (the victim’s hands would be tied), winds the wire around the friend’s neck, and feigns a pull using the stick tied to the wire at the other end. “This is how to do it without too much blood,” he says, and then confesses, “I’ve tried to forget all this with good music . . . dancing . . . feeling happy . . . a little alcohol, a little marijuana . . . a little ecstasy . . . I’d fly and feel happy.” At that point Anwar smiles widely and breaks into a cha-cha dance; the camera cuts to a longer shot showing Anwar dancing on the roof where he has executed more people than he can remember. His periodic snicker and his extended cha-cha music vocalization as he prances around the roof is a stark contrast to the horrific scenes he has just been describing.

The symmetrical counterpart of this scene is the final scene of the documentary, when we return to the same rooftop over a year later. In the meantime, Anwar and the other executioners have made an elaborate melodrama about the mass killings. On this return visit, Anwar admits openly, “I know it was wrong—but I had to do it.” While he discloses more details of the rooftop’s grisly history, something surprising happens: he begins to retch involuntarily. The dry heaving and the eventual vomit interrupt his words, but at no point does Anwar acknowledge his somatic reaction. There are moments when the guttural heaving sounds take over speech altogether, sometimes for up to uncomfortable lengths of time. When Anwar begins speaking again, he continues his thought as if his body had not just rebelled. We encounter in this scene a radical divide between soma and narrative. The extended scene of retching, of starting and stopping speech, of starting and stopping the heaving, becomes unnerving because it produces a sense of disgust in the spectator, or at the very least produces a certain discomfort that is the precise opposite of the visual pleasures afforded by the opening sequence. The disgust that the documentary has been gesturing to all along arrives on screen, and Anwar continues to ignore it even as his body heaves involuntarily.

To be sure, this is not the first instance of Anwar displaying symptoms of the enormity of his actions. In an earlier film noir style reenactment, Anwar has his victim lie on the table while he lies underneath, pulling on the two ends of the wire presumably wrapped around the victim’s neck. Anwar pulls with all his might, and then breathes hard, has trouble catching his breath, looks disturbed, and lets out guttural sounds. In another moment,

one in which Anwar is playing a victim being garroted by a Dick Tracey–styled Herman, similar involuntary guttural sounds emerge from his mouth before the wire is even pulled, sounds so concerning that Herman stops the scene, and Anwar’s hand simply shakes, repeatedly and involuntarily. The somatic response itself is a sign of the momentary failure of repression.¹² The involuntary retching, the hand that won’t stop shaking, and the breath that seems to come only in shallow spurts: How does one read the bodily reactions in these moments? We might well long for a narrative arc for the film as a whole that leads from corruption, to killing, to remorse—the classic narrative arc—and the final scene has been repeatedly criticized for somehow “redeeming” Anwar Congo. However, all we see is a bodily response sometimes coupled with Anwar’s narration; reading the scene as redemptive hardly attends to its ambiguity and strangeness. Though the retching interrupts the words, it is a more ambiguous sign than it might appear. Also, remorse is not in itself redemption. Anwar says, “I know it was wrong—but I had to do it.” The killing, in other words, was a kind of compulsion, and soon after he says this, his body convulses and retches, though he tries to ignore it. An overwhelming somatic compulsion escapes his self-mastery and, once again, escapes rationality. This compulsion mimics the former compulsion to kill (“I had to do it”)—to that end, it is a repetition (and as symptom, a substitution) of a previous compulsion, a previous time, that interrupts the present, an unfolding of what Freud called *Nachträglichkeit*, an involuntary action that is a long-deferred response.¹³ It bears the temporal traces of transference, in which a past time comes alive in the present and reveals time itself to be nonlinear. At no point in this clip does Anwar Congo acknowledge the retching, though he is one of the more reflective of the killers in the documentary. Deferred action need not lead to knowledge. Perhaps in Anwar’s case, it eventually did, but, of course, knowledge, like remorse, is hardly absolution.

12. Freud argues that repression “demands a persistent expenditure of force,” such that “it is not the repression itself which produces substitutive formations and symptoms, but [. . .] these latter are indications of a *return of the repressed* and owe their existence to quite other processes” (Freud 1953c: 151, 154).

13. Homy King discusses repetition compulsion and fantasy in *The Act of Killing* in an insightful contribution to a dossier of short essays on the film, concluding that “fantasy can paradoxically be the route back to reality, performing the difficult work of opening doors to the past that were previously locked shut” (2013: 35). My argument concerning fantasy is in line with King’s thoughts, but I am less concerned here with routing fantasy to reality because in my account fantasy is not entirely opposed to reality.

4. Screen Forms

If Anwar can be said to arrive at something like knowledge or even dawning awareness (because how can one know such enormity?), it feels, in part, related to the reenactments. These are reenactments of a previous performance, itself a kind of reenactment that happens at the moment of the original atrocity.¹⁴ The murders in 1965–66 were forms of deadly performance themselves, since the perpetrators relied on genres, codes, and scripts of received representations of violence in the media. Oppenheimer and Uwemedimo note that just as in images of smiling American military personnel in Abu Ghraib photographs, “the gestures of murder and torture are and were already re-enactments, just as those smiling snapshot clichés are pulled from a repertory of stock poses and therefore already and always repetitions” (2013: 295). These stock poses, genres, scripts, and forms of comportment made available in televisual streams might be usefully thought of as themselves different kinds of screens, making possible a new iteration and a form of projection even while withholding, screening out, something from the viewer and/or the performer.

Oppenheimer and Uwemedimo have described the film’s own cinematic strategy as one that deploys reenactment toward a “critical and interventionist historiography” (295).¹⁵ *The Act of Killing* is a document, therefore, of several events: it attaches the atrocities to particular perpetrators and to a particular organization; it tracks the process of working through the traumatic events of 1965–66; and it details a historical excavation of an event to counter that event’s official narrative.¹⁶ Recounting the details in

14. Also, the men use stills from the propaganda film *Pengkhianatan G 30 S/PKI* to model their makeup as killers and as victims. So not only do the reenactments return to the performance of the violence they committed in 1965–66, but the reenactments also reiterate the aforementioned film.

15. Oppenheimer and Uwemedimo have called this kind of critical reenactment “archaeological performance”: as a method of investigative filmmaking, it “entails successively working with and through the gestures, routines and rituals that were the motor of the massacres, as well as the genres and grammars of its historical recount. [. . .] Between a buried historical event and its restaging with historical actors, this method opens up a process of simultaneous *historical* excavation (working down the strata), and *histrionic* reconstruction (adding layers of stylized performance and recounting)” (2013: 304–5).

16. Not only have *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence* opened a space for dialogue within Indonesia about the events of 1965–66, but Oppenheimer has presented these documentaries to the US Congress and requested that the United States admit its role in the killings or at least declassify documents pertaining to these events. There is, however, a disparity in the broad international acclaim these films have received and their limited



Figure 2. Anwar Congo on television, from *The Act of Killing*. Courtesy of Final Cut for Real.

front of the camera or acting them out by means of performance changes the person doing the recounting and the acting, who brings out those aspects most suitable for the observing camera. The camera, in turn, creates out of this narration a record that is officially deemed not to exist.

Certainly the repetition of the performance has clear effects on Anwar himself, judging from his reactions in the first scene on the roof where he does the cha-cha, to the appearance of bodily disturbances during the “filmmaking,” to the final scene of unacknowledged but punctuated retching. The reenactments are the very settings for fantasy, or, rather, the play space in which desire is enacted.¹⁷ Within this play space, they can fashion themselves as perpetrators, victims, husbands, wives, communists, capitalists, cowboys, drug lords, et cetera. Insofar as the reenactments refer to a previous performance, they also register past—or retrospective—fantasies, and the key fantasy in this regard for Anwar and others is to become a “gangster.” They use this term to refer to themselves because they are all members of the paramilitary organization called Pemuda Panca-

reception within Indonesia, where the audiences for the film are largely intellectuals and activists.

17. Joan Scott, citing Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, notes that “fantasy is the setting of desire” such that “in the fantasized setting the fulfillment of desire and the consequences of this fulfillment are enacted” (Scott 2011: 49).

asila, an organization directly involved in the mass killings of 1965–66 and whose leadership openly proclaims masculinist virtues of gangsterism.¹⁸ The Indonesian word for *gangster* used by the organization's membership is *preman*, and the documentary includes several speeches and conversations where it is explained that *preman* means, at bottom, "free man."

The word *preman* has a checkered history in Indonesia. It is a transposition into Indonesian of the Dutch word *vrijman*, or "freeman," but this word in the original Dutch colonial context was used to refer to a freed plantation slave. By the early twentieth century, *vrijman* referred to an employee of the Dutch East India Company who worked as an independent contractor at the lower ranks: a coolie day laborer or noncontract overseer. The *vrijman* was free, in other words, by not being bound by a contract. A *vrijman* "is not in the service of the Dutch East India Company, but has permission to be in the Indies, and carries out trade for the sake of the [Company]."¹⁹ From the turn of the twentieth century to Indonesian independence in 1945, *vrijman* referred to noncontracted laborers as well as thugs hired by the company to supplement police power. The *vrijman* was free but somehow tied to the company, insofar as he was meant to be involved in the company's commercial pursuits. This is indeed a strange form of freedom, well articulated by the head of Pemuda Pancasila, Yapto Soerjosemarno, in a 1993 interview:

Preman means a free person, exactly *free-man*, I am one of these. A *preman* is a person who is free, not tied by any knot, free to determine his own life and death, as long as he fulfills the requirements and the laws of this country. But I am free to choose, to carry out the permitted or the not permitted, with all of its risks. For example, if you're a thief, you take the risks of being a thief, meaning if you're caught, you're finished. If you aren't caught, you're no thief, right? Legally that's the way it is; we hold to the principle of the presumption of innocence. (Quoted in Ryter 1998: 51)

The presumption of innocence protects the *preman* and creates a space of freedom outside the law that he might inhabit; a presumption originally

18. *Pemuda Pancasila* literally means "Pancasila Youth." *Pancasila* means "five principles," and these are taken by official Indonesian nationalism to be (1) belief in one God; (2) justice; (3) unity; (4) democracy; and (5) freedom. While Pemuda Pancasila openly embraces gangsterism, the word *preman* has a wider purview and is used by people even if they are not members of Pemuda Pancasila.

19. Documents of the Dutch East India Company, cited in Ryter 1998: 50–51.

intended to secure the law's objectivity by protecting the accused from pre-determined judgments becomes another way of inhabiting one's impunity. Pemuda Pancasila, a paramilitary organization, is not officially a part of the state apparatus, and yet it is synced into that apparatus; it is not itself the law, but it bears a relationship to it. "Legally that's the way it is": a thief not caught is not a thief; a killer never accused of murder is not a killer. Impunity is secured not by means of a juridical judgment but by means of withholding that judgment. Impunity is the obscene underside of the quotidian operations of the law, and as such it is the rule and not an exception.²⁰

Preman as a term survives Indonesian coloniality and enters post-coloniality, with its meanings shifting as it goes. Indonesian history has demonstrated that the slide from *vrijman* to *preman* to *gangster/free man* is hardly an itinerary marked with mistranslation. *Preman* sets the horizon of expectation for the men—it names what they simultaneously are, strive to become, and justifies all past illegal actions. Premanism is a form of self-fashioning, a screen or a transference schema upon which masculinist fantasies of domination can be projected and justified, and it makes available a set of vices to be cultivated. The *preman* can be marshaled in the service of state violence and need not be seen—by others or himself—as a state agent. It would seem that the *preman* is, in truth, a deictic figure pointing to an agency that mobilizes him for its own ends, to a gangsterism whose actions he happily carries out. In 1965–66, this agency was split between the Indonesian state and also the superpowers of the Cold War, who required bloodbaths to sanctify their own notions of freedom. The obscene underside of the law, the *preman* as a figure of impunity is the excessive supplement to the public face of the spread of democracy and its presumptive legal equality among persons before the law. The freedom the *preman* believes he is enacting turns out to be as phantasmagoric as the fever dream of a film the perpetrators are making with Hollywood archetypes in the tropics. The violence he enacts is of his own will but also of

20. The phrase "obscene underside" is Žižek's, from his discussion of Abu Ghraib images and the torture they revealed: "While they cannot be reduced to simple evil acts by individual soldiers, they were of course also not directly ordered—they were legitimized by a specific version of the obscene 'Code Red' rules. [. . .] There are no formal orders, nothing is written, there is just unofficial pressure, hints and directives are delivered in private, the way one shares a dirty secret. . . . [. . .] In being submitted to humiliating tortures, the Iraqi prisoners were in effect *initiated into American culture*, they got the taste of its obscene underside which forms the necessary supplement to the public values of personal dignity, democracy, and freedom" (Žižek 2009a: 370). Also see Žižek 2009b.

the will of agents far removed from him, sovereign powers (however mediated) who can decide on his field of action. His freedom is, in other words, a screen form.²¹ The permission to kill with impunity feels like a kind of liberation, an age-old fantasy made real.

This is the context in which Anwar's account of "having fun" while killing has to be situated—the ludic, unserious aspect of the killings he describes are a part of a free and youthful self-fashioning. According to the killers' narration in the documentary, in 1965–66 they were emulating Hollywood villains, and therefore "playing at" being themselves—that is, death squad killers. Or perhaps they felt they had escaped from being "death squad" leaders by playing at being themselves—that is, "mimic men" of Hollywood's sadism. Whether the screen form facilitated some kind of self-knowledge or whether it facilitated its concealment can never be determined in this instance, and not least because the gangsters' collective account that they tried to act like film characters might well be a retrospective projection, a generative screen memory in the classic Freudian sense.²² But the ultimate referent—the genocide—is broached by means of further mimetic acts, and this playacting lends insight into the past.

These mimetic acts are all screen forms in their own way: the emulation of stock Hollywood archetypes; shots of Anwar combing his hair, placing his dentures in his mouth carefully; Herman, in preparation for his run in the local election, watches Barack Obama's speeches and practices melodramatic oratorical gestures in the mirror. The most jarring of these screen moments occurs near the end of the movie, when we return to the waterfall song sequence, this time without the framing device of shouted directorial instruction. We hear the theme song "Born Free," from the 1966 film of the same name (about English benevolence in Kenya), the soft-focus spray of the waterfall obscures shapes but all colors are heightened, the dancers are resplendent in their costumes, and, as the refrain of "Born Free" resolves, we cut to two bedraggled-looking men. These men lift interconnected circles of piano wire coiled around both of their necks and drop the wire on the ground, and one of them reaches into his pocket to retrieve a medal. The camera reveals Anwar standing right next to that man, looking beatific, and the "victim" places the medal around Anwar's neck and says,

21. The term *screen form* is not intended to suggest the phrase "merely screen form." In fact, I mean this term in precisely the opposite direction, in that I am interested in all that screen forms make possible, transform, generate, efface, highlight, distort, and create.

22. See "Screen Memories" (1899) (Freud 1953d).

“For executing me and sending me to heaven . . . I thank you a thousand times, for everything.” The camera cuts to a long shot showing all the figures ranged around the waterfall, arms outstretched.

Immediately, even as “Born Free” continues in the background, we cut to Anwar watching this sequence on his television. He loves the sequence and is genuinely moved by it. The screen is a complex surface, both a site of projective creation and replication but also a site of exclusion, in the sense that screens “screen out” certain elements. Within the narrative of this documentary, the screen has to be read in all of its senses: the templates of Hollywood sadism are screen forms of intense transference for Anwar Congo and the other death squad leaders. As such, we might think of them as transitional objects, in the classically psychoanalytic sense: it is an object of play, mediates relations between “me” and “not me.”²³ The screen forms—the film noir gangster, the Wild West outlaw—are simultaneously given to Anwar Congo and created anew by him. They originate in Hollywood but are also conjured by him, both in 1965 and then again when he reenacts them. To consider the ludic aspect of this genocide means to consider the forms of fantasy that, in part, turned killing into a kind of sport or at least a kind of playacting. The screen as a transitional object is a site of creative projection, and it leaves oneself transformed.

The reenactments churn something of an experience that was not allowed to enter his consciousness when first experienced, judging from the classic trauma symptoms he displays over the course of the documentary. Doing the cha-cha on the rooftop where he killed hundreds of people and later in the film uncontrollably retching in that same place are symmetrical moments, each engaging the disgust and horror that cannot be admitted to consciousness. It would be tempting to read into the documentary a certain redemptive strand of thinking about screens and mediation, about playacting and performance. Such a reading might conclude that screens—televisual, transference, fantastical—simultaneously provide the possibility of grasping our embeddedness in regimes of violence while also making available the means to disassemble such complicity from ourselves as well as from others. Performance and play, in such a reading, would hold out the possibility of knowledge but not guarantee it. The documentary can

23. Of this object, Winnicott writes, “It is a matter of agreement . . . that we will never ask the child the question: ‘Did you conceive of this or was it presented to you from without?’ The important point is that no decision on this point is expected. The question is not to be formulated” (2005: 17).

certainly be read this way, but the paradoxes and possibilities that such a reading produces feel overly familiar and comfortable. Instead, what if one reads this documentary as asking questions rather than resolving them? What if we read the final scene with Anwar Congo uncontrollably retching on the hallowed/profane rooftop as an emblem for understanding a crisis in the global distribution of affect—to put it pointedly, at the absence of disgust by people who have caused suffering, whether directly in proximity to the victim or remotely by means of various geopolitical screens? Recall Ariel Heryanto's observation that exposés of corruption or violence do not necessarily lead to political action or social change. Such quiescence might indicate a widespread experience of the split between soma and narrative, the very split that Anwar demonstrates in spite of himself. As he lurches around the rooftop, telling stories interrupted by retching, or interrupting his somatic responses with stories, the scene becomes an allegory for a global malaise in which affect and narrative seem to inhabit parallel worlds in the same persons. Anwar's retching and heaving is the end of one character's arc in the documentary, but there are two other protagonists, even if they are minor with respect to Anwar's leading narrative role: Herman Koto and Adi Zulkadri. The last we see of Herman, he is screaming continuously while repeatedly pounding a drum set, in one of the abstract intervening shots. The last we see of Adi, who is magically free of symptoms that might be traced back to his deeds, he is staring off into space while seated in a shopping mall. Anwar's retching on the roof would have us consider the possibility that *Nachträglichkeit*—deferred action—is a sort of solution.

5. Enjoyment

Symptoms, for all their belatedness, do point to a disturbance that can be excavated or played out again in controlled surroundings. Whether a character displays symptoms or lacks symptoms altogether, we never lose sight in *The Act of Killing* of a certain objectivity, that mass killings occurred and that impunity has been in force since then. Somatic experiences bear a relationship to objective realities, and it is worth excavating the historically specific forms of that relationship. Insofar as symptoms are repetitions (with a difference) of a previous event, they provide critical openings for understanding those events. We find out in the later film, *The Look of Silence*, that some death squad leaders in 1965–66 developed mental disturbances even at the time they were engaged in killing. Alongside reports of killers going insane, there also circulated a rumor about a prophylactic

remedy against such insanity: to drink some portion of the victim's blood, thus incorporating into yourself the power of your victims. One death squad leader claimed the evidence of his total equanimity as proof that this magical rite did indeed work. In *The Act of Killing*, it is Adi who—said to have murdered and tortured as many people as Anwar—seems to display no symptoms (as far as the camera can see, in any case) and has complete awareness that what he did was wrong. Adi's imperturbability makes sense in the light of *The Look of Silence*, in which we learn that the perpetrators continue to spread rumors about their prowess in killing. These intimidating rumors about having participated in the mass killings let others know that these men are likely protected and should not be wronged. In addition to parroting the idiom of officialdom by erecting their own monuments (the number 66 near Medan's railway station), the killers have constructed their own form of fragmentary mythology, based on rumor, hearsay, and stories of magical powers. Well before Oppenheimer arrived on the scene to ask questions about their actions, it is clear, especially in *The Look of Silence*, that the killers are used to recalling the stories, and the narration sometimes feels as routine as the killings they committed. Concerning this routine narration, Oppenheimer and Uwemedimo write,

Indeed, these stories are told in the register of *sadis*.²⁴ The enthusiastic recounting of the *sadis* conjures, for the killer, an ultimate, metaphysical and magical power over death. It is a power to be relished, savored, by rehearsing again and again the grisly details. Thus, through the genre of *sadis*, may killers perform themselves not just as victors and appropriators of the PKI's projected powers, but as men of preternatural strength with an *ilmu* (or magical knowledge) far greater than that of their victims. (2013: 297)

If the narration of their deeds perpetuates the fantasy of mastering death, this fantasy's history goes back to the events of 1965–66. *Ilmu* names the kind of knowledge that intersects with brutal force, a critical blindness that allows one to kill quickly (Adi notes at one point, "Killing is something you do fast"). In the context of these films' discourse, *ilmu* is both a condition of masculinist impunity and also its result. If impunity can be understood as a promissory note of violence, then *sadis* and *ilmu* ratify that promise as a sort of signature, the former in the profane world of rumor and the latter in the sacred order of mystical knowledge. In *The Act of Killing*, when Herman, bizarrely acting as a corpulent overdressed communist wife

24. This word is an Indonesian appropriation of *sadist*.

(the impoverished, skinny, and terrified village woman is too unglamorous a figure), literally eats a stage prop—an animal's liver—even though the scene as the killers planned it did not include this action,²⁵ he acts from an inertia created by the act of performance itself. I will take up the question of performance and reenactment more fully below, but for the moment it is important to note that eating the liver marks a kind of death that goes above and beyond mere death for the victim, and for the perpetrator, it marks a corollary domination that does not end with death. Such power—like the sexual instinct in Freud's formulation—requires that he override disgust, biting voraciously into the raw liver. The perpetrator has a power over mere death, both of others and also his own.

This fantasy of a mastery over death is one that Fanon also recorded in the very different context of colonial Algeria. His clinical work can be read as investigations into forms of impunity. His insights into the psychology of violence and the symptomatology of imperial war are also insights into the psychology of impunity. Fanon was conducting his clinical work in the very years leading up to the atrocities in Indonesia, and his case studies are instructive for understanding Anwar Congo and his peers. Fanon's clinical experience in treating colonial subjects demonstrates that symptoms are social formations, crystallizations of the negativity that underwrites social relations.²⁶ As a clinician, Fanon attended to patients on both sides of the colonial divide, and "Colonial War and Mental Disorders" in *The Wretched of the Earth* includes case studies of both French and Algerian people: a resistance fighter suffering from impotence after his wife is raped by the French; an Algerian survivor of a mass killing by the French army struggles with newly emergent homicidal tendencies; an Algerian man whose mother was killed by a French officer murders a French woman; a white European who tortured people suspected of being involved with the FLN suffers from extreme anxiety (in the form of auditory hallucinations of screams); another European police officer tortures his family at home and tortures others at work. Fanon's case studies of those who commit violence and the symptoms they display have much to teach us about the forms of being that Anwar Congo and his cohorts enact and reenact.

25. This is made clear in the director's commentary on the DVD edition.

26. There has been a renewed interest in Fanon's clinical writings. Anthony Alessandrini and Azeen Khan have demonstrated how Fanon's clinical writings, including the under-read chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* entitled "Colonial War and Mental Disorders," present more nuanced understandings of violence than often imputed to him (see Alessandrini 1999, 2014; Lee 2015; Onwuanibe 1983; Melas 1999; Khan forthcoming).

If Fanon's revolutionaries—who, under the quotidian violence of colonialism, are not left with other viable political options—marshal negativity in the service of their emancipation, this negativity risks overreaching and landing in a space beyond the pleasure principle, an experience that Lacan would call “enjoyment,” an experience that winds up mirroring the sadism of colonial violence. Psychoanalytically speaking, the revulsion expressed by a white person's statement “Look, a Negro!” and the pitfalls of postcolonial nationalist consciousness (among them, state violence committed by postcolonial regimes) enact forms of enjoyment, or *jouissance*, or, at the very least, point to the excessive place toward which desire tends. In Seminar 7 in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan argues that instead of grounding ethics in “the good,” the properly ethical relation to the other is to grant the other the space to recognize their singular *jouissance*, and to know that the impossible, unnameable, and destructive thing toward which desire tends is what I share with the other, and this Thing is singular and nonexchangeable for each of us. In the space of a psychoanalytic session, this would mean that the analysand is brought to the brink of knowledge about his or her own desire and to an acceptance that it tends past pleasure toward *jouissance*, a category that “implies precisely the acceptance of death” (Lacan 1992: 189). This is death both of the object of desire and of one's own consumption in this object, which telescopes and focuses the world in all of its heterogeneity into a single (impossible) point. *Jouissance* veers past the very distinction between pleasure and pain into a space beyond meaning, self-definition, and the law. Insofar as it derives its energies from the logics of brute matter that is the world and the people in it, *jouissance* shares in the organic pulsions of the drives, pressures that might become legible as compulsions. That is to say, the split between soma and narrative is the very ground of *jouissance*. The force of enjoyment is double-edged: an intermingling of pleasure and pain, consumption and destruction, self-preservation and self-destruction.²⁷ As with (somatic) drives, consciousness negotiates experiences of *jouissance* by means of

27. In an essay about the grisly stories his father would tell him about his wartime experience, psychoanalyst Donald Moss speculates on how the narration of violent deeds makes the ambiguous pleasure of violence available to listener and recounter: “So this, then, is, I guess, one of the harms engendered by war stories. Maybe all war stories are told by fathers to sons. You can't know that. When you encounter the admonition to ‘First, do no harm’ you are meant to know, as a matter of course, what harm is. But here, in these stories my father told me, in my housing them now, in my telling them, I cannot distinguish pleasure from harm” (Moss 2010: 247).

the suturing work of fantasy, including fantasmatic identifications with particular figures or with narratives, anything that will rid the subject of the radical terror and alienation to which enjoyment leads.²⁸ Such fantasmatic forms are what I have been calling screen forms, and the genre of *sadis* and the acquisition of *ilmu* in the context of the afterlife of the genocide in Indonesia operate as these screen forms. As fantasies, they are simultaneously access points for *jouissance*, or enjoyment, and they also rescue the subject from the void that underlies that experience.

In one of his case studies, Fanon describes a nineteen-year-old former Algerian soldier who arrives at the clinic displaying severe symptoms: unshakable insomnia, dissociation, periodic inability to speak, and two suicide attempts. The patient lived in fear of a woman who he claimed would come to persecute him. Fanon notes that he had already learned of this patient's dead mother, of whom the patient was extremely fond: "When I asked him to describe this woman who was haunting, even persecuting, him he told me she was no stranger, that he knew her very well and he was the one who had killed her" (Fanon 2004: 192). Fanon explains that, given this information as a clinician, he set out to discover whether "we were in the presence of an unconscious guilt complex after his mother's death, as Freud has described in his *Mourning and Melancholia*" (193). What Fanon discovers is something much more staggering. The patient's mother "had been killed at point-blank range by a French soldier, and two of [his] sisters taken to the [French] barracks." One day he was sent with his compatriots to a French colonialist's estate because the French man had killed two Algerian civilians.

It was night when we arrived at his house. But he wasn't at home. Only his wife was in the house. On seeing us, she begged us not to

28. Lacan's thinking about *jouissance* is informed by Freud's discussion of the drives in his 1915 essay, "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes." There, Freud discusses how the *Trieb* (or drive, mistranslated as "instinct") latches on to an object in order to achieve satisfaction, and this object might be an external thing or the subject's own body. The drive transmutes in the following ways: "reversal into its opposite, turning round upon the subject's own self, repression, sublimation" (Freud 1953b: 125). Lacan's discussion of enjoyment dovetails with his critique of the commandment to love one's neighbor, his assertion that Sade reveals a truth that Kant's categorical imperative makes impossible for thought, and his reworking of Freud's reflections on the death drive. His discussion of Sade is a slightly different reading from Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's earlier and related claim in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that Kantian morality shares the form of Sadean morality, as figured by Juliette and her interlocutors (2007: 63–93).

kill her: "I know you have come for my husband," she said, "but he isn't here . . . [. . .]" We decided to wait for the husband. *But I kept looking at the woman and thinking of my mother. She was sitting in an armchair and her thoughts seemed to be elsewhere. I was asking myself why we didn't kill her. And then she noticed I was looking at her. She threw herself on me screaming: "Please . . . don't kill me . . . I've got children." The next minute she was dead. I'd killed her with my knife.* (193, italics mine)

After this incident, the young man vomits after every meal. While under Fanon's care, he is besieged by repeated nightmares of his room being invaded by women, each the same woman, each with a wound in her stomach, and each asking that he return their spilled blood. While, after weeks of clinical treatment, the nightmares disappear, "his personality, however, remains seriously flawed. As soon as he thinks of his mother, this disemboweled woman looms up disconcertingly in her place" (Fanon 2004: 194).²⁹ The overlap between his own beloved mother and the woman he kills persists at the time of the killing, at the time when he narrates the events to Fanon, and even after his time at the clinic is finished. It is impossible in this event to dissociate revenge killing from a killing as a result of the aggression that is part and parcel of filial love. How to understand the politics of race and colonial war when the child's greatest wish and greatest fear, that parents instantly die or disappear, is interwoven through it? The murder satisfies multiple overlapping wishes, and these overlaps muddy the easy Manichean thinking that colonialism generates. The murder, in this instance, is the very frisson of enjoyment, and enjoyment here extends well past the event itself: the dreams in which the white mother/Algerian mother returns, multiplied into a horde, and the satiation and horror of being bled dry by these doppelgängers. The fact that the murder itself takes such little time points to the true aim of enjoyment, for which the murder was not in itself the real, or only, aim. The true satisfaction of enjoyment can occur only in the young man's dream: "the sound of rushing water filled the room and grew so loud it seemed like a thundering waterfall, and the young patient saw the women slowly get their color back and their wounds began to close" (194). Desire is a gift that gives unto death.

This case study shows that if practicing impunity means to be exempt from one's own finitude, this fantasy of mastering death conceals a wish to

29. Fanon ends this case study tersely and inadequately: "As unscientific as it may seem, we believe only time may heal the dislocated personality of this young man" (2004: 194).

embrace it. It certainly explains the ease with which Herman cannibalizes his victim—the liver is raw, and the fact of its rawness underscores it as dead. Similarly, the unflinching way in which death squad leaders claim they drank their dead victims' blood in *The Look of Silence* also speaks to his embrace and incorporation of dead matter, dead subjects, into oneself. What better figure of enjoyment than the drinking of the victim's blood, which becomes the fantasy object around which *jouissance* might find satisfaction, the rescue rope in a trajectory that would end with one's own obliteration. The vicissitudes of enjoyment are such that the desire/fear (these cannot be disentangled) to be annihilated is replaced with a fantasy of escaping one's own death.

In another case study of Fanon's, enjoyment takes the form of torture: a French police inspector comes to Fanon and asks him "in plain language to help him torture Algerian patriots without having a guilty conscience [. . .] and with a total peace of mind" (199). Torture takes a very different toll on the torturer, a toll that might nevertheless help us understand the kinship between the two positions in this drama.³⁰ Lacan notes, in his reading of Sade, that the aim of torture is "to retain the capacity of being an indestructible support," and the subject does this by means of generating a fantasy: "the subject separates out a double of himself who is made inaccessible to destruction" (Lacan 1992: 261). So we have isolated two forms of fantasy: the fantasy of one's own annihilation (as in the first case study), and the fantasy of escaping one's own death by means of separating out a double of oneself. Both screen forms are mechanisms by means of which the subject attempts to rid itself (successfully or unsuccessfully) of the radical horror at the heart of *jouissance*.

Fanon, like Freud, worked at the very heart of a central paradox for politics: How does one account for the negativity that seems foundational in human relations even as one works toward the dream of a better future?³¹

30. Psychoanalysis helps us to understand that it is the relation in each transaction that bears out the truth of the situation, and not only this or that position within it. See "A Child Is Being Beaten" in Freud 1953a.

31. The ethical relation between self and other as suggested by Fanon is sometimes the very mechanism for thinking solidarity and a new humanism, and at other times a figure of failure of ethics itself in the radical incommensurability between neighbors (the Algerian quarter and the French quarter), or between corrupt postcolonial state agents and the people they exploit. At stake is the age-old concern with one's relation to one's neighbor, and in Fanon's iteration of this ethical drama, difference radically bisects the relation. Also, Fanon's account of colonial modernity demonstrates that the traumas of racial wounding do not necessarily lead to the rise of a beneficent nationalist conscious-

The Act of Killing, too, is centrally concerned with ethics, and its meditation on ethics takes the form of the camera's focus on bodily symptoms: the hand that shakes involuntarily, the throat that lets out guttural animal sounds, the body that repeatedly heaves and retches. Ethics is, in part, a somatic matter.³²

6. Play

There are scenes in the documentary that have an affinity to psychoanalytic sessions. Anwar is the analysand par excellence, displaying symptoms without acknowledging them. Watching the scene of himself being tortured, he remarks,

ANWAR. But I can feel it, Josh. Really, I feel it. (*Pauses.*) Or have I sinned? (*Pauses, and when he speaks, he is on the verge of tears.*) I did this to so many people, Josh. Is it all coming back to me? (*Weeping.*) I really hope it won't. I don't want it to Josh. (Oppenheimer 2012)

ness. Fanon is attentive to the psychological mechanisms whereby the racialized subject comes to inhabit the categories of identity and difference received from the encounter, and such inevitable inhabitation leads to forked paths: to solidarity and collective emancipation or to an unhappy consciousness fatally divided against itself, an unhappiness stemming from collective hapless emulation of "racially superior" forms of being.

32. In addition, some of Anwar's neighbors were people he killed; Adi recalls killing his girlfriend's father when he happened across him on the street, dumping the body over a bridge into the river. The survivors of the genocide and the families of the victims live among the aging gangsters who murdered their loved ones. What it means to be neighborly continues to be a central ethical problem in the age of mediatized warfare. Warfare and neighborliness were among the critical preoccupations for Freud, especially in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, where Freud critiques the ethical demand to love one's neighbor as oneself. For both Freud and Fanon, loving one's neighbor becomes a deeply misleading precept—the negativity that haunts the neighborly relation crystallizes in racism, with all its attendant state-institutional, military, and economic machinery. State violence is not only on the margins of Freud's text but is written into his fundamental propositions concerning aggression between groups of people. Lacan, in a 1960 seminar, also emphasizes that the neighbor can hardly be a stable ground for ethics because "it is from this fellow as such that the misrecognitions which define me as a self are born" (Lacan 1992: 198). Fanon's wager in *The Wretched of the Earth* was to harness the generative force of the negativity that concerns Freud and deploy it in the service of emancipation, a task risky not only because it amounts to a struggle to death but also because the negativity thus unleashed might overreach—hence his cautionary account of nationalist consciousness.

The scene ends with a shot-reverse-shot, between the end of the reenactment, which shows an unresponsive Anwar-the-victim, and cuts to Anwar watching the scene with teary eyes. Quickly afterward, we are on the rooftop for the documentary's final sequence, where Anwar reflects on his actions and cannot stop retching. The documentary suggests that it might not be possible to answer Anwar's questions, and if the camera can reveal Anwar's symptoms, the knowledge we might gain from them is up for questioning. There are critical differences, ultimately, between clinical sessions and the experimental reenactments of *The Act of Killing*. While both require attaching some narrative, no matter how disjointed, to oneself, phenomenologically the reenactments are of a different order altogether than the talking cure. These differences have to do with bodily reenactments, the mediation of the camera, and the circulation and reception history of the film itself. Ultimately the reenactments emphasize soma over narrative, and the cinematic apparatus, too, aims at managing the audience's somatic responses. Anwar's tearful question "Have I sinned?" seems an admission that he has. But given the presence of the camera, one must ask, Where does performance begin or end? As I noted earlier, some performances, such as masculinist impunity, seems to have no beginning or end. There is also a key difference between performance and reenactment: the latter being all manner of performance (such as gender) that repeats and sediments over time, and the former involving playing dress-up and acting out the past once again. Since both require acting "as if," how do we read the bubbling up of somatic symptoms throughout the reenactments and in the final scene of Anwar on the roof?

After all, the documentary has already demonstrated that the killers are very adept at acting "as if"—in 1965–66, they really might have acted as if they were glorious film heroes vanquishing communists even as they received their orders from the government, who would send them lists of names of people to be killed; they killed all manner of people as if these people were all enemies; they have been playing dress-up and acting "as if" with great fanfare throughout the film. Given these various forms of disclosures and dissembling, the final sequence is radically open-ended: it could signify the return of the repressed, or it might mark the significant crowning end of a Hollywood narrative of redemption, a demand that Anwar, who has assimilated so many televisual codes of being, might well desire to meet.³³ "Acting out" and "working through" form an ambiguous continuum.

33. Jill Godmilow, in a scathing review of *The Act of Killing*, puts it thus: "I trust that I am not the only one in the audience who has speculated that Congo felt he owed the Ameri-

Given this ambiguity between the authentic/genuine bodily response and the bodily response that obeys a script (or plays its part), the film renders the distinctions between authentic/fake, performance/reenactment, reality/fantasy to be ultimately undecidable. Yet he who confesses to possessing *ilmu* on Oppenheimer's camera does create a record of confession in which he attaches the murder not to an abstract force but to himself as an individual. Indeed, Oppenheimer and Uwemedimo (2013) argue that the cinematic apparatus transforms the routine detailing of *sadis* into a record in a historical situation where no records are deemed to exist of any such atrocities. *Ilmu*, that magical knowledge, transmutes into evidence, and the truths these perpetrators might withhold from themselves have a chance of being grasped by others.

On the other hand, while Oppenheimer is correct that the film itself serves as evidence since it attaches the confession of terrible atrocities to individual agents, such a veridical discourse remains at the level of narrative, or *logos*. For a juridical process that might one day approximate justice, such emphasis on the word makes good activist sense. The film's own cinematic strategies, however, never lose sight of the somatic as it articulates with narrative. Enjoyment is a profoundly somatic experience, along with the symptoms produced if one survives it. Paradoxically—and this is the key to the perpetrators' form of enjoyment—they deal death as a way of escaping their own death. That is, the fantasy of escaping their own death becomes the destination and the point of departure for enjoyment. This is the fantasy of the ultimate state of exception and impunity, of living outside the bounds of the law but also outside the limits of a drama bookended by birth and death. *Ilmu* gained from drinking blood is another variant of the same fantasy. The self-doubling that Lacan speaks about takes multiple forms in *The Act of Killing*, and it shares the very form of identification film spectators have to superheroes, villains, and all manner of protagonists who escape pain and death. The death squad leaders only appear to be limit cases. At bottom, they register a fantasy that every consumer of cinema has likely indulged at some point: the fantasy of escaping one's

can filmmaker an ending, and delivered it." The problem with Godmilow's reading (and there are others like it) is that it assumes the final sequence *is* a kind of wish fulfillment—that is to say, that we can read the symptom as somehow redemptive. My own reading leaves room for this important possibility, but I find the final sequence more ambiguous than Godmilow. I am less interested in reading the retching as redemptive than in the sharpening of the distinction between soma and narrative as shown in the final sequence (Godmilow 2014).

own death, of that ultimate state of exemption. An ever-present potential, such a fantasy can ratify all manner of enjoyment.

The documentary has also shown us all along that acting “as if” is tricky business, attendant with risks and its own unique forms of insight and transformation. Recall Freud’s comment that “the sexual instinct in its strength enjoys overriding this disgust” (of the other’s genitals). Disgust, as it is overridden becomes enjoyment, continuous with fun but extending critically past it. In *The Look of Silence*, the drinking of the victim’s blood keeps the full realization of one’s own acts at bay, and in *The Act of Killing*, Herman, dressed in elaborate drag as a communist wife, eats his victim’s liver. In its oscillation across the clean and the unclean, disgust also bears a relationship to the sacred itself. *Ilmu* is the sacred knowledge that enables the most disgusting actions in the name of overcoming disgust.

What can screens add to our understanding of the connections across enjoyment, disgust, and sacrality? The stage set is a kind of play-ground, in the sense of Johan Huizinga, who writes, “Just as there is no formal difference between play and ritual, so the ‘consecrated spot’ cannot be formally distinguished from the play-ground. The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, [. . .] etc., are all in form and function play-grounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain” (Huizinga 1950: 10). These spaces of play are spaces of transformation. The elaborate yet tawdry stage sets recall the unadorned anonymous rooftop, a space that takes on an aura of consecration once we have received Anwar’s narrative about the deeds he committed there. Let’s recall that the original atrocities, too, were ludic in nature.

There is one reenactment in the film where the crucible that is the magical circle, the stage, the screen, is shown most stunningly in its transformative aspect. This is an elaborate scene of a village being burned to the ground, bodies being dragged, women being raped.³⁴ Initially, we see the reenactment being rehearsed, the actors being given instructions. Once the scene ends, we cut to an image of Anwar asleep in his bed at night, and slowly the sound comes in, as if this might be a dream Anwar is having, of people shouting in the distance. The sound remains muffled but grows louder as we see the following: men dragging away struggling bodies, children being taken from mothers, a man being stripped then humiliated, another person being hauled by their torn shirt, a bound body being carried

34. Though not announced in the film itself, Oppenheimer has indicated that all actors in the scene were volunteers, and all of them members of the families of Pemuda Pancasila.

by men in Pemuda Pancasila outfits, men kicking someone (presumably) with all their strength, dead bodies thrown here and there. All of this appears to us unframed, with the diegesis of the reenactment becoming the only diegetic world we see. Even though we have just seen this scene being rehearsed, it comes at us with an immediacy that becomes increasingly uncomfortable the more the sound recedes. Suddenly we hear “Cut,” and the spell is broken. Some of the children are crying and upset after the filming, and Herman tries to calm them down. An elderly woman is conscious but unresponsive—someone holds her head and whispers an incantation and blows on her head three times in hopes of reviving her. It seems not everyone involved in the filming can keep the trauma of the reenacted scenes at bay, as “mere” reenactment. These traumatized reactions hardly indicate incapacity to differentiate between reality and its mere image. Rather, these reactions hold a key to the form of being that Anwar Congo and the other death squad youths inhabited in the sixties. In this sequence, imitation leads to identification, and its result is trauma, but this need not always be the case—the exact same process had occurred earlier from the side of perpetrators, who, empowered with *ilmu*, imitated their favorite film heroes and villains, those great figures of escaping one’s own death.

If the screen is the surface upon which fantasy can be projected, it is not for that reason illusory. If we understand fantasy in its Lacanian definition as that which is not opposed to reality but is rather the suturing and compensatory mechanism that gives shape to reality as a coherent experience, then the mediating functions of the screen foreground play as a central feature of the truths that might obtain from screens. The older woman and the children have misrecognized playacting for the real thing, and their misrecognition mirrors our own experience of watching the scene—we too have known it was all playacting but its cinematic strategies had us believing in it nevertheless. In this magical instance we see the screen and see past it, weighted as that screen form is with an event that threatens to recede from us. In this generative misrecognition, the past is brought into proximity with the present.

So we experience the horror all the while knowing it is merely a reenactment, and in the final scene of Anwar’s extended retching, I could not help but feel slightly sick to my stomach.³⁵ This, because I mirrored his disgust and that, in turn, swelled the repugnance I felt at the possibility

35. Similar to these instances, there is another reenactment where Anwar takes a blade to a stuffed doll that is a stand-in for his victim’s child, and seeing this toy ripped apart can be an unnerving experience.

of such identification with Anwar. The affective contagion that underwrites disgust brings viewers into proximity with an experience that is forever lost elsewhere and in another time. Sometimes cinema, too, can be a consecrated space. By means of its cinematic strategies, *The Act of Killing* opens up a space in which the mass killings—each death nonexchangeable—disclose themselves as inassimilable, incapable of being metabolized. Where does the atrocity reside if people get away with it? It would seem it resides in Anwar's bodily symptoms, but it also resides in the memories of the survivors, and, by means of the film, it resides in the spectators' reactions to the final sequence. At each of these moments of mirroring, something changes, and something new is also created. The historical event becomes commutable as an ever-changing somatic state. The contagious disgust that ensues only points to its absence in other terrorizing instances, and thereby disgust multiplies. It remains haunted, however, by the danger that there is enjoyment to be had in overriding it.

References

- Alessandrini, Anthony C. 1999. *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*. New York: Routledge.
- . 2014. *Frantz Fanon and the Future of Cultural Politics: Finding Something Different*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Anderson, Benedict. 2013. "Impunity." In *Killer Images: Documentary Film, Memory, and the Performance of Violence*, edited by Joram ten Brink and Joshua Oppenheimer, 268–86. Boston: Wallflower Press.
- Azoulay, Ariella. 2014. "Palestine as Symptom, Palestine as Hope: Revising Human Rights Discourse." *Critical Inquiry* 40, no. 4: 332–64. <https://doi.org/10.1086/676411>.
- Bataille, Georges, and Denis Hollier, eds. 1988. *The College of Sociology (1937–39)*. Theory and History of Literature, vol. 41. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bersani, Leo. 1986. *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- . 2015. *Thoughts and Things*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bersani, Leo, and Adam Phillips. 2008. *Intimacies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Brink, Joram ten, and Joshua Oppenheimer, eds. 2013. *Killer Images: Documentary Film, Memory, and the Performance of Violence*. Boston: Wallflower Press.
- Brinkema, Eugenie. 2014. *The Forms of the Affects*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- Douglas, Mary. 1966. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Euben, Roxanne L. 2015. "ISIL and the Armchair Islamist: How Execution Videos Sell a Fantasy of Masculinity." *Quartz* (blog). August 13, 2015. <https://qz.com/477063/isil-and-the-armchair-islamist-how-execution-videos-sell-a-fantasy-of-masculinity/>.
- Fanon, Frantz. 2004. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1953a. "'A Child Is Being Beaten': A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversion." In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 17: 175–204. London: Hogarth Press.
- . 1953b. "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes." In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 14: 110–40. London: Hogarth Press.
- . 1953c. "Repression." In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 14: 141–58. London: Hogarth Press.
- . 1953d. "Screen Memories." In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 3: 303–22. London: Hogarth Press.
- . 1953e. "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality." In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 7: 135–245. London: Hogarth Press.
- Godmilow, Jill. 2014. "Killing the Documentary: An Oscar-Nominated Filmmaker Takes Issue with 'The Act of Killing.'" *IndieWire* (blog). March 5, 2014. <http://www.indiewire.com/2014/03/killing-the-documentary-an-oscar-nominated-filmmaker-takes-issue-with-the-act-of-killing-29332/>.
- Heryanto, Ariel. 2014. "Great and Misplaced Expectations." *Critical Asian Studies* 46, no. 1: 162–66.
- Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor W. Adorno. 2007. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. 1st ed. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Huizinga, Johan. 1950. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Khan, Azeen. Forthcoming. "The Subaltern Clinic." *boundary 2*.
- Kiang, Jessica. 2015. "Interview: Joshua Oppenheimer Talks 'The Act of Killing,' How Werner Herzog Works and the Scene That Gave Him Nightmares." *IndieWire* (blog). February 26, 2015. <http://blogs.indiewire.com/theplaylist/interview-joshua-oppenheimer-talks-the-act-of-killing-how-werner-herzog-works-the-scene-that-gave-him-nightmares-20150226>.
- King, Homay. 2013. "Born Free? Repetition and Fantasy in *The Act of Killing*." *Film Quarterly* 67, no. 2: 30–36.
- Kolnai, Aurel. 2004. "Disgust." In *On Disgust*, edited and with an introduction by Barry Smith and Carolyn Korsmeyer. Chicago: Open Court.

- Kristeva, Julia. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection. European Perspectives*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lacan, Jacques. 1992. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*. Translated with notes by Dennis Porter. Bk. 7. New York: Norton.
- Lane, Max. 2008. *Unfinished Nation: Indonesia Before and After Suharto*. London: Verso.
- Lee, Christopher J. 2015. *Frantz Fanon: Toward a Revolutionary Humanism*. Ohio Short Histories of Africa. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Lemelson, Robert, dir. 2009. *40 Years of Silence: An Indonesian Tragedy*. Los Angeles: Elemental Productions.
- . 2010. *Afflictions: Culture and Mental Illness in Indonesia*. Los Angeles: Elemental Productions.
- Lemelson, Robert, Emily Ng, and N. Supartini. 2010. “Anak PKI! Multigenerational Trauma in a Javanese Boy.” In *Formative Experiences: The Interaction of Caregiving, Culture, and Developmental Psychobiology*, edited by Carol M. Worthman, Paul M. Plotsky, Daniel S. Schechter, and Constance A. Cummings. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Linfield, Susie. 2012. *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence*. Reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McGinn, Colin. 2011. *The Meaning of Disgust*. 1st ed. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Melas, Natalie. 1999. “Humanity/Humanities: Decolonization and the Poetics of Relation.” *Topoi* 18, no. 1: 13–28. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006272630101>.
- Menninghaus, Winfried. 2003. *Disgust: The Theory and History of a Strong Sensation*. Intersections. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Miller, William Ian. 1997. *The Anatomy of Disgust*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Moss, Donald. 2010. “War Stories.” In *First Do No Harm: The Paradoxical Encounters of Psychoanalysis, Warmaking, and Resistance*, edited by Adrienne Harris and Steven Botticelli, 243–50. Relational Perspectives Book Series, Vol. 45. New York: Routledge.
- O’Falt, Chris. 2016. “How the Oscar-Nominated ‘The Look of Silence’ Uses Art to Spread Activism.” *Indiewire*. February 26, 2016. <http://www.indiewire.com/article/the-look-of-silence-joshua-oppenheimer-interview-20160225>.
- Onwuanibe, Richard C. 1983. *A Critique of Revolutionary Humanism: Frantz Fanon*. St. Louis, MO: W. H. Green.
- Oppenheimer, Joshua, dir. 2012. *The Act of Killing* (DVD). United States: Final Cut for Real.
- Oppenheimer, Joshua, and Michael Uwemedimo. 2013. “Show of Force: A Cinéma-Séance of Power and Violence in Sumatra’s Plantation Belt.” In *Killer Images: Documentary Film, Memory, and the Performance of Violence*, edited by

- Joram ten Brink and Joshua Oppenheimer, 287–310. Boston: Wallflower Press.
- Rangan, Pooja. 2017. *Immediations: The Humanitarian Impulse in Documentary*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Reston, James. 1966. "A Gleam of Light in Asia." *New York Times*, June 19, 1966. <http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1966/06/19/82460679.html?pageNumber=174>.
- Rich, B. Ruby, ed. 2013. "Special Dossier on *The Act of Killing*." *Film Quarterly* 67, no. 2: 8–56.
- Ryter, Loren. 1998. "Pemuda Pancasila: The Last Loyalist Free Men of Suharto's Order?" *Indonesia*, no. 66: 45–73. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3351447>.
- Scott, Joan Wallach. 2011. *The Fantasy of Feminist History*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Sliwinski, Sharon. 2011. *Human Rights in Camera*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1993. "Echo." *New Literary History* 24, no. 1: 17–43. <https://doi.org/10.2307/469267>.
- Tempo*. 2012. "Special Issue: Requiem for a Massacre," October 1–7, 2012. <http://theactofkilling.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/TEMPO-UK-Edition-HiRes.pdf>.
- Time*. 1966. "Indonesia: Vengeance with a Smile," July 15, 1966.
- Tyson, Adam. 2015. "Genocide Documentary as Intervention." *Journal of Genocide Research* 17, no. 2: 177–99. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2015.1027077>.
- Wandita, Galuh. n.d. "Preman Nation: Watching *The Act of Killing* in Indonesia." *Critical Asian Studies* 46, no. 1: 167–70.
- Winnicott, D. W. 2005. *Playing and Reality*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 2009a. *The Parallax View*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- . 2009b. *The Plague of Fantasies*. 2nd ed. London: Verso.