

Portrait of an Act Dramatically Revealed: Watching *The Act of Killing*

Asakura Kayoko (Filmmaker)

I love watching movies where people die a shocking death. And as I like watching this gruesome spectacle, everybody ends up dying in my own movies as well. While it makes me tremble to see an actor's method of killing others, the dramatic flourish of a on-screen death, or a novel way of expressing this violent action on film, it also gives me a strong sense of fulfillment. It kind of feels like I have gained something from the experience. Of course I definitely do not want to see an actual killing. Perhaps I'm happy just watching a depiction of death instead of actually experiencing real fear. The time, effort and stress of arbitrarily filming scenes of murder actually dulls our consciousness towards death and even provides us with a sense of ease, with this feeling increasing the more intricate the production becomes, even though the process is bound to involve confronting death head-on.

The members of this death squad quite happily reenacted their murders when the director suggested he wanted to make a movie about the events, as if they were asking him to "Please make me an actor!" While these people have likely murdered tens of thousands of people, they are certainly not madmen, as their sense of morality is a little different: for them, helping these scenes be made provides sweet reminiscences for them. These men, who have committed murder on a grand scale, are great admirers of American movies (as am I actually), and appoint themselves to the role of cool Hollywood action hero while they are able to direct the scenes of their own murderous actions to their personal satisfaction. Before long they were pulling dramatic bloodthirsty faces at the request of their collaborators, which they surely were not making at the time of the actual murders, and the reality of the past was gradually being overtaken by fictional events. Their elaborate reenactments of the murder scenes give absolutely no feeling that these are authentic accounts of their actions; seeing their leader for some reason pulling his own teeth out with pliers in the middle of the night however, presents a significantly clearer resemblance to a person who has killed others before. Yet there is even somehow a flavor of peace in the filming of the leader's direct portrayal of mass murder, including even beheadings, with him

eager to try on special makeup for his film debut.

However, when filming the arson scene with a grand film set in the village, which signals the continuation of further rape, pillage and murder, the women and children participating in the filming are reduced to tears and a state of numbness by the shock of the violence recreated. Without memories of the original events, and not sharing the fascination with movies, the women and children are no longer "just watching," but truly experiencing fear. Reality has been eroded by fictional film-making. Upon looking at their faces, the leader is unexpectedly overwhelmed by memories of the countless murders turning over in his mind with the filming. The distinct experiences of taking other people's lives, using a wire garrotting technique that he proudly devised himself, are brought to the surface by his own performance of being killed and blended with his fictional ideas to form an image which briefly stuns him into a state of paralysis. All that is left for him is to keep staring at the hole in his life where the pleasant memories used to live.

What would have happened if there were handy cams available in 1965 and these people could have used film to show the world their murderous deeds as groups like the Taliban choose to do today? With the passing of time and turning the massacre into a piece of fiction, the need for ethical consideration is avoided and only the simple act of killing emerges. Murder is just another act, but whether you like it or not, it will make your temperature rise and be followed by a tremendous fear. Seeing the undeniable evidence of this "act," which should instinctively shatter the notion held by these men (and strongly supported by all around them) for decades that they were acting morally, will send shivers down your spine.

Through the double-sided approach of both creating an "act" and then watching it, this movie creates one of the most unforgettable leading men ever, and at the same time draws forth an overwhelming reaction that would overturn his life to date as he watches as a spectator. This powerful force will from now on undoubtedly produce a resounding shock in all the people who "just watch" this movie. (Translated by Joel Woodbury)

■ Screenings

The Act of Killing [IC] 10/12 10:00– [A6] | 10/13 18:00– [CL]