



by Klaus Theweleit
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The Laughter of Killers: Breivik et al. – A Psychogram of Killing for Pleasure

Das Lachen der Täter: Breivik u.a. – Psychogramm der Tötungslust

review

Klaus Theweleit's latest book takes the reader on a disturbing journey into the psychology of mass murder. Theweleit's original and accessible research is all too relevant to contemporary society and will appeal to an international readership.

The Laughter of Killers considers recent acts of mass violence in Indonesia, Cambodia and Rwanda, both as a group phenomenon and as the result of individual brutalisation. By means of terrorisation the perpetrator is stripped of any emotion other than in and for himself – resulting in blind blood lust. The ecstasy of violence is often expressed as laughter or a grim smile.

Anders Breivik, the Norwegian mass murderer, appeared even more repulsive because of his ecstatic laughter during his killing spree and his 'relaxed' smile during the trial. Theweleit explains this response in terms of Breivik's sense of false identity as a member of the Knight Templars, with its own laws and justifications that negate 'normal' human rules and emotions. Other examples are the Nazi SS, Islamic State, and the Ku-Klux-Klan – all engaging in mass killings so ecstatic that they can only give vent to laughter as an expression of release, and as an additional act of violence.

about the author

Klaus Theweleit was born in 1942 and studied German and English literature. He is a theoretician of literature and cultural studies and a writer. His book *Male Fantasies* became a bestseller, earning him international acclaim. Theweleit teaches at the University of Freiburg's Institute of Sociology and at the German Film and Television Academy, Berlin. From 1998 to 2008 he was professor of art and theory at the Academy of Fine Arts, Karlsruhe.

Previous works include:

Der Pocahontas Komplex (3 volumes, 1999-2013); *Buch der Könige* (3 volumes, 1988-1994)

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