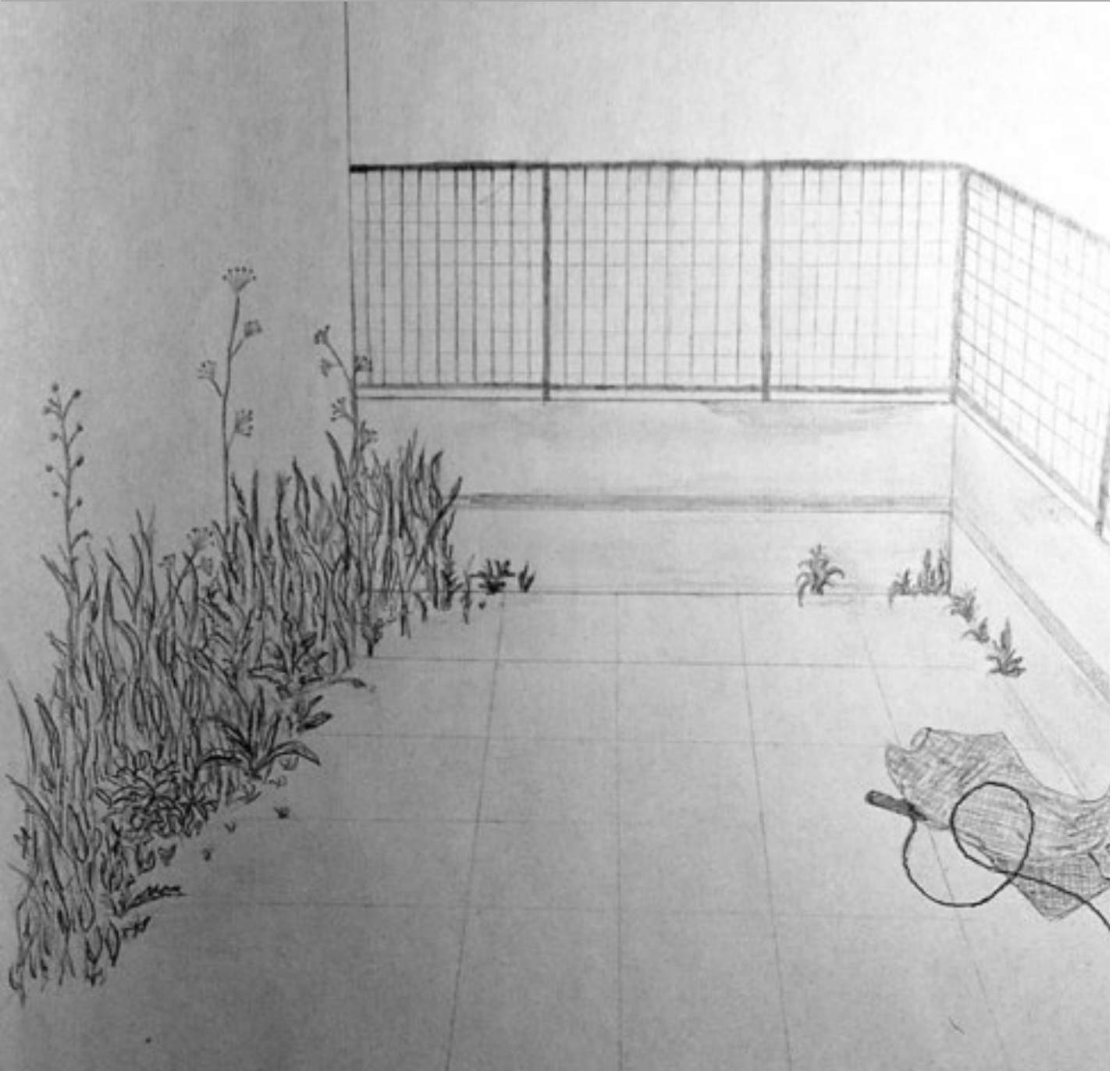


WORKING THROUGH THE ACT OF KILLING - A MATTER OF JUDGMENT?

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"...for men living in company, the inexhaustible richness of human discourse is infinitely more significant and meaningful than any One Truth could ever be"

– *Hannah Arendt*

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ABSTRACT

When confronted with laws that ignore, reinforce or legitimise violence, the possibility to judge seems to be put into question, since there are no rules to rely upon to avert that violence. On the other hand, judgment is crucial since it might be a way to counter such circumstances of corrupt law and stop ongoing injustice.

This paradoxical issue is prominent in the case study of this thesis, the documentary film *The Act of Killing* (2012). Dealing with the mass killings of Indonesia in 1965/66, the film opens a case that has been concealed since its occurrence and never taken to court. This is despite the events being characterised as ‘crimes against humanity’ by human rights organisations. I propose that by documenting how the perpetrators of the killings re-enact their deeds by means of stage-play, the film poses a theatrical trial that at the same time evokes, eludes and performs judgment or evaluation of the killings.

Drawing back on theory by Hannah Arendt and Gilles Deleuze, I argue that the film stimulates political judgment that is informed by the tension between critical distance and affect, which may be a productive method for citizens to deal with mass atrocities and present corruption. Moreover, exceeding the realms of structured societies, the film as a work of art performs an ‘immanent evaluation’ that acknowledges victims and perpetrators equally and as such challenges clear boundaries in favour of a continuous becoming of bodies. As such it allows us to productively and reparatively rethink the notion of judgment outside the confinements of law as ambiguous process without definite results.

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1. INTRODUCTION

I do believe that we shall only come to terms with this past if we begin to judge and to be frank about it.

Arendt *The Jew as Pariah* 248¹

This is where we tortured and killed the people we captured. I know it was wrong, but I had to do it. [Long pause] Why did I have to kill them? I had to kill... [pause] My conscience told me they had to be killed. This is ... [picking up a long piece of wire with a noose]. This is one of the easiest ways to take a human life. And this... [picking up a sack]. This was used to take away... the human beings we killed. Because without this ... maybe people would know.

Anwar, *The Act of Killing*, 2:30:55 - 2:36:34²

These are the last words we hear by Anwar Congo, murderer of hundreds of people during the Indonesian mass killing of 1965-1966, and protagonist in the 2012 film *The Act of Killing*. His sentences are interrupted by gagging and gut-wrenching noises that seem to come somewhere deep from his stomach, that smother his words and finally take over. His whole body cringes and cramps and is shaken by the retching. Eventually it soothes into silence, and Anwar, on shaky legs, slowly leaves the nearly fifty years old scene of crime, a roof terrace in the middle of the city of Medan. A few moments later, the final credits are running, with a conspicuously high number of contributors listed as ‘anonymous’.

“[M]aybe people would know,” (ibid.) – still today, many people in fact do not know about the Indonesian genocide, in which approximately up to one million people, accused communists, were tortured and killed. In contrast to the Rwandan genocide of 1994 or the Cambodian genocide of 1975-1979, the massacres of Indonesia are internationally largely unknown and no trial, neither in form of a juridical court case nor a court-like procedure such as a reconciliation commission, has taken place. In fact, the perpetrators of the time, from individuals to organisations and political parties, are still in power today and the events are secluded from history books and silenced in national discourse. As a result, survivors and sympathisers with the victims still today have to stay ‘anonymous’. In 2012 the Indonesian Human Right Commission ‘Komnas HAM’ submitted a report to the Attorney’s General Office which found “that government officials had been involved in the systematic persecution of members of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and suspected communist sympathizers following the abortive 1965 coup” and that a ““gross violation of human rights’, which include crimes against

¹ The quote by Hannah Arendt on the cover of this thesis is cited from Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (1968).

² Throughout the thesis, I will refer to the director’s cut, that means the 159 min. version, and I will cite the English subtitles as they are displayed in the official version. When relevant, I will add my own scene descriptions in [brackets]. Since *The Act of Killing* is the only film I discuss in this thesis, time references will be made without further information. Where relevant, I will refer to the respective protagonist.

humanity” has taken place (Amnesty International 33). Despite of these results, no further investigations have been initiated by the government yet.

The release of *The Act of Killing* (hereafter *TAOK*) has for the first time drawn wide public attention to the killings, both internationally and, mainly through secret screenings, within Indonesia, where the film is officially banned.³

The film confronts its viewer with the atrocities in a unique and radical way, going to the roots of what happened: the perpetrators themselves come onto the stage and take us to their scene of crime, reflecting on and re-enacting their deeds. They are performing themselves in order to make a film that, so they intend, shows “that this is the history. – This is who we are! So in the future people will remember! It doesn’t have to be a big film – (...). We, in our simple way, step by step – will tell the story of what we did when we were young!” (Anwar and Herman, 00:7:15-8:05). Director Joshua Oppenheimer and his co-directors Christine Cynn and ‘Anonymous’ follow and document the process of their filmmaking. *TAOK* presents the results of their eight year long journey and their investigation into the question “Why did [you] have to kill them?” (2:30:55).⁴

When confronted with the genocide of Indonesia, as shocking as learning about the killings themselves might be the fact that there has been no form of trial yet – no official condemnation of the crimes against millions of dead and those still suffering. The film, in consequence, exposes not only the concealed atrocities but, and even more so, the impunity of the perpetrators. While the deeds of the perpetrators can be seen as “crimes against humanity” (Amnesty International 33), the murderers might, legally speaking and within Indonesian society, not be designated as criminals, since they acted in conformity with the concerning law. Judgment as a literal ‘speaking of the law’ seems thus impossible.⁵ Critic Michael Meyer resumes: “Shock at the killers’ performance of impunity – an emotion expressed by critics and audience members worldwide – is inextricable from shock at the original deed itself” (Meyer, n.pag.).

The impunity, the lack of judgment of crimes beyond our grasp, and the confrontation with laws that allow the injustice to continue – these are arguably the most confronting themes of *TAOK*. By letting the perpetrators re-enact their deeds, the film offers the opportunity to learn about the narratives they use to justify atrocities as ‘right’. Further, it reveals the hypocritical condition of a society that is structured by violence, which is authorised or tolerated by law. Doing so, I argue that the film demands a judgment of both the atrocities of the past and the ongoing injustice, corruption and open

³ While “[i]n October 2012, Indonesia’s most important news publication, Tempo Magazine, published a special double edition dedicated to The Act of Killing, including 75 pages of boastful perpetrators’ testimony from across Indonesia”, as Director Joshua Oppenheimer notes (Oppenheimer, *The Guardian* n.pag.), the film has long been ignored and tried to be stopped by the government. Mette Bjerregaard reports: “[t]hrough a network of underground distributors and social media, The Act of Killing has now been viewed by millions of Indonesians. Government and anti-communist organisations continue to try to stop its distribution, but their efforts are ultimately futile in the internet age” (Bjerregaard, *The Guardian* n.pag.). The film is freely available on YouTube in Indonesia.

⁴ For the sake of readability and because he is the main director, I will refer in the following only to Oppenheimer when I speak of the filmmakers. It is important to keep in mind though that beside of the anonymous co-director, approximately fifty other Indonesian citizens took part in the making of the film without being able to have their names published.

⁵ The verb ‘to judge’ derives from Latin *judex, judic-*, from *jus* ‘law’ + *dicere* ‘to say’ (*OED Online*).

wounds of the present. However, it also confronts us with the difficulties of being within a *hypocritical* state of law.

The term ‘hypocritical,’ etymologically speaking, indicates two points relevant in this context: firstly, deriving from the Greek word *hypokrisis* it means ‘play-acting’ or ‘acting on the stage’. Secondly, *hypokrisis* derives from *hypo* (‘under’) and *krinein* (‘to sift’, ‘to decide’), indicating an inability to decide or, I interpret, to judge (“hypocrisy, n.” *OED Online*). I want to highlight with this a condition of law that allows or reinforces violence against those it pretends to protect, namely its citizens. Here, law is built on the mere pretence of creating ‘right’ and justice. Therefore, there are no rules to rely upon and seemingly no foundation for any judgment to work against violence. The film exposes this condition precisely by means of play-acting.

The question of judgment, thus, will be central theme of this thesis, in which I want to analyse *The Act of Killing* as a case study, – interpreting it against the backdrop of its specific historical-political context and searching for processes that are of relevance beyond this. Doing so, I will pursue the following questions:

Firstly, what form of judgment does *TAOK* motivate, evoke, perform or elude? Secondly, how can this judgment function productively and reparatively in working through past atrocities; and thirdly how can this inform ethical behaviour in the present when confronted with hypocritical conditions of law?

As a preliminary working definition, judgment will thus be understood in a broader sense than a ‘speaking of law’ as the ability and action of making a decision that is of relevance in a political space and exceeds subjectivity, and that responds to a crisis – a situation of “intense difficulty or danger” (“crisis, n.” *OED Online*). In order to specify my research interest, I will first give an overview of the former reception and scholarly work on the film, which will allow for a more nuanced explanation of my own approach and methodology.

1.1. THE ACT OF KILLING AS CASE STUDY

When it was first shown to a public audience at the Toronto International Film Festival and the Telluride Film Festival in Colorado in 2012, *TAOK* created an international stir, which continued with its nomination for an Oscar in 2014 and beyond. Besides countless diverse reviews by film critics and journalists, it has quickly become an object of scholarly attention, so far mostly by scholars of Indonesian history and culture. Most notably, the Journal *Critical Asian Studies* dedicated one issue to the film in February 2014, collecting articles of thirteen scholars and activists. In general, it can be said that both public and academic responses are divided between positive critique about the importance of this film for Indonesian society, its shockingly revealing content as well as its innovative style and method; and negative critique about historical inaccuracy, the missing of accounts by the victims, and ethical concerns. I will start to give an overview of the adverse criticism.

1.1.1. THE ACT OF KILLING IN DEBATE I – FACING THE PERPETRATORS

The most frequent objection raised by historians is that the film has “historical gaps” (Tyson 157). For example, it was criticised that, by focussing on individuals, *TAOK* might give the “misleading” impression that the killings were “the work of civilian criminal psychopaths”, while disregarding the role of the army (Cribb “The Act” 147).⁶ This reproach might be relevant when understanding *TAOK* as historical account, yet even then it seems misplaced, as Ariel Heryanto, scholar of cultural and postcolonial Asian Studies sums up: “it is unreasonable to expect this film, or any other title, to show all the issues deemed important in a discussion in the twenty-first century about the 1965 massacre” (163). It is important to note that in historical scholarship, too, the events of 1965 as well as the circumstances that led to them are still much disputed.⁷ More importantly, however, this criticism does not take into account that the film does not undertake – and neither does it claim to do so – a historical investigation and depiction of the events of 1965. As Oppenheimer himself writes: “The film is not a historical narrative. It is a film about history itself, about the lies victors tell to justify their actions, and the effects of those lies; about an unresolved traumatic past that continues to haunt the present” (Oppenheimer, *The Guardian* n.pag.). Considering the first-hand accounts of perpetrators involved in the mass killings I am convinced that the film has a lot to offer for historical scholarship nevertheless. My own reading, however, is rather in line with Oppenheimer’s statement and is concerned with *TAOK* as a cultural object that offers insights about dealing with these atrocities within, but also beyond the concrete historical and political context of Indonesia’s past and present society.

When dealing with an “unresolved traumatic past” (ibid.) of a society, a common approach (which is, for example, often used in Holocaust Studies) is to focus on the victims of the atrocities, in order to give formerly suppressed individuals a voice, to help them in the process of working through their trauma and possibly towards their healing. Therefore, it might not come as surprise that the absence of victims in *The Act of Killing* has been the issue of many controversial discussions. Cultural anthropologist Leslie K. Dwyer expresses this critique rigidly by accusing the director of “editing out the counter-narratives of victims” (187). This, again, implies the reproach that the film shows a lack of historical ‘completeness’, but it is much more an accusation of moral dubiousness. Critic Nick Fraser puts it most bluntly: “How badly do we want to hear from these people [the perpetrators], after all? Wouldn’t it be better if we were told something about the individuals whose lives they took? Instead of an investigation, or indeed a genuine recreation, we’ve ended somewhere else – in a high-minded snuff movie” (Fraser, *The Guardian* n.pag.). Galuh Wandita similarly expresses the concerns that the film does not only leave out the victims but is, moreover, in some of its scenes downright “offensive”, which she assesses as following: “I realize this may be the aim of the filmmaker, to make us squirm in our seats. But in a country where the dominant version of history blames the victims for genocide, an

⁶ The same argument is given by human rights activist Galuh Wandita (168), historian Gerry van Klinken (176), and anthropologist Saskia E. Wieringa, who states: “In spite of the mass murders being framed as the ‘spontaneous action’ of civilian groups the military were heavily involved and can be seen to engineer it. Both in Medan and in Aceh the Pemuda Pancasila, a militia linked to the army, were the main killers of suspected communists, as Muslim militias were in East Java.” (196).

⁷ Which is mainly due to the difficulties of accessing sources and testimonies. I will come to speak about the historical background in greater detail in chapter 2.

Indonesian audience may miss the irony” (169).⁸ These are surely valid concerns. However, Vanessa Hearman, scholar of Indonesian studies, offers another point of view: While first being similarly sceptical, she reports that her second viewing made her see “that through the relative absence of victims and the dominance of perpetrators, *TAOK*’s greatest contribution to advocacy for the victims is in showing us a highly realistic picture of Indonesian society and the impunity of the perpetrators (...) The victims may be ‘missing,’ but the larger point the filmmakers make about impunity is thereby emphasized even more” (171). I agree with Hearman and would further argue that when considering the absence of the victims one also has to take into account the genesis of the film.

Oppenheimer has been working in Indonesia for the 2003 released documentary *Globalization Tapes*, a project realised together with plantation workers about their alarmingly bad working conditions, when he found out “that the 1965-66 Indonesian massacres were the dark secret haunting Indonesia’s much-celebrated entrance into the global economy” (“Production Notes”, n.pag.). When he decided to make a film about this with the survivors, it turned out to be too dangerous for them.⁹ The survivors instead suggested interviewing perpetrators, and the film crew soon found out that they were willing to tell about their killings with pride (ibid.). In 2004 Oppenheimer met the men of whom he heard were “the most notorious death squad in North Sumatra”, Anwar Congo and his fellow accomplices (“Production Notes”, n.pag.). Oppenheimer states that he stayed “in constant dialogue with the survivors and human rights community” (*The Guardian*, n.pag.). He also emphasises that the filmmakers “developed the film’s central concept – allowing perpetrators to make fiction scenes about the killings – not as a trick to get these men to open up, but in response to their boastful openness, and as a means to understand its motives and consequences”, and that he is still in monthly contact with Anwar today (ibid.).

The latter statement responds also to further ethical concerns that accuse the filmmakers of having exploited these men, receiving awards while “leaving the film’s subjects exposed to retribution from fellow criminals” (Klinken 176), having “their bizarre and tasteless fantasies exposed to the world to no real purpose other than ridicule” (Cribb “The Act” 148); and “resurrecting colonial era narratives of a barbaric ‘heart of darkness’ penetratable [*sic*] only by the civilizing eye of the Western camera” (Dwyer 184). I would argue that these points are hard to hold onto when considering, for example, the countless ‘anonymous’ Indonesians who partook in the making of the film; or when undertaking a close reading. While I do not have an in-depth insight into Indonesian society and neither can nor want to question possible reactions by survivors or by the men involved in the film, to allege the directors of exploiting and ridiculing the perpetrators or reinforcing or repeating their violence, as Fraser implies

⁸ Indeed, the film was largely but not only conceived positively by Indonesians and survivors of the mass killings. Mette Bjerregaard screened *TAOK* at a university in Yogyakarta and reports that “an audience member vented his anger at Oppenheimer’s decision to give the killers free rein: ‘An alternative title of the film would be A Celebration of Killing. It is a series of festive occasions in which people are celebrating what they did in the past’” (n.pag.).

⁹ In an interview with John Roosa, Oppenheimer explains: “When we made [*Globalization Tapes*], the plantation workers said they were afraid to organise a union because their parents and their grandparents had been killed for being in a union. They then said, come back and let’s make another film about why we’re afraid, what it’s like for us to live with the perpetrators still in power around us. I came back and immediately the Army found out that they were talking to me about 1965 and started visiting them one by one and warning them not to talk about this” (Roosa, “Interview” 10).

above, seems of limited focus.¹⁰ A more attentive reading might show that, on the contrary, the filmmakers demonstrate the importance of taking perpetrators seriously as human beings. Despite their horrible acts they are not to ‘othered’ as evil monsters with whom one can or should not engage in a dialogue. I contend that in order to understand why mass killings and other crimes are happening again and again, and to find out how do productively deal with the deeds and the people who committed them, one cannot disregard the perpetrators nor meet them with preconceived or stigmatising ideas. This is an underlying statement in this thesis that I will seek to argue for.

I am aware of the fact that this position might easily or hastily be interpreted as a way of arguing in favour of the perpetrators or even excusing them. As such, my thesis might provoke critique similar to the one *TAOK* received. Engaging in a dialogue with people who have committed horrible crimes is certainly not an endeavour that we are used to or feel comfortable with. Hannah Arendt’s report on Adolf Eichmann’s trial, on which I will elaborate within this thesis, received objections for comparable reasons. However, Arendt made clear that trying to understand does not mean excusing, accepting or forgiving someone: “*tout comprendre* [does not equal] *c’est tout pardonner*. (...) Forgiving has so little to do with understanding that it is neither its condition nor its consequence” (*Essays* 308). I agree with Arendt that the process of understanding, especially when dealing with atrocities that seem beyond comprehension, is necessary and important even if impossible in achieving final results: “Understanding, as distinguished from having correct information (...), is a complicated process which never produces unequivocal results. It is an unending activity by which, in constant change and variation, we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, try to be at home in the world” (*Essays* 307-8). It is in this sense that my thesis will face the perpetrators and seeks to take them seriously as human beings with a potential for change.

Coming back once more to the reproaches expressed against *TAOK*: to ask whether the film, or any cultural object, employs any form of abusive or oppressive structures is without doubt important. Yet it can be seen as a form of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in reference to Melanie Klein calls a ‘paranoid’ reading, that misses out aspects that might become apparent through ‘reparative’ reading practices: “What we can best learn from such practices are, perhaps, the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the object of a culture – even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them” (Sedgwick 150-151). I would argue that the above critiques are narrowly focussed because they approach the film by something it lacks rather than by what it is and has to offer.

1.1.2. THE ACT OF KILLING IN DEBATE II – A CATALYST FOR CHANGE?

Examples of such ‘reparative’ readings might be those voices, which regard *TAOK* as possible “catalyst for real change” in Indonesia (Wandita 170). Bjerregaard reports: “Even people at the screening who didn’t appreciate the ‘film within the film’ structure and criticised its theatricality,

¹⁰ Note Michael Meyer’s response to these accusations: “A common misconception among viewers is that Oppenheimer somehow tricked the killers and their associates into participating in the film (...). This misconception is based on the perfectly logical notion that anyone who had taken part in such an atrocity would understand the danger of admitting to war crimes on camera. But these men had never been accused of anything; they were heroes.” (2013, n.pag.).

thought *The Act of Killing* would be ground-breaking in helping Indonesia break its silence about its history. International attention will surely help the country come to terms with its past” (n.pag.). Oppenheimer himself expresses a similar intention, albeit with an additional emphasis, noting “neither the UK nor the US can have an ethical relationship with Indonesia (or so many other countries across the global south), until we acknowledge the crimes of the past, and our collective role in supporting, participating in, and – ultimately – ignoring those crimes” (Oppenheimer, *The Guardian* n.pag.). Oppenheimer’s repeated mentioning of how this film should also be understood as a critique of the involvement of the US and UK in the Indonesian genocide is another reason to be doubtful of Dwyer’s interpretation of a repetition of colonial narratives – not because I believe the director’s word has necessarily more weight, but because I think it is relevant part of the context, and because questioning the narratives of history’s victors is one of the most important themes of the film – thus, implicitly, the victors of the Cold War are accused as well.¹¹

It is without doubt desirable that the film initiates debates that bring about a change of dealing with the genocide, both nationally and internationally. Considering the broad attention and discussions surrounding the film this is partly already happening. Yet, the question of what impact the film might have in Indonesia’s dealing with its past as well as its current policy cannot be answered yet.¹²

Moreover, to read the film in terms of leading to a societal change in Indonesia, as for instance Wandita’s approach assumes, might be a similarly limited view as the above objections. This approach could also be seen as a form of ‘paranoid’ reading with “a tendency to split ourselves, other people and the texts we are working on, and that are powerfully working on us, into good and bad parts, rather than conceptualising them as ethically complex”; and an inclination “towards all-or-nothing formulations and fantasies of omnipotence and omniscience or impotence and ignorance” (Edwards 109). Instead of investigating its ‘successful’ or ‘unsuccessful’ representation of the past or change of Indonesian’s future dealing with it, a more ‘reparative’ approach might allow to explore the healing, helpful and critical *potential* of *TAOK*. This implies a potential of facilitating change rather than an expectation of the film to fulfil a task of ‘saving’ victims, for instance, which might be too much to ask for from a work of art. To explore the potential of *TAOK* it is vital to take a closer look at its narrative and aesthetics, its structure, method and its theatricality – something none of the discussed scholars have undertaken in greater detail.

1.1.3. REPARATIVE READING

I intend to approach the film with ‘reparative’ reading practices, following Jason Edward’s understanding of Sedgwick. Thus my reading stands in contrast to a ‘paranoid’ practise of “critiquing texts as objects of inevitable dissatisfaction when compared to our impossible ideals, and thereby setting off potentially endless volleys of shame” (Edwards 112). However, ‘reparative’ reading does

¹¹ About the role of the Western governments, especially the US Administration, in the events of 1965-66, see for example Alex Bellamy (2012), 208-12.

¹² Currently, there are different opinions about this. Heryanto, for example, counters the above hopes saying: “Despite the great expectations of many (...), *TAOK* has not caused a major public controversy in Indonesia,” and will probably not lead to a radical shift (163). Baker takes a middle position, calling the film a “radical intervention into the wider Indonesian social memory” (151).

not mean a naïve or exclusive endorsement, but rather it means to “remain conscious of textual hostilities and be hurt, scared, scarred and angry in relation to them” (ibid.). Moreover, it strives to articulate how a text surprises us and challenges us to notice: “[i]t ain’t necessarily so” (ibid.). An underlying interest in my dealing with the film is therefore to seek what form of “sustenance” it has to offer – can it motivate a productive way of dealing with past and present violence? – and to become aware of its ethical complexity.

The latter has been addressed, for instance, by Slavoj Žižek in an article about the film for the *New Statesman* (2013). In his short discussion about *TAOK* as an example of the present trend of “privatising the public space,” he states that a starting point for approaching the film should be to see “the dislocating effects of capitalist globalisation which, by undermining the ‘symbolic efficacy’ of traditional ethical structures, creates such a moral vacuum” (*New Statesman*, n.pag.).

Thus, what some critics find repellent about *TAOK* – the alleged lack of taking a clear stance, the alleged total absence of victims and of a clear condemnation of the perpetrators – others see as productive critical potential. For example Meyer states that

[t]he film’s lack of moral handholding makes many people deeply uncomfortable, but this ambiguity is the key to its power. Without a binary of victims and villains, the viewer is unsure whom to root for or against. (...) The concept of mass murder is woefully unsurprising to the average news consumer, but seeing it celebrated without any counterbalance from the victims’ perspective presents a messy moral universe, one that audience members themselves must resolve, since the film doesn’t do it for them.

(Meyer n.pag.)

Likewise, Dwyer, despite or alongside his above reservations, observes that “[t]he film asks us to reflect on our own position as viewers (...) [and] gives none of the satisfaction of, say, a Hotel Rwanda or a Schindler’s List, where viewers can leave the theater having shed a cathartic tear, feeling their emotional response equivalent to having ‘gained awareness’ or ‘done something’ about genocide” (183-184). I would indeed argue that the critical potential of the film, and its ethical complexity, lies among other things in making the viewer uncomfortable, in ‘scaring and scarring’ them. I will explain why by giving a short impression of my own first viewing experience.

At the beginning I was repelled and shocked by not only the information about these mass killings I have not heard of before, but even more by the pride of the perpetrators, the seemingly lacking sense of understanding of what they have done – and, as mentioned by others, by the impunity they enjoy. I quickly and without much thinking formed my opinion about them, which took the form of a verdict: these men are guilty of horrible deeds, they show no sign of remorse and should be held accountable for their acts. Throughout my viewing of the film, I perceived it as an extremely uncomfortable, relentless confrontation with violence and lack of its condemnation within society. I felt an urge to judge these people ‘evil’ – without being sure whether this was in order to distinguish myself and my ideals of ‘right’ or ‘good’ from them, as a form of defence of the absent victims, or out of outrage or dismay. However, as the film went on I, too, underwent a process. The unique theatricality of the film confronts the viewer with the protagonists in a deeper and more complex, “more intimate and

innovative way” (Dwyer 183), complicating the initial judgment. The “ambiguity” and “messy moral universe” Meyer mentions (n.pag.) became especially apparent to me toward the ending of the film, where I found myself having a startling sense of compassion for at least Anwar, instead of the clear rejection before. The clear distinction of ‘evil’ and ‘good’, that I tried to uphold at the beginning and which many of the above mentioned critics seem to uphold when accusing the film of taking the perpetrators’ side, has been complicated.

Historian Gerry van Klinken expresses a similar change by stating: “Anwar Congo became for me a person who could grow” (178), and Heryanto concludes: “The film is a brilliant masterpiece because (not in spite) of its many paradoxes and ironies that complicate the vision and agenda of many human rights activists whose project often requires a clear demarcation between perpetrator and victim, good and evil, hero and villain” (166). I would argue that the film does both at the same time: on the one hand it demands a judgment, on the other hand it challenges its viewers not to judge about the murderers too easily and maybe even puts into question the possibility or productivity of judgment. Hence, I contend that *TAOK* not only raises the question of how to judge in a state where perpetrators are protected or tolerated by the law, but also shows that judgment might be a more complex endeavour than initially presumed and might even be impossible in terms of ethical acting. In order to explain how I will address these issues, I need to introduce my theoretical framework.

1.2. METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In distancing myself from most of the approaches used in the *Critical Asian Studies* articles such as historical, anthropological or Indonesia cultural studies – and by bringing in the notion of ‘reparative’ reading, I have already indicated part of my methodology. As a literary critic I am interested in the critical potential and insights *TAOK* has to offer as a work of art beyond (not disregarding) its specific context. I will explore these by undertaking a close reading of the narrative, methods and aesthetics; an approach that has rarely been used in analyses of the film.¹³ Since I will explore *TAOK* as a case study, however, my theoretical framework will be as important as the close reading, and both shall enter a fruitful dialogue in order to investigate the notion of judgment in dealing with injustice. In this regard I chose to focus especially on two thinkers to constitute my theoretical framework: Hannah Arendt and Gilles Deleuze.

Before I can turn to my analyses of the film with the help of Arendt and Deleuze, I will need to establish my argument that and how *TAOK* demands dealing with the question of judgment. I suggest that *TAOK* can be read as a theatrical trial that enables, by being placed outside of law, a different notion of judgment than one that is juridical. As Yasco Horsman shows in *Theaters of Justice*, trials have a specific theatrical structure. To read theatrical settings as different form of trials allows to

¹³ Notable exceptions are Sylvia Tiwon (2014) and Carrie McAlinden (2013); who are both discussing *TAOK* as a work of art rather than as ‘historical documentary.’ McAlinden suggests investigating the different representations of history the film exposes and gives an interesting analysis of *TAOK* in dialogue with Walter Benjamin’s theses on history. Tiwon focuses on the aesthetics of the film but offers a rather short analysis.

explore aspects that might elude a strictly legal framework and can thus offer new potential for staging and working through past atrocities.

In Arendt's writings on judgment, too, theatrical notions such as spectator and actor and a critical distance to the events play a crucial role. This strongly relates to Brecht and his conception of epic theatre, of which, I will argue, *TAOK* features specific elements. To investigate those will especially be of help when dealing with Arendt's notion of judgment.

In the context of her much disputed report on the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, Arendt states: "I do believe that we shall *only come to terms with this past if we begin to judge* and to be frank about it" (Arendt *Jew* 248, my emphasis, AK). When confronted with crimes so horrendous they seem to exceed any possible understanding of them, according to Arendt judging is crucial. Yet, the Eichmann report with its clear focus on the perpetrator was only a starting point for Arendt to think about the notion of judgment more thoroughly and to investigate its complexity beyond the mere juridical action, as independent human faculty. Since she never completed her theory on judgment as planned, I will mainly draw on her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* besides of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and further primary and secondary literature. I will analyse these text to assess the complex and unsystematic concept of Arendt's notion judgment, which especially emphasises the act of critical thinking.

As the previous account of my own reading and many reactions to the film have shown, *TAOK* provokes moments of shock as well as facilitating a change the viewer might undergo in the process, and which, I argue, breaks the critical distance the film otherwise establishes. The observation of a shift taking place within the film and possibly within the viewer might be productively analysed as *affect*, understood in a Deleuzian way as a change of "one experimental state of body to another" (Massumi, ix). I propose that this shift complicates the notion of judgment, and even calls it into question. I will follow Deleuze's distinction of morality and ethics and define morality as "a set of constraining rules that judge actions and intentions in relation to transcendent values of good and evil" and ethics as a "way of assessing what we do in terms of ways of existing in the world" (Marks 87). However, Deleuze's claim that ethical action necessarily excludes all form of judging will be one of the issues at stake.

I will introduce Deleuze's notion of 'immanent evaluation,' and propose a reading of the film in regard to this, hoping to gain further insight into the working of the film as well as into Deleuze's notions. In striving to operate reparatively concerning the violence of the past and the vulnerability of the present in this society, is there a more productive way to evaluate the situation than the critical judgment Arendt demands? The tension between critical distance and affect will be a vital aspect of discussion towards the end of this thesis.

1.3. OUTLINE

My hypothesis is that *The Act of Killing* motivates a critical investigation of the notion of judgment that entails both Arendt's advocacy of a critical-distant judgment as well as Deleuze's preference for ethical evaluation, yet goes beyond these and asks for a conception of judgment between critical

distance and affect. I suggest that the film asks to formulate judgment as responsible, ethical and political response to suffering and injustice of the past and present.

To test this, my steps will be as follows: In the following chapter, I will establish *TAOK* as theatrical trial, explaining the meaning of trials in dealing with past atrocities and drawing back on Brecht's theory on the epic theatre. I will also give a brief account of the historical and political context of my case study.

In the third chapter I will read *TAOK* as a process of judging. To do so, I will first undertake an analysis of Arendt's notion on judgment in its own terms. This allows for a productive investigation into the possibilities of judgment within what I call *hypocritical* conditions of societies, where judgment seems impossible due to the abuse of laws by the state. I will then engage in a critical-distant analysis of *TAOK* that not only asks how the motivates and evokes in protagonists and viewers, but that will also shed new light on Arendt's notion of reflective judgment.

In the fourth chapter *TAOK* will be seen as a process of becoming rather than of judging. The focus will mainly lie on the affects of the film, reading it in constellation with Deleuzian ethics of becoming. I will analyse theory and film simultaneously in order to explore the reciprocal impulses. Here I will argue that the film can be understood as a performance of 'immanent evaluation' that defies the notion of judgment in some regards. On the base of this I will lastly reflect on the tension between distance and involvement that *TAOK* creates and which, I contend, allows for its greater critical potential.

Overall, I want to pursue my research question by analysing *TAOK* on three levels: the protagonists (perpetrators) and their forms of (self-)judgment; the events and protagonists of the film as object of a judgment/evaluation by the viewer; and in the end the film as possibly performing a judgment/evaluation as a work of art in its own terms. Regarding the perpetrators, I will particularly focus on Anwar, which is due to the limited space of this thesis and to the notable ethical complexity that he embodies.

2. SETTING THE STAGE: *THE ACT OF KILLING* AS THEATRICAL TRIAL

In 1965, the Indonesian government was overthrown by the military. Anybody opposed to the military dictatorship could be accused of being a communist: union members, landless farmers, intellectuals, and the ethnic Chinese. In less than a year, and with the direct aid of western governments, over one million 'communists' were murdered. The army used paramilitaries and gangsters to carry out the killings. These men have been in power – and have persecuted their opponents – ever since. 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. This film follows that process, and documents its consequences.

TAOK 00:02:00-00:03:52

Following the title, this text is displayed at the beginning of *TAOK*, in the second scene after what could be called an opening or ‘prologue’ scene. This information, and it is the only information on historical background of the massacres given by the filmmakers, establishes context, aim and method. The film is based around the context of the events from 1965-66. It is made explicit here that it is not a documentary of the past events with the intention of an encompassing historical depiction. Instead, these lines place the film in the present, stating the aim and method: to understand why these gangsters participated in the murdering, by asking them to “create scenes” (ibid.) about themselves and their deeds and by documenting this process.

The aim of this chapter is to investigate how method, theme and context allow us to read *TAOK* as a theatrical trial that calls for a judgment and working through of the crimes in past and present. Reading it as such, I suggest, allows us to explore the notion of judgment in a realm outside of law as a critical spectator, which might be helpful in hypocritical conditions where one cannot rely upon laws in times of crisis.

Firstly, I will establish the context of the specific *case* by giving an overview of the historical background of the 1965-66 killings and the political situation in Indonesia today. This shows all the more the pressing nature of the film in regard to striving for a judgment that could possibly change the status quo.

I will then give a brief insight into the role of trials (both legal and theatrical) in dealing with atrocities in the context of literary theory. This will help to explore the potential of art to deal with the incomprehensibility of mass atrocities in a way that might not be accessible within juridical confines. While previous research in this regard has mainly focussed on the notion of trauma and on the role of victims, my present case study allows investing the productivity of a perpetrator-oriented approach.

Thirdly, I will argue that the film features distinct characteristics of Brecht’s theatre, an observation that enables the reading of the film as a theatrical trial, thus setting the stage for the upcoming analyses of *TAOK* as process of judgment and becoming.

2.1. *THE ACT OF KILLING* IN CONTEXT: THE KILLINGS OF 1965/1966 AND INDONESIA TODAY

While, as I have stated in the introduction, *TAOK* is much more about the present than a historical representation of the past, I consider it fruitful for any reading of the film to gain some background information about the killings of 1965-66. I do not intend, as Cribb implies in his critiques, to collate ‘accurate history’ with the film. This would bear the implication that we could know the past “as it really was” – a view that equates to 19th-century historicism and is not adequate anymore (Ranke 86, my translation, AK). However, scholars of Indonesian history and politics have done important work in assessing the events of 1965-66 as well as preceding and following developments in the country. Especially because in Indonesia itself only one version of history is valid, the available analyses are complex and not always conform to each other. It would be beyond the scope of this thesis to give an extensive reflection on the sources, or to do justice to their complexity. I will thus settle for a brief overview of important events and interpretations on which scholars seem to more or less agree.

After gaining independence from Dutch and Japanese colonisation, Indonesia's striving to become a nation was exposed to economic instability and a struggle between three main competing streams of thought: the Islamic, the communist, and that of the developmentalist army (Cribb "Genocide" 226). In 1957, in an attempt for more political stability, President Sukarno introduced the system of 'Guided Democracy;' propagated as the concept of 'NASAKOM', the forced conflation of nationalism/developmentalism, religion and communism. Following this, the communist party PKI grew larger and was by 1965 with about three million members "said to be the largest communist party in the non-communist world" (Cribb "Genocide" 229), whereas the army and the Islamic organisation lost power. The "economic malaise" was then mostly blamed on the rising Communist Party (Cribb "Genocide" 232).

On the 1st of October 1965 a coup on the government was committed, in which seven generals were killed.¹⁴ It is until today "a mystery" to historians by whom and how the attacks were organised and committed (Roosa *Pretext* 5). Yet it is clear that these attacks led to the take-over by the military regime of President Suharto (who installed the 'New Order' and stayed president until 1998), and were the starting point for what today is mostly referred to as 'the killings of 1965-66'. Roosa calls it "one of the worst bloodbaths of the twentieth century" (*Pretext* 4). Suharto accused the communist party of the coup,¹⁵ which was then followed by a widespread "demonization of the communists" (Cribb "Genocide" 233) and the systematic killing and torturing of whoever was found 'guilty' to be a communist, exercised mainly by local militias and mobs under Suharto's army. The killings took place all over Indonesia, mostly in the regions Central and East Java, Bali and North Sumatra (van Langenberg 49). An estimated number of up to a million people were murdered until March 1966. The fact that until today the number of deaths has not been determined, points to the general lack of official investigations and acknowledgment of the crimes.¹⁶

Concerning the relation of the 'pretext' and the genocide, Roosa concludes about the hypocritical condition of Indonesia's national memory:

The fetishization of a relatively minor event (the movement) and the erasure of a world-historical event (the mass killings of 1965-66) have blocked empathy for the victims (...). While a monument stands next to the well in which the movement's troops dumped the bodies of seven army officers on October 1, 1965, no monument marks any of the mass graves that hold hundreds of thousands of people killed in the name of suppressing the

¹⁴ See for example Roosa's detailed and extensive study: *Pretext for mass murder: the September 30th Movement and Suharto's Coup d'état in Indonesia* (2006) which draws back on new primary source material to shed new light on the events of the movement and their meaning for the killings that directly succeeded them.

¹⁵ Apparently, "Suharto argued that the PKI as a whole was responsible for the coup attempt and called for an 'absolutely essential cleaning out' of communists" (Bellamy 205; with reference to Arnold C. Brackman).

¹⁶ Most scholarly articles on the mass killings name a number of at least half a million deaths in the time between October 1965 and March 1966 (cf. Cribb "Genocide" 219 and 233, Lindsay 3, Amnesty International, 33). For a brief comprehensible overview on the role of the numbers for analysing the mass killings, see Cribb "Unresolved Problems in the Indonesian Killings of 1965-1966", 557-559. While the numbers do not necessarily help in understanding the agency and explanations of the killings (Cribb "Unresolved" 559), the lack of knowledge of the figures does surely emphasize the lack of knowledge and investigation of the massacres until today. Moreover, Douglas Kammen and Faizah Zakaria point out in their article "Detention in Mass Violence. Policy and Practise in Indonesia, 1965-1968" (2012), that most analyses leave out the huge number of detentions and tortures that were part of the mass violence; practices that went on long after March 1966 (441-442).

movement. As for the number of dead, their names, the location of the mass graves, the manner in which they were massacred, and the identity of the perpetrators, little is known in any detail or with any certainty. Beyond Lubang Buaya [the site where the generals were killed] lie many larger, more complex mysteries.

(Roosa, *Pretext* 225)

Suharto's regime did not deny the events, but forbade further investigations (Cribb "Genocide" 234). Even after his downfall in 1998, many members and organisations of the regime were still prominent, so that the only serious attempt to publicly address the killings failed. When in 2000 President Abdurrahman Wahid formulated an official apology, "Muslim leaders from his own party moved very quickly to prevent the inquiry from going ahead" (Cribb "Genocide" 236). This attempt remained "the only time (...) that the 'killings' issue commanded widespread attention in the mainstream media and public discourse" (McGregor 38). As little as the killings have been dealt with in Indonesia, they have "received little international attention at the time and have seldom been studied in detail since then" (Cribb "Genocide" 219). As for the role of Western government, which has not been discussed much neither, Bellamy notes in a recent publication (2012):

At the very least, the USA helped to create an enabling environment which left the perpetrators free to go about their bloody business with impunity. At the beginning of the slaughter, US officials gave the army the green light to proceed. (...) Ambassador Green advised the Administration to support the Indonesian army through covert efforts to 'spread the story of the PKI's guilt, treachery and brutality.'

(Bellamy 209)¹⁷

Hence, one could argue that also at an international level there exists impunity and a lack of working through in relation to the killings.

As for the current state of affairs, the political situation in Indonesia is highly charged: Communist parties are still banned from taking part in the proclaimed democratic elections; and accused communists or relatives of victims are not allowed to take certain positions in education and politics or to act in any ways that seem 'communist'. For example, as Oppenheimer's *Globalization Tapes* (2003) shows, people are prevented from building unions to fight against bad working conditions. Moreover, a propaganda video for Prabowo Subianto, candidate for president in the national elections on July 9 2014 has recently caused a stir in the media because of its symbolism that reminds strongly of Nazi imagery.¹⁸

¹⁷ After the end of the killings and the destruction of the Communist party, the cover headline of the US time magazine from July 15, 1966, reads: "Indonesia- The Land the Communists Lost" (*Time Magazine*. July 15, 1966. Vol. 88/3).

¹⁸ Cf. Yenni Kwok *Time* 2014. *The Jakarta Post* newspaper assesses the current situation as so dangerous that it gives up its journalistic impartiality to take a stance against Prabowo. The newspaper states: "There is no such thing as being neutral when the stakes are so high. (...) We are further perplexed at the nation's fleeting memory of past human rights crimes. A man [meant is Prabowo] who has admitted to abducting rights activists (...) has no place at the helm of the world's third-largest democracy. (...) [It] is an endorsement we believe to be morally right" (*The Jakarta Post* 2014).

Against the backdrop of what is known (or rather: still not known) about the killings and considering the situation in Indonesia today, the criticism against *TAOK* to focus on the perpetrators seems all too understandable. With no counter-narrative and no approaches of a collective process of remembrance and mourning, the muteness of the victims seems awfully loud. To give their silence a voice and their suffering a space would be an undertaking doubtlessly of greatest importance and urgency; as it has been, and still is, for the victims of the Holocaust and other cases of genocide. In contrast to the Rwandan or Cambodian genocide, in Indonesia the story of the victims has not received any “semantic authority” (Felman 127) yet. Giving the victims a voice is considered one of the possible outcomes of a trial that deals with atrocities. However, it is also important to listen carefully to the perpetrators in this process, as I will explain in the following subchapter.

2.1. THE ROLE OF TRIALS IN DEALING WITH ATROCITIES

A trial is commonly defined as “a formal examination of evidence by a judge, typically before a jury, in order to decide guilt in a case of criminal or civil proceedings” (“trial, n.” *OED Online*). A trial, thus, aims for a judgment on the base of the law, and ends with a verdict – a ‘truth speaking’ – that is supposed to bring about justice in accordance with this law. After the Second World War, trials were confronted with immense challenges in this regard: they had to deal with atrocities that “were submitted for the first time to the legal definition of a crime” (Felman 183, note 4) and had to create legal meaning of events that are due to their scope and execution beyond understanding. Moreover, as literary critic Shoshana Felman emphasises, “for the first time (...) history itself [was called] into a court of justice” (11). What was at stake here was not only the individual guilt, but the attempt “to resolve the massive trauma of the Second World War by the conceptual resources and by the practical tools of the law” (Felman 1). However, while trials received a new societal function – more than the juridical also a didactic and therapeutic one¹⁹ – it also became clear that the ‘tools of the law’ were not sufficient to work through collective trauma. Art came to be seen as a complement, offering capabilities the jurisdiction seemingly lacked:

We needed trials and trial reports to bring a conscious closure to the trauma of the war, to separate ourselves from the atrocities and to restrict, to demarcate and draw a boundary around, a suffering that seemed both unending and unbearable. Law is a discipline of limits and of consciousness. We needed limits to be able both to close the case and to enclose it in the past. Law distances Holocaust. Art brings it closer. We needed art – the language of infinity – to mourn the losses and to face up to what in traumatic memory is not closed and cannot be closed.

(Felman 107)

¹⁹ Cf. Horsman: “A trial, it was believed, has the unique capacity to bring the past to the national stage, and because it culminates in a verdict it could provide – perhaps – a healing moment of closure” (133).

In her comparative and dialogic analysis of trials and works of art, Felman demonstrates the productivity of the encounter between law and art as one that makes trauma – which eludes meaning and understanding – accessible.²⁰ A trial can provide closure and a “collective story” (127). Felman emphasises the importance of the Eichmann trial in this regard, which was revolutionary in performing and dramatising a “transformation of the victim that makes the victim’s story *happen* for the first time, and happen as a legal act of *authorship of history*” (126). Art can do justice to what cannot be closed and can acknowledge the silence of the victims, and thereby express the ‘expressionless’.²¹

The history of the relation between law and literature reaches back much further, with even “distinct echoes of this idea in Cicero’s admonition that rhetoric without poetics is a dead letter,” as Austin Sarat, Matthew D. Anderson, and Cathrine O. Frank argue in their encompassing critical review *Law and the Humanities. An Introduction* (2). Yet, the ‘law and literature movement’ gained significance in the second half of the twentieth century,²² and especially in the context of mass violence and trauma discourse, as Felman demonstrates. Similarly, Julie Stone Peters describes the relation of law and literature in the context of mass atrocities and trauma in her article “‘Literature,’ the ‘Rights of Man,’ and Narratives of Atrocity: Historical Backgrounds to the Culture of Testimony”.²³ She explores the rise of narratives of atrocities and detects the “underlying aspiration to a kind of redemption through storytelling” (254) in truth commissions, international trials and “other national and international arenas in which victims may bear witness to what they have suffered, and in which the narration of atrocity may serve at once as testimony, redress and public catharsis” (253). Again we find here the function of trials (or similar institutions like the truth commissions) through and in connection with storytelling (literature’s narrative power) to educate the public, heal both victims and perpetrators and provide closure for the community. “Narrative in human rights,” Peters observes, “has come to have an independent legal-political function” (254).²⁴

In her thorough analysis of the Eichmann trial and Arendt’s report on it, Felman has argued that the trial had transformative power precisely because it listened to the victims, even to their silence, thus giving their story authority. I find her argument convincing and necessary, yet I would argue that she

²⁰ “Between too much proximity and too much distance, the Holocaust becomes today accessible, I will propose, precisely in this space of *slippage between law and art*. But it is also in this space of slippage that its full grasp continues to elude us” (Felman 107).

²¹ A term Felman borrows from Walter Benjamin to describe the victims “whom violence has deprived of expression; who (...) have been historically reduced to silence” (13).

²² Arguably starting with James Boyd White’s *The Legal Imagination* (1973) as seminal work, which proposes methods of literary criticism to analyse legal texts.

²³ Peters offers a comprehensive overview on the “intertwined histories of modern literature and modern rights” (256). In contrast to Felman’s positive arguments, however, Peters’ conclusion is relentlessly pragmatic, stating that “the epidemic of storytelling that has come to rights culture and literary theory’s claim that it can offer rights a narrative foundation may indeed be a curative return (...) [but it may also] be a sentimental and eviscerated displacement of other kinds of work: the rebuilding of cities and farms; the fixing of broken bodies; the sad policing of still-unquiet violence” (282-283). *TAOK* might be seen as both: a way of storytelling that does, however, engage in the complicated business of striving to end ongoing violence.

²⁴ Peters names truth commissions as special example where “redemption [is aspired] through story-telling” (254). As Horsman describes, an important feature of truth commissions is exactly to try to do what conventional trials cannot: “As they have evolved over the last quarter-century, truth commissions seek not to punish criminals but to support a process of working through the past, which is often understood as a moment of ‘healing’ for the nation” (6). Truth commissions can thus be seen as a different *form* of a trial. In this thesis, I want to suggest that works of art, in this case *TAOK*, can possibly also function as a – yet again different – form of trial.

fails to acknowledge an important aspect of the trial and of Arendt's report: the importance of facing the perpetrator. The reason *TAOK* focuses on the perpetrators is first of all an unavoidable practical one: precisely because there has not been a trial or truth commission yet, the collective narrative or history of the victims is not yet possible as such.²⁵ However, I would argue that letting the perpetrators come to the stage is, in this case, an important decision for reasons that go beyond mere practicalities. Arendt's case helps to elucidate this.

When Arendt's report *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963) was published, it caused, likewise to *TAOK*, controversial debates about precisely the decision to leave out (and in this case one could indeed speak of an act of 'editing out') many of the accounts of the victims, and instead to focus on Eichmann. Gershom Sholem, for example, harshly criticised the "inappropriate" flippant tone (*Jew* 242) of the report as well as her focus on the perpetrator and her lack of "Herzenstakt" (*ibid.*) – of sensibility or empathy for the victims. In her response to him, Arendt made clear: "although you may be right that it is too early for a 'balanced judgment' (though I doubt this), I do believe that we shall only come to terms with this past if we begin to judge and to be frank about it" (*Jew* 248). Her endeavour to understand Eichmann was motivated by the belief that it is a judgment of his deeds, not empathy with the victims that can lead to justice and to a form of closure of the societal wounds of the past. Instead of following a pre-written script that aimed to convict the "monster" Eichmann (*Eichmann* 54) as she accused the judges of doing, Arendt emphasised that the focus of a trial should always lie with the defendant who should be seen as "a man of flesh and blood with an individual history, with an always unique set of qualities" (*Eichmann* 285).

In accordance with Arendt, I argue that in the process of coming literally *to terms* with the past (defining its conditions and different notions or stories), facing the perpetrator is as an important aspect as making the victims to be heard. By no means I want to question the importance of the latter. Yet I would insist that in order to *understand* (in Arendt's sense as a never-ending, ambiguous process) the violent acts that caused societal wounds – and possibly to prevent them from happening again – a careful investigation of the narratives and the individuals behind the violence is essential.

In context of the circumstances – by which I mean the historical background, the present political situation in Indonesia and the world-wide attention the film has gained – the staging of the perpetrators allows us to read the film as a process asking for a judgment of the events. Yasco Horsman asks, "[c]an a 'crime against humanity' be prosecuted within the confines of a legal trial, or do we need, in order to articulate its indictment, to construct a different theatrical space?" (64).

While the dialogue between law and literature in general was mostly determined by either reading law thematically *in* literature, or analysing it *as* literature,²⁶ the "movement (...) has been succeeded by increasingly complex and expansive notions of what constitutes either the legal or the literary text" (Sarat et al. 2-3, note 5). Besides of the above-mentioned studies, Horsman's *Theatres of Justice* is a productive example of this. Raising the question "What type of theater do we need to liberate

²⁵ However, Oppenheimer is indeed working on film (working title: *The Look of Silence*) that focusses more on the perspective of the victims, using footage he has secretly shot during his work on *TAOK* (Roosa "Interview" 9).

²⁶ "Where studies of law in literature focus on literary (typically narrative, novelistic) representations of legal professionals, the use of legal forms and documents, legal settings or, more fundamentally, the pervasiveness of legal culture that literature both helps to constitute and critique" (Sarat et al. 3, note 6).

ourselves from the past?” (4), Horsman analyses literary texts that reflect on the theatrical aspects of legal trials. He comes to the conclusion that liberation of past atrocities is impossible, since closure “in legal (closing a case), therapeutic (finding healing), and pedagogical (reaching a synthetic, positive understanding) senses” is “interminably deferred” (139). Yet, the process of staging and judging plays an indispensable part in working through the past, precisely because closure is impossible: it is a process that needs to be continued. I want to seize on Horsman’s method and insight and investigate *TAOK* as a kind of ‘theatre of justice’.

TAOK does not feature characteristics of a trial at first sight. Alain Finkelkraut proposes that a scene of justice can take place anywhere, as long as it is “symbolically rendered distinct from the realm of mundane life,” – “a table suffices” (Horsman 8). *TAOK* does not take place within a courtroom, neither does it feature a table, nor attorneys, legal judges or the common procedure of a court. Yet, it is separated by an “original cut” (ibid.; in this case actually the cut of the film clapboard), it is staged within the public sphere, it is concerned with criminal proceedings and constitutes, in a way, a “formal examination of evidence” (“trial, n.”, *OED Online*). Most importantly, it creates a specific theatrical space that can be read as a trial outside of the juridical confines, which can possibly help us to think judgment differently than jurisprudence might does. In the following, I will establish the theatricality of the film.

2.3. THE ACT OF KILLING AS EPIC THEATRE

Peace! Happiness! Smile! (...) These are close-ups. Don’t let the camera catch you looking bad! (...) Real joy, not just pleasure! A natural beauty! This isn’t fake! Okay, peace! Peace! Peace! Cut, cut, cut!

TAOK 00:00:30-00:02:00

The opening shot of *The Act of Killing* presents an idyllic scenery. In the background we see a lake and mountains, in the foreground a decayed restaurant in shape of a ginormous house-size fish that has little windows and a gangplank leading into his mouth. On the gangplank six women in the same golden dresses are dancing to soft music. Then there is a cut to a waterfall; the frame slowly becomes wider, disclosing the view on Anwar and Herman with arms open wide and surrounded by the six dancers. In front of the waterfall and embedded in bright green grass and misty air, the scenery seems to represent a peaceful, beautiful-fantastic world.



Fig. 1, “This isn’t fake!,” *TAOK* 00:01:56

In contrast to this visual impression stands the audio, which breaks with the illusion: from the off, we hear a man shouting the above stage directions. After the ‘cut,’ we see men running in the frame, giving out towels and blankets to the dancers in their thin dresses – emphasising the contradiction of the statement “[t]his isn’t fake” (see fig. 1). Screened before the title and the introductory comments as I have described at the beginning of this chapter, this scene appears as a form of prologue or even audio-visual epigraph, setting the theme for what is to come. To make aware of the *mise-en-scène* both within the film and the film-in-film, the *mise-en-abîme*, is one of the most dominant stylistic devices of the film. It questions a clear separation of what we deem ‘real’ and what we deem ‘fictional’ or stage-played, making aware of the sliding passage between these conditions and of the narratives that construct what might be believed to be an irrevocable truth.

Central to the story of *TAOK* are the three perpetrators and protagonists Anwar Congo, Herman Koto and Adi Zuldakry, who belong to the still very popular paramilitary organisation Pancasila Youth that was delegated by the government to partake in the killings. In the following I will refer to them as Anwar, Herman and Adi or in plural as protagonists. I choose the term ‘protagonists’ instead of ‘perpetrators’ by no means because I want to distract from the fact that they are murderers. Yet, the term has the advantage that it eludes the clear binary dichotomy of perpetrators and victims. This allows to approach them as human beings who committed these acts but who can or should not be reduced on being the ‘evil others’. Moreover, the word ‘protagonists’ in my opinion captures better the double role these men have in the film as the main actors, and as actors of the 1965-66 killings.

The overall narrative structure of *TAOK* reflects the process of its creation and is mainly guided by the temporality of the filmmaking. This is expressed formally and artistically by the fact that the scenes created by the protagonists consist first of very simple body gestures or spontaneous re-enactment and become more elaborated and better planned in their composition later on. As regards to the overarching narrative, it is characterised by the process of change the protagonists undergo

mentally and physically; for example the reflections on their film and their memories become increasingly complex.²⁷ However, whilst watching the film, we have to bear in mind that we cannot be sure about how far the film depicts the actual chronological process of filming, how scenes might be edited together in a different order and when they were shot (Tiwon 202). This uncertainty, Tiwon states, does express the “artfulness of the film” (ibid.) and makes us aware that the filmmakers not only follow as passive spectators but are engaged in the process and especially determine the end-product by choosing from the abundance of footage – selecting 159 minutes out of footage collected during many years – and by editing the scenes in a certain order.

The film consists of a montage of scenes, and cannot be clearly divided in frame story and *mise-en-abîme*. Rather, there is a constant switch between many different levels, or kind of scenes. Roughly, the scenes can be distinguished as such: The film the perpetrators make (*mise-en-abîme*); the making-of of that film where we see them leading cameras, planning and discussing the scenes, putting on costumes and make-up, etc.; the perpetrators watching themselves in the scenes they created earlier (mostly Anwar and Herman, sometimes with others); scenes of the daily-life of the perpetrators, including political engagement, other scenes from Pancasila Youth meetings; conversations among each other, reflecting and remembering the past; conversations with Oppenheimer who is never seen, but whose voice we hear off-screen. It is important to note that all the material we see is filmed by Oppenheimer and his crew, and all we see is their documentary work; we do not actually get to know about the film and storyline the perpetrators create.²⁸

Oppenheimer describes that the filming process began with interviews and simple re-enactments, and that “the idea of dramatizations came up quite spontaneously, in response to viewing the rushes from Anwar’s first re-enactments of the killings” (“Production Notes”, n.pag.). It was also due to the discovery of the close connection that Anwar and his friends had to the cinema. In 1965, they were so called “movie theatre gangsters (or *preman bioskop*)” (ibid.), who were originally tickets scalpers but then hired for the killings. Oppenheimer found out that their methods of killings were inspired by gangster films. This led him to the idea to challenge the protagonists,

to make the sort of scenes they had in mind. We created a space in which they could devise and star in dramatisations based on the killings (...). We hoped to catalyze a process of collective remembrance and imagination. Fiction provided one or two degrees

²⁷ Tiwon’s argument is the opposite, saying that we can notice the temporal disorder by the change of for example colour of Anwar’s hair. This seems only partly plausible. It does make aware that the scenes we see are not necessarily chronologically. However, a change between dyed and natural colour can occur several times in the course of eight years, and does not fall into much weight in contrast to the artistic development and the characters’ changes in attitude.

²⁸ For a few scenes, the newspaper boss Ibrahim Sinik rented regional TV drama studios, and the perpetrators were actually doing the filming themselves. We see a few of the scenes they film on a TV screen, while they film it or watch it back. However, these scenes are also filmed by Oppenheimer’s crew, so everything we see is through the eyes of their cameras. For a very detailed explanation on the productions of the different scenes, see the official *TAOK* “Production Notes” by Joshua Oppenheimer. There he states how he defined his own role, for example: “Whenever possible, I let them direct each other, and used my cameras to document their process of creation. My role was primarily that of provocateur, challenging them to remember the events they were performing more deeply, encouraging them to intervene and direct each other when they felt a performance was superficial, and asking questions between takes – both about what actually happened, but also about how they felt at the time, and how they felt as they re-enacted it.”

of separation from reality, a canvas on which they could paint their own portrait and stand back and look at it.

(Oppenheimer, “Production Notes” n.pag.)²⁹

The protagonists did plot a whole film, with its own storyline (about which the viewers of *TAOK* only learn to a small extent)³⁰ and with aesthetics that draw mainly on gangster films, but also on Western, musicals, film noir and other genres. Staging, thus, becomes an important element not only of the method of *TAOK*, but also of its narrative: the process of imagination is in fact deeply embedded in the narrative of the protagonists. One can argue that staging on the one hand helped and helps the protagonists to hold up the hypocritical state in which play-acting covers the criminality of their deeds. On the other hand it facilitates in the filming process an imagination in Arendt’s sense – a critical distance – as I will explain later.

Through the theatricality the scenes are set apart from real life, and they present a “safe space, in which all sorts of things could happen that would probably elude to a more conventional documentary method” (ibid.). It is this theatricality that allows Oppenheimer, and the viewer, to get to know about how Anwar and his friends are seeing themselves (figuratively and literally), how they want to be seen and how they explain themselves and their deeds. As such, it reminds indeed of a juridical scene, separated from reality by the “original cut” (Finkelkraut in Horsman 8), and in which perpetrators are asked to report and recite the circumstances of crime.

Moreover, I would argue that Oppenheimer’s method of showing the staged performances of Anwar and the others, while at the same time showing the process of production, and by intervening into the *mise-en-scène* also in non-staged parts, *TAOK* strongly features characteristics of Brecht’s epic theatre.

For Brecht, theatre is a medium to make visible social conditions and contradictions.³¹ Epic theatre is dialectic – showing “the contradictions of existence” (Benjamin, *Understanding* 8) – and didactic, combining learning and teaching. Walter Benjamin writes: “[t]he first commandment of epic theatre is that ‘the one who shows’ – that is, the actor – ‘shall be shown’” (*Understanding* 11). By this means, it seeks “to give expression to the relationship between the action being staged and everything that is involved in the act of staging *per se*” (Benjamin, *Understanding* 11). In order to become aware of the social conditions, for Brecht critical reflection is essential. In his earlier work on the *Lehrstücke*, he focussed on the role of the actors, who should become critical of their role by reflecting on it. His later work on the epic theatre lays greater focus on the audience, which is supposed to become critically aware of the actors and the actions on stage. However, as Benjamin notes, it is still “intended for the

²⁹ For an insightful scene in this regard, see *TAOK* 0:14:57-17:29. This scene, in a surreal way, gives insight into aspects that seem to constitute the protagonists’ narratives and motivations for killing: besides of money especially the wish to pretend to live a dream life in which criminality has a positive connotation and that makes them feel as cool as their film heroes. The scene reveals how strong their belief into these dreams and imaginations must have been, and still is. It seems like the focus on staging and acting was and is a way to escape the implications or meaning of his deeds themselves.

³⁰ Cf. for example *TAOK* 1:09:37-13:05.

³¹ As Benjamin writes, it is the “Schauplatz von Widersprüchen unsrer Gesellschaftsordnung, “the stage of the contradictions of our social order (Benjamin, “Theater” 526).

actors quite as much as for the spectators,” since “[e]very spectator can become one of the actors” (*Understanding* 20).

The critical reflection by the audience can be created through interruptions of the plot. Instead of empathy and identification with the actions, as in Aristotle’s dramatic theatre, the audience is supposed to be constantly thrown out of the action (by montage style, by inserted text, by observation), in order to “face something” and be “brought to the point of recognition” through critical distance (Brecht, “Anmerkungen” 88-89, my translation, AK). According to Benjamin, the most important element to create the critical distance is the *gesture* (cf. *Understanding* 3). As Samuel Weber points out, the gesture is not so much about a certain expression of something, but rather about the disruption of expectations or intentions: “[g]estures, Benjamin argues, emerge *in* and *through* the process of interrupting action. They are therefore constituted by and as interruptions” (Weber 100). Interruption, so Weber interprets Benjamin further, lies at the root of citation: “To cite a text means to interrupt its context” (Weber 99). I would argue that in *The Act of Killing* exactly this – the act of killing – becomes a citable gesture. I will come back to this in chapter 3. In close resemblance to Brecht, Oppenheimer states that “re-enactment [is] as a way of making visible those contradictory narratives that inhabit, and even constitute, our present” (Oppenheimer in Roosa, “Interview” 5). *TAOK* creates the critical distance that Brecht deemed so important for critical thinking, by this means it questions and interrupts fixed narratives. It does so, as I will show in my analysis, in regard to both the actors and the spectators.

However, at the same time, it *creates* a story – one, which was in a way non-existent before: that of the atrocities of Indonesia and the criminal, hypocritical conditions of its present society. Further, besides of establishing a distance, it also draws the viewers in; stimulates *affects*, a movement that implies closeness and thus appears counter directional. As such the film is not entirely subsumable under the notion of Brecht’s epic theatre, and demands an investigation not only of its theatricality, but also of its cinematography. I will come to discuss this aspect in chapter 4 in regard to Deleuze.

Both Arendt and Brecht equally emphasise the role of the spectator (and partly the actor) as a critic and judge – someone who bases his or her decisions on critical thought. It is interesting that both words derive from the same Greek word *krinein* ‘to separate, judge, decide’. Michel Foucault designates a critique as a “means for a future or truth, which it will neither know nor be,” (Foucault *Was ist Kritik?* 8, my translation, AK) since “it overlooks an area that it does not want to monitor and cannot regulate” (Butler *Essay*, n.pag., my translation, AK). Thus, the judgment made by a critic or judge might always have an element that eludes his or her control, an element that is and cannot be subordinated under law and regiment. While judgment in the juridical realm commonly confirms and relies upon pre-given laws, or aims to formulate future laws, here we find indications of judgments that are or can only be made independently of the realm of law. A critic of art and literature might have guidelines to rely upon, but cannot just assess his or her judgment by collating it with a pre-given rule of ‘good’ or ‘bad’. This is interesting when remembering the paradoxically hypocritical character of law, a state of ‘play-acting,’ and the difficulty to judge where judgment might be especially needed. How to judge without a law to rely upon? This is precisely the question Arendt pursues in her deliberations on judgment, and she also draws upon the critique of artworks (namely, upon Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*) as a starting point of her investigations.

3. A PROCESS OF JUDGING

To think critically applies not only to doctrines and concepts once received from others, the prejudices and traditions one inherits; it is precisely by applying critical standards to one's own thought that one learns the art of critical thought.

Arendt, *Lectures* 42

Killing is the worst crime you can do. So the key is to find a way not to feel guilty. It's all about finding the right excuse. For example, if I'm asked to kill someone... If the compensation is right... then of course I'll do it, and from one perspective it's not wrong. That's the perspective we must make ourselves believe. After all, morality is relative.

Adi, *TAOK* 00:51:54

The international reception of *TAOK* was determined by expressions of shock and outrage not only about the killings as such, but especially in regards to the impunity and public and self-celebration of the perpetrators. As viewers we are confronted with men making statements such as “it was like we were killing... happily!” (Anwar, 00:17:29), and who gain public recognition for their invention of a “new, more efficient system for exterminating communists [that] was more humane, less sadistic, and avoid[ing] excessive violence” (1:47:30). Nearly fifty years after they committed countless murders, these men seem to be proud and convinced of the righteousness of their deeds. This presents an extreme contradiction to and distortion of the commonly accepted moral code that killing is indeed “the worst crime you can do”, as Adi paradoxically states (00:51:54); and that it needs to be punished or at least judged in order to end an ongoing injustice. The shock the film evokes is thus one about the absence of a judgment that possibly fulfils the desire to respond to the silent cry of the victims who are painfully absent, and to acknowledge their oppressed narrative. A judgment – a speaking of the law – however, seems unattainable, considering that there are no valid laws to base it on.

In the previous chapter I have argued that *TAOK* enables the investigation of this difficulty precisely because it is placed outside of the juridical aim but at the same time creates a form of trial through its context and theatrical methods. In this chapter I want to explore how and what form of judgment the film motivates and evokes in the protagonist and the viewers.

The chapter will be divided in two main parts. In the first, I will undertake an analysis of Arendt's thoughts on judgment step-by-step. Her thoughts offer a fruitful foundation for they arose precisely out of the confrontation with totalitarianism and the loss of lawfulness and moral foundation. The consequent “*impossibility* to assess that which has happened and which happens anew daily according to fixed and generally accepted standards” (Arendt, *Denken* 57, my translation and emphasis, AK) motivated Arendt to think about the possibility and necessity of judgment – about the ability to judge without reliance on laws or morals, a form of judgment she terms reflective judgment. Arendt not only deems judgment relevant in coming to terms with atrocities of the past, but she also considers it an

important “responsible political action” (*Essays* 315) especially in times of crisis,³² thus in a condition where it seems impossible. I will come to see that Arendt’s thoughts on judgment orbit around the notions of actor and spectator, thus evoking a theatrical space. This will be of special relevance in regard to *TAOK*.

The second main part of this chapter will, then, present a critical analysis of *TAOK* in dialogue with Arendt’s theory. I will focus on the protagonists and the viewers, exploring in how far the methods of the film evokes a process of reflective judgment under circumstances that seem to defy the possibility of judgment. Before turning to Arendt, these circumstances, which I have described in my introduction as hypocritical, require some more explanation.³³

It is notable that the perpetrators mostly do not deny that killing is generally regarded as *bad*. However, they do question a judgment of their killings as *wrong*, since, “[a]fter all, morality is relative” (00:51:54). Adi indicates that judgment is commonly bound to laws or moral rules respectively, which are specific to the concerning state or society that creates them, as he states: “I don’t necessarily agree with those international laws. When Bush was in power, Guantanamo was right. Saddam Hussein had weapon of mass destruction. That was right according to Bush, but now it’s wrong. The Geneva Conventions may be today’s morality, but tomorrow – we’ll have the Jakarta Conventions and dump the Geneva Conventions” (1:07:30). Adi implies that no one has the right or ability to apply outside versions of laws and morals on the ground of which one would impose a judgment on the perpetrators.

The justification for the righteousness of their crimes is openly built upon a belief or constructed narrative: Adi states that they were right in their deeds, at least this is “the perspective we must make ourselves believe” (00:51:54). In a similar vein, Anwar proclaims that an anti-communist propaganda film, which is part of Indonesia’s history education in school, “is the one thing that makes me feel not guilty. I look the film and feel reassured” (00:42:22-42:58).³⁴ In contrast to Anwar, Adi is more conscious that the film is “a lie. (...) It’s easy to make the communists look bad after we killed them. That film is designed to make them look evil” (*ibid.*). Yet for both of them “[i]t’s all about finding the right excuse” not to feel guilty (00:51:54).

As we can see here, their narratives of justification are not merely individual beliefs but are weaved into the very structure of society. At the beginning of the film, Anwar visits a man who is introduced

³² Again it is worth to note the etymological reference: ‘crisis’ derives from the same word stem *krinein* as ‘hypocritical’, thus meaning a “time when a difficult or important decision must be made” (“crisis, n. *OED Online*).

³³ Cf. p. 3 in the present thesis.

³⁴ Anwar is shown while watching the propaganda film. He reports that all children had to watch this film regularly from elementary school onwards, and tells us: “The government made this film, so people would hate the communists. (...) I remember, because I worked at the cinema. (...) The youngest sat at the front [cut to the film with a cruel scene where someone is killed by being stabbed in the back, his face is full of blood and his eyes wide open]. Some children were traumatised by the film. But deep inside, I was proud, because I killed the communists who look so cruel in the film... And I went beyond anything in the film. [cut to the film again, where another man is shot, his daughter watching it, dramatic music in the background, she is rubbing her hands in the blood of her father, whose corpse has been carried away, smearing it into her face in despair]” (*TAOK* 00:37:31-39:46).

as Syamsul Arifin, Governor of North Sumatra. Their conversation is held in a light-hearted tone and the latter speaks directly towards the camera when telling about Anwar:

‘[W]hen people heard his name, they’d be terrified.’ (...) ‘Because he’s one of the killers [makes gesture of slitting his throat]. (...) Now, the communists’ children are starting to speak out, trying to reverse the history. One of them wrote, ‘I’m proud to be the child of a Communist’. But this won’t last long – because the people won’t accept it. Communism will never be accepted here, because we have so many gangsters, and that’s a good thing. The word ‘gangster’ [in Indonesian *preman*] comes from English. ‘Free men’. Thugs want freedom to do things, *even if they’re wrong*... But if we know how to work with them, all we have to do is to direct them.’

(Syamsul Arifin, *TAOK* 00:13:20-14:56, my emphasis, AK)

His words give an insight into the present³⁵ hegemonic discourse in Sumatra, which is characterised by the direct and public discrimination of communists. The killings of 1965/66 are still regarded as a heroic act of national importance, and attempts to speak against this, to “reverse history” (00:13:20) are being prohibited. It is interesting to note that here again, as in Adi’s statement before, a sense of *wrongness* is expressed, implying a moral standard that might exist somehow, but which is consciously and righteously overstepped even by high-ranking politicians: “Thugs want freedom to do things, even if they’re wrong” (00:14:50).³⁶ In a later scene, Marzuki, a “member of North Sumatra parliament” answers Oppenheimer’s off-screen question “what illegal business is Pancasila Youth involved in?” by admitting: “[i]llegal fishing, illegal logging, illegal gambling... and if they don’t pay, we blackmail them. (...) The governor needs Pancasila Youth to maintain security. (...) We proved our potential when we exterminated the communists” (1:18:20 - 1:21:07).

In scenes like these, the corruption, violence and hypocrisy of the present political and legal system in this proclaimed democratic state become apparent. Simply because their actions are approved or determined by the hegemonic discourse and justified by reasons of security, freedom and relativism, these men can so openly admit to being involved with what they themselves call illegal, violent or ‘wrong’ actions. Indeed, one can say that any laws and moral standards are suspended here: if deeds can be defined as ‘illegal’ or ‘wrong,’ but are common practice nevertheless, there is no basis for judgment. Hence, the hypocritical conditions of society do at the same time demand *and* defy a judgment of the crimes in this case. We are confronted here with a state similar to the one Hannah Arendt describes in “Understanding and Politics” (1954) as follows:

³⁵ ‘Present’ has to be understood relatively: the film covers a timespan of around eight years, and was finished two years ago from now. Yet, as mentioned before, the current situation functions likewise. Nevertheless, ‘present’ here is first of all to be understood in contrast to the past events of 1965-66.

³⁶ In a similar manner, Indonesia’s vice president by that time states in a speech that “[t]his nation needs ‘free men!’” (*TAOK* 00:37:10).

The downfall of nations begins with the undermining of lawfulness, whether the laws are abused by the government in power, or the authority of their source becomes doubtful and questionable. In both instances, laws are no longer held valid. The result is that the nation, together with its ‘belief’ in its own laws, loses its capacity for responsible political action; the people cease to be citizens in the full sense of the word.

(Arendt, *Essays* 315)

As a result, judgment, if feasible at all under these circumstances, is a more complicated process than the one of merely applying laws. The questions that arise are thus: how can judgments possibly be made in a hypocritical state? What happens if crimes are put on trial under these conditions? Let me begin to tackle these questions by exploring Arendt’s thoughts in this regard.

3.1. HANNAH ARENDT ON JUDGMENT

When turning to Arendt’s concept of judgment, one is confronted with the problem that she never realised the book she had planned to write. Her last work *The Life of the Mind* was supposed to be in three parts: after *Thinking* and *Willing*, Arendt planned a third and final volume on *Judging*.³⁷ Unfortunately, she died before she could begin to write it, so consequently many scholars have speculated about what Arendt’s final verdict on the notion of judgment might have been. The manuscripts of the *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, held in 1970, are considered to be the most important in this regard,³⁸ though Mary McCarthy notices that they most likely “do not exhaust the ideas that must already have been stirring in her head” (“Editor’s Postface” 243), and we cannot know what her theory of judgment would have become.

Dealing with the texts at hand, Roland Beiner most prominently argues that Arendt formulates “not one but two theories of judgment” – one concerning the actor and one concerning the spectator (“Essay” 91).³⁹ He states: “The emphasis shifts from the representative thought and enlarged mentality of political agents to the spectatorship and retrospective judgment of historians and storytellers” (ibid.). Beiner argues that there is a clear development with the later deliberations having more weight: “The more she reflected on the faculty of judgment, the more inclined she was to regard it as the prerogative of the solitary (though public-spirited) contemplator as opposed to the actor (whose activity is necessarily nonsolitary)” (“Essay” 92). He thus contends that *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* is a “reasonable basis for reconstructing Hannah Arendt’s theory of judging” (“Essay” 91). However, Dianna Taylor and others argue that a strict distinction between earlier and later thought

³⁷ I quote from the one-volume edition of *The Life of the Mind*. To avoid misunderstandings regarding the page numbers, I will refer to *Thinking* when discussing the first volume.

³⁸ As Mary McCarthy, editor and lifelong friend of Arendt, notes: “she no doubt felt that her lectures on Kant’s political philosophy, with their careful analysis of *The Critique of Judgment*, had pretty well prepared the ground to be covered” (“Editor’s Postface” 243).

³⁹ He argues that a point of “reorientation” can be detected in the lecture *Thinking and Moral Considerations* in 1971. Instead of the earlier *viva activa*, “in her writing from that essay onward, judgment is considered from the point of view of the mind” (Beiner 91).

does not fit Arendt's way of thinking, and that "the impulse to systematize Arendt's unsystematic treatment of judgment ought to be resisted" (Taylor 151).⁴⁰ I agree with Taylor and would argue further that trying to 'reconstruct' an unwritten theory is somewhat restricting when approaching the texts at hand. My following analysis of Arendt's notion of judgment will be in regard to my case study.

3.1.1. THOUGHT-DEFYING: THE EICHMANN TRIAL

While Arendt has thought and written about the faculty of judgment already before attending the trial of Adolf Eichmann, a main motivation for her to deal with the question of judgment more thoroughly was being confronted with Eichmann's "inability to judge in those circumstances where judgment was most needed" (Passerin d'Entrèves 248 and 252) and writing her report on the trial. I thus regard *Eichmann* as one vital expression of her thoughts on judgment, which sheds light on the idea and possibility of judgment in the context of a specific case. As such, I deem it helpful in regard to the analysis of my case study.

Arendt is highly critical of attributing to a criminal trial any other purposes than the process of coming to a judgment. For her, the Eichmann trial "is not 'a spectacle with prearranged results' but contains that element of 'irreducible risk' which, (...) is an indispensable factor in all criminal trials" (Arendt *Eichmann* 266). Thus, instead of any predefined historical lessons to be learned as, among other's, Israel's Prime Minister Ben-Gurion was striving for,⁴¹ for Arendt the trial is an open process with the only concern being to strive for an understanding of the individual Eichmann and his deeds. The aim of this, so Arendt, was to formulate a judgment on "a crime it could not find in the lawbooks and with a criminal whose like was unknown in any court" (Arendt *Eichmann* 298). Arendt counters popular arguments of the time that for unprecedented crimes no judgment is possible or "that we cannot judge if we were not present and involved ourselves" by stating that "it seems obvious that if it were true, neither the administration of justice nor the writing of history would ever be possible" (*Eichmann* 295-296).

Analysing Eichmann's behaviour and speech in court, Arendt notices that "[t]he longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of someone else" (*Eichmann* 49). She detects Eichmann's inability to *imagine* other standpoints and to speak anything but empty citations; in

⁴⁰ Similarly, Leora Bilsky suggests not to resolve the tension between these two conceptions, and insist that instead "the reciprocity between the judgment of actor(s) and that of spectator(s) should be seen as essential to Arendt's conception of judgment" (259).

⁴¹ Ben-Gurion declared that for Israel "the verdict of the trial mattered less than the *spectacle* staged for a global audience, a spectacle intended to teach Israel and the world a few lessons about the Holocaust" (Horsman 20, my emphasis). Cf. Arendt *Eichmann*, 9-10: "The lessons to be drawn from an identical show were meant to be different for the different recipients. Ben-Gurion had outlined them before the trial started, in a number of articles designed to explain why Israel had kidnapped the accused. There was the lesson to the non-Jewish world" to realise the murders of millions of Jewish people, the lesson to "the Jews in the Diaspora" to realise the importance of a Jewish state, and "for those inside Israel" to remember history. For Arendt, on the contrary, it was clear that "[o]n trial are his deeds, not the sufferings of the Jews, not the German people or mankind, not even anti-Semitism and racism" (5).

Arendt's view, Eichmann spoke only in clichés (*Eichmann* 48), which to her signals “sheer thoughtlessness” (*Eichmann* 287). This, to Arendt, also marks “the grotesque silliness of his last words” (*Eichmann* 252), which brought Arendt to understand, or rather not-understand the *banality of evil*. This describes the insight that evil might be the result of utter thoughtlessness and thereby being in itself thought-defying.⁴² This is not a general theory but rather an expression of that which eludes thinking, it “describes a ‘stumbling block’ that (...) points to a moment of *nonunderstanding*, which occurs precisely when we seek to apply our faculty of judgment and are confronted with this failure,” so Horsman (44).

He concludes that for Arendt, the trial was “a paradoxical didactic event in which she ‘came to terms’ with the reality of Eichmann’s crimes, *but not quite* – that is, she relates to it ironically – without ‘selling her soul to it’” (44).⁴³ By seeking to understand Eichmann’s deeds Arendt strives to “reconcile with reality” (*Essays* 308). This does not mean an acceptance but an acknowledgement of what happened, including the ‘reality’ of Eichmann’s thoughtlessness, in contrast to believing it to be a lie that in fact hides deeper motivations.⁴⁴ One might argue, then, that Arendt’s report on the trial presents a form of closure that does justice to the incomprehensibility of the atrocities, without being paralysed by the overwhelming suffering of the victims.

Stumbling upon the thought-defying insight that Eichmann committed his deeds not because of some inherent evil nature or hatred but because he was unable to reflect critically on the law he followed, motivated Arendt to explore the connection of thinking and judging more thoroughly.⁴⁵ She does so in her *Lectures* by turning to Kant’s aesthetics as an inspiration for political judgment.

3.1.2. REFLECTIVE JUDGMENT

In her question of how to judge in times of totalitarianism or other times of crisis where “laws are no longer held valid” (Arendt, *Essays* 315), Arendt is not interested in searching for lost fixed morals that tell one ‘what to do,’ but rather in exploring judgment as an activity that is done freely. As Horsman notes, “[j]udging becomes a genuinely ethical-political decision only when we do it *freely* – when a judgment cannot be determined by calculation or by the application of a rule” (Horsman 30). This form of judgment that does not function as ‘speaking the law’ but that is made independently from prescribed laws, Arendt calls *reflective judgment*, a notion she takes from Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. It is important to note that for Kant, reflective judgment concerns only aesthetics, whereas

⁴² Cf. Arendt *Jew*, p. 251: She writes that it is “indeed my opinion now that evil is never ‘radical,’ that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension (...) it spreads like a fungus on the surface. It is ‘thought-defying,’ as I said, because thought tries to reach some depth, to go to the roots, and the moment it concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because there is nothing. That is its ‘banality.’”

⁴³ Horsman makes a convincing point interpreting “Arendt’s Laughter” and the style of the report as transmitting this element of nonunderstanding, see his Chapter 2, where he concludes: “[i]t is precisely this laughter that embodies the particular mode of (non)understanding that Eichmann’s banality provokes” (45).

⁴⁴ Cf. *Eichmann* 49.

⁴⁵ She states in *The Life of the Mind*: “[t]o put it differently and use Kantian language: after having been struck by a fact that, willy-nilly, ‘put me in possession of a concept’ (the banality of evil), I could not help raising the *quaestio juris* and asking myself ‘by what right I possessed and used it’” (Thinking 5-6).

moral or determinative judgment is “our capacity to apply (...) rules” (Larmore “Moral Judgment” 49). It is Arendt who derives from Kant’s aesthetics a form of judgment that is an ethical act. The questions arising from this are: how to arrive at judgments that are not based on rules and laws; and how do these reflective judgments gain validity? To explore these questions, Arendt shows that turning to aesthetics (judgment as *taste*), presents a helpful start, since it represents “an analogous problem” (*Lectures* 61).

When asking for judgments of taste – e.g. whether something is beautiful or ugly – we are not “able to subsume it under a general category of Beauty as such; we have no rule that could be applied (...) If you say, ‘What a beautiful rose!’ you do not arrive at this judgment by first saying, ‘All roses are beautiful, this flower is a rose, hence this rose is beautiful’” (Arendt *Lectures* 13). Taste thus becomes a vehicle for judgment due to its discriminatory nature, and because it relates “to the particular qua particular,” in contrast to other, “objective senses [that] share their properties with other objects” (Arendt *Lectures* 66). Yet, so Arendt agrees with Kant, this form of judgment is not, as might be expected, based merely on private senses and as such purely subjective. According to Kant, the process of making an aesthetic judgment is more than the initial and spontaneous reaction of perception: “[t]hat is beautiful which pleases in the mere act of judging it,” an act that goes beyond the “bare sensation (something purely subjective)” which is “mechanical” (Kant, *Critique* § 45, emphasis in original). In contrast to this, to judge something as beautiful is an act of *reflection*, and act which is made possible by imagination. I quote Arendt’s derivations at length to make clear her line of argument:

It is not important whether or not [an object] pleases in perception; what pleases merely in perception is gratifying but not beautiful. It pleases in representation, for now the imagination has prepared it so that I can reflect on it. Only what touches, affects, one in representation, when one can no longer be affected by immediate presence – when one is uninvolved, like the spectator (...) – can be judged to be right or wrong (...) or something in between. One then speaks of judgment and no longer of taste because, though it still affects one like a matter of taste, one now has, by means of representation, established the proper distance, the remoteness or uninvolvedness or disinterestedness, that is requisite for approbation and disapprobation, for evaluating something at its proper worth. By removing the object, one has established the conditions for impartiality.

(*Lectures* 67)

For Arendt, judgment is an act of reflection and critical thought. To do so, it is necessary to be not affected but in distance to the object in question. Here, we find a clear similarity to Brecht’s epic theatre, which “compels a decision from [the spectator]” through distance and critical thinking (Brecht, “Anmerkungen” 88, my translation, AK). The situation in the theatre, where the spectator is confronted with the events on stage, is comparable to the relation between the object and spectator in Kant’s aesthetics, and to the situation in court as seen in the Eichmann trial. Likewise to Brecht, Arendt dismisses affects in favour of critical distance. This can be obtained by imagination, “the ability to make present what is absent” (Arendt *Lectures* 65), “which transforms an object into something I do not have to be directly confronted with but that I have in some sense internalized” (66).

Thus, “[t]his operation of imagination prepares the object for ‘the operation of reflection.’ And this (...) is the actual activity of judging something” (Arendt *Lectures* 68). Imagination is important because it establishes impartiality, the “most important condition for all judgments” (Arendt *Lectures* 68).

Impartiality is crucial for judgment in several senses (legal, aesthetic, ethical) because it distinguishes judgment from a mere subjective decision or opinion. It is enabled by the position of the spectator, in contrast to the actor. In her discussion of other texts by Kant in the earlier sessions of the series of lectures, Arendt carves out the importance Kant gives to the spectator for example in evaluating historical events. He is especially able to do so because “only the spectator occupies a position that enables him to see the whole; the actor, because he is part of the play, must enact his part – he is partial by definition. The spectator is impartial by definition – no part is assigned to him” (Arendt *Lectures* 55). However, in contrast to Kant and to an old tradition in Western philosophy that regards the *bios theōretikos* as more valuable than *bios politikos*,⁴⁶ Arendt’s own understanding of a spectator seems less clear-cut. She specifically emphasises that “[s]pectators exist only in the plural” (*Lectures* 63). As such, they are part of a public and not placed above or outside of the events.⁴⁷ Thus, Beiner may be wrong to claim that Arendt sees “the solitary (though public-spirited) contemplator as opposed to the actor (whose activity is necessarily nonsolitary)” (“Essay” 92). Thus, imagination is not only relevant for judgment in enabling distanced reflection of the object or events in question, but also re-presenting the standpoints and possible judgments of others who then become object of reflection.

This ‘enlarged mentality’ is not to be confused with empathy (Arendt *Lectures* 43). In *On Revolution*, she discusses the role of compassion as hindrance for political action. She notices its literal meaning “co-suffering” and states that “[b]ecause compassion abolishes the distance, (...) it remains, politically speaking, irrelevant and without consequence” (*Revolution* 86) because it avoids necessary critical reflection. We find here again a parallel to Brecht whose epic theatre wants to avoid the compassion, catharsis and the passivity of the spectator of the classic drama.⁴⁸ For Arendt the spectator is likewise not a mere passive observer but “moves in a space that is potentially public” (*Lectures* 43) and as such, I would argue, part of a political realm. Taylor summarises the idea of ‘enlarged mentality’ as follows: “[t]he kind of critical transformation one undergoes through judging, absent in Kant’s work, is the result of recognizing plurality: I know that in order to judge I must consider as many diverse viewpoints as I possibly can, yet I also realize that I can never completely grasp another’s point of view or location” (Taylor 163). This plurality is in fact, next to *imagination*,

⁴⁶ Meaning the political and the philosophical life; *bios theōretikos* comes from *theōrein*, ‘to look at,’ referring to the supposed supremacy of the spectator’s way of life as it was prominent in the history of Western philosophy (cf. Arendt, *Lectures* 21 and 55). Arendt distances herself from “the whole idea of the superiority of the contemplative way of life [which] comes from this early insight that meaning (or truth) is revealed only to those who restrain themselves from acting” (*Lectures* 55).

⁴⁷ Cf. Bilsky who argues strongly for the impossibility of an actor/spectator divide in Arendt’s form of judgment; e.g.: “In sum, since Arendt does not try to deny or abolish the positionality of reflective judgment and examines it within human time and human perspectivity, her own observations about judgment undermine the possibility of a clear actor/spectator divide” (275).

⁴⁸ Cf. Brecht, *Anmerkungen* 88-89.

the second important faculty that Arendt extracts from Kant's *Critique of Judgment* and that she deems important for reflective judgment: *sensus communis*.

Arendt points out that Kant uses two notions, 'common sense' and the Latin term *sensus communis*. She argues that with the latter "Kant indicates (...) an extra sense – like an extra mental capability (German: *Menschenverstand*) – that fits us into a community" (*Lectures* 70). It is notable that Arendt interprets *Menschenverstand* or common sense as community sense and not as an intrinsic moral sense,⁴⁹ and does not imply any universality. *Sensus communis* gives a subjective sense as taste validity because it binds it to communication and a shared public realm: "the nonsubjective element in the nonobjective senses is intersubjectivity. (You must be alone in order to think; you need company to enjoy a meal.)" (Arendt, *Lectures* 67). In the same vein, reflective judgment gains its validity – which is not objective but intersubjective – by communication and taking into account the plurality of human society.

3.1.3. JUDGMENT AS RESPONSIBLE POLITICAL ACTION

One can conclude that reflective judgment as developed by Arendt is enabled by *imagination*, which makes it possible to critically reflect on the specific situation (the particular) and gains impartiality and validity through *common sense* (by taking into account the concrete public space in which the judgment is made). In exploring aesthetics and taste, Arendt derives at a form of judgment that is not based on pre-existing rules or laws yet is still more than a mere opinion or personal taste and can claim validity. It is not objective, but it can serve as an example for future judgments. While undertaken from the position of the spectator, reflective judgment is an intersubjective process and strongly related to the public realm (the realm of actors) and therefore can be seen as a political and ethical act.

Arendt's deliberations on Kant's aesthetic can be read as endeavour to find possible ways to deal with the situation of the modern world within totalitarianism as she describes it in earlier writings. In Arendt's opinion the loss of laws and moral foundations does not equate a nihilistic moral catastrophe but is a call for human beings to judge by themselves, thus, to make *reflective judgments*.⁵⁰ In context of the concrete example of the Eichmann trial, Arendt finds no sufficient explanation for the "reluctance evident everywhere to make judgments in terms of individual moral responsibility" (Arendt *Eichmann* 297). In the light of the above, I would argue that reflective judgments are made in terms of individual *ethical* responsibility⁵¹ and as part of a community and plurality.⁵² Bilsky notes that "[i]n judging Eichmann's crimes, Arendt demonstrates how in order to arrive at a valid judgment,

⁴⁹ Arendt's notion of common sense differs thus also from the definition as "good sense and sound judgement in practical matters" ("common sense, n." *OED Online*). Beiner and Nedelsky argue that "Arendt's interpretation of Kant can be debated" ("Introduction" xi), since for Kant, "the ground for the 'common sense' is the identical cognitive faculties of imagination and understanding that all human beings share. (...) Judgments are, thus, universally valid" (*ibid.*).

⁵⁰ Cf. *Essays in Understanding* 314-315.

⁵¹ I prefer to use the term ethical here in order to emphasise the distinction from determinative judgment that is made according to fixed morals.

⁵² Cf. Arendt in "The Crisis in Culture": "Judging is one, if not the most important activity in which this sharing-the-world-with-others comes to pass." (221).

the very process of judgment has to be dialogic, i.e., respectful of human plurality” (Bilsky 296). Likewise, Taylor assesses:

[J]udging may act as a *sort* of guide, but it is not itself a banister. Like understanding, judging is an ambiguous process in which one must engage over and over again; it is not the case that one can simply make ‘a’ judgment about something and be done with it. (...) [T]o judge in dark times is to believe that things can be other than they are. Judging (...) insofar as it presupposes a critical stance toward prevailing social and political conditions, also recreates the dynamic and multiplistic conditions of human plurality.
(Taylor 163-164)

Thus, while in “Nazi Germany the judges actively blocked themselves from the people they judged,” Arendt “urges the Israeli judges to do the opposite, to try and engage Eichmann’s viewpoint, to see the world from his perspective in judging him” (Bilsky 271). This leads Bilsky to argue that “the ideal of reflective judgment is constituted by a reciprocal movement between the perspective of actors and spectators” (Bilsky 276). In this sense, judgment can be said to have a theatrical dimension, in the same vein Horsman contends it for thinking: “Thinking, I extrapolate, has a theatrical dimension, it relies on a *mise-en-scène* in which others are imaginatively evoked” (39). I would argue, then, that reflective judgment, which is based on critical thinking, takes place in a theatrical space between actor and spectator. This will become clearer in my analysis of *The Act of Killing* where I will explore how the dialogue between actor and spectator is formed in its theatrical space, and whether the separation of the two positions actor and spectator can even be held up that rigorously.

3.2. THE ACT OF KILLING – A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

For the protagonists of *TAOK* the crimes and the hypocritical condition of their society are the norm. By inviting them to perform their own roles as actors on stage in front of an international audience,⁵³ and by showing back to them their own film, the directors initiate a process of reflection. The protagonists are becoming spectators of their own actions and are provoked to become conscious of the other spectators who will later watch their film. As such, they are part of a theatrical scene that confronts them with the question of judgment. The audience, too, is confronted with judgment: through gestures, montage of scenes and the comments on the play-acting the viewers are made aware of their positions as spectators of the act of killing. In this part of the chapter, I want to undertake a critical analysis that focuses on reflective judgment and seeks to explore the question to what extent the film evokes critical judgment.

I want to proceed by following the process of *TAOK* in the double sense of the word: reading the film as a form of court proceeding that aims for a judgment, and examining the process of the film as

⁵³ Of course neither Oppenheimer nor the protagonists could know by the time of making the film that it would gain such worldwide attention. However, since Oppenheimer is an international director, it was clear that the film would speak also to an international audience, not only to Indonesians.

it unfolds. By undertaking a close reading of selected scenes, I will investigate on the one hand how the filmmaker and protagonists act and interact, and how critical judgment is motivated *within* the film. On the other hand I will take into account the *outside* position of the viewers of *TAOK* towards the scenes, asking what form of judgment the film potentially evokes in them. The emphasis here lies on the potential effects the film can have on viewers on the base of its narrative and aesthetic composition. Admittedly, my interpretation is informed by my standpoint as a Western European viewer and considering the context of the film as I have established it so far. It is important to take this into consideration as the effects of *TAOK* might be very different on reader communities in different contexts, have in mind for example of the remark of Wandita about an Indonesian audience.⁵⁴

3.2.1. FACING JUDGMENT

For one of the first scenes of the re-enactment of their deeds, Anwar and another man take the film team with them on a roof terrace in Medan, in the backside of a bag shop. In contrast to most subsequent scenes, this is an actual location of the past crimes.⁵⁵ Anwar introduces the place by saying: “There’s many ghosts here, because many people were killed here.” His companion adds: “They died unnatural deaths,” and Anwar confirms “–unnatural deaths” (0:08:40). Then he goes on to explain and demonstrate what happened on this roof terrace around fifty years ago:

‘They arrived perfectly healthy [mimes in an exaggerated way a ‘healthy’ walk]. When they got here they were beaten up... [mimes squatting on the floor with hands in front of the face]. And died. Dragged around... [mimes dragging a body]. And dumped. [Cut] At first, we beat them to death... But there was too much blood. There was so much blood here... [points at the space of the roof terrace]. So when we cleaned it up, it smelled awful. To avoid the blood, I used this system. Can I show you?’ – ‘Go ahead’ [Oppenheimer’s voice off-screen] – ‘See this pole? I’d tie wire to the pole. Sit here. [his companion sits down on the ground, near the pole]. Face that way. We have to re-enact this properly [puts wire around the other man’s neck]. This is how to do it - [pulls at the wire while looking into the camera] without too much blood [the other man pretends to choke]. – [Cut to Anwar who now has the wire hanging loosely around his neck] I’ve tried to forget all this with good music... Dancing... Feeling happy... A little alcohol... A little marijuana... A little... (...) Ecstasy... Once I’d get drunk, I’d ‘fly’ and feel happy. [He starts to dance and sums a melody] Cha cha.’ [He dances, laughs. The other man stands next to him, looks into the camera and to Anwar, laughs lightly and says] – ‘He’s a happy man.’

(*TAOK* 0:08:40-11:24)

⁵⁴ As described in the introduction; cf. Wandita 169.

⁵⁵ In an interview with Roosa, Oppenheimer reports that this was the first day he met Anwar, and he had not yet known that Anwar has lead them to a real location. He says: “it was never conceivable to me that in the name of improving a re-enactment, to make it more accurate, that we would do it in the real locations where atrocities occurred. And I think Anwar probably understood this, because I would always suggest we shoot re-enactments in other locations, or create a set” (Roosa, “Interview” 4).

This is the first scene (in the following referred to as: ‘first roof top scene’) out of many, in which the viewer is confronted with such an open and blunt confession and the mimicked demonstration of the act of killing. It is also an image for and visualisation of the state of impunity. My initial and personal reaction was a mixture of disbelief and repulsion. Disbelief, because I – paradoxically – asked myself the question: Is this ‘real’ or is this staged? The ease and detachment that determine Anwar’s speech and gestures seem unbelievable and surreal in contrast to the content, provoking a reaction of repulsion. This surely is one example of what Meyer means when noting the “[s]hock at the killers’ performance of impunity – an emotion expressed by critics and audience members worldwide – is inextricable from shock at the original deed itself” (n.pag.). I would argue that this spontaneous shock functions as a gesture in itself: it disrupts the expectations and moral narratives of an arguably common held belief that not only killing is wrong but the act should be followed by remorse. As I have already indicated in my introduction, I contend that this first opinion can be regarded as a verdict: the shock about impunity demands punishment, and the shock about such ‘unforgivable’ crimes condemns this man as killer.

I would like to suggest here to differentiate the concepts of condemning and judging, drawing back on the German meaning of these notions. In German, the verbs ‘to condemn’ and ‘to judge’ share the same stem: *ver-urteilen* and *urteilen*. However, the prefix ‘*ver*’ generally changes the meaning of the verb it is used with in two ways: it indicates a negative connotation; and it indicates a change of the object in question into a different state. Thus, while *urteilen* does not implicate fixed results, *verurteilen* does: the concerning person is – by means of the speech act – put into a different state, which has negative implications for him or her (for example to be put into prison or another penalty). In English, ‘verdict’ has the signification, etymologically speaking, that it ‘speaks truth’, which also implies a stronger sense of finality and authority than ‘judgment’.

In regards to the ‘first roof top scene’ I would thus argue that the described first reaction amounts to a verdict rather than a judgment, as it seems finite and indicates that a punishment for the accused will or should follow. Moreover, it is done hastily without further knowledge about this particular case. At most, it can be seen as a determinative judgment that relies upon given and general concepts such as human rights. However, these impressions derive more or less from a quick and initial viewing and demand a closer investigation.



Fig. 2, Anwar ‘first roof top scene,’ *TAOK* 00:10:27

The initial confusion about whether this is ‘real’ or staged highlights how this scene makes us aware of its *mise-en-scène*. As such, it resembles aspects of Brecht’s theatre conceptions. While Anwar is acting (miming, making gestures of dragging or killing) he is interrupting his actions by explaining them, or in return interrupting his explanations by the gestures. He is conscious of his audience – primarily the camera and Oppenheimer behind it, to whom he explains. Thus, he is aware of ‘playing a role,’ and tries to do it as best and authentic as he can: “We have to re-enact this properly” (0:08:40-11:24; see fig. 2). This reflection on his acting results in a constant interruption of the flow of play, which to a small extent makes Anwar and his companions take a position to their own acts and *how* they present them best. However, it is exactly the lack of taking a position to *what*, and not only *how* they are acting, that is so shocking for the viewers. This shocking insight might be similar to what happened to Arendt when she listened to Eichmann’s confessions and conceived that he “*merely*, to put the matter colloquially, *never realized what he was doing*” (Eichmann 287, emphasis in original).

On the viewers, however, this theatrical scene with its constant interruptions might have the effect of creating critical distance. Especially through the gestures that interrupt Anwar’s story (Anwar’s explanations and miming gestures, which are partly almost comical through his exaggeration or by expressing an extreme easiness when ‘citing’ his killings), the viewers are distanced to the events. This allows them to reflect not only on the plot but also on the question of how this plot is told, how the protagonists relate to it. As such, they are indeed called upon to become critical and aware, to ask questions about this surreal situation, such as: why did these people kill other people? How did it become such a common scope and a routine for them that they developed new systems to ‘avoid the blood’? Could Anwar really ‘forget’, is he really ‘a happy man’? Or are the drugs and dancing a way

to escape from his conscience, as Roosa suggests (“Interview” 3)?⁵⁶ Why can Anwar boast about his deeds so proudly? Instead of allowing for nothing else than an impulsive verdict, the scene, through its theatrical setting, does in fact invite to ask such critical questions. I would argue that the constant interruptions of play-acting and explanations initiate a process of inspecting the protagonists and their standpoints. As such, the scene sets into motion the process of reflective judgment, which goes on throughout the movie by showing them in the act of creating, and later watching, their scenes. Instead of condemning the protagonists according to, for example, human rights standards after having heard about the killings, we are invited to learn about them and to understand the events and context. The film provokes its viewers not only by its theme,⁵⁷ but also by its theatrical setting and method to make reflective judgments instead of determinative ones. By screening the scenes back to the actors, they become spectators themselves and are thus likewise motivated to reflect on their actions.

Shortly after, we see the above scene again. This time, we watch it as *mise-en-abîme* on a TV, and simultaneously see Anwar, Herman, another man and Anwar’s grandchild watching it. The camera jumps between the scenes on TV (see fig. 3) and Anwar and the others. The shots switch between wide and medium close-ups, allowing for an insight of both Anwar’s body language and facial expression. In the *mise-en-scène*, Anwar now takes the position of the spectator, according to Arendt the position allowing for impartial judgment. The object of judgment – Anwar’s deeds – is now *re-*presented and for him as spectator and removed into distance. As such, this situation partly provides the conditions for critical judgment for Anwar.



Fig. 3, Re-watching ‘first roof top scene,’ *TAOK* 00:27:38

⁵⁶ Roosa states about this scene: “What intrigued me about that scene was the multiple meanings of his dancing. One sees it is not a celebratory dance, but a way Anwar can forget about the horror. The viewer senses that Anwar actually has a conscience from which he is trying to escape” (“Interview” 3).

⁵⁷ Meant is the thematic presentation of the hypocritical conditions of a society in which laws have been undermined, as I have explained at the very beginning of this chapter.

Indeed Anwar reflects upon his actions; during the watching of the scene, his facial expression is quite serious and seems thoughtful. While in the *mise-en-abîme* the actor Anwar places a wire around the other man's neck, in the *mise-en-scène*, the spectator Anwar bends forward on his chair and places his face into his hands. Then he utters a judgment, while his look switches from the screen to a spot behind the camera, possibly Oppenheimer, as if he wants to make sure he understands. In a serious, critical tone, he states: "I never would have worn white pants. (...) I look like I'm dressed for a picnic. (...) My acting has to be violent. (...) Look, I'm laughing. I did it wrong, didn't I? It was my mistake" (0:27:31-29:01).

The shock experienced by the viewers in the first scene might be doubled here. To the viewers who are now in the position of a double-spectator, being able to reflect upon Anwar as actor *and* as spectator-actor, this scene appears as a repetition or citation of the former one. As such, the first scene arguably becomes a gesture in itself and interrupts the viewers' expectation possibly doubly: now the shock not only concerns the deeds and the boastful explanation of them, but more so concerns the judgment of Anwar. Or, to formulate it differently: it is the lack of critical reflection and judgment of the protagonists about their deeds that becomes shockingly apparent here. This seems similar 'thought-defying' as Arendt's descriptions of Eichmann's utterances. Indeed, the scene almost caused me to burst into laughter. This occurrence might be comparable to Arendt, who "often laughed uncontrollably while studying the [Eichmann] case" (Horsman 15), due to the inability to make sense of what she was confronted with.

The viewers' new assessment of the first scene will be characterised by additionally and comparatively taking into account Anwar's judgment of his own actions. Anwar is also shocked about what he sees, albeit for completely different reasons; he seems to compare the representation on the screen with his memories of the killings. To him, the situation seems ridiculous and unrealistic because he does not look serious, authentic or violent enough. Similar to his former actor-judgment (or lack of it), his spectator-judgment is also primarily concerned with only the formal representation, the *how* instead of the *what* or *why* of his actions – which confronts the viewers in their position as reflecting double-spectator with a stumbling block in understanding.⁵⁸

Considering Arendt's *Lectures* might help to reflect on this moment further. In his focus on the *how*, Anwar does not verbalise a judgment of his deeds, at least not a reflective one. Because he does not take any standpoints beside of his own (how do I look, how should I look?) into account, he is unable to form a *critical* judgment, one that applies "critical standards to one's own thought" (Arendt *Lectures* 42). I do not wish to imply here that it would only be a judgment if he would condemn his deeds – this would mean imposing a determinative judgment (the moral 'killing is wrong') onto him. Rather, it becomes apparent that he is not even concerned with his deeds and not actually reflecting upon them at all. However, the process of the film-making does confront him and the others to do so: by staging in front of the directors, the camera and thus a bigger audience, the protagonists are communicating and sharing their opinions on the killings in a broader public realm, and are thus

⁵⁸ Similar to Arendt's confrontation with Eichmann, as Horsman describes: "When we watch Eichmann as 'judge-spectators,' (...) we stumble over his banal refusal to think for himself" (42). About the *skandala*, the stumbling blocks, see also Arendt in Beiner, 113.

motivated to reflect on other standpoints and other opinions on them. At the same time, by watching themselves on the screen they become ‘impartial’ spectators of their own actions. Their past crimes and the people they have killed become, by means of imagination, present to them. The film thus motivates reflective judgment by stimulating their *sensus communis* and *imagination*.

It does so, too, for the spectator-viewers, who are challenged to take into account a point of view that seems very far away from their own, most likely: that of a mass killer. Confronted with the persistent narrative of the protagonists that the killings were heroic acts, the viewers might learn about the mechanisms and contradictions of this narrative. Imagination and community sense are, for both protagonists and viewers, stimulated through the theatrical staging and the filming, and especially through their positions as spectators.

3.2.3. CRITICAL JUDGMENT BETWEEN ACTOR AND SPECTATOR

During the process of *TAOK*, the protagonists get increasingly creative in their acting out the interrogation, torturing and killing of ‘communists.’⁵⁹ Instead of the first re-enactments that are mainly based on hand and body gestures, the later scenes are offering are more elaborate, partly very surreal and artistic, partly aiming for an authentic or realistic mode. The settings reach from office interrogations to a mix of Wild West and jungle, to actual theatre stages. Some scenes involve lavish application of make-up and costumes, some a lot of fake blood, the actions reach from pretended beating to sawing off heads and eating organs. One of the most interesting undertakings, however, is yet another change of position of the protagonists. Before, we have seen that through the method of acting, filming and screening back the film shifts the protagonists from the position of the actor partly to that of the spectator. But in later scenes we additionally find the shift of their position from perpetrator to victim. In order to re-enact how to torture and kill a communist, one does, of course, need a victim. While there are a few scenes where Anwar and Herman asks the women and children of their villages to help out, most of the interrogations of the communists, who are mainly male victims, are re-enacted by the protagonists themselves. The perpetrators, thus, ‘become’ the victims in these scenes. Parallel to the two scenes of Anwar I discussed in the first part of this chapter, I will now turn to two later scenes where Anwar is also actor – interestingly in the role of a victim – and later spectator.

The following scene occurs near the end, when the viewer has already ‘witnessed’ a number of violent interrogation scenes. These kinds of scenes are mostly constructed simply: a table, two chairs and the aforementioned wire suffice. This particular scene is held in film noir style, with the interrogators wearing suits and hats and the whole scene made very dark, both regarding the lighting conditions as well as the atmosphere. Anwar does not make the “mistake” again to laugh or to wear white trousers. In the first part of this very long scene, Anwar plays the perpetrator and Herman the victim. This entails one of the most cruel moments of the film, where Anwar brutally knives a teddy

⁵⁹ When I speak of ‘communists’ here or in the following, I mean people who play the communists in the re-enactments and the concept of the enemy that dominates the hegemonic discourse in Indonesia.

bear that symbolises the communist's / Herman's baby.⁶⁰ While this scene is extremely shocking in its violence, it creates a distancing effect to the violence that makes it possibly easier to bear by strange means: the combination of a strong resemblance to common gangster films conventions, and the rupture of this 'realistic' film style by the use of a teddy bear. For the viewers, this combination again makes aware of the *mise-en-scène* and of the corrupted condition and inner contradiction of the narratives of the perpetrators.

Shortly after, Anwar plays the communist. The others interrogate him, pretend to beat him brutally and bind him to the chair and then pretend to do to him what he has done to countless people in real life: they strangle him with the wire. They have to stop the play a few times, because Anwar is not feeling well. He starts to shake, sweat and breathe heavily. Finally, the others interrupt the scene by calling "cut, cut". The interruption causes a reflection, and Anwar utters: "I feel like I was dead for a moment..." (2:18:52). Now for Anwar, reality and imagination seem to blend into each other. They stop the shooting.

This whole scene ('torture scene,' 2:10:55-21:31) is interesting to watch because it confronts the viewer with two very extreme and opposite versions of Anwar: first, he is a brutal killer, next he is a suffering victim. Both roles seem staged *and* authentic, with a surprising change of emphasis: the killer Anwar of whom we know is 'real' here appears more like a convincing actor. The victim Anwar of whom we know he is 'stage-played' appears authentic, because his suffering here seems real – his body is physically breaking down. In this way, the film creates a confusion of the clear divide of perpetrator and victim and instead creates space of plurality. It indicates that human beings might not be clearly divisible in 'perpetrators' and 'victims,' in 'good' and 'evil' or in 'criminals' and 'innocent' people. Instead, there might exist a plurality in each single one, which means that one cannot judge someone as person in general, *per se*, but only on the base of specific deeds and in relation to a specific case. Plurality demands communication, the attempt to understand the other person, and it means that judgment cannot rely on preconceived morals but has to be an ethical act and "an ambiguous process in which one must engage over and over again; it is not the case that one can simply make 'a' judgment about something and be done with it" (Taylor 163-164). This insight can be seen as a development of the one I have described in relation to the first re-enactment scene, which provoked not to judge too easily. Here, the viewer is confronted with the fact that the perpetrator cannot be reduced to his 'evil' deeds but can possibly be a victim as well, as a result of which judgment becomes an even more complicated act than indicated before.

The 'torture scene' is also very insightful in regard to the effects it has on the spectator-actor perpetrator-victim Anwar when watching it on TV. *TAOK* provides several scenes where Anwar, and sometimes Herman and others, watch the scenes they themselves have created before. Anwar's reflections are mostly similar to the one I have described above; they are concerned with appearances, whether something is convincing, authentic or plausible. His relation to his film as spectator is extremely distanced: he does evaluate it as if it was just a work of art, as if he himself was not

⁶⁰ Anwar accuses the 'father' of having tried to bribe him with the baby, and as punishment plucks out the baby's / teddy bear's eye and rips of its limbs (2:10:55-13:47). Doing that, he says to the communist: "You are the real barbarian" (*ibid.*). This, again, like Adi's earlier, implies a contradiction: he does realise the cruelty and wrongness of his deed, but finds a way to justify it: in this case, the alleged violence and bribery of the enemy.

involved in it. It is the form of critique we would make when discussing the latest film we have seen in the cinema in order to come to a judgment of taste: was it a good film because it was plausible, full of tension and had beautiful imageries? Did it have the right amount of humour or sincerity?⁶¹ However, when Anwar watches the ‘torture scene’ where he is the victim, his reaction is different.

Again the camera shot switches between the scene on TV and Anwar’s face. First, he is laughing and joking about what he sees, getting his two grandsons to watch this with him. When they are gone, his expression becomes more serious and thoughtful. Watching the moment described above, where he thought he was dying, he utters in an astonished tone the question: “Did the people I tortured feel the way I do here?” (2:27:38). This question, I would argue, can be understood as a reflective judgment. The plurality that this scene creates by the various switching of roles and positions enables Anwar’s *sensus communis*, his ability for ‘enlarged thinking’. For the first time, he is able to take into account the standpoint of someone else and realises that the people he killed were not evil enemies, – ‘barbaric communists’ – but vulnerable and violated human beings.

The form of his reaction can be aptly described as astonishment (in the following I will refer to this as ‘scene of astonishment’). Asking a question that never occurred to him before, Anwar is enabled to become critical about his own deeds, due to imagination – in this case reflecting on his feeling of mortal fear without still feeling it and making present the pain of the people he killed – and enlarged thinking. This question-judgment cannot be grasped by moral rules, or put into a simple statement (like his earlier one: “I made a mistake”) but is more complex and acknowledges the pain and silenced story of his victims. Anwar engages in the viewpoint of his enemy, which in return evokes the viewers to engage in a dialogue with him, and to become aware that the Anwar cannot be reduced to the role of the ‘evil perpetrator’.

As a result of this dissolving of clear categories, one might also ask whether the viewer can still be reduced to his role as disinterested, detached spectator. As such, one has the possibility to switch the film off any time, one can say that one is not or does not want to be involved in such dirty business as it is happening on the screen. As a spectator, one can always contend to be impartial and innocent. However, considering the historical and political context of the film, and its precise emphasis that ‘reality’ is created and determined by ‘stage-play’ and constructed narratives, one might realise that one cannot simply ‘switch off’ life. The abyss between screen (or: stage) and spectator is narrowed – a movement that Benjamin describes in regard to the epic theatre as the transition from stage to podium: “The stage is still elevated, but it no longer rises from an immeasurable depth; it has become a public platform. Upon this platform the theatre now has to install itself” (Benjamin, *Understanding* 1; in the original he uses the term podium).⁶² With a podium, the separation between actor and spectator is thus complicated, for “[e]very spectator can become one of the actors” (Benjamin, *Understanding* 20).

The reflective judgment of Anwar becomes possible in this moment where the clear separation of spectator and actor is questioned. This sheds a new light on Arendt’s theory. Bilsky has noted that Arendt’s oeuvre itself implies that actor and spectator cannot be seen separately in regard to judgment but have to live in reciprocal exchange (276). She refers to the necessary dialogue of a perpetrator and

⁶¹ Cf. Anwar in *TAOK* 1:09:27-13:05.

⁶² Cf. Benjamin, “Theater” 519.

a potential judge. However, the analysis of *TAOK* suggests that spectator and actor not only need to be in dialogue, but are moreover to be understood as being in constant transposition.

3.3. CONCLUSION

The analysis of Arendt's thoughts and *TAOK* has shown both the problems as well as the potential of judgment. While a determinative judgment that relies on laws seems impossible or unproductive when confronted with corrupt and hypocritical conditions of a state – since it would only hold up the status quo –, reflective judgment turns out to be productive: it can bring into existence the acknowledgment of disavowed narratives and repressed standpoints. Reflective judgment is based on critical thought, which is not something that human beings inherently *have* but a capability that they can potentially *learn*. The film stimulates imagination and community sense and consequently enables a process of learning and understanding, thus a process of reflective judgment. It does so on two levels:

Firstly, the film repeatedly evokes critical judgment in the viewers. They become aware that this form of judging is not a final or unambiguous act, but an ongoing productive act that can show “that things can be other than they are” (Taylor 164). In this case it shows, for example, that Anwar might not be as ‘evil’ and remorseless as possibly assumed at first; and that the version of history advocated by the protagonists is not completely inviolable. The film further suggests that reflective judgment can by no means be reduced on the position of the spectator, as Beiner has claimed in regard to Arendt's theory.

Secondly, *TAOK* motivates, trains and finally stimulates reflective judgment at least in one of the protagonists, as we have seen in the ‘scene of astonishment.’ Anwar's reflective judgment cannot be reduced to his role as an impartial and distanced spectator, but seems to have occurred because his previous actor position in the ‘torture scene’ has changed, too: from perpetrator to victim. However, there is one decisive aspect to this, which I have not discussed yet: the nature and implications of the *astonishment* itself. Anwar's change in perspective – his ability to suddenly be aware of another standpoint than his own – can actually not be entirely reduced on the notion of reflective judgment. His question might be an example of *critical thought*. However, the insight emerges before this reflection takes place and his change in perspective is arguably not a conscious decision by Anwar. Instead, it appears as the result of an *affect* that hits him by surprise.

Consequently, I argue that the moment of astonishment cannot be entirely grasped with the help of Arendt's theory and requires further investigation into the notion of affect and a reconsideration of the notion of judgment.

4. A PROCESS OF BECOMING

The moment I expect the results I get, the filmmaking process is finished, or should be abandoned. The whole point is to journey into the unknown.

Oppenheimer, *reddit AMA* n.pag.

It is not a question of judging other existing beings, but of sensing whether they agree or disagree with us, that is, whether they bring forces to us, or whether they return us to the miseries of war, to the poverty of the dream, to the rigors of organization.

Deleuze *Essays* 135

As the academic and public reception of *TAOK* shows, many critics accuse the film of not taking a clear stance of either being for the victims or against the perpetrators, respectively. As Meyer states pertinently: “[t]he film’s lack of moral handholding makes many people deeply uncomfortable, but this ambiguity is the key to its power” (Meyer, n.pag.). Being confronted with atrocities that have mostly been concealed up to the present, and with what I called the hypocritical condition of society, the desire for judgment and clear stances seems all too understandable. Arendt offers a productive way to deal with “messy moral universe[s]” (ibid.), namely in form of a judgment that functions as “guide” but is not dependent on nor creates laws and moral rules (Taylor 163), and instead relies on critical thinking. The theatricality of *TAOK* motivates and enables this process of critical thinking and “judging [as] an ambiguous process” (ibid.). However, as we have seen in the previous analysis, the processes of judgment in *TAOK* cannot be entirely grasped by means of Arendt’s theory. We can ask whether the change Anwar undergoes in the ‘scene of astonishment’ can actually be understood in terms of judgment. As a result, one might ask: does the film evoke a different form of judgment, or does it perhaps even elude judgment altogether? If so, what are the implications of this? In this chapter I will analyse *TAOK* as a process of becoming and explore whether the film might in the end indeed refrain from a fixed form of judgment and instead offers different possibilities of working through the act of killing productively and reparatively.

Up until now I have mostly left aside the specificity of the medium film, and instead focussed on its theatricality. This has proven fruitful in order to carve out the trial-like setting of the film as well as the dynamic between actor and spectator, which has helped to conceptualise judgment as an ethical act outside the juridical realm. However, it has left undiscussed the aesthetics and affects of the film beyond its theatrical methods. For Deleuze, “[c]inema itself is not conceptual, but presents a challenge to our concepts” (Colebrook, *Deleuze* 54). Philosophy and literary theory may respond, then, “to the new perceptive forces or affects which art allows” (ibid.) rather than offer a preconceived theory to art. In this sense, I will explore the affects of *TAOK* in dialogue with Deleuze’s philosophy and ask how the film allows us to rethink the concept of judgment once again.

I will first come back to the ‘scene of astonishment’ to analyse the role of affects and the changes Anwar and the viewers might undergo. This will bring me to discuss to which extent the film, by creating a new mode of existing, does indeed refuse the notion of judgment. Here I will compare the two final scenes of *TAOK*. In the last part of this chapter I will propose that ‘bringing into existence’

and judgment might not be exclusive, as Deleuze implies,⁶³ and that *TAOK* might call for a new concept of judgment after all.

4.1. FACING AFFECTS

To begin with, the ‘scene of astonishment’ shall be returned to. When Anwar asks Oppenheimer to put on the scene “where I’m strangled with wire,” he first calls his grandsons to watch the scene with him (2:24:53-25:39) and ignores Oppenheimer’s off-screen objection: “[b]ut this is too violent, Anwar. Are you sure?” (ibid.). The three of them start to watch the scene, and Anwar reflects jokingly with his grandsons on what is happening: “It’s so sad, isn’t it? That’s your grandpa. That’s grandpa being beaten up by that fat guy” (ibid.). Here, it seems that Anwar creates a double distance to the scenes by sharing his spectator-position with his grandchildren who have to be protected or distanced to the violent events by jokes and emphasising that this “is only a film” (ibid.). Having the children on his lap, the distance is also created physically and visually, so that it looks as if he is hiding behind them (see fig. 4).



Fig. 4, Anwar with his grandsons, *TAOK* 2:26:41

The boys seem to function as a shield of protection creating an additional layer of distance. When Anwar sends them to bed, this distance falls away, and he is exposed to the scene more directly. A close-up of his face on TV, as victim-actor in the *mise-en-abîme*, reveals to him now what the viewer has witnessed before when watching the scene being shot: Anwar’s pain and suffering, a change of his condition and an intense bodily physical reaction to what is supposed to be a mere act of play. In the *mise-en-scène*, the camera shot switches to a close-up on Anwar’s face (now as spectator), showing him seemingly thoughtful and concentrated. After his question of whether the people he killed felt like

⁶³ Cf.: “Judgment prevents the emergence of any new mode of existence”(Deleuze *Essays* 135).

he did, Anwar proclaims: “I can feel what the people I tortured felt. Because here my dignity has been destroyed... and then fear comes, right there and then. All the terror suddenly possessed my body. It surrounded me, and possessed me” (2:27:38). He describes the change he underwent as actor: he could indeed not control his play-acting anymore because he was hit by a sense of fear and terror. Facing this moment now on screen unleashes another uncontrollable reaction. Oppenheimer replies to Anwar’s question and explanation: “Actually, the people you tortured felt far worse, because you know it’s only a film. They knew they were being killed” (2:28:21). Thereupon Anwar falls into silence for about ten seconds. His face is shown in close-up, and there is visibly a change going on in him that seems impossible to be put into words. His expression might be best described as astonishment (see fig. 5 and 6).



Fig. 5, Astonishment No.1, *TAOK* 2:28:24



Fig. 6, Astonishment No.2, *TAOK* 2:28:32

When he starts to speak again, his words first seem self-focussed again: “[b]ut I can feel it, Josh. Really, I feel it” (2:28:35). However, it seems that his self-perception has been shaken, when he asks “[o]r have I sinned?” followed by a moment of silence. His eyes suddenly filled with tears, he says: “I did this to so many people, Josh. Is it all coming back to me? I really hope it won’t. I don’t want it, Josh” (2:29:09). He falls silent and shakes his head as if to ward off the process of thought that follows this moment of astonishment, which seems to profoundly interrupt the construction of his life-long narrative. To understand better what is happening in this moment it will be helpful to briefly draw back on Walter Benjamin.

In his essays on Brecht’s epic theatre, Benjamin writes that “[t]he art of epic theatre consists in arousing astonishment rather than empathy” (Benjamin, *Understanding* 18, my emphasis). *Astonishment* means the recognition that “man can be changed by his surroundings and can himself change the surrounding world” (Benjamin, *Understanding* 13). Benjamin also describes figuratively that the “rock of astonishment” breaks the “stream of things,” creating a dialectic standstill (ibid.), a standstill that entails “contradictions of our society” (Benjamin, *Understanding* 8). To be astonished means to recognise something *without yet knowing it*. It might be interpreted the moment before the critical thinking unfolds itself, the decisive moment in which thinking can become critical, because it makes aware of the possibility of change and thus enables to “[apply] critical standards to one’s own thought” (Arendt *Lectures* 42). However, the moment itself is not of the nature of rational thought. Rather, it comes by surprise and is sensed before consciously known – one is astonished or: affected.

The concept of affect also plays an important role in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, who bases his contentions on Spinoza. Brian Massumi gives a fruitful working definition of the terms ‘affect,’ emphasising that it does not

denote(...) a personal feeling (*sentiment* in Deleuze and Guattari). *L’affect* (Spinoza’s *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act (...) (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include ‘mental’ or ideal bodies).

(Massumi xvii)

Hence, affect describes the change or becoming of bodies in the encounter with other bodies: “passages, becomings, rises and falls, continuous variations of power [*puissance*] that pass from one state to another. We will call them *affects*” (Deleuze, *Essays* 139). While to affect or be affected is an experience of the senses, it is not subjective but a “prepersonal intensity” (ibid.), a matter of forces that surpasses subjectivity.

In regard to the ‘astonishment’ scene, the notion of affect helps to understand that the physical change occurring in Anwar cannot be limited to his personal feelings, it is beyond his control, intention and understanding. Instead, in this surprising moment great potential for critical thought seems to be created. For the first time in the course of the film Anwar puts into questions the righteousness of his deeds (“or have I sinned?” 2:28:42). This presents a perspective he was unable to hold before. The stability and organisation of his narrative about the killings has been shattered. It is

not of relevance, here, whether this change in Anwar might or might not be permanent; what is more important is that in exceeding his subjectivity, Anwar's reaction culminates in the birth of potential: "man can be changed by his surroundings and can himself change the surrounding world" (Benjamin, *Understanding* 13). A new line of flight might have been created, which constitutes "the actualisation of connections among bodies that were previously only implicit" (Lorraine 147) and accounts for the bodies that have been excluded before: the people Anwar has tortured and killed. In this specific situation or encounter of bodies, the dead have in a way gained a new capacity to act upon Anwar by means of affect.⁶⁴

Anwar's astonished question "[d]id the people I tortured feel the way I do here?" (2:27:38) might be interpreted as a reflective judgment, as I have argued before. Yet, Arendt's notion does not take into account that the new perspective is not created by conscious reflection; it is not a result of critical thinking. On the contrary, it seems that Anwar's ability for critical thinking – to question his own norms – is a result of being affected, of a "passage from one experiential state of the body to another" (Massumi xvii). Instead of being a detached, distanced spectator, Anwar is hit by what he sees on screen.

The previous analysis of this scene in relation to Arendt's theory has already shown that the film questions the clear separation of spectator and actor. In regards to the viewers of *TAOK*, I would thus argue that the film is so 'uncomfortable' to watch because it does not always allow for a distanced position to hold onto completely. Being confronted with Anwar's transformations between victim and perpetrator, actor and spectator, the viewers are challenged to see Anwar not just as perpetrator but rather as a changing body. As a result, I cannot distinguish or distance myself in the way I might have tried at the beginning by ascribing the attribute 'evil' to the protagonists. Anwar's astonishment potentially provokes a moment of astonishment in the viewers, too. I might realise that my body as a viewer – both my physically body and my ideas, values and conceptions – is, too, always becoming other.

This has implications for our ability to judge. For only "[i]f we accept who we are and what we should be, then we can simply exclude those who are 'evil'; we can remain good, holy and 'pure' from the forces that supposedly work against life" (Colebrook, *Deleuze* 131). The film challenges this distinction and as a result, "[w]e do not view the (...) killer from some disengaged viewpoint; in reading we perceive the intensities and investments that are *at one and the same time* those of a violent evil and those of 'our' world," as Claire Colebrook describes fittingly in her Deleuzian reading of *American Psycho* (ibid.). In turning away from moral systems and fixed categories, Deleuze puts into question judgment altogether. *TAOK* as a film and as a process of becoming does so, too, as a comparative analysis of the final scenes of the *mise-en-abîme* and the *mise-en-scène* will show.

⁶⁴ Lorraine explains 'lines of flight' as "a path of mutation precipitated through the actualisation of connections among bodies that were previously only implicit (or 'virtual') that releases new powers in the capacities of those bodies to act" (147).

4.2. TO HAVE DONE WITH JUDGMENT?

As a viewer of *TAOK*, one gets to know relatively little about the plot of the film that Anwar and his accomplices create. However, their discussions during the shootings and during the viewing of the images they have created indicate that there is a coherent plot and that they consider carefully what effect each scene will have on the potential viewers.⁶⁵ Thus, it can be assumed that the scene they chose for an ending is supposed to be of importance for the message they want to bring across. This ending presents a scenery that we have seen at the beginning of *TAOK*: a beautiful green mountain landscape with a waterfall in the background, in front of which Anwar and Herman and women in bright dresses are dancing. The song *Born Free* is playing, altogether this creates an image that suggests a sense of peace and harmony. Then the camera cuts to two actors playing communist victims, who are taking off a noose of wire that is hanging around their necks and laying it down. One of them awards Anwar with a golden medal, shaking his hands and saying in a ceremonial tone: “For executing me and sending me to heaven... I thank you a thousand times, for everything” (2:24:01-2:24:22, see fig. 7). For a brief moment, we see the four of them holding hands. This scene presents a moment of judgment that is staged and intentionally created by the protagonists. The surreal atmosphere, the beauty of the landscape and the clothing, positioning and gestures by the actors suggest that this is supposed to represent a form of Judgment Day, whereby Anwar receives ultimate redemption.

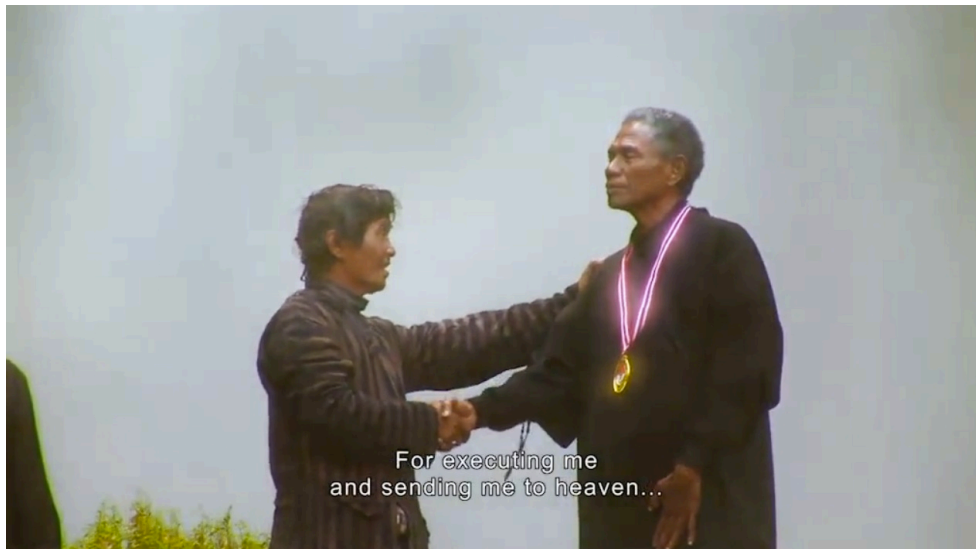


Fig. 7, ‘Judgment Day’, *TAOK* 2:24:02

⁶⁵ For example, when Anwar and Herman watch a surreal scene where Herman plays a cruel communist feeding the victim Anwar with his own organs. Anwar notices: “Imagine, if the film suddenly ended with this scene... People will think this is my bad karma. But if this is the beginning, then all the sadistic things I do next will be justified by the sadism here. Totally justified!” Herman replies: “But Anwar, you’re dead in this scene, because I cut your head off. So if this is the beginning, it must be someone else’s head that gets cut off, not yours.” Anwar: “That’s not true, because this scene... This scene is set in a time tunnel.” (*TAOK* 1:42:11-1:44:01). Scenes like this show that they want to bring across a certain narrative with their film. For other examples, see (1:09:37-1:11:10) or (1:25:25-1:27:00).

Anwar has created this tribunal and thus takes a simultaneous position of the one who is judged and the one who judges. Through the composition of the scene, he is imposing a judgment (an acquittal) on himself, the communist victims and history. I would argue that in the process of *TAOK*, this scene makes us aware of the dangers of moral judgment. Discussing the question of how to understand endings of legal theatres, Horsman argues:

Pronouncing a verdict or giving amnesty are totalizing gestures, both of which seek to establish the truth about the past and to radically alter our relation to it. How do we combine these totalizing gestures with the (...) demand to resist understanding the past in terms of what Dominick LaCapra calls 'redemptive narratives,' teleological stories that emphasise the 'positive' or 'just' outcome of history while overlooking or marginalising the history of suffering and trauma?

(Horsman 8-9)

The tribunal presented by Anwar, I contend, shows exactly this: judgment as totalising gesture that can only function hierarchically and authoritatively, since the judge imposes a moral, a certain narrative on history to create 'justice', while excluding from the story the suppressed and marginalised. I suggest that this is the form of judgment that Deleuze opposes, as he writes in his essay "To Have Done with Judgment." Judgment here contains torture, organisation and the will to dominate and is as such opposed to existence that contains cruelty, the will to power (in the sense of *puissance*, power to act), and vitality (Deleuze *Essays* 134).⁶⁶ Hence, it stands in opposition to existence and even "prevents the emergence of any new mode of existence" (Deleuze *Essays* 135). This seems indeed to be the case in this tribunal scene. Anwar seemingly wants to establish a judgment here that is valid once and for all, that demonstrates how 'just' and 'positive' the history of the 1965-66 killings are, and that the case can be closed in peace. Taking into account the people who were killed, however, it appears as a repetition of the violence and is characterised by a will to dominate and to torture. While the film Anwar wanted to create would have probably ended here, the process of *TAOK* goes on or presents a different ending, respectively.

The final scene of *TAOK* takes us back to the place of the beginning of the re-enactments:⁶⁷ the roof terrace. This scene ('second roof top scene') is shown shortly after Anwar's 'moment of astonishment,' and it can be described as a citation or repetition of the first 'roof top' scene, which I have discussed in chapter 3. Anwar, this time alone, explains again what has happened here. Because it is so similar in its composition to the 'first roof top scene,' it allows for a comparison and insight into the changes that the process of *TAOK* involves.

The whole tone of the scene is decisively different. Not only because it is night-time and Anwar wears a beige suit instead of his white trousers, but mostly because of his condition. He moves slowly, and seems to have difficulties in uttering his words. When he finally does, instead of re-enacting or

⁶⁶ Regarding Deleuze's term 'power', see for example Colebrook, "Power" 215-216.

⁶⁷ The 'roof top scene' I discuss here, is actually followed by one more short closing scene, that can be seen in correspondence to the 'prologue' of the opening scene and also shows the decayed fish-restaurant. It is, however, in complete silence and can be regarded as a form of visual epilogue rather than the final scene within the spoken narrative of *TAOK*.

performing gestural citations in entire control of his actions, his speech is accompanied by retching noises.

This is where we tortured and killed the people we captured. I know it was wrong, but I had to do it. [Long pause] Why did I have to kill them? I had to kill... [pause] My conscience told me they had to be killed. This is... [picking up a long piece of wire with a noose] This is one of the easiest ways to take a human life. And this... [picking up a sack] This was used to take away... the human beings we killed. Because without this... maybe people would know.

(Anwar, 2:30:55 - 2:36:34)

In contrast to the ‘first roof top scene’, Anwar seems to have lost his ability to play-act, and is hardly in control of his speech and body (see fig. 8). And even more than in the ‘scene of astonishment,’ he is affected by forces beyond his control and his body is physically undergoing a change. What he says almost loses all meaning, and what lies in the foreground is affect. While the admission “I know it was wrong” (ibid.) appears like an empty phrase, the affect of this whole scene – the space of which we know has entailed a countless number of dead bodies once, the colours, Anwar’s movements – expresses a sense of horror that is hard to be put into words. Anwar literally fails to speak, the narratives that have organised his life fall silent.



Fig. 8, Anwar collapsing, *TAOK* 2:32:52

When reading this scene in comparison with the ‘tribunal scene,’ it can be argued that it stands in direct contrast to it in various ways. First of all, this scene is not entirely intentionally created by anyone. Neither Oppenheimer nor Anwar did or could have prescribed what happens here; only the

occasion that allowed for this to happen has been created.⁶⁸ Oppenheimer explains: “I certainly never encouraged him to go back and dramatise what he did there. When we finally went back to that rooftop again at the very end of the process, five years later, to shoot what became the final scene in the film, I gave two simple instructions to my crew – a sound recordist and a cinematographer” (Roosa, “Interview” 4). These rules were to stay back against the wall and not “to step onto the roof terrace where Anwar danced, because that’s the space where all these people died and that space belongs to the dead,” and not to zoom in for close-ups “because the space – haunted as it is by the absence of the dead – is just as important as listening to whatever Anwar is going to tell us” (ibid.). The absence of the dead is not discussed in the film and cannot be explained by rational reflection, yet the presence of this absence is, I would contend, overwhelmingly palpable. What we find here, instead of a prewritten tribunal, is thus an assemblage of forces – which includes the absence of the victims and brings into existence new lines of flight.⁶⁹ Deleuze writes: “[h]erein, perhaps, lies the secret: to bring into existence and not to judge” (*Essays* 135). The final scene at the end of what arguably is a ‘process of judging,’ seems to elude judgment: both a moral judgment and also a reflective judgment, since a critical distance is largely removed by the emphasis on an experience of the senses.

Deleuze suggests replacing judgment by affect. In *Cinema 2*, he argues:

But it is not a matter of judging life in the name of a higher authority which would be the good, the true; it is a matter, on the contrary, of evaluating every being, every action and passion, even every value, in relation to the life which they involve. Affect as immanent evaluation, instead of judgment as transcendent value: ‘I love or I hate’ instead of ‘I judge’. (...) Of course there is no more truth in one life than in the other; there is only becoming.

(Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 141)

In regard to this, the process of *TAOK* can be productively described as a process of becoming. The film is an assemblage of forces refraining from morally judging the perpetrators of the mass killings. It does, however, evaluate by means of affect. Massumi states that affect implies “an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act” (xvii). In this last scene, it becomes clear that the act of killing does not only totally diminish the power of those who have been killed, but that it also has a diminishing affect on those who killed. Anwar’s body collapses in confrontation with the absent-present bodies of the dead.

Anwar’s collapse might provoke the same question I have asked in regard to the first roof top scene at the beginning: is this ‘real’ or is this staged again? One might argue that this would be decisive for the film’s meaning: does *TAOK* actually bring about the change of a perpetrator with pride to a man feeling remorse about his own past deeds? Does it in this sense work towards justice? The problems with these questions are that, first of all, we cannot know what is actually going on inside Anwar.

⁶⁸ By going back there, and by filming in a specific way.

⁶⁹ Cf. Graham Livesey on assemblage: “The result of a productive assemblage is a new means of expression, a new territorial / spatial organisation, a new institution, a new behaviour, or a new realisation. The assemblage is destined to produce a new reality, by making numerous, often unexpected, connections” (19).

Secondly, and more importantly, they restrict the potential of this scene to something that lies outside of it (Anwar's state of mind), instead of allowing it to speak for itself. Questions like these might be called 'paranoid' in Sedgwick's understanding and might even imply imposing a moral judgment, suggesting remorse as 'good' and pretending as 'bad'. I would contend that this overlooks the ethical complexity of the film that challenges the division of people into fixed categories. Oppenheimer himself addresses these questions as following: "It's definitely both. He's performing for my camera. He's certainly aware of the camera and he's thinking about that. At the same time, he's performing in such a way that he allows the past to hit him with an unexpected force in that moment" (Oppenheimer in Morris, n.pag.). This 'being hit with an unexpected force' describes exactly the affect entailed in and of this scene. Rather than anyone imposing a judgment on Anwar from the outside or by means of higher values, an "immanent evaluation" (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 141) takes place, which acknowledges all the forces and bodies involved.

A 'reparative' reading can account for affect by allowing viewers to "remain conscious of textual hostilities and be hurt, scared, scarred and angry in relation to them" (Edward 112). Following this, a possible sense of frustration about not knowing whether Anwar's vomiting is 'real' or not, can be assessed as an impulse to question the possibility of clear categories, of knowing what is 'true,' and to reflect on possible implications of this. This uncertainty highlights again the difficulty or impossibility of stable moral judgment. In contrast to focusing on Anwar and the question whether his performance is 'real' or not, remaining conscious or being perceptive towards this scene without asking for its meaning might enable us to gain further insights.



Fig. 9, "A haunted space," *TAOK* 2:31:34

What makes the 'second roof top scene' so powerful in its affects on the viewers is that it enables us to acknowledge the people who have been tortured and killed. We sense the horror of the past events and are hurt, scared and scarred by it. It changes *us*, too. I would argue that this is a form of compassion that is not necessarily a co-suffering as Arendt interprets the term, even if we are hurt too.

Rather, it is a compassion that makes us *aware* of the violence and pain in a way that does not allow us to withdraw to the safe position as spectator. It makes us feel concerned – in the sense that this story also concerns us. Not just because our governments might have been involved in these killings or similar reasons that would set off “potentially endless volleys of shame” (Edwards 112). Rather, because the killings mean a diminishing of plurality and potential of life, of ‘our’ world, which includes people who have killed.

This sense of compassion we might perceive is possibly also directed towards Anwar. I have described this startling sense of compassion as the most surprising reaction to *TAOK* when I first watched it. As mentioned above, we become aware by this scene that killing also has a diminishing affect on the perpetrators. Anwar collapses under the weight of the realisation of what the implications of his deeds entail. He might realise that he will never receive the redemption he imagined in his ‘tribunal scene’. The last shot shows Anwar leaving the roof top and coming to a sudden standstill on the stairs leading down. It seems that he is caught in the in-between place between the dead and the living. The fact that killing also hurts the perpetrators is an insight we usually do not see or not acknowledge because it does not allow us to retreat into the safe space that a clear distinction between ‘good’ and ‘evil’ has to offer.



Fig. 10, Anwar on stairs, *TAOK 2* 2:35:57

Following from these observations I suggest reading *TAOK* as a process of becoming that allows for ‘immanent evaluation,’ and performs such evaluation itself through its assemblage of bodies. It brings into existence new possibilities. Instead of the fixed narratives and a hierarchical organisation of history and society into “perpetrator and victim, good and evil, hero and villain” (Heryanto 166), the film creates a new mode of existence. It presents an assemblage of forces that eludes conceptual ordering and refutes moral relativism as propagated by Adi. What is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ is not a question of power in the sense of “will-to-dominate”, as Adi suggests, but it is a question of “*the good and the*

bad’, of power in the sense of “power to live” and becoming (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 141).⁷⁰ *TAOK* presents and performs a mode of evaluation that continuously asks: what augments and what diminishes bodies’ capacities to act?

4.3. WORKING THROUGH *THE ACT OF KILLING* – AN AMBIGUOUS PROCESS

The Deleuzian analysis of *TAOK* has led to an understanding and experiencing of the film that seemingly contradicts the results of my analysis in chapter 3. So far, I have claimed both that *TAOK* evokes and motivates reflective judgment and critical thinking, and that it eludes judgment and instead performs an ‘immanent evaluation’ by means of affect. There seem to be two contradicting movements present in the film: one that creates distance and one that draws in and creates involvement, each of them having a different consequence for the way we approach and deal with mass killings and their perpetrators. I believe that it is this tension that makes *TAOK* a theatrical, cinematographic trial that brings into existence a new way to think about judgment. This tension is, thus, a productive one and trying to resolve it would be counterproductive in my opinion. However, I do think that these two movements can be part of one dynamic process and are not as clearly separable as it might seem at first.

Both Arendt and Brecht emphasise the role of the distanced spectator that enables the judge or critic to become aware of societal conditions and contradictions and to think critically. For Brecht, this can be attained by gestures – interruptions – of the events on stage, to prevent “the purging of emotions through identification” so the spectator and actor could be critical towards the actions and conditions instead of being immersed by them and remaining passive. For Arendt critical thought can be attained by means of community sense and imagination. The latter creates the “proper distance,” so a spectator “can no longer *be affected* by immediate presence” (Arendt, *Lectures* 67, my emphasis). She actively refuses *affect* in favour for critical distance. However, the strict focus on critical thought is informed by a refusal of affect in the sense of personal emotions or sentimentality. For her, dealing with atrocities is a matter of political action rather than compassion.⁷¹

TAOK employs methods of the epic theatre and motivates critical reflection by means of gesture and interruption. Instead of identifying with the events, viewers are invited to take the position of critical spectators – as are the protagonists themselves, to whom their actions are moved into a ‘proper distance’ through the screening back of the films. However, for a large part the protagonists reflect on the killings (both the acts and the re-enactments) without questioning their norms and narratives, and a decisive moment of critical thinking is initiated in a moment where distance to the events cannot be held up anymore. This moment I have described with Benjamin’s ‘moment of astonishment.’

⁷⁰ Cf. “Nietzsche, who had already substituted affect for judgment, warned his readers: beyond good and evil does not in the least mean *beyond the good and the bad*. This bad is exhausted and degenerating life, all the more terrible, and apt to multiply itself. But the good is outpouring, ascending life, the kind which knows how to transform life itself, to metamorphoses itself according to the forces it encounters, and which forms a constantly larger force with them, always increasing the power to live, always opening new ‘possibilities’” (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 141).

⁷¹ Cf. Arendt, *Revolution* 86. On Arendt, narratives of atrocity and compassion also see Peters, 280.

The described scene with Anwar is by no means the only moment of astonishment. Other examples can be found throughout the film, in regard to the protagonist and maybe more often in regard to the viewers. A further example for the former is when Anwar comments after a very intensive and elaborate re-enactment of burning down a village: “[i]magine those children’s future. They’ve been tortured... Now their houses will be burned down... What future do they have? They will curse us for the rest of their lives. This was so very, very, very...” (*TAOK* 2:01:44). He does not finish his sentence, as if on the brink to grasping what is happening without being able to translate the sensation into thoughts and words. Further examples in regard to the viewer are the moments of shock described by many critics, the stumbling blocks in understanding when facing the perpetrators,⁷² the impulse to uncontrollable laughter I experienced, similar to Arendt’s experience in the Eichmann trial. In fact, I would argue that the whole film is a process that constantly creates both distance and involvement by means of affect.

Interestingly, it appears that affect – although closing distance – creates interruption, too, and potentially even stronger than distancing elements (montage, self-reflection while re-enactment). Affect itself seems to be a gesture, which is the essential element of the epic theatre. As stated before, “[g]estures, Benjamin argues, emerge *in* and *through* the process of interrupting action. They are therefore constituted by and as interruptions” (Weber 100). In *TAOK* it appears that gestures vigorously interrupt fixed narratives on the level of experiences of the *senses*, rather than the rational mind. The notion of astonishment, I suggest, captures exactly this tension. It describes both the moment of not-yet-understanding, where a body is being affected, and the critical thought that might follow from this perceptive experience.⁷³

Elena del Río, in her study *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance*, sees a similar relation of gesture and affect in the Brecht-influenced work by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. She writes:

Whether the marriage of history and affect propounded by Fassbinder may be seen as a logical extension of Brecht’s own subversive politics, or as a much needed correction to his subordination of the affective to the social, Fassbinder’s cinema no doubt shows that social and individual bodies, conscious and unconscious gestures, have a way of mirroring, provoking, and touching each other.

(Río 104)

Río’s argument concerning the close relation of Deleuzian affect and Brecht’s epic theatre is convincing and applicable to *TAOK*. I assert that the tension between conscious and unconscious gestures, which are provoking and touching each other, creates the full critical potential of *TAOK*. If we read the film as a theatrical and cinematographic trial, what does this mean for the notion of judgment?

⁷² As described by Horsman in regard to Arendt’s confrontation of Eichmann, cf. 42-44.

⁷³ Despite using the word ‘follow’ I do not wish to imply a fixed temporal order that is a work here. Rather, the process between ‘sensing’ and ‘rational thinking’ seems to be so entangled and of mutual impact that it cannot clearly be separated into cause and consequence.

I approach this question on two levels: firstly, on the level of the film as a work of art; and secondly, on the level of the actor-spectator relation, thus concerning the protagonists and the viewers.

Firstly: I suggest that the film performs what Deleuze calls *immanent evaluation*. By different means, directly or indirectly, it lets speak and speaks for all parties involved in the case: those who killed, those who ordered the killings, those who are denying their involvement and those who are proud of it. Further, it also lets speak and speaks for those who are being suppressed or blackmailed today on a regular base, those who survived the killings, those who lost loved ones – and those who have been killed. The film creates a space, a podium on which all these bodies encounter each other in an assemblage of forces and become other. The film evaluates by means of sensing and by stimulating the question whether the bodies' capacities to act are being diminished or augmented. As Deleuze writes: “[i]t is not a question of judging other existing beings, but of sensing whether they agree or disagree with us, that is, whether they bring forces to us, or whether they return us to the miseries of war, to the poverty of the dream, to the rigors of organization” (Deleuze *Essays* 135). This seems an open and ongoing question that cannot be answered unambiguously or finally. However, by provoking it, the film brings into existence a plurality and a (hi)story that has been suppressed before, and thus creates a potential, the possibility that things could be different than they are.

Secondly: In regards to the protagonists and the viewers of *TAOK*, I would argue that the film motivates and evokes *reflective judgment*. Interestingly, my analysis has shown that critical thinking might especially emerge as a result of being affected. Discussing the viewers' reaction to the 'second roof top scene,' I have shown that it most powerfully asks us to question our standards of thoughts (such as prejudices against perpetrators) and to take into account plurality of life (for instance feeling concerned by the killings that have occurred 50 years ago). This shows that the sense of compassion is by no means necessarily a hindrance to political action, as Arendt states. In contrary, it can enable reflective judgment, too, and thus function as impulse for political action. Hence, the tension of affect and distance might enable and train our ability to act and make decisions productively.

The notions of immanent evaluation and reflective judgment, despite seemingly excluding each other, show in fact some distinctive similarities: they constitute an ongoing, ambiguous process of becoming or understanding respectively, that has no endpoint and no definite results. They do not rely on pre-existing rules neither do they impose values on others from the outside or above – they take place on the podium. As such, they acknowledge and foster plurality. Both can create new existence, for example in form of affirming previously suppressed (hi)stories.

However, I would like to suggest that there is one difference. The notion of immanent evaluation opens itself to and takes account for all conscious and unconscious, known and unknown forces and intensities. Reflective judgment, however, seems to be limited to the ability of one's mind to “go visiting” (Arendt *Lectures* 43). Moreover, it might not allow for the complete immanence in which evaluation might take place. Reflective judgment, while not relying upon higher values, implies judging *about* someone else and, while taking place in plurality, it is made *individually*. Being undertaken by citizens within a specific community, it does have a concrete political relevance in terms of individual ethical responsibility.

Bringing these two notions together might help us to do justice to both: making decisions were they are crucial, in times of crisis, and at the same time refrain from totalising gestures that would reinforce

violence and suppression. In this way working through the act of killing is a matter of judgment/evaluation as an ongoing ambiguous process.

5. CONCLUSION

If this film is a success! We must understand every step we take here. It's not about fear. It's 40 year's ago... so any criminal case has expired. It's not about fear. It's about image. The whole society will say: 'We always suspected it. They lied about the communists being cruel.' It's not a problem for us. It's a problem for history. The whole story will be reversed. Not 180 degrees... 360 degrees!

(Adi, *TAOK* 1:05:32)

One must, however, expect the dramatist to take a certain amount of license in that he will tend to emphasise not the great decisions, which lie along the main line of history but the incommensurable and the singular. 'It can happen this way, but it can also happen quite a different way.'

(Benjamin, *Understanding* 7-8)

The protagonists of *The Act of Killing* could have not foreseen the success or scope of the international attention that the film Oppenheimer made about them and their filmmaking. It is interesting to note, however, that despite their rigorous efforts to present the communists as evil and cruel and themselves as national heroes, Adi anticipated that this film might reverse history by "360 degrees" (1:05:32). His statement is telling in regard to the self-righteousness and moral relativism of the protagonists. It is also evidence of the ingrained detachedness to the nature and implications of their deeds, a distance that has been unexpectedly narrowed, at least for Anwar, during the process of the filmmaking. For him, in the end, the film happened in a "quite a different way" (Benjamin, *Understanding* 8) than initially expected.

TAOK opens the "criminal case" (1:05:32) of the Indonesian genocide of 1965-66 and puts it on trial. It presents a process that works through these acts of killing and challenges the protagonists and its viewers to do so too. A trial typically aims for a judgment; in this thesis I have explored what form of judgment/evaluation *TAOK* as a theatrical and cinematographic trial *motivates, evokes, performs* or perhaps *eludes*.

Setting the stage for these investigations, I have first established context, theme and method of the film. Giving an insight into the historical background on the 1965/66 killings was helpful to understand the national and international conditions under which the killings have been committed. Yet it has also brought to light that a lot of historical research still needs to be done in this field, not only in direct regard to the killings but also concerning the role of former colonisers of Indonesia and

of Western governments that supported the killings. Facing not only a suppressed genocide but also the current societal and political conditions of Indonesia, where communist activities are still prohibited has made the question of a possible judgment appear all the more urgent. My aim was not to explore how far *TAOK* can actually be a ‘catalyst for change’ in Indonesian society, but to read it as a work of art that might help us think differently about judgment. As such, *TAOK* serves as a case study in the double sense of the word: an exemplary case which has to be taken seriously in its specificity but that might offer insights beyond its specific context, and as a criminal case that demands investigation and judgment.

A theoretical background on the role of trials – both juridical trials and theatrical ones – in regard to dealing with atrocities has shown that art can be a productive way to deal with tremendous societal traumata, especially due to its ability to express the ‘expressionless.’⁷⁴ However, in this regard both theory and art have been mainly concerned with the victims, whereas *TAOK* offers a different approach by letting the perpetrators take centre-stage.

Facing the perpetrators has proven fruitful in acknowledging the ethical complexity of the atrocities. While a dichotic divide of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ determines the logic of the narratives of the perpetrators, who see themselves as national heroes who fought the ‘barbaric communists,’ the film suggests that it is not helpful to respond to this logic by categorising the perpetrators as ‘evil’ in return. In *TAOK* a collapse of clear boundaries between perpetrators and victims takes place. As a result, we are unable to orientate ourselves by means of moral categories of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ and dealing with mass atrocities and present violence is complicated. This means we are challenged to engage into dialogues, negotiate and assess situations and people in their unique situations, again and again, and to acknowledge the sometimes irresolvable tensions that emerge from the lack of secure grounds and fixed rules. In this regard, further research on the challenges and potential these tensions create, and our abilities and possibilities to deal with them, is highly desirable.

One way to approach violence under these circumstances, which political theorist Chantalle Mouffe describes as the “dimension of undecidability that pervades every order” (17), is precisely by means of exploring the possibilities of making decisions – or: judgments. This has been my approach in this present thesis. In my analyses I have brought into constellation concepts, critical thoughts and affects by *The Act of Killing*, Hannah Arendt and Gilles Deleuze. My investigations have brought the following results in regard to my research question:

Firstly, the film *eludes* judgment but *performs* an evaluation that creates potential and exposes the augmentation or diminution in the bodies’ capacities to act in a process of continuous becoming. As a work of art, *TAOK* can entail and endure the extreme tension that arises out of the encounter and transformations of perpetrators and victims – in a way that might be hurting or scaring but is not violent. As such, it makes us aware of the potential that events “can happen this way, but it can also happen quite a different way” (Benjamin, *Understanding* 8).

In order to deal with these tensions as citizens, however, I contend that critical decisions in terms of individual ethical responsibility needs to be made. The film, I thus conclude secondly, *motivates*, *trains* and *evokes* reflective judgment in its protagonists and viewers. This is an ongoing and

⁷⁴ Felman with respect to Benjamin, 13.

ambiguous process that is stimulated by means of distance/gesture *and* affect. The tension between these counter directed movements has proven to be especially productive in stimulating critical thinking and my suggestion is to describe them by the notion of *astonishment*.

In regard to how exactly judgment/evaluation can help in working through the act of killing and dealing in a healing way with violent situations, no final verdict can be made. However, both notions are productive in terms of creating something new: reflective judgment is relevant for citizens of a community because it enables to productively question a status quo. Its undertaking is *responsible* (responding to concealed violence), *ethical* (without rules to rely upon, situational) and *political* (takes into account and ensures plurality). Immanent evaluation creates the potential for ongoing change.

In context of the present case study, *TAOK*, by means of immanent evaluation that allows so powerfully for the absent bodies to speak, does provide a moment and a sense of closure through acknowledgment of injustice. At the same time it performs a painful but important opening of the case that has been concealed and kept 'closed' for so long. Doing so, it asks its viewers to engage into an ongoing process of reflective judgment as responsible political action, in order to counter the "great decisions, which lie along the main line of history" and instead focus on "the incommensurable and the singular" (Benjamin, *Understanding* 7-8).

The tension between affect and gesture especially in regard to dealing with history and trials is promising and its critical potential demands greater exploration beyond the scope of the case study. Together with the tension of reflective judgment and immanent evaluation, it motivates further research that might offer new perspectives for related fields such as trauma studies or the law and literature movement.

At the same time, however, I would strongly argue that the case study itself demands further research. *The Act of Killing* is a highly complex film that can by no means be exhausted by a thesis such as this. However, I hope that this thesis has indicated the richness of the film and might serve as stimulation for further interdisciplinary research. In the context of literary studies, one obvious approach to the film would be psychoanalysis, of which both theory and film could surely benefit greatly. Also in regard to critical cultural studies after 9/11 and recent studies such as Maria Boletsi's *Barbarism and Its Discontents*, I suggest that the film has a lot more to offer.

At the beginning I have argued that most previous studies of *TAOK* have focussed on that the film lacks rather what it has to offer. Let me come back once again to Sedgwick's notion of reparative reading. "What we can best learn from [reparative reading] practices," Sedgwick writes, "are, perhaps, the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the object of a culture – even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them" (150-151). *TAOK* can arguably be seen as an object of a culture that does not strive to sustain many of its communities and selves. This, I would argue against the backdrop of the historical context that entails the approval and concealment of the genocide by the U.S., counts beyond the borders of Indonesia. *TAOK* reflects upon and is part of a culture that is determined by a corrupt, hypocritical and thus violent condition of a law that does not seek to protect the plurality of its citizens. As Žižek notes, *TAOK* presents "the dislocating effects of capitalist globalisation which, by undermining the 'symbolic efficacy' of traditional ethical structures, creates such a moral vacuum" (*New Statesman*, n.pag.). Arendt argues

that especially in times and states of crisis, where laws and morals do not function to counter violence and where judgment seems to be impossible, it is all the more necessary.

It would be wrong to ignore the societal structures we live in and the question how to deal with society's organisations, dominant narratives and violent laws, and Deleuze's concept of immanent evaluation might not account for these difficulties sufficiently. In order to protect citizens and communities, and in order to increase their capacity to act and to ensure plurality, decisions might have to be made. Arendt offers not a banister, but a guide or helpful tool in regards to this (cf. Taylor 163). Her notion of reflective judgment calls upon the responsibility – and the potential capability – of each and every citizen to ensure plurality and a political public (on the contrast to a totalitarian one). As the analysis of *TAOK* has shown, reflective judgment is most productive when one acknowledges the inseparable spectator-actor relation of every person and every community, and accepts that “the very process of judgment has to be dialogic, i.e., respectful of human plurality” (Bilsky 296). Moreover, we have seen that critical thought (the premise for reflective judgment) can be enabled productively through a reciprocal movement between affect (the ability to sense) and distance (the ability to reflect). As such, it can be trained and learned, for example by means of art. This I consider being the “sustenance” (Sedgwick 150) *TAOK* has to offer: as a process of judging and becoming, it offers the possibility to learn or train one's sensibility and “the art of critical thought” (Arendt, *Lectures* 42), which is both essential in dealing with complex ethical situations, be it a state of corruption or ‘crimes against humanity.’

The film, I conclude by taking into account the debated tensions, offers a concept of judgment/evaluation that understands working through the act of killing as an “ambiguous process in which one must engage over and over again” (Taylor 163), and which can only be engaged in without having a clear goal, which would mean a preconceived idea of how things should be. Instead, “[t]he whole point is to journey into the unknown” (Oppenheimer, *reddit AMA* n.pag.).

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