

## The Vision of the End: Anders on the TV Series *Holocaust*

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### *Abstract*

The article deals with philosopher Günther Stern Anders's response to the airing of the NBC miniseries *Holocaust* in Austria and in Western Germany in 1979. While much has been written about the TV miniseries, the reaction of Anders (1902–1992) has not been the object of discussion. The present article first examines the debate on the witnessing, visualization and representation of the Shoah (Adorno, Agamben, Didi-Huberman, Lanzmann and Levi), focusing in particular on the American TV miniseries *Holocaust*, and then investigates Günther Anders's reaction to this controversial fiction in the essay 'Nach "Holocaust"' (1979). Anders's remarks about the miniseries are important in connection with his cultural-philosophical studies on Auschwitz and Hiroshima-Nagasaki as major turning points, as well as his theory of media. It is remarkable that Anders was one of the first intellectuals to develop an interest in television as a new medium.

### *Visualizing the Holocaust*

Critics have often talked of Auschwitz as something that cannot be truly represented without risking reducing its unique horror to a tragic normality. Others have insisted on the importance of bearing witness to the Shoah.<sup>1</sup> The aesthetical and ethical problem raised by the representation of Auschwitz and the Holocaust is described by Theodor W. Adorno in a well-known passage of *Cultural Criticism and Society* (1949): 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, and that corrodes also the knowledge which expresses why it has become impossible to write poetry today'.<sup>2</sup> The arts cannot represent the Shoah, according to Adorno,

<sup>1</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Cultural Criticism and Society', in *Prisms*, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholson and Samuel Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), pp. 17–34 (p. 34).

because the Shoah has demonstrated the impossibility of an ‘artistic serenity’. Auschwitz marks, for Adorno, the caesura or irredeemable break in the history of civilization, the failure of Western humanism, insofar as its horror makes the person helpless and dooms any attempt at explanation. On the other hand, renouncing the possibility of bearing witness to the barbarity through arts would be giving in to the barbarity itself. It is no coincidence if Adorno later resumed and corrected his verdict in *Negative Dialectics* (1966), writing that the impossibility of representing Auschwitz does not cancel the duty of representing that impossibility.

While the debate on the representation of the Shoah developed in the 1960s among intellectuals (especially within the Jewish community), it took twenty years to extend it to the larger community, where there was a strong resistance towards dealing with the Holocaust. An important role in overcoming this resistance and bringing the Holocaust into the collective imagination was played by the more popular media, such as television and the cinema.<sup>3</sup> Among the many television and cinema productions on the Shoah, one of the most famous is the 1978 American TV miniseries *Holocaust*, directed by Marvin Chomsky. The miniseries, which featured talented actors like James Woods and Meryl Streep, was broadcasted in West Germany in 1979 — a year earlier, in September 1978, it aired in England — and seen by millions of persons.<sup>4</sup> The miniseries *Holocaust* described, in a typical Hollywood style, the genesis of the extermination of the Jews in the ill-fated decade 1935–1945 through the story of two German families, one Jewish, the Weiss family, and the other Aryan, the Dorf, in which the

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance: Raul Calzoni, ‘Witnessing and Visualizing Trauma. Peter Weiss, Alexander Kluge and Claude Lanzmann Representing the Shoah’, *Eupsycho*, 3.1 (2015), 4–12; *Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representations in Film and Television Since 1933*, ed. by Toby Haggitt and Joanna Newman (London: Wallflower, 2005); Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Andrea Minuz, *La Shoah e la cultura visuale. Cinema, memoria, spazio pubblico* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2010); Claudio Gaetani, *Il cinema e la Shoah* (Genoa: Le Mani, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> It is important to underscore that the miniseries did not air in East Germany. See, for instance: Mark A. Wolfgram, ‘The Holocaust through the Prism of East German Television: Collective Memory and Audience Perceptions’, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 20 (2006), 57–79; Friedrich Knilli and Siegfried Zielinski, *Holocaust zur Unterhaltung. Anatomie eines internationalen Bestsellers* (Berlin: Elefant Press, 1982); *Betrifft: Holocaust. Zuschauer schreiben an den WDR: ein Projektbericht*, ed. by Erwin Gundelshheimer and others (Berlin: Volker Spiess Verlag, 1983); Siegfried Zielinski, ‘History as Entertainment and Provocation: The TV Series “Holocaust” in West Germany’, *New German Critique*, 19 (winter 1980), 81–96 (repr. in *Germans and Jews since the Holocaust: The Changing Situation in West Germany*, ed. by Anson Rabinbach and Jack Zipes (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1986), pp. 258–86); *Im Kreuzfeuer. Der Fernsehfilm Holocaust. Eine Nation ist betroffen*, ed. by Peter Märthesheimer and Ivo Frenzel (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1979); Andréa Lauterwein, *Essai sur la mémoire de la Shoah en Allemagne fédérale (1945–1990)* (Paris: Kimé, 2005); Susanne Brandt, ‘Wenig Anschauung? Die Ausstrahlung des Film “Holocaust” im westdeutschen Fernsehen (1978/79)’, in *Erinnerungskulturen. Deutschland, Italien und Japan seit 1945*, ed. by Christoph Cornelißen, Lutz Klinkhammer and Wolfgang Schwentker (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2003). See also: *Germans and Jews*, the special issue of *New German Critique*, 19 (Winter 1980), dedicated to the response to *Holocaust* in West Germany.

father, a lawyer out of a job, decides to enlist in the SS and eventually becomes a war criminal.

The impact of the series in Europe was enormous, and sparked a debate on the question of representing the Holocaust, giving rise to two contrasting positions: the first rejected the representation of the Holocaust in images, while the second argued that only images could evoke an horror which otherwise could not be represented.<sup>5</sup> In regards to the reception of the *Holocaust* TV series in the US<sup>6</sup> the Bulgarian-American writer Elie Wiesel wrote in 1978: 'Auschwitz cannot be explained nor can it be visualized [...]. The Holocaust transcends history', because it is 'the ultimate event, the ultimate mystery, never to be transmitted'.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in 1979, the French director Claude Lanzmann (who at that time was filming his documentary film *Shoah*, 1985) criticized the series arguing that truly understanding the Holocaust is impossible and the *Holocaust* series could only be a fictive product of Hollywood's cultural industry but not a representation of the historical event. What, among other things, did not convince Lanzmann was the choice of representing mass murder through the life of a family, who experiences the various stages of persecution. There is a high risk that this format will serve to move the audience (and then to remove the memory), rather than helping understand what actually happened.<sup>8</sup> Another question is the extent to which the images should reflect the horror of the Shoah or, rather, seek not to excessively shock the audience. Stephen Spielberg faced a similar issue when he made *Schindler's List* (1993), an iconic film of the Holocaust, basing it on the testimonies of survivors instead of using the approach of Claude Lanzmann. The latter responded with a negative analysis of *Schindler's List*, describing it as a performance.<sup>9</sup> The German director Edgar

<sup>5</sup> See: Annette Insdorf, *L'Holocauste à l'écran*, special issue *CinémAction*, 32 (1985), 5–185 (pp.18–21).

<sup>6</sup> For discussions concerning the reception of *Holocaust* in the United States, see: Jeffrey Schandler, *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) — which shows that the Holocaust was a recurring feature in many popular TV programmes — and Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Elie Wiesel, 'Trivializing the Holocaust: Semi-Fact and Semi-Fiction', *New York Times*, 16 April 1978, section 1, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> See: Claude Lanzmann, 'De l'Holocauste à Holocauste ou comment s'en débarrasser', *Les Temps Modernes*, 395 (1979), 1897–1909. See also: Claude Lanzmann, 'Seminar with Claude Lanzmann 11 April 1990', *Yale French Studies: Literature and the Ethical Questions*, 79 (1991), 82–99.

<sup>9</sup> See: Mathias Weiß, 'Sinnliche Erinnerung. Die Filme "Holocaust" und "Schindler's List" in der bundesrepublikanischen Vergegenwärtigung der NS-Zeit', in *Beschweigen und Bekennen. Die deutsche Nachkriegsgesellschaft und der Holocaust*, ed. by Norbert Frei and Sybille Steinbacher (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2001), pp. 71–102. It is perhaps worth noting that the German writer Winfried Georg (Max) Sebald in a passage, which also emphasizes the capability of the impact produced by fiction film compared to the historical monograph, provides an adverse opinion of *Schindler's List* as a false form of fiction: 'The question remains the same: can one go to market using the misfortunes of others? Fiction is also a form of popularization — with the advantage that the topics are conveyed to a much wider reading group than the one possible for a historical monograph [...]. This is intentional, because I fear falling into the melodramatic, even when the melodrama is based on historical events. When this happens the aesthetic authenticity gets lost,

Reitz — who has linked his name to the film *Heimat* — recognized in *Holocaust* a negative model, lacking any aesthetic and/or experiential authenticity. In the light of the international success of this serial product, Reitz argues that Germans must take again possession of their history, which Americans have expropriated.<sup>10</sup>

Regarding the notion of unrepresentability, a completely different position was taken by Christian Zimmer, who defined *Holocaust* a weak fiction, but recognized its importance in the debate on Nazism.<sup>11</sup>

Not so distant from Zimmer's position was the one taken by the Italian novelist and survivor of Auschwitz, Primo Levi.<sup>12</sup> While criticizing the commercial aspect of the series, its inaccuracies, its naiveté, its failure to properly outline the historical characteristics of Nazism, Levi stressed that the series provided a sense of the Holocaust to people who had no other means to grasp it in concrete terms. For many Germans, the television miniseries had the extraordinary effect of brusquely awakening them from the oblivious sleep they had indulged in for thirty years. In a 1979 interview in the programme *Dalla realtà alla TV*, Levi explained his thesis as follows:

The fierceness and the disproportioned nature of the Holocaust carried out by the Nazis, which the fiction shows with shocking realism, harboured in itself a riddle that no historian has yet solved, and this explains the several phone calls that bombarded the networks of the countries where the movie has so far been broadcast. They were, for the most part, viewers asking 'why?', and this is a gigantic why, and as old as the human race. It is the query about the evil of the world, the question that Job addressed to God in vain, and to which people can respond with many partial answers.<sup>13</sup>

which is connected in subtle, intimate ways with the ethical one. It is paradoxical that the documents cannot become literature in their undisguised form. Of course there are also false forms of fictionalization: an example for me is the movie *Schindler's List*. I have always tried to present this topic as already mediated: the readers are repeatedly reminded that the story has been told by someone and that it has gone through the filter of the narrator'. Martin Von Doerry and Volker Hage, 'Ich fürchte das melodramatische', *Der Spiegel*, 11 (2001), <<http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-18700596.html>> (my translation) [accessed 20 January 2015].

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance: Matteo Galli, *Edgar Reitz* (Milan: il Castoro, 2006), pp. 117–119.

<sup>11</sup> Christian Zimmer, 'Le vrai choc d' "Holocauste"', *Les Temps Modernes*, 393 (1979), 1697–1704. The study of Ivelise Perniola focuses on the dispute between Zimmer and Lanzmann with regard to *Holocaust*. See: Ivelise Perniola, *L'immagine spezzata. Il cinema di Claude Lanzmann* (Turin: Kaplan, 2007), pp. 27–31.

<sup>12</sup> Holocaust was broadcast in Italy in episodes airing from May to June 1979. See, for instance: Emiliano Perra, 'Politica, memoria, identità. La ricezione italiana di *Holocaust* e di *Schindler's List*', *Cinema e storia*, 2 (special issue on *La Shoah nel cinema italiano*, ed. by Andrea Minuz and Guido Vitiello, 2013), 49–67; Emiliano Perra, *Conflicts of Memory: The Reception of Holocaust Films and TV Programmes in Italy: 1945 to the Present* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), particularly pp. 132–138.

<sup>13</sup> Primo Levi, 'Images from Holocaust', in *The Complete Works of Primo Levi*, ed. by Ann Goldstein, 3 vols (New York–London: Liveright, 2015), ii, 1308–16 (p. 1311). Even more favorable was the judgment of the Italian intellectual Luigi Pintor, who, while noting the pro-US rhetoric that characterizes the series, credits *Holocaust* for having awakened a 'sleeping left-wing'. Luigi Pintor, 'Olocausto, nostra storia', *Il manifesto*, 1 June 1979, pp. 1–2 (my translation).

*Anders and the Miniseries Holocaust*

Among the many spectators (more than twenty million Germans) who, on 22 January 1979, began watching the series, was the German Jewish philosopher Günther Stern Anders (1902–1992). From the comfort of his drawing room in Vienna — where he had settled in 1950, after his return from his exile in the United States, to follow his wife, the Austrian writer Elisabeth Freundlich — Anders carefully studied the TV series *Holocaust*.

At the time, Anders was one of the few philosophers who wrote about television, and was particularly aware of its potential. Especially in *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, 1956 [*The Outdatedness of Human Beings*], in the chapter entitled ‘Die Welt als Phantom und Matrize. Philosophische Betrachtungen über Rundfunk und Fernsehen’ [The World as Phantom and as Matrix: philosophical considerations on radio and television],<sup>14</sup> Anders remarks that television and radio provide us with world-wide home: families transform themselves into an audience of ‘mass hermits’. This experience depletes the sphere of feelings, and the sad conclusion is that we become ‘consumers of the world’.<sup>15</sup> Anders’ preoccupation with the new medium is important in connection with cultural-historical studies as well as with the history of his own work.

After watching the miniseries, Anders decided to write about it, joining the debate on the relation between movies and the Holocaust. The notes he took from 4 March to 20 April 1979 were published by Anders in the work *Besuch im Hades. Auschwitz und Breslau 1966. Nach “Holocaust” 1979* [Visit to Hades. Auschwitz and Breslau, 1966. After “Holocaust”, 1979],<sup>16</sup> and are not only interesting for the original discussion on the television series, but also for Anders’ reflection on Jewishness and on the role of images and films.<sup>17</sup> It is remarkable that Anders was one of the first to critically examine the Austrian victim myth.

Anders starts by asking the following question: why did the thrill of horror and shame produced by the American TV-miniseries *Holocaust* not occur in 1945, when people saw the documentaries and photographs testifying to the gruesome reality of the Shoah? The answer is rooted in Anders’s philosophical anthropology. This lack of response, Anders says, is not a German shortcoming, a sign of

<sup>14</sup> Günther Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen. Über die Seele im Zeitalter der zweiten industriellen Revolution* [*The Outdatedness of Human Beings* 1. *On the Soul in the Era of the Second Industrial Revolution*] (Munich: Beck, 1956), pp. 97–110.

<sup>15</sup> See also: Stefano Velotti, ‘L’antropologia di Günther Anders e l’ambivalenza delle immagini’, *Discipline filosofiche*, 2 (2008), 99–114. For this important dimension of Anders’s philosophy, see: Werner Fuld, ‘Zwischen Film und Bombe. Die Kontinuität des Andersschen Denkens’, in *Günther Anders kontrovers*, ed. by Konrad Paul Liessmann (Munich: Beck, 1992), pp. 114–23; and Klaus Albrecht Schröder, ‘Die Genese von Günther Anders’ Medienkritik’, *ivi*, pp. 124–34.

<sup>16</sup> Günther Anders, *Besuch im Hades. Auschwitz und Breslau 1966. Nach ‘Holocaust’ 1979* (Munich: Beck, 1996).

<sup>17</sup> See also Anders’s reflections on these topics in his works: *Mein Judentum* [*My Jewishness*], ed. by Hans Jürgen Schultz (Zürich-Düsseldorf: Benzinger, 1999 [1979]), pp. 69–87; and *Kafka. Pro und contra. Die Prozess-Unterlagen* [*Kafka, pro and contra. The Trial Records*] (Munich: Beck, 1952).

the inhumanity of the German people, but rather the hallmark of humanity *tout court* at the time of the ‘outdatedness of human beings’.

The surprising thing is that *this fiction gives us the facts*, and that only through this fiction we learn what happened a long time ago. And that’s not all. The fiction is essential not only because the truth that we need to know is no longer perceptible, but mainly because the monstrosity [*Ungeheuerlichkeit*] and the enormity [*Enormität*] of what happens today [...] are no longer perceptible and knowable.<sup>18</sup>

We are not able, Anders explains, to mourn for millions of people killed, we are unable to bear such a disproportionate pain. There is a discrepancy between what humans can produce (the bureaucratic extermination of an immense mass of Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals...) and what humans can see, feel, truly grasp. The ‘emotional illiteracy’, i.e. the inability to feel pain or remorse described by Anders in the first volume of his monumental *The Outdatedness of Human Beings*,<sup>19</sup> applies also to the Holocaust and makes it unreadable. In his main philosophical work Anders advanced a ‘philosophy of discrepancy’, an analysis of the gap between what we are able to produce (*herstellen*) and what we are able to imagine (*vorstellen*).<sup>20</sup> Faced with a new surplus of images, with their suffocating and blinding sensationalism, the imagination stalls, collapses, in a kind of domino effect, a defensive anaesthetizing reaction, leading to the inability to feel and therefore to take responsibility in regard to the world, to act as subjects.

Unlike many intellectuals, Anders’ book *After ‘Holocaust’* offered a positive assessment of the miniseries, not so much in terms of its aesthetic qualities, as for its power to awaken the conscience of West German and Austrian people.<sup>21</sup>

In light of the inevitable human tendency to avoid thinking of the horror that had happened, says Anders, the *Holocaust* series has a positive role: it brings the experience of Auschwitz into the homes of those who did not know what had happened in the concentration camps, close to where they lived, or of those who had been told but were unable to imagine it. The cinematic images rip the veil of oblivion, break the taboo of the Holocaust, and induce a painful awareness of the event: in this sense a conventional Hollywood series is able to achieve what had not been achieved in 1945.

The success of the television series was not a consequence of its historical accuracy or its reliance on real witnesses, but of the force of fiction, of its focus on the individuals rather than the mass, on the micro-history of a family. Throu-

<sup>18</sup> Anders, *Besuch im Hades*, pp. 202–03 (my translation).

<sup>19</sup> See: Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, pp. 260–70.

<sup>20</sup> See: *The Life and Work of Günther Anders: Émigré, Iconoclast, Philosopher, Man of Letters*, ed. by Günther Bishof, Jason Dawsey and Bernhard Fetz (Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2014).

<sup>21</sup> See: David Bidussa, ‘Prefazione. *Holocaust* e il discorso pubblico sulla Shoah’, in Günther Anders, *Dopo Holocaust, 1979*, ed. by David Bidussa and Sergio Fabian, trans. by Sergio Fabian (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2014), pp. 9–21 and Sergio Fabian, ‘Postfazione. Storie minuscole per turbare una coscienza opaca’, in *Dopo Holocaust, 1979*, pp. 85–97.

gh a fiction, a pretense, perhaps even a trivialization of the events, people were able to finally begin grasping and remembering the unconceivable horror of the Holocaust.

In describing the effects of the Holocaust, Anders adopts and corrects the well-known Paul Klee painting of *Angelus Novus*, as it was used by his cousin, Walter Benjamin, in *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (*Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, 1940).<sup>22</sup> In Germany after Auschwitz, no angel of history is silhouetted against the sky, or, at the most, it is a broken, impotent angel: an angel of oblivion.<sup>23</sup> Post-war Germany, after its total defeat, had to renounce any prospect of a millennial past or future, and all that is left is a passion for the present, personified by consumers with no sense of past or future.

Like Adorno, Anders also denounces the denial of the past that dominates the collective consciousness, preventing a healthy elaboration of the tragedy of the Holocaust. In this context, the series *Holocaust* adopts an innovative strategy: to reach out to the consciousness of millions of Germans, the director Marvin Chomsky based his work on the individual portraits of people involved. According to Anders, the miniseries successfully shows, as it reels backwards through a series of historical events, how what was treated as an insignificant lump of flesh was once a person, and how, behind the abstract numbers (six million), the abstract mass of victims, are real individuals who once loved, hoped, dreamed. Captivated by the fast-paced events and dramatic, and sometimes sentimental, moments, the viewer of *Holocaust* becomes involved in the story of the two families and shares their tragic destiny:

The imaginary character of a single tortured person of whom we know the fictitious life and whom we have learned to love, reveals about the millions of dead far more than could have been revealed, even about a single individual, by sum of the millions.<sup>24</sup>

As for the habitual criticism leveled against the film, i.e. that it emphasizes personal events and disregards the historical dimension of the Holocaust, Anders's position is clear: the need to personalize the history is a result of the previous depersonalization that the people of the Holocaust have undergone. Auschwitz, as Primo Levi said, involved the 'destruction of man', a destruction in which not only individual lives are destroyed but also the very idea of the humanity of the victims and it is this humanity that must be restored. Shoah victims were treated literally as animals who were processed and transformed into things — shoes, spectacle frames, broken dentures, baggage without owners — or quasi-things, the waste arising from the chimneys of the furnaces where the bodies were burnt.

<sup>22</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Hannah Arendt and trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007 [1968]), pp. 253–63.

<sup>23</sup> I refer to the title of a novel by the Austrian writer Maja Haderlap.

<sup>24</sup> Anders, *Besuch im Hades*, p. 187 (my translation).

According to Anders, it is necessary to react against the perception of the victims as an anonymous mass and the murderers as mere cogs in a machine. The status of persons must be restored back to both victims and to their executioners, people like Erik Dorf (actor Tom Bell) in *Holocaust*, the murderous bureaucrat, whose fictitious character recalls that of Adolf Eichmann.<sup>25</sup>

Anders's notes emphasize the importance of narrowing the focus of our gaze, of bringing the most horrible crime in history within the visual and conceptual grasp of humankind: 'photographs [which] showed too many corpses and the horror for death, even when faced with the crime, decrease as the number of dead bodies shown increases'.<sup>26</sup> Hence the need follows to renegotiate what Adorno called the 'aesthetic distance'.

### *Narrowing the Focus*

This narrowing of the focus is a necessary step to coming to terms with the Holocaust. The circulation of the miniseries *Holocaust* is therefore a crucial bridge that allows people to span the gap of thirty-five years of silence and oblivion. But what does this reflection on the past entail? And why was it not possible for Germans to engage in it sooner? The answer lies partly in the uniqueness and exceptionality of the event called Auschwitz, which constitutes an historical watershed.<sup>27</sup> The crimes occurred under the command of a higher authority, and that made them impersonal, wrapping them in anonymity without responsibility, in the automatic character of the routine, in the 'banality of evil' (using the well-known wording by Hannah Arendt).<sup>28</sup> Secondly, the colossal dimensions of the crime made it very difficult to remember and reflect on it. Faced with such an enormous deed, the mechanism of remorse becomes clogged and denial takes its place. The greater the evil, says Anders, the less can consciousness grasp, feel remorse, and eventually produce a new sense of moral integrity. The eyes of humans become saturated, unable to absorb crimes whose boundaries extend

<sup>25</sup> It is worth remembering that Anders submitted the trial of Adolf Eichmann to careful scrutiny in his work *Wir Eichmannsöhne: Offener Brief an Klaus Eichmann* [*We Sons of Eichmann: Open Letter to Klaus Eichmann*] (Munich: Beck, 1964). The trial before the Jerusalem District Court began on 11 April 1961 and ended on 15 December 1961, when Eichmann was sentenced to death. The book includes Anders's correspondence with Klaus Eichmann, the son of the notorious Nazi bureaucrat and genocidaire. Anders's remarks recall the thesis of his ex-wife, the political philosopher Hannah Arendt, in her study *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking, 1963).

<sup>26</sup> Anders, *Besuch im Hades*, p. 187 (my translation).

<sup>27</sup> See: Steven T. Katz, 'The Uniqueness of the Holocaust: the Historical Dimension', in *Is the Holocaust Unique?: Perspectives on Comparative Genocide*, ed. by Alan S. Rosenbaum, 2nd edn (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000), pp. 49–68.

<sup>28</sup> Yet, the last twenty years of research have demonstrated that a large number of the victims of the Holocaust were killed in more traditional face-to-face killing operations. See, for instance: Dan Stone, *Histories of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).



towards the infernal. Finally, says Anders, humans can remember or imagine, or adequately perceive only what they are able to control linguistically. This last aspect, copies and amplifies Adorno's well-known position, according to which it is impossible to write poetry after Auschwitz: you cannot because 'the words are lacking' to express Auschwitz. Yet 'to be speechless' means renouncing the possibility of preserving the memory of the Holocaust, abdicating to the horror and wrapping Auschwitz in a mist of denial. Instead it is necessary to maintain one's bearings, to avoid being overcome by the dimensions of the events: to achieve this, the gaps in the collective memory must be interrogated, snatching from oblivion all that recalls the finiteness of the human being. As Theodor W. Adorno noted in his *Negative Dialectics* (*Negative Dialektik*, 1966): 'Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems'.<sup>29</sup>

According to Georges Didi-Huberman, even for Anders, grasping Auschwitz required resorting to the power of images, while remaining aware of the limited vision they provided: in order to know you should exert the imagination.<sup>30</sup> For this reason, it is useful to film what was invisible, to imagine Auschwitz notwithstanding the impossibility of representing it in its entirety. While reproducing in full the reality of the Holocaust is impossible, says Anders, we must be able to give a sense of what it was and to induce remorse for it. Thanks to the filter of fiction, the series *Holocaust* can scale down the dimensions of the horror to a graspable size and testify to a horror that would otherwise remain forgotten.

Anders's reflections in *After Holocaust* can be considered as an extraordinary compendium of 'negative aesthetics'. According to him, what the images in the miniseries *Holocaust* transmit

is the *horrible appearance* [*grauenhafte Schein*], or rather the semblance of horror [*der Schein des Grauenhaften*], which the reality we perceive cannot transmit like the artistic medium manages to do. And what we perceive is not the 'appearance', but the reality of that time, which, in order to be perceived had to be first turned into fiction.<sup>31</sup>

Anders here seems to have embraced the lesson of Friedrich Schiller in his letters *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*, 1795 [*On the Aesthetic Edu-*

<sup>29</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. by E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973), p. 362.

<sup>30</sup> See: Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. by Shane B. Lillis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 38–39; see also: Anders, *Besuch im Hades*, pp. 202–03. For a discussion on this topic, see: Natascia Mattucci, 'Shoah tra riproducibilità e immaginazione', in *Pop Shoah? Immaginari del genocidio ebraico*, ed. by Francesca R. Recchia Luciani and Claudio Vercelli (Genoa: Il melangolo, 2016), pp. 113–27, particularly pp. 125–27.

<sup>31</sup> Anders, *Besuch im Hades*, p. 200 (my translation).

*cation of Man*], for whom aesthetics (whether it be theatre or cinema) should be the instrument of morality.

If the reality of the horror of our condition cannot be directly perceived, our imagination must serve as a kind of telescope's lens:

Our simple perception [*nackte Wahrnehmung*] is not enough to understand the present-day world, and it is too short-sighted for the enormous, or better, monstrous dimensions [*monströse Ausmaße*] of what we ourselves are capable of producing [...]. We must rather use fantasy as a corrective, because the truth of our monstrous conditions can in no way be perceived, at least by the naked eye [...]. At the very least we should be able to imagine the immensity that we ourselves are able to produce and provoke.<sup>32</sup>

The (apparent) deformation, the exaggeration that fancy and force of imagination perform must not be understood as a falsification of the truth. It is rather an alternative method of observing, of allowing people to grasp the truth-content behind the lie, to communicate it and expand our ability to feel. The ability to teach how to despair: 'And thank God, now they despair, finally they despair'.<sup>33</sup> This, for Anders, is the role of culture after Auschwitz: that of expanding our capacity to feel, to see, to break the invisible barrier that surrounds the events of the past. This goal is paramount and anything that allows us to achieve this goal is therefore laudable, whether it is the arguments of philosophy, the words of literature, or the images of a Hollywood TV-miniseries.

<sup>32</sup> Ivi, p. 39 (my translation).

<sup>33</sup> Ivi, p. 202 (my translation).