



2013

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Babette Babich

Fordham University, babich@fordham.edu

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Recommended Citation

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Angels, the Space of Time, and Apocalyptic Blindness: On Günther Anders' Endzeit–Endtime

Babette Babich

Department of Philosophy

Fordham University, New York City

babich@fordham.edu

ABSTRACT

Anders was a preeminent critic of technology and critic of the atomic bomb as he saw this hermeneutico-phenomenologically in the visceral sense of being *and* time: the sheer that of its *having been* used (where the Nietzschean dialectic of the ‘having been’ reflects the essence of modern technology) as well as the bland politics of nuclear proliferation functions as programmatic aggression advanced in the name of defense and deterrence. The tactic of sheerly technological, automatic, mechanical, aggression is carried out in good conscience. The preemptive strike is, as Baudrillard observed, the opponent’s fault: such are the wages of evil. Violence in good conscience characterizes the postwar, cold war era and the present day with its mushrooming effects of neo-fascism under the titles of national security and anti-terrorism. Karl Krauss’ 1913 *bon mot* regarding psychoanalysis as the very insanity it claims to cure [*Psychoanalyse ist jene Geisteskrankheit, für deren Therapie sie sich halt*] has never been more apt for political translation — straight into the heart of what Lacan called the Real which has ‘always been’ the political register. Where Habermas and heirs have tended to disregard Anders (as they also sidestep Heidegger and Nietzsche), just as most philosophers of technology (and indeed philosophers of science) have ignored the political as well as the ethical in their eagerness to avoid suspicion of technophobia, we continue to require both critical theory and a critical philosophy of technology, a conjunction incorporating Ander’s complicated dialectic less of art in Benjamin’s prescient but still innocent age of technological reproduction but and much rather “on the devastation of life in the age of the third industrial revolution.” Thus rather than reading Anders’ critique of the bomb as limited to a time we call the Atomic Age — as Anders himself varied Samuel Beckett’s 1957 *Endgame* (*Fin de partie*) as *Endzeit* that is “Endtime,” here invoking the eschatological language of Jacob Taubes as Anders does — this essay connects his reflections on the bomb with his critique of technology and the obsolescence of humanity as of a piece with our dedication to hurling ourselves against our own mortality. This concern with the violence of technology, this hatred of the vulnerability of having been born and having been set on a path unto death (the mortal path that is the path of life) inspires Anders’ engagement with the sons of Eichmann — the heirs of those who designed and executed the Nazi death camps and extermination chambers of the Holocaust — and the sons of Claude Eatherly — the heirs of both those who designed and those who as pilots (banality of banality) deployed the bombings that exploded the supposed stuff of the sun itself contra the Empire of the Sun in the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We, embroiled as we are in wartime after wartime,

suppressing public protest on a scale like never before, in country after country across the globe, cannot dispense with Anders today.

KEYWORDS

Günther Anders, Walter Benjamin, apocalyptic blindness, endtime, holocaust, humanity

The door in front of us bears the inscription “Nothing will have been” and from within: “Time was an episode.” Not however as our ancestors had hoped, between two eternities; but one between two nothingnesses; between the nothingness of that which, remembered by no one, will have been as though it had never been, and the nothingness of that which will never be. — Günther Anders, *Commandments in the Atomic Age*¹

1. *Angels*

Walter Benjamin, Günther Anders’ cousin, had traced the mystical art of the one and only Paul Klee, his possession, which he had acquired from Gershom Scholem, of Klee’s 1920 *Angelus Novus*, now the iconic postcard on every college teacher’s door, the angel of history, to recollect the word painting of the open mouth “His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread,”² so that we can conflate as we do, Klee and Benjamin, one with the other.

A Klee painting named *Angelus Novus* shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. ... His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing

¹ Günther Anders and Claude Eatherly, *Burning Conscience: The case of the Hiroshima Pilot*, Claude Eatherly, told in his letters to Günther Anders, Preface by Bertrand Russell; foreword by Robert Jungk (New York: Paragon, 1961), p. 11.

² Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” in Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essay and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1969), p. 257.

from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.³



Fig. 1. Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*, 1920.

Gift of Fania and Gershom Scholem, Jerusalem; Courtesy of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

In an end time, that is to say, at the end of time, the strobe light of horror showed the still figure, the frozen figure of the angel of every apocalypse. And of course, let us think of Rilke, and his *Duino Elegies*, angels were on everyone's lips. *Ein jeder Engel ist schrecklich*.

Aren't they all? *Where are you* when you see angels? What has become of your life, what has become of your eyes, that you *can* see angels? Günther Anders explores the mode of such modalities, *können* and *nicht können*, to be able to and not to be able to, as opposed to Shakespeare's rag in Jack Benny's voice and the filmic icon of the same, Nazi Germany, Hollywood style: to be, not to be, being and non-being. Non-being as a possibility, real in a different sense than it had ever been before for any time since we humans had become, in Hölderlin's words, a conversation with ourselves, for ourselves. For Anders, as he writes in 1975, these are old-fashioned worries, the problem now as ever is to come to terms with what we have learned to do.

³ Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," p. 257-258.

This is also the source of and point for Anders' invocation of Goethe's 1797 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice' [*Der Zauberlehrling*] and not only because Hollywood had translated this figure to the film center of a cartoon musical opera, *Fantasia*. Once again we cite: "We are incapable of not being able to do what has once been done. It is thus not can-do-ability [*Können*] that we lack, but no-can-do-ability [*Nichtkönnen*]."⁴ Anders is well aware of the Goethean source of his insight but he traces this with Heideggerian precision, indeed a Nietzschean acuity — Nietzsche always claimed that one had to have many eyes — towards the prospect of understanding the end-time, as this time, our time, is the time of ending things, everything, the world, ourselves, and every other thing on it. For Anders, as for Nietzsche as I have argued in connection with Nietzsche's critical philosophy of science, as for Heidegger as I also underline his philosophy of modern technology, what is important is to consider the ultimate, the *further consequences* in every case. Thus where scholarship looks to certain genocides, but not to others, Anders traces the inevitable lockstep of the ability to destroy and the inability to locate or to place the blame on this people, this political constellation, rather than that. And that mucks up everything for the political theorists, the political philosophers, the pundits and the casual reader all of whom find themselves asking how he dare say such things. And so we bring in the experts to tell us that Anders was simply a polemicist, a *ketzer*, *hetzer*, or as we say in English: *a pain in the neck*. Which bluntness coheres with the terms Anders used to characterize school or university scholarship. The higher your position, the better the school you find yourself at, the more you fit the mold: without exception. And Anders refused appointments because he knew that there was no way to change anything from within: the only thing that university appointments do is produce university rank and file, lockstep as true for the most cutting edge grad student as for the most distinguished professor. If few of us have read Anders, certain scholars over the years have done so and have had recourse to him in their work from Peter Sloterdijk to Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* who cites Anders' differentiation of the ordinary thinking of end-times traditionally speaking from the thinking of such times in a nuclear era: "a naked apocalypse, that is to say an apocalypse without a kingdom."⁵ But I mention the non-reading because in a scholarly world where Heidegger is read,

⁴ Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen. Über die Zerstörung des Lebens in Zeitalter der dritten industriellen Revolution* (Munich: Beck, 1984), p. 395.

⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (Fortress Press, May 1, 2004), p. 217, here citing Anders, *Endzeit und Zeitende*, 1959.

even if he is often deplored, or where Adorno is studied, with all the limits that go along with that and where Benjamin is even revered, there is simply no excuse for leaving out this fellow traveler when it comes to the themes of power and violence.

It is violence in perfect good conscience that characterizes war as it characterizes the postwar, the cold war era but also the present day with its mushrooming effects of neo-fascism under the titles of national security and the terrorist, from surveillance to full-body (meaning-naked body) searches to surgical strikes to individual-sized Armageddon in the form of drones, all in the name of anti-terrorism. Karl Krauss' 1913 *bon mot* regarding psychoanalysis as the very insanity it claims to cure [*Psychoanalyse ist jene Geisteskrankheit, für deren Therapie sie sich halt*] has never been more apt for a political translation straight into the heart of what Jacques Lacan called the Real which has of course 'always been' the true political register.⁶ It is not for nothing that Žižek was not only a philosopher as a young man but a student of the thinking of Lacan in Paris. Where Habermas and his heirs disregard Anders (as they also manage to set aside or minimally to sidestep Heidegger and Nietzsche and so on), just as most philosophers of technology (and indeed philosophers of science) have ignored the political as well as the ethical in their eagerness to avoid suspicion of technophobia — a reserve that characterizes most political theory that considers technology from George Kateb to John McCormick (Gilbert Germaine is an exception, John Street is an exception, Langdon Winner too is an exception but who reads these thinkers?). Latour is no exception, that's the deal, and so we read him. Say truth to power in the academy and you are out. And Günther Anders (as well analysed by so many authors) was always already 'out,' excluded from the academy.⁷ And as he

⁶ See for this, Babich, "On the Order of the Real: Nietzsche and Lacan" in: David Pettigrew and François Raffoul, eds., *Disseminating Lacan* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 48-63.

⁷ There are a number of authors who write in German on Anders. Note that to say this is not to claim that his work is particularly 'well-received' at the university level, indeed these days in Germany Nietzsche's work not to mention Heidegger's or even Adorno's work is increasingly less discussed especially in philosophy departments, and it is not even necessary to have read Adorno let alone specialized in work in order to be named a recipient of the prestigious Adorno Prize which Anders himself was honored to receive in 1983. See, for example, the contributions to be found in Konrad Paul Liessmann, ed., *Günther Anders kontrovers* (Munich: Beck, 1992) or else Margret Lohmann's dissertation, *Philosophieren in der Endzeit. Zur Gegenwartsanalyse von Günther Anders* (Munich: Fink, 1996) or indeed Ludger Lütkehaus, *Philosophieren nach Hiroshima. Über Günther Anders* (Frankfurt am Main:

continues to be left out, the following is only an effort to count him in. The reader will, I hope, forgive me, if my style is also open to other names along the way.

2. *Time*

We are used, we modern authors, to positioning ourselves in time. And we long ago forgot Augustine's cautionary warning that we take ourselves to know such an ordinary notion as time.⁸ Even those who reflect on Nietzsche's Zarathustran reflections on time tend to skip over the literally contradictory contours of *Augenblick*, the intersecting courses, past and future, colliding in the gateway Moment. Despite the warning title *Of the Vision and the Riddle*. Nietzsche scholars simply solve the problem or are sure that there was never a problem in the first place.

Thus we scholars, we scientists, we knowers, all pronounce on time: we claim that it speeds up (when we are having fun, when we are busy, when we are late) and complain that it slows down (when we are waiting for an anxiously anticipated event, when we are bored, when we are boiling water) and we descry and map the lines of time.

Time always seems to have a spatial dimensionality, thus Günther Anders reflects on the absurdity of defining let alone distinguishing the two, and he reflects too on the absurdity of the project, pointing out that and just to be sure, and as the average person might answer that he has never once found himself in danger of "confusing the one with the other."⁹

By comparison with Jacob Taubes and Hans Jonas and many others of the day, arguably also including Anders' cousin Walter Benjamin all of whom either wrote volumes on eschatology or essays on the same, Anders offers us no more than an anti-eschatology: reflections on the end, of the apocalypse, on

Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1992) as well as Lütkehaus' *Schwarze Ontologie. Über Günther Anders* (Lüneburg: zu Klampen, 2002). In English, studies heretofore are limited to Paul van Dijk, *Anthropology in the Age of Technology, The Philosophical Contribution of Günther Anders* (Amsterdam, 2000) as well as my own essay, which was itself originally published in German, Babich, "O, Superman! or Being Towards Transhumanism: Martin Heidegger, Günther Anders, and Media Aesthetics," *Divinatio* (January 2013): 83-99.

⁸ "What then is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I want to explain it to someone who asks, I don't know." Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 14.

⁹ Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen; Zweiter Band. Über die Zerstörung des Lebens im Zeitalter der dritten Industriellen Revolution* (Munich: Beck, 1984 [1980]), p. 350.

annihilation, mutually assured and what not, which is to say that he writes about the “endtime,” saying to be sure that “the future has already ended.” Where Anders differs from others is that he brings his philosophical, even his theological reflections as we shall see down to earth. Anders who has little patience as Adorno with Heidegger but who, unlike Adorno had no problem using Heideggerian insights wherever needed, could rebuke Heidegger for describing the human being as the ‘shepherd of being.’ And if religious and poetic associations serve the image of the shepherd well, the philosophical image of the shepherd has been problematic since Thrasymachus, handily floored Socrates by pointing out that there is no difference between shepherd and tyrant: from the view point of the ones “shepherded,” that would be the sheep as it is they that are preserved for ends that are not their own and it is they that are always brutally killed in the end.

But even if one hears the language poetically, through every bucolic register, and even if one hears the language through the tonalities of the New Testament, Heidegger’s language still misses the point for Anders,

“The Shepherd of Being,” that which Heidegger still yet very biblically, that is to say anthropocentrically, suggests – whereby he vastly overrates “the position of the human being in the cosmos” (which couldn’t give a damn about whether we continue to exist or have already disappeared), no, we are certainly not “shepherds of being.” Far rather we might consider ourselves the “shepherds of our product- and gadget-world” as a world that needs us, more strikingly than we do ourselves, as servants (e.g., as consumers or possessors).¹⁰

The language is the language that runs throughout the first volume composed as a monograph in 1956 (the second volume is put together seriatim and published in 1980) and that is the language of obsolescence: the human being is at an end, as it were and all time henceforth is and can only be at an end, the end of days, the end time. Where traditional eschatologies take a leap into the mystical, the gnostic, the beyond, Anders stays squarely in the here and now. Because for Anders that is where the end transpires: not later, not in a world to come, but always already here.

These reflections on time are compelling for Anders above all not for religio-theological reasons, like the aforementioned Taubes or else like Jonas but and

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 281.

not even for the traditionally epistemological reasonings of a Kant, but just on moral grounds. If Anders thus begins his second volume by reflecting on the inversion of the Lords' Prayer, 'Give us this day our daily bread' into a new mantra, 'give us this day our daily eaters,' what is required is the same culinary desperation Adorno also discovered at the heart of the culture industry: the world needs consumers, social followers, more than it needs products because, as Anders already noted, this is Heideggerian challenging forth replete with *Machenschaft*, the *Beiträge*, plus the lectures to the club of Bremen, and Anders is much punchier: we make products to make products to make products. To this extent marketing and the production of market is our only occupation and preoccupation. To this end all advertising and what is today's digital marketing but advertising? What is today's academic hot topic, the digital humanities, but advertising? Anders' point is that the only imperatives we know are the imperatives of what can be done: if it can be done, it should be done. Heidegger says this too, of course, and to this day our sole concern is not with what one should do, what a quaintly Kantian question, but how we might do and how we might forever continue to do (this is the meaning of what we call 'sustainability) what we can do: *Das Gekonnte is das Gesollte*. As a result Anders has even less patience, if that is possible, with the idea that technology might be some neutral means (he has a field day with the language of ends and means when it comes to the atomic bomb and the point of its production) or that it might be somehow be in our control or even within our purview. The epigraph Anders sets to the second volume as a whole is significant: "It is not enough to change the world." Writing in 1980, one is well beyond any imperative that would call for changing the world, in a good Marxian voice, just because as Anders writes, we always do that anyway. What is lacking is an interpretation of what we have done, especially in our times where, as he argues, our ability to act far exceeds our comprehension. Later in the book, written two years earlier, his chapter on "The Obsolescence of History" will make the same point again with a trio of dated epigraphs — and, in a way, only the dates should strike us in this trifecta: *Politics is our destiny (1815)* *The economy is our destiny (1845)* *Technology is our destiny (1945)*

3. *New Rules*

The old commandments had failed and Anders had 'new' commandments.

The ‘commandments’ were originally published in 1957 and Günther Anders managed to secure English-language circulation by sharing them with Major Claude Eatherly, the weather reconnaissance pilot, who gave the go-ahead, or all clear for the bombing of Hiroshima. Two points first: dropping an atomic bomb is a very different thing than ordinary bombing missions. If, for the safety of the bombers themselves, weathermen always played a crucial role, in this case one needed to know still more about wind and weather than ordinarily so, for precision bombing now had different implications. Secondly, the trajectory of flight path, immediately evasive, flying up and away after dropping the bomb, also testifies to this difference. If bombers are inevitably at a distance from the work of their actions, those who dropped the bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki were and had to be clear about the devastation they would bring because the backwash in this case could touch them in the sky. Eatherly was infamous not for having flown the mission, he was of course, like every successful bomber, a war hero, but for having had second thoughts about it.

In the commandments Anders sent to Eatherly, we can read, as if it were the highest moral imperative and this is indeed how Anders meant it: “widen your sense of time.”¹¹ Anders has his reasons for this as he introduces this broadened sense of time by calling for an equally broadened breadth of ‘moral fantasy:’¹² you must broaden your ethical sensibility “until imagination and feeling become able to comprehend and to realize the enormity of your doings.”¹³

Anders who was concerned with the phenomenological effects of the end-time [*Endzeit*], was also concerned what he calls the “guiltless guilty” as this ontological characteristic is now the destiny of the human, following the objective, physical, thingly circumstances of the modern technological era. Anders used the word ‘technicity,’ to the irritation of newspaper commentators: the same irritation has meant that scholars and popular authors could successfully ignore Anders just as they have ignored Jacques Ellul, and to a lesser degree Martin Heidegger on the same topics.

By contrast Marshall McLuhan would be inhaled. Technology can’t be the problem: the medium is, the message is.

¹¹ Günther Anders and Claude Eatherly, *Burning Conscience: The case of the Hiroshima Pilot, Claude Eatherly, told in his letters to Günther Anders*, Preface by Bertrand Russell; foreword by Robert Jungk (New York: Paragon, 1961), p. 13. See too the more mainstream title, William Bradford Huie, *The Hiroshima Pilot: The Case of Major Claude Eatherly* (New York: Putnam, 1964).

¹² Anders and Eatherly, *Burning Conscience*, p. 13.

¹³ *Ibid.*

In his correspondence with Eatherly, which if I am correct was Anders' way to communicate with American English speaking commentators, Anders did not make it difficult for those same commentators to dismiss him. Indeed, Anders put his key point, which was also his most difficult point, on the very first page, almost summing up the heart of the masterwork that has yet to be translated into English. Thus Anders writes to Eatherly — a letter to a former American airman, incarcerated for petty crimes in a psychological hospital or institution (where for the most part Eatherly would remain) and hence written out of the blue, as it were — by speaking of nothing more esoteric than 'technification,' speaking in a Heideggerian sense but no less in a Kantian sense of what Anders there describes as the:

“technification” of our being: the fact that to-day it is possible that unknowingly and indirectly, like screws in a machine, we can be used in actions, the effects of which are beyond the horizon of our eyes and imagination, and of which, could we imagine them, we could not approve — this fact has changed the very foundations of our moral existence. Thus, we can become “guiltlessly guilty,” a condition which had not existed in the technically less advanced times of our fathers.¹⁴

By thus speaking of our 'technification,' the same technology on every social level that Jacques Ellul would for his part claim as the wager [*Enjeu*] of the century in a series of his own books,¹⁵ or of what Heidegger far less popularly called the “essence” of modern technology, Anders could emphasize that it would be this essence into which we ourselves would be absorbed. Thus Anders' first letter to Eatherly patiently articulates the points Anders had developed in his 1956 *Obsolescence of Humanity*.¹⁶

For Anders, we *are* our tools, that is to say, we *are* our gadgets, our devices, our things, our objects. By saying this, Anders is far from today's object oriented ontologists (I say this admitting the wide variability of these writers, and I say this noting that in some cases Anders is even cited —and the sighting of any citation, in the wild as it were, is rare enough). But Anders differs. He

¹⁴ Anders and Eatherly, *Burning Conscience*, p. 1.

¹⁵ Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, John Wilkinson, trans. (New York: Vintage, 1967). The original title was in advance of Anders' work: *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1954).

¹⁶ Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen; Zweiter Band. Über die Zerstörung des Lebens in Zeitalter der dritten industriellen Revolution* (Munich: Beck, 1984 [1980]).

does not think that we can simply think the thing, the object, the gadget and his reason for this reticence is the very hermeneutic and phenomenological reason that this objective is not accessible to us simply because we are already the object of technology as the subject of history, and hence we are ordered to (in this sense as we saw above we are the shepherds of), we are claimed by things, by objects. The fact that we have made them is quite irrelevant and this irrelevance as this is the scope, the range, the breadth, the sheer size (this is Jünger's titanism or giganticism), of modern technology. And, as we shall see, this same signal irrelevance of the connection between what we know and what we have made or done, pace Kant or Vico, is the point of Anders' reflections on Goethe's "The Sorcerer's Apprentice," *Der Zauberlehrling*.

Anders' main concern was the same non-neutrality that Heidegger for his own part also emphasized at the start of his *The Question Concerning Technology*. Good or bad, neutral or non-neutral, either point is committed in advance to the same. Anders' argument is that once we have an object, we have it. Because it is the object that has us, we can—as a result—claim *neither* detachment *nor* sovereignty. Other authors reflecting on technology have made similar points in similarly uncompromising fashion especially Heidegger and Ellul but what bears further reflection is that Anders' point would not be directed to the ontological circumstance of doing and not doing. Thus Anders was more concerned for very phenomenological purposes with 'having.' And this also meant that Anders' concern was with the inescapably moral fraughtness: this is what it is to be 'guiltlessly guilty,' this is what it means for all of us, to accept the designation of banal evil as a descriptor for all us, every one of us a son of Eichmann, Hiroshima everywhere.

The condemnation for Anders is the damnation of being *and* not being in the context of the things of our age. There is no way to be, simply to be, in the world in the wake of the atom bomb. It is in this sense that Anders can reflect in 1966 and contra Lukács and many others, that given the literally 'negative religion' that was the atomic fact — and by no means only the mere threat of nuclear annihilation — everything the past century had previously considered under the rubric of nihilism, by comparison with that same "possibility of 'annihilation' turned out to be sheer culture-hall nonsense." For Anders, "Nietzsche, even the beastly serious Heidegger, come across as laughable before the madness [*Folie*] of this possibility."¹⁷ The possibility is that of a literal annihilation, in fact the creation, the production of nothingness, eliminating all

¹⁷ Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen; Zweiter Band*, p. 404.

humanity and culture and all history with it. The question of nuclear annihilation thus explicitly extends beyond the Heideggerian possibility of impossibility. This is of course the heart of what Anders, a good Heideggerian, had to mean by the *Obsolescence of Humanity*, which is of course nothing but the ‘Obsolescence of Dasein’ and precisely qua Dasein or as such. What is at stake for us as mortal beings is no longer anything so classical as our mere mortality, that we, as beings who can die, are bound to die and bound to the loss of our ownmost possibilities for being but and much rather that today we are no longer ‘mortal’ but have been converted into simply “‘killable’ entities.”¹⁸

For Anders, as we have already quoted him in the epigraph to the current essay, we human beings are no longer in a position to simply regard our lifetime, even as Mallarmé might have done, as simply random, as chance tossed into the realm of possible being, or as Nietzsche wrote: “a hiatus between two nothings.”¹⁹ His *Commandments in the Atomic Age* are mortal reflections as he writes to Claude Eatherly and as is immediately clear upon reading them, offer an array of spiritual exercises. Much rather than a re-furbished vision of the ten Commandments, as it were, these are to be read as rules for the soul’s direction, meditations of a Stoic kind, beginning, just as Marcus Aurelius begins Book Five of his *Meditations*: let this, not that, be your first thought upon arising.

The point here is that there has been a reversal, a turn, a change and things are now and forever more no longer as they were. If that sounds extreme it is only because Anders remembers, as Benjamin does, what makes history history and that prerequisite is always a recording hand. With an angel, we are covered even after the apocalypse. Take away the angel and you have as Nietzsche also reflects, as he writes in the parable of the mad man who comes to seek and then to announce the death of god in his *The Gay Science*, that having murdered god — “*We have killed him*—you and I. All of us are his murderers.”²⁰ — we have at the same time managed “to wipe away the entire horizon.”²¹ Nietzsche continues to elaborate the significance of nothing other than the very last words

¹⁸ Ibid., 405. Anders concludes the section by denouncing the situatedness of dying one’s own death as Rilke had spoken of this and as Heidegger had made his own claim to the same. For Anders, using a Heideggerian argument against Heidegger, the thing about dying is that the individual’s loss of his own singularity in dying is and can hardly be one’s “own.” Ibid., p. 407.

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), Vol. 12, p. 473.

²⁰ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §125.

²¹ Ibid.

of the Christ as he hung on the cross, asking for forgiveness on our behalf, because we his murderers, guiltlessly guilty, had and could have had no idea what we were doing:

What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us?²²

The scene of the *Commandments* as Anders' translator put his *Meditations in the Atomic Age* is as bleak. In the wake, not of the death of God, but the explosion of the power of stars, we are, in Anders' terms "killable," as humankind and as a whole, not only henceforth but in every other sense as well. Thus humanity as such is not only limited to "today's mankind" or "spread over the provinces of our globe; but also mankind spread over the provinces of time."²³ The expanse is literally unimaginable — which does not mean that Anders has any trouble explaining it, and he gives Eatherly a little lesson in history as he does:

For if the mankind of today is killed, then that which has been, dies with it; and the mankind to come too. The mankind which has been because, where there is no one who remembers, there will be nothing left to remember; and the mankind to come, because where there is no to-day, no to-morrow can become a to-day. The door in front of us bears the inscription "Nothing will have been" and from within: "Time was an episode." Not however as our ancestors had hoped, between two eternities; but one between two nothingnesses; between the nothingness of that which, remembered by no one, will have been as though it had never been, and the nothingness of that which will never be.²⁴

²² Ibid.

²³ Günther Anders and Claude Eatherly, *Burning Conscience: The Case of the Hiroshima Pilot, Claude Eatherly, told in his letters to Günther Anders*, Preface by Bertrand Russell; foreword by Robert Jungk (New York: Paragon, 1961), p. 11.

²⁴ Günther Anders and Claude Eatherly, *Burning Conscience: The case of the Hiroshima Pilot, Claude Eatherly, told in his letters to Günther Anders*, Preface by Bertrand Russell; foreword by Robert Jungk (New York: Paragon, 1961), p. 11.

Anders' own expression is shot through with the Nietzschean language, the door or the gateway, as we have already seen, is Nietzschean, the formula of the two nothingnesses, as we also have seen, is Nietzschean, but the tenor and the tone is hermeneutic phenomenology: a meditation on being and having been, on being and not being. This is the Sophoclean *me phynai*,²⁵ as Nietzsche also reflects on it, on what it would be never to have been at all, where just this is, as Nietzsche also reflects, utterly impossible for humanity, which leaves us the curiously second best option of dying soon, as Yeats translates Sophocles and sets as the last lines of his *A Man Young and Old*,

“Never to have lived is best, ancient writers say;
 Never to have drawn the breath of life, never to have looked into
 the eye of day;
 The second best's a gay goodnight and quickly turn away.”²⁶

Anders who brings to his reflections literary considerations amidst philosophical and theological considerations also argues in the high spirit of the original members of the Frankfurt School (neither Habermas nor Honneth need apply, nor, to be sure, would they wish to). Thus Anders compares the “consumer terrorism,” he describes, i.e., say compulsory consumption, to the even more significant compulsion to use. This is the compulsion of the applied. Applied terrorism is the terrorism of what happens to be on hand, what is available for use, and this applicable and therefore deployable terrorism is for Anders quite literally the reason atom bombs were detonated as they were and in the first place: President Truman, as Anders points out, happened to have had two bombs available, therefore there would be two targets. The only question was *where* they would be. That is the space question. The time question concerned only how soon they could be used. And given diplomacy and the ontic details of concluding world war two, Germany was out of the question, so the space in question, the where of the bomb, followed the question of time, the when of when the two bombs one happened finally to have on hand, could ultimately get to be used.

But beyond consumer-terrorism and applied-terrorism, beyond having become less mortal than mere ‘killable’ beings, Anders reflects that we are killed

²⁵Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonnus*, « mê phunai ton hapanta nikai logon: to d', epei phanêi... » (1224f)

²⁶ W. B. Yeats, *A Man Young and Old*, in *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats: Volume I: The Poems*, ed. Robert Finneran (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), p. 231.

when we are killed by an atom bomb not by human hands, and by nothing so old-fashionedly humane as human intention or human passion. We do not die at human hands because *hands* — that's the point of obsolescence — do not for Anders enter into it at all. Like Major Claude Eatherly who gives the all-clear from his plane, The Straight Flush,²⁷ and thus like the command to execute the mission, like the bombers of the Enola Gay, who dropped the ridiculously aptly named hydrogen bomb: Little Boy, such a death when it comes, would come either, shades of Eichmann (but with drone warfare the shadow falls more clearly) come

from agents somewhere, thousands of kilometers distant from us, following orders in accord with duty, or indeed through brainless and sightless machines, that have long since been emancipated from the hands and the intentions of their creators and users.²⁸

As Anders goes on to point out, the constellation shifts from the tragic to the ridiculous or idiotic, and this shift relieves us of no part of our own responsibility for the outcome. The overabundance, the excess production of nuclear warheads (this is not a matter of number as much as it is a matter of deadly power) is something that has been happening since 1945 — and it has hardly decreased it has only intensified in recent years. With every increase in “overkill,” Anders likes to use the term in English in his German text, what also increases is the likelihood that each of us has now to perish at what is, in effect, however objectly or mechanically, our own hand.²⁹ We are all at fault. The consequence, if one is blunt, and Anders was blunt to a fault, is that one could no longer, though this hardly stops today's philosophers of religion, from talking as if God were in his heaven. Thus “Scheler's dictum,” as Anders quotes it here, that “he believed in the devil (in contrast to the theologians of his own generation who believed in the existence of god but not the devil)”³⁰ would thus

²⁷ A “straight flush” is jargon for a poker hand of five cards in sequence and of which there are better and worse kinds. In Eatherly's case, the name of his B-29 Superfortress was illustrated on the nose of the plane with a depiction of a toilet bowl with a downed Japanese pilot in the toilet and using the toilet seat as an flotation device with a disembodied hand on the right-hand side poised to pull the chain, for a “straight flush.”

²⁸ Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen; Zweiter Band*, p. 406.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 407.

attain a new vitality for us today. As Anders argued, the devil would appear to have taken up a new residence.³¹

Far from any symbolism, the apocalypse for Anders could henceforth have nothing whatsoever to do with any kind of second coming, any sort of new Reich, any last judgment, or anything at all that one might need to ‘interpret.’ What we no longer have is hermeneutic esotericism: there is no ‘meaning’ in need of subtle divination.

Now, the End-time of today is of a ‘massive’ sort. It is in need of no symbolization. For this possibility (and that means if it is a matter of technology: the inevitability) there are historical examples: the facts Hiroshima and Nagasaki and that of the secret from-no-one calculation regarding the ‘overkill’ capacity of today’s stockpiled weapons. In our situation the sheer fact that the end has yet to enter in is no refutation of the reality of the danger, no counterdemonstration of the fact that our time is *a*, indeed *the* endtime.

The ‘Now’ of this fact of the facticity for all and for each one of us of what has been, of what has been done by human beings lies (or better said: should lie) as a weight upon all human beings. This is for Anders, the Promethean guilt of action, of original sin, and it has been a problem since the time of the change of the gods, for the ancient Greeks this was the change from the age of the titans to the Olympians gods, for Jews and for Christians, this goes back not only to Adam and Eve but above all to the time of Cain. In another way of telling the story, this guilt or acquired shame has been with us since Enkidu stopped to sleep with the woman of the city paid to seduce him, and who as a result lost the patience, the grace, *the time* that allowed him to run in innocence alongside the gazelle, the lion, and so on. Thereafter, Enkidu, the wild man, would not free the animals from the traps city hunters had set for them, but being himself caught in and by another kind of city hunter’s trap, he would be lost to his forest companions, with little to do except follow the whore who had come to lure him to the city.

Sin, for Anders, Promethean shame, needs no specific confession: it is neither Jewish nor Christian nor pagan but purely attendant upon our humanity. It is the human condition that we be ashamed of having been born, that we be preternaturally conscious of our limits (this is what Heidegger called our

³¹ Anders writes that “the devil has moved into another apartment.” Ibid., p. 410.

ontological ‘excellence’) as these are the limits of the just and only human. Our oldest stories are stories of being ashamed of nakedness, ashamed of our naked bodies, of being embarrassed to be seen, appalled at our own frailty. And by the same token, we are hell bent on becoming, at any price, more than that, more than we are. Our tools, our objects, our tanks, our planes, our bombs, these days such things also include our digital prowess seem to be just the ticket. And it all starts with a fig-leaf.

With the atom bomb in particular, humanity succeeded in crystallizing the terror of laying siege to a city, wasting it, compressing it down in time and spatial act to the press of a button, mere minutes from start to finish. Over and out.

At least in theory — and as Anders already at the beginning of the 1960’s, writing to Eatherly took care to note (and in the interim his point has only been made all the stronger, in ways unimaginable to most of us — not that we think about it): the bomb, although hardly ever thought about (this would be different for Major Eatherly who knew such things far better than most) was no static achievement. Indeed, since the bomb was developed, progress consisted in further perfecting it, meaning as this was hardly lost on Anders, that that same project to develop a better bomb was all and only about increasing its deadliness, magnifying the destructiveness of such a negative genie-in-a-bottle.

The problem with the project from the outset, following Hiroshima and Nagasaki, was only that the genie had already been out for a detonating fall, twice over. As Anders put it:

For the goal that we have to reach cannot be *not* to have the thing; but never to use the thing, although we cannot help having it; never to use it, although there will be no day on which we couldn’t use it.³²

It was Anders’ technically attuned thinking, student as he was of Edmund Husserl — his dissertation on “Having” concerned epistemological ontology³³ — and of Heidegger, it was thus his techno-epistemological sensibility that led him to offer the above reflection on the consequences that follow simply from what we do as modern, technical human beings, living at a tempo like none before, “the completely new, the *apocalyptic* kind of temporality, *our* temporality.”³⁴ This temporality of our time is the end-time: all time henceforth

³² Anders and Eatherly, *Burining Consicence*, p. 20.

³³ Stern, *Über das Haben. Sieben Kapitel zur Ontologie der Erkenntnis* (Bonn: Cohen, 1928).

³⁴ Anders and Eatherly, *Burning Consicence*, p. 12.

must be counted from here and accordingly and because we are at the end, we affect the future, any *possible* future, like no other epoch in the history of humanity.

Anders offers one of the first articulations of a point we now so take for granted that we simply refer to the concept by a number, counting generations — we count, biblically of course, seven generations, and then because it is now a cliché we stop thinking about it. As Anders explains:

the people of the Western world, since they, although not planning it, are already affecting the remotest future. Thus deciding about the health or degeneration, perhaps the ‘to be or not to be’ of their sons and grandsons. Whether they, or rather we, do this intentionally or not is of no significance, for what morally counts is only the fact.³⁵

The point here is that the only thing that matters is our objects, that is, what we have, what we possess and what we have done. As a consequence there is no question of intention, there is no question of rightly or wrongly deploying such objects. Atom bombs, napalm, lets make it real for us today, drone strikes, fracking, nuclear power plants, GMO crops, etc. These things cannot be used well. Thus Anders writes to conclude the second volume of his *Obsolescence of Humanity*, “it is not can-do-ability that we lack, but no-can-do-ability.”³⁶ Heidegger had earlier begun his own reflections on technology by taking about the limitations of thinking that technology was either an instrument (the instrumental definition) or a human attribute (the anthropological definition).³⁷ Instead, and much, much rather another essence, so Heidegger argued, was at work in modern technology.

4. *Time-Space*

Time, as we have seen that Anders also reflects upon it, is always found to have a kind topology, a spatial dimensionality, complete with the topographic features of a particular landscape — think of Dali’s *The Persistence of Memory* or for pop culture, think of *The Twilight Zone*’s milder television metaphors: we are time-travelers of an antique adept’s variety, less the high future of a Star

³⁵ Anders and Eatherly, *Burning Conscience*, p. 13.

³⁶ Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen; Zweiter Band*, p. 395.

³⁷ H. and then

Trek cruising the edge of a singularity in space-time than the late 19th century future of a Jules Verne.³⁸ We hitchhike in our fantasies equipped with nothing like the latest scientific vision, a mere hundred years old, of time-travel via rocket-ships and jet-powered speed, to take us, thank you Dr. Einstein, back in time without noticing it. We prefer 19th century cabinets. Dr. Who needs no spacesuit. Nor is it an accident that the latest language to describe the (imaginary) transforms of the digital are borrowed — hat tip to Evgeny Morozov, thanks to techno-media scholar Jussi Parikka — from Harry Potter's creator. J. K. Rowling's horcrux is the perfectly articulated image for our multitasking minds.



Fig. 2. Salvador Dali. *The Persistence of Memory*. 1931. Oil on canvas. © ARS, NY

Rowling, the horcrux's creatrix, had her own borrowed rabbit (or lion) up her sleeve or tucked into her hat, even if she did not name the master of wonderland and its topographical transforms, morphological shifts of size and form, down the rabbit hole and all. The mathematician author Lewis Carroll and his 'Wonderland' is thus the poster-boy, the ideal author of the digital era because even with no acquaintance with Alice, and no acquaintance with any of

³⁸ Invoking Schlegel's description of the historian as a backwards turned prophet, an image doubtless precisely relevant for his cousin Benjamin's description of the facing orientation of Klee's Angel of history, Anders suggests that we need to demand the same of today's prognosticator or futurologist. In this same context, Anders claims Jules Verne as the patron saint of modern technology: "*the prophet of the technological revolution.*" Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen; Zweiter Band*, p. 428,

her adventures (who was the rabbit? who was the walrus? who needs any of them, we have Angelina Jolie forever — in her avatar *avant la lettre* in *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*), we have the very idea. Mentioning, the mere mention of the wondrous is all we get *and* all we need: we know everything we need to know about the mathematico-logical transform of our new projected selves.

We are, aren't we now, transhuman, posthuman, humanity 2.0 (surely we're due for an upgrade to humanity 3.0 or even 4.0 by now).

And then, just for the locus of the boggart in the wardrobe as such, Rowling also had her C.S. Lewis.

I mention boggarts and wardrobes, cabinets and time travel, because when we shift levels (and note that we are still talking of topologies), one should be struck by the persistence of our representation of time as time in history is always a picture, an image, iconic. As if we might be surprised that anything with two dimensions might be other than a picture.

Theodor Adorno to bring Anders' competition, not that we read him either on the matter of technology as we should, and not that today's Frankfurt School bothers to do anything but silence him in favor of themselves, was also struck by iconic, canonic time, as Berthold Hoeckner rightly notes.³⁹ And this is always a claim with particular insistence in Adorno where music is, of course, the art of time as we like to say. With music we are also always and even if Hoeckner is, like most musicologists, most philosophers, most academics, inattentive to Anders (or Stern in this context) speaking about Anders who also (as Stern) offered his own reflections on time, musical time,⁴⁰ as phenomenologically, as hermeneutically as Hoeckner himself.⁴¹ Hoeckner, like Anders, like Adorno (if also although Hoeckner does not note this, like Nietzsche), attends to the time of the now — *Jetzt-Zeit* — in his discussion of the 'star' in Beethoven, echoes of constellations important for Adorno as for Benjamin, Anders, and even indeed Schoenberg.⁴² Quoting Adorno's

³⁹ Berthold Hoeckner, *Programming the Absolute: Nineteenth-century German Music and the Hermeneutics of the Moment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

⁴⁰ I discuss Anders in this context and in connection with Adorno on the space of sound and Nietzsche on time in music in Babich, *The Hallelujah Effect: Philosophical Reflections on Music, Performance Practice and Technology* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013).

⁴¹ Hoeckner, to be sure, does not attend to the breadth of this array as I am discussing Anders here and to be sure he prefers the more common constellation, as most scholars do, of names to bother to name in his own study.

⁴² Hoeckner's reflections are broad ones but I argue here that to have the measure he wishes need even more damned names (in the Fortean sense) are required than Anders' own. I am

“aesthetics of appearance” (under the important presumption of an allergy to Heidegger that spares any engagement with the notion as it also appears early in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*), Hoeckner characterizes Adorno’s “aesthetics of *Augenblick* as an aesthetics of apparition: ‘the artwork as appearance approaches most clearly the apparition, the celestial vision.’”⁴³ Of course as we have already suggested, the same lines of thinking are also to be found, traced and elaborated in just this context in Anders. For Hoeckner — and here one misses a discussion of both Heidegger and Nietzsche, what will be needed is a “hermeneutics of the moment.”⁴⁴ With this desideratum the author must disentangle himself from Adorno who exemplified perhaps more than any other author the lived anxieties of influence (Heidegger, and Gadamer but also Anders and the same Habermas Adorno had intellectually discounted but also and certainly, whether we like it or not — and we do not like it — Hannah Arendt as well). In addition, there are other authors who also write on dialectics and time in conjunction with Benjamin, making very close arguments for Hoeckner regarding Adorno’s supposed lacks, as Günter Figal has analysed these. Focusing, as Hoeckner does, on Adorno’s attention to the standstill, Hoeckner disagrees with Figal. There are less lacunae in Adorno than an abundance of eyes, as it were — the image of the Argus-eyed is significant as it should be for Hoeckner’s reading — than a veritable constellation of insights into that same dialectic. Thus we read that “what intrigued Adorno was Benjamin’s objectification of the historical process in the image.”⁴⁵ The key passage everyone cites from Benjamin’s *Passagenwerk* is thus worth citing here:

What has been coalesces in lightning like fashion with the Now. In other words, the image is the dialectic at a standstill. For while the relationship of the present to the past is a purely temporal one, the relationship of what has been to the Now is dialectical, of a pictorial rather than a temporal character.⁴⁶

speaking of the now nearly forgotten Siegmund Levarie and I discuss this (in another context) in Babich, *The Hallelujan Effect*, see p. 7 as well as 196ff.

⁴³ Hoeckner, *Programming the Absolute*, p. 16.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 17.

⁴⁶ Ibid. See for the same citation, Günter Figal’s chapter “Aesthetic Experience of Time” in his *For a Philosophy of Freedom and Strife: Politics, Aesthetics, Metaphysics*, Wayne Klein, trans. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 121. Figal cites Benjamin, GS V: 1, 578.

The point made here overlooks a key point in Nietzsche (and it is instructive that authors for all their enthusiasm, are at pains to keep Nietzsche at a distance). In addition there is the eschatological as such, in this case the very picture of it, which is the picture-book Dante, in the images inextricably associated with him since the 1850's, not only for us today but for Anders, and Adorno, and Benjamin ever since Paul Gustave Doré's illustrations came to stand in Dante's name and place, an achievement arguably to match that of any other illustration in any other book.

Doré's pen drawing of the Empyrean in Dante's *Paradiso*, Canto 31, published mid-19th century, combines as a rebus both the power of the sun as life and in death as this famously comes to J. Robert Oppenheimer's lips as he invokes the language of the Vedic tradition, "Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds."⁴⁷ As Peter Sloterdijk takes up this same association, the "Bomb is really the only Buddha that Western reason could understand. Its calm and its irony are infinite. ... As with Buddha, everything that could be said is said through its existence."⁴⁸



Fig. 3. Trinity Atomic Bomb Explosion, 16. Juli 1945, 05:29:45.

⁴⁷ J. Robert Oppenheimer, on the thoughts and reactions on July 16, 1945 at the Trinity atomic bomb test site. "We knew the world would not be the same. A few people laughed... A few people cried... Most people were silent. I remembered the line from the Hindu scripture the Bhagavad Gita; Vishnu is trying to persuade the prince that he should do his duty, and to impress him takes on his multi-armed form, and says, 'Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds.' I suppose we all thought that, one way or another." In: *The Decision to Drop the Bomb*, NBC documentary, 1965.

⁴⁸ Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 131-132.



Fig. 4. Paul Gustave Doré, *Empyrean*, Dante, *Paradiso*, Canto 31. Public Domain.

To talk about Anders' *Endzeit und Zeitenende*,⁴⁹ we need Nietzsche's eternity in fact as this is the moment, the now. Again and as already intimated at the start, this is mapped out in space, a space of infinite dimension, fore and aft, as Nietzsche depicts it and without which dimensionality it is impossible to think the *Augenblick* as Nietzsche also names the moment. Time stands still and in what Nietzsche could describe as two roads, mapping infinities past and future, the crossover, the junction is the moment, *Augenblick*,⁵⁰ the same word Adorno uses.

And why not the moment, the blink of an eye, an image which already closes off the seen, relegating it to a lost glimpse? Why not in Anders' time, in Adorno's time, Benjamin's time: a time when the apocalypse seemed sure just because as Anders emphasized with respect to Hiroshima, and although we scarcely like to talk of this at all, in Vietnam, or in Iraq as Baudrillard did not fail to try to tell us, or closer to home for the German Anders, already in Dresden, as Winifried Sebald has reminded us, it had already taken place. For Anders, indeed, and starting with his own experience of it, the first world war had already done that and the second war as that came and ended, not once, but twice, and then again with two bombs, could not but repeat the same message, once more with feeling, and a reprise, *da capo*. The encore at the end of

⁴⁹ Anders, *Endzeit und Zeitenende. Gedanken über die atomare Situation* (Munich: Beck, 1972).

⁵⁰ I explore this in further detail in Babich,

the second world war, and the constellation, the order of events would matter for Anders, changed everything beyond imagining, beyond rectification, beyond redemption or correction.

This is for Anders in his retrospective reflections on the “Obsolescence of Space and Time” part of the problem, emphasizing, as Gadamer would also always do in his lectures when I was a student, the importance of consummation, satisfaction, fulfillment, what Anders simply called “having.” It is instructive that Anders begins his 1959 reflections with the illustration of ‘Schlaraffenland’⁵¹ but it is even more significant that we can barely translate this term into English although we Americans have perfected its realization on earth arguably more than other people, at least in the Disney version. *Schlaraffenland* is a world where sausages leap perfectly broiled, perfectly willingly, into our always hungry mouths, no effort at all, guiltlessly, automatically, and in this child’s fantasy, not really for children because there is beer that has the same eager proclivities to satisfy any thirst we might have, the only name we have is Candyland, or the media obsession with the heaven of certain confessional persuasion: complete with a given number of promised virgins springing, not unlike the sausages, unbidden, uncoaxed, and unfazed into the martyr’s arms.

Our age crosses space and time, obliterating, as Anders also emphasizes all distances, spatial and temporal. We are effectively as he argues, rendered by technological means into spaceless, timeless beings, not in the sense of transcendence but as he writes of imperviousness, blindness. This is apocalyptic blindness and thus we no longer have any sense of history or indeed memory. But the problem of the modern time-less (lacking time as we do), space-less (lacking a sense of the world around as we do) way of being is precisely that it transcends nothing at all. We are, as Anders goes on to argue, mediated in all of this by our technology, which is always to be found just where we put it: precisely, exactly “in the ‘middle’ of the fulfillment of needs or ‘facilitating’ [‘*Vermitteln*’] the manufacture of products.”⁵²

5. *Whose Holocaust? Which Genocide?*

Who counts?

⁵¹ Anders, „Die Antiquiertheit von Raum und Zeit,” in *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen; Zweiter Band*, p. 335.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 336.

If some have followed the apotheosis, as it were, of the cattle car as this was borrowed along with the entire factory slaughterhouse project, technique, assembly line-layout, and so on, from Chicago's stockyards and thence to Auschwitz, Dachau, Buchenwald,⁵³ we can also trace the lines, the tracks of the trains that ran throughout a war of destroyed transports. These traintracks that could have been bombed were never destroyed and Hitler not only got the trains to run on time, but the trains that fed the final solution ran without fail. A transport always arrives at its destination, to vary Jacques Lacan while keeping the same spirit. In the same spirit, these are the ashes of which Derrida also speaks, Anders talked about things not even a Klee could illustrate. No paintings are possible, one is immediately moved to film *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*, and even that shudders. Meshes of non-representation. Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and we have no idea what we are talking about. And then students of Adorno prattle about a *Bilderverbot*. God forbid that we care to speak of this, of these people, foreign to us, in foreign places, alien beings, who are they? We continue to require both critical theory and a critical philosophy of technology, a conjunction incorporating Anders' complicated dialectic less of art in Benjamin's prescient but still innocent age of technological reproduction but and much rather Ander's reflections "on the devastation of life in the age of the third industrial revolution."⁵⁴ Thus Anders would talk not about enemy fascism (which was an easy sell as many authors know to their advantage) but and much rather the American, the good-guys, the non-fascist, non-(supposedly)-totalitarian, but very democratic (despite its complete secrecy) controversion of just-war ideology, transforming it into just and only a war after the war had ended. For all by themselves, in the midst of the Japanese effort to surrender — surrenders are diplomatic things, that take diplomatic intervals of time, negotiation, the business of sovereignty and legitimacy — the bomber's planes would fly as for weeks, indeed for all the years of the Manhattan Project, it had been planned to fly just those planes, to send them somewhere appropriate just in order (that would be the end in question) to drop the winged death, the apocalypse itself. The end fruit of that same project was two bombs completed just prior to the end of a war (but when does anything end?) that was finished just a touch too soon before the planes (these would be the means) were nonetheless launched to destroy cities full of people.

⁵³ The historian Charles Patterson's *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust* (New York: Lantern Books, 2002) thus borrows its title from Singer's "The Letter Writer." For the quote here, see Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka*, p. 183.

⁵⁴ Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen; Zweiter Band*.

If scholars dispute whether one can claim that ordinary German knew or did not know about the Holocaust, Holger Neering points out that in this case there is nothing to dispute.⁵⁵ For more than sixty years, German authors have been at pains to argue, like Neering, that no one can make that statement about Hiroshima, about Nagasaki.⁵⁶ And yet even this point can miss the point. We are, we remain still in the dark about the atomic attacks on Japan. Thus if the above description of the timing or the necessity for the bombs dropped on Japan sounds like an overstatement, that is because, as Americans, we continue to be in denial, we are, as Anders offered Eatherly a diagnosis for his mental distress at a distance, are traumatized. And this trauma today is the result of, as trauma always perpetuates itself as trauma, by means of suppression.

The development of the atom bomb was a secret during World War II (not only the project as such was a secret but three different locations were created, likewise in secret, in Oak Ridge, Tennessee (uranium), Hanford, Washington (plutonium) and today the best known of these: Los Alamos, New Mexico. As one cultural scholar has observed, the development of the bomb, which involved building the aforementioned cities *from scratch*, was arguably the best kept secret of the war. Bertolotti's analysis is offered by way of an old fashioned sort of what is today popularly called media archaeology, by way, with perfect documentation, of a study of print media as the means of both suppression and controlled dissemination (translation: that is propaganda, translation, to borrow the language of the masthead of New York Times, that is 'all the news fit to print') during the Second World War.⁵⁷

The closest we have ever come to this was Dresden, also an aerial destruction, angels again, firebombed by the British, Bomber Harris who it is said, knew what he was doing. Winfried Sebald in the English version of his book *The Natural History of Destruction*⁵⁸ used the nihilistic language of Lord

⁵⁵ Robert Jungk, *Strahlen aus der Asche. Geschichte einer Wiedergeburt*, with a preface by Matthias Greffrath (Munich, 1991) [1959], p. 317; the English edition was published only two years later as *Children of the Ashes. The Story of a Rebirth* (London: Heinemann, 1961).

⁵⁶ Holger Neering, "Cold War, Apocalypse and Peaceful Atoms. Interpretations of Nuclear Energy in the British and West German Anti-Nuclear Weapons Movements, 1955-1964," *Historical Social Research*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (2004): 150-170. Neering cites Robert Jungk's *Strahlen aus der Asche. Geschichte einer Wiedergeburt*, with a preface by Matthias Greffrath (Munich, 1991) [1959], p. 317. Neering also refers to Anders in the same time era.

⁵⁷ See David S. Bertolotti, "The Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima" in Bertolotti, *Culture and Technology* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1984), pp. 81-112.

⁵⁸ W.G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction* (New York: Modern Library, 2004).

Solly Zuckerman, the architect of the Dresden firebombing, to title his book, and it is a fantastic title.⁵⁹ The whole point, the whole purpose, the sole, the one and only end, of waging war is terror.⁶⁰

6. *Anders Gesagt: Once More, with feeling*

A student of Husserl (again it is important to say this first) Anders was also a student of Heidegger as he was a student of Max Scheler (and Anders arguably gets his ethics from Scheler if not his practical sensibility). Scheler is beyond the scope of this paper but Heidegger as is already evident is central to the reading I have offered. If Anders' scholars tend to eschew Heidegger (and if Heidegger scholars return the favor by ignoring Anders), Heidegger's reflections on technology remain decisive for Anders. I argue that one needs to keep Heidegger's criticisms in mind to read Anders (assuming to be sure Anders' cutting critiques of Heidegger). To do this, it is necessary to go beyond the limits of Heidegger scholarship as even Heidegger scholars show little patience for the sustained and thoroughgoing character of Heidegger's interest in technology as indeed in modern science, both which Heidegger thought in terms closer to Anders' preoccupation with the same. Heidegger scholars can be the least valuable resource owing to their concern to excavate their personal favorite theme which means too that they tend to cut all references to Nietzsche, leaving Hölderlin (because who understands him?) and certainly mixing and matching Hölderlin and Rilke (why ever not?), all the while ending

⁵⁹ Ibid. he quotes the Swedish journalist Stig Degerman's 1946 report of nothing so much as a landscape of destruction at which no one of the inhabitants considered to look "writing from Hamburg," as Sebald describes the journalist's report, "that on a train going at normal speed it took him a quarter of an hour to travel the lunar landscape between Hasselbrook and Landwehr, and in all that vast wilderness, perhaps the most horrifying expanse of ruins in the whole of Europe, he did not see a single living soul" Sebald, "Air War and Literature," p. 30.

⁶⁰ Karl Löwith's "European Nihilism: Reflections on the Intellectual and Historical Background of the European War," in Löwith, *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, Gary Steiner, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 173-284 as well as Karl Jaspers, *The Atom Bomb and the Future of Man*, trans. E. B. Ashton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961). For the specifically American context here, see Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962) and for a discussion of Kahn from a present day context, Sharon Ghamari-Tabrizi, *The Worlds of Herman Kahn: The Intuitive Science of Thermonuclear War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press; 2005).

by nailing that personal interest to the wall as the whole of Heidegger: be it being, be it meaning, be it objects, be it god or God, or what have you.

Here I have sought to emphasize that Heidegger, differently from Anders but also from Jaspers and from Löwith as well as Jünger, sought to criticize technology and in particular to criticize the sheer idea of the atomic bomb together with television and film, as Heidegger saw television and radio and film hermeneutico-phenomenologically in the visceral sense of both being *and* time.⁶¹

A full elaboration of Heidegger and Anders goes far beyond the scope of this paper, though it is instructive to note that some elements of such a reading appear in Sloterdijk's recent work. This is the sheer that of its *having been* (where the Nietzschean dialectic of the 'having been' reflects the essence of modern technology) as deployed, as put to use, as set in motion in addition to the bland politics of nuclear proliferation as this also functions as programmatic aggression advanced in the name of defense and deterrence. The tactic of sheerly technological, automatic, mechanical, aggression is carried out in good conscience. The very notion of the "preemptive strike" is, as Jean Baudrillard observed again and again towards the end of his life, absolves the perpetrator (ergo it was not the English who would be blamed for Dresden, the oddness of Eatherly's conscience was not that it, in Anders expression, burned but just that Americans simply have no blood on their hands for Hiroshima). Blame for the preemptive strike can always be laid at the opponent's feet, it is his fault: such are the wages of evil.

The claim of innocence was hard for Eatherley,⁶² and similar claims were hard on soldiers who had fought in Vietnam, especially after their return to everyday life in the United States, and the dissonance of the claim continues to be hard — we just call it post-traumatic stress now, denouncing it as we now do as a "disorder — for today's fighters in the Gulf, Afghanistan, etc.

Sloterdijk analyses this 'shock' at the end of his book, *The Critique of Cynical Reason*, even going so far, and the present author is grateful for this, as to invoke Anders. But Anglophone readers looking for the next new thing have never read Anders (who was never the next new thing, perforce not, having never been translated into English) or Sloterdijk (who was) and those looking

⁶¹ See Babich, "Constellating Constellating Technology: Heidegger's *Die Gefahr* / The Danger" in: Babette Babich and Dimitri Ginev, eds., *The Multidimensionality of Hermeneutic Phenomenology* (Frankfurt am Main: Springer, 2013), pp. 153-182.

⁶² Claude Eatherly & Günther Anders, *Burning Conscience* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1962).

for *today's* next new thing (and it is only today's new thing that matters) cannot go back and read what they did not read in the first place. Thus we scholars trust young scholars who, as Nietzsche once expressed it, “have thoroughly unlearned the art of reading.” And by the time anyone notices a lack, those same scholars will have moved on to where they wished to be, all in time to be replaced by the next set of scholars seeking the next generation of the next new thing.

The war on terrorism, as Slavoj Žižek observes, is infinitely fightable and wildly adaptable, transformable. Indeed, our enemies are beautifully invisible: a powerfully convenient antagonist and the invisible and therefore omnipresent enemy serves as today's transformation, the perfection of the sheer automatism of war. The invisible enemy all around us is the equivalent of the acephalic and therefore perfect soldier of past war fantasies as Sloterdijk invokes these to conclude his *Critique of Cynical Reason*.⁶³ Of course there is more, as the NSA has undone the old joke — we have met the enemy and he is us — by making it come true, literally so. Add to that the new laws hastily instituted everywhere criminalizing protest and “outing” anonymity. What is certain is that with all the damage it has caused in recent decades and as it goes on and on, the war on terrorism is a war fought in good conscience and hence the perfect war for the “guiltlessly guilty”: who thus can fight infinitely and without remorse.

And yet, and this is the full technological metal jacket. We do not stop there, we use other means, geological, meteorological means for waging war, and we pretend that we have no choice, we pretend that we need energy (although Anders pointed out that our perpetuation of our supposed need for energy was a calculated choice, a result of a politico-economic option to ignore the abundance of energy just for the economic sake and advantage of the strictures, the restrictions of pretended, affected, monetizable so-called limited resources that would then justify the utter destruction of the earth, water, air, everything. Obviously I am speaking of fracking but also deep sea drilling to go with the heedless destruction of the seas by industrializing fishing to reach proportions of the same apocalyptic force that is the theme of this essay.

“What is decisive,” as Adorno wrote, “is the absorption of biological destruction by conscious social will. Only a humanity to whom death has become as indifferent as its members, that has itself died, can inflict it

⁶³ See again, Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*. I discuss these points further in Babich, “Sloterdijk's Cynicism: Diogenes in the Marketplace” in: Stuart Elden, ed., *Sloterdijk Now* (Oxford: Polity, 2011), pp. 17-36 and pp. 186-189.

administratively on innumerable people.”⁶⁴ And I would, extend this, as Adorno also would, to animals, I would extend this, as Nietzsche would, to the earth itself. Our trouble, and hence our continued interest exactly in Eichmann — and not as Anders would say in “Eichmann’s sons,” for we are, all of, his children — where Eichmann is only *pars pro toto*, a word, a signifier for the story we tell ourselves that all our troubles in war, past and present, is always and only about the other: the Nazi, the Russian, the phantom Al Queda operative — like a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle, an invisible, omnipresent, opponent so convenient that we could hardly resist inventing him, and so we did. If civilian death and the destruction of human, individual habitations and the conditions of maintaining a life was always both deliberate and regretted and thus a problem in war and so a necessary evil in the case of Dresden, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, such deaths need no longer be regretted because they are no longer collateral. We send drones to kill civilians, we attack supposed ‘terrorist’ sites and cells and incidentally, having to search them out at night, kill and rape (it’s night) women, children, and so on. We listen to Žižek because we no longer have Baudrillard to make these points, not that scholars ever listened to Baudrillard in his lifetime. And indeed and for the same reasons, university scholars managed to pay no attention at all to Anders in his living years (why ever would we: just wait long enough and one can convert that attention into gold, that is: a university appointment of one’s own, which the younger scholars are already planning to set aside in their good time in favor of once, again, the next new thing, something with the word digital, or even better prefixed with a non- or an anti-).

Thus rather than reading Anders’ critique of the bomb as limited to a time we call the Atomic Age — as Anders himself varied Samuel Beckett’s 1957 *Endgame (Fin de partie)* as *Endzeit* that is “Endtime,”⁶⁵ here invoking the eschatological language of Jacob Taubes as Anders does — this essay connects his reflections on the bomb with his critique of technology and the obsolescence of humanity as of a piece with our dedication to hurling ourselves against our own mortality. This concern with the violence of technology, this hatred of the vulnerability of having been born and having been set on a path unto death (the mortal path that is the path of life) inspires Anders’ engagement with the sons of Eichmann — the heirs of those who designed and executed the Nazi death camps and extermination chambers of the Holocaust — and the sons of

⁶⁴ Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (London: Verso, 1997 [1974], p. 233).

⁶⁵ Anders, *Endzeit und Zeitenende: Gedanken über die atomare Situation* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1972 [1950]).

Claude Eatherly — the heirs of both those who designed and those who as pilots (banality of banality) deployed the bombings that exploded nothing but the stuff of the sun itself against the Empire of the Sun in the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We, embroiled as we are in wartime after wartime, suppressing public protest on a scale like never before, in country after country across the globe, cannot dispense with reflecting on that same legacy.

We stop short of bluntness and Anders was blunt. We need as much of that as we can get.