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# Günther Anders's *Epitaph for Aikichi Kuboyama*

Babette Babich

**Abstract:** Günther Anders's poem *Du kleiner Fischerman* is read here as a text contribution to the irruption that is violence and its enduring (omnipresent) aftermath. The essay includes a discussion of transmedial expression, including dramatization, or television and social media, text and subtext, as well as the inspiration of Anders's poem as a work of art continuing in our times: the ongoing exclusion(s) of certain names and certain thinkers as of certain musical modes, including electronic musical works, as of voices and of collective memory, or oblivion. Reading Raymond Williams along with Anders and Adorno on television updated in today's era of screen-being, this essay reads the challenges of on-line music magazines, Leonard Cohen and k.d.lang, between modes of memorialization, including a reading of Anders's poetic memorial on the violence of Walter Benjamin's death to conclude with Ivan Illich on the ongoing expropriation of death (and health) today.

**Key words:** Hydrogen bombs, Herbert Eimert, Raymond Williams, Ivan Illich, music

*Das wichtigste steht natürlich in den Anmerkungen.*

—Max Weber

Günther Anders includes two poems in his annotations to his 1956 book, *The Antiquatedness of Humanity*. The first, "The Fevered Columbus," is a paean to cosmic excess: the abundance of the universe for nothing and more nothing.<sup>1</sup> The second poem is included in a footnote appended to

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1. Günther Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen I. Über die Zerstörung des Lebens im Zeitalter der dritten industriellen Revolution* (Munich: Verlag C. W. Beck, 1980), 341–342; 346–347.

a text in which Anders reads violence in terms of what is and has been done: “The experiments succeed, the experimenting fails,”<sup>2</sup> on being and having: this that *is* done and this that *has been* done. More than anyone before him or since—and here I include Gabriel Marcel who took over Anders’s project as his own<sup>3</sup>—Anders thinks through *being*, past, and future in terms of *having* and its modalities. Meditating on a cascade of verbal auxiliaries throughout his work, not only in his 1928 *Über das Haben*, he reminds us in his 1980 book featuring a series of reflections on “Antiquatedness”: “‘Having’ was already ‘deployment.’ *Habere* is already *adhibere*.”<sup>4</sup> Anders takes the declination at the level of the word, the verb, parsing school logic as philosophical logic changed forever, so Anders writes, in the wake of the extermination camps in the third part of his book, on “the roots of our apocalypse blindness”:

There the lethal machines operated with absolute efficiency, leaving no uneconomical residues of life. There the venerable proposition, *All men are mortal*, had already become an understatement.<sup>5</sup>

In place of the classical mortal syllogism, we have what follows from what has been done which is to say from what in consequence *can* thus and *will* thus be done, articulated and articulable as now and henceforth given presuppositions: the logic of the proposition now without “understatement”: “All men are killable [*tötbar*].”<sup>6</sup> To this extent, the “nuclear experiments” of the post-war world become everyday affairs, barely noticed. And as unnoticed, Anders who stacks what has been done and what thus follows from the fact of this “having been” argues that quite by definition what was not then and is not now and will not *per impossible* in future be noted cannot function as any kind of deterrent but serves instead as palimpsest whereby what *can* be done becomes what *ought* to be done.<sup>7</sup>

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2. Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen I*, 256f.

3. Under the name he was born with, Günther Stern, Anders writes *Über das Haben. Sieben Kapitel zur Ontologie der Erkenntnis* (Bonn: Cohen, 1928). Marcel acknowledges his debt to Anders from the outset of *Être et avoir* (Paris: Fernand Aubier, 1935), in English as *Being and Having*, trans. Peter Smith (Westminster, UK: Dacre Press, 1949).

4. Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen I*, 334.

5. Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen II. Über die Seele im Zeitalter der zweiten industriellen Revolution* (Munich: Verlag C. W. Beck, 1956), 243.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Anders goes further to be sure as he points out that one can hardly deploy the bomb in the case of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in order to put pressure on the Soviet

Much of the moral tone of today's ongoing medical pandemic follows from what Anders analyses as the "maxim of the gadget [*Geräte*]."<sup>8</sup> For Anders, this programmatic maxim is the cybernetic heir to the Nietzschean rendering of Pindar's injunction, "become the one you are [*Werde der du bist*]." As a result, whatever *can be done must be done* as moral imperative and Anders adds that anyone who opposes this is "branded a luddite" [*Maschinenstürmer*, a titular allusion to Ernst Toller's 1923, *The Machine-Wreckers*], what Anders names a "reactionary," a technophobe. "And because nothing is easier than that, such branding always works."<sup>9</sup>

After the first two bombs had been dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki the ongoing deployment of atomic weapons were characterized not as the use of weapons per se but as "tests," just as in the case of the first July 16 Trinity explosion. Anders refused this "experimental" characterization for reasons of precision, pointing out that a test is (or ought to be, should be) different from deployment or use. For Anders, it ought not be possible to describe the consequences of the fall-out from such so-called "tests," such as "the first victim of the hydrogen bomb, the Japanese fisherman, Aikichi Kuboyama, who died in 1954" precisely where that same death was no "attempt" (the German has this clear ambiguity) but sheer, ontic fact.<sup>10</sup>

Anders reads the violence of the Second World War as a scattered, spreading, if often dissembled and typically disattended, violence: a violence that, having been done, continued to be done on an ongoing basis not only in Europe but also in the Pacific, particularly in and around Japan.<sup>11</sup> But there is more and the current author has been contributing to the growing literature on Anders, most recently with a book: *Günther Anders's Philosophy of Technology*, which is also a monograph on social phenomenology as on philosophical anthropology, as on music and literature.<sup>12</sup> This range alone, quite as Ernst Schraube writes, may make Anders diffi-

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Union, because the deployment vitiates statements of an if/then kind—as he argues.

8. Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen I*, 40.

9. *Ibid.*, 41.

10. *Ibid.*, 260.

11. See for a discussion of violence in a general foregrounding of Anders's thinking, the various contributions to Michaela Latini, Alessandra Sannella, and Alfredo Morelli, eds., *La grammatica della violenza Un'indagine a più voci* (Rome: Mimesis Edizioni, 2017).

12. Babette Babich, *Günther Anders's Philosophy of Technology: From Phenomenology to Critical Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

cult to read.<sup>13</sup> For Anders wrote between the traditions of phenomenology (Husserlian/Schelerian/Heideggerian) and critical theory; being himself a “founding” member, with Theodor Adorno and others, of the original Frankfurt School. A sense of this breadth is required to begin to unpack the complex contours of Anders’s thought, a thinking largely unreceived even within the philosophical tradition in which he wrote. That original historical tradition was the “continental” tradition, classically regarded, yet if the then-continental had (and if the current continental tradition has) its troubles reading/engaging Anders, this hardly augurs well for the more analytic modalities that constitute the greater part of university or academic philosophy. Additionally, so I argue, it may be useful to consider Anders’s absorption with a phenomenological sociology of music as he articulated this as a matter of affinity and not less: of privilege, permission, recognition, acknowledgment—elements central to what we today advocate as pluralism and diversity in the canon. But in addition qua phenomenological performative, Anders emphasizes, here not unlike Adorno, that there will be the question of the sort or kind of music we listen to, the music we favor or are willing to listen to, the music to which, even more significantly, we might dedicate an intellectual hearing, including the kind or sort of musical scholarship and here there is a clear analogy with philosophical kinds,<sup>14</sup> the style(s) of writing, the focus and the range, the names and the voices of the authors we read (or don’t read) or name (or fail to name). Specifically, Anders’s phenomenological analysis of music argued that participating in the “world” of music, performing, having an opinion or judgment about or even listening to music was a privilege some were permitted to have and from which others were excluded.

The musicologist and cultural theorist, Benjamin Steege has described Anders’s engagement with, serving as the original inspiration for, along with correspondence between the composer and the philosopher on an experimental, musical composition:<sup>15</sup>

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13. Ernst Schraube, “‘Torturing Things until They Confess’: Günther Anders’s Critique of Technology,” *Science as Culture*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2005): 77–85.

14. See, more broadly, on this analogy: Babich, “Are They Good? Are They Bad? Double Hermeneutics and Citation in Philosophy, Asphodel and Alan Rickman, Bruno Latour and the ‘Science Wars’” in: Paula Angelova, Andreev Jaassen, Emil Lessky, eds., *Das Interpretative Universum. Dimitri Ginev zum 60. Geburtstag gewidmet* (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 2017), 259–290.

15. See Benjamin Steege, “This is Not a Test: Listening with Günther Anders in the Nuclear Age” in Viktoria Tkaczyk, Mara Mills, and Alexandra Hui, eds., *Testing Hearing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 327–348.

*Epitaph für Aikichi Kuboyama* (1962) . . . a tape work by Herbert Eimert, composer, critic, and founder of the electronic music studio at West German Radio in Cologne.<sup>16</sup>

Like Anders, Eimert was himself a student of Max Scheler as well as a composer and a theorist, expert in atonal and electronic, experimental music. Eimert began work on the composition in 1957 directly after the appearance of Anders's book on the *Antiquatedness of Humanity*.<sup>17</sup> This direct efficacy, as this is part of what Gadamer called *Wirkungsgeschichte*, should be underscored along with its complexity over time and its original obliquity, drawn from an endnote, as most readers tend to overlook the ancillary parts of a book: front matter, emendations, annotations.

In other formats, compounding the challenge, readers rarely read footnotes or follow links in academic writing, quite in spite of the hype associated with hypertext from some years ago, hype now lost in the seamless life that is social media. By contrast, links adumbrate social media, a matter of screen-being as it were, the superficialities of a life lived online, distraction compounded by distraction, to quote Raymond Williams: "distraction by distraction from distraction"<sup>18</sup>

The Williams quote is often repeated, sometimes without context, from his 1975 inaugural lecture as the first Professor of Drama at Cambridge University: "Drama in a Dramatised Society." Also included in a collection of Williams's essays, *On Television*,<sup>19</sup> Williams's focus is less television *per se* or the medium—the kind of thing Gerry Mander writes about rather more incisively in his *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*,<sup>20</sup> and Neil Postman rather more presciently, starting with his title *Amusing Ourselves to Death*<sup>21</sup>—than it is a sociological-cum-anthropological reflection in *medias res*, given the same California that struck Anders, Adorno and other expatriate members of the original Frankfurt School who found themselves

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16. Steege in Tkaczyk, Mills, and Hui, eds., *Testing Hearing*, 355. For an explication, note the 1:28 min track: "About the techniques used in 'Epitaph for Aikichi Kuboyama': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4SNaDWXDjDY>."

17. Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen I*, 346–347.

18. Raymond Williams, *Drama in a Dramatised Society: An Inaugural Lecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 5.

19. The text is reprinted, as excerpt, in Williams, *On Television* (London: Routledge, 2013 [1989]).

20. Gerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 1978).

21. Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking, 1985).

exactly there. Now *California*, as the song tells us, *is a state of mind*; that same state of mind in which many of us have grown up and in which state we still and currently find ourselves, more so, perhaps, given Lockdown (off again, on again) as it is also the enabling condition for the same.

Williams reflects on the backwards and forwards ubiquity of television, and Anders makes a similar point as does Adorno, concerning what that ubiquity or omnipresence does to society. Williams underscores that “drama, in quite new ways, is built into the rhythms of everyday life.”<sup>22</sup> In 1957, Adorno, here writing in English, invokes English literary theory to highlight the market:

the archetypes of present popular culture were set comparatively early in the development of middle-class society—at about the turn of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries in England. According to the studies of the English sociologist Ian Watt, the English novels of that period, particularly the works of Defoe and Richardson, marked the beginning of an approach to literary production that consciously created, served, and finally controlled a “market.”<sup>23</sup>

For Anders, in a text that likewise appeared in English (in 1956):

In the days before the cultural faucets of radio and television had become standard equipment, the Smiths and the Millers used to throng the motion picture theaters where they collectively consumed the stereotyped mass products manufactured for them.<sup>24</sup>

Anders emphasizes the fractionization, individualization, isolation of what had been *social* life where Williams adverts to the shift as such to the suffusion of the banal, the everyday, quite opposed to the exceptionality of *fest qua fest* (as Nietzsche notes this and as Gadamer also foregrounds in his *The Relevance of the Beautiful*). Author of *Drama: From Ibsen to Eliot*,<sup>25</sup> Williams means the everydayness of the transition from the “festive extraordinary” to “ordinary absorption.” Hence in his Cambridge lecture, Williams can start with the theatrical rites of the ancient Dionysia (oblique to, as Nietzsche reminds us, the life and time of the *polis*) and the medieval mystery play,

22. Williams, *Drama in a Dramatised Society*, 5.

23. Theodor Adorno, “Television and the Patterns of Mass Culture” in Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, eds., *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America* (London: Collier Macmillan, 1957), 474–488, here: 475.

24. Anders, “The World as Phantom and Matrix,” *Dissent* 3.1 (1956): 14–24, here: 14.

25. Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965).

in order to track the change “from honouring Dionysus or Christ to taking in a show.”<sup>26</sup> At stake is the aesthetic concern with “critical discrimination,” then a concern with high art/low art, but which Williams refused to reduce to such value-weighting schemes. Instead, casually omitting a mention of hermeneutics, the word being too long for anyone other than Walter Ong or Northrop Frye, it was for Williams a matter of where one finds oneself, parked, as one is for hours on hours, in front of the TV, where we find ourselves with our screens today—it is a direct evolution, no detours, online, wired or wireless—constantly connected. To the question, *Where do you find yourself?* Williams answers: “It depends where you ask that question from.”<sup>27</sup> This *where* turns out to be that “state of mind” Williams names, with reference to:

contemporary California, where you can watch your first movie at six-thirty in the morning and if you really try can see seven or eight more before you watch the late movie in the next recurrent small hours. Fiction; acting; idle dreaming and various spectacle; the simultaneous satisfaction of sloth and appetite; distraction from distraction by distraction. It is a heavy, even a gross catalogue of our errors, but now millions of people are sending the catalogue back, unopened. Till the eyes tire, millions of us watch the shadows of shadows and find them substance; watch scenes, situations, actions, exchanges, crises.<sup>28</sup>

Clearly “binge watching” is no recent phenomenon. But how could it ever have been, just given that television or other screens served and serve as the soundtrack and visual backdrop for contemporary lives from childhood onward? Williams echoes Adorno’s and Eisler’s reflections which they set in between the lines in their reflections on the co-option of composers (they do not mention theorists) by the same cultural industry in *Composing for the Films*.<sup>29</sup> The artist does not change Hollywood. And for Anders it is not quite a matter of the composer or the director or the individual charged (as Adorno was, as Williams was) with providing “advisory” or consulting input to the culture industry. Much rather, Anders was concerned with the “invention” of the mass consumer not *en masse*, buying anything that can be imagined in a shopper’s paradise, but as targeted eater, consumer of just

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26. Williams, *Drama in a Dramatised Society*, 5.

27. *Ibid.*, 6.

28. *Ibid.*, 6–7.

29. Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947).



and only what there is to consume (to “buy”) and nothing else. The manufacturer, Anders observes (think of Apple or Tesla):

does not want all of his customers to consume one and the same product, he wants all of his customers to buy identical products on the basis of an identical demand which has also to be produced.”<sup>30</sup>

Thus focusing on the need to produce this “identical demand,” Anders takes note of something different when it comes to culture delivered via television or radio or what have you—permitting the extension of Anders’s insights alongside those of Jean Baudrillard on today’s media—namely, the social elimination of mass experience *per se*. Thus Anders, invoking then current sociology of crowds with reference to Gustav le Bon, argues that sociological tactics or “stage directions” for dictators, as Anders puts it, are increasingly irrelevant: “No method of depersonalizing man, of depriving him of his human powers, is more effective than one which seems to preserve the freedom of the person and the rights of individuality.”<sup>31</sup>

As Anders argues, parallel to Williams’s reflexivity which may be captured with a reference to Nietzsche’s aphorism on the abyss that looks back into the subject gazing into the abyss:

it is through the consumption of mass commodities that mass men are produced. This implies that the consumer of the mass commodity becomes, through his consumption, one of the workers contributing to his own transformation into a mass man. In other words, consumption and production coincide.<sup>32</sup>

In other words, what is invented is the *consumer*: “And this production takes place wherever consumption takes place—in front of each radio, in front of each television set.”<sup>33</sup>

Thereby, Anders highlights the investment Williams details in terms of time (“if you really try,” as Williams puts it, detailing the time commitment entailed by binge watching), namely that the consumer, this is where Anders speaks of his “eaters,” pay for the privilege of consumption (and as a useful “eater,” Anders’s term of preference, why should the eater not pay)? The niggling detail is that the consumer consumes at the command of the manufacturer and serves quite by consuming as part of the same “man-

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30. Anders, “The World as Phantom and Matrix,” 14.

31. *Ibid.*, 16.

32. *Ibid.*, 15.

33. *Ibid.*, 14.

ufactured" good ("you are the product" as many analyses of surveillance capitalism and big data have told us):

To complete the paradox, the homemaker, instead of receiving wages for his work, must pay for it by buying the means of production (the receiving sets and, in many countries, also the broadcasts) by the use of which he becomes transformed into mass man. In other words, he pays for selling himself: he must purchase the very unfreedom he himself helps to produce.<sup>34</sup>

Where do we find ourselves today?

In and out of lockdown, a heretofore unprecedented notion in the lifetime of humanity or more immediately, in terms of our visceral persons, in terms of our physiognomy set into the ethers of transmissions of all kinds, electromagnetically and physiologically speaking, with or without attention to microwaves, cell shocked and connective tissue hardened, sclera annealed, additives of all kinds in our air, our water, our food, the new antigen tests, the PCR tests, the mRNA and viral vector vaccines seriatim, blue light, attention captivated, as we are, practically, performatively, really now real. To go back to the question of Eimert's composition inspired, following a footnote reference to a connecting annotation, in Eimert's case to Anders's poem, or, following any reference, typically, when we read a book or an essay, readers might note an illustration and sometimes not even that. This text-focused habitus makes the emphasis on margins and the affirmation/denial of *hors-texte* seductive as it allows us to pretend that we are taking account of things we do not actually take account of in today's era of downloaded PDFs, eBooks, "flowing" text, where we have no sense of the actual book itself, its weight or "voluminosity," its pages, printed or not, front or back matter. The current essay is an essay about such backmatter but that means that we are talking of self-imposed blinders, as Homer made the point not with Polyphemus who could barely see to begin with before being blinded by Odysseus but using the metaphor of hearing/non-hearing, speaking, Nietzsche quotes this, of the "stopped up ears" indispensable for the oarsmen who took Odysseus past his sirens so that he alone might, this is the spiritual ancestor of "distraction from distraction," have his cake [this is the siren's song] and eat it too [this is musical delectation, listening to a sound alluring-unto-death], while all-too prosaically saving his life at the same time). All this and the absence of examples such as one might have these in the context of a master class, makes writing on or referring to mu-

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34. *Ibid.*, 16.

sic a challenge. It is worse when it comes to the so-called “new” music, it is (arguably) still worse when it comes to experimental, electronic music.

I speak from some experience. I recall the preliminary (experimental) text that eventually became *The Hallelujah Effect*,<sup>35</sup> which originally appeared in an online music magazine, *Perfect Sound Forever*.<sup>36</sup> Whatever readers this text had had already self-selected as musically attuned: as those in the know (those listening to “Perfect Sound Forever”). The essay began with distraction: a link to the k.d. lang music video I was analysing in order to talk about musical and acoustic priming and thence to the Frankfurt School and to Beethoven in order to get to Nietzsche’s Greeks. For this same reason, this link/distraction could virtually guarantee that no one who managed to find the online essay would ever return to read the essay in any or all of its range, as a text which only took (as *terminus a quo*) a music video that was itself a “cover”<sup>37</sup> of another performer/composer, Leonard Cohen, incomparable, as I was trying to argue that he was, in order to argue that the ancient Greeks might not be the cliché affair that we assume, an argument Nietzsche had insisted upon only to be ignored in his turn and still. What was certain in my hermeneutic judgment of the likelihood of having readers for such a text (Nietzsche had a more erudite articulation for the same complaint, *non legor, non legar*) was that reading would have to take a backseat, as well it might, to the music.

Eimert’s “realization for the ear” to speak in the musical tone of a Kepler or a Kircher—philosophically that would be the legacy of Plato’s *Myth of Er*—offers the listener a sounding-out of Anders’s textual (or musical) “invention” of his *Epitaph for Aikichi Kuboyama*. In this way, Eimert’s 23 minute, three-part, electronic musical tape work, including voice recordings and sound cuts, layers and remixes, and all the resources of a radio broadcast studio (as musical instrumentum), composed/compiled 1957–1962, retrains Anders’s (self-described) “grave inscription.”<sup>38</sup> To be clear, and

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35. Babich, *The Hallelujah Effect: Music, Performance Practice, and Technology* (London: Routledge, 2016 [2013]).

36. Babich, “The Birth of kd lang’s *Hallelujah* out of the ‘Spirit of Music’: Performing Desire and “Recording Consciousness on Facebook and YouTube.” *Perfect Sound Forever. online music magazine*—Oct/Nov 2011. <http://www.furious.com/perfect/kdlang.html>. Accessed 13 September 2021.

37. For a critical phenomenology of the musical cover, see Babich, “Musical ‘Covers’ and the Culture Industry: From Antiquity to the Age of Digital Reproducibility,” *Research in Phenomenology* 48.3 (2018): 385–407.

38. See, for discussion, again of the dynamic between Eimert and Anders, Steege, “This is Not a Test.”

Steege repeats this emphasis for the sake of that clarity, critical as reading Anders is soaked in the gnomic, hence my reference to Plato's ideal music, the epitaph is actually engraved nowhere on any grave or monument. Set as distal note to page 296 in the annotations (346–347) to Anders's 1956 *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*,<sup>39</sup> Anders's there-inscribed epitaph for Aikichi Kuboyama commemorates the Japanese radio officer on the fishing boat who later died of radiation poisoning in the aftermath of the Bikini Atoll hydrogen bomb test on March 1, 1954, i.e., in the fall-out from, the wake of, complications from the detonation: a matter of coincidental, "collateral" damage. But anything that takes weeks or months is typically discounted and to this day, Kuboyama's death at the age of 40 on September 23, 1954, is attributed to some other cause than the explosion of a bomb a thousand times more deadly than the bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima. Indeed: in today's age of the still-ongoing pandemic, we are used to official denials of causation. And, as Edward Teller said of Kuboyama, without calling him by name: "It's unreasonable to make such a big deal over the death of a fisherman."<sup>40</sup>

The YouTube video of Eimert's composition, *Epitaph for Aikichi Kuboyama*, is worth seeing/hearing in a musical/musicological context, quite in a phenomenological sense and may, if we make the effort to hear it, teach us to listen, through echoes and repetitions, as the composition itself is also layered and composed, again and again.<sup>41</sup>

Note here the title of Anders's study of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, set at the centre of his 1956 book on the "antiquatedness" of the human: "*Sein ohne Zeit. Zu Beckett's Stück 'En attendant Godot.'*" The title, "Being Without

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39. As Anders says in his own annotation, "quoting" what is accordingly, shades of Plato, not quite a quote and which Anders also gives away as not quite-quoting, underscoring the indirect sourcing of his account according to a certain source: "*nach*" "(after *Sydney Chronicle*, 3 March 1955.)" See Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, 347.

40. Cited in Michael Hoffman's review of *The Day the Sun Rose in the West*, a survivor's account written by Matashichi Oishi, a crewmember of *The Lucky Dragon* fishing trawler (Fikuryumarū No. 5). See Hoffman, "Forgotten Atrocity of the Atomic Age," *The Japan Times*, Aug 28, 2011.

41. Herbert Eimert: *Epitaph für Aikichi Kuboyama* (1960–1962) 1/3: <https://youtu.be/ENlzdZ5Hl2c>; Herbert Eimert: *Epitaph für Aikichi Kuboyama* (1960–1962) 2/3: <https://youtu.be/6jnZpAO1tFA>; Herbert Eimert: *Epitaph für Aikichi Kuboyama* (1960–1962) 3/3: <https://youtu.be/IX-kSRr1rcg>. Accessed 12 September 2021 See too, without background images, together with *Sechs Studien*, the 2012 WERGO Studio Reihe edition of Herbert Eimert, Leopold von Knobelsdorff, *Epitaph Für Aikichi Kuboyama, Sechs Studien*, likewise on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/Assb5zhHIXg>. Accessed 13 September 2021.

Time,” foregrounds Heidegger, via Anders’s reflections on *having* and its modalities, an allusion continuing in the chapter’s focus on deity, the holy, that is also modernity’s self-preoccupation, no matter whether one begins with Nietzsche or takes a step back to Hölderlin or Meister Eckhart or Jacob Böhme—it depends on how you take your mysticism—with the death or flight or absence of God.

For Anders, it will make a difference to have proceeded in the decades after Nietzsche’s death in 1900 to think the death of God in spite of the theological detail that it is this death that inaugurates the Christian era. A keen student of phenomenologically informed, hermeneutically informed social anthropology, Anders writes, and note his style, note his voice in its several registers as he, the son of the psychologists William Stern and Clara Stern, psychoanalyzes these same authors, be it:

Rilke, or Kafka, or Beckett—their religious experience springs, paradoxically, always from religious frustration, from the fact that they do not experience God, and thus paradoxically from an experience they share with unbelief. In Rilke this experience springs from the inaccessibility of God (the first *Duino* elegy); in Kafka from inaccessibility in a search (*The Castle*); in Beckett from inaccessibility in the act of waiting. For all of them the demonstrations of God’s existence can be formulated as: “He does not come, therefore He is.” “Parousia does not occur, therefore He exists.” Here the negativity we know from “negative theology” seems to have affected the religious experience itself—thereby intensifying it immensely: while in negative theology, it was merely the *absence of attributes* that was being used to define God, here *God’s absence itself* is made into a proof of His being. That this is true of Rilke and Kafka is undeniable; likewise that Heidegger’s dictum which he borrows from Hölderlin—“for where danger is growing, rescue is growing, too”—belongs to the same type of “*proof ex absentia*.”<sup>42</sup>

The reflection is a reflection on the *shadows* of the divine: this is negative theology: “*God’s absence itself* is made into a proof of His being.” And of course because this is Anders’s reflection, it is at the same time a critical theoretical reflection on technology as on history and dominion as Anders goes on to parse Hegel’s vision of the “motor of history” by way of the Kojévian disposition whereby the individual might be elevated beyond Abrahamic walking *with/being before* deity, not incomparable to the titanic

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42. Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, 215–254. Translated into English in 1965 as “Being Without Time: On Beckett’s Play *Waiting for Godot*” in: Martin Esslin, ed., *Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1965), 140–151.

ideal of Prometheus, defeated, as Anders claims, by Hegel's agonistic symbolism whereby, henceforward (here I cite the English translation):

“Man” is now seen as a *pair of men*; that the individual (who, as a metaphysical self-made man, had fought a Promethean struggle against the Gods) has now been replaced by *men* who fight *each other* for domination. It is *they* who are now regarded as *reality*; for “to be” now means “to dominate” and to struggle for domination; and they alone are seen as the “motor of time”: for time is history; and history, in the eyes of dialectical philosophy, owes its movement exclusively to antagonism (between man and man or class and class); so exclusively, that at the moment when these antagonisms came to an end, history itself would cease, too.<sup>43</sup>

At stake are/would be *titanic* struggles, especially if, as Anders says with some unmarked irony, we manage not to die, especially as Anders gives this Aeschylean account of Beckett's drama, revised for the post-Hegelian, post-Marxian mind. No such “titanism” is in evidence in the context of the poem Anders adds to commemorate what has taken place in the case of the death of Aikichi Kuboyama, not merely, as Peter Sloterdijk reminds us down to the details of what can and what cannot be said (Sloterdijk notes that to advert even to the fact of the deployment of the bomb was prohibited in post war Japan),<sup>44</sup> but more critically concerned with what continues to continue. Thus bombs, fracking, pollution, 4G, 5G, facts about lockdown, masks, vaccines, all of this continues apace, etc.

Earlier, I noted Herbert Eimert's electronic composition inspired by Anders's poem set into his endnotes: *Inscription auf dem Gedenkstein für dieses erste Opfer der Wasserstoffbombe in Batavia*. [Inscription on the memorial stone for this first victim of the hydrogen bomb in Batavia (currently: Jakarta)].<sup>45</sup> Anders emphasized that this ought to be so commemorated that we might come to know it backwards and forwards: *wir wollen ihn auswendig lernen*, or as Steege renders it: “by heart.”

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43. Anders, “Being Without Time,” 149–150.

44. I discuss this as “occupation censorship” in connection with Anders in Babich, *Günther Anders's Philosophy of Technology*, 216f. See Sloterdijk, *Terror from the Air* (Cambridge: Semiotexte/MIT Press, 2002).

45. Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, 346. The note number: 260, corresponds to the page in the text where Anders addresses the non-experimental nature and the misleading technical rhetoric used to describe and used to preclude and prohibit discussion of the effects of such “experiments,” which are already dispersed not on a “trial” but on a real and continuing basis, contaminating “air, sea, rainwater, earth, the botanical world, the animal world, the human world” (*ibid.*, 260) quite along with food-stuffs and so on.

Anders's poem, here citing Steege's translation, reads as follows:

You little fisherman,  
 we don't know whether you had merits.  
 (Where would we be if everyone had merits?)  
 But you had worries like us,  
 like us, somewhere the graves of your parents,  
 somewhere, on the shore, a woman who waited for you,  
 and at home, the children who ran to meet you.  
 Despite your worries  
 you found it good to be there.  
 Just like us. And you were right, Aikichi Kuboyama  
 You little fisherman,  
 even if your foreign name does not tell of merit,  
 let us learn it by heart for our brief term  
 Aikichi Kuboyama.  
 As a word for our disgrace  
 Aikichi Kuboyama.  
 As our warning call  
 Aikichi Kuboyama.  
 But also,  
 Aikichi Kuboyama,  
 as the name of our hope: For whether you  
 preceded us in your dying or only  
 departed in our stead—  
 that depends only on us, even today,  
 only on us, your brothers,  
 Aikichi Kuboyama.<sup>46</sup>

Later, in June of 1979, Anders concludes his foreword to his second volume on humanity in the era of its techno-industrial “destruction” with a quote from Max Weber, here repeated above, as epigraph: “The most important things, naturally, are in the annotations.”<sup>47</sup>

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46. Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, 346–347, this translation cited from Steege, “This is Not a Test,” 335–336. See too Émilie Tardivel, “Vivre sans la peur. Éloge de la conscience apocalyptique” in *De quoi avons-nous peur?* (2018), 77–93.

47. Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen II*, 14.

I have been emphasising the placement of the poem in *The Antiquatedness of Humanity*.<sup>48</sup> Reading it, we may believe we see the reasons Eimert could have found this text compelling for his tone-speech tape composition. Listening to it, as I have sought to recommend, just as Steege also recommends,<sup>49</sup> is surely better.

But the poem is complicated and not merely because it is a memorial poem by a stranger (someone “other”) for a stranger (someone “other”), and not merely because Anders treated memorial compositions with a certain bluntness that is of a piece with his style. Thus we can compare a parenthesis found in Anders more “familiar” commemorative legacy “*Das Vermächtnis*,” written in memory of Anders’s cousin, Walter Benjamin, a shock intervention in the middle of a memorial word, a defense against the imposition of common presumption:

(Keiner  
trat selbst durchs Tor. Sie werden  
über die Schwelle geschoben)

[(No one / steps of themselves though the gateway. They were / shoved over the threshold.)]

Anders’s words for Benjamin redeem what is otherwise colloquially, thoughtlessly said: here, quite as in every case like it, there is no such thing as suicide, no “self”-murder.

Writing of Aikichi Kuboyama, Anders reminds us that we are “brothers” to Aikichi Kuboyama, *let his name be a memory*, and as “brothers,” using Anders’s stylized rhetoric, *let his name be a blessing*, his name can be “the name of our hope.” And still, we are hardly let off lightly. Indeed, we are not let off at all: Anders catches us, to the discomfit of many of his would-be readers, by his style, his *otherness*, his indiscriminate pronouns: Anders names *us*—*all of us* and not *some of us*—as so many, many, *sons* of Eichmann.

This inclusiveness is perhaps even harder in the current “pandemic,” a time even more “experimental,”<sup>50</sup> than the “tests” that caught one individual

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48. “Obsolescence” as this is sometimes translated is misleading and Anders himself insists that the term belongs to Ernst Bloch.

49. Steege, “This is Not a Test,” 336–337.

50. *Ibid.*, cited above, foregrounds the experimental for Anders and beyond in its historical breadth both with reference to experiments as such in science as in art and culture.



(this is an utter understatement) on one unprepared fishing trawler.<sup>51</sup> Thus Anders writes of the first *and* second *and* third industrial revolutions.<sup>52</sup> And, today, to use Williams's question once again, *where do we find ourselves?* We know the answer, especially in the era of "the great reset": we find ourselves today living in (and on the terms of) the fourth industrial revolution.

It seems evident that Anders found himself in the same era as he speaks as a prophet along with Ivan Illich in his own *Medical Nemesis*. A native of the same Vienna where Anders lived the greater part of his life and where Anders died, Illich (1926–2002) was not known for a lack of provocation, which may be the reason Illich's book remains timely and may also be the reason it remains unread, except in fits and starts, bits and quotes. *Medical Nemesis* is a book on the "expropriation" (to use the very Heideggerian, very Andersian language Illich takes up with reference to neither thinker, as he takes over or "covers" the word in his own voice, for his own purposes in writing the "expropriation of health" and "of death").<sup>53</sup> By saying that Illich does not refer to Heidegger or Anders, I would not care to claim that Illich was unaware of these references (Illich, famous for his own footnotes in *In the Vineyard of the Text*,<sup>54</sup> is just as scrupulous in leaving out certain references) but I think it safe to say that Illich means something else thereby.

A Catholic priest by vocation and dedication throughout his life, as a man less than convinced of the death of God (so unlike Anders), Illich knew that it is less our own *life* that is taken from us in our fear of death and our fear of dying (which is on Illich's account the reason we submit to

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51. This is inaccurate or a matter of spin. Daisuke Akimoto notes that it not just one "fisherman" and not just one fishing trawler but, and much rather, a more difficult to assess number of boats and corresponding victims: "As many as 856 Japanese vessels in the area were damaged and contaminated by the end of 1954." *Japan's Nuclear Identity and its Implications for Nuclear Abolition* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 20. Akimoto goes on to point out that this number must be increased even more given that there were a total of 67 such tests, meaning that fisherman and the inhabitants of the Marshall islands suffered the consequences in terms of stillbirths and deformities, illnesses and thyroid disorders.

52. Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen II*, 15ff.

53. Illich uses both phrases in his *Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976).

54. Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996 [1991]). See for a discussion with specific reference to Nietzsche and philology, my "Weinberg und Rhythmus: Ivan Illich, Friedrich Nietzsche—und Harry Potter" in Babich, *Nietzsches Plastik. Ästhetische Phänomenologie im Spiegel des Lebens* (Oxford/Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021), 283–314.

medicalisation despite the limitations of what it actually offers us—as even painkillers, so Illich reminds us, are abstemiously dispensed, even when suffering from morbid illness, even in hospital) but our own death.

For this reason, Illich, reflecting on death, reminds us of the danger that is the nemesis of *Medical Nemesis*—speaking of “black magic”<sup>55</sup> as of illusion and sleight of hand in the midst of high science.<sup>56</sup> What had been human dignity and freedom, the soul's salvation, as he (and not only he) regarded it, is thereby *expropriated*: taken over from one. Relieved of one's agency, what is sacrificed is the idea that one's own health *and* one's own death are one's own to live *and* to suffer.

Anders's elegy for Aikichi Kuboyama tells us of the struggles of life and the redemption that is not based on merit: “(Where would we be if everyone had merits?).” Thus Williams quotes Rilke's definition of ‘fame,’ the same ‘fame’ about which Hannah Arendt writes in the case of Benjamin: “‘Fame,’ said Rilke, “is the sum of misunderstanding which gathers about a new name.”<sup>57</sup>

And how shall we speak of the old names? The names we ablate, the names we trivialize, names we have forgotten or never noticed to begin with? For Anders, who also emphasizes the concrete, ordinary body, there is also the redemption of ordinary things and ordinary life for those otherwise undistinguished: *Trotz deine Mühen* [Despite your troubles] / *fandest du es gut da zu sein*. [you found it good to be there] / *Genau wie wir*. [Just like us] . . .<sup>58</sup>

Just like us.

### Acknowledgements

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55. Illich, *Medical Nemesis*, 107f.

56. I discuss this with reference to Heidegger, Illich and nursing philosophy in Babich, “Ivan Illich's *Medical Nemesis* and the ‘Age of the Show’: On the Expropriation of Death.” *Nursing Philosophy* 19.1 (2018), 1–14.

57. Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot*, 41.

58. Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, 346.