

HUMAN RIGHTS IN FILMS: A THOUGHT EXPERIMENT ON A THEORETICAL BASIS

Filmlerde İnsan Hakları: Teorik Temelde Düşünsel Bir Deney

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Abstract

The main questions of this article could be described as follows. Firstly, how can films contribute to a definition of the 'human' as the subject of human rights discourse? Secondly, how do films help us to understand human feelings in humanitarian catastrophes, such as the Holocaust? In the first chapter, we will attempt to analyse the effect of films on our understanding of the world and also our perceptions of life on the basis of the definition of a human in light of some contemporary scholars, such as John Berger, Jean Epstein and a visual artist named Hito Steyerl. Moreover, in this chapter, we will attempt to demonstrate how films may contribute to our definition of a human in a practical way through a film by Godfrey Reggio, called Koyaanisqatsi. The second chapter will discuss the second question, which is concerned with how films make it easier to understand human feelings in criminal cases, such as those involving the Holocaust, with the main focus being on the Eichmann case. Finally, in light of the first two chapters, we will attempt to answer the question, what is a human rights film from a theoretical perspective?

Keywords: Human Rights, Film, Human, John Berger, Hito Steyerl, Jean Epstein, Koyaanisqatsi

Özet

Bu makalenin iki temel sorusu vardır: ilk olarak, filmler insan hakları söyleminin konusu olarak 'insanın' tanımına nasıl katkıda bulunur ve ikincisi, filmler Holokost gibi insani felaketlerdeki insani duyguları anlamamıza nasıl yardımcı olur? Birinci bölümde, filmlerin dünyayı anlayışımıza ve John Berger, Jean Epstein ve Hito Steyerl gibi çağdaş düşünürler ve sanatçılar ışığında bir kavram olarak insanın tanımına dayanarak hayat algısı üzerinde nasıl bir rol oynadığına dair bir analiz yapmaya çalışacağız. Ayrıca bu bölümde, Godfrey Reggio'nun Koyaanisqatsi filmi üzerinden, filmlerin bir kavram olarak 'insan' tanımımızda nasıl rol oynadığını pratik olarak da göstermeye çalışacağız. İkinci bölümde, ikinci soru üzerinde durularak, filmlerin ceza davalarında insanların duygu ve hislerini anlamaya nasıl yardımcı olabileceğini, ünlü Nazi soykırım davası Eichmann üzerinden anlatmaya çalışacağız. Son olarak, ilk iki bölüm ışığında insan hakları filmi teorik perspektiften nedir sorusuna cevap vermeye çalışacağız.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İnsan Hakları, Film, İnsan, John Berger, Hito Steyerl, Jean Epstein, Koyaanisqatsi

Introduction

The concept of human rights is a subject of discussion for many people, from social activists to leaders of governments. This concept has a wide scope and gives rise to varied and sometimes strongly debated discourses and

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practices. However, there is no a unique definition of this term. Rather it can be defined in various ways according to the field of study.³ In some cases, this term may be regarded as having a completely legal meaning and also as an institutional entity. In this sense human rights are part of the constitutional text and international conventions and are discussed in courts or international organisations. On the other hand, human rights may be seen as involving subjective aspects and they are discussed in moral philosophy or other human sciences.⁴ Moreover, in terms of the subjective aspects, the main function of human rights is to ensure that the individual is a subject of law. In other words, in this sense, the “human” as a concept may be identified with the concept of “rights” in that the human can be the human because rights help the creation of human identity. In the light of these matters, it can be noted that human rights provide a conceptual framework by which it is possible to discuss the relationship between a legal category and the ontological level of constructing a human. Although there are different definitions of human rights from different disciplines, very basically Human Rights term is defined as: Human rights are, literally, the rights that one has simply as a human being. As such they are equal rights, because we are all equally human beings. They are also inalienable rights, because no matter how inhumanely we act or are treated we cannot become other than human beings.⁵ At this point, films, as a part of art, can provide unique opportunities to understand the definition of the human in the context of human rights and also modern conditions.

The invention of cinematography has suddenly shifted our perception of the world in terms of our perception of time, place and reality. The cinema does not just present images, it surrounds them with a world.⁶ For instance, before cinematography, our perception of time could not return to its source; namely, we may not change the time into the past. However, cinematography characterises a world in which we travel from its end to its beginning.⁷ Furthermore, modern technological developments pave the way for reproducibility and this leads to our perspective of life and our way of perceiving the environment being altered.⁸ As expected the law cannot recover from these shifts because the subject of law, namely the human, is affected in many ways. Paradoxically, cinematography and its usage, namely film, on

³ Costas Douzinas, *Human Rights And Empire* (1st edn., Routledge-Cavendish 2007), p.14

⁴ Ibid, p.14

⁵ Donnelly, J. ‘Human Rights, Democracy, and Development’, *Human Rights Quarterly* 21 (1999) 608-632, p.612

⁶ Deleuze, G. *Cinema 2 The Time-Image* Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Caleta, University of Minnesota Press, (SO Minneapolis), p.68

⁷ Jean Epstein and Christophe Wall-Romana, *The Intelligence Of A Machine* (1st edn., University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

⁸ John Berger, *Ways Of Seeing* (1st edn, Penguin 2008).

the one hand, provide us with a unique perspective of aspects of the world and, on the other hand, easily manipulate us through constructing a sort of illusion. In the context of understanding the definition of a human we should be aware of the negative side of films, which may manipulate and corrupt us through the technical opportunities that cinematography may offer and also montages.

In light of these issues, the main question areas that this Article is concerned are as follows. Firstly, how can films contribute to a definition of the 'human' as the subject of human rights discourse? Secondly, how do films help us to understand human feelings in humanitarian catastrophes, such as the Holocaust? In the first chapter, we are trying to analyse the effect of films on our understanding of the world and also our perceptions of life on the basis of the definition of a human in light of some contemporary scholars, such as John Berger, Jean Epstein and a visual artist named Hito Steyerl. Moreover, in this chapter, we endeavour to demonstrate how films may contribute to our definition of a human in a practical way through a film by Godfrey Reggio, called *Koyaanisqatsi*.⁹ The second chapter will discuss the second question, which is concerned with how films make it easier to understand human feelings in criminal cases, such as those involving the holocaust, with the main focus being on the Eichmann case. Finally, in light of the first two chapters, we will attempt to answer the question, what is a human rights film from a theoretical perspective?

1. Film and its Potential for a Definition of the "Human"

To discuss films in terms of the definition of a human, it is essential that the meaning and significance of images is examined. However, to achieve this, we must also be aware of the impact of technology on images. In this sense, Berger provides us with a framework by which we may examine how technology and inventions affect, on the one hand, our way of seeing and, on the other hand, our perception of self, because, according to Berger, provided that we can understand "how we are seeing the world", we also discover something regarding ourselves.¹⁰

Human beings have always needed to communicate with each other, and throughout this process, meanings are conveyed to one person from another. Meaning is the main purpose of this communication. The process of conveying meaning can be realised through various means, such as words. According to Berger, "seeing comes before words"¹¹, because seeing establishes our

⁹ 'Koyaanisqatsi' (En.wikipedia.org, 2017) <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koyaanisqatsi>> accessed 26 April 2017.

¹⁰ John Berger, *Ways Of Seeing* (1st edn, Penguin 2008).

¹¹ Ibid.

environment in the surrounding world. In other words, meaning may be conveyed through images. Every visible object represents a certain meaning. However, these meanings depend on our habits and traditions; that is, how we see is affected by our beliefs and knowledge. Furthermore, we cannot see just one thing; rather we always see different things and their relationships between not only each other but also ourselves. Additionally, once we can see, we may be aware that we can also be seen and are part of the visible world.¹² The process of seeing is more primary than the process of speaking because spoken dialogue attempts to verbalise something to explain how we appear to others. But, seeing is the founding element of this dialogue. In literature there is idea that a rich variety of media are needed for learning conversations, embodying symbol systems as diverse as photographs, animated scientific diagrams, maps, mathematical notations, graphs, text and films.¹³ In brief, how we see is a crucial part of our understanding of self and our perceptions of life. Therefore, if someone controls and manipulate images and their meanings through technological devices, such as the camera, we can be affected in many ways because we have a unique relation with the meaning of the images. In this case, it is crucial to explore the answer of the question, how does technology affect how we see?

In a traditional way of seeing, namely the perspective, everything is gathered in the eye of the spectator and this is how "reality" is created by these appearances. All images combine in the eye so that the vanishing point of infinity and the visible world is regulated by the spectator, which is different from the view that only God can regulate the universe.¹⁴ According to this tradition, images of reality are based on one spectator, who, unlike God, can only be in one place at one time. The invention of the camera affects this tradition in many respects. Through the invention of the camera the central role of the human eye has altered and it is thought that there is no centre. The camera may reproduce every image and in this way it affects its meaning and destroys its uniqueness. This point is very significant for us because, in order to contextualise the term a human rights film, we should examine the meaning of images and also how they affect the reproduction of their meaning.

Through the invention of the camera and its consequence, namely reproduction, the meaning of images becomes transmittable and is transformed from being a unique meaning to being information; that is to say, the image is hereafter usable by everybody for many purposes and its

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Roy D. P., 'Seeing What We Build Together: Distributed Multimedia Learning Environments for Transformative Communications' *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 1994, 3(3), 285-299, p.290

¹⁴ John Berger, *Ways Of Seeing* (1st edn., Penguin 2008).

meaning is either modified or fully changed.¹⁵ Every image states its meaning in the context of the subject who sees it, the object which is seen and the place and time. Reproduction manipulates meaning through detaching its context because reproduction isolates it with respect to its place and time and reproduces it in different ways for its own purposes. Take a look at the famous fresco by the Italian Renaissance artist Raphael, called *The School of Athens*.¹⁶ The fresco represents many scholars who have been affected by the Renaissance period and every figure represents a specific scholar. Moreover, this fresco decorates Apostolic Palace in the Vatican. The meaning of this fresco can be understood in its own context, that is to say, the time of the fresco, the Renaissance, its place, the Vatican, its painter, Rafael, and its figures of scholars. If someone uses this image on the wall of a café, though not the whole fresco but only part of it, its meaning is completely changed according to the purpose of the owner of the café. Furthermore, reproduced materials can be particularly used for political and commercial purposes to manipulate the purpose of their existence. In contrast to reproduced materials, original frescoes and pictures are unique in their own context and also we can build a bridge between the meaning of the original image and its own semantic world.

The matter of the invention of the camera and reproduction effects of the meaning of images are examined through Berger's work, *Ways of Seeing*. Beyond this point, Steyerl invites us to take part in a new discussion akin to Berger's point. She describes the prevailing condition of "groundlessness"¹⁷. According to Steyerl, contemporary people do not have any stable ground and their situation is explained by means of the metaphor of "free fall". She argues that new technological developments, such as Google Map and 3D, pave the way for transformation regarding our sense of spatial and temporal orientation. In other words, the conventional linear perspective has shifted and has been substituted by the "aerial view". Similarly, Berger highlights the invention of the camera and how it affects how we see. Steyerl highlights the fact that new technologies of surveillance, tracking and targeting affect our sense of orientation and can start to play tricks on us. Furthermore, in this way we can lose our sense of above, below, before and after, even our sense of self and our limits. She maintains that we lose our traditional way of seeing,

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Susie Hodge, *Raphael: His Life And Works In 500 Images: An Exploration Of The Artist, His Life And Context, With 500 Images And A Gallery Of His Most Celebrated Works* (1st edn, Lorenz Books 2013).

¹⁷ Hito Steyerl, 'In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment On Vertical Perspective' (2011) 24 e-flux journal.

feeling and balancing as a result of new types of visuality that arise.¹⁸ How can Steyerl produce this result?

The main problem of modernity is that a stable horizon is lost and consequently our stable paradigm of orientation, which means our concepts of self, the object, time and space, are shattered. All concepts are crucial with respect to the definitive role of the visual sense for human perception, which is the main issue of this chapter. When Steyerl explains this crucial shift, she begins with a history of the horizon line because the essence of this shift is based on this. The horizon line, for Steyerl, defines the limits of communication and understanding; that is, human beings may see and understand within this line and also beyond this line there is only silence and muteness.¹⁹ The invention of a stable horizon by sailors created the perception of stability and this illusion has paved the way for inventing the “optical” paradigm, which defined modernity, referred to as the “linear perspective”. In this sense, Erwin Panofsky explained that “the construction of linear perspective declares the view of a one-eyed and stable beholder as a norm and this view is itself assumed to be natural, scientific, and objective.”²⁰ A linear perspective played a key role in terms of constructing space so that it is calculable, navigable and predictable and also the notion of linear time, which made mathematical prediction possible. Furthermore, human beings as spectators have become central to the established worldview because a linear perspective leads to combining the whole paradigm in the viewers’ eyes. Steyerl argues that these shifts, namely the linear perspective and centralising the spectator’s eyes, led to western dominance and the domination of its definition of time and space and what is more provided standards for marking people as other and legitimising their conquest over them.²¹ However, the cinema and use of montages have shifted this perception of linear time and space by destabilising the beholder’s perspective and destroying the perception of linear time. Time and space have been reimagined through quantum physics and the theory of relativity.²² Epstein claims that, before cinematography, “no time can return to its source; no effect can precede its cause”. However, cinematography describes “a world that would go from its end to its beginning” and “the effect has become the cause; and the cause, the effect”.²³ Steyerl maintains that, over and above the invention of the camera and montages, today’s developments, such as 3D and

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Jean Epstein and Christophe Wall-Romana, *The Intelligence Of A Machine* (1st edn, University of Minnesota Press 2015).

Google Maps, provide an aerial view and they create an imaginary stability for the spectator and also a sense of an imaginary horizon, and consequently Steyerl refers to this new condition using the metaphor free fall.²⁴

In conclusion, to answer the question about whether films provide us with a way to define ourselves as humans, we should consider the capacity of films and the effect of technology on films. More importantly, technological developments, which have made films possible, have at the same time affected our worldview and also our perception of time and space, as Steyerl explains above. In particular, the time dimension has been made visible by films and revealed some historical and philosophical questions such as about how we can learn from history and whether history is repeated. Therefore *creating the witness* by the making the films in creating virtual witnesses to genocide and human rights violations over the last one hundred years made in immense impact on understanding and defining the Human Rights.²⁵ In this sense, it can be said that films are an instrument not only for art but also for philosophy. In the next chapter, we will attempt to indicate that films as a philosophical instrument define human beings in modern times using the example of Reggio's masterpiece, *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982).

***Koyaanisqatsi* as a Mirror of Human Beings**

When we hear the word *Koyaanisqatsi*, it seems to be very different to the words we use. It appears to be belong to another world. Similarly, the film seems to be a different type of film; it is neither a film nor a documentary. It is not a film because it does not contain any fiction or any characters, and it is not a documentary because it does not give any information about anything. It can be argued that it is a sort of "pure cinema" because it is formed from unique images and music and, when these images and music are combined, the meaning manifests itself in a profound way. It is a kind of symphonic poetry in which we may perceive our humanity because, in modern times, in other words, in the condition of free fall it is a unique way to understand something about human beings. Epstein notes that "today, the reality of space and time, determinism and freedom, matter and spirit, or the universe's continuity and discontinuity loses its contour, its consistency... and tends to become conditional, floating, allegorical, and intermittent reality, all in all, it becomes poetry".²⁶

²⁴ Hito Steyerl, 'In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment On Vertical Perspective' (2011) 24 e-flux journal.

²⁵ Torchin, L. *Creating the Witness: Documenting Genocide on Film, Video, and the Internet*, University of Minnesota Press (2012), p.1

²⁶ Jean Epstein and Christophe Wall-Romana, *The Intelligence Of A Machine* (1st edn, University of Minnesota Press 2015).

The title of the film came from the Hopi language and it means “life out of balance” or “life disintegrated”.²⁷ The word is based on a prophecy about Hopi civilization and, according to the prophecy, before the end of the world, humanity will experience three stages, and *Koyaanisqatsi* is the first one (the other two stages, namely *Powaqqatsi* and *Naqoyqatsi*, are also used by Reggio in the *Qatsi Trilogy*). The film describes a loss of balance, which is the essence of life, between humanity and nature: the earth, oceans and the sky. Furthermore, the film defines human beings as subjects of modern technology and also indicates how humanity occupies nature with technological machines. How can the film do this? What kind of technical method did the director use to achieve this?

The film starts and ends with two iconic scenes: the first one is about drawings in a cave in Horseshoe Canyon (Utah) and the second one is about a Saturn V rocket during its launch (Apollo 11). These two images are crucial for understanding the meaning of the film. In the first image, certain drawings belong to roughly ten thousand years earlier and, through this image, we may construct a unique relationship with ancient human beings and may understand the unique essence of human beings, which do not change over time. However, in the second scene we may observe the challenge human beings face in occupying nature even beyond the world, and their strongest weapon is technology. These two meanings clash throughout the film and this clash represents the dilemma of modern human beings. This means that, on the one hand, we are part of nature and, on the other hand, we destroy it in order to stay alive.

In the first scenes, nature in its beauty, which is untouched, is displayed using influential music and the meaning of nature, which is designed to be a habitat for human beings, manifest itself in a profound way. After this, the occupation of nature is distinguished using technological machines; for instance, a transmission tower is depicted as a technological army which occupies the natural land. In particular, scenes about modern city life, including work life, a market, entertainment and food, reveal the unique way in which we may observe the speed of life and how the complexity of human beings is lost, which means we no longer have special feelings and an essence of life; rather we are a product of the technology. In this sense, the director of the film argues that “the film is not the effect of technology, it’s that everything exists within [technology]. It’s not that we *use* technology, we *live* technology”.²⁸ Following these scenes, buildings, skyscrapers, bridges

²⁷ Koyaanisqatsi’ (En.wikipedia.org, 2017) <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koyaanisqatsi>> accessed 26 January 2018.

²⁸ Koyaanisqatsi’ (En.wikipedia.org, 2017) <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koyaanisqatsi>> accessed 20 February 2018.

explode and this is seen in a rhythmic way with penetrating music. These scenes, indicate the devastating effect of technology on human beings. Moreover, we may observe this devastating effect through close-up images of ordinary human faces in a very striking way.

As regards to the technical speciality of the film, time-lapse photography is the most influential way to explain many issues about the speed of life, speed of production and humans in big crowds. Ron Fricke used this technique in the most influential way, like in his other films, such as *Baraka* and *Samsara*. Furthermore, music is a major part of the film, meaning the film manifests itself with the aid of music. In fact, sometimes the music is ahead of the images and the images are accompanied by music. The film does not include any dialogue and similarly the music does not include any words, except *Koyaanisqatsi*, which is the only word to explain the situation for human beings.

In conclusion, in the context of defining a human, *Koyaanisqatsi* provides a framework in which modern humans may observe their position in nature. To construct ourselves as humans, we should designate our position in terms of nature, time, space and technology and also to define a human we must answer some questions about human beings. For instance, are we part of nature or do we control it? Does technology serve us or vice versa? What is time in our daily lives? Is time real or plastic? The film encourages us to ask these questions ourselves and to stand in order to understand our position about the whole of life. Because, if we do not stand we cannot understand our position or the purpose of life. The film can help us to define ourselves as humans, which is a unique way to perceive human rights.

2. The Film as a Witness in the Case of the Holocaust

The field of human rights is a discipline in law. The term right is a legal concept. The discipline of law has certain functions, such as the jurisdiction to limit the right to protect human rights. In general, the aim of the law is to ensure social order and a sense of justice. However, the law as a discipline of limits cannot be enough in the sense of justice. In particular, in situations involving human catastrophes, such as the Holocaust, the discipline of law distances itself from the past and does not have any functions by which to understand people who have experienced this kind of catastrophic event. Art brings the law closer to the past and human feelings.²⁹ To understand any losses and traumatic memories, we need art, which places us in the position of bearing witness. The film, at this point, provides a proper background by which people may see memories of the past. On the one hand, these can

²⁹ Shoshana Felman, 'Theaters Of Justice: Arendt In Jerusalem, The Eichmann Trial, And The Redefinition Of Legal Meaning In The Wake Of The Holocaust' (2001) 1 Theoretical Inquiries In Law.

provide information regarding historical events and, on the other hand, they can help people develop empathy so they understand other people's feelings, which are common in the background of humanity.

The Holocaust is a much-debated event in history. Through the Holocaust, many concepts, such as a "crime against humanity" and the "banality of evil", have been created by lawyers and scholars. However, for millions of people, the Holocaust has begun to make sense through visual cultures, such as television and films.³⁰ In particular, in the U.S, the telecasting of the war crime trial of Adolf Eichmann marked the first time that the holocaust reached a prominent position in terms of publicity, such as appearing in public affairs programmes, documentaries and dramas.³¹ At the same time, it was the first major public effort to conceptualise the Holocaust as a discrete chapter in history and to define it as a phenomenon centring on Nazis and Jews. Furthermore, this telecasting of the Eichmann trial tried to present a different perspective. On one hand, the Israeli government regarded the trial as presenting the Holocaust, which is a distinctly Jewish phenomenon, and also attempted to use this trial in the new state's political agenda. On the other hand, the American conceptualisation of the trial focused on the holocaust as a morally charged phenomenon with universal significance. In the U.S., where the trial had its largest television audience, the visual culture not only provided information about this occasion but also shaped public discussion of "what it meant to be a 'witness' to this historic event".³² Jeffrey Shandler notes that "the small screen now plays a central role in maintaining the powerful relationship that millions of Americans have with the Holocaust, enabling them to feel that they understand this forbidding event, remote from their own experience, and that it informs their moral consciousness".³³

To sum up, films and visual culture have many functions: they show people historical events and provide strong grounds on which we may develop empathy to be able to understand others' feelings and build a relationship with people who have experienced events with catastrophic consequences. It could be said that apart from historical and humanitarian factors, one of

³⁰ There is also a vast literature on films on Holocaust. See among others: Zelizer, B., *Visual Culture and Holocaust*, The Athlone Press, (London, 2001); Kerner, A., *Film and Holocaust, New Perspectives on Dramas, Documentaries and Experimental Films*, Continuum Publishing, (London, 2011); Colombat, A., *The Holocaust in French Films*, Scarecrow Press, (1993); Hicks, J., *First Films of the Holocaust, Soviet Cinema and the Genocide of the Jews 1938-1946*, University of Pittsburgh Press, (Pittsburgh, 2012)

³¹ Jeffrey Shandler, "The Man in the Glass Box: Watching the Eichmann Trial on American Television" in Barbie, Zelizer, B., *Visual Culture and Holocaust*, The Athlone Press, (London, 2001);

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

the significant reasons the Holocaust is a much-debated historical event is because many films, such as *Schindler's List* (1993) and *The Pianist* (2002), and many documentaries, such as *Shoah* (1985) and *The Specialist* (1999) have been produced.

3. In Lieu of a Conclusion: What is a Human Rights Film?

In this article, authors have attempted to contribute a basic level of the theory of the human rights film. No such theory has as yet been elaborated on.³⁴ Indeed, we have focused on this issue on two different conceptual levels, namely the ontological level and epistemological level, because, the concept of human rights includes these two dimensions.

In the first chapter, we have tried to explain the perspectives of Berger and Steyerl to understand the relationship between technological developments and our perception of self. What is the relationship between the perception of self and the concept of human rights? The concept of human rights is identified not only through its legal meaning but also through a less legalised, more emotional sense of human dignity. In this sense, Bronkhorst notes that "human rights have taken over the role previously played by religions and tradition".³⁵ Each religion has its own concepts of human dignity and its own moral precepts. However, human rights discourse offers a universal moral system which is preferred by a large part of the world's population. In this sense, the role of human rights is to construct a self as a human who has their own dignity and decency and is the subject of a universal moral system which is rooted in universal feelings about right and wrong. Likewise, religion asserts what is right and what is wrong. In the light of these matters, the perspective of the concept of human rights should be on the ontological level, which concerns certain existential questions, such as those asking what a human is and what time is. In this context, the effect of technology and the invention of the camera have come into prominence, as Berger and Steyerl mention, because these innovations have paved the way for novel perceptions of humans and time. Moreover, *Koyaanisqatsi* helps us to discuss these matters based on the film. However, it can be argued that the film was also created using technological inventions, such as the camera and montages. On the ontological level this is a dilemma that should be discussed by scholars who are interested in the theoretical level of a human rights film.

In the second chapter, we have attempted to reveal the epistemological aspect of a human rights film through the visual culture of the holocaust. On this level, the questions are about how the film helps us to understand human

³⁴ Daan Bronkhorst, 'The Human Rights Film' [2004] Amnesty International Film Festival.

³⁵ Ibid.

rights violations, how we can be aware of human rights and their limits and what kind of film helps us to understand human rights. In this regard, we focused on two main points: the first one is the role of giving information about historical violations and the second one concerns shaping the picture of these violations in the public sphere. Moreover, Bronkhorst claimed that "human rights films... are the films that reflect the actual state of human rights violations, or the visions and aspirations as to the ways to redress those violations".³⁶ This definition is a contribution on the epistemological level and, according to this definition, the main purpose of a human rights film is to "redress violations". In this regard, many issues can be discussed, such as the "truthfulness" of the film, how the film affected the audience and the educational message of the film. However, as with the ontological level, this level also faces the dilemma that the meaning of the film can be manipulated by mass media to obtain a rating and by politicians for their political campaigns and it can also be manifested as a piece of propaganda. In brief, although films can manipulate the meaning and definition of human rights, they are effective and informative way of wide spreading the idea of human rights. This point should be resolved on the theoretical level of a human rights film.

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³⁶ Ibid.

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