A GENEALOGY OF THE CONTEMPORARY UNDEAD LIFE THROUGH BYUNG-CHUL HAN

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In this article, I reconstruct Byung-Chul Han's diagnosis of neoliberal capitalism through a genealogy of his notion of the 'undead life' — a life that is "too alive to die, and too dead to live." I argue that this intervention is necessary to profoundly understand his critique of the desecrated existence, atomized community, and debased politics plaguing contemporary society. Thanks to the cult of positivity, the heart of the neoliberal dispositive, living today is devoid of endurance, vigor, and depth. A further immersion into the neoliberal abyss leads to a disquisition of corollary predicaments, such as depression, pornography, and psychopolitical domination. In the concluding section, I raise some issues found in Han's appraisal of neoliberal capitalism and the digital regime. More importantly, I present some images of resistance and hope from his writings and diagram some ways to creatively and critically survive in the present.

Keywords: neoliberal capitalism, positivity, transparency, undead life,

INTRODUCTION: THE DELUSION OF FREEDOM

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* Friedrich Nietzsche (1985, 25-28) portrays the *camel* as a slavish 'yes-sayer' that willingly kneels in front of the *dragon,* symbolizing the acquiescence of modern European humanity. Similarly, in *Anti-Oedipus*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1983, 38) problematize the Reichian question of why the masses desire their own oppression, especially in the post-1968 era. Indeed, these predicaments remain relevant but have evolved into a more sophisticated and venomous kind.

Meanwhile, the Korean-born German philosopher Byung-Chul Han creatively puts a contemporary face to these problems through the theorization of 'achievement-subjectivity.' The achievement subject's mantra is, 'Yes, I can.' In *The Burnout Society*, Han (2015a, 9) opines: "Unlimited Can is the positive modal verb of achievement society.… Prohibitions, commandments, and the law are replaced by projects, initiatives, and motivation.… Achievement society creates depressives and losers.…" Incongruously, this brand of positivity adulterates Nietzsche's famous dictum, "What does not kill me, makes me stronger" (Nietzsche 2005, 77). In the current scheme of things, this bastardization is referred to as 'toxic positivity,' wherein an individual is

subjected to inexorable pressure to always be happy or positive, regardless of the circumstances.

Han further claims that the achievement society has surpassed Michel Foucault's 'Disciplinary Society' and even Gilles Deleuze's 'Control Society.' These previous societies are shaped and modulated by infrastructures of negativity.[1] On the other hand, the achievement society is inhabited by subjugated subjects who do not perceive themselves as subjugated, but as projects always-in-the-making. The Italian activist Franco Berardi in *Precarious Rhapsody* (2009a, 106) likewise echoes this radical turn: "By the end of the twentieth century, the whole question of repression seemed to melt into thin air and disappear from the scene. Rather than neuroses produced by a repression of libido, the dominant pathologies of our times are schizoid and result from an eruption of expression: *Just do it*."

Whereas the camel-like state for Nietzsche is a necessary stage towards freedom, the achievement society underscores the entrepreneurial and free self only to achieve more constraint and exploitation. In *Capitalism and the Death Drive,* Han (2021a, 95) associates the achievement society with the 'neoliberal ethics of performance.' It is a cunning and devastatingly efficient system divergent from the capitalism that Marx criticized. Industrial or modern capitalism is grounded on external domination, which reaches its limit at a certain production level. On the contrary, exploitation today is self-incurred and limitless. As Han (2021a, 95) explicates:

> We voluntarily exploit ourselves until we break down. If I fail, I take responsibility for this failure. If I suffer… I have only myself to blame. Because it is wholly voluntary, self-exploitation is exploitation without domination. And because it takes place under the guise of freedom, it is highly efficient. There is no emerging collective, no 'we,' that could rise up against the system.[2]

If people are preoccupied with projecting themselves as entrepreneurs or hyper-producers, they become exhausted due to voluminous tasks and depressed because of overwhelming pressures. If no collectivity can be formed to critically articulate this new adversary, the crucial question, thus, is whether revolution is still possible today. Or should contemporary revolutionaries abandon this project in exchange for the delusion of freedom?

In the preliminary section of *The Transparency Society*, Han warns us about the new dogma dominating contemporary society—'transparency.' The prize of optimal freedom of expression and information, powered by various digital infrastructures and technological innovations, is control. But this regulation also leads to other problems, such as the debasement of communal values and different psychopathologies:

> Transparency… forces everything inward to transform it into information. Under today's immaterial mode of production, more information and communication mean more productivity and acceleration. In contrast, secrecy, foreignness, and otherness represent

> obstacles to communication without borders. They are to be dismantled
> in the name of transparency (Han 2015b, viii).

The new dogma of transparency functions as the heart of the society of positivity. As a system, it abolishes the dialectic of negativity or any forms of disruptions, nuances, and detours. As this principle infiltrates the human psyche, it pushes the individual to its limits in the guise of freedom and productivity.

What separates Han's philosophical project from others is his analysis of neoliberal capitalism via the post-immunological paradigm. Whereas the immunological paradigm is marked by "borders, transitions, thresholds, fences, ditches, and walls" (Han 2015a, 3), the post-immunological paradigm is defined by the dissolution of boundaries and otherness. As such, this new paradigm engenders the disappearance of the factors that pre-condition immuno-defense or ground the dialectic of negativity—the driving force of the immunological paradigm. The demise of negativity gives birth to the excessive proliferation of positivity. The immense positivization of life in the post-immunological period is fundamentally responsible for the psycho-pathological conditions in the 21st century, such as burnout and depression.

THE VICIOUS CURSE OF POSITIVITY/TRANSPARENCY

Life's Desecration

In the famous Korean Netflix series *Reply 1988* (2015),[3] a nostalgic detour of life's simplicity in the everyday and the significance of communal life are intricately illustrated. People born during the 1990s perceive this as a symbolic and nostalgic time machine to the past. Nostalgia aside, the vibrant community portrayed in this series is irreconcilable to the realities of contemporary South Korean society, where subway trains metamorphose into sleeper cars and suicide shadows almost every individual. Worse, the slow duration of time and the serenity of the neighborhood in this series are difficult to comprehend alongside the Itaewon Halloween tragedy last October 31, 2022.[4] While a complex generational gap separates South Korea's past and present, another factor that deserves serious attention is its current post-immunological configuration, principally characterized by the impoverishment of negativity and erosion of ritualized practices.

Rituals, the activities habitually performed during cultural and religious events, are symbolic practices that transform the world into a reliable, habitable, and accessible place.[5] The simple practices of gift-giving and food-sharing during the Christmas season, as well as some religious or tradition-oriented celebrations, such as the Songkran Festival (Thailand), the Bon Om Tuk (Cambodia), and the Sinulog Festival (Philippines), are some of the symbolic practices that stabilize people's life, particularly in the Southeast Asian region. These practices are animated by their respective cultural nuances; they are collectively performed, and are celebrated annually. In the digital world, on the other hand, human complexities are simplified, and rituals and durations are devoured by compulsive production. Ungraspable speed disfigures people's

understanding of occurrences, meanings, and relations. Consequently, the world becomes a derelict realm.

The compulsion of production circulating in the present annihilates the duration of things towards unending consumption. This curse voids the possibility of lingering—an essential human activity that presupposes things that endure. The unremitting consumption [*verbraucht*] and not use [*gebraucht*] of smartphones are enormously contributory to the current destabilization of life. The rapid succession of content, images, and applications negates the actuality of lingering and, in turn, promotes restlessness and obsession. Unyielding consumption desecrates rituals that essentially allow us to treat people and things with dignity and beauty.

Moreover, rituals are symbolic practices that "bring people together, create an alliance, a wholeness, a community" (Han 2020, 6). A society wealthy of ritual practices is a place populated by a "we" and not by egos. In the Philippines' Moriones festival,[6] for instance, the participants are anonymized by the Morion masks and costumes as they perform reenactments and other penitential rituals. The festival also breeds an opportunity to immerse with the locals and witness their passionate religious faith. In other words, the performance, participation, and experience of the Moriones, are collective and culturally rooted. The participants forget or ignore themselves through de-psychologization and de-internalization. In the neoliberal world, however, it is a commonplace observation that many people perform rituals or participate in festivals merely for information, blind show, and social media validation, not for genuine experience and reconnection with the world.[7] In *The Expulsion of the Other*, Han elucidates the concept of terror of the *Same,* which engenders the demise of the community. This terror comes unnoticed or unchallenged because of its positivity and its promise of development. In social media, the "social" reaches an absolute zero point:

> One travels everywhere, yet does not experience anything. One catches sight of everything, yet reaches no insight. One accumulates information and data, yet does not attain knowledge. One lusts after adventures and simulation, but always remains the same. One accumulates online 'friends' and 'followers,' yet never encounters another person (Han 2018a, 3).

Societal atomization and narcissism are likewise complemented by a community of emptiness where symbolic perception is replaced by serial perception. Whereas the former presupposes the experience of duration, the latter involves a relentless registering of the new as it "rushes from one piece of information to the next, from one experience to the next, from one sensation to the next, without ever coming to closure" (Han 2020, 7). Serial perception and its cult of perpetual updating fuel the digital world—of extensive consumption and connection, but not relation. There is no such thing as completion or closure; instead, "what emerges is an endless addition and accumulation of the same" (Han 2020, 27). When almost everything becomes provisional, unstable, and inconclusive, it leads to the state called *de-housing* [*enthausung*]. Festivals have beginnings and endings; every closure is always an opportunity to start anew.

Today, it is impossible to close one's eyes and mouth, as well as to slow down. Everyone talks, but no one listens. Everyone struggles for attention, but their value or sincerity is questionable. The neoliberal noise proliferating in the digital world makes silence, listening, and deep contemplation rare gems. Silence and rest are perennial bedfellows, for they both affirm people's relationship with the divine. They are essential aspects not only of religion, but also festivals and intersubjective relations, which further intensify life. Whereas other countries welcome the New Year with huge fireworks displays and deafening sounds from musical instruments, in Bali's Nyepi Festival, the whole island comes to a standstill, and everyone practices utter silence.[8]

Unfortunately, rest in many parts of the globe is merely understood as a preparation and recovery from work rather than a sacred, distinct, and essential human activity; even play is deemed a leisure activity. Adorno and Horkheimer (2002, 158) are therefore commendable in claiming that rest or amusement is merely a prolongation of mechanized work in the age of advanced capitalism. Work profanity causes individuals to feel guilty or unproductive when resting (or sleeping), when their performance is slow and inflexible, and when they are offline for an extended period. In the case of fractalized labor, the labor prevalent today, its promise of making time more flexible so that workers can have more time for themselves and the community, remains an illusion. Even outside office hours, the poor worker should always be on-call, like a ticking time bomb waiting to explode. In this vein, receiving a call from a boss residing in a different country at 2:00 am seems like a usual labor scenario. Likewise, attending an online meeting while having a vacation with your family appears normal. Lack of rest, sleep, time for oneself, and social relations are worsened by the accelerated and incessant pressure emanating from work.[9]

More importantly, a life without rest and play is a life without lingering, profundity, and sovereignty. Whereas work individualizes people, rituals unite them, i.e., in serving as a temporary and repetitive closure so that they may start anew from time to time. A desecrated life is devoid of intensity and durability. Neoliberalism brings people "deeper and deeper into the wilderness.… concern for the good life, which also includes … the community, is yielding more and more to the simple concern for survival" (Han 2015a, 13). The contemporary academia, sad to say, reflects the aforesaid malady. In most cases, it is no longer a fecund site for higher leisure and deep contemplation because it has transfigured into a factory of human capital and endless work. Professional training, accelerated processes, metricized policies, and measurable outcomes override the goal of meaningfully cultivating formative education. The neoliberalization of the university obliterates the intricate distinction between the sacred and the profane by totalizing the latter. Echoing Han (2020, 44), "it makes everything comparable to everything else and thus equal to everything else." Likewise, neoliberalized education produces hyper-productive, highly individualistic, and consumerist students (Villegas 2007, 27). The hell of the Same in the university brings forth communication without community.

However, given the complexity of the labor society and the plethora of ways people develop to creatively thrive, Han's distinction between strong and weak play should also be examined or reconstructed. Undeniably, there are times when the activities performed by workers blur the lines between strong and weak play. Sometimes, individuals engage in certain activities that blur the lines between strong

and weak play. Using the Deleuzo-Guattarian language, this line of becoming lies in the middle, which "is not an average; it is fast motion, it is the absolute speed of movement" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 293). Watching plays and musicals mounted by the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) and listening to the local and independent music played in Shimokitazawa's *Basement Bar*, for instance, resemble experiences that cannot be merely categorized as momentary escapes from the daily grind of work. It is undeniable that some find themselves radically immersed in the Dionysian experience of stage plays and live performances while wiping their tears and banging their heads off with their friends. Diagramming these experiences are episodes of becoming capable of emancipating life from its undead state. Albeit these examples relatively escape the contents of Han's *The Disappearance of Rituals*, they are given justice in an earlier book, *The Burnout Society*. In nuancing the various implications of the achievement society, he distinguishes two kinds of tiredness, namely, the *I-tiredness* and the *We-tiredness*. The former resembles a solitary kind of exhaustion that expires someone and "destroys all that is common or shared, all proximity, and even language itself" (Han 2015a, 31). On the other hand, the latter speaks of a tiredness that inspires and "enables the human being to experience singular calm, serene not-doing…. It brings back a sense of wonder into the world…. Deep tiredness loosens the strictures of identity…. This particular in-difference lends them an aura of friendliness…. This tiredness founds a deep friendship and makes it possible to conceive of a community" (Han 2015a, 32).

Lastly, language in the society of positivity is functionalized and detached from play. Profane or positive language lacks splendor and seduction. On the other hand, the language of poetry promotes play, excess, and openness. In poetry, "language plays…. Poems are *magic ceremonies of language*. The *poetic principle* returns pleasure to language through a radical break from the economy of the production of meaning. The poetic does not produce" (Han 2020, 60). Rather, the poetic ruptures and seduces. Berardi, Han's kindred spirit, shares the same disposition about poetry. For him, poetry or the poetic act shatters the established relation between the signifier and the signified towards new possibilities of meaning and relation (Berardi 2018, 21).

Despite the prevalence of language's functionalization today, Han perceives a glimmer of hope through the Japanese Haiku. Like rituals, the Haiku's poetic configuration depicts an overabundance of signifiers and a deficiency in terms of the signified. It radiates a hermeneutical play of meanings. Since it moves in nomadic strokes and lacks any fixed meaning, the Japanese Haiku is irreducible to any form of translation (Han 2020, 63).

The Pornographic and Depressed Society

In "Nosedive," one of the episodes in the *Black Mirror* series, Lacie (the main character) epitomizes an achievement subject immensely obsessed with high ratings and social recognition. This episode highlights the cults of hyper-visibility, societal pressure, and the pursuit of constant affirmation in contemporary culture. In addition, it depicts the dehumanizing consequences of a society governed by totalizing metrics and superficial validations—the fundamental ingredients of the erosion of the

community. Fueled by digital technology, an excessively transparent society merely encourages shallow connections but not meaningful relations.

Unfortunately, in a transparent society, even love "flattens out into an arrangement of pleasant feelings and states of arousal without complexity or consequence…. Love undergoes domestication and is positivized as a formula for consumption and comfort" (Han 2015b, 5-6). Writ large, transparency penetrates communal relations or how people perceive and treat their fellowmen. Berardi, meanwhile, describes this phenomenon as the death of conjunctions—the principal feature of the smooth generation. In *Precarious Rhapsody*, he (2009a, 85) opines:

> Reducers of complexity such as... information, stereotypes or digital network interfaces have simplified the relationship with the other, but when the other appears in flesh and blood, we cannot tolerate its presence… The video-electronic generation does not tolerate armpit or pubic hair. One needs perfect compatibility… to interface corporeal surfaces in connection…. Conjunction finds its ways through hairs and the imperfections of exchange.

Meaningful relations, be they romantic or communal, are indubitably characterized by perplexities, incompatibilities, and impermeabilities. These attributes are forms of negativity that keep relationships vibrant. Exuberant relations are also conjunctions of happiness. Han uses the German word "Glück" to describe a form of happiness typified by open spaces or gaps. A hyper-transparent society, devoid of fissures, detours, and enigmas, is an unhappy society. However, the transparent society is not only unhappy but also pornographic.

The transparent society resembles a porn society where all things are gauged based on their exhibition value (data or information). Going back to the *Nosedive* episode, this exhibition value relates to how the compound substratum of human subjectivity is reduced to individuals' artificial curation of their social media identity. As such, identity is reduced to an online profile that is searchable and quantifiable by everyone. More importantly, ratings merely based on positive feelings or pretentious reactions to others determine people's value. The price of this anomaly that suppresses real feelings is the achievement of high ratings. This is why, upon receiving a wedding invitation from Naomi, Lacie's highly rated childhood friend, the latter sees it as a perfect moment to boost her rating. Unfortunately, she encounters various tragedies along the way that seriously tumble her score.

In the porn society, no stones remain unturned; all glitches are smoothened; and all things are exposed and commodified. As Han (2015b, 11) puts it, "In the society of exhibition, every subject is also its own advertising object…. Everything has been turned outward, stripped, exposed, undressed, and put on show. The excess of display turns everything into a commodity; possessing no secret…. Capitalist economy subjects everything to compulsory exhibition. The staging of display alone generates value; all the inherent nature of things has been abandoned." Likewise, the porn society desecrates eros, obliterates sex, and banalizes pleasure. More specifically, the sexual act transforms into a mere mechanical performance of exhibition and efficiency, and the body becomes an uninhabitable vessel—a microcosm of the unlivable world. The

pornographic body is barren of any defects and interruptions; it is without wrinkles, blemishes, and pubic hair. Furthermore, a sexual act repugnant to secrets and detours is only a mechanical activity deprived of erotic intensity. A relation that has no time for play and ambiguity is no relation.

What used to be the Other as a friend, as secret, or as Eros, is now totalized by the narcissistic self. In *The Agony of Eros,* Han (2017c) argues that the unwavering narcissism governing the contemporary society murders eros—the very principle which posits "a relationship to the Other situated beyond achievement, performance, and ability…. The negativity of otherness—that is, the *atopia* of the Other, which eludes all ability—is constitutive of erotic experience" (Han 2017c, 11). Additionally, Han laments that there is no longer a room for secrets, veil, and concealment—ingredients necessary for a more intense or pleasurable relation: "Compulsive transparency annihilates room for the play [Spiel-Räume] of pleasure and desire [Lust]. Evidence admits deduction, not seduction. The seducer takes paths that proceed by detour, digression, and indirection" (Han 2015b, 15). Speaking of play, Soren Kierkegaard's *Diary of a Seducer* is a foremost literary example of scintillating and ticklish seduction. Generally, it chronicles Johanne's erotic account of his pursuit and eventual engagement to Cordelia. Through the former's erotic wit, the latter describes their relationship as a hybrid of unpredictability and fantasy:

> He was sometimes so intellectual that I felt myself annihilated as a woman; at other times he was so wild and passionate, so desiring, that I almost trembled before him. At times I was like a stranger to him; at times he surrendered completely. Then when I threw my arms around him, everything changed, and I embraced a cloud (Kierkegaard 1987, 12).

Towards the end, however, Cordelia's enthralled state transforms into a narrative of vulnerability and intoxication as Johannes effectively manipulates her to conclude their relationship.

Pornographization is the de-auratization, de-mystification, and de-eroticization of the world. In pornography, all bodies are totalized, sexualized, and measured. For Han (2018a, 7), "pornography carries out a complete de-narrativization and de-lingualization not only of the body, but of communication as such, therein lies its obscenity." On the contrary, seduction necessitates a playful distance from oneself since it is based on the exteriority and fantasy of the Other. In a porn society, the Other becomes a naked object that is immediately consumed. Everything about the other is made visible and produced. Forget about erotic foreplay, silence, and theatre. Alarmingly, the cult of pornography is pervasive even in art (film, music, spoken word poetry, culinary arts), as well as in the fields of dataism, politics, and education.

In the name of transparency, secrets, otherness, and fissures deemed as hindrances to hyper-communication are eliminated. Nevertheless, digital psychopolitics cunningly compels people "to confide, share, and participate: to communicate our opinions, needs, wishes, and preferences" (Han 2017a, 15) in a friendly manner. Since everything becomes transparent, sexualized, and mechanical, eros and play are annihilated.

An unhappy and pornographic society promotes an undead life. The achievement subjects are "too alive to die, and too dead to live" (Han 2015a, 51). Han opines that a universal fear of pain dominates the life of the contemporary populace:

> The ability to tolerate pain is rapidly diminishing. The consequence of this algophobia is a permanent anaesthesia. All painful conditions are avoided. Even the pain of love is treated as suspect. This algophobia extends into society. Less and less space is given to conflicts and controversies (Han 2021b, 7).

Affirming struggles and complexities comprises a vibrant and stable life. Milan Kundera (1984, 5), in *Unbearable Lightness of Being,* exquisitely captures this idea by saying that "the absolute absence of burden causes man to be lighter than air, to soar into the heights, take leave of the earth and his earthly being, and become only half real." However, the possibility of being hurt or experiencing tragedies is a test of strength and commitment. Of course, commitment presupposes our readiness to share our life with others, which essentially includes swallowing our egos and occasionally making our hands dirty. Indeed, many individuals today are discouraged from having romantic or communal commitments. This indifference to social commitments is aggravated by digital infrastructures, where positivity and the obsessive curation of one's social identity serve as a universal *ethos*. Hyper-connection and hyper-communication do not facilitate encounters, but merely draw into an endless ego loop. Disturbingly, this is a deceptive pathway provided by neoliberal capitalism so that individuals can cope with the hyper-productive and accelerated life it promotes.

People do not have the guts to commit because they are afraid to experience harm and are exceptionally preoccupied with projecting themselves as entrepreneurial subjects. At this point, it is important to note that the lack of time to partake in anything social or collective is likewise a paramount feature of contemporary society. In a much larger scope, Berardi refers to this contemporary condition as 'chaos.' In *The Soul at Work*, he (2009b, 125) elucidates that chaos occurs "once the flows are too intense for our capacity to elaborate emotionally. As such, the mind drifts towards panic, the uncontrolled subversion of psychic energies premise to a depressive deactivation." Meanwhile, in *The Scent of Tim*e, Han underscores that the age of acceleration, the principal fuel of chaos, has already elapsed. Psychopathologies, the offsprings of today's temporal crisis, are engendered instead by dyschronicity: "Time is lacking a rhythm that would provide order, and thus, it falls out of step. Dyschronicity lets time whizz" (Han 2017d, vi). This temporal crisis ruins the possibility of experiencing duration, thereby authoring transient subjects and an impoverished world.

Both Berardi and Han maintain that psychopathologies express a profound crisis of freedom—the curse of hyper-expressivity[10] and a crisis of negativity. Lack of time to rest, sleep, and socially interact characterizes a world of entropy and incessant oppression. For Han, nonetheless, the more fundamental problem is when the achievement subjects overheat in this exceptionally fleeting world. When this occurs, their defensive immunological response is deactivated. In the post-immunological age, psychopathologies emerge as an offshoot of excessive positivity and not of viral or

bacterial negativity, which further causes the deadly accumulation of ego-libido. As Han (2020, 14) remarks:

> It exploits itself voluntarily and passionately until it breaks down. It optimizes itself to death. Its failing is called depression or burnout…. Depression … is based on an excessive relation to self. Wholly incapable of leaving the self behind, of transcending ourselves and relating to the world, we withdraw into our shells. The world disappears. We circle around ourselves, tortured by feelings of emptiness. Rituals, by contrast, disburden the ego of the self, de-psychologizing and de-internalizing the ego.

The society of positivity is a captive to the cult of authenticity. When its populace produces itself narcissistically, the community is undermined. Under this curse, the perpetual production of oneself translates into exploitation. 'Hustle Culture,' a trending labor-related jargon, compels subjects to add another layer to their entire workday by converting hobbies or interests (like food tasting, motorcycle driving, and sneakers reviewing) into a commodity. Although some do it full-time due to its superlative financial promise, these so-called influencers vlog their lifestyle and publicize even the most confidential pages of their lives just to offer something to the altar of transparency and commodification.

However, despite this so-called religious social media frenzy, genuine fulfillment remains a question, which is why it merely pushes the self into further exhaustion and a deeper narcissistic void. The subject's suffocation to the cult of authenticity brings about depression. The relentless striving for authenticity results in a continuous comparison with others, which is merely a way to equal oneself. In the *Topology of Violence*, Han (2018b, 45) clarifies that at least the word "compete" means to seek together—a "competition for *something*. Between two enemies, what is at stake is not a thing but existence itself." In the society of positivity, however, no exterior authority or enemy compels the subject to seek for more other than itself. Without the negativity of the other, the subject launches a war against itself.

The achievement subject is also characterless and always ready for any purpose and responsibility. Interestingly, on March 30, 2024, the American rapper/singer Lizzo valiantly announced that she was quitting the music industry.[11] Her noble goals of performing music and bringing happiness to the people are subjugated by the clout-obsessed and one-dimensional netizens. Indeed, her act epitomizes a rare gallantry in a society numbed by pseudo-freedom. I earnestly hope that her radical gesture may craft revolutionary possibilities for the music community and the larger society. Character, as embodied by Lizzo, is a form of negativity that helps stabilize the self and the community. Between stability and freedom, the achievement subject would choose the latter over the former instead. Of course, freedom accomplished through flexibility merely personifies an illusion, which would further lead to exhaustion, character disturbance, and depression. This pseudo-freedom likewise redounds to an intensified and pathological relation to oneself.

The subject's narcissism or lack of relationship to the outside is the antithesis of resonance—the dynamic well-spring of common rhythm in a community. Digital society is dominated by communication channels filled with echo chambers, where the

only voices audible are those of individuals. Without resonance, widespread sameness proliferates—a condition where everyone is different yet the same (*terror of the same*). Although in previous societies, subjects relate to higher external authorities such as God, Han (2018b, 46) claims that this hierarchical relationship is not only characterized by punishment but also by gratification.

Depressed individuals sink and drown in themselves. Incapable of stepping outside itself, the self loses any relation to the Other as atopia or alterity. The disappearance of rituals and the expulsion of the Other cause self-destruction when the subject exploits itself willingly and fervently until it reaches its limits. In the worst-case scenario, depression or burnout may result in suicide. However, Han emphasizes that neoliberal-induced death is not characterized by sovereignty because it is not premised on the affirmation of life. Rather, this death is caused by emptiness, meaninglessness, and exhaustion. The Japanese call this 'karoshi' (death from overwork)—a pathology that engenders work-related pressures, depression, and suicide.

Smooth Politics and Depoliticized Identities

How does a desecrated, depressed, and pornographic life affect politics? How do narcissism, hyperactivity, and the death of critique, debase politics? In the positive or achievement society, every action is premised on self-optimization and narcissistic gratification. The subject surrenders himself/herself to the altar of hyper-activity, believing that this would imply redemption from falling into the quicksand of bare life and unhappiness. In another sense, hyper-activity, the endless movement of bodies, is an antithesis to boredom—a state which is interpreted in the neoliberal capitalist society as contrary to productivity (Han 2015a, 22).[12]

However, meaningful experiences rest on sociality, lingering, and depth. These things are absent when activities speedily overlap with others without grounding and completion. Succumbing to endless tasks convinces the achievement subject that it is tantamount to becoming a vital community member. In this manner, team-building activities, retooling training, and even fitness sessions extend as terrains for competition, narcissism, and burnout.

Hyper-attention is an intimate bedfellow of hyper-activity. The former causes the subject to lose focus due to information overload and ceaseless multitasking. The cult of avoiding inactivity flawlessly disperses one's consciousness and vitiates critical thinking. Another implication of hyper-attention is the inability to think of the future. In the political realm, when things metamorphose into a protracted present or immediately publicized, communications and projects, "becomes short term and thins out into mere chapter…. A vision directed toward the future proves more and more difficult to obtain" (Han 2015a, vii). This is the reason Han claims that rational discourse is incompatible with the digital or information society. In *Infocracy: Digitization and the Crisis of Democracy*, Han (2022, 26) contends:

> Rational decisions require a long-term perspective. They are based on reflections that extend beyond the present moment into both past and future…. In information society, we simply do not have the time for rational action. The compulsion of accelerated communication deprives

us of rationality. Under temporal pressure, we instead opt for intelligence…. Intelligent action aims at short-term solutions and successes.

Instead of rational discourse, it is affective communication that prevails. This digital-driven communication is determined not by comprehensive and empirically tested arguments, but by exciting, controversial, and positive information. Under this new scheme, "fake news, or a fragment of decontextualized information may be more effective than a reasoned argument" (Han 2022, 26). Miserably, technology is weaponized to make truth disputable and condemn those who fight for it.

One of the most famous beneficiaries of the information regime is the U.S. President, Donald Trump. During his first term (2017 to 2021), Han (2022, 26) calls him as the first Twitter president whose "politics is determined not by a vision but by viral information. Infocracy promotes success-oriented, instrumental forms of action and leads to the spread of opportunism." Technically, Trump and other politicians around the globe profited from the techno-algorithmic mechanism called *psychometrics*. As a powerful device for psychopolitical profiling and marketing, psychometrics micro-targets voters wherein they receive personalized advertisements, "based on their psychograms, *via* social media. Like consumer behaviour, voting behaviour is subjected to unconscious influences. Data-driven infocracy undermines the democratic process, which requires autonomy and freedom of the will" (Han 2022, 27). After Trump's pre-orchestrated victory during his first term in 2016, Cambridge Analytica, the British data analytics and behavioral communications company, gloriously yet disturbingly declared: 'We are thrilled that our revolutionary approach to data-driven communications played such an integral part in President-elect Trump's extraordinary win.' [13]

In a similar vein, former Cambridge Analytica *employee-turned-whistleblower* Brittany Kaiser revealed in *Rappler Talk* on July 15, 2020, that former senator and now Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. requested the said company to rebrand the image of the 'Marcos' family on social media. Despite this controversial request, CEO Alexander Nix perceived it as a great financial opportunity for the now-defunct political data company.[14] Likewise, the Marcos Jr. political camp efficiently utilized popular social media platforms, such as *Facebook*, *YouTube*, and *TikTok*, to reach out to Filipino voters, especially those who access the internet for anything "socio-political." What exacerbates this predicament is that even though trolls and fake news are fueled mainly by money, the fact remains that some individuals (netizens) continue to act as agents of these misleading mechanisms because of their blind allegiance to certain political organizations and personalities. In her Harvard University commencement speech, the *Rappler* CEO and Nobel-Laureate Maria Ressa underscores this aforesaid crisis. Alluding to former President Rodrigo Duterte and other global fascists, she laments: "an atom bomb exploded in our information ecosystem because social media turned our world upside down, spreading lies, faster than facts, while amplifying fear and anger, fueling hatred. By design. For profit. Whether it's the AI of social media or generative AI, we don't have integrity of information, we don't have integrity of facts."[15]

In addition, a hyperactive and short-sighted society disheartens the emergence of rage. As a principle of negativity, rage is the ability to interrupt the present and spawn new things. A society without this negativity, thus, lacks a critical relation with the world and is incapable of spawning new things. On a micro-level, an individual devoid of rage is characterized by an impoverished and amorphous political identity.[16] The crippling political consciousness converts the subject into a positivity machine whose life estranges vitality and the impetus for socio-political transformation.[17] Writ large, a society inhabited by depoliticized subjectivities, Han (2015b, 6-7) aptly describes, "does not harbor negativity that might radically question the political-economic system as it stands. It is blind to what lies outside the system. It confirms and optimizes only what already exist." Instead of rage, what governs the achievement subject is 'digital outrage' (Han 2017b, 8)—an affective and ephemeral emotion depicted in 'politically correct' social media posts. These posts usually lack profundity, follow through in real life, and potency to transform oppressive societal conditions. For example, some users immediately de-commit themselves when a previous political engagement in social media is overridden by romanticized or controversial issues involving celebrities or influencers. Diverting attention prevents individuals from deeply analyzing their societal conditions and establishing a community of solidarity and negativity. In fact, a profound societal awareness presupposes understanding or knowledge. However, because of accelerated time, information lacks time to marinade into knowledge. In this manner, information becomes deformative, communication becomes cumulative, and social critique is deadened.

Through 'dataism,' (Han 2022, 15-17) people tend to ignore the critical questions and more profound issues once they are presented with data. Those who sincerely advocated for the 'War on Drugs' during Rodrigo Duterte's presidency, for instance, always cite statistical data on how *tokhang* has reduced crime and drug rates in urban areas. They no longer question whether this method is ethical and methodologically credible. More importantly, these die-hard supporters no longer interrogate the principal reason behind the massive proliferation of drugs and crimes in the country. Dataism incapacitates people from perceiving the interconnections or the causal relations between things. Blind supporters are incapable of comprehending that the drug problem is not the only quandary plaguing Philippine society. In some places in the Philippines, the issues troubling the community are unemployment, food security, and literacy (Coronel 2021, xi). As such, a holistic understanding and analysis of the drug war necessitates an understanding of the other adjacent societal contagions damaging Philippine communities.

Politics' debasement, in general, and the degeneration of democracy in particular, is also reflected in the educational realm. Academics hyperactively and blindly embrace the ranking bandwagon without interrogating its credibility and searching for the different factors considered and the methodologies utilized behind this metricized system. Sometimes, rankings per discipline or researcher are based on questionable parameters consequential to anomalous results.[18] More importantly, some academics blindly participate in this bandwagon without noticing the elephant in the room that regulates and manipulates this game—neoliberal capitalism. Inopportunely, although manifold dubious and predatory schemes corrupt the ranking system, critical challenges to this irregularity merely appear as sporadic whispers

quickly superseded by voluminous clerical tasks, re-tooling activities, and even diverting controversies in popular culture. The non-existence of dissent serves as the greatest foundation of a one-dimensional achievement society.

A developed political identity presupposes the existence and consciousness of a community. However, the subject's ability to intricately analyze political occurrences and ethically recognize the other is inchoate or vitiated. The numbing of sensibility goes hand in hand with the weakening of criticality. Aside from the subject's superficial knowledge of and engagement with socio-political events, he/she remains unperturbed in the face of social injustices, hence, fashioning a breeding ground for neutrality and indifference. Jean Baudrillard (1994, 11) compellingly describes this moment as the "zero point of politics, a stage which also implies the reproduction of politics, its endless simulation."

The deterioration of political consciousness is exponentially widespread in the cyberspace. The ubiquitous and totalizing algorithms in the digital sphere undermine not only people's critical acuity, but also their emotional sensibility. These characteristics are undoubtedly indispensable in empathizing with the Other and grasping different political occurrences.[19] Numerous digital infrastructures or social media platforms simplistically reduce complex human emotions into default reaction emojis or GIFs (Graphics Interchange Format). It is as if emotions and experiences "can be replaced by algorithmic information capable of transforming that object or that event into exchangeable existence" (Berardi 2009a, 95). They likewise discourage negativity, as seen in the absence of a dislike button on Facebook and a double thumbs-down button on *Netflix*. These digital images "offer no complexity…. They lack all brokenness, which would trigger physical or mental reflection" (Han 2015b, 13) that would substantially decelerate communication and the flows of capital. In addition, much of political involvements today are reduced to online participations—a 'politics of Like,' where different discourses and predicaments are one-dimensionally gauged through the rubrics of positivity, the quantity of information, and the acceleration of exchange. Paradoxically, even negativity is capacitated to accelerate information and proliferate communication. In its debased form, negativity is used to propagate controversies and gather more attention or sympathy from the netizens.[20] In other words, it can also be converted into an instrument of transparency.

Furthermore, netizens (anonymous or identified) still maintain the perspectives corresponding to their prejudicial taste or narrative regardless of their veracity, and despite the presence of credible repositories of knowledge. A meaningful and reliable grasp of the different political events and principles appears to be an unfeasible project, thanks to the omnipresent positivity governing the present society. The death of negativity undermines or eradicates critique and creates myopic echo chambers, where the populace voluntarily embraces prejudicial opinions and facts parallel to their whimsical self-referentiality. Han (2015b, 7) laments, "Opinions are matters of no consequence… They lack cogent negativity… Compulsive transparency stabilizes the existing system most effectively… It does not harbor negativity that might radically question the political-economic system as it stands. It is blind to what lies outside the system." Shying away from genuine vision and dedicated political commitments breeds a 'politics of agreeableness' (Han 2021a, 127). Politics of this sort is not only

repugnant to negativity, but it is also afraid of experiencing pain and undergoing struggles. In *The Palliative Society*, Han (2021b, 7)[21] asserts:

> The pressure to conform and to reach consensus intensifies. Politics accommodates itself to the demands of this palliative zone and loses all vitality. 'There is no alternative': this is a political analgesia. The vague 'centre ground' has a palliative effect. Instead of argument and competition over better ideas, there is a surrender to systemic compulsion. Post-democracy, palliative democracy, is spreading. Palliative politics is incapable of implementing radical reforms that might be painful. It prefers quick-acting analgesics, which only mask systemic dysfunctionality and distortion. Palliative politics lacks the courage to endure pain.

As such, the social equation, *less critique and struggles entail less commitment and meaning* metamorphoses as the new universal *ethos* of the achievement/positive subject—a dubious and narcissistic formula that prevents overcoming his/her self-optimized walls. More importantly, politics regulated by this new *ethos* is not characterized by a "mutual desire for another way of living" (Han 2017c, 44).

Lastly, intense consumerism and productivity governing the society of positivity promote a fleeting and shallow relation with the Other. The commodification of values or culture perils the foundation of the community. Even social justice and humanity support are turned into consumerist products and/or causes. Caps, t-shirts, and coffee mugs that support the 'Black Lives Matter' movement, for instance, can be purchased in its official online store.[22] From a Hanian perspective, this merely illustrates consumerist politics or performative activism: "Changing the world through consumption – that would be the end of the revolution" (Han 2020, 5). Instead of actively participating in opposing racial injustice in conjunction with neoliberal capitalism, Han underscores that people merely resort to the smooth route of consumption. But consumption is not revolution. Fingers "by themselves, are not capable of genuine action. They are only an *organ for making consumer choices*. Consumption and revolution exclude each other" (Han 2022, 15). Unfortunately, consumption impairs the bonds between people and the continuity of the community because the commodification of values benefits no one else but the self. Politics, thus, transforms into a debased habitat for an impossible revolution because "there is no cooperative, networked multitude that could serve as a global protest movement and revolutionary body" (Han, 2021a, 18).[23]

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I reconstruct Han's critical analysis of the neoliberal capitalist system, through a genealogy of his notion of the 'undead life,' and its effects to the desecration of life, fragmentation of the community, and depoliticization of identities in the contemporary period. However, despite the brevity and lucidity of his writings, they are not exempted from different criticisms.

Generally, it is tempting to claim that Han suggests a nostalgic return to old rituals or practices. This is perhaps the reason some scholars accuse him of conservative humanism. Re-visiting these communal forms of life, Han accentuates, merely hopes to emancipate the current society from its collective narcissism and inspire the formulation of novel ways to radically survive and thrive. Of course, people cannot just wait for an apocalyptic event that will rejuvenate eros, or "reveal the atopia of the Wholly Other by suddenly interrupting the *Same*" (Han 2017c, 7) like in Lars von Trier's film *Melancholia*. It is likewise futile to merely embrace old values or traditions blindly.

Contra Han, I think that cyberspace can still serve as a well-spring of some pragmatic or revolutionary possibilities. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, individuals forged ways to effectively utilize the affirmative potentials of the digital technology. Some examples include synchronous lectures and meetings, medical e-consultations, online *kamustahan* sessions, and call for donations to help typhoon victims and drug war victims. *Prima facie*, these novel *e*-nitiatives do not necessarily lead to Han's theorization of a ritual community. However, the power of the people's narratives of despair and survival should not be underestimated, since they are potent vectors of community-formation and ethical solidarity in the future.

Admittedly though, Han's lucid writings are sometimes subtly tainted by reductive disquisitions and analyses heedless or oblivious to moments of becoming emerging at the interstices of things.[24] Additionally, his writings are occasionally repetitive and polarizing, and moderately logo-/Eurocentric.[25] There are times that cultural complexities are overlooked or obscured by Han's exceptional philosophical ruminations. In many Third World countries, for instance, digital literacy and internet access remain as societal problems for they are only accessible to the privileged few. As such, the oppressive impacts of the digital panopticon or the achievement society vary from one society to another.

Against the backdrop of these criticisms, Han's comprehensive diagnosis of the neoliberal system stands faithful to the perennial goal of philosophy, i.e., to struggle against different mutations of the undead life towards a life of becomings (Han 2021a, 102). He ingeniously puts a face to this objective in *Psychopolitics* through the principle of 'Idiotism.' Playing the role of the idiot gives us access to the wholly *Other*. As an idiosyncratic, un-allied, and un-networked entity, the idiot inhabits an immemorial exteriority and thus metamorphoses as a figure of resistance (Han 2017a, 83). In *Capitalism and the Death Drive*, meanwhile, this nomadic subjectivity transforms into an 'active death,' which is premised on a "life that returns death to life" which emancipates us "from the paradox of undead life…." (Han 2021a, 14).

Aside from the idiot, Han commends Paul Celan with his theorization of the poem that provides us an opportunity to dialogue with the Other—a conversation which "lets the most essential aspect of the other speak…." (Han 2018a, 64).[26] The opportunity to recognize the uncanny Other through poetry also opens the doors for cultivating an active friendship in an egoistic and positivity-laden world. According to Han (2018b, 47),

> To free itself from the narcissistic hamster wheel, … it would have to restore a relationship to the other…. It should be possible to have a

> relationship to the other in which I affirm it in its otherness, allowing it to
> be as it is. This yes to its being is called friendship. This friendship is not
> a passive, indifferent, …   relationship with the other but rather an active,
> involved relationship to its being.

The essential ingredients of this new philosophy include an optimal amount of solidarity from a minimum amount of commonality and maximum nearness from a minimum relation.

The aforesaid examples are only a few of the alternative images of life or figures of resistance derivable from Han's writings. These alternatives can help neutralize or antagonize the detrimental effects of the contemporary undead life. The invisible thread that links all these practices is what he calls the '*vita contemplativa*.' In a world of hyper-production, hyper-connection, and narcissism, this human capacity should be radically revitalized because it "connects [us] to the experience of being in which what is beautiful and perfect does not change or pass—a state that eludes all human intervention…." (Han 2015a, 14). While the *vita contemplativa* is a recurring theme in his writings, it is only in his newly published book *Vita Contemplativa: In Praise of Inactivity* (2024)[27] where he extensively discusses this principle defined by the solemn call for inactivity towards a vibrant world of becomings. However, the idea of inactivity in Han's writings only achieves more philosophic depth and radicality when freed from its anthropological essencing, i.e., when examined in conjunction with his earlier, albeit recently translated works, such as *Absence: On The Culture and Philosophy of the Far East.* In this provocative literature, he theorizes the concept of 'absence' or 'absencing' as the paramount pillar of Far Eastern thinking. Absencing dwells on a culture of in-difference wherein events unfold with no particular subject and intentionality involved because "most expressions retreat into the in-difference of a singular *happening, without victim and perpetrator, without guilt and atonement*" (Han 2023, 78).

Ironically, despite Han's extensive criticism of neoliberal capitalism, he could not escape the commodifying character of the society of positivity. His condensed ideas, austere sentences, and short books are summarized by clout-chasing netizens into a sort of *Reader's Digest* guide to life on *YouTube* and *Tiktok*, such as, "Byung-Chul Han and self-optimization #capitalism #marxism #therapy," "Go take a walk #boredum #bored #philosophy #philosophytok #philo101 #byungchulhan # achievementsociety #burnout #burnoutsociety #contemplation #think," and "#love #relationshipadvice #philosophy #psychology #billbeteet." [28] But instead of being disheartened, this inevitable possibility should make people, especially the netizens, more vigilant and creative in going against the grain of neoliberal capitalism and in navigating the information regime.[29] One possible way is to regularly practice digital Sabbath or detox—an intervention where netizens critically distance themselves from the tyranny of perpetual transparency. Unplugging from constant digital connectivity may open opportunities for improved communal interaction, contemplative moments, and spiritual re-connection. With prudence, they may likewise explore and utilize open-source sites and de-centralized social media platforms, where there is more autonomy, privacy, and a relatively better sense of community. Some of these

alternative platforms include *Minds* (https://minds.com), *Mastodon* (https://www.mastodon.social), and Lemmy (https://join-lemmy.org/).

In the concluding and climactic scene of *Nosedive,* Lacie's encounter with Susan marks a turning point as the latter challenges the totalizing rating system and encourages the former to embrace genuine emancipation from the transparent society. As Lacie finds herself imprisoned, her digitalized contact lens is removed, thereby liberating her from inescapable surveillance. Consecutively, she removes her outer garment and gazes at the dust drifting down from the ceiling. Amidst laughter and tears, she sees an African American staring at her from an adjacent cell. Subsequently, they exchange vulgar and insulting language with each other. Their unfiltered verbal sparring astonishingly surmounts hostility and leads both to experience a paradoxical solace in being able provocative to talk freely and critically without the pressure from a rating-obsessed society. The episode culminates in a valiant moment of defiance as they jointly howled their fury—a scathing denunciation of the system.

NOTES

1. Just to be clear, the societies Han mentioned overlap with each other. In *The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault (1995, 207) discusses the transition of disciplinary power to the internalization of the externalized power. Deleuze, in "Postscripts on the Society of Control," claims that Foucault's disciplinary society could not fully take account of the emerging pathologies of the time, specifically those observed after World War II. Deleuze argues that the control society offers a more intricate form of surveillance and control where power operates in a more free-floating totalizing form (Deleuze 1990, 178).

2. Oppression does not come only from negativity or from an external system. Rather, it also comes from positivity—"not just from the Other or the foreign, but also from the Same" (Han 2015a, 4).

3. *Reply 1988*, directed by Shin Won-ho, written by Lee Woo-jung (South Korea: tvN, 2015–2016), available on Netflix.

4. See Jessie Yeung, " 'Somebody is going to die': How Seoul's deadly Halloween crush unfolded," *CNN*, November 4, 2022, https://edition.cnn.com/2022/11/04/asia/itaewon-seoul-korea-halloween-crush-timeline-intl-hnk-dst/index.html.

5. There are also ritualistic practices which are harsh, dangerous, and outdated. For example, female members of the Dani Tribe in Papua New Guinea (Indonesia), cut off their fingers when their loved ones die as a gesture of grief. At present, this practice has declined against the backdrop of the rapidly evolving contemporary society (Becky, "Finger Cutting of The Dani Tribe: Pain, Grief, and Heritage!," *Indonesia Sentinel*, November 11, 2024, https://indonesiasentinel.com/finger-cutting-of-the-dani-tribe-pain-grief-and-heritage/.

6. The Moriones festival reminisces the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as well as recounts Longinus' story, https://www.festivalscape.com/philippines/marinduque/moriones-festival/.

7. See Tyler Lubben, "The Impact of Social Media on Cultural Traditions and Values Unveiling the Dual Impact of Social Media on Cultural Preservation and

Evolution," *Medium*, April 7, 2024, https://medium.com/illuminations-mirror/the-impact-of-social-media-on-cultural-traditions-and-values-e10c9034a96a.

8. See "Nyepi: Bali's New Year's Day of Complete Silence," *Wonderful Indonesia*, June 11, 2024, https://www.indonesia.travel/gb/en/event-festivals/nyepi-balis-new-years-day-of-complete-silence.

9. In *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, Jonathan Crary (2013, 11) observes that "there is an erosion of sleep everywhere. Over the course of the twentieth century, there were steady inroad made against the time of sleep."

10. See Berardi, 2009a, 106-109.

11. See Robert Requintina, "US rapper Lizzo quits music industry in shocking post," *Manila Bulletin Online*, March 30, 2024, https://mb.com.ph/2024/3/30/us-rapper-lizzo-quits-music-industry-in-shocking-post.

12. See also Arendt 1998, 320-325.

13. See "Cambridge Analytica Congratulates President-elect Donald Trump and Vice President-elect Mike Pence," *PR Newswire*, November 9, 2016, https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/cambridge-analytica-congratulates-president-elect-donald-trump-and-vice-president-elect-mike-pence-300359987.html.

14. Sofia Tomacruz, "Bongbong Marcos asked Cambridge Analytica to 'rebrand' family image," *Rappler*, July 15, 2020, https://www.rappler.com/nation/bongbong-marcos-cambridge-analytica-rebrand-family-image/.

15. Maria Ressa, "FULL TEXT: Maria Ressa's speech at the 2024 Harvard commencement ceremony," *Rappler*, May 24, 2024, https://www.rappler.com/voices/thought-leaders/full-text-maria-ressa-speech-2024-harvard-commencement-ceremony/.

16. See also Sloterdijk 2010, 2.

17. See Adorno 1991, 104.

18. See Antonio Contreras, "The business of ranking and rating universities," *The Manila Times*, March 21, 2024, https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/03/21/opinion/columns/the-business-of-ranking-and-rating-universities/1937769.

19. See also Berardi 2009a, 11-14.

20. See Michael Sandel, "Philosopher Michael Sandel on What Trump's Win Says About American Society," interview by Walter Isacson, *Amanpour and Company*, YouTube video, 17 mins. and 58 secs., November 15, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Um017R5Kr3A. In this interview, Sandel emphasizes that one of the failures of the Democrats is that they failed to underscore the dignity of work that caused many Americans to feel socially and economically left out. And despite a barrage of criticisms launched against Trump, his political managers strategically portrayed him as the representative of the marginalized class in the contemporary American society.

21. See also Han 2017c, 43-44.

22. See, for example, the *Black Lives Matter Official Store*, https://store.blacklivesmatter.com/dept/merchandise?cp=101422_103740.

23. See also Berardi 2009a, 34: "In order for struggles to form a cycle there must be a spatial proximity of the bodies of labor and an existential temporal continuity. Without this proximity and this continuity, we lack the conditions for the cellularized bodies to

become community. No wave can be created, because the workers do not share their existence in time, and behaviors can only become a wave when there is a continuous proximity in time that info-labor no longer allows."

24. See, for instance, his hasty take on the impossibility of revolution today (Han 2021a, 16-20).

25. This criticism will be neutralized when scholars would likewise indulge ample time in his theorization of 'absence,' which serves as the bedrock of Far Eastern thinking. According to him, this brand of thinking resides neither in the "inner and the outer, inwardness and outwardness. It dwells in a zone of in-difference, an in-between that is both de-internalized and de-externalized. Emptiness is neither inside nor outside (Han 2023, 30). Aside from this, scholars may likewise study other corollary concepts, such as 'friendliness' and 'deep bowing.'

26. Han also nobly admires the practice of the Japanese tea ceremony because it de-psychologizes egos in collective silence (Han 2020, 64).

27. Before this book, Han wrote a chapter "*Vita Contemplativa*," in *The Scent of Time* (2017d, 85-144).

28. See, for example, Paul Blaschko, "Go Take a Walk," *Tiktok*, February 22, 2022, https://www.tiktok.com/@profblaschko/video/7067289590650113326.

29. See, for example, Max Oden, "Brands backing Black Lives Matter: it might be a marketing ploy, but it also shows leadership," *The Conversation*, June 4, 2020, https://theconversation.com/brands-backing-black-lives-matter-it-might-be-a-marketing-ploy-but-it-also-shows-leadership-139874.

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