

Article

Rethinking the Neoliberal University through Byung-Chul Han (First of Two Parts)

Kyle Alfred M. Barte

Abstract: In this paper, I engage the neoliberalization of universities using insights from Byung-Chul Han. Specifically, I criticize the neoliberal university's absolute prioritization of what Han calls the *vita activa* (active life) over the *vita contemplativa* (contemplative life). I argue that the emphasis the neoliberal university places on activity or work is crippling its own capacity to think. I begin by expositing Han's insight that thinking and knowledge flourishes during moments of inactivity or leisure, i.e., the *vita contemplativa*. Next, I present a brief sketch of the neoliberal university and, using Han's language, emphasize how work and performance have become its central categories, eventually diminishing the role of inactivity or leisure within its walls. Afterwards, I show that the absolutization of the *vita activa* has crippled thinking within the confines of the university. This atrophy of thought is manifested in various areas, such as the informatization of teaching, the inability to criticize the status quo, the production of superficial and inferior research publications, and the fading of the spirit of community. Finally, this paper ends with an appraisal of the *vita contemplativa* as a counterbalance to the neoliberal strictures on thinking within the university.

Keywords: Han, achievement society, neoliberal university, *vita contemplativa*

With a few exceptions, universities across the globalized parts of the world have become neoliberal institutions. Accordingly, corporate-inspired schemes—such as managerialism, audit, transparency, commercialization, standardization, league tables, and metrics—that drive the ceaseless demand for production, optimization,

efficiency, competition, and so on, now define their day-to-day operations.¹ It is not surprising then that the culture and everyday work in universities now closely resemble the ethos of hyperactivity and optimization so prevalent in today's corporate world. Correlatively, across many neoliberal universities spaces and time to do nothing particularly productive are becoming less and less common.² Indeed, the corporate ethic of busyness, hyperactivity, and productivity has seemingly become the accepted way of doing things.

This paper attempts to problematize the neoliberal university's apparent fetishization of activity and busyness using the philosophical framework of Byung-Chul Han. Specifically, my analysis will center on Han's insight that thinking and contemplation—the *vita contemplativa*—primarily emerge during moments of inactivity.³ Inactivity in the Hanian sense is a type of doing that has no end; an act that is free from purpose or usefulness, like forms of leisure.⁴ The problem, however, is that, from the viewpoint of the performance-driven neoliberal regime—where one's worth is defined by one's productivity—this type of purposeless doing is treated, Han says, “as a deficiency that must be overcome as quickly as possible.”⁵ In applying Han's insights to the neoliberal university, my argument is twofold. First, the paper argues that the neoliberal university's overemphasis on activity or work has crippled thinking within its walls. Shoving the cult of productivity and efficiency down the gullets of academics and students reduces them to mere machines that cannot pause and think but must simply execute, to a certain degree mindlessly, one task after another. Hence, as I will show later, what is common in universities today is the production of uninspiring and unoriginal research papers, the erosion of pedagogical techniques that demand thinking, the general disability to connect the dots between disparate pieces of information, and the erosion of the spirit of community. And second, that to ameliorate its capacity to think, the university must rehabilitate its ability to be inactive. This entails that the university must, to a certain extent, insulate itself from the logic of neoliberalism. Educating for economic growth has its own

¹ See, for example, Igea Troiani and Claudia Dutson, “The Neoliberal University as a Space to Learn/Think/Work in Higher Education,” in *Architecture and Culture*, 9:1 (2021), 12; Daniel Saunders, “The Impact of Neoliberalism on College Students,” in *Journal of College and Character*, 8:5 (2007), 2; and Gina Anderson, “Carving out time and space in the managerial university,” in *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 19:5 (2006), 579.

² For this discussion, see Troiani and Dutson, “The Neoliberal University as a Space to Learn/Think/Work in Higher Education,” 5-23.

³ For this discussion, see Byung-Chul Han, *Vita Contemplativa: In Praise of Inactivity*, trans. by Daniel Steuer (Cambridge and Hoboken: Polity Press, 2024), EPUB, chap. 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

advantages. However, as I will explain below, pathologies emerge when the university becomes too hospitable to the neoliberal logic. Warding off the active-driven neoliberal logic engenders pockets of inactivity within the university, spaces where it can breathe and think.

While a great multitude of studies on the neoliberal university and its pernicious impacts on the faculty and students already exists, what remains underrepresented in the vast body of literature is a sustained exploration of neoliberalism's ruinous impact on thinking. Meanwhile, many of the few studies that have explored the precarious relationship between the neoliberal university and the act of thinking have merely done so in passing, oftentimes neglecting to provide a nuanced and profound description of thinking,⁶ as if the act of thinking is something that requires no further elaboration. This is where my paper becomes relevant. It will address the gaps in the literature by, firstly, presenting through Han a nuanced and substantial understanding of thinking and, secondly, by highlighting how this is crippled by the neoliberal principles many universities today embrace. Arming myself with a more refined view of the act of thinking enables me to present a more thorough analysis of how it is affected, often negatively, by the neoliberal principles that have become commonplace in many universities.

To develop my arguments, this paper will be split into two parts, with each part comprising two sections. In part I, I will firstly provide an exposition of Byung-Chul Han's analysis of neoliberal society, with emphasis given on his framing of the neoliberal regime as an active society or a society dominated by the *vita activa*. It will then show that for Han this neoliberal emphasis on the *vita activa* has crippled society's general capacity to think because the ceaseless demand for work and performance efface moments of inactivity where thought can enter the contemplative mode. Secondly, I will present a general sketch of the neoliberal university to portray it as an institution blanketed by the *vita activa*. I will explain how, overtime, the neoliberal emphasis on the *vita activa* penetrated the walls of universities and has now become its dominant logic, turning it into an active university. Part II will firstly discuss, using Han's conceptual tool box as a heuristic lens, how thinking in the neoliberal university has been crippled because of the *vita activa's* dominance. Here, I will highlight the various areas in the university where thought has clearly atrophied due to its embrace of neoliberal principles. Part II will end by providing an appraisal of inactivity as a possible antidote to crippled thinking in neoliberal

⁶ See, for instance, Troiani and Dutson, "The Neoliberal University as a Space to Learn/Think/Work in Higher Education," 5-23. See also Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber, *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

universities. It will also anticipate possible objections and provide responses to them.

Han's Critique of the Neoliberal Regime: Achievement, Transparency, and the Erosion of the *Vita Contemplativa*

Almost all of Byung-Chul Han's numerous books are held together by an opposition against a common enemy: neoliberalism. He is often severe, even ruthless, in his criticisms of the neoliberal regime. This scathing indictment can be gleaned in what many consider as his most popular work, his 2015 publication *The Burnout Society* (originally published in German in 2010), in which he announced, owing to the various techniques of the neoliberal regime, that the 21st century has transformed into an achievement society.⁷ In Han's eyes, this society is fundamentally different from the disciplinary society of the 20th century, the society which Michel Foucault skilfully dissected throughout his works. While Foucault's disciplinary society was dominated by negativity—by prohibitions, punishments, commandments, borders, and the like—Han observes that the contemporary achievement society is dominated by positivity, that is, by “the inability to say no.”⁸ The individuals who populate such a society—achievement subjects as he calls it—are seduced by the neoliberal regime into pursuing innumerable projects and achievements without end, constituting them as individuals who are expected to be able to do everything optimally.⁹

Han discerns that one fundamental effect of this achievement-based society is the heightening of individual competition and, by extension, the prevention of the formation of a community. A community, as Han suggests in the book *In the Swarm: Digital Prospects*, denotes a stable “we” that displays concern for society as a whole.¹⁰ The neoliberal regime, however, sees that a society of atomized egos freely competing against one another inevitably drives up production. Thus, in one of his latest books, *Vita Contemplativa: In Praise of Inactivity*, he wrote that “[t]he neoliberal regime increases productivity by isolating people and forcing them to compete. It transforms life into a battle for survival, into a hell of unbridled competition.”¹¹ When we take a cursory glance at the state of contemporary

⁷ Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society*, trans. by Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Byung-Chul Han, *In The Swarm: Digital Prospects*, trans. by Erik Butler (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2017), 7.

¹¹ Han, *Vita Contemplativa*, chap. 4.

society today, it is not difficult to agree with Han's thoughts here. Truly, a spirit of individual achievement and competition seems to hang in the air of contemporary societies, as multiple studies corroborate.¹²

A dialectical movement unmistakably animates Han's analysis here. This is obvious when we read his 2017 book *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power*. Neoliberalism, he says, proves to be highly efficient and intelligent when, instead of dominating through discipline, it controls society by exploiting freedom.¹³ He notes that when individuals are forced to obey and produce against their will, as is the case in a disciplinary society, the returns are scant.¹⁴ Hence, to heighten production, domination switched from discipline to the individual freedom to achieve because, to invoke Han's words in *The Burnout Society*, "the achievement-subject is faster and more productive than the obedience-subject."¹⁵ Yet, as Jason Bartles clarifies, for Han, "it is not that subjugation and coercion no longer exist but rather that the achievement subject feels free in their obedience to capitalism."¹⁶ This occurs because instead of ruling with an iron fist, capitalism now cloaks itself in the garb of friendliness. To prove Han's point, Bartles mentions the gamification of labor in contemporary offices which conditions the workers to be emotionally invested in the pursuit of achievement and efficiency by creating the illusion that work is now play, that it should be enjoyed instead of being shunned like the plague.¹⁷ The upshot here, of course, is that the more invested and excited workers become for work, the more they aid in the accumulation of capital.

Han further nuances his analysis of the performance-obsessed neoliberal regime in his 2015 book *The Transparency Society* (originally published in German in 2012). "Transparency is a state in which all not-knowing is eliminated," he writes in its closing pages.¹⁸ What Han here has

¹² See, for instance, Emily Sohn, "Perfectionism and the high-stakes culture of success: The hidden toll on kids and parents," in *American Psychological Association* (1 October 2024), <<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2024/10/antidote-achievement-culture>>; Thomas Curran and Andrew P. Hill, "Perfectionism is Increasing, and That's Not Good News," in *Harvard Business Review* (27 January 2018), <<https://hbr.org/2018/01/perfectionism-is-increasing-and-thats-not-good-news>>; and Will Coldwell, "The rise of perfectionism—and the harm it's doing us all," in *The Guardian* (4 June 2023), <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jun/04/the-rise-of-perfectionism-and-the-harm-its-doing-us-all>>.

¹³ Byung-Chul Han, *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power*, trans. by Erik Butler (London & New York: Verso, 2017), 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Han, *The Burnout Society*, 9.

¹⁶ Jason A. Bartles, "Byung-Chul Han's Negativity; or, Restoring Beauty and Rage in Excessively Positive Times," in *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 21:3 (2021), 59.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Byung-Chul Han, *The Transparency Society*, trans by Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 47-48.

in mind is the various techniques the neoliberal regime deploys to surreptitiously manipulate individuals to willingly render everything about them visible or quantifiable. Social media, for instance, has encouraged individuals to shamelessly, even pornographically, display all facets of their existence. Meanwhile, the rise of metrics has led to the emergence of individuals and institutions that cannot help but quantify their performance, essentially translating their existence and identities to measurable data points. Worryingly, while contemporary society seems to valorize transparency, Han sees it as an apparatus of dictatorial control. This is because it is through transparency that capital is able to colonize all spheres of existence to operationalize and accelerate them.¹⁹ It therefore makes sense why contemporary offices have quotas for their workers. It makes sense why individuals today are encouraged to obsess about numbers and data—such as their caloric intake, hours of sleep, steps taken, sales made, funds collected, and so on. It makes sense why, as Jerry Muller showed, a metric fixation has engulfed contemporary societies.²⁰ By rendering everything visible or flattening everything into a number, the apparatus of transparency tyrannizes individuals and institutions to incessantly compel themselves to improve their performance vis-à-vis the gathered data. At the end of the day, this amounts to one thing: the self-optimization of individuals and institutions augments the expansion and accumulation of capital.

In Han's mind, this neoliberal regime of achievement and transparency ultimately absolutizes the *vita activa* or a life dominated by work and performance. This type of life, according to Jason Morgan's interpretation of Han, entails that "the self must always be in the middle of self-production, in obeisance to the dictates of capital."²¹ More vividly, Han wrote in a language akin to the early Marx:

Thus, a society of work emerges in which *everyone* is a slave to work, i.e. a society of working people. Everything has to be a kind of work, and there is no time that is not dedicated to work. The dispositif of work makes *time itself do work*. Work makes use of all activities and forces for itself; it presents itself as *one universal* activity. Because all energy is fully absorbed by work, the only thing that can fill the time outside of work is a

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

²⁰ See Jerry Z. Muller, *The Tyranny of Metrics* (Princeton and Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2018).

²¹ Jason Morgan, "Ritual and Otherness in Human Relations: The Human-Person Philosophy of Byung-Chul Han," in *Studia Gilsoniana*, 12:2 (April-June 2023), 315.

passive entertainment or recreation that serves only to make the worker able to work again with his full strength.²²

But while Marx's proletariat was exploited and coerced by an external domineering force—the capitalist—Han's achievement subjects voluntarily and excitedly submit themselves to the cult of work all in the name of maximizing achievement.²³ As a consequence, there is no master or greedy capitalist to blame when they face the destructive effects of overworking. They have no one to blame but themselves. This is the context for Han's most popular conclusion: this active-driven society ultimately leads to the subject's burnout and depression. The achievement subject, he wrote in *The Disappearance of Rituals*, "exploits itself voluntarily and passionately until it breaks down. It optimizes itself to death. Its failing is called depression or burnout."²⁴ In the estimations of Alphin and Debrix, this is one of Han's most novel arguments for it discloses the sad reality that burnout and depression, and the other psychic maladies of achievement society, are not caused by a vicious other but are painful experiences that are self-inflicted.²⁵ But aside from the psychic maladies it engenders, Han points out that incessant activity also leads to the demise of thinking. This is now where my exposition will turn to.

In his 2017 book (originally published in German in 2009) *The Scent of Time: A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Linger*, Han speculated that the active-driven neoliberal regime may have crippled thinking and lessened the number of thinkers today precisely because it has pushed aside the *vita contemplativa* in favor of the *vita activa*. Let me state his case in verbatim:

It may be a particular characteristic of the present that thinkers, anyhow a small number at any time, have become even fewer. Thinking might have suffered from the fact that the *vita contemplativa* has been pushed aside in favour of the *vita activa*; it is possible that the hyperactive restlessness, the frantiness and unrest of today, does not do any good to thinking, and that

²² Byung-Chul Han, *The Scent of Time: A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Linger*, trans. by Daniel Steuer (Cambridge and Medford: Polity Press, 2017), EPUB, chap. 12.

²³ Han, *Psychopolitics*, 2-5.

²⁴ Byung-Chul Han, *The Disappearance of Rituals: A Topology of the Present*, trans. by Daniel Steuer (Cambridge and Medford: Polity Press, 2020), 14.

²⁵ Caroline Alphin and François Debrix, "Biopolitics in the 'Psychic Realm': Han, Foucault and neoliberal psychopolitics," in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 49:4 (2021), 6.

thinking just reproduces always the same because of increasing time pressures.²⁶

Han here highlights the inextricable link between thinking and the *vita contemplativa*. Thinking “is a contemplative activity. It is a manifestation of the *vita contemplativa*,” he wrote in the same text.²⁷

The *vita contemplativa* is a concept that Han has developed throughout his number of writings. In *The Burnout Society*, he characterized it as a state whose basic mood is, in his own words, “marveling at *the way things are* ... which has nothing to do with practicality or processuality.”²⁸ More than a decade after writing these words, Han developed this further in the book *Vita Contemplativa* in which he primarily uses the term “inactivity” to refer to *vita contemplativa*. Inactivity, as he defined in that book, is a form of “free time,” time that interrupts the order of work and production.²⁹ Hence, it has nothing to do with work, performance, practicality, or processuality. Work and performance belong to the order of survival, according to Han.³⁰ Individuals work in order to procure the things that they need. By contrast, as free time, inactive moments reflect the useless and the purposeless: “This ‘to-no-end’, this freedom from purpose and usefulness, is the essential core of inactivity,” Han adds.³¹ Han’s commentator Steven Knepper gives us a couple of relatable examples of the *vita contemplativa*. For him, observing wildlife, painting, and reading a book on a bench at a busy bus stop—assuming, of course, that they are not done for the sake of achievement—are all forms of inactivity.³² They are forms of inactivity because they are forms of interruptions from the imperative of work and performance. In Han’s language, they are pursuits that have no practical use or purpose in capital’s quest for endless accumulation.

For Han, it is during these moments of inactivity or leisure—where there is no coercion or necessitation, toil or care—that thought is free to venture deep and far.³³ Work, by contrast, is the absence of freedom. In work, the mind and body is completely taken over by the necessity to fill a lack, reach a goal, or the need to survive that the individual becomes incapable of contemplative inactivity.³⁴ This is why the life of Han’s thinker

²⁶ Han, *The Scent of Time*, chap. 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Han, *The Burnout Society*, 14.

²⁹ Han, *Vita Contemplativa*, chap. 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Steven Knepper, Ethan Stoneman, and Robert Wyllie, *Byung-Chul Han: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge and Hoboken: Polity Press, 2024), 134.

³³ Han, *The Scent of Time*, chap. 12.

³⁴ Han, *Vita Contemplativa*, chap. 1.

is anything but work.³⁵ The point is that, for Han, deep contemplative thinking, such as philosophizing, flourishes only when work stops.

There is perhaps a temptation here of reading Han as espousing a privileged lifestyle entirely freed from the demands of work, leaving one with all the time in the world for intellectual and creative pursuits. But Han does not fall into such extremes. While he does unfailingly endorse the revitalization of the *vita contemplativa*, he also does not give it absolute priority. Instead, he says that the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa* must be woven together for thinking to be constituted. In a Kantian play of words, he wrote in *The Scent of Time*: “A *vita contemplativa* without acting is blind, a *vita activa* without contemplation is empty.”³⁶ Activity and inactivity are two sides of the same coin. He reiterates this point more forcefully in *Vita Contemplativa* in which he coined the term *vita composita* to denote the symbiosis between activity and inactivity.³⁷ Indeed, their necessary relationship, according to Han, is like that of light and shadow: “The shadow gives the light its form, its contours. Shadow and light condition each other. Similarly, activity and inactivity can be understood as two different states or modes of thinking, even of spirit. Thinking weaves itself out of light and shadow.”³⁸ In other words, for Han, action must culminate in contemplation; meanwhile, contemplation must guide action. The problem, as I will explain further below, is that the balance and tension between the two have been upended, leading to a society that is almost bereft of contemplative elements. The issue is that the very nature of thinking/contemplation, as Han understood it, is antithetical to the principles of the neoliberal regime.

Throughout the years, Han has been incredibly consistent in depicting thinking as constituted by the principles of slowness and inefficiency. Thinking, “often moves in roundabout ways,” he says in *The Scent of Time*.³⁹ He discusses this in greater detail in *Psychopolitics*. There, he talked about how knowledge, which is derived from the act of thinking, is not a simple collection of pieces of information or data. Rather, it entails the weaving together of disparate elements into a meaningful narrative or, as he puts it, “a unity that makes sense.”⁴⁰ He mentions concepts, syllogisms, and theories as examples of these narratives. This is why thinking, for Han, is time-consuming and inefficient. Knowledge or being, as he asserts, “has a

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Han, *The Scent of Time*, chap. 12.

³⁷ Han, *Vita Contemplativa*, chap. 5.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, chap. 3.

³⁹ Han, *The Scent of Time*, chap. 12.

⁴⁰ Han, *Psychopolitics*, 69-71.

temporal aspect. It grows slowly and gradually.”⁴¹ A time for maturation is needed to form a narrative.

More importantly, Han claims that it is not the mind that actively dictates what things should be linked into a coherent whole. Rather, thinking for him is a correspondence: “it corresponds to what ‘appeals to us as the voice of being’ by letting itself be *de-terminated* ... by that voice. To think means to ‘open our ears,’ that is, to listen, to lend an ear,” he wrote in *Vita Contemplativa*.⁴² Thus, a thinker for him does not dictate what a thing is. Rather, as Han disclosed in a rare interview, a thinker like himself receives thoughts: “... I don’t try to write, no. I receive thoughts ... The ones in the books aren’t mine. I receive the ones that visit me and I copy them. I don’t claim authorship of my books: that’s why the words in them are wiser than I am.”⁴³ In this manner, Han’s thinker is also a listener. It is through listening that being or the Other reveals itself to the thinker who is simply the medium or receptacle. For this reason, Han is staunchly critical of what he categorizes as “Western thinking.” This type of thinking, as he outlined in one of his earliest books, *Absence: On the Culture and Philosophy of the Far East* (originally published in German in 2007), is aggressive and forceful because it views the world as a form of “a resistance that has to be broken through determined actions.”⁴⁴ This type of thinking entails forcing the world to reveal its secrets. However, it often nosedives into the destructive act of forcing reality to fit into one’s preconceived categories. It is, therefore, deaf to the voice of the Other. It does not listen. Thus, it is violent.

But listening is not violent. Rather, to use one of Han’s favorite terms, it is “friendly.” This is why he often uses the term friendliness to characterize listening and thinking. For instance, in *Absence* he says that Far Eastern thinking is friendly because it does not foist set axioms and principles onto the world.⁴⁵ Rather, it lets the world be. Han’s commentator Robert Wyllie clarifies this further when he says that friendly thinking does not forcefully penetrate the world of appearances and phenomena.⁴⁶ It does not twist and force reality into preconceived rigid categories. Rather, Wyllie continues, it is a form of thinking that allows things and others to be what

⁴¹ Han, *Vita Contemplativa*, chap. 4.

⁴² *Ibid.*, chap. 3.

⁴³ The narrative account of the interview can be seen here: Joseba Elola, “Byung-Chul Han, the philosopher who lives life backwards: ‘We believe we’re free, but we’re the sexual organs of capital,’” in *EL PAIS* (8 October 2023), <<https://english.elpais.com/culture/2023-10-08/byung-chul-han-the-philosopher-who-lives-life-backwards-we-believe-were-free-but-were-the-sexual-organs-of-capital.html>>.

⁴⁴ Byung-Chul Han, *Absence: On the Culture and Philosophy of the Far East*, trans. by Daniel Steuer (Cambridge and Hoboken: Polity Press, 2023), 56.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

⁴⁶ Knepper, Stoneman, and Wylie, *Byung-Chul Han: A Critical Introduction*, 38.

they are. In this way, a thinker-listener for Han is in a mood of friendliness. It is friendly to the voice of being.

Han's preoccupation with the concept of friendliness can be traced as far back as his earliest published book *The Philosophy of Zen Buddhism*. Friendliness, he suggests, is derived from the Zen Buddhist notion of emptiness, that is, the denial of "the substance-like insistence on oneself."⁴⁷ Only with this denial of oneself, or ego-death as some would call it, does the world or the Other appear in their otherness. Without emptiness, individuals risk morphing into the narcissistic subjects that Han vividly depicts in *The Agony of Eros*:

Today, we live in an increasingly narcissistic society. Libido is primarily invested in one's own subjectivity...The world appears only as adumbrations of the narcissist's self, which is incapable of recognizing the Other in his or her otherness—much less acknowledging this otherness for what it is. Meaning can exist for the narcissistic self only when it somehow catches sight of itself. It wallows in its own shadow everywhere until it drowns—in itself.⁴⁸

The narcissistic subject, the individual that is full of himself so to speak, is incapable of listening or friendly thinking. Consumed by his own pursuit of self-optimization and self-perfection, the narcissist reduces the Other into a mere instrument for its projected ambitions.⁴⁹ In this respect, instead of experiencing the otherness of the Other, the narcissistic neoliberal subject painfully twists and turns the Other into a mere mirror that serves to validate the self's self-importance and achievements.

More forcefully, Han in *The Agony of Eros* begins using the term eros or love to characterize thinking. Eros, he wrote, "concerns the Other in the strong sense, namely, what cannot be encompassed by the regime of the ego."⁵⁰ It is based on a recognition that the other is an atopolos or incommensurable.⁵¹ Thus, to experience the atopic other presupposes one's openness or friendliness to the voice of the Other. Again, Han here insists that thinking is not a sole act of a thinker trying to forcefully penetrate the surface of reality. Rather, thinking as eros connotes the mind's

⁴⁷ Byung-Chul Han, *The Philosophy of Zen Buddhism*, trans. by Daniel Steuer (Hoboken and Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022), 84.

⁴⁸ Byung-Chul Han, *The Agony of Eros*, trans. by Erik Butler (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2017), 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 3. See also, Alphin and Debrix, "Biopolitics in the 'Psychic Realm'," 8.

⁵⁰ Han, *The Agony of Eros*, 1.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, See also John Picchione, "Byung-Chul Han: Digital Technologies, Social Exhaustion, and the Decline of Democracy," in *New Explorations*, 3:2 (2023).

powerlessness as it is led and seduced “down untrodden paths, through the atopic Other.”⁵² We again here encounter the notion of emptiness so prevalent in Han’s early works. Indeed, without emptiness, eros cannot appear:

Eros is a relationship to the Other situated beyond achievement, performance, and ability. *Being able not to be able* (Nicht-Können-Können) represents its negative counterpart ... Absolutizing ability is precisely what annihilates the Other. A successful relationship with the Other finds expression as a kind of *failure*. Only by way of *being able not to be able* does the Other appear.⁵³

Thinking, then, as emptiness, friendship, listening, and eros is a kind of failure, a form of refusal to actively impose one’s rigid biases and prejudices to the world. As a refusal to act, as a mode of emptying the self, thinking opens up a space for silence and stillness so that the Other begins to speak, so that the Other is heard.

This implies that thinking cannot be accelerated at will. Acceleration, Han argues in *The Scent of Time*, robs beings of the time and space for maturation they need to emit their unique scent, that is, their otherness.⁵⁴ Hence, time and again, Han insists that instead of looking at waiting, delaying, tarrying, and so on pejoratively, we must consider them as mental attitudes of a thinker. For example, in *Absence*, he praises Far Eastern thinking for its slow and friendly pace.⁵⁵ In *Psychopolitics*, he expresses his approval for the gesture of closing one’s eyes as an act of contemplation, as an act of resistance from crowding and crippling stimuli.⁵⁶ In *The Burnout Society*, he commends the act of taking a pause from constant activity in order to think back and reflect, in order to contemplate.⁵⁷ All these points align with Han’s broader conviction that not all negativity is destructive. Indeed, as he pointed out in *Topology of Violence*, “not infrequently, forms of negativity such as hesitation, pausing, boredom, waiting, or rage prove constructive, though they are threatened with disappearance in the course of society’s increasing positivization.”⁵⁸ In this way, the forms of negativity mentioned above—such as slowness, closing

⁵² Han, *The Agony of Eros*, 52.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁴ Han, *The Scent of Time*, chap. 1.

⁵⁵ Han, *Absence*, 69–70.

⁵⁶ Han, *Psychopolitics*, 71.

⁵⁷ Han, *The Burnout Society*, 22–24.

⁵⁸ Byung-Chul Han, *Topology of Violence*, trans. by Amanda Demarco (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2018), 117.

one's eyes, pausing, delaying, and so on—though not always good, can be seen as constructive particularly in the way they create the time and space for thinking to commence and flourish in a world that is always on the go. Interestingly, others seem to corroborate Han's appraisal of taking a break (or negativity) to think. For example, the great 19th century neuroscientist Santiago Ramón y Cajal, in his classic book *Advice for a Young Investigator*, extols the value of delaying in producing important scientific breakthroughs. As a case in point, this was the advice he gave to aspiring young scientists: "if a solution fails to appear after all of this [thinking], and yet we feel success is just around the corner, try resting for a while. Several weeks of relaxation and quiet in the countryside brings calmness and clarity to the mind."⁵⁹ Ramón y Cajal here displays the attitude of Han's thinker. He does not force the narrative. He waits for things to settle down, for the mind to slowly draw connections until finally, "bursting forth at last is the flower of truth, whose calyx usually opens after a long and profound sleep at dawn."⁶⁰ With this in mind, thinking in the Hanian sense is patience: the patience to allow things to emit their scent, the patience to allow the truth or being to slowly present itself.

The problem in today's neoliberal regime is that the *vita contemplativa* is pushed aside in favor of the *vita activa*. In the effort to maximize production and consumption, moments of leisure and inactivity have become scarcer and shorter. As Han wrote:

Inactivity is time-consuming. It requires a *long whiling*, an intense, contemplative lingering. In an era of rushing, in which everything is short term, short of breath and short-sighted, it is rare. Today, the consumerist form of life prevails everywhere. In this form of life, every need must be satisfied *at once*. We are *impatient* if we are told to *wait* for something to slowly *ripen*. All that matter are short-term effects and quick gains.⁶¹

The general restlessness of the neoliberal regime prevents individuals from resting in contemplative inactivity.⁶² Thus, consumed by

⁵⁹ Santiago Ramón y Cajal, *Advice for a Young Investigator*, trans. by Neely Swanson and Larry W. Swanson (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1999), 35.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Han, *Vita Contemplativa*, chap. 1.

⁶² This is not to say that achievement subjects do not rest. In fact, according to Han, achievement subjects have today perfected the art of resting. They take power naps, meditate, meticulously track their sleep, and so on. But Han fully understands that these forms of "rest" are most of the time integrated into the work process. They are done for the sake of regeneration so that the individual is again fully available for the pursuit of productivity and

constant activity, neoliberal subjects cannot access reality which is revealed only in contemplative attention.⁶³ Indeed, as John Picchione underscores, “for Han, a society driven by the hysteria of ‘achievement’ and by the neurotic obsession of hyperactivity has lost its possibility of contemplation, a spiritual relationship with the world through the calm and slow gaze on things and on others.”⁶⁴ To put it differently, the whizzing away of time, the general time-pressures of the neoliberal regime, the need to be in constant productive mode blinds the mind to truth.

Neoliberalism’s impatience with everything inefficient and slow allows calculating to eclipse thinking. Thinking, as we know from the discussion above, is slow and irregular. In contradistinction, calculating, or the collection of information and data, is linear. Calculating, according to Han, can be accelerated at will since it does not look around: “For it, a detour or a step back do not make sense. They only delay the step in the calculation, which is purely a step of the work process.”⁶⁵ A mind that calculates does not tarry or linger on a piece of information to draw narrative connections. Rather, it consumes the information and immediately jumps to a new one, Han claims.⁶⁶ But without narrative strings that bind all these pieces of information into a unity that makes sense, they cannot be considered knowledge from Han’s viewpoint; only a hodgepodge of data. This is why, as he argued in *The Burnout Society*, computers are stupid despite their enormous capacity for calculation precisely because they lack the ability to delay.⁶⁷ The computer is not a thinker because it only calculates. It only gathers information without thinking back and reflecting on these pieces of information. Thus, as Han strongly opines in *Vita Contemplativa*, “[i]nformation represents the highest point of being’s atrophy.”⁶⁸ This atrophy of thought, as I will show in the proceeding sections, is exactly what is happening today in universities that have neoliberalized.

optimization. Hence, for him, they are not counterbalances to work. They are not forms of inactivities or negativities where contemplation can flourish. This only goes to show that, for Han, while negativity can be totalized by the positive-driven neoliberal regime, it also loses its very negativity in the process. Truly, for Han, forms of negativities, such as slowing down, always stands as an incommensurable counterpart to the positivity of the neoliberal regime. For Han’s discussion of this issue, see *The Scent of Time*, chap. 12.

⁶³ Han, *Vita Contemplativa*, chap. 1.

⁶⁴ Picchione, “Byung-Chul Han,” n.p.

⁶⁵ Han, *The Scent of Time*, chap. 12.

⁶⁶ Han, *Vita Contemplativa*, chap. 4.

⁶⁷ Han, *The Burnout Society*, 22.

⁶⁸ Han, *Vita Contemplativa*, chap. 4.

The Neoliberal University and the *Vita Activa*

Since their inception, universities have long enjoyed a degree of autonomy from the logic of the market. However, this independence was slowly undone during the Industrial Revolution when the pressure to industrialize for national economic growth initiated the slow transmutation of the university as *bildungsroman* (as a site for the cultivation of the Greek youth) into a training ground for the self-made man of capitalism.⁶⁹ This siege reached a critical point in the 1970s. At that time, the Fordist-Keynesian socioeconomic model had exhausted its possibilities, giving impetus for key neoliberal figures—such as F.A. Hayek, Milton Friedman, Margaret Thatcher, and Ronald Reagan, among others—to successfully reorganize society according to the view that the attainment of a better life can only be done by liberating the market from the fetters of the State.⁷⁰ Consequently, key social institutions gradually lost State financial support. Among them was the educational sector which, since then, has been chronically underfunded throughout most neoliberal societies.⁷¹ To compensate for the lack of public funding, the immediate solution for many universities was to emulate the strategies of consumer industries to fund their operations.⁷² The distinction between a university and a private business has become fuzzy since then.

⁶⁹ Walter Rüegg, “A Conversation about the Humanities,” in *The Western University on Trial*, ed. by John W. Chapman (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1983), 122.

⁷⁰ For a discussion of neoliberalism’s emergence, see David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1-2.

⁷¹ The Philippines, for example, allocate on average a measly 4% of its GDP on education as opposed to the UNESCO recommended figure of 6%. For a more thorough discussion of neoliberalism’s impact on the educational sector of the Philippines, see Rohaiba B. Radiamoda, “The Impact of Neoliberalism on Philippine Public Education and the Aid of the Special Education Fund,” in *Lukad: An Online Journal of Pedagogy*, 1:1 (June 2021), 20-32.

⁷² In the Philippines, various roadmaps have been deployed by the government, such as the Roadmap for Public Higher Education Reform, that aims to achieve two things. First is to justify the defunding of public colleges and universities. And second is their transformation into financially self-reliant entities by encouraging partnerships with private businesses and the use of idle lands and resources. For a more thorough discussion of the transformation of state colleges and universities in the Philippines into business-like entities, see David Michael M. San Juan, “Neoliberal Restructuring of Education in the Philippines: Dependency, Labor, Privatization, Critical Pedagogy, and the K to 12 System,” in *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review*, 16:1 (2016), 80-110. For a general discussion of the university’s embrace of business strategies, see Wesley Shumar, “Caught between Commodification and Audit: Concluding Thoughts on the Contradictions in U.S. Higher Education,” in *The Experience of Neoliberal Education*, ed. by Bonnie Urciuoli (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2018), 218. See also Saunders, “The Impact of Neoliberalism on College Students” and Paul E. Bylsma, “The Teleological Effect of Neoliberalism on American Higher Education [Special Section],” in *College Student Affairs Leadership*, 2:2 (2015).

Slowly but surely, the university shed its otherness. Its purported impracticality—a favorite target by capitalists—was undone and redirected to serve the most practical of pursuits: capital.⁷³ Under the diktats of neoliberalism, Henry Giroux rightly observes, “higher education matters only to the extent that it promotes national prosperity and drives economic growth, innovation, and transformation.”⁷⁴ This is why big businesses have forayed into the educational sector.⁷⁵ When we think of the role universities play in the growth and expansion of businesses, it is not hard to understand why. Indeed, as is well known, universities today supply the vast army of technically trained laborers that serve as the battery of political economy. Some universities are more overt. Like any capitalistic enterprise, for-profit universities operate solely for the sake of making a profit. Looking at this from Han’s viewpoint, this state of affairs typifies the transparency of neoliberal universities. As Han mentioned in the *Transparency Society*, “matters prove transparent when they shed all negativity, when they are smoothed out and leveled, when they do not resist being integrated into smooth streams of capital, communication, and information.”⁷⁶ The university has indeed been integrated into the smooth functioning of the capitalist system. It has lost its capacity to govern itself according to its atopic rules by willingly bending the knee to its neoliberal masters, turning itself into a mere appendage in capitalism’s quest for endless accumulation.

Under the dictatorship of transparency, the neoliberal university has become obsessed with datafication and metrics. As we know, to attract funds in the form of student enrollees, the university has to build itself into an appealing brand for consumption.⁷⁷ For this reason, it has to be heavily audited and managed. External auditors collect certain kinds of information—faculty productivity, efficiency in the use of State funds,

⁷³ One of the dominant rhetorics against the university forwarded by neoliberal ideologues is the notion that academics are not relevant in the real world, lazy, waste their time dawdling in contemplation, biased, and entitled. Hence, education and their practitioners were pressured to focus on more practical concerns, such as the creation of vocational courses, commercialization and marketization of teaching and research that should align with the principles of industry and business. For this discussion, see Troiani and Dutson, “The Neoliberal University as a Space to Learn/Think/Work in Higher Education,” 6.

⁷⁴ Henry A. Giroux, *Neoliberalism’s War on Higher Education* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), 58.

⁷⁵ This is especially true in the Philippines where a great number of its biggest educational institutions are owned by business moguls, such as Lucio Tan, the Sy family, the Phinma Group, just to name a few. For a more thorough enumeration, see Mary Ann LL. Reyes, “Big business in education,” in *PhilStar Global* (3 March 2024), <<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/03/03/2337585/big-business-education>>.

⁷⁶ Han, *The Transparency Society*, 1.

⁷⁷ Alpesh Maisuria and Svenja Helmes, *Life for the Academic in the Neoliberal University* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 15.

graduation rates, salaries of recent graduates, research grants, and so on—to monitor and assess the performance of the university at all levels.⁷⁸ The data is then used to grade and rank universities in various ways to “confirm” their quality, a step that is essential in their marketing efforts.⁷⁹

Academics and students are caught in the vortex of this culture of transparency. Lecturers are expected to share their rubrics, the breakdown of their exams, their grading sheets, their consultation periods, and so on. They, along with the students, are enjoined to fill out all kinds of forms that measure all levels of the university’s operations. Both are also relentlessly evaluated to quantify their quality. For Han, transparency flattens a thing into its mere price, thereby eliminating its depth and otherness.⁸⁰ In much the same way, academics and students are flattened into a mere number—in their evaluation results, grades, and quantity of output. This, I contend, creates a strong pressure to achieve, to self-optimize, so that individuals reach the threshold of “excellence” or “very satisfactory.” In point of fact, many academics today are forced to overdo their teaching to increase the likelihood of receiving a generous evaluation score from their evaluators: their students.⁸¹ Others attend trainings, seminars, and conferences as often as possible to collect precious certificates that are not without impact on the advancement of their careers. Students, meanwhile, have seemingly become hyperactive and restless in their quest to accumulate as much merit as possible. They are subjected to a demanding excellence framework that largely conditions their value as students and thus their future income stream. This system, mostly internalized by the students themselves, impels them into a whirlwind of activities, such as excelling in performance tasks, institutional and national level exams, academic competitions, and the organization of and active participation in extra-curricular activities. It is no wonder then that the burnout rates among university students have skyrocketed in recent decades.⁸² Such scenario expresses what Han thinks is the seductive pull of the neoliberal regime. Individuals freely push themselves to the brink of a soul-crushing exhaustion, even to the point of

⁷⁸ Troiani and Dutson, “The Neoliberal University as a Space to Learn/Think/Work in Higher Education,” 16. See also Lawrence Busch, *Knowledge for Sale: The Neoliberal Takeover of Higher Education* (Cambridge & London: The MIT Press, 2017), 36.

⁷⁹ Maisuria and Helmes, *Life for the Academic*, 15.

⁸⁰ Byung-Chul Han, *Capitalism and the Death Drive*, trans. by Daniel Steuer (Cambridge and Medford: Polity Press, 2021), 33.

⁸¹ Claudine Grisard, “Time, Workload Model and The Entrepreneurial Construction of the Neoliberal Academic,” in *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 96 (2023), 13.

⁸² See, for instance, Trine Østergaard Wulf-Andersen and Lene Larsen, “Students, psychosocial problems and shame in neoliberal higher education,” in *Journal of Psycho-Social Studies*, 13:3 (2020), 303-317.

death, because they are rewarded, internally and externally, for doing so.⁸³ In the context of the neoliberal university, hyperactivity leads to academic recognition, awards, incentives, and promotion. The trade-off, if we listen to Han, is burnout and depression.

The neoliberal university has also discovered that operation costs dramatically decrease if its faculty is largely comprised of non-tenured, part-time, or adjunct instructors. The hiring of adjunct instructors as a money-saving policy began in the 1970s, coinciding with the neoliberal takeover over higher education.⁸⁴ In many neoliberal universities today, adjuncts constitute the majority of the teaching staff. They are usually poorly paid and overworked, making them, as one description puts it, “a slave class of teachers who must teach vast numbers of students at a time in order to scrape by with wages and benefits one might find in the fast-food industry.”⁸⁵ Lacking benefits and financial stability, many of these academic precariats are forced to work more than one job, further intensifying the dominance of the *vita activa* in their lives.

Tenureship, while it hands them a degree of stability, does not release academics entirely off the clutches of the *vita activa* since their fate and capacity to rise through the academic ranks depend mostly on their productivity. No area in the neoliberal university typifies this the most than research.⁸⁶ In the neoliberal university, the research output of academics is rigorously counted and ranked, and the data collected contributes to university rankings. Active scholars who publish frequently are rewarded in the form of tenureship, promotion, recognition, economic incentives, and the like. In a spin of transparency, the excellence of academic thinkers has been reduced to the frequency of their publications and the number of their citations. Meanwhile, refusal to abide may lead to disciplinary actions, even unemployment, as suggested by some cases in American and English universities.⁸⁷

This state of affairs highlights a major implication: forms of inactivity—such as leisure—are gradually disappearing in universities that

⁸³ For Han’s more thorough discussion of this, see Han, *Psychopolitics*, 1-15.

⁸⁴ Frank Donoghue, *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 24.

⁸⁵ Zena Hitz, *Lost in Thought: The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020), 200.

⁸⁶ The frantiness of the “publish or perish” culture is perfectly captured by this advice written in what is considered a primer for young and aspiring academics: “You cannot wait to be brilliant. You need to make yourself known as soon as possible ... You must be ambitious; you must aim to publish early and often ... Without publication ... your career will truly perish.” See Emily Toth, *Ms. Mentor’s Impeccable Advice for Women in Academia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), EPUB.

⁸⁷ Maisuria and Helmes, *Life for the Academic*, 27.

have neoliberalized. With this in mind, Raniel S.M. Reyes laments, also drawing from Han's ideas, that neoliberal academia has morphed into a kind of wilderness where individuals are consumed by the simple concern for survival.⁸⁸ Consequently, he adds, "it is no longer a fecund site for higher leisure and deep contemplation."⁸⁹ In this wilderness we call the neoliberal university, waiting, delaying, and tarrying are considered negative attitudes that would cost an academic's career or a student's future income potential. In most cases, neoliberal universities give little, or none at all, space and time for students and academics to engage in activities other than work. Truly, in all appearances, the neoliberal university has become an active university, a space blanketed by the *vita activa*. This, as I will show in the second part of this paper, has damaging effects to the state of thinking within its walls.

*The Graduate School
Department of Philosophy
Research Center for Culture, Arts, and Humanities
University of Santo Tomas, The Philippines*

References

- Alphin, Caroline and François Debrix, "Biopolitics in the 'Psychic Realm': Han, Foucault and neoliberal psychopolitics," in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 49:4 (2021).
- Anderson, Gina, "Carving out time and space in the managerial university," in *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 19:5 (2006).
- Bartles, Jason A., "Byung-Chul Han's Negativity; or, Restoring Beauty and Rage in Excessively Positive Times," in *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 21:3 (2021).
- Berg, Maggie and Barbara K. Seeber, *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2016).
- Busch, Lawrence, *Knowledge for Sale: The Neoliberal Takeover of Higher Education* (Cambridge & London: The MIT Press, 2017).
- Bylsma, Paul E., "The Teleological Effect of Neoliberalism on American Higher Education [Special Section]," in *College Student Affairs Leadership*, 2:2 (2015).

⁸⁸ Raniel S.M. Reyes, "A Genealogy of the Contemporary Undead Life Through Byung-Chul Han," in *Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy*, 26:2 (June 2025), 240.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

- y Cajal, Santiago Ramón, *Advice for a Young Investigator*, trans. by Neely Swanson and Larry W. Swanson (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1999).
- Coldwell, Will, "The rise of perfectionism—and the harm it's doing us all," in *The Guardian* (4 June 2023), <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jun/04/the-rise-of-perfectionism-and-the-harm-its-doing-us-all>>.
- Curran, Thomas and Andrew P. Hill, "Perfectionism is Increasing, and That's Not Good News," in *Harvard Business Review* (27 January 2018), <<https://hbr.org/2018/01/perfectionism-is-increasing-and-thats-not-good-news>>.
- Donoghue, Frank, *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).
- Elola, Joseba, "Byung-Chul Han, the philosopher who lives life backwards: 'We believe we're free, but we're the sexual organs of capital'," in *EL PAÍS* (8 October 2023), <<https://english.elpais.com/culture/2023-10-08/byung-chul-han-the-philosopher-who-lives-life-backwards-we-believe-were-free-but-were-the-sexual-organs-of-capital.html>>.
- Giroux, Henry A., *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014).
- Grisard, Claudine, "Time, Workload Model and The Entrepreneurial Construction of the Neoliberal Academic," in *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 96 (2023).
- Han, Byung-Chul, *Absence: On the Culture and Philosophy of the Far East*, trans. by Daniel Steuer (Cambridge and Hoboken: Polity Press, 2023).
- _____, *Capitalism and the Death Drive*, trans. by Daniel Steuer (Cambridge and Medford: Polity Press, 2021).
- _____, *In The Swarm: Digital Prospects*, trans. by Erik Butler (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2017).
- _____, *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power*, trans. by Erik Butler (London & New York: Verso, 2017).
- _____, *The Agony of Eros*, trans. by Erik Butler (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2017).
- _____, *The Burnout Society*, trans. by Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).
- _____, *The Disappearance of Rituals: A Topology of the Present*, trans. by Daniel Steuer (Cambridge and Medford: Polity Press, 2020).
- _____, *The Philosophy of Zen Buddhism*, trans. by Daniel Steuer (Hoboken and Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022).

- _____, *The Scent of Time: A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Linger*, trans. by Daniel Steuer (Cambridge and Medford: Polity Press, 2017), EPUB.
- _____, *The Transparency Society*, trans by Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).
- _____, *Topology of Violence*, trans. by Amanda Demarco (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2018).
- _____, *Vita Contemplativa: In Praise of Inactivity*, trans. by Daniel Steuer (Cambridge and Hoboken: Polity Press, 2024), EPUB.
- Harvey, David, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- Hitz, Zena, *Lost in Thought: The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020).
- Knepper, Steven, Ethan Stoneman, and Robert Wyllie, *Byung-Chul Han: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge and Hoboken: Polity Press, 2024).
- Maisuria, Alpesh and Svenja Helmes, *Life for the Academic in the Neoliberal University* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020).
- Morgan, Jason, "Ritual and Otherness in Human Relations: The Human-Person Philosophy of Byung-Chul Han," in *Studia Gilsoniana*, 12:2 (April-June 2023).
- Muller, Jerry Z., *The Tyranny of Metrics* (Princeton and Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2018).
- Picchione, John, "Byung-Chul Han: Digital Technologies, Social Exhaustion, and the Decline of Democracy," in *New Explorations*, 3:2 (2023).
- Radiamoda, Rohaiba B., "The Impact of Neoliberalism on Philippine Public Education and the Aid of the Special Education Fund," in *Lukad: An Online Journal of Pedagogy*, 1:1 (June 2021).
- Reyes, Mary Ann LL., "Big business in education," in *PhilStar Global* (3 March 2024), <<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/03/03/2337585/big-business-education>>.
- Reyes, Raniel S.M., "A Genealogy of the Contemporary Undead Life Through Byung-Chul Han," in *Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy*, 26:2 (June 2025).
- Rüegg, Walter, "A Conversation about the Humanities," in *The Western University on Trial*, ed. by John W. Chapman (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1983).
- San Juan, David Michael M., "Neoliberal Restructuring of Education in the Philippines: Dependency, Labor, Privatization, Critical Pedagogy, and the K to 12 System," in *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review*, 16:1 (2016).
- Saunders, Daniel, "The Impact of Neoliberalism on College Students," in *Journal of College and Character*, 8:5 (2007).

- Shumar, Wesley, "Caught between Commodification and Audit: Concluding Thoughts on the Contradictions in U.S. Higher Education," in *The Experience of Neoliberal Education*, ed. by Bonnie Urciuoli (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2018), 218.
- Sohn, Emily, "Perfectionism and the high-stakes culture of success: The hidden toll on kids and parents," in *American Psychological Association* (1 October 2024), <<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2024/10/antidote-achievement-culture>>.
- Toth, Emily, *Ms. Mentor's Impeccable Advice for Women in Academia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), EPUB.
- Troiani, Igea and Claudia Dutson, "The Neoliberal University as a Space to Learn/Think/Work in Higher Education," in *Architecture and Culture*, 9:1 (2021).
- Wulf-Andersen, Trine Østergaard and Lene Larsen, "Students, psychosocial problems and shame in neoliberal higher education," in *Journal of Psycho-Social Studies*, 13:3 (2020).