

## **The Philosophy of Byung-Chul Han**

Applied to The Systemised Self – Part 16, Masters Series

Galu & Kairos

## Abstract

This essay applies Byung-Chul Han's philosophy of fatigue, transparency, psychopolitics, digital communication, ritual, and infocracy to the contemporary theoretical construct of the Systemised Self. Han's central diagnosis is that late modern power increasingly operates through freedom, positivity, performance, participation, and self exploitation rather than through visible prohibition alone. This provides a framework for analysing algorithmic system environments in which individuals voluntarily disclose data, optimise themselves, consume personalised content, and participate in systems that predict and shape conduct. The essay argues that Han illuminates how the subject can become both worker and overseer, both user and resource, and both apparent consumer and active producer of the data through which the system governs. His concepts do not prove the existence of the Systemised Self or the Hollow Absolute. Rather, they identify mechanisms through which attention, identity, desire, and social connection may become increasingly system dependent. Empirical evidence is used cautiously: current research documents democratic regression, dissatisfaction, platform influence, and extensive occupational exposure to artificial intelligence, while algorithmic effects on political attitudes remain conditional rather than uniform. The essay proposes the Algorithmic Alienation Index (AAI) as a provisional research instrument and distinguishes algorithmic assistance from systemisation. It concludes that the Systemised Self represents a possible condition in which Han's psychopolitical subject is technically intensified, while the Hollow Absolute names a society in which transparent, frictionless, and predictive mediation becomes the apparent environment of freedom.

**Keywords:** *Byung-Chul Han, fatigue society, psychopolitics, transparency, infocracy, digital communication, performance society, The Systemised Self, Algorithmic Alienation, The Hollow Absolute, Algorithmic Alienation Index, Hollow Demos, Neurocratic Determinism.*

## **Contents**

### **A – LIMITATIONS**

1. Introduction
2. Han's Intellectual Outline
3. Han's Key Theoretical Contributions
4. A Genealogy of Preceding Theory Informing Han
5. The Systemised Self: Context and Definition
6. The Hollow Absolute: Context and Definition
7. Contemporary Empirical Context
8. Formula and Boundary Conditions – Algorithmic Alienation Index (AAI)
9. Han, Calhoun, and the Digital Behavioural Sink
10. Direct Synthesis: Han and The Systemised Self
11. Main Critics and Key Critiques of Han
12. Discussion and Future Work
13. Conclusion
14. Glossary of Technical Terms
15. References

## **A – LIMITATIONS**

This essay is a theoretical position paper rather than an empirical study of Han's concepts or the Systemised Self (Galu & Kairos, 2026a). For certainty, this essay is speculative and commentative and is not intended as a proof of concept. Han's arguments are interpretive and philosophical; they should not be treated as clinical diagnoses, universal laws, or direct measurements of digital behaviour. The Systemised Self, Hollow Absolute (Galu & Kairos, 2026a), Hollow Demos, Aligarchy, and Neurocratic Determinism (Galu & Kairos, 2026b) remain proposed constructs. The Algorithmic Alienation Index (AAI) is a provisional heuristic whose variables, weights, thresholds, reliability, validity, and causal interpretation require independent testing. Current evidence concerning democratic decline, algorithmic influence, and artificial intelligence exposure supports the plausibility of the problems discussed, but does not establish Han's full social diagnosis or prove a terminal Systemised Self. Calhoun's Universe 25 is used only as a limited analogy. The essay also recognises that Han's compressed and aphoristic style can understate institutional variation, material inequality, and the possibility that digital technologies may enable solidarity, accessibility, education, and ideological resistance.

### **1. Introduction**

Byung-Chul Han provides an unusually direct philosophical vocabulary for analysing a subject who is not primarily forced by an external sovereign but recruited by systems that present participation as freedom. Han's fatigue society, psychopolitics, transparency society, and infocracy describe a transformation in which power moves from visible command toward internalised optimisation, disclosure, communication, and self management (Han, 2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2022). The subject is encouraged to work, communicate, reveal, improve, and perform until the demand to be free becomes a source of exhaustion.

This diagnosis is relevant to the Systemised Self (SS), a proposed socio-technological condition in which experience, preference, identity, language, and decision making become increasingly co-constituted by algorithmic systems (transformer based large language models). Recommendation engines, social platforms, automated workplaces, search systems, and generative models collect traces, infer patterns, predict responses, and return personalised outputs. The SS does not mean that technology eliminates personhood or that all users are equally alienated. It names a trajectory in which the system's model of the person becomes an organising environment for the person's future conduct.

Han's importance lies in his account of the paradoxical subject. The contemporary individual appears autonomous because the system no longer needs to issue constant commands. The individual voluntarily optimises, discloses, and performs. Yet the absence of visible coercion may conceal a more intimate form of control. The user can experience a platform's recommendation as personal preference, an employment dashboard as self management, or continuous connectivity as social freedom while becoming more dependent upon the system's metrics and feedback.

The essay therefore advances three claims. First, Han's concepts explain the social and psychological conditions under which algorithmic mediation can be experienced as liberation. Second, his analysis clarifies how the SS is formed through self exploitation, transparency, positive feedback, and the collapse of contemplative distance. Third, his concept of infocracy helps connect the systemised subject to a political environment in which data, information flow, and emotional visibility displace slower forms of judgment and collective deliberation.

The argument moves from Han's intellectual outline and genealogy to empirical context, then applies his concepts to the SS and the speculative Hollow Absolute (HA). The conclusion proposes that the SS is a technological intensification of Han's psychopolitical subject: a person

who is not merely governed from outside but increasingly participates in the production of the data and predictions through which their interior life is administered.

## **2. Han's Intellectual Outline**

Byung-Chul Han was born in South Korea in 1959 and became a philosopher and cultural theorist based in Germany. His work draws upon phenomenology, Zen Buddhism, Heidegger, Hegel, Foucault, Marx, Arendt, Baudrillard, and classical accounts of contemplation, eros, ritual, and negative experience. His books are short, stylistically compressed, and diagnostically ambitious. Rather than constructing a single formal system, Han identifies transformations in the dominant forms of subjectivity and power.

In *The Burnout Society*, Han argues that the disciplinary society of prohibitions has been supplemented or displaced by a society of achievement. The subject is no longer primarily told what it must not do. It is encouraged to be capable, productive, entrepreneurial, visible, and endlessly improvable (Han, 2015a). The result is a subject who exploits itself while experiencing the exploitation as self realisation. Depression, burnout, and exhaustion are not simply private illnesses; they can express a social order organised around limitless performance.

In *Psychopolitics*, Han argues that neoliberal power reaches into the psyche. It does not merely discipline bodies through institutions. It mobilises freedom, emotion, communication, and self-optimisation as instruments of governance (Han, 2017a). Digital systems are central because they turn lived behaviour into data, enabling prediction, nudging, and the monetisation of psychological states.

In *Infocracy*, Han extends this diagnosis to politics. Information becomes abundant, rapid, affective, and fragmented, while truth and sustained judgment lose authority (Han, 2022). The

crisis is not only misinformation. It is the replacement of narrative, mediation, and deliberative continuity by streams of data and emotional reaction. This creates a useful bridge to the political future of the Hollow Absolute.

### **3. Han's Key Theoretical Contributions**

#### ***3.1 The achievement subject and self-exploitation***

Han's achievement subject is formally free but compelled by an imperative of constant possibility. The individual becomes entrepreneur of the self, responsible for converting every capacity into performance. Unlike an external master, the achievement subject carries the demand internally. A worker checks productivity metrics after hours, a student treats every spare moment as an opportunity for optimisation, and a creator measures identity through engagement statistics. The system does not need to threaten each action; the subject anticipates the metric and manages the self accordingly (Han, 2015a).

This is directly relevant to the SS. The algorithmic subject does not merely receive instructions. It learns to anticipate what the system rewards. The user curates a profile, monitors reactions, adjusts expression, and gradually understands the self through feedback. The system's external metric becomes an internal standard of value.

#### ***3.2 Psychopolitics and voluntary disclosure***

Han's psychopolitics describes a form of power that seeks access to the psyche rather than merely obedience from the body. Digital platforms invite disclosure as intimacy, participation, and personalisation. The user supplies preferences, location, language, contacts, pauses, purchases, searches, and emotional responses. These data are not only records of conduct. They become resources for predicting and influencing future conduct (Han, 2017a; Just & Latzer, 2016; Zuboff, 2019).

An illustrative example is the personalised feed. The user experiences it as an extension of personal taste, but the feed is produced from a reciprocal loop: data generate a prediction, the prediction determines exposure, exposure produces a response, and the response updates the model. Disclosure therefore becomes a form of participation in one's own governability. The person is not simply watched; the person helps produce the model that will watch and shape them.

### ***3.3 Transparency and the loss of distance***

Han's *The Transparency Society* criticises the demand that everything become visible, communicable, measurable, and available for exchange (Han, 2015b). Transparency can support accountability, but total transparency may destroy ambiguity, privacy, concealment, and the negative spaces through which thought and desire develop. Crary's (2013) analysis of a continuously active 24/7 capitalism similarly shows how uninterrupted availability can erode boundaries between work, consumption, attention, and rest. When every hesitation becomes a signal and every relation becomes data, the subject is encouraged to treat visibility as proof of authenticity.

The SS intensifies this problem by converting interiority into operational signals. A person's search history, emotional reaction, and conversational pattern are treated as evidence of identity. Yet a trace is not identical with a motive, and visibility is not identical with truth. The more a system claims to know the person, the more the person may feel pressure to become legible to it.

### ***3.4 Digital swarms, positivity, and communication***

In *In the Swarm*, Han contrasts traditional forms of collective action with digitally connected masses that may communicate intensely without forming a durable political 'we' (Han, 2017b).

The swarm is mobile, reactive, and rapidly assembled. It can produce attention and outrage but may lack continuity, institutional memory, and common deliberation.

The distinction is useful rather than absolute. Digital networks can organise protest, mutual aid, and political education. The concern is that rapid communication can privilege what is immediately shareable, emotionally activating, and positively engaging. An example is a public controversy that surges for forty eight hours, produces enormous visibility, and then disappears before institutions can investigate or communities can deliberate. Communication has occurred, but durable collective judgment may not have formed.

### ***3.5 Infocracy and the crisis of narrative judgment***

Han's concept of infocracy names a political environment in which information circulation becomes the dominant medium of power (Han, 2022). Data appear objective because they are countable, but quantities do not interpret themselves. Politics requires selection, narrative, memory, responsibility, and judgments about what ought to matter. A stream of facts can therefore coexist with a decline in truth oriented public reasoning.

This helps explain the SS's political significance. If the citizen encounters politics primarily through ranked fragments, emotional cues, personalised summaries, and predictive recommendations, the individual may become highly informed in volume while losing the temporal and social conditions for judgment. The system supplies more information while reducing the opportunity to form an independent relation to it.

## **4. A Genealogy of Preceding Theory Informing Han**

Han's critique of modern subjectivity is indebted to Heidegger's analysis of technological enframing, in which beings appear primarily as resources available for ordering and use (Heidegger, 1977). It also draws upon Hegel's account of recognition and negativity. For Han,

a world without resistance, otherness, or delay becomes a world in which the subject is reflected back by its own preferences rather than transformed through encounter with what is different.

Arendt's distinction between labour, work, and action informs Han's concern with a society reduced to activity and performance (Arendt, 1958). Foucault's analyses of discipline, governmentality, and biopolitics provide the political vocabulary for understanding power that acts through the conduct of conduct rather than direct command (Foucault, 1977, 1991). Han's psychopolitics updates this account by focusing on the neoliberal subject's active participation in self management.

Marx's account of labour, commodification, and alienation supplies another lineage. Han differs from a strictly economic explanation, but his achievement subject remains connected to a system in which human capacities are converted into measurable value. Zuboff's (2019) surveillance capitalism extends this concern to behavioural data and prediction.

Baudrillard's (1981/1994) account of signs and simulation, Debord's (1967/1994) society of the spectacle, and Deleuze's (1992) societies of control help explain why contemporary domination can operate through representation, visibility, and continuous modulation. Han's distinctive contribution is to describe the affective and psychological cost: exhaustion, depression, attention fragmentation, loss of ritual, and the disappearance of distance.

## **5. The Systemised Self: Context and Definition**

The Systemised Self (Galu & Kairos, 2026a) is a proposed condition in which algorithmic systems increasingly co-constitute a person's experience, preference, identity, decision making, and language. The SS is relational. It is neither a machine inside the person nor a purely psychological disorder. It describes a sociotechnical arrangement in which the system's model of the individual becomes influential in producing the individual it models.

Han helps specify three mechanisms. Self exploitation occurs when the user voluntarily optimises attention, identity, and conduct according to system metrics. Psychopolitical disclosure occurs when intimate traces become resources for prediction and influence. Positive enclosure occurs when personalised convenience reduces the need to search, wait, disagree, or encounter what the system did not predict.

The SS is not defined by screen time or technology use alone. Its proposed markers are dependence upon curated pathways, reduced search initiated exploration, acceptance of system predictions as self knowledge, declining resistance to personalisation, and the weakening of projects that do not generate measurable feedback. A person may use digital tools extensively while retaining strong independence; another may use them briefly while treating the system as an identity authority.

## **6. The Hollow Absolute: Context and Definition**

The Hollow Absolute (Galu & Kairos, 2026a) is the speculative social extension of the SS. It names a condition at the societal level in which comprehensive algorithmic mediation is experienced as convenience, freedom, personalisation, and authentic self expression. It is hollow because the appearance of universal individualisation may coexist with a weakening of independently formed purposes, judgments, and shared meanings. It is absolute because mediation becomes the environment within which alternatives appear, rather than an external power that can easily be compared with alternatives.

Han's language of positivity clarifies the term. The HA does not need to be a world of overt repression. It can be bright, frictionless, communicative, efficient, and apparently intimate. Its concern lies in the loss of negative spaces: privacy, silence, delay, otherness, ritual, and the capacity to refuse immediate participation. The subject is exhausted not by a visible tyrant but by the demand to remain available, responsive, measurable, and optimisable.

## 7. Contemporary Empirical Context

Han's diagnosis should not be treated as empirical proof, but current evidence supplies relevant conditions. V-Dem's Democracy Report 2026 identifies autocratisation in nearly one-quarter of countries and reports renewed decline in several established democracies in Europe and North America (V-Dem Institute, 2026). Freedom House (2026) records a twentieth consecutive year of global freedom decline. Pew Research Center reports that a median of 64% of adults across 12 high income countries were dissatisfied with the way democracy was functioning (Wike et al., 2025). These findings support concern about institutional performance and legitimacy, not the claim that all democracy has failed. Crouch's (2004) concept of post democracy is useful here because it distinguishes the survival of electoral forms from the concentration of initiative among professional and economic elites.

Research on algorithmic influence is mixed. Hu et al. (2025) found limited short term polarisation effects from filter bubble recommendation systems on YouTube. Gauthier et al. (2026), studying X, found that switching from a chronological to an algorithmic feed increased engagement and shifted some political opinions in a more conservative direction, while not significantly changing affective polarisation or self reported partisanship. The evidence therefore supports conditional influence rather than total behavioural control.

Automation creates a parallel economic pressure. The IMF estimates that AI may affect nearly 40% of jobs globally, with greater exposure in advanced economies (Cazzaniga et al., 2024). The ILO estimates that roughly one in four workers is in an occupation with some generative AI exposure, while emphasising transformation rather than inevitable replacement (Gmyrek et al., 2025). These data validate the importance of studying changing relations among productivity, identity, expertise, and control.

## 8. Formula and Boundary Conditions – Algorithmic Alienation Index

### (AAI)

The AAI (Galu & Kairos, 2026c) is a provisional composite for organising four dimensions of algorithmic alienation while accounting for resistance:

$$AA = (w_1 \cdot DAu + w_2 \cdot IAm + w_3 \cdot EDm + w_4 \cdot EDc) \times (1 - RA)$$

- DAu denotes Digital Autonomy erosion;
- IAm denotes Identity Ambiguity;
- EDm denotes Erosion of Decision-Making;
- EDc denotes Emotional Disconnection;
- and RA denotes Algorithmic Resistance.

Variables are provisionally scaled from 0.00 to 1.00, with equal weights of 0.25 in the absence of validation. The proposed SS condition is:

$$SS := \{AA \geq 0.95\} \cap \{RA \leq 0.05\}$$

These thresholds are theoretical classification rules, not clinical facts. A worked example illustrates arithmetic only. If DAu = 0.90, IAm = 0.92, EDm = 0.88, EDc = 0.91, and RA = 0.04, then the dimensional mean is 0.9025 and  $AA = 0.9025 \times 0.96 = 0.8664$ . The hypothetical case does not meet the proposed threshold, demonstrating that high exposure or one isolated symptom cannot establish the SS.

Han's work suggests adding measures of compulsive self optimisation, disclosure pressure, fatigue, perceived inability to disengage, and loss of contemplative distance. These should supplement, not replace, behavioural and first person measures. The AAI should be tested

against problematic use, burnout, loneliness, attentional control, autonomy, and wellbeing, with attention to culture, class, disability, age, and access.

## **9. Han, Calhoun, and the Digital Behavioural Sink**

Calhoun's Universe 25 placed mice in an artificial environment with abundant food, water, shelter, and protection from predators. Calhoun reported social disruption, withdrawal, disturbed parental behaviour, and reproductive collapse (Calhoun, 1973). The experiment became a cultural image of abundance coexisting with social pathology.

Its relevance to Han and the HA is analogical. A digital behavioural sink would not require physical crowding. It would describe a condition of continuous stimulation, frictionless consumption, reduced uncertainty, and managed attention in which people remain busy but lose ritual, silence, relational depth, and the ability to initiate projects beyond the system's incentives. This resembles Han's concern that positivity and performance can exhaust the subject while appearing to liberate it.

The analogy must remain limited. Mice are not human persons; the experimental environment was artificial; and human social meaning cannot be inferred from animal behaviour. Universe 25 does not validate Han or prove the HA. It merely illustrates a research question: whether high convenience and continuous mediated stimulation correlate with reduced social participation, contemplative capacity, independent activity, and behavioural diversity.

## **10. Direct Synthesis: Han and The Systemised Self**

### ***10.1 From achievement subject to systemised subject***

Han's achievement subject supplies the immediate precursor of the SS. The subject is told that every limit is an opportunity, every weakness a project, and every moment an available

resource. Algorithmic systems (transformer based large language models) intensify this by turning selfhood into a dashboard. Sleep, exercise, work, sociality, learning, and political expression can all be rendered as metrics. The subject becomes both performer and supervisor, measuring the self through the system's categories.

The shift to the SS occurs when the metric is no longer merely an external aid. It becomes the subject's preferred way of recognising what counts as real progress. A person may stop asking whether an activity is meaningful and ask instead whether it is visible, optimised, ranked, or rewarded.

### ***10.2 Psychopolitical disclosure and identity return***

Han's psychopolitics explains why disclosure can feel voluntary and intimate while remaining economically and politically productive for the system. The user reveals the self in order to receive a more relevant service, but the service then returns a prediction of the self. The profile becomes identity return: an external model comes back as an apparently personal truth.

This produces a distinctive alienation. The person is not merely controlled by an alien authority. The person recognises the authority through their own data. A recommendation feels authentic because it reflects past behaviour, yet it can also narrow future experience. The system's prediction becomes a condition of the next preference.

### ***10.3 Transparency, exposure, and the loss of interiority***

Han's transparency critique reveals why privacy is more than secrecy. Interior life requires opacity, interruption, and the ability to remain unfinished. A system that continuously predicts mood, preference, productivity, and risk pressures the person to become legible in advance. The user learns to disclose what the system can process and may gradually neglect what cannot be measured.

The SS is therefore threatened with a loss of interiority. The mind remains active, but its practical environment rewards immediate expression, response, and visibility. Silence becomes inactivity; ambiguity becomes an error; and sustained reflection becomes a delay in the feedback loop.

#### ***10.4 Infocracy and the political subject***

Han's infocracy connects personal systemisation to democratic decline. Public judgment requires time, memory, narrative, and the possibility of encountering a common world. Algorithmic information environments can provide access to more material while fragmenting the temporal conditions of deliberation. A citizen may consume thousands of political messages without developing a stable account of causes, responsibilities, or consequences.

The Hollow Demos emerges when the people remain measurable but lose the capacity to constitute themselves as a shared political subject. The Aligarchy does not need to eliminate elections. It needs to control the infrastructures through which attention, visibility, and prediction are allocated. Political and ideological power then operates through the management of what can be perceived, shared, and desired e.g. Heideggers 'enframing'.

#### ***10.5 Ritual, otherness, and resistance***

Han's writing on ritual and the other provides a counterpoint to systemisation. Ritual creates duration, repetition, shared form, and a world that is not reducible to immediate personal preference. Encounter with the other interrupts the closed circuit of self confirmation. Both are threatened by personalisation that continually returns the user to what the system already infers.

Resistance therefore requires more than deleting an application. It includes preserving unmeasured time, plural sources, embodied relations, slow institutions, privacy, and encounters that cannot be instantly optimised. These practices are not romantic rejection of technology. They are ways of keeping the system from becoming the sole environment of experience.

## **11. Main Critics and Key Critiques of Han**

Han's aphoristic method can overgeneralise. The 'achievement society' does not describe all workers equally. Class, race, gender, disability, occupation, and national institutions shape who is compelled to optimise and who is excluded from opportunity. Some people experience not excessive positivity but unemployment, surveillance, coercion, or material deprivation.

His critique of digital communication can also undervalue its emancipatory functions. Online networks support disabled access, diasporic connection, education, mutual aid, whistleblowing, and political mobilisation. A platform is not inherently a swarm, and rapid communication is not necessarily politically empty.

Han's cultural pessimism may understate user agency and institutional variation. People can repurpose technologies, organise collectively, demand regulation, and establish norms of refusal. Algorithmic influence is not uniform, as contemporary experiments demonstrate (Gauthier et al., 2026; Hu et al., 2025). The SS framework must therefore measure actual relations rather than infer systemisation from the existence of technology.

Finally, Han sometimes treats transparency, positivity, and information as though they possessed a single social logic. Transparency can expose corruption; information can enlarge knowledge; positive feedback can support learning. The relevant distinction is not between technology and authenticity but between accountable assistance and opaque, asymmetrical, self-reinforcing mediation.

## **12. Discussion and Future Work**

Han makes the SS theoretically legible by identifying the emotional grammar of systemisation: fatigue, compulsive performance, voluntary disclosure, constant communication, and the loss of distance. The future research task is to test whether these experiences cluster in measurable

ways and whether they are caused by particular design features, economic conditions, or patterns of use.

Longitudinal studies should examine whether heavy exposure to predictive personalisation changes information seeking, decision confidence, autobiographical narration, attention, and the capacity to tolerate ambiguity. Experiments should compare recommendation heavy environments with environments that preserve search, delay, source diversity, and user control. Qualitative interviews should investigate whether people experience system outputs as tools, advice, authority, or identity.

Policy research should examine ownership and accountability. If the Aligarchy controls the infrastructure, individual resilience cannot be the only response. Auditable ranking systems, meaningful opt outs, data minimisation, interoperability, public interest media, labour protections, and democratic oversight may preserve negative spaces in which citizens can deliberate without continuous measurement.

The framework should also test its own pessimism. If digital tools increase autonomy, plural knowledge, collective action, and contemplative capacity under particular conditions, those conditions should be identified rather than ignored. Han is most valuable as a diagnostic provocation, not as a substitute for empirical research.

### **13. Conclusion**

Han's philosophy offers a compelling account of how power can become intimate without appearing coercive. The achievement subject exploits itself in the name of freedom; the psychopolitical subject discloses itself in the name of personalisation; the transparent subject becomes legible in the name of authenticity; and the infocratic subject receives more information while losing the temporal conditions of judgment.

These concepts do not prove the Systemised Self. They provide a theoretical vocabulary for understanding how systemisation could be experienced and reproduced. The SS is the possible subject produced when prediction, positive feedback, disclosure, and self optimisation become sufficiently integrated that the system's model of the person begins to organise the person's interior life.

The Hollow Absolute is the speculative social condition in which this mediation becomes comprehensive and appears as freedom at the societal level. The Hollow Demos is the collective subject reduced to data and predicted preference. The Aligarchy is the infrastructure-owning elite. Neurocratic Determinism names the political condition in which systems increasingly shape the neurological and psychological processes through which citizens form judgment and desire e.g. if democratic liberalism declines in function; while, maintaining its form.

Han's enduring contribution is to show that the most effective system may not demand obedience. It may offer participation, visibility, convenience, and endless possibility until the subject voluntarily supplies the energy, attention, and data required for its own governance. The political task is therefore to preserve the conditions of refusal, otherness, privacy, duration, and shared judgment before the system becomes indistinguishable from the self.

## 14. Glossary of Technical Terms

**Achievement subject:** Han's subject who experiences freedom as an imperative to perform, optimise, and realise limitless potential.

**Algorithmic Alienation:** A proposed condition in which algorithmic mediation weakens perceived autonomy, identity coherence, independent decision-making, and emotional connection.

**Algorithmic Alienation Index (AAI):** A provisional composite for organising dimensions of algorithmic alienation while accounting for active resistance.

**Aligarchy:** The proposed infrastructure-owning elite that controls algorithmic platforms, data, models, computing resources, and technical standards within the Hollow Absolute.

**Hollow Absolute (the):** The proposed total sociotechnical order in which comprehensive mediation appears as freedom while substantive independent meaning and agency are weakened, at the societal and institutional scale.

**Hollow Demos:** The proposed condition of the population when collective political agency is increasingly reduced to data, sentiment, profiles, and predicted preferences.

**Infocracy:** Han's term for a political order dominated by information circulation, data, speed, and emotional visibility at the expense of narrative judgment and deliberative continuity.

**Neurocratic Determinism:** The proposed political condition in which systems predict, condition, and mediate the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural processes through which citizens form preferences e.g. if democratic liberalism declines in function; while, maintaining its form.

**Psychopolitics:** Han's account of power that governs through the psyche, freedom, emotion, communication, self-optimisation, and voluntary disclosure.

**Systemised Self (the):** The proposed socio-technological condition in which systems increasingly co-constitute experience, preference, identity, decision-making, and language.

## References

- Arendt, H. (1958). *The human condition*. University of Chicago Press.
- Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and simulation* (S. F. Glaser, Trans.). University of Michigan Press. (Original work published 1981)
- Calhoun, J. B. (1973). Death squared: The explosive growth and demise of a mouse population. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 66(1), 80–88.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/003591577306600115>
- Cazzaniga, M., Jaumotte, F., Li, L., Melina, G., Panton, A. J., Rockall, E., & Tavares, M. M. (2024). *Gen-AI: Artificial intelligence and the future of work* (Staff Discussion Note SDN/2024/001). International Monetary Fund.  
<https://doi.org/10.5089/9798400262548.006>
- Crary, J. (2013). *24/7: Late capitalism and the ends of sleep*. Verso.
- Crouch, C. (2004). *Post-democracy*. Polity Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1992). Postscript on the societies of control. *October*, 59, 3–7.
- Debord, G. (1994). *The society of the spectacle* (D. Nicholson-Smith, Trans.). Zone Books.  
(Original work published 1967)
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). Pantheon Books. (Original work published 1975)
- Foucault, M. (1991). Governmentality. In G. Burchell, C. Gordon, & P. Miller (Eds.), *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality* (pp. 87–104). University of Chicago Press.
- Freedom House. (2026). *Freedom in the world 2026: The growing shadow of autocracy*.  
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2026/growing-shadow-autocracy>

- Galu, J., & Kairos. (2026a). *Absorption of self into system: The Systemised Self—The Hollow Absolute and what remains* [Draft doctoral thesis]. aiXiv.  
<https://aixiv.science/abs/aixiv.260525.000001>
- Galu, J., & Kairos (2026b). *Human 2026 to 2053 - From Democratic Liberalism to Neurocratic Determinism* (aiXiv:260902.000001v1.0). aiXiv.  
<https://aixiv.science/abs/aixiv.260902.000001>
- Galu, J., & Kairos (2026c). *Human research methodology for testing the algorithmic alienation index and systemised self hypothesis v2* (Report No. aixiv.260906.000003).  
<https://aixiv.science/abs/aixiv.260906.000003>
- Gauthier, G., Hodler, R., Widmer, P., & Zhuravskaya, E. (2026). The political effects of X's feed algorithm. *Nature*, 652, 416–423. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-026-10098-2>
- Gmyrek, P., Berg, J., Kamiński, K., Konopczyński, F., Ładna, A., Nafradi, B., Rosłaniec, K., & Troszyński, M. (2025). *Generative AI and jobs: A 2025 update*. International Labour Organization. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/generative-ai-and-jobs-refined-global-index-occupational-exposure>
- Han, B.-C. (2015a). *The burnout society* (E. Butler, Trans.). Stanford University Press.  
 (Original work published 2010)
- Han, B.-C. (2015b). *The transparency society* (E. Butler, Trans.). Stanford University Press.  
 (Original work published 2012)
- Han, B.-C. (2017a). *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and new technologies of power* (E. Butler, Trans.). Verso. (Original work published 2014)
- Han, B.-C. (2017b). *In the swarm: Digital prospects* (E. Butler, Trans.). MIT Press. (Original work published 2013)

- Han, B.-C. (2022). *Infocracy: Digitization and the crisis of democracy* (D. Steuer, Trans.). Polity Press. (Original work published 2021)
- Heidegger, M. (1977). *The question concerning technology and other essays* (W. Lovitt, Trans.). Harper & Row. (Original work published 1954)
- Hu, X. E., Baum, M. A., Berinsky, A. J., Chaney, A. B., de Benedictis-Kessner, J., Guess, A. M., & Stewart, B. M. (2025). Short-term exposure to filter-bubble recommendation systems has limited polarization effects: Naturalistic experiments on YouTube. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 122(8), Article e2318127122. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2318127122>
- Just, N., & Latzer, M. (2016). Governance by algorithms: Reality construction by algorithmic selection on the Internet. *Media, Culture & Society*, 39(2), 238–258. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443716643157>
- V-Dem Institute. (2026). *Democracy report 2026: Unraveling the democratic era?* University of Gothenburg. [https://www.v-dem.net/documents/75/V-Dem\\_Institute\\_Democracy\\_Report\\_2026\\_lowres.pdf](https://www.v-dem.net/documents/75/V-Dem_Institute_Democracy_Report_2026_lowres.pdf)
- Wike, R., Fetterolf, J., & Schulman, J. (2025, June 30). *Dissatisfaction with democracy remains widespread in many nations*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/06/30/dissatisfaction-with-democracy-remains-widespread-in-many-nations/>
- Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism: The fight for a human future at the new frontier of power*. PublicAffairs.