

Positivity and Negativity: A Comparison Between Byung Chul Han and René Girard

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Abstract: the article proposes a comparison between the perspectives of René Girard and Byung Chul Han on violence, in order to understand the contemporary dynamics of the subject. Girard analyzes violence as a result of mimetic desire, while Han relates it to the desire to assert the self in capitalist society. Girard, in works such as *Deceit, desire and the novel* and *Violence and the Sacred*, expounds the theory of triangular desire and the scapegoat as the origin of culture. On the other hand, Han, in *Topology of Violence*, argues that violence arises from the desire for self-affirmation and constant production of the self in the capitalist context. Although they start from different premises, both criticize modernity and its promises of autonomy. Girard points out how imitation leads to melancholy, while Han exposes the depression of the self-exploiting subject. In addition, transcendence and immanence are discussed in contemporary society, where the sacred is diluted or disappears. Both negative and positive perspectives of desire offer a profound understanding of current social and psychological dynamics.

Keywords: violence; desire; René Girard; Byung Chul Han; modernity.

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Resumen: el artículo propone una comparación entre las perspectivas de René Girard y Byung Chul Han sobre la violencia, con el fin de entender mejor las dinámicas contemporáneas del sujeto. Girard analiza la violencia como resultado del deseo mimético, mientras que Han la relaciona con el deseo de afirmar el yo en la sociedad capitalista. Girard, en obras como *Mentira romántica y verdad novelesca* y *La violencia y lo sagrado*, expone la teoría del deseo triangular y del chivo expiatorio como origen de la cultura. Por otro lado, Han, en *Topología de la violencia*, argumenta que la violencia surge del deseo de autoafirmación y producción constante del yo en el contexto capitalista. Aunque parten de premisas diferentes, ambos critican la modernidad y sus promesas de autonomía. Girard señala cómo la imitación lleva a la melancolía, mientras que Han expone la depresión del sujeto que se explota a sí mismo. Además, se discute la trascendencia y la imanencia en la sociedad contemporánea, donde lo sagrado se diluye o desaparece. Ambas perspectivas, negativa y positiva del deseo, ofrecen una comprensión profunda de las dinámicas sociales y psicológicas actuales.

Palabras clave: violencia; deseo; René Girard; Byung Chul Han; modernidad.

Resumo: o artigo propõe uma comparação entre as perspectivas de René Girard e Byung Chul Han sobre a violência, a fim de melhor compreender a dinâmica contemporânea do tema. Girard analisa a violência como resultado do desejo mimético, enquanto Han a relaciona com o desejo de afirmação do eu na sociedade capitalista. Girard, em obras como *Mentira Romântica e Verdade Romântica* e *A Violência e o Sagrado*, expõe a teoria do desejo triangular e do bode expiatório como origem da cultura. Por outro lado, Han, em *Topologia da Violência*, defende que a violência surge do desejo de auto-afirmação e da constante produção do eu no contexto capitalista. Embora partam de premissas diferentes, ambos criticam a modernidade e as suas promessas de autonomia. Girard aponta como a imitação leva à melancolia, enquanto Han expõe a depressão do sujeito que se auto-explora. Para além disso, a transcendência e a imanência são discutidas na sociedade contemporânea, onde o sagrado se dilui ou desaparece. As perspectivas negativas e positivas do desejo oferecem uma compreensão profunda das dinâmicas sociais e psicológicas actuais.

Palavras-chave: violência; desejo; René Girard; Byung Chul Han; modernidade.

1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to compare two ways of conceptualizing violence to offer a better understanding about the dynamics of contemporary subjects. Both René Girard and Byung Chul Han reflect about the role of violence in the construction of the subject, its relationships with others, and its metaphysical implications. In general terms, René Girard analyses violence as a product of mimetic desire, while for Byung

Chul Han, violence starts from the desire of affirming the self in the social context of capitalist imperative of production.

To explain René Girard's understanding of violence, I will focus on two of his works. The first, *Mentira romántica y verdad novelesca* (1985) is a comparative study between the novels of Cervantes, Flaubert, Stendhal, Dostoiivski and Proust, where he analyses the imitative relationships between the characters to condense it into a theory of desire. The desire works in a triangular manner: we do not desire an object for its intrinsic value, we do it because someone else desires it. We desire the desire of another (Girard, 1999). This other is called the mediator of desire, an admired other, an idol that inspires us to be like them. Violence emerges precisely because when I wish to be like the mediator, I tend to appropriate their things, to compete for the same objects of desire, I even want to eliminate them to be like them (Antonello & Webb, 2010). This desire of appropriation, beyond of just usurping the material goods of the other, can become the metaphysical desire to want to become like the other, for which violent means can be useful.

In *Mentira romántica y verdad novelesca* a distinction appears between internal mediation and external mediation, which corresponds to a way of conceiving two types of mimesis. This form of conceptualization, however, will not be taken up by Girard with the same words in later works. In general, imitation through internal mediation corresponds to a close relationship of rivalry between imitator and the model of the desire; while imitation through external mediation eliminates rivalry due to the distance that prevents the confrontation between the two subjects. The criterion for differentiating between internal mediation and external mediation is *the "distancia espiritual"* (Girard 1985). A short distance between two subjects allows them to compete with each other and dispute the objects of the desire. It is necessary to understand that it must not be a physical distance: in monarchical times, the jester cannot aspire to become king, but in democratic times, anyone can aspire to power. Modernity, therefore, is the time of internal mediation. Since anyone can aspire to obtain privileges and recognition, we all enter that competition equally. On the other hand, to explain the external mediation we find, for example, the relationship between Sancho and Don Quixote. Although those characters keep a physical closeness, as they accompany each other on their adventures, Sancho knows that he cannot aspire to become a knight: "nunca desea el criado lo que desea su amo" (Girard, 1985, p. 15). The social and intellectual differentiation is specific to a context that gives particular roles to each individual, it prevents subjects from coveting the same objects, or from a subject seeking to dethroning the other. This distance prevents rivalry. Another example of external mediation is the imitation of fictional characters or characters who have passed away: In Cervantes, Don Quixote imitates Amadís de Gaula, while in Stendhal, Julián Sorel

imitates Napoleon. In neither of these cases does the imitator's sphere of possibilities coincide with the mediator's sphere of possibilities.

Although the concept of external mediation is defined in his first book, Girard does not take it up in later works. It is clear that one of the open questions raised by his thought is whether imitation, as a constitutive behavior of human culture, generates violence, and if there is a way out of this violence. The concept of external mediation consists of an exploration of the positive mimesis, as it raises the possibility of eliminating rivalry between subjects while maintaining the imitation relationship. (To clarify positive mimesis refers to the peaceful consequences of desire and it is distinct from the concept of positivity ontologically used by Byung Chul Han, as will be seen later). However, a possible objection to external mediation formulated by Stephane Vinolo (2010), is as follows: although it is true that the subject imitates Napoleon does not rival Napoleon, they will necessarily rival other imitators of Napoleon. Violence, then, emerges among the imitators of one same model. This objection also applies to *Imitatio Christi*: historically, various religious communities have fought both, physically and intellectually, for positioning themselves as the best imitators of the model, they dispute who is the best follower of Christ. As a result of this objection a concept of conversion as a way out of violence arising of mimesis. Following Joao Cezar de Castro Rocha (2017), while the concept of conversion comes from a Christian origin, it can be used as a secularized way. It is not necessary about a conversion towards Christ, but rather an ethical conversion. Conversion does not consist of eliminating desire but in becoming aware of how desires functions, discovering how and whom we imitate. It involves "admitir que siempre se ha copiado a los Otros a fin de parecer original tanto a sus ojos como a los propios" (Girard, 1985, p. 39). The possibility of ending rivalry coincides with the renunciation of the ideal of autonomy and originality as individuals and it also coincides with the reflective ability to avoid our tendency to sacralize or idealize others. As can be seen, conversion is an intellectual movement in which one is able to recognize oneself in the dynamics of the desire, and that does not necessarily involve a religious experience. Furthermore, conversion is a concept which Girard continues working in his various writings. In *La violencia y Lo Sagrado* (2005) conversion is also that reflexive capability to get out from the dynamics of scapegoating, that is, to get out of the collective dynamics of mimetic desire: lynching, accusation persecution, etc. In the words of Rocha de Castro (2017):

En el momento en que me vuelvo consciente de la naturaleza mimética de mi propio deseo, y no solo del deseo como una formulación puramente teórica, estoy obligado a reconocer que la mentira romántica debe ser sustituida por la verdad novelesca. Ese reconocimiento epistemológico trae consigo una actitud ética: en la

medida de lo posible, buscaré mantener bajo control las rivalidades que resultan del deseo mimético. (p. 126)

The second work of René Girard is *La violencia y lo Sagrado* (2005), in which he analyses sacrifice through a comparison of anthropological studies, psychoanalytical studies and old texts such as the Bible and Greek tragedies. In this way, he constructs the hypothesis of “chivo expiatorio” as origin of the culture. The simplest way to understand this theory is founded on the article “Mimesis and violence: perspectives in cultural criticism” published in 1979 and included in the book *The Girard Reader* (1996). As noted, imitation produces conflicts. In the conflictual relationship between two subjects, a way to reconcile is to blame third party (1996). The resulting harmony arises because the two subjects are united by the goal of preventing the third party from doing them harm. The desire to expel or eliminate that other establishes the bond. This example is replicated at the community level: when a community finds its stability threatened due to the potential escalation of revenge dynamics to a catastrophic level, so a subject emerges whom everyone blames as the culprit of all evils. This is the scapegoat; its elimination will bring order back to the community. Once the scapegoat has been sacrificed, the institutions that order a culture are established: myths, rites, and prohibitions (2005).

With the aim of summarizing the Girardian hypothesis of violence as the origin of the culture, we are going to simplify the theory in three key moments: mimetic crisis, sacrifice and instauration of the institutions. These moments are not purposed as a historic necessity, but as an explanatory matrix that allows understanding of cultural variations. The first moment, mimetic crisis corresponds to a moment of violence of everyone against everyone, where no difference, no role, no law establishes the place and limits for every individual. Everyone wants to occupy the other’s place using violence, usurping their belongings and to appropriate their honors. However, the unleashed violence threatens the survival of the community. Revenge, with its reciprocal dynamic of retaliating against the received blow, threatens the existence of the collective. Violence must be stopped through displacement: the real objective of revenge must be replaced by a sacrificial victim. So, what happens in the second moment: violence of all against all becomes the violence of all against one. All the blames and all the evils of the community are focused on the body of that one. Sacrifice in the archaic societies appears as the moment at which blood establishes what can and cannot be spilled. According to Girard (2005) the fundamental difference that organizes an archaic society in the distinction between the pure and the impure, what we can contextualize to our times as the distinctions between what is legal and illegal, correct and incorrect. The subject who is chosen as the sacrificial body is watched by the whole community as a

monster or a demon who must die. The election of the monster answers three criteria: it must be like the object that originally provoked anger, it must be a marginal member of the collective, and, above all, its murder will not bring about anyone's revenge (2005). The third moment corresponds to the order and peace resulting from the assassination of the scapegoat. Since the collective reconciles by assigning all the blame to a third party, a new era begins where the community establishes the basic differences and institutions for its functioning. In this moment, the scapegoat, what was once a fertile monster of evil and guilt is now transformed into a god we must thank for the new order. The basic institutions which are responsible for maintaining the bonds of the community are directly connected to this foundational murder: myths recount the story of this moment, rituals practically remember the significant episodes of this time, and taboos remind us the taboo objects that unleashed the original violence of the respective mimetic crisis.

Byung Chul presents his understanding of this topic in *Topología de la violencia* (2016). The south Korean philosopher takes space from the negative understanding of desire, where the identity builds for opposition towards the other and desire about what is not gotten, to create a theory's theory of the violence since a positive perspective of desire: the self that affirms and produce themselves. The other does not represent an enemy but is another who competes with in a society of isolated egos. Even though people talk about competition in society, I don't compare myself to others; I compete with myself to improve (Han, 2016). This positive desire of expansion of the self is stimulated by the capitalist imperatives: there is no end to production, no end to sales, no rest, no end. Who exploits and who is overworked coincide in the same individual so violence comes from within, not from an outside agent. For Han (2012) the tool of the individual for simultaneous production and destruction of itself is violence. Self-demanding does not lead to the development of a proud individual but rather to the downfall of someone depressed.

In the context in which Byung Chul Han thinks is different from that of René Girard. The French philosopher published his most important works in the 1960's and 70's. He lived in a time recognized by the youth revolts and the Cold War, where the model of violence was the reciprocity of threads between two symmetrical power blocks (Girard, 2010). By his part, the south Korean philosopher wrote in times where Cold War is finished. There are no longer two blocks in opposition. Once capitalism deploys its power, globalization starts as a force that eliminates frontiers and homogenizes the cultures. With the deployment of neoliberalism, free trade agreements are signed, companies are established in multiple countries, products are present across entire continents, and capital circulates freely around the globe. Capitalist hegemony unfolds without hindrance, without enemy, creating an immanent plane that digests everything Other to turn it into a commodity (Han,

2016). In addition, communication over long distances has been reduced to a instant. Internet and social networks have disrupted social relationships to the point of beginning to rethink a new individual. Despite the context of both authors is different, Girard and Han profess Catholic religion.

It is important to show that Byulg Chul Han commented in the second chapter of *Topología de la violencia* (2016) a work of René Girard. Han briefly expounded the Girardian theory that the main source of human violence is rivalry, born from imitation, which in turn is able to generate fictional value in human relationships. Everything surrounding the idol (the mediator of desire) is impregnated of a prestigious value. In other words, the value of the objects of desire is a construct of the imagination. Han mentioned that the Girardian theory does not include violence created by rivalry competing for objects with intrinsic value, as water or money. Furthermore, the South Korean author agreed with Girard that, for the archaic societies, violence is a religious experience, meaning communication with the divine to prevent a greater violence through the substitution of the sacrificial. However, for Han this reactive and negative view is not comprehensive, since there were archaic societies whose violence was not aimed at preventing greater violence. Their goal was to produce more violence to reaffirm itself as a community above death. A people identified with their war god will just to kill more, for power and immortality, not to prevent anything. Han sees this desire to accumulate deaths as a primitive relative of the desire to accumulate capital.

2. The Subject, Desire and Violence

The construction of a philosophical thought implies showing what the understanding of the subject is and the relations that constitute it. For both Girard and Han, the understanding of the subject involves an understanding of desire, of the relation with others and of the relation with the transcendent (which we could also call metaphysical relationships).

While Girard has a negative understanding of desire, Han has a positive one. In the history of the philosophy, it is more common to find a negative explanation of desire: we desire what we do not have, we desire what is repressed, we desire from lack and need. Emptiness is essential in the negative model of desire (May, 2005). However, from the philosophical proposal of Deleuze & Guattari, a tradition of thought of positive desire is retroactively established connecting to Spinoza, Marx and Nietzsche. Desire is not lack, but production (Deleuze & Guattari, 1985) Positive desire is an affirmation of itself, production and creation of reality, is flow and

connection of flows. It should be clarified that Byung Chul Han distances from the proposal of Deleuze & Guattari, as he considers it an idealization of positive desire. For Deleuze and Guattari, the positive production of desire is a liberating promise embodied in the exemplary model of the schizo subject. Han (2016), for his part, recognizes that the excesses of positive desire become violence and exploitation. Schizophrenic disinhibition dilutes all the differences to the point of generating the violence of homogeneity.

In the case of Girard, the fundamental lack is ontological: I am not who I want to be. The desiring subject feels empty and wants to usurp the ontological fullness of another through imitation. The other remains as the spring from which the self emanates, that other idolized as a model to follow. Girard (1985) breaks with the lineal model of desire, where the subject wishes what craves by his own will or because is seduced by the inherent values of object. However, the relationship between the object and subject have a third component: the other as mediator of desire. I desire what my idol desires. The unique way to build an identity and affirm the individuality is to extract the content of the others through imitation. However, the modern subject that seeks autonomy, in other words, the subject seeks to reaffirm itself, it finds itself embarrassing the confession of its dependence with the others. As the subject wants to be independent, it hides ontological links with the others (Mendoza Álvarez, 2017). Hiding of the dependence with others, Girard calls it “mentira romántica”. “El orgullo sólo puede sobrevivir gracias a la mentira” (Girard, 1985, p. 57). So, Girard is a critic of modernity. Although the modern subject seeks to affirm itself like autonomous and authentic, truly is a subject who depends ontologically on others. In terms of desire, the reactive desires –those that depend on the other to exist– are disguised as spontaneous desires– those that have their origin in themselves– (Sanabria Galvis, 2022a).

The desire to imitate the other means the recognition that the desiring subject feels empty while the mediator is in fullness. When the subject imitates, it involves a comparison with the other. The result of this comparison is that the other gains a status of prestige and fullness, while the subject feels emptied to the point of considering itself as wretched and contemptible (Sanabria Galvis, 2022b). The negative dynamics of desire lead us to dissatisfaction and melancholy. Once the subject of the desire is achieved, it is not enough; there will be a new object of the desire and always farther and more unattainable. Moreover, due to not being able to reach what I want to be I end up harming myself, humiliating myself and seeking myself into misery. Self-aggressiveness and self-hatred are products of the distance between the self and the other (Girard, 1985).

In the case of Han, the self is a fundamental excess, the self is positioned as the first ontological unit. Here I am, I go first. Individual self-realization is the motor and the principle of the real. Since the subject does not doubt itself, an inversion of the Cartesian expression occurs: I am, therefore I think (Han, 2016). The self desires itself and with that produces itself, regardless of the others. The self expands to the point that it eliminates any transcendent instance, any possible relation with the other. In the negative model, the subject defined by its relations with the other: I am the negation of the other, I am obedient to the other, I am a conflicting internalization of the other. But the subject of the late modernity is not negation, but affirmation. It can be said then that the other disappears in such a way that the desiring subject and the object of desire coincide. If there is no other, there is a narcissistic relationship (Han, 2012). In short, it can be said that desire here is an expansion of the self, a longing to increase its possibilities to the point of hypertrophy and collapsing inward.

Just as the negative model of Girard has the risk of melancholy, the positive model of Han ends in depression. The colloquial usage of melancholy and depression might identify them as synonymous, however, Han proposes a distinction. In general terms, depression is to consume itself in emptiness or absence, while depression is to consume in excess. In both cases, we are dealing with a harmed subject, meaning someone broken by gap or contradiction that defines it, but it is not the same gap. One of the consequences Han has because of affirming that late modernity is marked by self-demand rather than external repression and coercion is to acknowledge that psychoanalysis (and its concepts derived from a negative view of desire) becomes less effective. Therefore, psychological pathologies are not the same in a disciplinary society as in a performance society. The mind (psyche) of the negative model maintains a relationship with the other; it imitates them, internalizes their norms and values, and copes with their absence. The negative subject suffers the gap of the distance between the self and the other. In this sense, melancholy is the internalization of the lost subject. In other words, the identity of the melancholic has a crack where the absence of the lost other resides. In the positive model, hypertrophy of the self eliminates otherness (Han 2016). The excessive expansion of the self leaves no space for the other, not even for their absence. Therefore, the performance subject suffers the gap between the self and the ideal self. The unattainable ideal that is pursued with all freedom. The subject sees itself as a venture that's always in progress, a project waiting for success. In other words, it sees with a big potential of success, but it finds it frustrating. Depression is the lack of capacity to reach its goals, the difficulty of matching with the ideal image of the self. It could

even be said that for the depressed individual, there is no goal, no reward for their efforts, and as a result, they crumble under their frustration (2016).

Understanding how the identity of the contemporary subject is built is crucial for comprehending social dynamics and, especially, violence. Both authors agree that modernity is a horizontal plane where equality and homogeneity expand. They also agree that individuality, when it affirms itself, generates violence. However, their approaches to these issues are different yet complementary. According to Byung Chul Han, the absence of a transcendent ontological plane leaves subjects in the homogeneity of commodities. There is no mystery; everything is sellable. In this context, the identity of the subject depends on their capacity to perform and achieve goals, and their ability to withstand pressure and stress. This is where individual pride originates. On the other hand, René Girard argues that the disappearance of a transcendent plane as the foundation of human life creates a horizontal plane where we are all the same. Equality promoted by democracies and republics which ostensibly seek brotherhood, ends up in mutual destruction. Since we are intolerant of recognizing ourselves as equals to one another, we feel compelled to differentiate ourselves from others. Thus, the self constructs its identity in opposition to the other. This “being against” becomes the way to create differences. If I want to affirm my individuality as different from another’s, I must invent differences that set us apart. The task of the individual, then, is to create these differences in the other as humiliating and degrading, so that by a simple comparison, they can attribute superiority to themselves. In this sense, violent actions –such as rape, indifference, murder, suicide, war, etc.– are variations of the affirmative expression of individuality.

Byung-Chul Han achieves a key conceptual distinction that advances this kind of research by clearly distinguishing between power and violence. While power is the capacity to organize and order, distinguish and assign roles, violence, on the other hand, is the capacity to annihilate the other (Han, 2016). One of the key questions in reflections on violence is: How are communal bonds possible? How do we understand the relationships between individuals? In the case of Girard (2005), communal bonding is achieved through violence: we all remain united to the extent that we exclude a scapegoat. Furthermore, under the regime of a modern state, the criminal justice system emerges to control violence between individuals. Criminal law represents the institutional capacity to depersonalize revenge and rationalize violence, with the aim of preventing an escalation of bloodshed. At this point power is defined by its capacity to exercise controlled violence. Byung Chul Han does not limit his understanding of violence as the primary regulator of human relationships.

Drawing on Aristotle and certain liberal ideas, the South Korean thinker opens the possibility of understanding connections with others through promises, agreements, friendship, and contracts. The law no longer understood simply as the threat of punishment but as the possibility of maintaining agreements and contracts, along with friendship, opens other dimensions for understanding community and politics (Almeyda, 2022).

3. Metaphysic: Transcendence and Immanence

Another key point for comparing the works of René Girard and Byung-Chul Han is metaphysics, particularly the existence of two ontological planes: the transcendent and the immanent. Throughout the history of philosophy, these two planes have varied: the beyond and the here and now; the divine and the worldly; the eternal and the changing; immutable laws and fluctuating phenomena; the sacred and the profane. Some philosophies give preeminence to the transcendent plane as an explanatory principle for understanding what we experience on the plane of reality. For example, Plato, whose eternal ideas are the origin of the fleeting reality we perceive. Similarly, in medieval Christian philosophies, God serves as the ontological foundation for His creatures (Schmidt, 2018). Even Kant preserves the thing-in-itself as an inaccessible plane that sustains the real. However, there is another set of philosophies that focus on remaining within the immanent plane, arguing that it is unnecessary to multiply worlds to explain reality (Antonelli, 2014). This effort to seek an immanent explanation can be traced back to Aristotle, with his idea that beings contain their own end (telos) within themselves. Other examples include Spinoza's philosophy of self-creating nature, Hegel's absolute spirit, Marx's dialectic of history, Deleuze's desiring-machines, and Susan Sontag's erotics of art.

In the case of the works of Girard and Han, immanence is not merely a philosophical tool for understanding the world, it is also a characteristic of the functioning of the world. In occidental modern societies God is not the center of human life, nor the source of political sovereignty, nor the ontological foundation of creation. (Escamilla González, 2013). In other words, the symbolic legitimacy of a transcendent meaning loses strength to give way to the rational and democratic subject as the constructor of his own reality. For both Girard and Han, the absence of an authentic sacred plane transforms human relationships.

For Girard, transcendence is transformed and incorporated into the immanent plane in a degraded form. Although what is truly sacred and divine has lost its legitimacy, this does not mean that humans have abandoned their desire for

transcendence. In the modernity, there remains “el hambre inmensa de lo sagrado” (Girard, 1985, p. 77), that desire to find a stable and coherent meaning. This desire for transcendence reintroduces the sacred into the space of the collective we. “Ya no hay Dios, ni rey, ni señor para unirlos con lo universal. Los hombres desean según el Otro para escapar al sentimiento de lo particular; eligen unos dioses de recambio porque no pueden renunciar al infinito” (Girard, 1984, p. 63). In other words, in the absence of God, human beings will become God to each other. The tendency to imitate one another implies placing the admired other on a transcendent plane, transforming them from mortal to idol, painting them with the highest prestigious, charming, perfect. Metaphysical distance is reintroduced into the space of encountering another. Thus, the absence of the truly sacred does not lead to the autonomy and responsibility of the subject, but rather a capacity to self deception and creation of conflicts. Girard (1985), like the novelists who inspire him, “no define nuestro universo por la ausencia de lo sagrado, como hacen los filósofos, sino por un sagrado pervertido y corrupto que envenena poco a poco las fuentes de la vida” (p. 184).

While for Girard the modern subject remains in a tense relationship with the void left by the sacred, for Han, the expansion of the self and capitalism overthrows the sacred for that void without leaving room for that void. In other words, the sacred spaces do not exist in the late modernity sacred spaces are exclusive places accessed by crossing a threshold to catch a glimpse of the inaccessible, the mysterious (Han, 2016). Now, there is no mystery, nothing is inaccessible. On the contrary, everything is exposed, everything is on display, as a merchandise in a shop window. The hypothetical inaccessibility of the other disappears under the imperative to display our privacy on social media. Similarly, the hypothetical inaccessibility of the *thing-in-itself* vanishes under the equalizing power of capital which turns every object into merchandise. This is violence of transparency which makes the other disappear under the light of the identical (2016). Both subject and object are stripped bare before the seductions of capital, ready to be exploited. Now, everyday life hides no transcendent meaning behind its surface, but more than that, the surface itself is covered of empty meanings, messages without content. The world is covered with advertisements and that garbage does not smell, but seeks to be beautiful to attract the attention of the other.

The scientific and politics promises in the modernity, that bring itself the disappearance of the transcendent plane as the central meaning in the human community, they promised a paradise of equality and freedom where human beings would be the owner of our reality under democratic and republican institutions.

However, human sovereignty over reality did not imply the elimination of metaphysics, but rather its transformation. For Girard, the transcendent remains in a degraded form in the ability to disguise what is fleeting as eternal, that is, the ability to create idols. For Chul Han, capital occupies that sovereign and transcendent place that turns everything else into something identical, in other words, everything becomes a commodity. In this capitalist context, the idol is capital. As Byung Chul Han (2016) says, power and glory belong to capital:

La publicidad se presenta como la versión capitalista del canto de alabanza litúrgico. Las estrellas, que glorifican los nuevos productos, son los ángeles de hoy en día. Los cantos de alabanza capitalista dan gloria. Son la cara bonita de la dominación, que solo sirve al capital. La aclamación, a la que tributa el dominio del capital, se llama consumo. (p. 99)

Both authors, in their own way, show how the absence of divine allows any fleeting entity to become a substitute for the eternal, a symbolic center of power and glory. While for Girard these substitutes can be any subject or object without establishing hierarchies of established divinities, for Han, capital is the substitute that hegemonizes the space vacated by the divine, and from there, ontological hierarchies are established. Perhaps a tacit consequence of these positions is a nostalgia for the divine, a suggestion that, if the truly sacred had not abandoned its place, there would not be so many usurpers vying for the eternal role.

4. Conclusion

In general, it is important to note that the relevance of these philosophers is key to understanding the construction of the subject in times of globalization and virtual social networks. It is precisely within this context happens the dynamics diagnosed by the authors take place. A quick look at the internet reveals phenomena of imitation and self-affirmation. Influencers live by feeding their egos, asserting their freedom through travels and meals, and acting as the owners of their own companies, they become both master and slaves of themselves. It might be argued that influencers represent the apogee that consumes the modern ideal of autonomy. They are their own bosses, reveling in the vanity of imposing their own rules. On the other hand, there are phenomena that are explicitly acts of imitation. Dance challenges or extremes stunts that young people replicate, styles or certain words that spread as quickly as memes. For that reason, a complementary approach between the theories of René Girard and Byung-Chul Han should be considered.

Although Girard and Han have two different starting points, one from the model of negativity and the other from the model of positivity, both authors, in their own way, offer a critique of modernity. The modern promise of an autonomous and free individual ends in failure. On one hand, there is a failure of the romantic lie, which conceals the ontological connections with the other. On the other hand, there is a failure of the depressed subject who becomes in their own exploiter.

One could also venture to build a bridge between both philosophies by suggesting that the "performance subject" is also a form of the "romantic lie", as this subject pretends to be a self-construction, independent of its ties to others. Of course, it is important to clarify that self-affirmation from a position of positivity entails desire as production and spontaneous motivation of will; whereas affirmation of identity since the negativity supposes lack relationship and repression, which becomes the subject reactive. It is also worth noting that the performance subject does not seek to dominate others; rather, it seduces them, draws attention, and attracts their gaze to inflate its own ego. Here Byung Chul Han is careful not using the term "recognition", as it would imply the involvement of other subjects. The self expands within its own realm, because everything is identical to itself. For Girard, however, the subject of the romantic lie expands over others, dominates them, and reduces them to parts of itself, mere tools for its own proposal.

Regards to the topic of desire, it is essential to clarify that Girard recognizes as the motor of the desire as the imitation of others, while Han locates this motor in the desire of self-realization. These starting points have repercussions both on the psychological and social levels. Psychologically, the negative model of desire culminates in melancholy and dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction here is understood as the state of disillusionment after achieving the object of desire, since this object loses its charm and appeal once attained, leading back to the same cycle of longing and failure. Also, having cleared that melancholy is the intern tear of the subject for finding itself void in front of a fullness lost. By his part, the positive model consumes itself into depression and exhaustion. The performance-orientated subject, committed to endless productivity, ultimately ends up exhausted and internally torn, as their Ideal Self shows unattainable.

The social consequence of the negative model is a society of envious individuals who seek to appropriate prestige of others to climb the social ladder (Di Battista, 2010). The consequence of the second model is a society of isolated egos, each competing to push themselves further and further. One could argue that the intention of Han is asserting that the performance subject is both exploiter and

exploited has the effect of obscuring hierarchical and dominance-based relationships. His proposal that violence no longer comes from an external coercive agent but from the individual's own freedom, which exerts violence in the name of self-realization, accurately diagnoses the situation of a certain type of worker who aligns with the neoliberal narrative of entrepreneurship: small and medium enterprises, remote workers, influencers, and others influenced by Silicon Valley's ideology. While this diagnosis of performance society is accurate, it is not exhaustive. Performance and transparency are not the only forms of violence at play in contemporary society. Byung-Chul Han's analysis dismantles neoliberalism's promises, undermines its prophecies of success, but overlooks other forms of violence that persist from the past. Of course, since his aim is to dismantle the performance society on its own positive terms, this approach is well-justified. The search for other explanatory models of violence reflects the need for complementarity among theories to conduct more accurate diagnoses of our societies.

In both developed and developing countries (or, in other words, North Atlantic countries and those in the Global South), there remain forms of violence where the division between exploited and exploiter are categories that aid in understanding. Naturally, the concept of exploiter and exploited varies according to how two individuals exert violence upon each other to pursue specific goals, as can be observed in the transformations of the spirit in *La fenomenología del Espíritu* by Hegel. In this work, different ways of relating to others result in various types of violence and hierarchization; well-known examples include the violence between master and slave, the conflict between Antigone and Creon, and the violence of the French Revolution (Hegel, 2010). This enduring phenomenon of hierarchies and domination, which varies according to context, cannot be fully analyzed using Byung-Chul Han's theory alone. Additional theories that examine the dynamics between identity and difference are necessary to understand the creation of hierarchies. In the framework of Girard, a key point is that difference does not exist independently; rather, it is a product of identity. Along similar lines to Han, Girard argues that modernity is a realm of identity or homogeneity. However, for Girard, violence does not emerge from the expansion of homogeneity that threatens to erase differences. Instead, violence arises because, in a democratic world where we are all equals, we struggle to tolerate each other as equals. We desire to differentiate ourselves from others, even to become superior to them. Here lies one of the paradoxes of modern ideals of equality and autonomy: while equality is promised among individuals, we strive to separate ourselves from others, to distance ourselves

in the pursuit of autonomy. Privileges continue to exist, though they are no longer attributed to a divine origin and are theoretically accessible to anyone. Now, the attainment of privilege and superiority is dictated by arbitrariness rather than a preordained divine will. From this perspective, democracy can be seen as a contest among flatterers and traitors competing to elevate any individual to a royal status (Girard, 1985).

Both philosophies can be complementary in understanding the dynamics of the contemporary subject. In a Hegelian fashion, Byung-Chul Han demonstrates how the premises of the neoliberal subject ultimately fail when taken to their logical extremes. Notably, Chul Han is skeptical of the modern individualist project, and a sense of nostalgia for the presence of the other can be perceived in his assertions.

Positivity is an emptiness and an unbearable loneliness. It leaves us vulnerable to a certain kind of violent negativity: since the positive subject is devoid of content due to isolation, it finds a way to incorporate content through the construction of an enemy. This emptiness thus becomes fertile ground for nationalisms, xenophobia, and any other form of groupthink that can be explained by scapegoating dynamics. The emptiness of positivity is so fragile that we can easily fall back into identity-building processes based on the exclusion and elimination of the other, requiring only the construction of a contemptible image of this other. In this sense, theories of positive and negative violence can be complementary. This complementarity is evident not only in politics but also in social media, where both the affirmation of the transparent self and the self-exploitation of influencers in pursuit of success, as well as the imitation of viral behaviors and the construction of new, fleeting idols, are observable phenomena that can be analyzed through both theories.

In conclusion, the comparative analysis between the works of Girard and Byung-Chul Han offers a profound understanding of the dynamics of the contemporary subject within a context defined by globalization, technology, and capitalism. From different perspectives, both converge in their critique of modernity and their exploration of the psychological and social implications of desire. Girard, through his model of negativity, emphasizes the importance of imitation and the reliance on others in shaping the subject's identity. His analysis reveals how the lack of an authentic transcendent dimension leads to the creation of idols and the perpetuation of rivalry and violence in society. On the other hand, Han, through his model of positivity, highlights the narcissistic expansion of the self and the pursuit of self-realization as driving forces of human behavior in the age of performance and transparency. His work reveals how the absence of sacred spaces and the dominance

of capital creates a society of isolated, exhausted individuals, obsessed with success and productivity.

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