

Human Identity and Agency Envisioned by Moral Imagination in the Practice of the Self

Eddy Putranto | Department of Philosophy
Parahyangan Catholic University,
Bandung, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

In the information-saturated culture today identity of the self is getting blurred and pulverized. The situation is disorienting and calling into question the concept of 'identity', 'selfhood', 'subject' or 'authenticity'. Despite various kinds of method of 'self-mastery', the self remains elusive, even more than ever before. This article discusses the problem of 'self', not in terms of its 'essence', but rather in terms of what s/he does in the practice of the self. Identity is something constructed by the act of searching for meaning. Through 'moral imagination', the search for meaning becomes moral responses toward events of humanity. Self is the

subject of history that actualizes him/herself through the history of humanity.

Key Words:

•Agency •Authenticity •Authoring and Rebirthing The Self •Disownership of The Self •Identity •Moral Imagination •Self •Subjec •History of Humanity.

Cultural studies of human person today have tried to address the issues of identity and agency. The studies allow us to follow discussions around self-construction in relation to the formation of identity and agency. How is the self being constructed in society and how is it constitutive for the emergence of human identity and agency? Identity refers to the question of “whom” or what anthropological image a person is assuming to identify with in relation to one's self-consciousness developed in society; whereas agency refers to the question of “how” to get that image through practicing the self.¹

Being human requires a practice of the self in light of the ideal anthropological image and vision of how to live and to be that have been embodied consciously in the self. As we are aware of our embodied memory and knowledge of what it means to be human, we have to take that memory into practice in worlds of action in order to be a living human. When we meet a situation about which we are very much concerned, the practice itself serves as a response to that situation. That is the time when the anthropological images and visions are applied creatively and imaginatively to the particular situation being concerned.

However, the practice of the self is not about techniques used to solve problems of human reality. It is not about the exercise of power that imposes the political influence and pressure for socio-political change. Nor is it about knowledge and expertise practiced in debate and argumentation even for paradigm shift. Nor is it about a religious instruction and tradition preached for religious revival. The practice of the self constitutes what is called moral imagination that is the human capacity to orient us to a new and more humane horizon. It is the exercise of moral imagination triggered by human reality that has been concerned and cared about in order to transform that reality to a better state of life. The self will be constructed in the line of the construction of humanity that the person cares about.

The Practice of the Self

For writers like Margaret Archer, the discussion on the human self-shaping and self-understanding is a crucial effort to reclaim humanity that has been considered lost by those who believe in the so-called “postmodernism's death of humanity.”² To do so, in *Being Human: The Problem of Agency*, she rejects both the modern and postmodern approaches of self-understanding. In “modernity's man,” as the projection of the Enlightenment, selfhood is asocial shaped by rationality.³ Because rationality was considered as pre-given, therefore none of our relationship to the world was significant to the concept of the self. As opposed to “modernity's man,” postmodernists proposed the concept of “society's being.” Human self was dissolved into the category of mere social product or the gift of society. It is socially constructed particularly through social conversation and linguistic interaction with other human beings. Also contrary to the modern Cartesian thinking of human existence, which established human beings as the sources of history and the masters of nature, the postmodernists dethroned human beings from the makers to

the mere recipients of history. As a result, humanity was lost to society. It no longer becomes the place of referential meanings in the real world. Moreover, with the claim of the death of meta-narrative, there is no longer a single way to grasp meanings, nor are there big stories to render them. "Humanity was increasingly turned into an entity constituted by language—a movement from subject to subjectification and subjugation."⁴

In postmodernism, *self* does not amount to much,"⁵ said Jean-Francois Lyotard. "Man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea,"⁶ said Michel Foucault. Furthermore, with the doctrine of the death of humanity, there is no enough room for unique human identity and authenticity as Kenneth Gerden said, "With the spread of postmodernist consciousness we see the demise of personal definition, reason, authority, commitment, trust, the sense of authenticity, sincerity, belief in leadership, depth of feeling and faith in progress. In their stead, an open slate emerges on which persons may inscribe, erase and rewrite their identities as the ever-shifting, ever-expanding and incoherent network of relationships invites or permits."⁷

Against both the modern and the postmodern concepts of humanity, Archer defends the significance of practice for the emergence of self-consciousness. She argues that humanity is neither pre-given nor the gift of society, but it "emerges from our practical activity in the world."⁸ She talks about the primacy of practice over rationality and social conversation for the development of self-consciousness. The practice itself serves as a learning process through which the continuous sense of self emerges. Social instruction is not necessarily needed, because essentially "we are thrown into the real world and make what we can of situations, of which we have no prior understanding, through exercising our species' endowments in praxis."⁹ It is like infants who develop their self-consciousness through activities of doing and reacting even without proper knowledge and information of how to do things.

However, Archer still acknowledges social inputs through social relations for the development of the self. Within social relations, “we humans form society through our activities, but we are also shaped by it.”¹⁰ The point here is that with the nature of human capacity for spontaneity, imagination, and originality the social inputs received from society do not reduce humanity to “society's being.” She maintains the autonomy of the self over society, and only in this way is a human person capable of identifying personal values and making sense of life through personal commitments both for oneself and for society.¹¹

The human capacity for originality, in turn, becomes a foundation for human improvisation of what we have been told by and received from society so that we are not passive recipients or blind imitators of society. Dorothy Holland and her coauthors, in *Identity and Agency in Cultural World*, have attempted to articulate the significance of improvisation on one's behavior and practice to the contribution of social construction and development. Improvisation is a spontaneous action that occurs “when our past, brought to the present as *habitus*, meets with a particular combination of circumstances and conditions for which we have no set response.”¹² It would lead individuals to the experience of the potential life-change from one's scripted socio-cultural position to one's new way of being. In the situation in which the improvisation is being performed, persons or groups are drawn towards “the tension between past histories that have settled in them and the present discourses and images that attract them or somehow impinge upon them.”¹³ The meeting between the past and the present challenges the persons to take their improvisation and spontaneity into practice. Holland and her colleagues believe that stimulated by such improvisation the change will come about from generation to generation; that the experience of the next generation will creatively be constructed. As an example, they believe that “the improvisations of the parental generation are the beginning of a new *habitus* for the next generation.”¹⁴ Hence, such

improvisations become potential mediations of the identity-making process and even of the life-change in society.

Identity emerges from the imagining of self in worlds of action, motivated by ideals of life to which one is strongly emotionally attracted. It is developed through human practical actions. In turn, the actions become the expressions of one's ideals and at the same time the responses to what one cares about and is committed to. It is a key foundation from which people create new worlds, new actions, and new ways of being. Thus, our view of identity tries to respect human beings as social creatures who are capable of imagining self beyond one's socially settled subjectivity and growing toward another altered one. As social creatures, individuals are always in forming self within social practice, led by dream, hope, fear, suffering, desperation, and even happiness and pride as immediate senses to what they care about, to what is going on around them.

It does not mean, however, that human persons are free to shape whatever subjectivity they wish and to do whatever strikes them at the moment. Our concept of the person in relation to the redefining identity emphasizes one's openness to the process of becoming, to the possibility of being with respect to the previously established self that has been spoken historically by social situations and society and upon which one improvises.

The arena of improvisation takes place in events that individuals are very much involved. In these events the individual persons enter into an existence of what Michael Holquist, adopting Bakhtinian theory, calls the "world of dialogism," a process of being "addressed" and "answering."

Dialogism begins by visualizing existence as an event, the event of being responsible for (and to) the particular situation existence assumes as it unfold in the unique (and constantly changing) place I occupy in it. Existence is addressed to me as a riot of inchoate potential messages, which at this level of abstraction may be said to come to individual persons much as stimuli from the natural environment come to

individual organism. Some of the potential messages come to me in the form of primitive physiological stimuli, some in the form of natural language, and some in social codes, or ideologies. So long as I am in existence, I am in a particular place, must respond to all these stimuli either by ignoring them or in a response that takes the form of making sense, of producing—for it is a form of work— meaning out of such utterances.¹⁵

The act of making a response is a process of making meaning of life through which human identity is being authored and self-consciousness is continuously being developed. In other words, it is in social worlds of action with the dialogical process that the formation of the self takes place.

Homi Bhabha, another figure in socio-cultural theory, has tried to address in his book *The Location of Culture* the issues of the identity-making process as the negotiation of cultural differences. Negotiation can be understood as a form of dialogism, a synthesis between cultural differences for the sake of human originality. Instead of using the philosophical discourse of human identity as the process of self-reflection and the anthropological view of human identity as divided between Nature and Culture, Homi Bhabha attends to the questions of identity from the postcolonial perspective.¹⁶ The problem of identity in postcolonial view emerges “as a persistent questioning of the frame, the space of representation, where the image – missing person, invisible eye, Oriental stereotype – is confronted with its difference, its Other.”¹⁷ The self-forming relates to discovering one's missing person, one's “invisibleness” through the meeting with “Other.” The moment of encountering Other initiates what he calls “*the process of identification.*”¹⁸ In this process, the Other serves as an objectified image of identity that persons are attracted and want to be identified with. “The question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a *self*-fulfilling prophecy – it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in

assuming that image.”¹⁹ For this reason, Bhabha emphasizes the significance of “the realm of the *beyond*,”²⁰ “the Third Space” between the self and the Other as a condition constitutive for individuals to rewrite their identity. It is “a moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion.”²¹ It is a space of creative invention that compels us “to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences.”²²

In conjunction with the social change and development, to live “in the realm of the beyond” will open up the window of the future without leaving behind of the past. The future is part of our today's negotiation and improvisation of the differences with respect to human history. In facing the future, to live in the beyond will allow us to “not merely change the narratives of our histories, but transform our sense of what it means to live, to be, in the other times and different spaces, both human and historical.”²³

The process of the negotiation in “the realm of the beyond” that causes creatively new meanings and new ways of living, in fact, becomes the process of agency when persons realize their autonomy as an actor of social life and their authorship of the social development. From the postcolonial perspective, agency emerges as a result of the negotiation that brings about the social consciousness of one's own historical narrative. In many respects, it is about uncovering and revising history that has been forgotten and robbed by outside powers.²⁴ It is also an “act, exercised by people through the various and contradictory discourses through which they are constituted, to 'author' a positioned self or person at particular moments or encounters.”²⁵ In this way, agency plays as moment of authorship that returns the subject as a historical subject so that one can live with a history of one's own.

Moral Imagination

The practice of the self as a response to what one cares about requires the so-called “moral imagination.” The term “moral” here does not primarily refer to morality according to the Moral Theology, which very much concerns with the definitions of right and wrong, good and bad according to moral laws. Rather, moral is like *vocation*²⁶ that invites us to exercise our responsibility in the creation of a new humanity. Hence, moral signifies human calls to set a condition in which people can live their alternative better lives.

While moral emphasizes human responsibility to set a new humanity, “imagination” on the other hand underscores human capacity to create new reality. Imagination is “a capacity to perceive things beyond and at a deeper level than what initially meets the eye.”²⁷ The best way to experience the realm of imagination is by looking at the works of art that have the “capacity to give birth to something new that in its very birthing changes our world and the way we see things.”²⁸ Imagination itself is an art, which is an art of creating what does not exist. For Mark Johnson, imagination is “the key to these artistic acts by which new things come into existence, old things are reshaped, and our ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, thinking and so forth are transformed.”²⁹

Art may attack us with surprises and shocks that transcend us beyond what we actually encounter and even beyond what actually the artists had experienced. Another world seems being opened and as if no one has ever entered into this world. It leads us to the personal rather unique experience of transformation. “In the actual experience of art we do not experience the artists behind the work of art. Rather we recognize the truth of the work’s disclosure of a world of reality transforming, if only for a moment, ourselves: our lives, our sense for possibilities and actuality, our destiny.”³⁰ The experience of art can become another starting point of our actuality

that allows us to challenge the status quo. To enter into the world of art, we have to free ourselves from the “aesthetic theories of taste”³¹ because the experience of art is not merely an aesthetic experience. We have to prevent our agenda and vision from distracting our experience of art and let the art itself triggers our imagination to enter into its world that offers another new alternative realm of meaning and being.

Different from reason whose primary task is to analyze what actually is, here, and now, imagination “can take wing,” flying towards various possibilities, moving beyond what actually is. It is also different from fantasy in the sense of its immediate link to a reality. Fantasy, although it is also a human capacity to enter into various possibilities of living, is not necessarily rooted in a reality. It can become a wild wandering of mind that is nothing to do with a real life. However, “it keeps the mind open and limber; it can entertain; it can be a means of experimenting; it can help us do the important work of building new wholes. But fantasy need have no necessary relationship to 'reality' and hence it can in its own subjective pleasure or horror.”³²

The moral imagination is always rooted in a human reality and becoming a response to that reality towards an imaginably new way of being. It becomes

the greatest instrument of moral good . . . if we employ our [moral] imagination—and if we imagine justice and peace, compassion and reconciliation—then not only do we give ourselves the possibility of doing something rather than simply doing nothing, but the very capacity to imagine has itself contributed to the moral good, both of those whose imagination spurs them to action and of those who benefit from it.³³

The realistic hope for the moral good and therefore for the emergence of a new humanity “does not lie in some miraculous interventions — whether supernatural or techno-capitalist—but in the

groaning and greening socially conscious and active people who have resolved to make a difference in various locations and stations in life.”³⁴

The life-change in our society is started by people who have moral imagination and vision, and willing to engage in making their visions come into reality for the new humanity particularly through the practice of the self in the realm of social action and speech.

The practice of the self in making a difference in our life needs the moral imagination that allows us to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist. Writing particularly on the peace-building practice, Paul Lederach believes that the moral imagination is a very unique human gift that may become the turning point of new life that rises from the current reality we live filled with the destructive violence and relationship. It functions to help us to “transcend the cycles of destructive violence while living with and being relevant to the context that produces those cycles.”³⁵ Again, like arts that are beyond technique and method, Lederach argues that the moral imagination works in an artistic process that brings us to a journey toward new horizon of the reality that has been captured.

We need to envision ourselves as artists. We need a return to aesthetics . . . the place of imagination . . . [S]ocial change that sticks and makes a difference has behind it the artist's intuition: the complexity of human experience captured in a simple image and in a way that moves individuals and whole societies. The true genius of the moral imagination is the ability to touch the art and soul of the matter.³⁶

Accordingly, the human reality is like an art and we have to see it as an art that triggers our imagination and invites us to its world in which we are challenged to come out with our moral visions as a response to that reality. That is why the moral imagination is imperative to enter into the world of human reality filled with human triumph and loss.

What makes change possible? How does constructive social change happen? How can we truly become an agent of change? These questions are not just a challenge reserved for leaders in power or policy makers in charge of strategically and politically creating social changes. How about the person who is not in charge and has no technique and skill whatsoever to change the reality, can she/he be an agent of social change? How possible does a powerless person in a society contribute to the life changes of the society? Can a little child who barely knows nothing about how to answer to the human problem be a transformer of human reality? The social change may come into being not only by our analytical knowledge, but primarily by our imagination as we have discussed.

In fact, there are stories about people of courage who practice their moral imagination in responses to the human attacks and tragedies. Such practices can be acted by almost anyone who has courage and moral imagination, including six-year-old Ryan Hreljac. At the age of six, Ryan was moved by the fact that people in Africa have difficulty to access to clean water. He was so touched so that the only dream he wished was that people in Africa could have an access to clean water. From his teacher he also learned that without clean water people could get sick. To make his dream come true he worked so hard raising money, doing anything from cleaning the house to asking for donations. Finally, in four months he reached \$70, the amount of money he was told enough for having a well built in Africa. He continued raising money because later on he knew that the actual cost to build a well was \$ 2.000. He kept working up to now under his Ryan's Well Foundation. Now he has raised over \$1.000.000 and his work has helped thousands of people in Africa who otherwise might not have a healthy and normal life.³⁷ This is a story of person who usually in our society is not counted to make change possible but he practice his moral imagination and in the end contribute to the creation of new humanity.

Another story comes from Wajir in the northeastern part of Kenya: how

a few women stopped a war. Dekha, one of the key women leaders, recalled that one night in 1993 shooting erupted near her house. She got to run for her first-born child and hid for several hours under the bed while bullets crisscrossed her room. She was so tired living in an unended clan-based war and thinking how to make Wajir a safe place where her daughter would enjoy a violence-free life. Apparently she found other women who felt what she had been worried about, lamented the rising violence even involving young boys with guns and wished the violence comes to an end. So the women quietly gathered with the same idea, fewer than a dozen of them at first, to find a way to make a safe place that is free from violence. They decided the place to start was the market. They agreed that the market should be safe for any woman of any clan background to come, to have market business, and also to look out for their children. Access and safety to the market had to be assured. The women vision and dream were spread out fast throughout the village. Situation in the market was monitored every day, not allowing any infraction or any abuse of someone because of her clan or geographic origin. Whenever issues emerged, the small committee of women would move quickly to resolve them. Within a short period of time, the women had created a zone of peace in the market. Their movement and initiatives resulted in the creation of the Wajir Women's Association for Peace.

To extend the zone of peace wider out of the market, the Women's Association approached the elders of all the groups and succeeded in bringing them to a meeting. They aligned themselves carefully and respected the elders to not push or take over the meetings. With a long process of conversation, finally they came to an agreement to stop the violence and realized the wasting time of fighting among them. They formed the Council of Elders for Peace and worked in the process of engaging the fighters and dealing with clan clashes.

The next movement was how to engage the youth, particularly the

young men who were hidden and fighting in the bush. Accompanied by the elders, the women met the key youth and formed what became known as the Youth for Peace. Together they traveled across the district to give public talks to youth and mothers. They soon realized that guns and fighting actually had significant economic benefit. Therefore the main concern was employment. If they asked the youth to leave their guns and fighting, they would need something to occupy their time and provide income. In response to this concern, the business community was invited to provide jobs. In the end of the women's dream for a safe place, the Wajir Peace and Development Committee was erected, ceasefires came into place, guns were handed over. It was the women's moral initiatives and imaginations that stop the war.³⁸

The stories narrate the journey moved by dreams and hopes, guided by consciousness and imagination toward a new better humanity. From the stories we learn that the social change and the new humanity come about not too much in the line of an intellectual journey, the cognitive processes of getting the analysis right and developing the technique that facilitates the management of the change process. It is a journey involving dreaming and acting. It flows from one initiative to another, that an vision is triggered by the previous in order to birth the next. Ryan's initiatives in their process turn to attract other persons and from there the community is engaged in making the initiatives be played forward to the social change. Even though the target of the social change was physically in distance from the community where Ryan lives, but it lies inside their heart and mind. Humanity, then, goes beyond borders, runs across communities even continents. They were able to see people's longing for a better change of life, imagined it and found the lead to the journey of the social change.

The crying of Dekha's baby forced her to find imaginatively a way out of the violence for the sake of the baby. However, it turned to become the works of the community who joined Dekha's dreams for a violence free life.

The social transformation emerged from inside, promoted by the people who in fact lived and experienced the violence. In other words, the social change was brought about by the people in the settings of violence who imagine and take actions for peace. The key for the genuine change requires the embrace of complexity of the historical reality. Instead of avoiding it, the women with some of the member of the community actively responded and engaged the reality becoming their most attention. The moral imagination suggests that “transcendence is not avoidance or flight from what is, but rather it is a deep rootedness in the reality of what has existed while seeking new ways to move beyond the grips of those patterns. Transcendence and imagination respond to historical patterns but are not bound by them.”³⁹

This is the real challenge to live out our moral imagination: how to transcend violence while we are still engaging the immediate and historical reality that continues to produce it; how to move beyond what has been and is now, while we are still living in it; how to remove ourselves from the mud of evil, while we are still being trapped in it.

Disownership of the Self

Moral imagination becomes the soul of the practice of the self. It is a capacity unique to human being that urges the self to throw itself out in response to and transcend the human reality in accordance to the dream of better future. This is the ultimate call inscribed in the self, an inner disturbing voice that suggests a meaningful life by taking a risk to come to a social shore that is uncontrolled. It is a risk because the self steps into the uncontrolled without any guarantee of success or even safety. People living in settings of violence are faced with danger and uncertainty. Therefore, peace is a mystery. It may or may not be achieved and we cannot control it. We may not reach the peace, but we may always pursue it. Stepping into the

risk is part of the practice of the self that may give birth a new life both to the self or the world around it.

Human capacity to imagine a better future has to be taken into a risk that actually puts the self in danger and terror, in confusion and disturbance. The time of disturbance and terror is that of self-dislocation and fragmentation. The self is displaced when it takes a risk pursuing the imagined, yet uncontrolled better future. It leaves its place, maybe a comfortable or uncomfortable place, to meet the unease that puts itself in a death-life situation. Leaving the home-self that may give warm and comfort, stability and certainty, yet perhaps uncertain and discomfort, becomes necessary to the growth of the self. There is something inside me, yet other than me, an *alterity*, that may haunts me and calls me beyond myself, a voice that can never stay quiet.⁴⁰ This is a disturbing voice inside me that somehow urges me to leave my *status quo* to meet the risk that shapes myself.

For Jacques Derrida, selfhood is at surgical risk that will put the self in a situation of life and death risk that perhaps will bring life, perhaps death. The subject is never settled and in place. It is always moving and dislocating, in forever process of placing, a process of being thrown and throwing. The subject has been thrown at birth, adapted to condition of life, structured and given the personality and the patterned responses to the circumstances. However, it is never identified, but always in the process of becoming, of throwing and projecting itself beyond itself to a never-ending openness to "alterity in me and the other." Openness to alterity is a gift that can only arrive as the interruption of phonemenological systems of description. The subject has to move beyond the closed description determined by language. No language or metaphor can grasp alterity within ourselves, others, or wholly other. The kind of selfhood that Derrida urges us to consider is one where reason and unreason belong together, where the economies of rationality and language that wish to identify and nail things down need to be broken by moving beyond the strategies of identity that enclose life in

the repetition of the same, namely death. What we can do is “dream” of describing the placing of the selfhood “because it must vanish at daybreak, as soon as language awakens.”⁴¹

Hence, the subject is without subject⁴² and the subject is without place.⁴³ “[T]here is never been The Subject for anyone the subject is a fable.”⁴⁴ In this sense, we will never locate and identify the constituted and settled self. The identity of the self “is not the individuality of a thing that would be identical to itself, it is not an atom. It is a singularity that dislocates or divides itself in gathering itself together to answer to the other, whose call somehow precedes its own identification with itself.”⁴⁵ Identity is always in the process of confirming and becoming, taking place in the agency of facing a risk, by getting free from the trap of definition and identification that confines the self.

Each time this identity announces itself, each time a belonging circumscribes me, if I may put it this way, someone or something cries: Look out for the trap, you're caught. Take off, get free, disengage yourself. Your engagement is elsewhere. . . . Identification is a difference to itself, a difference with/of itself. Thus with, without, and except itself. The circle of the return to birth can only remain open, but this is at once a chance, sign of life, and a wound. If it closed in on birth, on plenitude of the utterance or the knowledge that says “I am born,” that would be death.⁴⁶

Human identity can never be claimed only with the “biographical sedimentations” of what has been thrown and written, but needs a human agency of taking a risk to be open to the alterity. The self has to be born and reborn; identity has to be pursued in an unending act of agency. In other word, the self and identity will not be born in the settings of self-transcendence as proposed by modernity, nor in that of language and social interaction as the wish of postmodernism, but by the act of human agency. What we call biographical sedimentation, then, offers an unmarked and

non permanent place of the self that serves as the support or foundation for the human agency and its authenticity.

The question of selfhood has to turn from the quest for “what” to an exploration of “who” a self is. More than rationality, moral imagination shapes the “who-ness” of the self characterized by practice and adjustment to the world. Moral imagination becomes a voiceless voice, a voice of “alterity inside me,” that disturbs, yet transcends the self to get more aware of its who-ness. The disturbing voice urges us to leave our home-self of containment, our biographical sedimentation, to “dream” of imagined self and set a blueprint of imagined world being concerned. Such an imagination leads us, as a who, to the experience of “disownership of myself” and “beyond myself,” to the realm of new birth for the self and humanity.

To locate the self is to dislocate it; to own is to disown. Identity is the product of disownership of the self as the moral imagination dislocates the self and brings toward a new, yet non permanent location for it. The rebirth of the self requires the abandoning of self-mastery, which in fact is not more than an illusion of the self. It also includes a space of rebirthing or authoring, which is that of responsiveness to the call of the voiceless voice of alterity inside me, the other, and the world around. The responsiveness is more than what we do what, but rather what the meaning of life we envision and live out. Identity is not the product of our activity of doing things in response to the call, but that of life meaning we live out. The moral imagination calls us to place ourself in the imagined world that becomes the frame of meaning in which the meaningful life is negotiated. Hence, disownership of the self is not a choice, but a call to enter into the space of rebirthing.

Conclusion

Today we are living in the time when self construction becomes a project attentive to self-empowerment, self-awareness, self-esteem and any other kind of self-transcendence. The self regenerates itself in a way of narcissistic individual therapy that sometimes undermines community. The self does amount to much as long as it has been mastered. In this modernity's sense of the self we are thought to own ourselves with self-mastery and discovery. However, the transcendental self is disembodied, separated, and distinguished from the very corporeal body upon which it otherwise mused.

Another side of our living today suggests that the story of the self is over, replaced by that of social interaction, networking, and communication. The local has been diluted to the global, individual to corporation, nation to multinational hypercapitalism, the self to society. Communication technology has grown rapidly, facilitating and creating even more needs of human interaction with the growing number of internet meachines of social, yet virtual networkings. We recieve too much information to digest and make sense of. It is just too many competing messages who tell us who we are so that we get numbed and saturated.

Apparently, besides the promotion to live in a self-mastery, we too are living in the crisis of self-dilution. This crisis extends to the question of human authenticity and agency. Can we still live in our authenticity and continue to see ourselves as self-conscious agents in the setting of what Kenneth Gergen calls "social saturation?" How do we understand human identity and how to pursue it when the self is never completed and always in continuous construction?

The heart of authenticity lies not in the essence of the self, what is "in" and belongs to the self, but how we get into the subject of responsiveness and commitment. The essence of the self can never be claimed completely. However we may have witnessed of the persons of courage envisioned by

moral imagination pursuing what it means to be human. They are enlivened by hopes and dreams, concerns and responsibilities. The place of the subject is in the history of humanity filled with smile and tragedy, laught and terror. To listen to our voiceless voice within ourself and in humanity calls us to become historical subjects who are involved in the drama of humanity. Human identity is constructed through th practice of the self in the history of humanity and our agency of responsiveness to the voices. Thus, we start another story of the self, which is the story of historical subject envisioned by moral imagination.

End Notes:

¹ Here, I am applying what Homi Bhabha calls “the process of identification,” a process of transformation of the subject in assuming an image of identity. Agency signifies the return of the subject to the history of one’s own. It relates to one’s authorship of meaning in history. Agent, from the study of social text, is the one who makes sense of narrative story, different from the “hero” of the story. He or she is the one who makes the narrative alive and conveys to the public what the narrative is all about. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2002), 44-5; 188-9.

² Margaret S. Archer, *Being Human: The Problem of Agency* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1

³ James H Olthuis also argued that the root of the postmodern attack on Modernity lies on the domination of reason and science in defining a world. “Like it or not, the Enlightenment dream of a world increasingly controlled by the light of pure rationality is fading fast over the horizon. Control through reason and science has left wide swaths of destruction in its wake: systematic violence, marginalization, oppression, suffering, domination of the ‘other.’” James H. Olthuis, “Crossing the Threshold: Sojourning Together in the Wild Space of Love, in *The Hermeneutics of Charity: Interpretation, Selfhood, and Postmodern Faith*, eds. James K.A. Smith and Henry Isaac Venema (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 23.

⁴ Archer, 25.

⁵ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 15.

⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Random House, 1970), 387.

- 7 Kenneth J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (New
8 York: Basic Books, 2000), 228.
- 9 Archer, 3.
- 10 Ibid., 127.
- 11 Ibid., 307.
- 12 Ibid., 283-305.
- 13 Dorothy Holland, William Lachicotte, Debra Skinner, and Carole Cain, *Identity and
14 Agency in Cultural Worlds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 17.
- 15 Ibid., 4.
- 16 Ibid., 17-18.
- 17 Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 47.
- 18 Bhabha, 46.
- 19 Ibid., 46.
- 20 Ibid., 44.
- 21 Ibid., 45.
- 22 Bhabha, 1. Reading Jung Yung Lee's *Marginality* helped me to understand "the realm of
23 the beyond." Maybe it is not quite the same, but in my opinion Lee's thesis of living "in
24 beyond" two worlds has the similar notion with Bhabha's "the realm of the beyond."
25 Trying to describe what it means to live in marginality, Jung Yung Lee distinguishes
26 three steps of living: "in between," "in both," and "in beyond." To live "in between"
27 two worlds (being Asian and being American) is to live fully in neither. In "in both"
28 one affirms both worlds, appreciates both the old and the new worlds. However, the
29 most challenging step is to live "in beyond," when one is no longer disturbed by the
30 differences, yet still aware of their existence. The differences can never be eliminated,
31 but they can be reconciled. A new life will emerge from the experience of living "in
32 beyond." Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis:
33 Fortress Press, 1995).
- 34 Bhabha, 1.
- 35 Ibid.
- Ibid., 256.
- Ibid., 192-7.
- Deborah Durham, "Youth and the Social Imagination in Africa: Introduction to Parts
1 and 2," *Anthropological Quarterly* Vol. 73, no. 3 (July 2000): 118.
- John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (New
York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2005), 27.
- Ibid., 26-7.
- Ibid., 27.
- Mark Johnson, *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics* (Chicago,
IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 212.
- David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (London: SCM Press, 1981), 110.
- Michael Austin, *Explorations in Art, Theology and Imagination* (London: Equinox
Publishing Ltd., 2005), 129.
- Laurent A. Park Daloz, Cheryl H. Keen, James P. Keen, and Sharon Daloz Parks,
Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World (Boston, Mass.: Beacon,
Press, 1996), 132.
- Anthony Gittins, *A Presence that Disturbs: A Call to Radical Discipleship* (Liguori, Miss.:

Liguori Publication, 2002), 51.

³⁴ Eleazar S. Fernandez, *Reimagining the Human: Theological Anthropology in Response to Systemic Evil*, (St. Louis, Miss.: Chalice Press, 2004), 229.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid. 73.

³⁷ A true inspiring practice of the self documented in a documentary movie "Ryan's Well." The Ryan's Well Foundation can be visited at <http://www.ryanswell.ca>

³⁸ The completed story can be found in John Paul Lederach's book: *The Moral Imagination: the Art and Soul of Building Peace*, 10-3.

³⁹ Lederach, 56.

⁴⁰ Henry Isaac Venema, "The Risk of Leaving Home," in James K.A. Smith and Henry Isaac Venema (eds.), *The Hermeneutics of Charity: Interpretation, Selfhood, and Postmodern Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 197.

⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," in *Writing and Differences*, trans. By Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 124-25.

⁴² Jacques Derrida, "To Unsense the Subjectile," in Jacques Derrida and Paule Thevenin, *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud*, trans. By Mary Ann Caws (Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1998), 67.

⁴³ Ibid., 123.

⁴⁴ Jacques Derrida, "Eating Well," in *Who Comes after the Subject?* Ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy, trans. Peter Conner and Avital Ronell (New York: Routledge, 1991), 102.

⁴⁵ Derrida, "Eating Well," 100-1.

⁴⁶ Derrida, "To Unsense the Subjectile," 93-94.

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