



ux Pyre

In Defense of

the Errant Fan

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Writers Residency

November, 2023. Palestinian photojournalist Ahmad Ibrahim (@ahmad.ibraa) posts a story (fig.1) to Instagram, uncovering BTS merch in the wreckage of a building in Gaza destroyed by Israel. The unidentified young child who lived there was killed by the Zionist occupation, their ARMY¹ memorabilia and school books tragically the only things to survive the bombing. Amongst the buried merch are flimsy paper print outs of *Map of the Soul On:e Concept Photobook*, including a striking bright blue image of Kim Taehyung's Inner Child photoshoot (fig.2). The video and its screenshot, the image of Ahmad's hand lifting the image of Taehyung from the ruined mess of rubble towards the sky, is posted to Twitter and goes viral.

August, 2025. Kim Taehyung (BTS V) – ruthlessly stacking up brand deals post enlistment – is announced as the new ambassador for the Korean Coca Cola Zero campaign. The news is met with immediate and angry uproar from Pro-Palestinian ARMY,² as well as resounding support from puritanical ARMY 'protecting' the band from impure boycotters. *ARMY for Palestine* and aligned groups share the announcement with renewed calls to boycott Coca Cola – a prioritised BDS target – with some fans even calling for the boycott of BTS itself.

Some images are impossible to discuss without first acknowledging and describing the emotional response they provoke. The screenshot above is one such image, holding a devastating punctum³ for fans and non-fans alike. And yet, it is important to describe the precise nature of that piercing. The image of Ahmad lifting the images of BTS from the rubble is emotive enough without any personal connection to the *image of BTS*. The aftermath of violence permeates



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

the image, and its context. We know that the wreckage of homes were bombed by the Israeli army, and that a child was killed. We know that all that remains of that home, and that child's future is their things – their school books, the photos they printed off of what they loved. And by we, I mean all of us who have been watching the Palestinian genocide through our phones since late 2023 and before, who have grown harrowingly familiar with traumatic images of murder, torture, starvation and systematic destruction, despite platform-decreed censorship of Zionist-invested social media, the resounding bias of almost all mainstream media outlets, and Israel's targeted strategy of killing all journalists who tirelessly document the genocide of their people.

Images matter more from the outside. The representations of genocidal violence pale incomparably to the reality of living through it.

'The force of a reproducible image... lies, in part, in the intense proximal relationship of contiguity that it generates with others who are differently governed, differently authorized by class, by race, by gender, by sexuality, by citizenship, and yet commonly vulnerable to the unrestrained depredations of power that such images engage.'⁴

In his introductory essay to *The Lives of Images Vol. 2*, Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa examines the (digitally reproducible) image's relationship to ethics and violence. In the excerpt above, he describes the potency of what happens when we come into contact with images of violence, generated or spread by those with very different lived experiences than our own. He describes that the image's power, indeed, its attack on us, is formed partly through the intense proximity it evokes with those who are different from us.

The nature and movement of the reproducible image itself compels us to witness, and allows a certain *almost touching* to happen – a contiguity – between disparate viewers and subjects.

To be ARMY is to be contiguous. To be ARMY – both singular, and plural – is to be *almost touching* at all times, to form your identity, at least in part, around a greater whole.

I have experienced being part of this vast collective, and have identified with and participated within it, albeit frictionally. It's important to note that I am, or was, an errant, wayward fan – I listened selectively to BTS's music, fundamentally disagreeing with the practice of streaming⁵ and owned very little merch, the consumerist cornerstones of active stanning. I did not go to cupsleeve events,⁶ I did not collect photocards,⁷ I could not relate to expressions of straight fangirl desire and was critical of pretty much everything, from the group's compliance with military propaganda to their highly successful leverage of philanthropic branding. I became a fan during lockdown, after reading a large amount of BTS fanfic (thirsty for affect, for well-written smut, for escapist narratives and tropes) and becoming curious about the different 'characters' who were banging each other in pretty inventive ways.

And still, despite my cynical and unseemly fan beginnings, I loved them. I might not have expressed my fanning through traditional K-pop modes of collecting/worshipping,⁸ but I collected digital images. In the intense crucible of sparsely-employed lockdown, I consumed BTS' endless streams of content on YouTube and social media, screen-shotting to my heart's content. I started a meme account dedicated to taking their images out of context for humour,

to formulating narratives within the dense visual culture of K-pop. It was satirical, but underpinned with an extensive catalogue of knowledge, an intimate familiarity with the boys (men) and their lives, mannerisms, and imagined inner worlds.

‘Learning his life was the only way I knew to communicate my admiration, to make my love something active and muscular.’⁹

I may have been touch starved, but I knew the exact scrunch of Jimin’s eyes and nose when he smiled. Others did too, and I soon found them and talked to them, experiencing an immediate kinship and even a little possessiveness over our shared obsession.

I cannot unwrite the fandom etched in me, or my knowledge of the history of those images. I know very well the image of Taehyung that Ahmad holds aloft in the screenshot, because I bought a ‘like new’ copy of *Map of the Soul On:e Concept Photobook* through a slightly dodgy Discord seller in 2021. Taehyung’s Inner Child photoshoot (fig. 2) is not my favourite, just as Taehyung was dear to me, but not my favourite – the visuals overly nostalgised, like his song ‘Inner Child,’ too sweet despite the deep timbre of his voice. But still, I know what is behind the rest of the image: the striped dungarees that extend beyond the frame, the behind the scenes video of him fake-bashfully allowing blue crystals to be glued to his face. To love one of them is to love all of them, to know them intimately as a narrative whole; distinct organs that make up a body.

The screenshot of the image of Taehyung in Gaza (fig. 1) has a specific punctum for ARMY, as the image of violence and trauma is overlaid with another piercing affect: that of familiarity. There was such *knowing* in that small clip of

those images found in the rubble. So many of us could relate to saving those exact images, or similar ones, to printing out our favourite photoshoots saved from Twitter or fan websites, hoping that the quality didn't degrade even further. So many of us could relate to decorating our rooms with those images, splaying our love out boldly or shyly onto the walls. Fans responded with deep empathy for the Palestinian ARMY, a child with hopes and dreams tragically cut short, knowing the deep source of comfort BTS can bring.

'Fans are drawn to BTS because of the group's messages about grief, about injustice, and about friendship. Now, Palestinian ARMY are dying. This is an injustice. These are our friends.'¹⁰

The video and its screenshot had a galvanizing effect on the fandom, with many calling for BTS to speak out against the Palestinian genocide, in the same way they had previously been outspoken in support of BLM and Stop Asian Hate.

'Palestinian ARMYs have made a home for you even on their occupied land @BTS_twt. Do you really not care?'¹¹
@ARMY4Palestine

BTS's *image* was present in Gaza – as a touchstone of love and worship no less – so why wasn't their public empathy, their supposed humanitarian interest, their influential and state-exported soft power?

The image became a rallying call, the centre of an outpouring of solidarity, anguish and heartbreak. Its power transcended that of the symbolic, stirring up collective action: fans organised to boycott HYBE, the Zionist-entrenched multi-million conglomerate that owns BTS, and Scooter Braun, CEO of HYBE America,¹² a notorious Zionist with close ties to Israel and Netanyahu.

The power of the image and its aftereffects cannot be denied, but the dynamics of the ‘unrestrained depredations of power’ it engages must be examined.¹³

Contiguity is not the same as humanisation. In the image above (fig. 1), only one person has been widely named, and that is Taehyung. To name is to humanise. Hardly any discussions of the image include that of the boy in the right of the image, his face distressed and shaded by his cap, or Ahmad Ibrahim, the photo journalist who posted the video. There are also small figures in the background, climbing across the rubble, but no discussion of the image mentions them.¹⁴

Most Westerners viewing images of Gaza from the outside have become desensitised to them. We have become so used to images of destruction, to the flattened architectures of genocide, that our responses become dulled. For some, it takes the placing of their beloved K-pop idol amidst a bomb site in Gaza to see that this is a world proximal to ours. This conditional humanisation highlights how racialisation operates in the image. The familiar – distinctly white-washed – image of Taehyung, a Korean celebrity, for some generated a greater emotional response than the images of brown Palestinians climbing through a bomb site.¹⁵

Clearly the intense proximal contiguity of the reproducible image does not require the humanisation of certain subjects. It is necessary to consider how the movement of the image across social media warps the image of violence and Palestinian suffering into a ‘consumable narrative(s),’ and how poor images, such as the screenshot above, may contribute to ‘the interplay of social media and the politics of (de)humanisation,’ as Shraddha Chatterjee and Perna Subramanian argue.¹⁶

‘The poor image is a copy in motion. As it accelerates, it deteriorates. It is a ghost of an image, a preview, a thumbnail, an errant idea, an itinerant image distributed for free, squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed, as well as copied and pasted into other channels of distribution.’¹⁷

The home printer printout of Taehyung is a poor image – after Hito Steyerl’s seminal essay – as is the screenshot (fig. 1) of Ahmad lifting it, miraculously untouched, from the bomb site thick with the harrowing remnants of the young child’s life. Poor, not in meaning, or symbolic texture, but in quality. The violence of its production is inherent to the quality of the image – people in Gaza are reliant on sparse technology, and photo journalists often have to wait for hours to charge their phones or cameras.

The screenshot accelerated fast. Every ARMY active on Twitter and Instagram is likely to have seen the image, either in November of 2023 when it was picked up by an ARMY from Ahmad Ibrahim’s story and shared within fandom spaces, or in the instances it has resurfaced since, such as in reaction to Kim Taehyung posting a photo of McDonald’s fries to Instagram in July 2024.

As the screenshot accelerated virtually across the internet – becoming viral, hyperreal¹⁸ – it quickly accrued symbolism and affect, its meaning completely inextricable from its movement. In fact, its movement and degradation became proof of its affect. Spreading with this much velocity, the image was stripped of its metadata, copied and degraded through cross-platform sharing, downloading, and screenshotting. In contrast to many images that go viral on Twitter, this image retained a lot of its original context

through Ahmad Ibrahim's makeshift watermark, meaning that its original source was traceable.

Revisiting Benjamin's essay in the context of digital technology, Victor Burgin explores how the reproducibility of digital images contributes to their democratic sense of ownership, production and distribution. Reproducible images may lose their ineffable aura – that unique quality of an unreproducible, original work of art – but at the same time, they gain something new: the ability of the individual 'to, in a sense, 'possess' the work, and make their own use of it.'¹⁹ In the vast dumpster fire of our contemporary internet and its pockets of fandom, there are no unreproducible images, but there are some images whose circulation is gatekept. To invert Steyerl, let's call these images *rich images*.

If poor images are images ripped, spread and leaked, low in quality yet loaded with movement-accrued meaning, then rich images are the shiny ones with many pixels, undegraded, present often behind a paywall or a purchase. They are *official* images, holding a certain authority alongside their high resolution. BTS' multi-million dollar merch industry is built on rich images, released at strategic points: photocards, photobooks, seasonal collections of DVDs, etc, etc.

A rich image can easily become a poor image, and often does, within the arena of fandom – the paper print out of Inner Child Taehyung is a rich image turned poor one, probably downloaded from a Twitter scan of the original photobook (fig.2). Here we see how the purity culture of K-pop merch collecting rubs up against its symbiotic counterpart, the flagrant piracy culture of fandom.

Fans have always, and will always, make things their own. The errant fan is always the most devoted.

A revered and almost mythic member of the ARMY is qdeoks, an anonymous ARMY dedicated to uploading paid content subtitled for all fans to enjoy, who to this day has evaded copyright law prosecution by BigHit or HYBE, perhaps due to the fact that piracy is undeniable good for wider business. A Yoongi-bias (appropriately, the one member who has in the past expressed anti-capitalist sentiments, albeit performatively), they attend concerts and post teasingly ‘no one here knows I’m qdeoks,’ their digital notoriety at odds with the cute trappings of the cliché concert photo of hand clutching lightstick and photocard.²⁰ The prevalence of media piracy within K-pop fandom is a salacious and well-honoured tradition.

Far from losing any unique ineffable quality, the viral digital journey of poor images and pirated media constructs a new kind of aura, a collective and highly emotive one.

‘The condition of the images speaks not only of countless transfers and reformattings, but also of the countless people who cared enough about them to convert them over and over again, to add subtitles, reedit, or upload them.’²¹

We print things out because we love them, we want to be close to them, to touch them, to *own* them, which is something voraciously close to love, but not quite. Collecting, pirating, editing poor images is idolatry in action, for those without the means to truly possess official images. And by possessing the official image, we get that much closer to possessing that which we worship, or perhaps, to controlling our feelings for it.

I too, caved to the desire to possess. At the beginning of writing this essay I was overtaken with that essential step of the artistic process: the sudden urge to clean my room.

In the midst of rabid urgency I unearthed a Jimin photo-book I had fervently purchased a few years ago, at the tail-end of my obsession, perhaps in a desperate attempt to prolong it. As I leafed through the pages, momentarily stilled, the lustrous, high definition images jumped out at me precisely because of their lack of affect, without any residual twinge of the heart. Disappointingly textureless, too smooth, airbrushed. The appeal was still there, sure – the stylised fetishwear, Jimin’s signature predatory bottom gaze, the Grecian-inspired set, rich with clumsy narrative potential and bisexual lighting – but the sparky crush of the images that had led me to make the purchase was gone.

In contrast, when I scroll through my old BTS meme account, fondness eeks out of me. All those low res, painstakingly screenshotted and phone-edited images, layered with hidden meanings and in-jokes. Mostly low quality images or screenshots, yes, but I could alter them, post them, possess them, to some degree. It was a time-sensitive thrill to hop onto an image’s virality, ride it for a while, distort it, and create my own narrative out of it. Those images have so much auratic texture, their meanings layered with various contextualisings and recontextualisings. They feel more *real* than the rich images of fandom, and in some ways closer to the truth, as in to say, my truth, and the collective truth of that small online community who co-created all those meanings with me.

‘...every production of a digital copy-image, is at the same time a creation of your own image, an act of self-visualization. Making a digital copy, I make a copy of myself, and offer this copy to an invisible spectator hidden behind the surface of my personal computer’s screen.’²²

The truth of the image is always about ourselves, the distributors or makers, as much as it is about its subject. But still, the truth of images can be tricky to pinpoint, and searching for ‘truth’ in the images of idols is even trickier.

The idol – 아이돌 (aidol) – is a layered and evasive kind of truth, a truth inscribed with the mechanisms of glamour and its own construction. The idol’s truth is one that speaks to the desires of a nation, an industry, and to the construction of both nation and industry.²³ The truth of the idol is that of soft power, of multi-conglomerates, of misogyny, of child labour, of techno-orientalism,²⁴ of Hallyu wave, of Christian fundamentalism, of the enduring legacy of Motown²⁵ and Black musical influence²⁶ – traced back to America’s military occupation of Korea – of patriarchy, of all that is sacrificed for eternal youth and beauty on a screen.

Idolatry, the worship of something other than God as if it were a deity, underpins the K-pop industry, as well as Western concepts of celebrity. The K-pop Idol, however, is unique to its Korean context, and differs from Western concepts of celebrity on several key points. Idols are expected to owe their fans emotional loyalty and exclusivity, and show fans ‘a careful deference,’²⁷ even devotional acts and suggestive homoerotic fan service,²⁸ all of which serve to create the illusion of a reciprocal, romantically coded relationship with fans. The template for this stems originally from Japan’s industrialised idol (アイドル aidoru) industry.²⁹

In Esther Yi’s book, *Y/N*, an unnamed Korean American woman falls in obsessive love with an idol named Moon, undertaking a surreal quest to Seoul to find him. Being a fan is often described romantically as being in orbit to something greater than yourself, but ironically the opposite might also

be true. In *Y/N*, Moon orbits the protagonist, who is herself intended as a Y/N self-insert³⁰. It is she who is at the centre of the story, her agency and desire are the driving forces of the novel, and eventually the figure of Moon falls away, secondary to her inner world. Moon is made real, and eventually made unreal, by her desire. We are never quite sure whether he is a symptom of her own imagination, her needs and wants externalised and crystallised into being through the pressure points of divine timing.

Yi describes the character of Moon as something cutting: ‘I always imagine Moon almost as a knife, kind of a violent figure. And I don’t mean that in a willful way but that he seems to be exposing some kind of wound or void in these characters’ lives.’³¹

Moon is all of the character’s projections made flesh. He is the perfect plot device, a vector: cutting directionality without its own inherent meaning. And we cannot truly love a vector, because it is simply a carrier of what we imagine the inverse of our own loneliness to be.

Yi perfectly captures the intensity of limerence – a state of obsessive parasocial love frequently ignited by loneliness – that idol worship entails. Looking at images of the idol is not enough, nor even is the idea of him in reality:

‘She recognizes that her frustration with the pictures is actually a pleasure to feel, fortifying as it does the notion of a real thing. But the real thing is not enough. Moon himself is not real enough. She wants him too much. Her appetite is unnatural.’³²

Her worshipful appetite can never be sated. There is something voracious about fan-love, a desire to *consume*, sometimes even to destroy. In *Y/N*, fans are called Liver, or

livers, an essential part of the idol's body. We, the fans, are a part of what makes the idol whole. We enable their body, their vast machine of consumption and performance and glamour, to operate. Worship is ultimately about the fan, not the idol, and the idol – to the somewhat sadistic satisfaction of the fan – cannot survive without us.

In February 2025, I saw Taemin (pre nose job) at a small venue in East London. It was a religious experience, not least for his trademark lyrical penchant for sexy queer-coded Catholic guilt. Despite not being a *fan* fan, I wept, my throat swelling as he walked alone onto the darkened stage and let out a single, beltingly clear note, a thousand fans around me holding their breath. The experience was deeply spiritual. I wept not for my love for him, which was more admiration than anything else, but for the ardent rapture that surrounded me. There was so much hope in that room, so much devotion. He had saved everyone, in one way or another. From loneliness, from heartache, from a life scraped clean of beauty.

‘He was the world, which seemed bigger simply because he occupied it at the same time as me. He was the moon, an orbit, a gravitational contract.’³³

There's an ineffable quality to the immensity of feeling in fan worship that frequently seems to demand a celestial metaphor. In *Neverland: The Pleasures and Perils of Fandom*, Vanessa Kisuule describes fan love and obsession with an elegance that cuts right to the heart of the experience. For all of her formative years, she was a massive Michael Jackson fan. The obsession that once fueled her, now haunts her, in the wake of his child abuse revelations. In the book, she asks very difficult questions about love, shame, legacy, and the possibility of holding our idols to account.

What hit me most was her explorations of the grief of falling out of love with our idols, especially in the context of betrayal. ‘It’s not him I am mourning, it’s the lost belief. That smothering hush of firm faith.’³⁴

The description lanced through me, intimately familiar. When I was 14, I experienced a transformative, timely loss – I lost my faith in God. It was a hushed and inevitable kind of death, one marked by the slow creeping of gradual acceptance, rather than any grand realisation. I lost my faith in God not because he had committed any great sin or hurt, but because he had gone quiet on me. The subtle signs of presence I used to look for all around, were transformed slowly, and then abruptly, into absence. There was nothing there after all – nothing but the silence of my own mind.

In the silence of God, I found betrayal.

Losing faith is a very particular kind of grief. It is not only mourning the absence of a love that holds and sustains, an infallible love without earthly limitations, it is mourning the disintegration of that which underpins a life: our fundamental guiding beliefs and principles.

Losing faith in BTS was a similar but far more diluted and earthly fading, a ghostly echo of this previous spiritual grief. I had gone into the fandom cynical, and I exited cynical (though I still hang around the edges of it, peeking), hardly surprised that my idols had disappointed me again and again, or that the fires of fan obsession inspired by the isolation of lockdown were no replacement for, and often a distraction from, real-world connection. I knew this whole game of worshipful loneliness inside and out.

‘I used to worship Michael, and worship is a form of annihilation. The godlike figure in that scenario must fulfill the

desires of their devotees, which necessarily means denying their humanity. Worship has... no interest in the multiple dimensions of a person or their betterment.’³⁵

To worship our idols is to place them on an untouchable pedestal. We desire closeness with that specific vector of desire, and yet we fear the loss of divinity that closeness will bring. Avoidantly, we love our idols precisely because they are celestially unreachable, and because that fearsome loss of divinity is somewhat unlikely. As Esther Yi’s unnamed narrator laments, lustful and tragic: ‘She can never have it; that’s why she loves it; she loves what she cannot have; but she will die if she cannot have this thing that she loves not being able to have.’³⁶

Yet to worship is not to love, as Kisuule distinguishes, though worship might believe itself to be love, and both find themselves to be intimately entwined. In the worst case, obsessive worship can impede on our capacity for interpersonal love and empathy, as in the case of puritanical anti-boycott fans who care more about protecting the supposed innocence of their idol than for the life of one of their fellow ARMY killed in Gaza.

‘It’s not him that I love. I love the story of him.’³⁷

The image of Taehyung in Gaza is significant for many reasons. Firstly, it reminds us of the value and strength of hope. It reminds us that a child’s inner world of comfort and joy will persist despite the horrors of genocide, and despite the vast disconnect between the image of Taehyung and the reality of BTS as idols, as humans, as extremely rich men who have been completely silent on the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.

K-pop fans' relationship with their idols is constructed as one of mutually parasocial devotion. It is that which makes BTS's silence on the image of Taehyung in Gaza, and on the Palestinian genocide, such a damning betrayal. The idol is meant to be devoted to *us* in turn, to acknowledge and respond to our needs and outcries, contractually, symbiotically. We are their organs after all, the earthly flesh that sustains them.

ARMY is both singular and plural, noun and adjective. To betray one group of ARMY, or one singular ARMY, is to betray the whole, the vast collective of contiguous *almost touching* subjects. However, the collectivity of ARMY is not an automatically politicised solidarity. ARMY might be contiguous, but not all ARMY are humanised equally. The *we* of ARMY is flattening and misleading if the illusion of unity does not require any real call to action, just as the sharing of images of Palestinian suffering – especially the commodified, desensitised kind of engagement normalised on social media – does not automatically constitute meaningful action.

It is necessary to be closely critical of the solidarity ARMY purports to offer, specifically the 'transnational affective economy,'³⁸ in which shared fandom becomes the primary mode through which empathy and humanity is afforded to Palestinian subjects, as Prerna Subramanian articulates in conversation with Shraddha Chatterjee in *Auditioning for Humanity: The Geopolitics of Social Media and the Question of Palestine*.

Referencing fig.1 above, Subramanian explores how narratives of shared relatability effectively 'privatize affect, abstracting Palestinian suffering into consumable spectacles.' What makes Palestinians legible as human is their 'abstraction from their own genocide,' not their experience of it.

We see the rubble behind the image of Taehyung, the visual evidence of genocide, and we barely register it, the sight of destruction secondary to the image of the idol.

Subramanian pinpoints how this decontextualisation is a key factor in the dehumanisation of Palestinians on social media. If we relate to Palestinians as fans before anything else, we risk minimising and normalising the realities of genocidal occupation, ignoring the specific material realities of Palestinian survival and resistance.

An *almost touching* means nothing if it does not spur us to action.

However, fandom *is* being used by ARMY to organise. *ARMY for Palestine*, a collective led by Palestinian ARMY and dedicated to collective action, raised over \$100,000 for direct aid fundraisers in Gaza by June 2024.³⁹ They have contributed to on-the-ground campaigns such as CareForGaza, the Palestinian Children Relief Fund, and the Municipality of Gaza's water wells. As Andrea Acosta describes in *Ment Magazine*, 'Their leveraging of fandom as a collective force that can produce change has not only paved the way for the ARMY community this year but crafted a broader model for what organizing in fan spaces can, and perhaps should, look like at a time of global crisis.'⁴⁰

ARMY has mobilised physically too. In March 2024, a protest organized by the collective *Boot The Scoot* took place outside the Universal Production Music offices in Santa Monica, California. The aim of the protest was to pressure HYBE into dropping Scooter Braun from his position as CEO of HYBE America, as part of the wider HYBE Divest From Zionism campaign.⁴¹

We must be errant fans in a material, non-utopic sense, if the collectivity of ARMY is to be meaningful in any kind of tangible way, and if the sharing of poor images on social media is to spark effective change. We must learn to make our love ‘something active and muscular,’⁴² not in that age-old practice of learning our idols, as Kisuule so precisely conjures, but in the ways in which we learn other fans. Fandom can be toxic and delusional and consumerist, but it can also be this glorious, generous practice that spreads outwards obliquely, entangling each of us in collective responsibility.

Texturally auratic and entangled, the image (fig. 1) of an image (fig. 2) becomes itself, caught in an infinite feedback loop of its own construction. It is impossible to separate the two, because they are now one, enmeshed with meaning. They refer to each other, they call to each other, they are siblings in our collective imaginary. The Earth to our Theia,⁴³ ravenous Saturn to its moon.⁴⁴

We cannot look at the strikingly blue, overly sentimentalised image of Inner Child Taehyung without thinking of its copy in Gaza, cut with a familiar devotion, visible to us because of the genocidal murder of a child who loved the image of their idol in the same deep, fervent way we know how to.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 ARMY is BTS's fandom. The acronym of ARMY; 아미 (ami), in Korean; stands for Adorable Representative M.C. for Youth, recalling BTS's hip-hop origins and summoning ironic, and unironic, militarised connotations.
- 2 Images Staff, 'Fans call out BTS' V.'
- 3 The lightning point in a photograph that pierces us with private meaning. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*.
- 4 Wolukau-Wanambwa, 'Learning to Linger,' 35.
- 5 K-pop strongly emphasises streaming due to its impact on chart success and industry recognition.
- 6 Cupsleeve events are fan-organized celebrations held in cafes to mark idols' birthdays and album releases.
- 7 Photocards are small, collectible cards featuring selfies of idols that are included in albums and merch.
- 8 McNamara and Shin, 'I Came to Ruin You.'
- 9 Kisuule, *Neverland*, 13. On Michael Jackson.
- 10 SparklyKat, 'Fans Are Taken For Granted.'
- 11 ARMY for Palestine, 'Palestinian ARMYs.'
- 12 Braun stepped down from the position of CEO of HYBE America at the beginning of July 2025, but he continues to serve as director of the board and senior advisor to HYBE chairman and CEO Bang Si Hyuk, and remains the second individual largest shareholder in the company.
- 13 Wolukau-Wanambwa, 'Learning to Linger,' 35.
- 14 Shadi Al-Atallah, personal communication.
- 15 Shadi Al-Atallah, personal communication.
- 16 Chatterjee and Subramanian, 'Auditioning for humanity.'
- 17 Steyerl, *In Defense of the Poor Image*.
- 18 Baudrillard, *Simulacra & Simulation*.
- 19 Burgin, *Returning to Benjamin*, 9.
- 20 니키 (qdeoks), 'no one here knows.'
- 21 Steyerl, *In Defense of the Poor Image*.
- 22 Groys, 'Modernity and Contemporaneity', 77.
- 23 Lee, 'Tradition, Transition and Trends,' 34.
- 24 Lee, 'BTS and the Labor of Techno-Orientalism.'
- 25 Saint Virgil, 'Motown Walked So K-pop Could Run.'
- 26 See the works of Crystal S. Anderson.
- 27 Ahn et al., 'Intro', 17.
- 28 In K-pop, fan service refers to a range of actions by idols that are done specifically to please and entertain fans. It includes acts of physical affection, such as holding hands or taking shirtless photos, showing off their 'aegyo' (cuteness), flirting, or making suggestive comments.
- 29 Ahn et al., 'Intro', 8–10.
- 30 Y/N fanfic is a type of fanfiction where Y/N stands for Your Name, allowing the reader to insert themselves as the main character of the story.
- 31 Kenin et al, 'The loneliness.'
- 32 Yi, *Y/N*, 51–52.
- 33 Kisuule, *Neverland*, 6.
- 34 Kisuule, *Neverland*, 15.
- 35 Kisuule, *Neverland*, 145.
- 36 Yi, *Y/N*, 52.
- 37 Yi, *Y/N*, 154.
- 38 Chatterjee and Subramanian, 'Auditioning for humanity,' 6.
- 39 AJ+ (ajplus). 'Here's how BTS ARMYs.'
- 40 Acosta, 'An Interview with ARMY for Palestine.'
- 41 Acosta, 'An Interview with ARMY for Palestine.'
- 42 Kisuule, *Neverland*, 13.
- 43 Theia was a Mars-sized planet that collided with the proto-Earth about 4.5 billion years ago, destroying both planets and forming two new celestial bodies: our Earth and its Moon.
- 44 In Greco-Roman mythology, and the famous highly-memed Goya painting, Saturn devours his son, voraciously. Astronomers now think that the planet Saturn devoured one of its moons, the remains of which we can see encircling it today in the form of its rings.