



The Agony of Eros (Untimely Meditations)

Byung-Chul Han

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Byung-Chul Han is one of the most widely read philosophers in Europe today, a member of the new generation of German thinkers that includes Markus Gabriel and Armen Avanessian. In *The Agony of Eros*, a bestseller in Germany, Han considers the threat to love and desire in today's society. For Han, love requires the courage to accept self-negation for the sake of discovering the Other. In a world of fetishized individualism and technologically mediated social interaction, it is the Other that is eradicated, not the self. In today's increasingly narcissistic society, we have come to look for love and desire within the "inferno of the same."

Han offers a survey of the threats to Eros, drawing on a wide range of sources -- Lars von Trier's film *Melancholia*, Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, *Fifty Shades of Grey*, Michel Foucault (providing a scathing critique of Foucault's valorization of power), Martin Buber, Hegel, Baudrillard, Flaubert, Barthes, Plato, and others. Han considers the "pornographication" of society, and shows how pornography profanes eros; addresses capitalism's leveling of essential differences; and discusses the politics of eros in today's "burnout society." To be dead to love, Han argues, is to be dead to thought itself.

Concise in its expression but unsparing in its insight, *The Agony of Eros* is an important and provocative entry in Han's ongoing analysis of contemporary society.

This remarkable essay, an intellectual experience of the first order, affords one of the best ways to gain full awareness of and join in one of the most pressing struggles of the day: the defense, that is to say -- as Rimbaud desired it -- the "reinvention" of love. -- from the foreword by Alain Badiou

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