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# Byung Chul Han

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Non-things

La Sociedad del Cansancio

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*Byung Chul Han*

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**RIDDLE CAMERON**

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*Non-things* Bloomsbury Publishing  
In this wide-ranging book, renowned philosopher and cultural theorist Peter Sloterdijk examines art in all its rich and varied forms: from music to architecture, light to movement, and design to typography. Moving between the visible and the invisible, the audible and the inaudible, his analyses span the centuries, from ancient civilizations to contemporary Hollywood. With great verve and insight he considers the key issues that have faced thinkers from

Aristotle to Adorno, looking at art in its relation to ethics, metaphysics, society, politics, anthropology and the subject. Sloterdijk explores a variety of topics, from the Greco-Roman invention of postcards to the rise of the capitalist art market, from the black boxes and white cubes of modernism to the growth of museums and memorial culture. In doing so, he extends his characteristic method of defamiliarization to transform the way we look at works of art and artistic movements. His bold and original approach leads us away from the well-trodden paths of conventional art history to develop a theory of aesthetics which rejects strict categorization, emphasizing

instead the crucial importance of individual subjectivity as a counter to the latent dangers of collective culture. This sustained reflection, at once playful, serious and provocative, goes to the very heart of Sloterdijk's enduring philosophical preoccupation with the aesthetic. It will be essential reading for students and scholars of philosophy and aesthetics and will appeal to anyone interested in culture and the arts more generally.

La Sociedad del Cansancio MIT Press

An argument that love requires the courage to accept self-negation for the sake of discovering the Other. 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

### Culture and Globalisation Polity

Beauty today is a paradox. The cult of beauty is ubiquitous but it has lost its transcendence and become little more than an aspect of consumerism, the aesthetic dimension of capitalism. The sublime and unsettling aspects of beauty have given way to corporeal pleasures and 'likes', resulting in a kind of 'pornography' of beauty. In this book, cultural theorist Byung-Chul Han reinvigorates aesthetic theory for our digital age. He interrogates our preoccupation with all things slick and smooth, from Jeff Koon's sculptures and the iPhone to Brazilian waxing. Reaching far deeper than our superficial reactions to viral videos and memes, Han reclaims beauty, showing how it manifests itself as truth, temptation and even disaster.

This wide-ranging and profound exploration of beauty, encompassing ethical and political considerations as well as aesthetic, will appeal to all those interested in cultural and aesthetic theory, philosophy and digital media.

Universidad de la Salle

Transitamos por tiempos inciertos: a la par que sufrimos diversos desastres naturales asistimos a un ominoso medrar del estado de vigilancia, a un creciente malestar psíquico difícil de precisar, a una pérdida progresiva de sabiduría y saber-vivir, a una maquinización de lo humano que amenaza con hacerse absoluta, y a un ambiente mediático caracterizado por la manipulación y la sobresaturación de información. Es este un tiempo que clama por un diagnóstico y por un

camino hacia adelante. Por ello es pertinente revisar la obra de Byung-Chul Han (de la cual este texto sirve como presentación), quien, a través de las categorías centrales de positividad y negatividad, propone un hilo conductor. Más allá del diagnóstico sombrío, los ensayos de este libro proponen prácticas y lineamientos en la política y la educación, encaminados a recuperar la escucha, la contemplación, la negatividad sin la cual la permanente aceleración de actividades e información del mundo moderno, inundado de positividad, amenaza con consumirnos.

Byun-Chul Han Polity

A prominent German thinker argues that—contrary to “Twitter Revolution” cheerleading—digital communication is destroying political discourse and

political action. The shitstorm represents an authentic phenomenon of digital communication. —from *In the Swarm*

Digital communication and social media have taken over our lives. In this contrarian reflection on digitized life, Byung-Chul Han counters the cheerleaders for Twitter revolutions and Facebook activism by arguing that digital communication is in fact responsible for the disintegration of community and public space and is slowly eroding any possibility for real political action and meaningful political discourse. In the predigital, analog era, by the time an angry letter to the editor had been composed, mailed, and received, the immediate agitation had passed. Today, digital communication enables instantaneous, impulsive

reaction, meant to express and stir up outrage on the spot. “The shitstorm,” writes Han, “represents an authentic phenomenon of digital communication.” Meanwhile, the public, the senders and receivers of these communications have become a digital swarm—not a mass, or a crowd, or Negri and Hardt's antiquated notion of a “multitude,” but a set of isolated individuals incapable of forming a “we,” incapable of calling dominant power relations into question, incapable of formulating a future because of an obsession with the present. The digital swarm is a fragmented entity that can focus on individual persons only in order to make them an object of scandal. Han, one of the most widely read philosophers in Europe today, describes a society in which information has overrun thought,

in which the same algorithms are employed by Facebook, the stock market, and the intelligence services. Democracy is under threat because digital communication has made freedom and control indistinguishable. Big Brother has been succeeded by Big Data.

*Capitalism and the Death Drive* MIT Press

A philosopher considers entertainment, in all its totalizing variety—infotainment, edutainment, servotainment—and traces the notion through Kant, Zen Buddhism, Heidegger, Kafka, and Rauschenberg. In *Good Entertainment*, Byung-Chul Han examines the notion of entertainment—its contemporary ubiquity, and its philosophical genealogy. Entertainment today, in all

its totalizing variety, has an apparently infinite capacity for incorporation: infotainment, edutainment, servotainment, confrontainment. Entertainment is held up as a new paradigm, even a new credo for being—and yet, in the West, it has had inescapably negative connotations. Han traces Western ideas of entertainment, considering, among other things, the scandal that arose from the first performance of Bach's Saint Matthew's Passion (deemed too beautiful, not serious enough); Kant's idea of morality as duty and the entertainment value of moralistic literature; Heidegger's idea of the thinker as a man of pain; Kafka's hunger artist and the art of negativity, which takes pleasure in annihilation; and Robert Rauschenberg's refusal of the



transcendent. The history of the West, Han tells us, is a passion narrative, and passion appears as a killjoy.

Achievement is the new formula for passion, and play is subordinated to production, gamified. And yet, he argues, at their core, passion and entertainment are not entirely different. The pure meaninglessness of entertainment is adjacent to the pure meaning of passion. The fool's smile resembles the pain-racked visage of Homo doloris. In *Good Entertainment*, Han explores this paradox.

### **The Scent of Time** Polity

In celebration of the 250th anniversary of the birth of G.W.F. Hegel, Slavoj Žižek gives us a reading of the philosophical giant that changes our way of thinking about our new posthuman era. No

ordinary study of Hegel, Hegel in a *Wired Brain* investigates what he might have had to say about the idea of the 'wired brain' - what happens when a direct link between our mental processes and a digital machine emerges. Žižek explores the phenomenon of a wired brain effect, and what might happen when we can share our thoughts directly with others. He hones in on the key question of how it shapes our experience and status as 'free' individuals and asks what it means to be human when a machine can read our minds. With characteristic verve and enjoyment of the unexpected, Žižek connects Hegel to the world we live in now, shows why he is much more fun than anyone gives him credit for, and why the 21st century might just be Hegelian.

**In the Swarm** Verso Books

Alain Badiou is arguably the most significant philosopher in Europe today. Badiou's seminars, given annually on major conceptual and historical topics, constitute an enormously important part of his work. They served as laboratories for his thought and public illuminations of his complex ideas yet remain little known. This book, the transcript of Badiou's year-long seminar on the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan, is the first volume of his seminars to be published in English, opening up a new and vital aspect of his thinking. In a highly original and compelling account of Lacan's theory and therapeutic practice, Badiou considers the challenge that Lacan poses to fundamental philosophical topics such as being, the

subject, and truth. Badiou argues that Lacan is a singular figure of the "anti-philosopher," a series of thinkers stretching back to Saint Paul and including Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, with Lacan as the last great anti-philosopher of modernity. The book offers a forceful reading of an enigmatic yet foundational thinker and sheds light on the crucial role that Lacan plays in Badiou's own thought. This seminar, more accessible than some of Badiou's more difficult works, will be profoundly valuable for the many readers across academic disciplines, art and literature, and political activism who find his thought essential.

*What is Power?* John Wiley & Sons

Our societies today are characterized by a universal algophobia: a generalized

fear of pain. We strive to avoid all painful conditions – even the pain of love is treated as suspect. This algophobia extends into society: less and less space is given to conflicts and controversies that might prompt painful discussions. It takes hold of politics too: politics becomes a palliative politics that is incapable of implementing radical reforms that might be painful, so all we get is more of the same. Faced with the coronavirus pandemic, the palliative society is transformed into a society of survival. The virus enters the palliative zone of well-being and turns it into a quarantine zone in which life is increasingly focused on survival. And the more life becomes survival, the greater the fear of death, which has become increasingly visible again. Everywhere,

the prolongation of life at any cost is the preeminent value, and we are prepared to sacrifice everything that makes life worth living for the sake of survival. This trenchant analysis of our contemporary societies by one of the most original cultural critics of our time will be of interest to a wide readership.

#### Good Entertainment TAURUS

We no longer inhabit earth and dwell under the sky: these are being replaced by Google Earth and the Cloud. The terrestrial order is giving way to a digital order, the world of things is being replaced by a world of non-things – a constantly expanding ‘infosphere’ of information and communication which displaces objects and obliterates any stillness and calmness in our lives. Byung-Chul Han’s critique of the

infosphere highlights the price we are paying for our growing preoccupation with information and communication. Today we search for more information without gaining any real knowledge. We communicate constantly without participating in a community. We save masses of data without keeping track of our memories. We accumulate friends and followers without encountering other people. This is how information develops a form of life that has no stability or duration. And as we become increasingly absorbed in the infosphere, we lose touch with the magic of things which provide a stable environment for dwelling and give continuity to human life. The infosphere may seem to grant us new freedoms but it creates new forms of control too and it cuts us off

from the kind of freedom that is tied to acting in the world. This new book by one of the most creative cultural theorists writing today will be of interest to a wide readership.

**Deconstruction in Chinese** MIT Press  
Untrammelled neoliberalism and the inexorable force of production have produced a 21st century crisis of community: a narcissistic cult of authenticity and mass turning-inward are among the pathologies engendered by it. We are individuals afloat in an atomised society, where the loss of the symbolic structures inherent in ritual behaviour has led to overdependence on the contingent to steer identity. Avoiding saccharine nostalgia for the rituals of the past, Han provides a genealogy of their disappearance as a means of diagnosing

the pathologies of the present. He juxtaposes a community without communication – where the intensity of togetherness in silent recognition provides structure and meaning – to today’s communication without community, which does away with collective feelings and leaves individuals exposed to exploitation and manipulation by neoliberal psychopolitics. The community that is invoked everywhere today is an atrophied and commoditized community that lacks the symbolic power to bind people together. For Han, it is only the mutual praxis of recognition borne by the ritualistic sharing of the symbolic between members of a community which creates the footholds of objectivity allowing us to make sense of time. This new book by

one of the most creative cultural theorists writing today will be of interest to a wide readership.

Psicopolitica John Wiley & Sons

In the wake of globalization, cultural forms of expression have become increasingly detached from their places of origin, circulating in a hyper-domain of culture where there is no real difference anymore between indigenous and foreign, near and far, the familiar and the exotic. Hyperculture is a state of the deep intertwining of cultures in which once formerly separate cultural spheres now overlap and interpenetrate. It is a profoundly rhizomatic culture of intense hybridization, fusion and co-appropriation. Today we have all become tourists, even in our ‘own’ culture, to which we do not even belong

anymore. Examining the distinctive characteristics of our contemporary hyperculture and its costs, Han demonstrates why we need to renounce our status as perpetual sightseers in the realm of 'cul-tour' and devise a new way of orienting ourselves in the world.

*Lacan* Stanford University Press

In his philosophical reflections on the art of lingering, acclaimed cultural theorist Byung-Chul Han argues that the value we attach today to the *vita activa* is producing a crisis in our sense of time. Our attachment to the *vita activa* creates an imperative to work which degrades the human being into a labouring animal, an animal laborans. At the same time, the hyperactivity which characterizes our daily routines robs human beings of the capacity to linger

and the faculty of contemplation. It therefore becomes impossible to experience time as fulfilling. Drawing on a range of thinkers including Heidegger, Nietzsche and Arendt, Han argues that we can overcome this temporal crisis only by revitalizing the *vita contemplativa* and relearning the art of lingering. For what distinguishes humans from other animals is the capacity for reflection and contemplation, and when life regains this capacity, this art of lingering, it gains in time and space, in duration and vastness.

*Quebras del mundo de hoy* Stanford University Press

Our societies today are characterized by a universal algophobia: a generalized fear of pain. We strive to avoid all painful conditions – even the pain of love is

treated as suspect. This algophobia extends into society: less and less space is given to conflicts and controversies that might prompt painful discussions. It takes hold of politics too: politics becomes a palliative politics that is incapable of implementing radical reforms that might be painful, so all we get is more of the same. Faced with the coronavirus pandemic, the palliative society is transformed into a society of survival. The virus enters the palliative zone of well-being and turns it into a quarantine zone in which life is increasingly focused on survival. And the more life becomes survival, the greater the fear of death: the pandemic makes death, which we had carefully repressed and set aside, visible again. Everywhere, the prolongation of life at any cost is the

preeminent value, and we are prepared to sacrifice everything that makes life worth living for the sake of survival. This trenchant analysis of our contemporary societies by one of the most original cultural critics of our time will appeal to a wide readership.

**No-cosas** Stanford University Press  
Power is a pervasive phenomenon yet there is little consensus on what it is and how it should be understood. In this book the cultural theorist Byung-Chul Han develops a fresh and original perspective on the nature of power, shedding new light on this key feature of social and political life. Power is commonly defined as a causal relation: an individual's power is the cause that produces a change of behaviour in someone else against the latter's will. Han rejects this

view, arguing that power is better understood as a mediation between ego and alter which creates a complex array of reciprocal interdependencies. Power can also be exercised not only against the other but also within and through the other, and this involves a much higher degree of mediation. This perspective enables us to see that power and freedom are not opposed to one another but are manifestations of the same power, differing only in the degree of mediation. This highly original account of power will be of great interest to students and scholars of philosophy and of social, political and cultural theory, as well as to anyone seeking to understand the many ways in which power shapes our lives today.

Hegel in A Wired Brain John Wiley & Sons

In the wake of globalization, cultural forms of expression have become increasingly detached from their places of origin, circulating in a hyper-domain of culture where there is no real difference anymore between indigenous and foreign, near and far, the familiar and the exotic. Hyperculture is a state of the deep intertwining of cultures in which once formerly separate cultural spheres now overlap and interpenetrate. It is a profoundly rhizomatic culture of intense hybridization, fusion and co-appropriation. Today we have all become tourists, even in our 'own' culture, to which we do not even belong anymore. Examining the distinctive characteristics of our contemporary hyperculture and its costs, Han demonstrates why we need to renounce



our status as perpetual sightseers in the realm of 'cul-tour' and devise a new way of orienting ourselves in the world.

### Digitization and the Crisis of Democracy

#### The Burnout Society

El autor expone una de sus tesis principales: la sociedad occidental está sufriendo un silencioso cambio de paradigma, un exceso de positividad que está conduciendo a una sociedad del cansancio. Toda época tiene sus enfermedades emblemáticas. Así, hay una época bacterial que toca a su fin con la invención del antibiótico. A pesar del manifiesto miedo a la pandemia gripal, actualmente no vivimos en la época viral. La hemos dejado atrás gracias a la técnica inmunológica. El comienzo del siglo XXI, desde un punto de vista patológico, no sería ni bacterial ni viral,

sino neuronal. La depresión, el trastorno por déficit de atención con hiperactividad (TDAH), el trastorno límite de la personalidad (TLP) o el síndrome de desgaste ocupacional (SDO) definen el panorama de comienzos de este siglo. Estas enfermedades no son infecciones, sino estados patológicos que siguen a su vez una dialéctica, pero no una dialéctica de la negatividad, sino de la positividad, hasta el punto de que cabría atribuirles un exceso de esta última.

#### **Was ist Macht?** Polity

Tracing the thread of "decreation" in Chinese thought, from constantly changing classical masterpieces to fake cell phones that are better than the original. Shanzhai is a Chinese neologism that means "fake," originally coined to describe knock-off cell phones

marketed under such names as Nokir and Samsing. These cell phones were not crude forgeries but multifunctional, stylish, and as good as or better than the originals. Shanzhai has since spread into other parts of Chinese life, with shanzhai books, shanzhai politicians, shanzhai stars. There is a shanzhai Harry Potter: Harry Potter and the Porcelain Doll, in which Harry takes on his nemesis Yandomort. In the West, this would be seen as piracy, or even desecration, but in Chinese culture, originals are continually transformed—deconstructed. In this volume in the Untimely Meditations series, Byung-Chul Han traces the thread of deconstruction, or “decreation,” in Chinese thought, from ancient masterpieces that invite inscription and transcription to

Maoism—“a kind a shanzhai Marxism,” Han writes. Han discusses the Chinese concepts of quan, or law, which literally means the weight that slides back and forth on a scale, radically different from Western notions of absoluteness; zhen ji, or original, determined not by an act of creation but by unending process; xian zhan, or seals of leisure, affixed by collectors and part of the picture's composition; fuzhi, or copy, a replica of equal value to the original; and shanzhai. The Far East, Han writes, is not familiar with such “pre-deconstructive” factors as original or identity. Far Eastern thought begins with deconstruction.

Upheaval in the Lifeworld John Wiley & Sons

One of today's most widely read

philosophers considers the shift in violence from visible to invisible, from negativity to excess of positivity. Some things never disappear—violence, for example. Violence is ubiquitous and incessant but protean, varying its outward form according to the social constellation at hand. In *Topology of Violence*, the philosopher Byung-Chul Han considers the shift in violence from the visible to the invisible, from the frontal to the viral to the self-inflicted, from brute force to mediated force, from the real to the virtual. Violence, Han tells us, has gone from the negative—explosive, massive, and martial—to the positive, wielded without enmity or domination. This, he says, creates the false impression that violence has disappeared. Anonymized,

desubjectified, systemic, violence conceals itself because it has become one with society. Han first investigates the macro-physical manifestations of violence, which take the form of negativity—developing from the tension between self and other, interior and exterior, friend and enemy. These manifestations include the archaic violence of sacrifice and blood, the mythical violence of jealous and vengeful gods, the deadly violence of the sovereign, the merciless violence of torture, the bloodless violence of the gas chamber, the viral violence of terrorism, and the verbal violence of hurtful language. He then examines the violence of positivity—the expression of an excess of positivity—which manifests itself as over-achievement, over-

production, over-communication, hyper-attention, and hyperactivity. The violence of positivity, Han warns, could be even more disastrous than that of negativity. Infection, invasion, and infiltration have given way to infarction. *The Memory Police* Prabhat Prakashan Exploring how neoliberalism has discovered the productive force of the psyche Byung-Chul Han, a star of German philosophy, continues his passionate critique of neoliberalism, trenchantly describing a regime of

technological domination that, in contrast to Foucault's biopower, has discovered the productive force of the psyche. In the course of discussing all the facets of neoliberal psychopolitics fueling our contemporary crisis of freedom, Han elaborates an analytical framework that provides an original theory of Big Data and a lucid phenomenology of emotion. But this provocative essay proposes counter models too, presenting a wealth of ideas and surprising alternatives at every turn.

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