BERSANI AVEC KUBRICK

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Communication Studies.

Chapel Hill
2007

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ABSTRACT

JEREMY POWELL: Bersani avec Kubrick
(Under the direction of Richard C. Cante)

In this paper, Leo Bersani’s critical writings are brought to bear on Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining* (1980). Exploring ideas about coupling, relationality, subjectivity and cinema, in this paper Bersani’s account of aesthetic engagement is both affirmed and reinflected.

Ingmar Bergman’s *Scenes from a Marriage* (1973), *The Shining*, and an online parody trailer called “Shining” are examined. These films reveal narrative cinema’s difficulties in mounting a potent critique of coupling. Bersani’s writings propose that cinema best offers not a *critique* of coupling, but a *relational model* for a mode of being in the world. This mode of being, enabled by “the communication of forms,” is an alternative to our usual mode, governed by “the enigmatic signifier.” However, we can survive in either of these modes only through an oscillation between the two.
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CHAPTER 1
DISSOLVING SCREEN COUPLES?

The first episode of Ingmar Bergman’s 1973 television miniseries *Scenes from a Marriage* offers many hints of marital turmoil to come, as Johan and Marianne are interviewed for a puff piece by a TV journalist keen to present them as an ideal couple with “a perfect life.” After corroborating Johan’s upbeat account of their ostensibly problem-free relationship, Marianne reveals a certain anxiety about their future, noting that “the very lack of problems could cause strife.” Then, when her husband has stepped away to take a phone call, Marianne is pressed by her interlocutor on the topic of love. She responds, “If [the apostle] Paul is right about love, it’s so rare that hardly anyone ever experiences it . . . Personally, I find it’s enough to be kind to the person you live with. Affection is also good. Humor, friendship, tolerance. Having reasonable expectations. If you have all that, then love isn’t necessary.” Marianne laments that people are “forced to play all these roles” that put “unrealistic emotional demands” on us, and she wishes that “we could be kinder to each other.” The interviewer misinterprets these remarks as signs of a yearning for a more romantic life.

The couple separates approximately halfway through the miniseries’ five-hour running time, when Johan sits his wife down and proclaims that he is leaving her for a younger woman. We the viewers have had little forewarning of this development, and we
and Marianne learn of his infidelity at the same time. Her devastated pleas for Johan to stay manage to provoke his rage but do not succeed in forestalling a separation. The two characters then embark upon the oscillation between extremes of bitterness and bittersweetness that will occupy *Scenes*’ three remaining episodes. We witness these two characters discovering that the dissolution of their couple was not so clean a break as they had thought. They end the film snuggling together in bed, proclaiming their still-present love for each other—but with no apparent intention to remarry.²

With unrestrained dialogue, emotionally raw acting, and intimate mise-en-scène, Bergman’s film is ferociously critical. But critical of what, precisely? The very title *Scenes from a Marriage* proclaims the limit of its critique: in attacking the institution of bourgeois marriage, *Scenes* stops short of critiquing coupling. Marriage is vivisected (without anesthetic!) and left, as it were, to expire on the table. But the couple, the dyad, is left alive. That is to say, Bergman advances a strong position against marriage, but leaves intact the hegemony of coupling. By never suggesting any viable alternative to the dyad, and by focusing his critique on the institution of marriage, Bergman winds up reinforcing the seeming inevitability of coupling as the dominant mode of living.

Generically *Scenes from a Marriage* is an art film. It’s also an “Art Film,” created by arguably the premier auteur of that moment in film history.³ By contrast, in the various genres that comprise popular Hollywood cinema, the expectation of the formation of a couple in light/happy entertainment (or of the dissolution of a couple in heavy/sad entertainment) tends to be so strong that we viewers often adopt a sort of paranoid position toward the various potentials for coupling among a given film’s characters. From this position, we continually scan the film for diegetic and nondiegetic cues that might
hint at particular couplings (or de-couplings) to come. We thus hope to anticipate, and therefore not to be taken aback by, the vicissitudes of the narrative’s moves toward and away from couplings. Many of us have marked, generally inconsistent, idiosyncratic preferences for (or against) certain kinds of resolutions to certain kinds of coupling-potentials among certain kinds of interpersonal configurations between certain kinds of characters. Such preferences permit each of us to feel as though his or her own take on coupling is distinctive. But their very multiplicity may also reinforce our understanding of coupling as the natural and inevitable way of relating to each other, and perhaps even to the world.

Compared with *Scenes from a Marriage*, which announces itself as an almost prototypical deployment of the dissolution-of-the-couple trope, my second example may at first seem an odder choice. *The Shining* (1980) occupies a generic position mid-way between the art film and the horror film. Stanley Kubrick’s post-*Dr. Strangelove* forays into various popular genres are closer in spirit to the “art film” than to whichever other genres are also being employed: “hard” science fiction in *2001: A Space Odyssey*; dystopian science fiction in *A Clockwork Orange*; historical costume drama in *Barry Lyndon*; the war film in *Full Metal Jacket*; and the erotic thriller in *Eyes Wide Shut*. The progression of the dissolution of *The Shining*’s couple is implied via classic art film techniques of composition and rhythm as well as sometimes obscure symbolism. The Overlook Hotel inhabits its characters as perhaps no cinematic milieu ever had, at least outside of the work of Michelangelo Antonioni. What there is to understand about this couple is conveyed in large part through the way the oppressive setting is oppressively filmed by Kubrick’s camera.
Nonetheless, the particular elements of *The Shining* that I want to discuss also have much to do with its aspects as a horror film. Jack Torrance (Jack Nicholson) doesn’t merely reject or abandon his wife and son. He tries to murder them. Early commentators, including Stephen King—the author of the novel from which the film was adapted—complained that Nicholson’s Jack is too disturbed from the beginning, and then goes totally bonkers too unsubtly and too quickly. Such opinions express a desire to witness a more protracted descent into a more realistic madness, starting from an initial state of normality. Such a change would also have the effect of prolonging the segment of the narrative during which the inevitability of the couple’s ultimate dissolution is not yet definite.

In the film as it is (rather than as these reviewers seem to think they might prefer it), we are never permitted—not even in its earliest moments—to see the contemporary couple constituted by Jack and his wife Wendy (Shelley Duvall) as an even outwardly “happy” one. Wendy displays too much nervous anxiety, which is too obviously directed at the ever-present possibility of Jack’s eruption into rage. Jack, for his part, behaves alternately distractedly, contemptuously, and angrily toward his wife. At one point he refers to her as “the old sperm bank.” Despite using this degrading epithet, and despite looking lustfully at other women (natural women as well as a supernatural/hallucinated one), he never once displays any sexual interest in Wendy. Nor does she display any in him.

All of this notwithstanding—or perhaps because of all of this—the couple of *The Shining*, as a couple, could hardly be described as “unstable.” Indeed, an ill-advised dedication to stability might be viewed as this couple’s main problem. At least one of the
individuals (Jack) seems to have “wanted out” since long before the beginning of the film’s plot. Yet, in the early scenes, he is unable even to make any initial move toward the couple’s dissolution. Instead, he remains trapped in a state of stalled movement of which his writer’s block is only the most obvious symptom. Whether typing, aimlessly bouncing a ball, or running his hand along the long walls of the halls of the hotel, Jack is stuck in a series of cycles of aimless physical repetitions that never really accomplish any significant motion. Finally, his violent psychosis emerges to force a change.

There’s another reason why The Shining might seem to be an unusual choice to exemplify the dissolution-of-the-couple’s functions in filmic narrativity. It’s common to discuss The Shining not as the story of the dissolution of a couple, but rather as the story of the dissolution of a family. Jack’s psychosis seems to be the product of a reaction against his duties as a father more than a reaction against his duties as a husband. Michel Ciment, for instance, reads the film as “the definitive victory of the son over the father.” Ciment notes that the “relationships within the Torrance family illustrate the classic development of the Oedipal triangle.” But the triangulation inherent in the Oedipal family could not, of course, come to be without having been preceded by the strong libidinal dyad of the mother and father. That is to say, the Oedipal family is predicated upon the couple, even though not all couples necessarily become (Oedipal) families.

It is here that The Shining reaches the limit of its critique. Kubrick’s film narrates the dissolution of an overly stable couple, a dissolution that requires each of the couple’s members to become monstrous in their own ways. Jack becomes a raving, bestial maniac. Wendy becomes perhaps the most unappealing “scream queen” ever to star in the horror genre. So far, so good.
But Kubrick, like Bergman, stops short of challenging the dyad. In fact, he stops even shorter. Whereas Bergman did at least powerfully attack marriage, Kubrick positively affirms the stable Oedipal family. Jack long ago _abdicated_ his responsibilities as “caretaker” of his son and wife. In one highly available interpretation of the film’s narrative, then, it is his personal, moral failure to fulfill these responsibilities that corrupts the stability of this couple into an imprisoning force from the get-go.

My interest in this paper is in the possibility of cinematic and theoretical _critiques_ of coupling. Given that, it is not at all clear to me that there is anything much to be gained (here) from a detailed description of cinematic narratives that employ the obverse of what I have been discussing: the _formation-_of-the-couple. Of course, I don’t wish to claim that all such cinematic narratives are “created equal.” Certainly, a wide range of disparate ethical and aesthetic projects may be mounted within films that narratologically move toward the formation of a couple. Yet it is difficult to imagine that any potent critique of coupling could be developed within such a film. This is perhaps because the motivation toward coupling is so dominant within our culture that the pleasure provided by the formation of the couple at the conclusion of a cinematic narrative tends to overwhelm and negate any critical observations that might have been managed. Perhaps such a critique could be accomplished only by the formation of a couple that, at least _as_ a couple, is in some way truly _monstrous_. Even in that case, though, any such critique seems likely to reach its limit once it inevitably brushes against the aforementioned difficulty of imagining and presenting viable alternatives to coupling. (“Stay single”?)

Here “Shining,” a re-cut trailer virally distributed online, appears as an interesting cultural artifact. This piece subverts the dissolution-of-the-couple in Kubrick’s
film by distorting it precisely into its opposite: a formation-of-the-couple narrative.6

“Shining” manipulates images and dialogue from The Shining to make the feature film appear to be a romantic comedy about a boy (Danny) in search of a father figure. In the narrative of “Shining,” Jack is a frustrated writer who is rescued from his creative block by coupling with Wendy and adopting Danny. (If I read the trailer’s cues correctly, Danny, though in Wendy’s charge, is not her son.) According to The New York Times, this re-cut trailer was designed for a contest sponsored by the New York chapter of the Association of Independent Creative Editors. Participants were challenged to create a trailer for any existing movie that made that movie appear to belong to a different genre.

What I find interesting here is not the ripeness of a horror film to be recast as a romantic comedy, but that of a couple-dissolution plot to be transformed into a couple-formation plot. Furthermore, while “Shining” does include a schmaltzy voice-over, a few sound effects and an upbeat excerpt from Peter Gabriel’s song “Solsbury Hill,” one of its added elements sticks out much more ostentatiously. This is a line of dialogue, “I’m your new foster father,” extracted from Nicholson’s performance in a different film, About Schmidt (2002). Recognizing that this line derives from a film other than The Shining is quite dissatisfying, since it seems to violate the purity of the exercise. This violation might also seem to weaken the short film’s perfection as a demonstration of couple-formation’s immanent relation to couple-dissolution. On the contrary, precisely because the added line is so glaringly unnecessary to fully understanding the trailer’s narrative, dissatisfaction at noticing this “impurity” may be read as more evidence of the notion that each trope may, in fact, be perfectly immanent within the other.
All three of these texts demonstrate that any incipient critique of coupling within a cinematic narrative employing the dissolution-of-the-couple trope tends to be quite recuperable by the hegemony of coupling. *Scenes from a Marriage* ultimately proclaims the resilience of the couple as a libidinal dyad, even after the onscreen couple’s emotionally vicious dissolution as a pair of persons sharing their everyday lives. We can see this also in the example of *The Shining*, which might conceivably be read as a terrifying cautionary tale against allowing one’s own couplings to become so stable that one cannot readily withdraw from them—but which finally seems to convey, much more compellingly, a message about the paramount importance of embracing one’s obligations to the structure of the Oedipal family (and to the “overarching” dyad installed within it). The alternative proposed by *The Shining* to the “all work” of couple-based responsibilities is not unlimited “play.” Instead, it is indiscriminately destructive repetition and madness, followed by the permanent stasis of frozen death.
Leo Bersani, who has approached many of the issues that these films put on the table, is an interesting, somewhat controversial figure on the contemporary critical scene. His work is open to attack from many quarters. He could easily be pigeonholed as a protomystical thinker of limited range, as being of interest primarily those engaged with a few particular subcultures: especially francophiles and urban(e) queers, and maybe even just white, bourgeois gay males. He writes almost exclusively about high modernism in literature, painting and film. His work often flies beneath the radars both of popularists and of those for whom the close reading of works of art without much reference to those works’ sociohistorical contexts is not a sufficient and/or valid methodology. Worst of all, his work has been very pointedly criticized as an attempt to justify and maintain his own class, race, and gender privilege.\(^7\)

In the opposite corner of the ring, some scholars have high praise for Bersani. Interestingly, though, such praise often seems to take the form of brief citation. Adam Phillips, for instance, has written that although “most of the best popular psychoanalytic theory takes relationship for granted,” in his opinion “much of the most interesting psychoanalytic theory today is skeptical of the whole notion of relationship (Freud, Lacan, Laplanche, Bersani).”\(^8\) Although Phillips’ article goes on to discuss the work of the first three writers in his parenthetical citation, Bersani is not mentioned again. This
seems to me somewhat typical of the way that many writers choose to acknowledge an affinity with Bersani’s thought. The tendency may have developed as a reaction to the difficulty of describing Bersani’s work without discussing it at length. Perhaps it’s also a reaction to the difficulty of discussing Bersani’s work at all without making it sound deliberately obscurantist. And his intimate association with queer culture probably discourages engagement from “straight” scholars, either for the more obviously lamentable reasons or because such scholars fear being left open to contradictory charges of recuperative appropriation or of “de-queering” the politics of Bersani’s work. Putting such speculations aside, I will attempt to do justice to the development of some of Bersani’s complex, heterodox, and highly dynamic intellectual project. It is first and foremost—I will argue—a project against the couple.

For Bersani, the critique of coupling must not remain at the level of interpersonal relations. His thought has been progressively re-located from the register of the couple, to the register of the dyad (as a copulative mode of relation between a subject and an object), to the register of relationality more broadly conceived (attempting to think alternatives to the subject-object mode of relating). Tracing these moves will require some time and effort, so, before we begin, let me explain why I agree with Bersani that such a re-location is necessary in the first place.

Bersani’s critique—and any other possible critique of coupling—should be conceived as distinct from the somewhat more familiar critiques of patriarchy, marriage, heteronormativity, and compulsory reproductivity. The first of these usually focuses on socially constructed disparities between a dominant male group and a subordinated female group. The second focuses on a specific institutional practice, and has historically
devoted much of its attention to juridical supports for oppressive social formations (such as divorce laws). This concern with changing laws and regulations has of course become a crucial aspect of many (though not all) critiques of heteronormativity, too. And the critique of compulsory reproductivity often aims at improving reproductive rights. But in its most intellectually suggestive form, this last critique aims to re-place the leverage point of ethical, aesthetic and political calculations toward the pleasures of “the present,” as well as toward more risky attitudes about possible “futures.”

The critique of coupling, however, must remain conceptually distinct from each of these other critiques. One could, with varying degrees of difficulty and plausibility, construct arguments attacking any one or more of these constructions while leaving the others more or less intact. Although it is true that much of the most interesting theoretical writing addressing any of these individual concerns seems to address all of them (including the critique of coupling), I contend that such critiques of coupling finally don’t get far enough away from it.

For example, Lee Edelman’s recently influential book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* is yet another ferocious critique. It has been influential partly thanks to what seems to be its relatively broad relevance to any political project for radically rethinking futurity. Edelman savages the ideology of “reproductive futurism,” thereby performing explicit critiques of compulsory reproductivity and heteronormativity along with implicit critiques of patriarchy and, perhaps, marriage too. But he seems to leave coupling well enough alone.

This may be an oversimplification. But it is not, I think, a misrepresentation of the book’s argument, a summary of which might proceed like this: according to Edelman, the
dominant ideology in our culture is that of reproductive futurism, whereby social value is invested in a certain futurity—specifically, in the world as it will be in the future for the children of the present. Under such a regime, politics necessarily will always remain “conservative” in the sense that it “works to affirm a structure, to authenticate social order, which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of its inner Child.” Due in part to the fact that homosexual sex never results in procreation, the antithesis of Childhood becomes Queerness. The figure of the queer thus carries both the burden and the privilege of figuring jouissance, “a movement beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the distinction of pleasure and pain, a violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, and law” (25).

For Edelman here, it doesn’t seem to matter much that many homosexuals adopt children or even have children of their own. What matters more is that the sex act between people of the same sex is entirely disarticulated from any possibility that this act might result in the production of a child, and is thus also disarticulated from the ideology of reproductive futurism. Edelman presents the (male) homosexual as a solitary, driven One who is also—fantasmatically, for reproductive futurists—a Zero. But he is never once, in the body Edelman’s text, described as part of a Two. In this way, largely by implication, No Future mildly critiques coupling as a side effect of its argumentative main line. But, for reasons that will soon become clear, Edelman’s figurations of solitary, menacing, absolutely negative gay men—what he calls sinthomosexuals—seem to me not to be of much help in conceptualizing a non-copulative mode of relationality.
Leo Bersani is briefly cited twice in the pages of *No Future*. Bersani also provided a promotional blurb for the back cover of the paperback version. That blurb is worth reproducing here in full:

In consistently brilliant theoretical discussions (for the most part, psychoanalytically inspired), as well as in strikingly original readings of Dickens, George Eliot, and Hitchcock, Lee Edelman argues that in a political culture dominated by the sentimental illusions and frequently murderous moral imperatives of “reproductive futurism,” homosexuality has been assigned—and should deliberately and defiantly take on—the burden of a negativity at once embedded within and violently disavowed by that culture. The paradoxical dignity of queerness would be its refusal to believe in a redemptive future, its embrace of the unintelligibility, even the inhumanity inherent in sexuality. Edelman’s extraordinary text is so powerful that we could perhaps reproach him only for not spelling out the mode in which we might survive our necessary assent to his argument.

- Leo Bersani

But, in his own work, Bersani has upped the ante on Edelman. Or, rather, he already *had* at the time he penned the above text.

In the 1980s, Bersani’s work took as one of its organizing principles the theorization and celebration of a relinquishment of identitarian organizational structures. Bersani proposed the cultivation of a movement toward the elimination not of the psychological subject per se, but of the *individual*. This could occur, he argued, through processes and, sometimes, “events” of *self-defeat*. These amount to failures of the stable ego-structures of psychologically individuated persons, or their “dis-organization.” Such failures happen in the form of the ego’s temporary transgression of its own boundaries, spilling out (so to speak) so that the subject momentarily no longer distinguishes between self and other.
This transgression is called self-shattering or *ébranlement*, a term Bersani adapted from the work of Jean Laplanche. It is defined as “the pleasurable unpleasurable tension of sexual excitement [that] occurs when the body’s ‘normal’ range of sensation is exceeded, and when the organization of the self is momentarily disturbed by sensations or affective processes somehow ‘beyond’ those compatible with psychic organization.”

For Bersani, “[s]exuality is perhaps as close as we come (short of death) to the beneficent destruction of the empirical individual, a destruction that is identical to the body’s most intense concentrations on its own capacity for sensations.”

By way of analogy to Freud’s distinction between primary narcissism and secondary narcissism, Bersani designated the masochism found in adult sadomasochistic sexual practices as *secondary masochism*, in order to distinguish it from *primary masochism*. “Wholly devoid [. . .] of such moral components as the guilt with which a later, secondary masochism will be burdened (and corrupted), the primary masochistic desire would seek merely to repeat the ecstatic suffering of a pure ébranlement.”

In *The Freudian Body, The Culture of Redemption* and *Homo*, Bersani posited ébranlement as immanent to all modes of sexuality, but as more readily accessible through particular sexual practices: rimming (for the “active” partner only); cruising; and homosexual activity in general. Bersani’s enthusiastic willingness (during this period of his work) to implicitly hierarchize—I see no way around calling it hierarchization—human sexual practices according to their capacity for providing instances of ébranlement often seemed to be at odds, at least in spirit, with his delightful attacks on “puritanical feminism” and on various thinkers’ projects for a “redemptive reinvention of sex.”
In 1997, Bersani was interviewed by Tim Dean, Hal Foster, and Kaja Silverman. The interview, published in the journal *October*, is a particularly useful piece for two reasons. First, the dialogic nature of the interview situation maneuvers Bersani into addressing directly some previously ambiguous elements of his writing. Second, this interview finds Bersani on the cusp of a major shift of focus:

*Bersani:* [Ébranlement is not necessarily] a characteristic of our sexual lives; it means that a masochistic self-shattering was constitutive of our identity as sexual beings, that it is present, always, not primarily in our orgasms but rather in the terrifying but also exhilarating instability of human subjectivity. [The] originary experience of masochism [. . .] cannot be forgotten or done away with; we always revert to it in some way; there is always a memory of self-constitution that includes this masochistic coming-into-being of the sexual.

This statement marks a significant, if subtle, shift in Bersani’s thinking. Ébranlement *is* still considered to be always already accessible precisely through our orgasms, and more readily accessible through particular ways of achieving those orgasms. But Bersani is now also focusing on ébranlement as the gateway to an alternative mode of subjectivity—or, more accurately, to an alternative *way of being*. Ébranlement’s radical potentialities lie in the possibility of divesting the psychological subject of its subjectivity, i.e., of its capacity for identifying itself *as* a subject in relation to a field of objects. This *subject divested of subjectivity* is one not delimited by any stable boundaries between self and not-self, or self and world.

Given how frightening, perhaps also how dubious this probably sounds, one must ask: why has this potential by this point become so appealing to Bersani? The answer lies in coupling.
In “Forming Couples (Contempt),” the first chapter of Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit’s book *Forms of Being: Cinema, Aesthetics, Subjectivity*, the authors closely read the film *Le Mépris* (Godard, 1963) as a cinematic critique of coupling. From the first lines of the chapter, the authors lay down the stakes of their argument. But they do this without fully informing us, up-front, of the nature of those stakes.

“Contempt cements the couple,” they write in the chapter’s first line. Having written this, they acknowledge this sentiment’s opposition to conventional wisdom: “An arguably more plausible view would be that contempt drives the couple apart, a view supported—or so it has been maintained—by Jean-Luc Godard’s 1963 film *Contempt*, in which a wife’s sudden contempt for her husband deals the death-blow to an idyllic intimacy.” Bersani and Dutoit proceed to argue that, in both Godard’s film and everyday relationality, “the looks that express contempt as well as those that react to it, far from signifying the dissolution of the couple, reduce the entire relational field to the structure of the *intimately conjoined couple*” (19-21; emphasis mine). The writers oppose this category of the “intimately conjoined couple” to a second mode of interacting with “the relational field”; they call this other mode *non-copulative pairing*.

The intimately conjoined couple is, for Bersani and Dutoit, “immobili[z]ed by seduction, fascination and paranoia” as a result of the way each person in the couple has been constituted as an individuated subject. This constitution has occurred for each through his or her encounter with what Bersani, again following Laplanche, calls the *enigmatic signifier*. This “message by which the child is seduced, but which he or she cannot read” is the form in which the child receives unconscious and sexual significations
of the psychologically motivated world of adults, installed unintentionally but inevitably by the caregiver (37).

For Bersani, this installation constitutes an “original seduction” with lamentable consequences. In “Sociality and Sexuality,” he writes that “we are originally seduced into a relation by messages we can’t read, enigmatic messages that are perhaps inevitably interpreted as secrets. The result of this original seduction would be a tendency to structure all relations on the basis of an eroticizing mystification.” After this original seduction, “[t]he enigmatic signifier becomes a knowledge [that all others] are at once willfully withholding from me and using in order to invade my being.” As a result, we routinely “confront others with paranoid mistrust” (646). Because each sexuated human subject is constituted through the installation of the enigmatic signifier, it’s extraordinarily difficult for any of us to escape the mode of relating to the world that is thus initiated:

The inability to decipher the enigmatic signifier constitutes us as sexual beings—that is, beings in whom desire or lack is central. Desire as lack is born [. . .] as the exciting pain of a certain ignorance: the failure to penetrate the sense of the other’s soliciting—through touch, voice, gesture, or look—of our body. The enigmatic signifier narrows and centers our look; it is the originating model of a relationality in which subject and object are separated by the distance of an imaginary secret or a special authority, a distance that only ‘knowledge’ might cross or eliminate.23

Imagining the possibility of possessing such knowledge leads to (among other things) a constant, paranoid scanning of both the other and the world for clues to the nature and location of that knowledge.

In this model of subjectivity and of subjectivity’s limits, then, every human subject is constitutively paranoid as well as constitutively appropriative. He or she is
protectively and proactively invasive of a world that constantly appears to want to invade the subject. Bersani and Dutoit put it this way in their book on Derek Jarman: “Desire imprisoned in lack avenges itself by a furious incorporation of objects, an attempt literally to stuff the hole of desiring being.” Here they also make crystal clear just what’s at stake, for them, in escaping the appropriative relationality governed by the enigmatic signifier: “Nothing less than psychic survival may depend on imagining [non-appropriative] relational lines” (71).

For Bersani, such lines may be imagined only after recognizing what he has in different phases of his work called homo-nest and the extensibility of sameness. This “sameness” is not necessarily extended as “humanness.” In Forms of Being, Bersani and Dutoit write: “Immanent in every subject is its similitudes with other subjects (and other objects)—similitudes that are illuminated, that ‘shine’ into visibility when those others intersect with the subject’s spatial or temporal trajectories.” For a subject, this means recognizing that “in approaching otherness, he is also moving toward himself. A non-antagonistic relation to difference depends on this inaccurate replication of the self in difference, on our recognizing that we are already out there.” After this recognition, “[d]ifference can then be loved as a non-threatening supplement to sameness,” rather than hated as a necessarily invasive threat.

Yes, loved. In other words, Bersani thinks that “the only way we can love the other or the external world is to find ourselves somehow in it. Only then can there be a nonviolent relation to the external world that doesn’t seek to eliminate difference.” And, fortunately, we are always already able to find ourselves replicated outside ourselves. These replications are only “inaccurate,” never perfect; to find one of them is to form a
non-copulative pairing between the subject and a part of the world. “We love [only] inaccurate replications of ourselves [because] we relate to difference by recognizing and longing for sameness. All love is, in a sense, homoerotic.”

To sum up in a single phrase, then: the relational regime of the enigmatic signifier is to the intimately conjoined couple as the relational regime of homo-ness (or the extensibility of sameness) is to non-copulative pairings.

When he was working with the earlier model of self-defeat through ébranlement, Bersani’s project amounted to the development, primarily through close readings of exemplary literary texts, of what he called an “ethical erotics.” “[I]f a community were ever to exist in which it would no longer seem natural to define all relations as property relations (not only my money or my land, but also my country, my wife, my lover), we would first have to imagine a new erotics. Without that, all revolutionary activity will return, as we have seen it return over and over again, to relations of ownership and dominance.” In such passages as this one from Homos, we see that Bersani’s radicalism is in some ways not too far removed from a good old-fashioned post-1968 utopianist critique of the interconnections between economic conditions and culturally constructed consciousness. “The notion of property contaminates all relationality,” he writes. It doesn’t get much more succinct than that. However, I think “property” here refers not merely to owned material objects but, much more broadly, to subject-object relations in general. For, with the theory of non-copulative pairings, Bersani wants to describe a relational regime in which only very weak distinctions can possibly pertain between the subject, other subjects, and objects. In this regime, sameness is all.
Bersani’s most recent work, including *Forms of Being*, is characterized by an interest in formulating the non-psychological “subject” of/in a world of such non-copulative pairings. This “subject” still experiences desire. But this kind of “desire” has nothing whatsoever to do with lack. Bersani’s project, as a whole, now appears to have been to theorize “a re-circuiting away from the psychological subject to modes of singularity (rather than varieties of personality) defined by networks of similitudes [. . .] not only among human subjects, but also between the human and the non-human.”

What he here calls “networks of similitudes” are often referred to in his recent work as *the correspondence of forms, or the communication of forms*. It is within this register of formal correspondences/communications that the subject of non-copulative pairings glimmers into being. Coupling—one psychological subject becoming attached to a second psychological subject in a strong libidinal dyad—is antithetical to this reformulation of the subject’s relations with its world. To put it in only slightly reductive terms, then, in his later work Bersani seems to discover that, throughout his critical project, coupling has been the symptom rather than the disease.

Speaking with Kaja Silverman in 1997, Bersani had defended the centrality of primary masochism (the desire to repeat ébranlement) to his explication of his own project:

_Bersani_: I am now interested in masochism not as pleasure in pain so much as the pleasure of at once losing the self and discovering it elsewhere, inaccurately replicated.

_Silverman_: Why is it still masochistic?

_Bersani_: Because it still means a certain pleasurable renunciation of one’s own ego boundaries, the pleasure of a kind of self-obliteration [. . .]

_Silverman_: Your idea of a communication of forms seems to be really new and original. I think it’s a mistake to fold it back into your earlier
argument about self-shattering and masochism [. . .] It suggests that you’re still talking about body or psyche [. . .] In fact, you’re talking about form.

**Bersani:** What for you is a reactive gesture is for me a point of departure. Our move toward the correspondence of forms [. . .] depends on a certain notion of masochism. If there weren’t pleasure in giving up what our civilization insists that we retain—our ego boundaries—the communication of forms would never occur. So masochism is the precondition of this passage.32

By 2000, we can see that Bersani seems to have changed his mind on precisely this issue. By that point, he is seeking to dissociate the notion of the communication of forms from primary masochism and ébranlement, in an explicit and self-conscious disavowal of his own earlier work:

Much of this now seems to me a rather facile, even irresponsible celebration of “self-defeat.” Masochism is not a viable alternative to mastery, either practically or theoretically. The defeat of the self belongs to the same relational system, the same relational imagination, as the self’s exercise of power; it is merely the transgressive version of that exercise [. . .] To neglect self-defeat in sexual relations leads to that pastoralizing of sexuality I have frequently criticized; but to privilege self-defeat in the relational field is to reduce that entire field to libidinal relationality.33

By figuring the readiness with which the dissolution-of-the-couple trope and the formation-of-the-couple trope support each other, and thus by demonstrating the absolute governance of each by the overall structure of coupling, the “Shining” parody trailer, for instance, can help us to understand the reason that Bersani gives for this disavowal of his earlier work, and for this change in direction. Both moves are perhaps related to the way in which sadomasochistic sexual practices have a very hard time managing to perform the critique of power relations that is often claimed for them. In *Homos*, Bersani had discussed in detail the mechanisms of S/M practices, arguing that they cannot be potently
critical. The *structure* of dominance and submission must remain unassailed (or only impotently assailed) in S/M because it is precisely that structure that gives pleasure to the participants. As Bersani writes, “to empower the disenfranchised partner is [. . .] not at all the same thing as eliminating struggles for power in erotic negotiations.”34 In fact, he argues here that S/M is the opposite of subversive: “S/M fortifies those structures [of dominance and submission in the culture at large] by suggesting that they have an appeal independent of the political ideologies that exploit the appeal” (90).

In a homologous manner, it is coupling that continually animates and gives force to the formation-of-the-couple trope as well as the dissolution-of-the-couple trope—and the latter supports coupling no less than does the former. It makes sense from the standpoint of this schema, then, to see the appeal of witnessing couplings and decouplings as indissociable from the violent pleasures available in narrativity itself. This is to say that the structure of coupling and the very force behind its power as form—i.e., the energy that forces it into its powerful form—is usually only reinforced by those cinematic narratives that attempt to lodge a critique of that structure within the framework “composed” of these same forces.

Now, I don’t want to attribute too much originality to the heterodoxies or eclecticism of Bersani’s thought. Edelman, D.A. Miller, and Judith Butler, for example, all write and think in quite similarly eclectic modes, about similar issues. On the whole, Bersani’s project is by no means incommensurable with most of the work of any of these theorists. Yet, Bersani’s move into the “communication of forms”—and what that framework might mean for human subjectivity—does seem to place his work in a class of its own.
For instance, in her essay “Longing for Recognition,” Butler works through a few of psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin’s theories with much the same goal as in Bersani’s appropriation of Laplanche. She too wants to effect a kind of liberation of human subjects from insidious dyadic relationality. In order to assert that each of us “fundamentally is a subject in a temporal chain of desire that only occasionally and provisionally assumes the form of a dyad,” Butler relies on a notion of “ontological ek-stasis” through which the subject “finds itself ambiguously installed outside itself.” So far, this sounds similar to what Bersani is getting at with the extensibility of sameness. But, significantly, Butler’s subject is still Hegelian. It is still constituted through its recognition of its self in the Other: in the other subject, that is, rather than dispersed throughout the world. Thus, the Butlerian subject is still consistently locatable as a relatively strictly delimited subject. Bersani’s subject in communication, on the other hand, is defined precisely by the absence of such boundaries between self and world-as-other that are implicitly required by Butler’s argument. For Bersani, subjectivity is not merely always-already split between self and other. Rather, Bersanian subjectivity is dispersed, as being, throughout the world itself.

It is difficult to imagine any of the various other politically motivated critics of coupling going there. But their reluctance to go there—or their inability to, or their decision not to—must be taken seriously. For, recalling the blurb for No Future, we should remember that Bersani himself expressed concern about the survivability of Lee Edelman’s prescriptions. Indeed, similar reproaches could be, and have been, leveled at Bersani’s writing. It’s possible, then, that the relatively wide-ranging reluctance to embrace, or difficulties in embracing, Bersani’s work—at least his more recent work—
derives at least in part from this problem of the survivability of the human organism in the communication of forms.

With the earlier ébranlement model, Bersani had acknowledged exactly this site of difficulty. In *Homens*, he wrote: “To survive in any environment requires a degree of invasive intent with respect to that environment; the exercise of power is a prerequisite for life itself. [But . . .] the project of mastery might generate a pleasure—a thrill— incompatible with invasive appropriations.”37 This “thrill,” the “pleasure” of ébranlement, is a threat to survival for two reasons. First, as Bersani describes in the passage that I just quoted, the body might be unable to sufficiently protect itself from material harm while its invasive appropriativity is suspended. Secondly, one can never be certain that the ego’s boundaries will then be properly “reset” once the ébranlement recedes. This second danger seems unlikely when ébranlement is considered in its aspect as an event accessible through certain sexual practices. (Do you know anyone who went crazy from an orgasm?) But when one thinks about ébranlement as “present, always, not primarily in our orgasms, but rather in the terrifying but also exhilarating instability of human subjectivity,” this danger must be taken, essentially, as our permanent condition anyway.38 As for the first threat, that of the body’s unprotectedness, this too might be dismissible as little more than an intensification (and a mild one, at that) of the condition under which each of us persists even while our ego boundaries are as stable as we can possibly make and maintain them.

But now, the power of ébranlement to offer an escape from the clutches of the relational regime of the enigmatic signifier no longer seems viable to Bersani. Instead, the radical hope for a better way of relating, which has always been legible between the
lines of his texts, has settled on the potentialities inherent in the communication of forms.

But, since ébranlement seemed a threat to survival, it is important here to ask why the communication of forms—in which “subjectivity” as such is no longer even locatable—would not be an equally unlivable ethical, aesthetic and political “form of being.”

Writing with Dutoit, Bersani at length discusses Witt, a key character in Terrence Malick’s The Thin Red Line. In their reading, Witt figures, or gives image to, the living of the communication of forms. Bersani and Dutoit write:

[H]is unforgettable presence is the result of his ontological passivity—not the passivity of someone who submits to the will of others, but the active passivity of someone who, acknowledging that he is the world in which he lives, makes his self superfluous in order to multiply his being. The attentive way in which Witt’s look simply lets the world be also replicates the world as an accretion to a consciousness, and a look, ceaselessly receptive to the world. The forms it absorbs constitute the identity of the absorbing consciousness.39

This mode of being is that of a subject divested of subjectivity, that is, a non-psychological subject, attuned to the communication of forms and constitutively unable to enter into relations of coupling or property. “The astonishing unprotectedness of Witt’s look designates a subject without claims on the world, who owns nothing (not even the life he so freely gives at the end)” (164-165; emphasis mine). If Bersani neglects to explain how to survive the self-divestiture of subjectivity necessary in order to access the communication of forms, this may be because such an act is simply not permanently survivable. The subject divested of subjectivity may be necessarily unconcerned with the preservation of the self.

This, I believe, is why the subject divested of subjectivity, and the correspondences to which it is supremely receptive, are in Bersani’s later work not
merely allegorized by readings of works of art such as *The Thin Red Line* and *Le Mépris*, but are actually *produced* by the encounter with the work of art. As Bersani has put it, “the most detailed discussions of specific works can be not formalistic exercises, but rather absolutely identical with philosophical reflection. Close reading can be psychically, perhaps even ontologically re-creative.”[^40] What is being “re-created” in such readings is, I think, precisely the subject divested of subjectivity.

This is to say that, although engagement with the communication of forms is not permanently survivable, nothing in Bersani’s work claims that we should or can adopt this mode of being as a *permanent* mode. Rather, the subject divested of subjectivity is a *flickering* subject, a *glimmering* subject, a mode of being that comes and goes but must not stay put—and perhaps cannot stay put.

Bersani and Dutoit’s very impulse to discuss *The Thin Red Line* derives from the idea that “[w]ar, and the *jouissance* that nourishes war, contradicts universal presence. To *show* this is art’s highest ethical accomplishment.”[^41] They suggest that exploring the communication of forms “requires a suspension of strictly human interests, a removal from those existential contexts in which paranoid fascination is the human subject’s spontaneous response to the other’s soliciting (or even interested) gaze.”[^42] Becoming a subject divested of subjectivity “requires a relational discipline capable of yielding an ascetic pleasure that may, at least intermittently, supersede the *jouissance* of ‘the blindest fury of destructiveness.’”[^43]

The key phrases here are: 1) “suspension,” and 2) “at least intermittently.” The encounter with a work of art is an opportunity to engage in a practice of receptivity capable of recharging the subject’s divestiture-of-subjectivity batteries, so to speak. This
is not so as to close off the subject’s access to other, more appropriative modes of being. Rather, it is so that the non-appropriative mode of relationality to the work/world will remain flickeringly available, at least for a while, after he or she turns away from the work of art and re-turns to everyday life.

One of the relatively few internal contradictions of Bersani’s work, though perhaps a major one, was noted by the writer himself in the prologue to *The Culture of Redemption*. Within a period during which many of his theoretical polemics attacked the notion of stable identity and “authoritative selfhood,” Bersani admitted that his own work displayed “a slightly dispiriting consistency.” I think this refers to a double tendency in/of his own writing style and critical method.

On the one hand, contrary to the style of authorship he most often praises, the aesthetic of Bersani’s own work is consistently *authoritative*. That is, his writing seldom comes close to what he has variously called:

- **inapplicable discourse**: “At the price of a certain indifference to the beneficial effects of thought’s mastery of nature (including its own nature), art cultivates a deliberately fragmentary, unusable, even ignorant relational play with the entries of its culture’s encyclopedia,”

- **formal irresolution**: “Only the non-aesthetic is formally fixed and readable; a sign of the aesthetic is formal irresolution,” and:

- **the negativizing movement of self-reflexiveness**: “resolutely nonredemptive art, far from making sense of life, initiates us to the pleasures of an uncritical participation in the text’s own trance of agitated repetitions [and] also cultivates an ironic reserve toward its own excesses.”
On the other hand, each of Bersani’s new publications seems to function primarily in response to his own oeuvre up to that point. In one peculiar way, his work is thus seeming to become even more consistent than ever before. Evidence of this is his more and more consistent choice not to cite his sources. While trying (in vain) to track down the origin of a phrase in *Forms of Being* that sounded to me like it might (or might not) be an allusion to something in Hegel, it occurred to me that Bersani and Dutoit’s text, despite vociferously arguing against the regime of the enigmatic signifier, had positioned me, the attentive reader, precisely as a paranoid subject searching for “clues” that may or may not have been intended as clues at all. This tendency is exacerbated by the fact that Bersani has stated and restated his ideas in ways that have grown increasingly cryptic, aphoristic, even kōan-like.

In other words, the mode of “close reading”—and “close moving-image textual engagement”—practiced by Bersani and Dutoit, as well as others (for example, Edelman, D.A. Miller, Tom Cohen) can indeed be “ontologically re-creative” of a subject divested of subjectivity, for/in/through the subject who is performing the reading. But the mode of reading required of the reader of the texts thus produced is not necessarily the same. Indeed, in important ways Bersani’s texts do not themselves commission such a subject, unless the reader *knows (how) to, and is willing to, accord Bersani’s critical text a certain sort of relational “generosity.”*
CHAPTER 3

SHININGS

What the subject sees in such “recharging” sessions is, according to Bersani, the “shining” of being in art.\textsuperscript{48} For Bersani, the extensibility of sameness does not need to be created. It is simply a condition of being. But it does need to be made visible to us as a condition under which we always already persist. Visual art, and especially cinematic art, enjoys a special capacity for such making-visible, such shining. But these works of art must be met halfway by a subject who does not strive for interpretation, but who is attentive and receptive to correspondences among appearances.

In this sense, the stakes laid down in \textit{Forms of Being} have to do with the possibility of lodging a critique of coupling within a narrative cinematic text that employs the tropes of the formation and/or dissolution of a couple. Here the way in which a work of art, especially a film, might help us to escape coupling is not through performing any kind of “critique.” (Though, of course, it might quite effectively critique something else at the same time.) This is crucial to Bersani’s understanding of what he has called the \textit{ethico-aesthetics} of cinema. For him, “the perceptual aesthetic of film can be ethically defended. It registers not the real world ‘as it is,’ but a positioning in a real world. The images of film propose relational models, which means that film can’t help but work within the field of ethics.”\textsuperscript{49} In this sense, works of art do not critique \textit{anything}. Rather, they show us how to \textit{be} better. When they do so, they “shine.” And when we \textit{see} what
they show us, we shine back, in a “withdrawal from the visible world into the superior visibility of what has been derealized.”

Our best hope of relating to each other without seeking to destroy what is other about each other may be achievable only through attentive, actively passive encounters with formally irresolute art. And it is precisely here that something like an “alternative” to coupling can be said to present itself.

The alternative to couple-based responsibilities, the alternative that—for instance—Jack Torrance winds up embracing in *The Shining*, is *not* necessarily the “permanent stasis of frozen death.” In the end, the murderous rampage of Jack Nicholson’s character Jack proves to be largely unsuccessful. His son Danny and wife Wendy repeatedly escape his axe’s blade, and he manages to kill only Halloran, the cook. The rampage ends in the hotel’s hedge maze, as Jack, tricked by Danny’s backtracking and footprint-erasing tactics, cannot find the way out. Eventually, Jack sits down in a pile of snow. The nighttime blizzard continues to blow. Next, we are presented a daylit image of a literally frozen Jack, icicles hanging from his face. His eyes are rolled up, unseeing.
But this is not Kubrick’s last word. For next we are shown a shot of a long hallway inside the hotel. We hear jazz, party music. The camera moves slowly forward, down the hallway, approaching a group of photographs on the far wall. A few cuts bring us closer to these images. At last, a single photograph fills the frame. It is a black-and-white image of a crowd of people in formal dress celebrating some special occasion. The camera continues to advance, until we see that Jack Torrance occupies a central position in this group shot, smiling straight at us with wide, gleaming eyes. In the final seconds of the film, Kubrick’s camera tracks down to reveal the photograph’s caption: “Overlook Hotel, July 4th Ball, 1921.” Jack is celebrating independence at last.

Kubrick’s use of the word “shining”—in the film as in the Stephen King novel from which it is taken, a sort of telepathy combined with precognition—is not identical to
Bersani’s. But there is something to learn about the latter from the cook Halloran’s anecdote about his childhood experiences with his psychic power. Earlier in the film, Halloran tells Danny: “My grandmother and I could hold conversations entirely without ever opening our mouths. She called it shining. And for a long time I thought it was just the two of us that had the shine to us.”

This is precisely the delusion under which Jack, like all subjects in intimately conjoined couples, labors while living. It is never “just the two of us” that have the “shine” to us. The shine is in all the world, but it is up to us to see it and shine back. Jack becomes mad because he fails to become-shining, fails to find himself replicated outside himself. In his son. In the keys of his typewriter. In the texte he produces. In the ball he furiously throws against the walls of the hotel, and in the patterns on those walls. Above all, in Wendy: to whom he never could see that he need no longer remain coupled, even were they to remain together. In Scenes from a Marriage, Johan and Marianne divorced, but ceaselessly remained coupled. Jack too—even as he threatened to bash Wendy’s brains “right the fuck in”—remained coupled to her as strongly as ever, if not more so.

Here lies the surprising significance of a change that Kubrick made to his film after its initial premiere. The director removed a final scene that originally followed the July 4th photograph that now ends the film. In the deleted scene, Wendy, recovering in a hospital, is told that searchers have failed to find Jack’s body, the body we have seen frozen in the snow.

The scene had to go in order to lend a more perfectly final symmetry to the two still images of Jack, each centered in its cinematic frame—a sort of frozen-to-“frozen” “cut” that re-stages, with a difference, Kubrick’s iconic bone-to-spaceship cut from 2001.
But I would assert that this extra scene had to go, too, because it implied that Jack’s body had vanished into the photograph, when, in fact, something very important is happening between these two co-existent “still” images, as Kubrick clearly knows, though via different pathways of thought. The first image (frozen Jack) figures the subject tormented by the enigmatic signifier and driven straight through the end of invasive appropriativity, into immobilization. In the second (Jack’s photo from “out-of-time”), we see the alternative: an attentive, actively passive subject divested of subjectivity, comporting himself toward non-copulative pairings. Ready to witness, obviously having witnessed, and witnessing the communication of forms. Overlooking it everywhere.

He looks a little mad in that final image as well.

And he’s looking, you’ll notice, at us.
NOTES

1 Like Bergman’s *Face to Face* (1976) and *Fanny and Alexander* (1982), *Scenes from a Marriage* exists in two versions: a television miniseries (1973, 299 minutes, six episodes) and an abbreviated theatrical cut (1974, 169 minutes). Although there are many differences between the two texts, they are not relevant to my argument.

2 The film’s recent sequel *Saraband* (2003) posits one possible fate for these characters. But the sequel’s existence should not constrain interpretation of the earlier film.

3 To this day, the name Ingmar Bergman readily serves as a synecdoche for the entire postwar-European-film-as-high-art canon, and his name almost automatically commissions opinions about the value of canonicity. See for instance a *New York Times* article (very recent as of this writing) about a DVD box set of Bergman’s earliest cinematic work. Released as the initial offering in a new line of ostensibly “lost, forgotten, or overshadowed classics,” the set is criticized for failing to live up to that mission statement precisely due to Bergman’s status as the Art Film auteur *par excellence*. Dave Kehr, “Critic’s Choice: New DVD’s,” *The New York Times*, April 3, 2007, final edition, section E.


6 This parody circulated on the Web in late 2005 and spawned a host of mostly inferior imitators, such as “Scary Mary” (*Mary Poppins* recast as a horror thriller in the vein of *Candyman*). This was followed by dozens of queerings of popular films accomplished by recutting, say, clips from *Back to the Future* or *Heat* and overdubbing the main musical theme of *Brokeback Mountain* onto the result (Virginia Heffernan, “Brokeback Spoofs: Tough Guys Unmasked,” *The New York Times*, March 2, 2006, final edition, Lexis-Nexis). “Shining” may been viewed at http://www.ps260.com/molly/SHINING%20FINAL.mov

7 For instance, see Peggy Phelan, “Homos” (review), *Contemporary Sociology* 25, no. 1 (1996), 82-83. “As a reader of this political moment,” Phelan writes, “Bersani is muddled, arrogant, ethically small.” For Phelan, the central thesis of this book also
“comes perilously close to arguments made by the New Right...[The] ideal that Bersani champions has often been used as a justification for screwing everyone except white men of privilege, straight or gay.”


10 Edelman, 3 (emphasis in original).

11 Actually, in the book’s “acknowledgements” Edelman does put the couple on the table right up-front by thanking his longtime partner: “My debt to Joseph Litvak is in a category of its own and continues, daily, accumulating interest beyond my ability to repay it. His generosity, both emotional and intellectual, makes better everything it touches and I count myself singularly fortunate to be able to owe him so much.” (Ibid., x). Invoking Litvak’s name in this way, with reference to an apparently inescapable and stabilizing relation of presumably mutual ow(n)ing, further disinstalls No Future—radical as it may be (and this is a very radical book!)—from the project of coupling-critique in which I am interested here.

12 Ibid., back cover.


14 Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, Arts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais. (Cambridge: Harvard, 1993), 142. Also, crucially, see Leo Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?” October 43 (1987): 197-222. Note: In this essay I will draw no sharp distinction between Bersani’s solo work and his collaborations with Dutoit. It is mostly for the sake of compositional convenience, and not to diminish Dutoit’s by-all-accounts major contributions, that I will occasionally seem to credit ideas expressed in their co-authored texts to Bersani alone.


17 For “puritanical feminism,” see Bersani, Homos, 53-56. For the “redemptive reinvention of sex,” see Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?” 215.
In this regard Bersani is no different from many other theorists—cf. the many published interviews with Derrida, Deleuze, etc.


I see this as a reinflection, a shift in focus, rather than an entirely new concept: both aspects of ébranlement may be found to obtain in Bersani’s earliest descriptions of it. See Bersani, The Freudian Body, 60-64; Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?” 216-218, especially 218 n.25.


Bersani and Dutoit, Forms of Being, 37-39.

Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, Caravaggio (London: BFI, 1999), 71.

Bersani and Dutoit, Forms of Being, 8-9.

Bersani and Dutoit, Caravaggio, 71-72 (emphasis in original).


Bersani, Homos, 128.

Bersani and Dutoit, Forms of Being, 137.


Bersani, Homos, 82.

Patrick ffrench raises something close to such a concern in his review of *Forms of Being*. See Patrick ffrench, “Potential Not To Be: Bersani and Dutoit’s *Forms of Being*,” *Film-Philosophy* 9, no. 5 (2005). http://www.film-philosophy.com/vol9-2005/n3ffrench; see also Bersani and Dutoit, “A Response to Patrick ffrench and Peter Caws.”


Bersani et al, “A Conversation with Leo Bersani,” 6; I have quoted this line once already.

Bersani and Dutoit, *Forms of Being*, 165.

Bersani and Dutoit, “A Response to Patrick ffrench and Peter Caws” (unpaginated).

Bersani and Dutoit, *Forms of Being*, 177 (emphasis in original).


Bersani and Dutoit, *Forms of Being*, 177 (emphasis in original).


Ibid., 131-133.

Bersani and Dutoit, *Forms of Being*, 67.


Bersani and Dutoit, *Forms of Being*, 175 (emphasis in original).


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