

**BECOMING SAME:**  
**BERSANI AND DELEUZE**  
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How does one reject the habitual action and common sense that, as effects of subjection, may be crucial to one's very emergence and survival as a subject? How is it possible to pry open the "lines of force" that have rigidified into recognizable structures of existence through the habits of the self, of living? How much, and what forms, of one's continued existence as a subject can one hazard in risking the unpredictability of becoming? Addressing these questions, Michel Foucault, in his ethics texts and late interviews, locates in gay sexuality and "lifestyle" of the early 1980s forms of ascesis, of open-ended and inevitably dangerous relations to the self, that demand of us new modes of connectedness to the world. Crucial for Foucault is the "formless," "unforesee[able]" character of this connectedness: the subject must "invent," not "discover," new relations to oneself and to others through *rapport à soi*, a constantly modified care of the self.<sup>1</sup> Homosexual "lifestyle" — through, for example, the practices of friendship and S&M — provides a breeding ground for such new relatedness. Above all, one must resist turning this becoming-homosexual into a program with clearly articulated goals: "As soon as a program is presented, it becomes a law, and there's a prohibition against inventing. There ought to be an inventiveness special to a situation like ours....The program must be wide open."<sup>2</sup>

Here we can detect reasons for the common discomfort that political activists have with Foucault's work. For example, commenting on the seeming omnipotence of power that one finds in Foucault's genealogical texts, David Larmour, Paul Allen Miller, and Charles Platter write that Foucault's "view [of power as "ubiquitous and inescapable"] has troubled those who see political struggle as a positive force for the improvement of human life, for this conception of power seems to offer limited possibilities for meaningful political change."<sup>3</sup> Once we note that "meaningful" silently stands as a synonym for "predictable" or "programmatic," we begin to understand the basic differences and incompatibilities between Foucauldian and liberal/liberationist politics. For the latter, the meaningfulness of political struggle becomes

inextricable from a vision of a future whose formation can be predicted from, because it is premised on, the present, existing reality. It can be argued that, for example, the politics of the 1970s gay liberation, in all its disruptiveness, followed a Marcusean understanding of authentic sexuality and selfhood as buried somewhere underneath the repressive cultural machinery of normalization; gay liberationists saw themselves as midwives to a future whose knowable lineage would guarantee the recognizable form of the newborn. In opposition to this, Foucault repeatedly insisted on the importance of allowing the emergence of the future as an unforeseeable and possibly monstrous becoming through something he calls, importantly, “affective and relational virtualities.”<sup>4</sup> A politics that elicits the emergence of the *virtual* is incompatible with programs whose outcomes can be articulated before their actualization; once our political practices solidify into predictions and plans, the virtual is pre-empted into the existing modes of being.

This rejection of mappable struggles explains also the radical break between the first and latter two volumes of *The History of Sexuality*. In a 1984 interview Foucault notes that he did embark on the proposed six volumes, tracing the genealogy of several concepts in the history of sexuality,<sup>5</sup> but abandoned them because he almost “died of boredom writing those books.”<sup>6</sup> Despite such a close encounter with death-in-writing, what was missing from the venture was, according to him, a sense of “risk”: the risk of failure, of not knowing if one could complete the project.<sup>7</sup> Importantly, it is to these “dangerous” texts, “widely misinterpreted and even more widely ignored,”<sup>8</sup> that Leo Bersani turns in his efforts to initiate what he calls “our most urgent project now,” that is, “redefin[ing] modes of relationality and community, the very notion of sociality.”<sup>9</sup> Even before his encounter — at least in print — with Foucault’s work, Bersani similarly wanted to negotiate the openness of the future by rejecting approaches where what is to become is envisioned before its emergence. Already in *Baudelaire and Freud*, he argues that our disappointment with or rejection of the present symbolic must not congeal into utopic projects because these always depend on the foreseeable, on visions “of something.”<sup>10</sup> In foreseeing the future, that is, such programs pre-empt the emergence of the radically new.

To allow this unforeseeability, one must, Bersani argues, move beyond the forms of disciplinary subjectivity that predetermines one’s relations to the outside. While I am here able only to inaugurate such a project, I propose that, to gloss this new form of relatedness, or the “ethical imperative to re-adjust or to re-orient our extensions,”<sup>11</sup> we may want to trace the suggestive links between Bersani’s work and that of Gilles Deleuze, whose sympathy with Foucault’s project is well documented.<sup>12</sup> Obviously, I do not argue for anything like a complete agreement between Bersani and Deleuze. Finding strict correspondences between their work would amount to, precisely, the disciplinary project of re-cognizability that both thinkers criticize. Rather, I suggest that we can find in (or more accurately *between*) their work the kind of “resonance” or “intensity”

that Deleuze picks up on between himself and Foucault: “It’s not just a question of intellectual understanding or agreement,” he writes in *Negotiations*, “but of intensity, resonance, musical harmony.”<sup>13</sup> Such intensities and harmonies are not locatable in either body of work but take place, incorporeally as it were, between the two. We can thus draw an analogy between, on the one hand, my suggestions about the resonance between Bersani and Deleuze and, on the other, what the latter writes about the encounter of bodies: he insists that an encounter-as-becoming “is not common to the two [bodies]” but “is between the two.”<sup>14</sup>

### BEYOND THE ENIGMATIC SIGNIFIER

Bersani’s recent work marks a consistent step forward in the project that has engaged him from *Baudelaire and Freud* (1977) to *Homos* (1995). During this investigation, he has not shied away from disagreeing with and modifying his earlier formulations. Given these sometimes drastic rearticulations, it is not surprising that his critical reception has lagged behind, remaining loyal to formulations that he himself has already discarded. For example, if *Homos* did not already do so, *Caravaggio’s Secrets*, his new collaboration with Ulysse Dutoit, and his most recent essays should give pause to queer theorists who have put to productive use the concept of *ébranlement*, the ego’s traumatic shattering in sexuality’s jouissance. In *Homos*, Bersani questions the radicality of this concept, which emerged in his early work of the 1970s and, taking a distinctively political turn, became an eminently appropriable concept for queer theory in “Is the Rectum a Grave?” If in *The Freudian Body* he is concerned with tracing how the disruptive potential of sexuality is “domesticated” in and by Freud’s narrative of sexual development, he seems to be sensitive to — or, somewhat less generously, paranoid of — the way in which radical projects are defused through their very articulation. In *Homos*, he similarly notes how the seemingly most transgressive forms of sexuality and relationality may necessarily remain indebted, in their opposition and resistance, to the economies they queer. Ultimately, they too are rendered mere moments in disciplinary productivity that tame the disruptive potential of the new.

Most notably, the shift in Bersani involves his increasing misgivings about psychoanalysis’s ability to carry forward the rethinking of sexuality and relatedness he is interested in. Such doubts are not new to Bersani. Throughout his writing, he has noted the paradoxical functioning of psychoanalysis as, on the one hand, “the most pervasive, and the most prestigious modern form of a discursive technology of self-knowledge and self-creation,” and, on the other, a discourse whose disorienting moments of “theoretical collapse” grind the disciplinary inquiry to a halt.<sup>15</sup> Yet, whereas psychoanalysis seems to be suited to explaining the kind of erotic appeal that Bersani theorizes with Jean Laplanche’s notion of the enigmatic signifier, the relatedness that he and Dutoit call *the correspondence of forms*<sup>16</sup> — or what we may call *sameness* — is, he (both singly and with Dutoit) now argues, inconceivable from within psychoanalysis’s conceptual framework.

Psychoanalysis would reduce the radical alterity of sameness to a re-cognition of the familiar erotic appeal of the lacking partial object, of the seductive secret.

Throughout his work, Bersani has been concerned with the ethical value of what he already in *Baudelaire and Freud* names “psychic mobility” and “unanchored identity.”<sup>17</sup> For him, sexuality confounds the disciplinary ambitions of identity-formation — identities that enable the exercise of authority — in opening the subject to the world through the kind of “obscene passivity” that he identifies as the phobogenic core of homosexuality in “Is the Rectum a Grave?”: the openness of gay sexuality to *ébranlement* that not only names the radical passivity of sexuality’s *jouissance* but also the zero-degree tension of death.<sup>18</sup> In *The Freudian Body*, he argues, rephrasing Laplanche, that such an openness stems from the infant’s traumatic encounter with the unmanageable stimuli that threaten to unbind the incipient ego during its earliest stages of development. If “[s]exuality...is intolerable to the structured self,” this is because it emerges precisely as the *jouissance* of an ungovernable shattering that the infant survives by finding masochistic pleasure in it.<sup>19</sup> Sexuality, as this encounter with the real that the ego cannot cathect or facilitate in its existing mode, is close to the pleasure of the complete discharge of energies against which the reality principle guards us. In this shattering, the Bersani of *Baudelaire and Freud*, “Is the Rectum a Grave?” and *The Freudian Body* finds an ethical moment of relatedness that is premised neither on the masterful ambitions of His Majesty the Ego nor on “the *redemptive reinvention of sex*,” but on a radical openness to the world.<sup>20</sup>

Initially, he and Dutoit follow a familiar line of argument in *Caravaggio’s Secrets*. As much as Bersani postulates in *Baudelaire and Freud* that “going toward the object in fantasy may be equivalent to going away from it,”<sup>21</sup> Caravaggio’s paintings, he and Dutoit contend, exemplify the double movement of sexuality, of invitation and withdrawal, propelled by the enigmatic signifier. The enigmatic signifier for Laplanche structures the child’s first entry into subjectivity in which the mother (unintentionally) seduces the child with an address that the child is unable to “metabolize.”<sup>22</sup> Such a blockage constructs a secret that is inherent in sexuality itself, and in Caravaggio this “double movement” is visible in “the soliciting move [of, for example, Bacchus in *Bacchino Malato*] toward the viewer, and the self-concealing move away from the viewer. It is...the movement away that fascinates, indeed that eroticizes the body’s apparent (and deceptive) availability. The latter is at once put into question and sexualized by the suggestion of a secret.” Sexuality emerges when seduction to reading is “qualified by a partially self-concealing movement of retreat” (3). This seduction is simultaneously our initiation into relationality: “we are originally seduced into a relation by messages we can’t read, enigmatic messages that are perhaps inevitably interpreted as secrets.”<sup>23</sup>

Our inability to read, to symbolize, the enigmatic signifier introduces lack into being — or, perhaps more appropriately, our being as fundamentally lacking. Desire, as “an epistemological

category,” “is constituted, originally, as the exciting pain of a certain ignorance” (40). If desire is the seduction to read, the ego and the unconscious too emerge in conjunction with the enigmatic signifier: the unconscious, according to Laplanche, is constituted in primal repression by those parts of the maternal address that the child is unable to symbolize (39-40, 63-64). In this primal erotic appeal, “*an ego is erotically solicited into being*” (40).

But as Bersani and Dutoit point out, the enigmatic signifier that seduces us to being and to intersubjectivity also proscribes that relatedness as a paranoid and incorporative interrogation of the other and the world. Indeed, even if the object of desire is inevitably lost and “[t]he mobility of the desiring imagination makes the identity of the desiring self problematic,”<sup>24</sup> such shattering of the self does not dis- and re-orient our intersubjective coordinates. Rather, intersubjectivity here is based on secrets that appear just beyond our reach, behind the mask of the *objet a*. Pointing to “the inadequacy of knowledge as a category capable of containing the modes of relationality” (73), Bersani and Dutoit logically emphasize *unreadability* as a site where such coercive relatedness fails and where one may begin to envision a different form of connectedness. Yet, we must carefully distinguish between two forms of unreadability, as much as we must, according to Bersani and Dutoit, notice in Caravaggio “two kinds of concealment” (39). The first concealment refers to the erotic address of the enigmatic signifier, the second to “the ‘concealment’ of an unmappable extensibility of being” (39). In the former, the enigmatic signifier itself, blocking symbolization, becomes precisely the object of paranoid, inevitably failing investigation, which we can characterize in a Foucauldian vein as a form of disciplinary productivity. To this unreadability Bersani and Dutoit oppose the form of failure they find most interesting in, say, Beckett, Rothko, and Resnais, in whose work Bersani designates “failure” as the artists’ “failing with respect to certain traditions and expectation connected to the medium in which they were working.”<sup>25</sup> Contrary to the unreadability of the enigmatic signifier, which incites “paranoid aggression” or “mistrust” of the other and the world (94), this latter form of failure “inhibits a kind of appropriation of the work which we tend, as a result of a great deal of quite effective cultural training, to take for granted.”<sup>26</sup>

Despite initiating desire, inherently mobile in its endless displacements, the enigmatic signifier, Bersani and Dutoit now argue, in fact seduces the subject to a posture of immobility: it “structures a relation according to fixed gazes — not only the gaze of the one being seduced, but also the gaze of the seducer, who is himself (or herself) seeking in the curious and subjugated look of the other the secret of his (or her) own seductive power” (42). Working towards “the possibility of spatial interests not defined or directed by the imaginary secrets of the other,” Caravaggio, they suggest, envisions this new kind of relatedness — unhampered by the erotically soliciting secrets that circulate between subjects, unknowable to both the seduced and the seducer — through what they call “a betrayal of his subjects” (42). Betrayal becomes in Caravaggio,

as in Jean Genet's work, "an ethical necessity."<sup>27</sup> It marks a withdrawal of interest — and we can give this term its psychoanalytic specificity here — from the riddle-work that the enigmatic signifier initiates. For Bersani and Dutoit, it points to a form of relationality that does not address the secreted, individual core of the other. By the same token, it is a betrayal of what we have come to understand as the integrity of the historical and historicizable subject: Caravaggio hereby illustrates a shift from historicity to ontology, a "move from historical subjects to modes of being" (43). Similarly, Genet's betrayal is a more effective disruption of symbolic economy than the acts of appropriation and parody. Genet, Bersani claims in *Homos*, "is basically uninterested in any redeployment or resignification of dominant terms that would address the dominant culture."<sup>28</sup> Betrayal is, then, crucially different from the vicissitudes of performativity, or "inaccurate repetition," that Judith Butler theorizes.<sup>29</sup> "Genet's use of his culture's dominant terms...are designed not to rework or to subvert those terms, but to exploit their potential for erasing cultural relationality itself (that is, the very preconditions for subversive repositionings and defiant repetitions)."<sup>30</sup> Genet withdraws from the symbolic circuits whose resignification, however subversive, would merely repeat their laws. Through betrayal, the subject, instead of being caught in a game of paranoid identification and knowledge,<sup>31</sup> is opened to a play of inaccurate replication in which we find disparate parts of ourselves outside ourselves, enabling strange correspondences not between subjects but among dislocated, "impersonal" shards of what we have come to understand as the completeness of our being.<sup>32</sup> Betrayal is "an ethical necessity" because it unhinges our intersubjective relation to the other and to the world and, instead, calls for us to respond "incorrectly" to the erotically soliciting address, helping us to envision "a nonsadistic relation to external reality" (69).

In *Caravaggio's Secrets*, Bersani and Dutoit chart this movement "from a fascination with the enigmatically soliciting look...to other modes of spatial (and, implicitly, of affective and moral) connectedness" (99). In "Genital Chastity," Bersani similarly suggests that, in Aristophanes' speech in Plato's *Symposium*, desire emerges not as one for difference or complementarity but for "the *extensibility of sameness*."<sup>33</sup> He contends that what we seek in our lost halves is not difference, not the lacking organ of psychoanalysis, but rather an "inaccurate replication" of ourselves. He hereby articulates a form of relationality that confounds appropriative models of self and desire.<sup>34</sup> If "[a]ll being moves toward, corresponds with itself outside of itself,"<sup>35</sup> then this movement is not characterized by the illusion of the "*belong to me*" aspect that Lacan sees in the representations of the Cartesian subject.<sup>36</sup> Sameness, or one's inaccurate replication, is different from narcissism in that there is no bound self that can be in a specular relation to its mirror image. Rather, this new relationality allows what Bersani calls "impersonal narcissism," in which "the self out there is 'mine' without belonging to me."<sup>37</sup>

Unlike intersubjectivity initiated by the enigmatic signifier, this new form of connectedness comes into being when "the very gesture of concealment is performed as a physical *contact*

rather than a provocatively isolating move” (79). Such a gesture is illustrated, according to Bersani and Dutoit, by *St. John the Baptist with a Ram*, in which the youth’s turning away opens him to a contact with the animal. Thus what we may read as an erotically soliciting pose — at once offering and hiding, making available and turning away — opens onto another connectedness, this time between species. Rather than presenting the erotic emblems foregrounded in paintings such as *Victorious Cupid*, *St. John* is structured by a number of “fanlike structures opening outward, away from the youth’s body” (81). The painting de-privileges sexuality and brings out a more diffuse sensuality of surfaces — a “nonerotic sensuality” (79) — thereby offering a “scene of erotic provocation in which excitement would no longer be a function of an impenetrable subjectivity” (81). Our attention is displaced from subjective interiority (what does the youth want? what does he desire?) to the “indefinite extensibility” (82) — the youth’s interminable connectedness to other spaces and surfaces around him, extending in lines beyond the painting to an indefinite space. With the disappearance, or emptying-out, of the enigmatic signifier, the sensual is redirected from secret interiority to the indefinite openness of surfaces and spaces — in this case, to the sensual connectedness between species.

### HABITS OF DIFFERENCE

The impersonal, interspecies connectedness between the boy and the ram echoes Deleuze’s anti-humanism, which conceives of our being in the world in terms of assemblages and mixtures of bodies. Bersani, tracing “the relation of the human body not to a more or less enigmatic human intentionality, but rather to a vast family of materiality in which community is no longer a function of reciprocal readings of desire” (6), argues that “we can find ourselves *already* in the world — there not as a result of our projections but as a sign of the natural extensibility of all being.”<sup>38</sup> Deleuze concurs: “you are all this already....You are always an assemblage for an abstract machine, which is realized elsewhere in other assemblages. You are always in the middle of something; plant, animal or landscape.”<sup>39</sup> Suggesting what Keith Ansell Pearson calls “non-human becomings of life,”<sup>40</sup> Deleuze insists that bodies are always *assemblages* and *relations*: “Mixtures are in bodies, and in the depth of bodies: a body penetrates another and coexists with it in all of its parts, like a drop of wine in the ocean, or fire in iron.”<sup>41</sup> In Rosi Braidotti’s terms, both Deleuze and Bersani trace the flows of “open-ended, interrelational and trans-species” “nomadic” bodies that “explode[] the boundaries of humanism at skin level.”<sup>42</sup>

Tracing his thought to Spinoza, Deleuze conceptualizes such interconnectedness in terms of modes, which express eternal attributes. These modes can be understood as *virtualities* out of which particular bodies-as-relations are actualized: they are the given, unique relations of extensive parts: “A given mode ‘comes to exist,’ comes into existence, when an infinity of extensive parts enter into a *given* relation: it continues to exist as long as this relation holds.”<sup>43</sup>

According to Deleuze, a body consists of the “parts [that] belong to it...in terms of a certain relation (of motion and rest) that characterizes it.”<sup>44</sup> Each body is made of smaller bodies that accommodate themselves to or “resonate” with one another in a field of gravity or density: “There are no existing bodies, within Extension, that are not composed of a very great number of simple bodies.”<sup>45</sup> Some parts (or smaller bodies) that contribute to the singular relations are shared with other bodies, in which these parts enter into different relations. In other words, bodies do not form self-enclosed or separable fields but overlap with other bodies, sharing some parts that each body submits to a unique relation. Distinct from one another in their specific internal relations, they are connected through the parts they share (and, ultimately, the single substance of which they are expressions). In this sense, bodies parallel what Deleuze and Félix Guattari refer to as philosophical concepts. Concepts too are constellations of multiple components. While concepts in themselves are “whole,” they remain “fragmentary wholes.”<sup>46</sup> They resonate with other concepts, sharing components: “Concepts are centers of vibrations, each in itself and every one in relation to all the others. This is why they all resonate rather than cohere or correspond with each other.”<sup>47</sup> Concepts do not form “a puzzle,” a constellation of tightly interlocked pieces; rather, they, like bodies, form a relation through their *resonance*, an incorporeal frequency, as it were, that is unique for each singular concept or body.<sup>48</sup>

Such resonance and interpenetration of bodies and concepts, I suggest, echo Bersani’s notions of inaccurate replication and extensibility of being. According to both Deleuze and Bersani, we find ourselves already in the world, not in the form of a narcissistic mirror image nor the uncanny double but in partially corresponding forms, in a dynamic of “the incorporeal” or “impersonal narcissism.” Bodies become or disintegrate in a series of unforeseeable encounters where the relations that mark bodies’ uniqueness are strengthened, complicated, or destroyed. Following Spinoza’s ethics, Deleuze writes that “good” encounters are those that enhance or multiply the already existing relations, while “bad” (not “evil”) encounters are inimical to the current resonance of bodies. In either case, encounters are always marked by a ceaseless productivity of relations, that is, by *becoming*: “this process is that of all generation of formation, that is, of all coming into existence.”<sup>49</sup>

Like encounters, what Deleuze calls repetition emerges as “the fundamental category of a philosophy of the future [*la philosophie de l’avenir*].”<sup>50</sup> *L’avenir*, that which is to-come, denotes the radical, unpredictable future whose virtual becoming must take place outside representation.<sup>51</sup> Such a call for repetition and difference beyond representations is echoed by Bersani’s fascination with unreadability: that is, if difference is inimical to representation for Deleuze, sameness is closely linked to the unreadable for Bersani. In *Caravaggio’s Secrets*, failures of interpretation become ethical moments where coercive epistemological concerns yield to ontological modes of being in art and literature. Bersani refers to the move to ontology when he

describes his project as one of thinking of “presences of the subject in the world that are not effects of interpretation, projection or identification. The art [Bersani and Dutoit have] studied suggests, in different ways, that we are *already in the world* (even before we appear in it...), there are always relations, and not simply because we interpret and project and introject the world.”<sup>52</sup>

Both representation (in Deleuze) and readability (in Bersani) — even when the latter names the necessarily failing interrogation of the enigmatic signifier — foreclose the emergence of the future in constricting us to the predetermined circuits of desire-in-lack. Both Bersani and Deleuze wish to alienate us from our comforting modes of recognizability, which immobilize becoming into common sense or habit. Indeed, re-cognition is the opposite to, or pre-emptive of, encounters.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, referring to Henri Bergson’s work on duration and evolution, Deleuze notes that “habit never gives rise to true repetition.”<sup>54</sup> For Bergson, habit emerges nearly irresistibly in the necessary intermingling of *élan vital* and matter. As he writes in *Creative Evolution*, life infiltrates matter through a kind of deception — “a dint of humility” — to use it for its own purposes: “Life ha[s] to enter...into the habits of inert matter, in order to draw it little by little, magnetized, as it were, to another track.”<sup>55</sup> Matter’s resistance, however, often overcomes the suppleness and mobility of the vital impulse, “draw[ing] to itself the ever-alert activity of this higher principle, ...convert[ing] it to its own inertia and caus[ing] it to revert to mere automatism.”<sup>56</sup> Having taken the form of matter, life is almost inevitably seduced and trapped in “parasitic habits” in its inert forms of matter.<sup>57</sup> Like “ready-made” “garments” donned out of necessity for a particular occasion but consequently naturalized, habits become a layer of dead matter constricting the mobility and freedom of the living organism: “the body will become to the soul what...the garment was to the body itself — inert matter dumped down upon living energy.”<sup>58</sup>

Bergson insists that habitual actions pre-empt the unforeseeability of becoming. As forms of matter arrest the movement of *élan vital*, “hypnotiz[ing]” it, there begins the marking of time, the illusion of reversibility and repeatability: “Life in general,” Bergson writes, “is mobility itself; particular manifestations of life accept this mobility reluctantly, and consequently lag behind. It is always going ahead; they want to mark time.”<sup>59</sup> One can predict the future of such unorganized bodies because they are framed in “ready-made” slices out of the “whole.” “The mechanistic explanations...hold good for the systems that our thought artificially detaches from the whole. But of the whole itself and of the systems which, within this whole, seem to take after it, we cannot admit *a priori* that they are mechanically explicable, for then time would be useless, and even unreal. The essence of mechanical explanation, in fact, is to regard the future and the past as calculable functions of the present, and thus to claim that *all is given*.”<sup>60</sup> In Deleuze, such mechanistic predictions are exemplified by scientific experiments conducted in “relatively closed environments” where the openness and unpredictability of encounters have been eliminated.<sup>61</sup>

For Bersani, identities figure as something like habits, as coagulations of our infinite extensibility. Taking on such habits may be necessary for the continuity of particular forms of life, but they simultaneously constrict and discipline becoming. As much as habits for Bergson articulate yet immobilize life's thrust of becoming, Deleuze contends that both habit and memory are necessary for repetition to emerge as "the category of the future," yet repetition "mak[es] use of them as stages and leav[es] them in its wake."<sup>62</sup> For Bersani, identities domesticate becoming into the somnolent state of habitual action whereby the endless, inaccurate replication and correspondence of forms — the mixture of bodies, as Deleuze would say — are arrested into recognizable forms. Similarly, what Bergson calls habit-memory domesticates difference and prevents (Deleuzian) repetition. As Deleuze writes, one must "[o]ppose repetition not only to the generalities of habit but also the particularities of memory."<sup>63</sup> If psychoanalysis argues that "in mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish,"<sup>64</sup> both Bersani and Deleuze question the subject's absolute, immobile faithfulness to the past. Echoing Nietzsche, they point to forgetting as a condition of becoming; and for both, it is in its insistent return to memory where psychoanalysis prevents a thinking of the new: "We move by forgetting," Bersani writes, "and no human faculty is more alien to psychoanalysis than that of forgetting."<sup>65</sup> Deleuze too emphasizes the necessity of "active forgetting and affirmative experimentation with what is yet to come."<sup>66</sup> For him, repetition, as "the thought of the future," constitutes a break from habitual action and memory.<sup>67</sup> If the first passive synthesis is one of habit and thus linked to the present, the second passive synthesis is the condition of memory and the past. The third, active synthesis is one of forgetting: in Nietzschean terms, it enables the affirmation of the eternal return, the willing forgetfulness, the actualization of the new from the virtual.<sup>68</sup>

### THINKING SAMENESS

Considering these brief suggestions about Bersani's and Deleuze's shared trajectories, we can conclude that, through their thinking of mixtures of bodies and of communication of forms, both theorists engage us in conceptualizing what Braidotti calls "viral politics," that is, politics that eschews the human as its necessary agent and instead emerges from a "dynamic process of interaction between the human and the non-human."<sup>69</sup> The comparison between Deleuze and Bersani suggests to us what is perhaps a surprising revelation about the latter's work: he sketches in his latest texts a philosophy of affirmation, of life's ineffable productivity. The emphasis on relationality offers him a way to think about infinite interconnectedness that characterizes Deleuze's thinking about encounters of bodies and the univocity of Being.

"Viral politics" — or politics of becoming — allows the emergence of possibilities that, as I noted in the opening of this essay, vary from current modes of being so drastically as to constitute monstrosities. In a Darwinian sense, of course, such "teratological variations" are only rarely

sustainable; more often than not, in crossing the limits of tolerable change, they constitute evolutionary disadvantages that are eliminated by natural selection.<sup>70</sup> However, in the rare cases where these unforeseeable variations do survive, they do so by precipitating an evolutionary leap that radically transforms the existing horizon of possibilities. That such metamorphoses are terrifying in their unknowability explains why even radical forms of politics, while finding the existing conditions intolerable, may refuse to embrace an unpredictable future as their aim. In this context, Foucault's rejection of planned resistance in his post-genealogical texts challenges us to think of politics as evolutionary becoming, thwarting power's ability "to make the eruption of the event part of the fabric of the known."<sup>71</sup> Like Foucault's politics, whose future must remain "wide open,"<sup>72</sup> evolution, according to Bergson, has no habits or plans: "A plan is a term assigned to a labor: it closes the future whose form it indicates. Before the evolution of life, on the contrary, the portals of the future [*les portes de l'avenir*] remain wide open."<sup>73</sup>

In his implicit focus on the question of sameness, Bersani seems to suggest that, having congealed into a predictable program, our thinking of difference may have foreclosed the operations of what Deleuze calls "difference in itself [*différence en elle-même*]."<sup>74</sup> If sameness emerges as a category of becoming, this is because it opens at this precise historical moment as the defamiliarizing figure of the new. By connecting Bersani to Deleuze, we may be able to pursue the interimplicated questions of thinking and becoming, the two central themes in the latter's work.



1. Michel Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," trans. John Johnston, in *Essential Works of Foucault, Vol. 1: Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 136; "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," in *Essential Works*, vol. 1, 263.
2. Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," 139.
3. David H. J. Larmour, Paul Allen Miller, and Charles Platter, "Introduction: Situating *The History of Sexuality*," in *Rethinking Sexuality: Foucault and Classical Antiquity*, ed. Larmour, Miller, and Platter (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 18.
4. Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," 138.
5. As Arnold Davidson notes, the back cover of the French first edition listed the forthcoming volumes, which were to deal with "the problematization of sex in early Christianity," children's sexuality, women's sexuality and bodies, perversions, and the "biopolitics" of population and race (Davidson, "Ethics as Ascetics: Foucault, the History of Ethics, and Ancient Thought," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 117).
6. Foucault, "An Aesthetics of Existence," trans. Alan Sheridan, in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1988), 47.
7. *Ibid.*, 48.
8. Davidson, 115.
9. Qtd. in Tim Dean, Hal Foster, and Kaja Silverman, "A Conversation with Leo Bersani," *October* 82 (Fall 1997): 4.
10. Bersani, *Baudelaire and Freud* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 3.
11. Bersani, "Against Monogamy," in *Beyond Redemption: The Work of Leo Bersani*, ed. Timothy Clark and Nicholas Royle, a special issue of *Oxford Literary Review*, 20:1-2 (1998): 5.
12. See Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Seán Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).
13. Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 86.
14. Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 7.
15. Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 30, 3, 10.
16. Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Forms of Violence: Narrative in Assyrian Art and Modern Culture* (New York: Schocken Books), 1985. In Bersani's own work, this term is renamed "communication of forms" (Bersani, "Against Monogamy," 20).
17. Bersani, *Baudelaire and Freud*, 2.
18. Apart from gay men's sexuality, Bersani locates exemplars of such "obscene" openness and passivity — "the terrifying appeal of a loss of the ego, of a self-debasement" (Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?," in *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, ed. Douglas Crimp [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988], 220) — also in artists. He argues that in Baudelaire, for example, "the artist loses his virile identity *through* an obscene openness to external reality which makes him an artist but which also makes him—a woman" (Bersani, *Baudelaire and Freud*, 14).
19. Bersani, *Baudelaire and Freud*, 77; *The Freudian Body*, 38-39; "Is the Rectum a Grave?," 217. See also Laplanche, "To Situate Sublimation," trans. Richard Miller, *October* 28 (1984): 20-23.
20. Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?," 215; *Baudelaire and Freud*, 14.

21. Bersani, *Baudelaire and Freud*, 38.
22. Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio's Secrets* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 40. Subsequent references will be given parenthetically within the text. See also Bersani, "Genital Chastity," in *Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Tim Dean and Christopher Lane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 356; and "Sociality and Sexuality," *Critical Inquiry* 26:4 (Summer 2000): 646. These essays are nearly identical; where the same text appears in both, I have cited only "Genital Chastity," the more recent of the two.
23. Bersani, "Sociality and Sexuality," 646.
24. Bersani, *Baudelaire and Freud*, 40.
25. Nicholas Royle, "Beyond Redemption: An Interview with Leo Bersani," in Clark and Royle (eds.), 174. For discussion of Beckett, Rothko, and Resnais, see Bersani and Dutoit, *Arts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).
26. Royle, 174.
27. Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 151.
28. *Ibid.*, 152.
29. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); and *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), esp. 1-30. Bersani objects particularly to Butler's reading of Jeannie Livingston's film *Paris Is Burning*. He argues that, rather than subversively resignifying the terms of a racist and homophobic culture, the subjects in the film, "in their pathetically minute attention to the styles of power from which they have been permanently excluded, ...perform nothing more than their own submission to being brainwashed, safely sequestered, and, if necessary, readied for annihilation" (Bersani, *Homos*, 49; see Butler, "Gender Is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion," in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* [New York: Routledge, 1993], 121-140). Obviously, Butler's "inaccurate repetition" must be clearly distinguished from Bersani's "inaccurate self-replication": one way to think of this difference in Deleuzian terms is to note that, while Butler's performativity is ironic, the proper register for betrayal and inaccurate self-replication would be humor (see Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton [New York: Columbia University Press, 1994], 5).
30. Bersani, *Homos*, 153.
31. See Jacques Lacan, "Seminar on "The Purloined Letter,"" trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, in *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida, and Psychoanalytic Reading*, ed. John P. Muller and William J. Richardson (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 28-54; and Lacan, *Seminar II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 175-205.
32. Parenthetically, let us note the inadequacy of language to think this dynamic, which makes the above self-reflexive and proprietorial gestures ("*we find...ourselves*") anachronistic. Rather, here we must begin to conceive of this mixture of bodies or inaccurate replication in terms of an impersonal, subject-less connectivity. Tim Dean briefly discusses the question of "impersonality" in terms of psychoanalysis's understanding of sexuality and fantasy in *Beyond Sexuality* (Chicago University Press, 2000), 85, 261ff. While I am unable here to pursue this link, we may note, anticipating my turn to Deleuze's work below, that the notion of impersonality occupies also Deleuze: see John Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 80ff.
33. Bersani, "Genital Chastity," 365.
34. Here Kaja Silverman's concept of "heteropathic identification" approximates that of inaccurate replication. Like the latter, Silverman's notion seeks to articulate an

- identificatory mode based not on the complete correspondence of self to the desired other but a partial sameness, that is, a replication where parts of ourselves resonate with or correspond to the outside. See, Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 22-27 and passim.
35. Bersani, "Genital Chastity," 365.
  36. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), 81.
  37. Bersani, "Genital Chastity," 365; see also Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio's Secrets*, 20, 77.
  38. Bersani, "Against Monogamy," 20.
  39. Deleuze and Parnet, 112-113.
  40. Keith Ansell Pearson, *Viroid Life: Perspectives on Nietzsche and the Transhuman Condition* (London: Routledge, 1997), 109.
  41. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 5-6.
  42. Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 124.
  43. Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone, 1992), 208.
  44. Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights, 1988), 32.
  45. Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 201.
  46. Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 16.
  47. *Ibid.*, 23.
  48. *Ibid.*, 19.
  49. Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 210.
  50. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 5, 94; Deleuze, *Différence et répétition* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1968), 12, 125.
  51. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 8, 10. On the question of the "virtual," see Pearson, *Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual: Bergson and the Time of Life* (London: Routledge, 2002).
  52. Royle, 187, ellipsis in original.
  53. Deleuze and Parnet, 8.
  54. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 5.
  55. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (Mineola: Dover, 1998), 99.
  56. Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (New York: Macmillan, 1911), 28.
  57. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 113.
  58. Bergson, *Laughter*, 50; see also *ibid.*, 149.
  59. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 104, 128.
  60. *Ibid.*, 37.
  61. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 3.
  62. *Ibid.*, 94.
  63. *Ibid.*, 7.
  64. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey et al. (London: Hogarth, 1953-1974), 21:69.
  65. Bersani, "Against Monogamy," 21.
  66. Rajchman, 133.

67. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 7.
68. *Ibid.*, 79 ff.
69. Braidotti, 266.
70. See Elizabeth Grosz, "Darwin and Feminism: Preliminary Investigation for a Possible Alliance," *Australian Feminist Studies* 14:29 (1999): 35.
71. Grosz, "Thinking the New: Of Futures Yet Unthought," in *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory, and Futures*, ed. Grosz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 16.
72. Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," 139.
73. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 104-105; *L'évolution créatrice* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1914), 114. See also Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Citadel, 1992), 104.
74. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 94; *Différence et répétition*, 126.

