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# HOMOS

*Leo Bersani*

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**HOMOS** Leo Bersani
Acclaimed for his intricate, incisive, and often controversial explorations of art, literature, and society, Leo Bersani now addresses homosexuality in America.

Hardly a day goes by without the media focusing an often sympathetic beam on gay life--and, with AIDS, on gay death. Gay plays on Broadway, big book awards to authors writing on gay subjects, Hollywood movies with gay themes, gay and lesbian studies at dozens of universities, openly gay columnists and even editors at national mainstream publications, political leaders speaking in favor of gay rights: it seems that straight America has finally begun to listen to homosexual America.

Still, Bersani notes, not only has homophobia grown more virulent, but many gay men and lesbians themselves are reluctant to be identified as homosexuals. In *Homos*, he studies the historical, political, and philosophical grounds for the current distrust, within the gay community, of self-identifying moves, for the paradoxical desire to be invisibly visible. While acknowledging the dangers of any kind of group identification (if you can be singled out, you can be disciplined), Bersani argues for a bolder presentation of what it means to be gay. In their justifiable suspicion of labels, gay men and lesbians have nearly disappeared into their own sophisticated awareness of how they have been socially constructed. By downplaying their sexuality, gays risk self-immolation--they will melt into the stifling culture they had wanted to contest.

In his chapters on contemporary queer theory, on Foucault and psychoanalysis, on the politics of sadomasochism, and on the image of "the gay outlaw" in works by Gide, Proust, and Genet, Bersani raises the exciting possibility that same-sex desire by its very nature can disrupt oppressive social orders. His spectacular theory of "homo-ness" will be of interest to straights as well as gays, for it designates a mode of connecting to the world embodied in, but not reducible to, a sexual preference. The gay identity Bersani advocates is more of a force--as such, rather cool to the modest goal of social tolerance for diverse lifestyles--which can lead to a massive redefining of sociality itself, and of what we might expect from human communities.

Reviews of this book:
"Perhaps no one since Leo Bersani in 'Is the Rectum a Grave?' has written so convincingly against the danger of homosexual assimilation as Leo Bersani in *Homos*...One of the strongest elements of [this book] is Bersani's attack on things which promote a `denial of sex,' whether it be sex acts themselves or, more importantly, the context in which those sex acts are made possible...*Homos* is a profound piece of imaginative literature."

--Dale Peck, *Voice Literary Supplement*

> "In *Homos*, Leo Bersani effectively attacks some sacred cows of gay cultural theory. Most obviously, he argues against the tenet that gay and lesbian identities are socially constructed and so ultimately (indeed, preferably) dissolvable...Refreshingly, [Bersani] also does not skate round sensitive questions such as the status of sadomasochism within gay sexual practice, and the tortuousness of the political liaison between gays and lesbians...Bersani emerges as our most persuasive advocate of homosexual identities that offer and require social resistance--he terms this 'anticommunitarianism'--but also as perhaps the only writer in the field who convincingly brings together psychological and sociological accounts of sexuality."

--Richard Canning, *New Statesman & Society*

"Bersani engages with questions which the gay movement cannot ignore."
--*Times Literary Supplement*

"In his provocative and sure-to-be-controversial book, *Homos*, Bersani argues for the need to preserve the 'otherness' that he maintains is the essential core of homosexual identity."
--David Wiegand, *San Francisco Chronicle*

"*Homos* is one of the most...

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