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To cite this article: Hector Kollias (2013) 'Another man is an other': impersonal narcissism, male homosexuality, perversion, *Textual Practice*, 27:6, 991-1011, DOI: [10.1080/0950236X.2013.830824](https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2013.830824)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2013.830824>



Published online: 11 Oct 2013.



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'Another man is an other': impersonal narcissism, male homosexuality, perversion

The concept of impersonal narcissism Bersani and Phillips envisage and advocate in *'Intimacies'* has a long history, not least in Bersani's attempt to rethink male homosexuality as 'homo-ness', alongside his even longer-lasting project of reconceptualising some of the fundamentals of psychoanalytic thought. Tracing these developments in Bersani's thought, this article seeks to align them with a much-maligned and prone to misuse concept, taken from a very different psychoanalytic vocabulary, namely Lacanian perversion. Elaborating a notion of perversion that can confidently be traced in Lacan's teachings but that, at the same time, veers resolutely away from the facile condemnations of perversion in much 'orthodox' accounts indebted to Lacan, and which have significantly contributed to the all-out rejection of psychoanalysis within the dominant currents of queer theory, I aim to bring Lacan's pervert and Bersani's impersonal narcissist together, rehabilitating the concept of perversion as supremely useful and salutary. Thanks to the alignment between a seemingly – but only superficially – homophobic Lacan, and the core of Bersani's ideas around impersonal narcissism as inseparable from a narrower conception of male homosexuality, the goal of this article is to help us understand the ineluctable relation between the transgression of a sexual norm and the generation of that very norm.

Keywords

Impersonal narcissism; perversion; homosexuality; psychoanalysis; Bersani; Lacan; Phillips; Freud; queer theory; Dustan

1. Celebrating failures

'Psychoanalysis', Adam Phillips writes in the preface to *Intimacies*, 'has become the discipline of useful errors, of instructive (and destructive) mistakes, of radical roads not taken'.¹ Leo Bersani, co-author of the same book, has spent a good deal of the past 30 years, at least since *The Freudian Body*, arguing that Freudian metapsychology is rife with 'moments of textual embarrassment', to the point where it '*depends on* a process of theoretical collapse' (FB 2, 3). Bersani's attitude towards this collapse has not been to abandon psychoanalysis but to embrace it *because of* those errors: 'I want to celebrate a certain type of failure in Freud's thought' (FB, 3). Not only does this failure result in the manifold 'instructive (and destructive) mistakes' that psychoanalysts in Freud's wake will make and continue to make; if it is to be celebrated, this is because this same failure also leads to 'reinventions' of psychoanalysis that would not redeem or correct the failures of its founding father, but rather keep up with his 'recklessly self-defeating moves' (FB, 10).

The project articulated in *Intimacies* clearly wants to belong in this lineage of productive offshoots from the celebrated failures in Freud's theories. This project is variously named in Bersani's writings: 'a communal model of impersonal intimacy' (I, 42), 'impersonal narcissism' (I, 77), or 'spatial, anonymous narcissism' (RG, 75). *Intimacies* is the latest in a long line of efforts to think 'new relational modes', the formula – and the challenge – Bersani inherits from Michel Foucault.² In the tale Socrates tells about love in Plato's *Phaedrus*, Bersani discovers 'a narcissistic pleasure that sustains human intimacy, that may be the precondition for love of the other' (I, 72). Bersani redefines Socratic love as impersonal narcissism, as 'narcissistic love' that at the same time 'is exactly identical to a perfect knowledge of otherness' (I, 84, 85). Therefore this becomes an elaboration of his earlier exploration of the theme of 'homo-ness', Bersani's effort to think how 'the homosexual as a category [...] might be the model for correspondences of being that are by no means limited to relations among persons' (RG, 44). For me, the promise of impersonal narcissism is thus integral to what I consider the most strikingly original, as well as the most intellectually and politically riveting attempt at 'thinking homosexuality' since Foucault, going well beyond the often gratuitously self-congratulatory and/or meaninglessly self-dispersing discursive machinations of a queer theory that would have nothing to do with any attempt at theorizing homosexuality at all. But 'the homosexual as category' can all too easily fold back into a more particular configuration of homosexuality – *male* homosexuality upon be exact – and thus easily fall foul of criticisms of its particularity.³ Is the ostensible privilege bestowed upon the male homosexual in Bersani justifiable? Does that

privilege extend to all, or only to some male homosexuals, and is there a set of criteria with which to decide?

In attempting to tackle these questions, I am proposing a rather surprising affiliation with another 'radical road not taken' and which runs parallel to impersonal narcissism's path, as well as delineating, from within psychoanalysis, traces of a theory 'that can be used to resist projects of subjection' (I, 65). I am referring to what is surely one of the most maligned, muddled, prone-to-collapse concepts in the entire psychoanalytic vocabulary: perversion. Perversion represents a kind of failure itself, firstly in the way it is psychoanalytically determined as such, in the sense that the perverse subject is somehow stuck in developmental arrest, falling short of the normative prescriptions that have persisted in psychoanalytic thinking since Freud. Secondly, perversion is a failure within psychoanalysis itself, an idea that never manages to attain full elaboration, whose definitions are often contradictory or unsatisfactory, and whose intractable normalizing connotations invite – and for good reason – the ire of many, not least Foucault. I am – perhaps perversely – advocating a version of perversion which is also rife with contradictions and internal ruptures destined to be subsequently *sutured*: Lacan's. And, just as Bersani hints at the possibility that those 'moments of textual embarrassment' can reveal 'the politically radical currents of [Freud's] thought', I also want to trace the points in Lacan's thought on perversion where the redemptive temptation can be countered by the insistence on a failure worth celebrating (FB, 2).

Perversion in Lacanian theory is one of the three 'subjective structures', the three clinical categories under which a subject can be classified, alongside neurosis and psychosis – and I am well aware that this definition is inadequate. Whatever perversion turns out to be, in his Seminar on transference Lacan is adamant that Greek love, the same male homosexuality anchoring Bersani's impersonal narcissism: 'was then what it is now, a perversion'.⁴ The notion that homosexuality, male or female, is subsumed under the category of perversion in Lacan's thought is clearly anathema to anyone invested in Foucault or queer theory, yet the reason I want to think Bersani and Lacan together is precisely because they provide complementary and equally salutary frameworks for thinking homosexuality. Of the numerous caveats and precautions solicited by such an endeavour, the most important might be to say that it is clearly not the case either that impersonal narcissism pertains only to male homosexuals or that perversion as a category covers only male homosexuality.⁵ And yet, even in *Intimacies*, despite the wide range of references, the majority of 'test cases' for impersonal narcissism are male homosexuals. Similarly, although Lacan himself wrote on sadism, masochism, voyeurism, exhibitionism, fetishism – the entire Kraft-Ebbing menagerie – the same questions about the

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exemplarity of male homosexuality can also be asked of his work, and even more so that of his followers whose doctrinal position is here ironically ventriloquized by Tim Dean: 'our examples of perverts are almost always gay men'.⁶

What I propose as my version of (Lacan's) perversion is resolutely *not* an orthodox Lacanian one, despite stubbornly claiming to be Lacan's. This is due to what I perceive as yet another failure – one that I will *not* be celebrating – resulting from the stultifying fate that Lacan's theoretical legacy has suffered in the hands of his orthodox followers. What 'has become' of Lacan's notion of perversion is tantamount to the ossification of a volatile, erratic category whose politically radical potential has been neutralized and straitjacketed into a 'structure'. The tension between the undeniable 'structuring' impulse in Lacan's thought and his equally undeniable reluctance (or failure) to achieve systematicity will prove an ally in my effort to demonstrate the scope and the value of perversion, both as psychoanalytic category and as a concept whose operation in the social/political field seeks out, in order to oppose, all forms of normativity. The ideas wrestled with here would follow the celebrated failure to conceptualize human sexuality that began with Freud, continued with Lacan, and is still failing. As Samuel Beckett, another of Bersani's favourite references would have it: 'Fail again, fail better'.⁷

2. Raising the 'homo' to the dignity of the pervert: how to read Bersani with Lacan

Before *Intimacies*, the components of a theory of impersonal narcissism were chiefly to be found in Bersani's readings of another of Plato's dialogues, *The Symposium*, an essential text for Lacan too; and also, crucially, for Freud's account of male homosexuality in his essay on Leonardo da Vinci. It is here that, despite his initial judgment on Freud's diagnosis of Leonardo as 'obsolete and offensive', Bersani locates the promissory core of impersonal narcissism: 'object-love as self-love' (RG, 54, 53). Leonardo, speculates Freud, identifies with his mother's desire for him, and later seeks substitutes of himself, whom he desires in the way he imagines his mother desired him. Bersani calls this 'identification as libidinal recognition': 'The ability to identify with the loved object allows for a very different relation to the world. [...] The self-preservative hatred of objects, [becomes] secondary to an object-love identical to self-love' (RG, 53, 56). And Bersani clearly sees that this process in which subject and object, self and other collapse or invert into each other, can be 'conceived of within the Freudian scheme [...] only as *a perversion*' (RG, 53, emphasis added).⁸ Perversion in this sense, and in the case of Leonardo specifically, is also

what results from what Bersani elsewhere addressed as 'a certain failure on the part of the father during the Oedipal period to crystallize into the prohibitive Law' (FB, 109). And of course, this is the perversion occupying Lacan in his discussion of *The Symposium*, the perversion he unmistakably, yet in typically indirect fashion, points to with his quick characterization of Alcibiades as 'by no means a neurotic' (Ec, 699).

But what is perversion, and why is (male) homosexuality one? Undeniably, as the word itself suggests and as its history testifies, perversion is determined with reference to normative criteria – and yet psychoanalysis has arguably done the most damage to the very criteria of normativity with which perversion could be safely delineated. Lacan attempts to investigate this: '[Perversion] is not simply an aberration in relation to social criteria [...] although this register is not absent, nor is it an atypicality according to natural criteria [...]. It is something else in its very structure' (I: 221). The register of normativity is never absent from a consideration of perversion, but Freud had already amply demonstrated that not only are the sexual drives entirely divorced from 'natural criteria', they effectively sabotage any normative imposition altogether.⁹ Nevertheless, psychoanalysis has found a way of recuperating the notion of perversion, a story that remains cherished to the present day: as perverse as the drives may be at the start, the grand Oedipal narrative proclaims there is to be development, 'maturation', and perversion is only its arrest, its stalling. Jacques-Alain Miller puts it very clearly: 'the normaliser [...] in psychoanalysis is classically presented as the Oedipus complex'.¹⁰ The contemporary clinical adumbration of that idea is that perversion represents a 'failure of symbolization', an abstraction aiming to keep together both the 'structural' perspective whereby perversion is distinct from the other clinical structures for specific formal reasons, and the intractable notion of 'failure', of something gone askew in the profoundly normative evolution here proposed.¹¹

But Oedipus is not the only 'normalizer'.¹² In the context of their collaboration in *Intimacies*, and given the unmistakable anti-normalizing force of Bersani's project as a whole, I find it shocking that Adam Phillips also sets up a 'normalizer' against the ogre of perversion: desire itself. 'The Uses of Desire', published two years before *Intimacies*, finds Phillips deploying uncharacteristically *doctrinaire* non-Lacanian arguments about perversion even as he claims Lacan as the major influence for his conception of desire. Whilst desire is 'the impossibility of knowing [...] what one wants', 'perversions describe a state of frantic certainty' (UD, 172). Perversion is 'whatever is the enemy of the new, whatever is horrified by the future', the frantic certainty about what one wants that can only be described 'in terms of revenge, mastery and repair' (UD, 172, 173). Pitted against a future-embracing desire 'hoping for whatever actually happens', it is not hard to see how perversion thus becomes 'the antonym of desire', a

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‘pre-emptive strike against the differentness of another person’, even ‘our secular, sexualized, ersatz form of redemption’ (UD, 172, 177). Although as ‘antonym’ perversion could be seen as formally or logically opposing desire, Phillips prefers to see desire ‘not so much in opposition with perversion as at odds with it’ (UD, 178). Implicit already in the counter-definitions given in terms of hope and futurity versus frantic ‘knowingness’ and reparation or revenge, the normativity this ‘at odds with’ sets up is made explicit with the following forceful rhetorical questions:

What happens, as in so-called perversions, when the demand for love is pre-empted by or located in an apparently recognizable object? If, say, the demand for love is a demand for hope, what kind of hope is there in a shoe? (UD, 168)¹³

Such censure, regrettably, legitimizes the kind of all-round rejections of psychoanalysis as inherently normalizing and disciplinary that are rife in post-Foucauldian queer theory. I am more concerned, however, with the way that Phillips’s disdain for the ‘apparently recognizable object’ would also thereby denounce Bersani’s fertile correspondence between ‘libidinal recognition’ and identification in the paradigmatic case of ‘object-love as self-love’. Bersani’s pre-*Intimacies* articulation of impersonal narcissism in Leonardo and in Socrates as able to ‘break down the defensive formation of the self-congratulatory ego’ is remarkably refuted almost point by point by Phillips’s pre-*Intimacies* demonization of perversion (RG, 34). Where Bersani found in Freud’s ‘obsolete’ account the very way to overcome its obsolescence, Phillips is here consigning the core, the origin of impersonal narcissism to the quagmire of developmental and moral aberration. The reasons why Phillips appears so misguided are instructive. The fact that his conception of perversion derives from object-relations analysts like Masud Khan and Robert Stoller while that of desire is indebted to Lacan is symptomatic of a curious split that engenders multiple contradictions – though neither accuracy nor fidelity is here the point.¹⁴ More troubling is the slide from a conception of desire ‘com[ing] from a wholly other outside and/or a wholly other inside’ – what Phillips will later poignantly call ‘the impersonality of desire’ (I, 115) – to one where it is opposed to the ‘pre-emptive strike against the differentness of *another person*’ (UD, 166, 172, emphasis added). More worrying is the re-introduction of normativity by the back door, as a result of desire’s recuperation, its redemption from impersonality. It is not the pervert whose project is reparation, but rather Phillips who restores desire to the fullness of personality.

Why would Phillips retreat from a ‘formal’ or logical opposition between desire and perversion? Might the motive for this reparation be that inherent in the logic of opposition is the reversal, the flip-over of

the opposed terms? Opposition as logical connection, as Hegel knew, does not allow hierarchy in its pure form; hierarchical distinction is an addition, a normative supplement. When Lacan mysteriously intimates that perversion is 'something else in its very structure' he aims at moving away from the normative whilst keeping an eye on its insistence to come into the frame whenever perversion is discussed. In my reading, he manages to do this much more diligently than a number of his pronouncements on the perversions may lead one to believe. He does it by being a good Hegelian, by sticking with the logical structure of opposition, with its constitutive operation of flipping or inversion – what from now on I shall be calling 'the perverse operation'. Lacan's mathemes of fantasy and of perversion are quasi-algebraic formulae set up to formalize Freud's famous opposition of perversion, not to desire but to neurosis. They are the foundations of both Lacan's and my elaborations of the concept. The matheme of fantasy, also called the 'fundamental fantasy' and pertaining to neurotic subjects, is written thus:¹⁵

$$\S \diamond a$$

where \S denotes the subject and a is short for *objet a*, whilst the 'lozenge' (\diamond) signifies their mode of relation. The matheme of fantasy therefore states: the subject in its particular relational mode to *objet a*; whereas the matheme of perversion:

$$a \diamond \S$$

apparently signifies the inverse.

Appearances deceive. On one level, that which Lacan would qualify as Imaginary, the mathemes, flipped over by that logical or *structural* operation inherent in opposition, are mirror images of each other. The operation of the flip that generates them is nothing other than itself, devoid of any further determination, normative or otherwise. Both it and the mathemes themselves are formal descriptors, incommensurable with norms. However, and crucially, the elements constituting the mathemes, also formal descriptors that I hastily glossed just now, are absolutely incommensurate with each other. On a second, Symbolic level then, what obtains *after* one matheme is flipped over to the other far from mirrors what obtained *before*. Inasmuch as the mathemes resemble predicative sentences, their meaning, the mode of relation represented by the 'lozenge' (\diamond) will differ depending on the position of subject and predicate/object. Crudely put: the subject can never be thought of as equivalent or commensurate to *objet a*. For Lacan \S is the subject as 'barred', cut through by the

signifier, the subject of language that is also therefore the subject of castration and of desire, while *objet a* is typically referred to as the ‘object-cause of desire’ – not ‘the object of desire’ because desire is a relation to a lack and not to an object. Before he came to this way of describing *objet a*, Lacan had already been using this symbol in the more intuitive sense of ‘objet petit autre’, that is to say as the Other (‘Autre’, symbolised A) as partially manifested as object (*a*) for the subject; and this partiality will also mean that *objet a* can signify the partial object of the drive. It is this aspect of *objet a* that gives this relatively late definition of perversion its force: ‘that which I define as perversion is the restoration [. . .] the restitution of *a* in the field of A’ (XVI: 291). What is the ‘object’ that the pervert seeks to restore, to give back to the Other? Is it an object, a partial object, or (the object of) a lack? And how can such an object, in the operation of the matheme, take the subject’s place? To answer these questions a detour is necessary; a detour that paradoxically leads to the conceptual core of my effort to think Lacan and Bersani together.

The most consequential alignment between Bersani and Lacan would focus on a set of densely argued theses within texts with ostensibly different agendas, but which show them both now undertaking a real and avowed departure from Freudian doctrine, a reinvention of Freudian metapsychology, specifically of the idea of sublimation. In essence, where Freud understood sublimation as the channelling of the drive’s energies onto non-sexual objects, the productive digression or swerve resulting in socially valorized artistic and intellectual endeavours, the activity ultimately responsible for civilization as a whole, Lacan and Bersani both, while they do not dismiss this notion, are equally adamant that sublimation does not entail a defusing of the drive. On the contrary, they both assert that in sublimation the drive is at its most powerful; the drive effectively sublimates, raises *itself*. For Bersani this means not only that sublimation is ‘grounded in unalloyed sexuality’, in the solipsistic, object-less auto-erotic drives of earliest infancy, but that with each sublimation that the originary quantum of drive energy (or libido) undergoes, new forms of self-organisation and self-projection are born: it is ‘the sublimation of auto-eroticism’ that gives rise to the ego, and it is the ego’s ‘anticipated self-shattering’ that gets sublimated into the ego-ideal (CR, 37, 38). In *The Culture of Redemption* Bersani radically rethinks the fundamental tenets of Freudian metapsychology and underwrites the formation of the ego not as precariously attached to its own exigency of self-preservation but rather to more and more ‘elaborated mode[s] of self-enjoyment’, increasingly complex, sublimated forms of the originary ‘*jouissance* of self-shattering’ (CR, 43, 41). Thus, by mapping the dominance of self-shattering *jouissance* onto the progressive formations of the ego, Bersani essentially rewrites narcissism in and as sublimation; he dares to

imagine the subject (the ego) as the complex but direct product of 'unalloyed' drive energy.

If one could thus claim that Bersani's sublimation, 'unalloyed' self-reflective sexuality, is 'of the subject', and that as such it also provides the very foundations for impersonal narcissism, Lacan finds himself on the other side of the 'lozenge', as it were. His idea of sublimation starts from the pronounced suspicion of its conception as a defusing of the drive and ends up circumnavigating possibly his most conceptually agile and most influential innovation – *objet a*. Lacan takes seriously the notion that sublimation is a 'vicissitude' of the drive, but appears to agonize for years over Freud's assertion that it relates to a 'change' in the drive's object. Sublimation is certainly an operation upon the object, but by means of sublimation the drive itself is fundamentally reoriented, its aim being not the attainment of an object that would satisfy it, but satisfaction itself by means of sublimating that object. This is after all what the well-known formula 'sublimation raises the object [...] to the dignity of the Thing' states (VII: 112). If the drive in sublimation can raise its object to the dignity of the Thing (*La Chose*) – the always-already lost object that cannot be recuperated within the Symbolic – then the drive, partial, regressive, subordinated to the superior machinations of desire and fantasy of which, in some accounts, it is merely the servant, now acquires a terrible potency. When he fleetingly dares to suggest that sublimation is 'in itself a mode of satisfaction for the drive' Lacan may not appear to depart much from Freudian orthodoxy (XVI: 214). But it only takes a cursory reading of what sublimation is capable of yielding in Seminar VII to recoil immediately from its omnipotent compulsion and from the Thing that plays flame to its moth. Sublimation ultimately becomes for Lacan the sign of the drive's power extending over all object relations, the royal route to *jouissance* which for the drive is but a circle or a circuit designed never to attain *jouissance* in the Thing itself – unequivocally designated as evil, suffering or death – but to zoom in on that object lying at the heart of the circuit and which represents for the drive (and for the subject) the remainder, the surplus *jouissance* animating its every movement. This, finally, is *objet a*.

What this focus on sublimation aims to show is essentially that Bersani and Lacan, large differences notwithstanding, find themselves in alignment over the single most important element shared by the constellations of impersonal narcissism and perversion: *jouissance*. For Bersani famously *jouissance* becomes the very ethical principle of 'homo-ness', 'our primary practice of non-violence' which the male homosexual, or rather the homo, 'proposes and dangerously represents [...] as a mode of asceticism', a notion whose dangerous fascination may have been toned down but still survives in *Intimacies* (RG, 30).¹⁶ For Lacan, equally

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famously, *jouissance* becomes integral to *objet a*, perhaps even more than the desire of which the *objet a* is nothing more than the cause. In *objet a* as remnant of 'the Thing' of Seminar VII, as seat of the 'surplus *jouissance*' the Other is always perceived as being endowed with, Lacan has located what is the determining, the most consequential descriptor in the mathemes of fantasy and perversion alike: by designating the object as indelibly vitiated by the stain of the Real, by surplus *jouissance*, Lacan has ensured that no possible relation represented by a lozenge could ever designate an equivocation between \$ and *a*. And despite the raft of 'precautionary measures' buttressing neurosis and the castrated subject as the subject for whom '*jouissance* is forbidden', reached only by that suspiciously *inverted* 'ladder of desire', Lacan also makes it clear – at times not without a certain degree of rancour it seems to me – that there are those who throw caution to the wind and try at least to cosy up to the evil and the suffering and the orgiastic pleasure of *jouissance* (Ec. 696, 700). It should be obvious: who is 'the man who pursues *jouissance* as far as possible' (Ec. 700)? Clue: he is 'by no means a neurotic' – Alcibiades; Alcibiades the homosexual pervert. So why is *he*, the homosexual-qua-pervert, made to take on so much?

3. On the joys and perils of 'being' *objet a*: enter Dustan

Were we to take the unthinkable step of *accepting* Lacan's thesis that male homosexuality 'structurally' is indeed a perversion, what would we stand to gain? My (heuristic) answer is: rather a lot. A major benefit is a more complex understanding of the kind of sexuality that Bersani and Phillips write about and effectively advocate as not only the joyful outpouring of future-oriented impersonal desire. There are other forces at work in Leonardo's 'object-love as self-love'; or in cruising which Bersani exalts as giving rise to 'a new ethics [...] in which the subject, having willed its own lessness, can live less invasively in the world' (RG, 62); or in the barebacking that Phillips contentiously raises to 'a picture of what it might be for human beings in relation to each other not to personalize the future' (I, 117). The matheme's provocation is immediate: the pervert is the subject who, in his desire, assumes the place of *objet a*, becoming object-cause of *another's*, of *the Other's* desire. This, surely, is quite an extraordinary position for a human being to be in. In 'just' being \$ a neurotic has it comparatively easy, as a speaking, desiring being for whom the object of desire always recedes in the distance, and who experiences *jouissance* only fleetingly or by proxy, holding on to its allure without quite risking its fatal fury. But if being a pervert is, somehow, to be a part of the maelstrom of *jouissance*; to be partly Other; to be the object-cause of

desire of someone or something that in that very operation becomes itself a subject . . . at the very least that sounds like a tall order. It might speak directly to the exigency of impersonality, to the 'lessness', the auto-diminution of a subject inhabited by otherness, but the pervert's subjective 'lessness' lies in his being an object (for the Other) – the price of impersonality is now objectification.

One implication is that the pervert, therefore, desires from a position in which what becomes apparent is quite a different form of impersonality – the drive itself. This is where Phillips's 'at odds' positioning becomes helpful. Whilst desire is often revered for its mobility, its future-oriented projection, its impersonality, the drive is not always, if ever, such a beneficent or lauded notion. Unlike desire, it is by nature conservative, as Freud maintained, and it is also – like *objet a* that lies at the heart of its circuit – always partial. 'At odds' with desire, one could say, is the drive, and Phillips's admonitions start to make a lot more sense where the drive's radical inhumanity is concerned. Bersani or Phillips should also, in this scenario, worry about the positive spin on gay male sexual practices such as cruising or barebacking, in that the involvement of the drive in them might indicate the presence of an impersonality integral to impersonal narcissism but ultimately indifferent to its benevolent reach. The drive's partiality means that it eschews the pernicious wholeness of the narcissistic ego, but the subject (the pervert) whom the drive compels may have a tougher time of it than may be surmised by the commendation of 'impersonal' sexual practices. Bersani, for example, finds the experience of cruising valuable because: 'Otherness, unlocatable within differences that can be known and enumerated, is made concrete in the eroticized touching of a body without attributes' (RG, 61). In *Intimacies* he offers a subtle reading of Guillaume Dustan's *Dans ma chambre (In My Room)* that still manages to celebrate the fact that 'tireless sexual promiscuity makes for a connectedness based on unlimited bodily intimacies' (I, 37). Dustan's companion text, *Plus fort que moi (Stronger than Me)* offers what I see as a corrective view of the experience of impersonal sexual contact, this time located in the dark room of a Parisian gay club: 'I could be engulfed in this magma of hands, dicks, mouths. I could set out no longer to give a damn about knowing what belonged to whom, who was fat, old, ugly, contagious.'¹⁷ The 'eroticized touching of a body without attributes' is now a magma of partial objects and body parts, a true circuit party of the drive never ascending from the partial to the total, indefatigably encircling its partial objects, indifferent to moral or self-preservative concerns.

But the matheme's perverse operation, alarmingly insisting on objectification and partiality as the price one pays for 'bringing down the ego', should no sooner be left to drown in Phillips's indignation. There is life in

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the partial object yet. Dustan, in a later book called *Génie divin* (*Divine Genius*), climbs out of the magma in order to theorize from – to sublimate – this position of partiality.¹⁸ In a way, his ‘theory’ is a wicked little twist on Bersani’s ‘homo-ness’:

After that, I said that Lévinas was the great pretext with which we were re-sold all the Judaeo-Christian stuff from the end of the 1970s. The Other. Well spotted, since the moment when the revolution, the true revolution, was the Same, it was liberated homosexuality, the re-foundation of the social outside compulsory heterosexuality. The Face against the Arsehole.¹⁹

Perhaps the rhetoric on sameness and the lofty philosophical references are not quite polished, but the irreverent stand-off of ‘the face against the arsehole’ demands to be taken seriously, both as a rejection of the wholeness with which the face synechdochically stands for the ‘entire’ person to be recognized, and also, if only we read ‘against’ as ‘pressed against’ (*contre* in the original allows this), as figuring the sexual act that perhaps best exemplifies the drive’s partiality: rimming. Dustan’s salaciously provocative juxtaposition already highlights a sexual and political decision – unmistakably now: a pervert’s decision – to favour the anus over the face, to favour a relatively undifferentiated body part over the symbol of personality; but pitting ‘the face against the arsehole’ also allows for the staging of a mode of relation no longer based on individuality or personality. We are invited instead to imagine a relation between the arsehole as (already) a body part and the face now become nothing more than a body part, having discarded, or not yet assumed, its symbolic significance as index of the person. Reading Dustan’s cod-philosophical provocation as a figuration of rimming alerts us to what is most radical about his discourse on both sex and politics: namely (and at this moment I cannot avoid an appeal to the vital reinvention of sexual politics Bersani initiated in ‘Is the Rectum a Grave?’) that the way the sexual bleeds into the political cannot consist in subsuming the partiality, the radical alterity of the sexual act under a redemptive sexual-political identity, but rather in reducing the politics of facial recognition to a contact between body parts, to the politics of partial objects – politics as rimming.²⁰

Bersani, I hasten to add, although rarely referencing the drive as possible agent or origin of what he joyfully calls ‘a universal relatedness grounded in the absence of relations, in the felicitous erasure of people as persons’ (I, 38), is very much alert to the potentially threatening, de-personalizing and painful side to the experience resulting from ‘impersonal’ sexual contact. He shows both sides of the coin when he remarks on

'Guillaume's extraordinarily rich (yet also monotonous) sex life', approvingly citing Dustan's judgment that 'sex is the central thing', to conclude that, contrary to Freud's explicit separation of sex from culture, 'gay culture as a culture of sex [. . .] justifies putting those two words together' (I, 36, 37). The reference to 'Civilization and its Discontents' points to sublimation (culture – or politics) as only the persistence of 'unalloyed sexuality'. 'Raising the object to the dignity of the Thing', the quasi-ironic word 'dignity' notwithstanding, no less than Bersani's *jouissance* of self-shattering becoming *itself* the object of sublimation in a series of 'elaborated forms of self-enjoyment', both lead to Miller's contention that it is in perversion where the drive 'takes satisfaction itself as its object'.²¹ Lacan takes a negative route in expressing the same thing: 'the subject, as neurotic, is condemned precisely to the failure of sublimation' (XVI: 261). The pervert on the other hand – he has sex, he has sublimation, he has culture, he has politics. Only, sex as culture/sex as politics inexorably leads back to the drive's insistence, even – particularly – in sublimation, still to take *jouissance* as its object and to make the pervert its favourite avatar.

5. The perverse operation: another man is an other

Perversion is not all that bad. In fact, if the notion has a value, if it is worth rescuing from the onslaught of both its detractors and its staunchest apologists, this is because reinvented – not redeemed but worked through – perversion *works*. It works not merely as the blanket description of a 'polymorphous perversity' tied to the libido, nor simply as the fundamental tropism, the turn away from aim and object that would ultimately characterize the drive and its circuit in general.²² It works, through its minimal delineation in the *matheme*, not only to embrace the divergent aberrations struggling to gather under the queer umbrella, but to finger 'the homo' from within the more unstable definition of 'the homosexual as category'. I could even suggest that it works almost as Lacan had intended it to – if it is not to be a 'subjective structure' lest it petrify into an ogre for those who are by no means perverts, then let it be a *structural operation*, the operation that flips the formula for fantasy over. Why not call this operation a *queering* then? Because the anti-identitarian impulse of queer has long ceased to be tethered to the sexual whereas the 'perverse operation' is unimaginable without *jouissance*, it is an operation *on jouissance* and *of jouissance*. But also because if 'queering' is meant to be transformative, 'queering' the normative machine, the perverse operation, however complex or variegated its contingent results, fundamentally is *just a flip*. It is the flip that resists and denies normativity and by the same token institutes normativity as that which it flips – what Freud and Lacan call disavowal. The perverse

operation does not deconstruct binaries, it maintains them as perpetually animated antagonism. Perversion, to allow Lacan one last pithy definition, is ‘that which, in the human being, resists any normalization’ (VI: 571).

‘Any normalization’ – Lacan should certainly not be taken to mean that any historically contingent pervert is capable of resisting any historically contingent normalization; even less that all imaginable perversions resist all possible types of normalization. What I take this remarkable sentence to refer to is the absolutely necessary operation of the flip without which human beings would have no knowledge of norms. In this sense, the perverse operation (another difference with queer) is universal and trans-historical – but only as logical descriptor, in its abstract form. The moment the operation is ‘applied’, the moment it is populated with subjects and *objets a* it becomes absolutely contingent and historically determined. In this schema, fantasy and its *matheme* are always and necessarily normative, whereas once they are flipped by the perverse operation they become always and necessarily non-normative. Subjects, *objets a*, their modes of relating are all caught up in the flip, rearranged in the perverse operation. This profound contingency authorizes, *pace* the Lacanian orthodoxy, the possibility, even the necessity, that a male homosexual subject – here, now; or in Plato’s Athens – need not be a pervert. A norm is in itself contingent even if it is necessary *that there be* a norm. When Bersani reaches for the figure of ‘the gay outlaw’, or the cruiser, or the barebacker, he is, in my reading, reaching for the pervert, the non-normative or even anti-normative portion of ‘the homosexual as category’; but any such portion or category invested with the promise of generating ‘new relational modes’ is already happily destined to become itself normative at some point and in some way. And that would be the point where another flip, another perverse operation will pave the way for another sense of the new. If, about 15 years ago, Dustin was just about able to write that ‘the true revolution was the Same’, he would, I sincerely hope, share my sense of disquiet at the slogan recently used for the divisive campaign for gay marriage in France: ‘marriage for all’ (*le mariage pour tous*) is meant to be proclaimed as a right, but it can very easily sound rather more like an obscene obligation, not simply a case of homonormativity, but of a totalitarian norm for all.

This dialectic between the norm and perversion has not always been well observed – not least by psychoanalysis itself. It is very easy to stick to the certainties of the existing norm that claims, for example, that the imposition of a fetish object between two human beings’ desires amounts simply to a repudiation of the interpersonal or the impersonal in the relation between them. What the fetishist does, according to Lacan’s *matheme* and provided he undertakes that ‘perverse operation’ that applies to its flip, is in some respects nothing short of magical.

When Phillips mockingly asks 'what hope is there in a shoe?' he completely misses the point of fetishism, which depends not on my ability to desire a shoe, but in my being able to position myself *as the shoe*, which then leads to the shoe being raised from a meaningless object to what I would call 'the dignity of a subject': the shoe-fetishist is not someone whose demand for love is addressed to a shoe, but someone who offers their partner the shoe as the inexorable reduction of *their* demand for love, thereby answering it in a particular form that nevertheless speaks of *the universal*, *partial* manner in which that demand can only ever hope to find a response.²³ To the extent that the appeal to/of the shoe is not merely, or not necessarily, as an instrument for the satisfaction of a demand, but as the partial object through which object-love can indeed be experienced as self-love, I suggest it would be reckless to preclude the presence of hope in such a transformation.

It is not hard to relate the fetish-'scene' outlined above with Dustan projecting himself as partial object in the magma of the darkroom – precisely so that the other partial objects he finds there attain subjectivation by relating to the *lack* his own partiality signifies. The disturbing self-objectification that the pervert undergoes in order to become *objet a* for the Other may find a counterbalance in the raising, the sublimation of the partial objects, the 'hands, dicks, mouths' of Dustan's magma into at least the bearers of the mark of subjectivity. In quite a different context, as part of his polemic against the fascination with 'otherness' that he quite rightly also aims at psychoanalysis, Dustan comes up with the formula of this essay's title: 'Another man [guy/bloke] is an Other!' (*Un autre mec, c'est un Autre, quoi*). The slogan is clearly aimed at those within the psychoanalytic discipline who all too readily associate the Other with the other sex. But it becomes all the more pertinent in the context of the matheme and of the perverse operation: despite the compulsive partiality (that is to say: the impersonality) of his sexual relations, Dustan is here hinting at the self-lessening, self-objectifying exercise that allows him to make Others of the mere 'other men' he frequents. For if I maintain that the operation described by the matheme and fleshed out in the examples discussed in this essay is nothing short of magical, this does not mean it is carried out by an instantaneous sleight-of-hand. Psychoanalysis incontestably shows: one is not born a pervert, one becomes one. And this, I believe, is also what Bersani, following Foucault, intends when he stresses the notion of *ascesis*, regarding cruising as an 'ascetic practice' (RG, 62) and barebacking as 'an ascesis in depersonalisation' (I, 40). Self-objectification is an ascesis in depersonalization. The homosexual-qua-pervert is a subject constantly involved in the transformational, creative exercise of his own objectification. In *Intimacies* Bersani connects barebacking with the ascetic/religious practice of 'pure love', both of which

'can be thought of as disciplines in which the subject allows himself to be penetrated, even replaced, by an unknowable otherness' (I, 53). The discipline involved is precisely that whose aim it is to *replace* the subject with the 'unknowable otherness' of *objet a*. Perversion is thus not an identity: it is a becoming-other of the subject – which is precisely what is worthy of celebrating in impersonal narcissism.

On the other hand, and remembering the idea that the pervert seeks to restore *a* to the Other, 'to fill the hole in the Other', a less felicitous outcome can also be envisaged (XVI: 253). In the magma, Dustan offers himself, with the *jouissance* of sacrifice, to the Other, this time as a monstrous assemblage of 'hands, dicks, mouths', to a black hole devouring the surplus *jouissance*, no longer the lack, that Dustan embodies. But who is to say that out of this black hole, out of this vortex of *jouissance* to which Dustan surrenders himself, an entirely new set of relational modes will not rise, based perhaps on the political premise (and promise) of the encounter between the face and the asshole? Who precludes the subject's sacrifice being to *jouissance* itself, to that which is prohibited – only so as to re-found the Law that prohibits it and re-orient the 'inverse ladder of desire' with which it is accessed (Ec. 700)? The answer is, unfortunately, that psychoanalysts (including, often, Lacan) do. It is intriguing that Dustan's formula 'another [man] is an Other' is the reverse, the flip-side of Lacan's slogan from his *Seminar XVI: From one Other to the other* (*D'un Autre à l'autre*). The 'flip' here is perhaps better described as a denial, a disavowal of the 'correct' or 'dialectical' path of desire. Dustan has gone through the initial 'stage' in Lacan's speculative trajectory, from one other to the Other – from 'another bloke', to 'the Other', which Lacan associates precisely with the restitution of *objet a* to the field of the Other, the bloated surplus that transforms a humble castrated subject (another bloke) into the Other: primal, uncastrated, monstrous. The orthodox understanding of perversion is that it stops there. It does not recognize and, therefore, does not seek to turn the Other into an other, using *objet a* as imaginary knife. In this sense Dustan *fails*: he fails to take the journey back from the Other, along the route where Lacan locates the necessity that lack be re-instituted in the Other and symbolized in *objet a*.

This could only be another failure to celebrate. Lacan's own insights can readily be used against his prescriptions: to take the route 'back' to the other, to mark the 'journey' with the sign of lack and castration – in the final analysis: to become neurotic – is neither a developmental nor a 'structural' exigency – it is a normative one. Failing to do so, sticking with (re)finding the Other, ambiguously 'offering' *objet a* both as an object of real plenitude *and* as an object of real lack, is one of the pervert's modes of 'resistance to normalization'.²⁴ As a failure it maps perfectly on to the

clinical, developmental 'failure of symbolization', or its more archaic equivalent, 'the failure of the father'. All these assignments of failure are spurious 'clinical' or speculative remnants of the old Oedipal model, of the 'stages' of drive organization ascending up to genitality – which Lacan repeatedly debunks. Despite a wealth of material in his work mitigating to the contrary, Lacan (and his epigones even more so, particularly the 'clinicians') still clings on to a strictly hierarchical structuration which always articulates 'bad, better, best': the three times of Oedipus; the three psychic mechanisms of defence and of course their intricate connection to the three admissible 'subjective structures'; to those we can now add this little dialectical dance between other and Other. This is why Dustan's failure needs to be celebrated – because it comes as confirmation of the inexorable tug of war between the speculative/adventurous and the redemptive/disciplinarian impulses in psychoanalysis. It comes as a timely reminder that the counter-intuitive reparation that would turn Freud's thought into a methodology for classifying subjects according to a differential diagnosis of hierarchically normalized forms of illness still persists.

Dustan's Lacanian failure thus rejoins Bersani's notion of the homosexual as a 'failed subject', assumed unapologetically: 'At his or her best, the homosexual is a failed subject, one that needs its identity to be cloned, or inaccurately replicated, outside of it. This is the strength, not the weakness, of homosexuality, for the fiction of an inviolable and unified subject has been an important source of human violence' (RG, 43). This valorization of failure as strength also plays right into the hands of Lacanians who would no doubt shout: disavowal! Bersani here both *accepts* that there is a normative developmental process that the homosexual fails to flow through, and *rejects* the teleology of this process, clinging on to the idea of failure as strength. Miller too, for example, who persists with the dogmatic view of perversion as a 'lesser condition' than neurosis whilst authoring timely reminders of its political value as rebellion against sclerotic conformist identifications, is clearly under disavowal's grip – but he is by no means a pervert. It is the acceptance and the celebration of failure that makes Bersani's homo a pervert, and it is *qua* pervert that Dustan offers his own failure as a refusal of a different historically circumscribed hierarchical norm, both acting as perennially raised middle finger to those who see in perversion only the sign of arrest or abnegation. Lacan on one occasion at least dared to call it resistance, though the customary attribution of disavowal works just as well.

To the degree that the perverse operation, the flip itself, can be said to embody a gesture, it is the perennially raised middle finger, the defiant assumption of the failure to ascend to normativity: I know there is one more step to take to join the ranks of the 'normal' – or indeed the neurotic

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– but all the same, I would rather stay put. The failure of the father, the failure of symbolization, the failure ingrained in the flip itself from the matheme of fantasy to that of perversion – they are all to be celebrated. This is because perversion, in this re-invented guise at least, is neither Phillips's 'pre-emptive strike' nor his 'ersatz form of redemption'. Far less is it a capitulation to a 'subjective structure' condemning subjects to a narrative of arrested development, or worse. As I have been trying to show, perversion is an operation bearing upon the relation between the subject and the Other (extending to others, and to the world) whose ingenuity and creative *élan*, whose persistence with sublimation and with the perils and thrills of 'surplus' *jouissance* are all too quickly forgotten for reasons that never even seek to go beyond the slavish acquiescence to normativity and conformism. Both as ascesis of self-objectification and as subjectivating sublimation, perversion is a process of re-invention through failure, of 'failing better'. If 'the pervert' is a derogatory label, it should be defiantly embraced by those fortunate enough to merit it. And if psychoanalysis is to stop being itself in a kind of developmental arrest it must embrace its own failures as constitutive *and* productive – and it may as well keep an eye on those who, like perverts, habitually embrace productive failure as an effective strategy against the culture of redemption.

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Notes

- 1 Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, *Intimacies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. vii. A note on references: Books and articles/essays by Bersani and Phillips will be referred to in abbreviated form, followed by page number, in the main body of this essay. Abbreviations are as follows: Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986): FB Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990): CR Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995): H. Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010): RG Bersani and Phillips, *Intimacies*: I. Phillips, 'The uses of desire', in *Side Effects* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2006), pp. 161–181: UD.
- 2 Foucault, 'Friendship as a way of life', in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Essential Works of Foucault*, Vol. 1 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), p. 135.
- 3 See for example Judith Halberstam's contribution in: Robert L. Caserio, Lee Edelman, Judith Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz and Tim Dean, 'The anti-social thesis in queer theory', *PMLA*, 121, no. 3 (May 2006), pp. 819–828.
- 4 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire Livre VIII: Le Transfert* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), p. 43. References to Lacan's Seminars are given in the main text in the form (number of seminar: page) and are to the French editions, with my own translations.

- References to the *Écrits* are given in the form (Ec. page) and are to: Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, translated by Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1997).
- 5 Another glaring such caveat would concern my exclusive treatment of *male* homosexuality. Obviously I (also) do this because of the prevalence of male homosexual examples both in Bersani and in Lacan. I cannot rehearse a more careful argument revisiting Lacan here, but I find that in any context Tim Dean's argument is persuasive: 'Thinking about homosexuality within the framework of gender risks returning our account to the sexological models of desire from which psychoanalysis tried to break a century ago.' See Dean, 'Homosexuality and the problem of otherness', in Dean & Lane (eds.), *Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2001), p. 125.
 - 6 Tim Dean, 'The Frozen countenance of the perversions', *Parallax*, 14, no. 2, pp. 93–114, here 104. I regret not having the space to engage critically and comprehensively, not just with Dean's overwhelmingly persuasive assault on what I call the 'ossification' of perversion into a clinical structure, but also with Foucault himself. I should like to note that this essay issues from the subtraction and condensation of arguments that find fuller elaboration in two book-length works in progress with the following provisional titles: *Flippin' Perverts: Psychoanalysis, Queer Theory and the Uses of Desire and Knowledge*, and *A Future for Alcibiades: Male Homosexuality in Foucault, Lacan and Bersani*.
 - 7 Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho* (London: Calder, 1984), p. 7.
 - 8 Tim Dean approaches the 'Leonardo case' not from the point of view of the same or of identity but from that of the Other, only superficially opposed to what Bersani reads into Freud's text. Leonardo is someone who 'loves self-substitutes *from another's point of view*.' See Dean in *Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis*, 125.
 - 9 Tim Dean makes this point particularly forcefully, see 'The Frozen Countenance of the Perversions', 97.
 - 10 Jacques-Alain Miller, 'On perversion', in Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, and Maire Jaanus (eds.), *Reading Seminars I and II: Lacan's Return to Freud* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 306–320, here 314.
 - 11 See Bruce Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 179. It is no surprise that the failure here belongs again to the father, nor that one of Fink's test cases is of course Leonardo.
 - 12 And Oedipus is allegedly on the wane! The recent publication of Lacan's *Seminar VI: Le Désir et son Interprétation* (Paris: La Marinière, 2013) seems suspiciously convenient for J.-A. Miller to issue a quasi-evangelical back-cover blurb, announcing: 'Oedipus is not the only solution to desire, it is only its normative form; desire's destiny is not expended in Oedipus – hence the commendation of perversion with which this volume ends.'
 - 13 What hope, indeed. For a different critique of Phillips on perversion (which I readily second), see Marcia Klotz's essay in this volume.

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- 14 Phillips also borrows from Khan a notion of desire that ‘involves mutuality and reciprocity’ (UD, 174), epithets that could both be singled out for describing exactly what desire *does not* involve for Lacan.
- 15 It bears remarking that the matheme of fantasy is more often than not treated somewhat as a universal, including by Lacan himself, despite further elaborations of specific ‘mathemes’ for phobia, obsessional neurosis, etc. This is symptomatic of the normalizing impulse’s persisting in Lacan as well. But the fact that perversion issues from this particular matheme with a mere flip is also very indicative of *its* particular relation to the universal.
- 16 One could argue that it is Phillips who becomes the flag bearer for *jouissance* in their collaboration: not only does he cite the end of ‘Is the Rectum a Grave?’ in a tone of near-adulation, his endorsement of barebacking seems indelibly coloured by the picture his interlocutor paints of the *jouissance* inhering in impersonal sexual contact. Better late than never, I guess, given that ‘The Uses of Desire’ can just as much be used to silence Bersani’s entire construction of a *jouissance*-laden impersonal narcissism (paradigmatically in ‘Sociality and Cruising’), to drown it in normalizing cacophony; as it can become itself mired in its contradictions about desire and perversion with a simple reminder that ‘in the *jouissance* of otherness, an entire category of exchange is erased: the category of intersubjectivity’, the very category subtending Phillips’s entire argument in that regrettable essay (RG, 61).
- 17 Guillaume Dustan, *Plus Fort que moi* (Paris: POL, 1998), 22, my translation.
- 18 I have analysed Dustan’s writings in more detail, again in connection with the drive (although not with perversion) in my ‘Guillaume Dustan, master of the drive’, *Journal of Romance Studies*, 8, no. 2 (2008), pp. 113–130.
- 19 Dustan, *Génie Divin* (Paris: Balland, 2001), p. 205, my translation.
- 20 Rimming of course plays a central role in Bersani’s extraordinary reading of Genet’s *Funeral Rites* in *Homos*, where the kind of ethics and politics born out of new relational modes – or, in my interpretation, from perversion and its obedience to the command of *jouissance* – is approached by way of the starkest possible presupposition: ‘betrayal is an ethical necessity’ (H, 151). I regret that due to lack of space I cannot include a discussion of these notions, and of Bersani’s reading of Genet’s novel in general, since not only do they map themselves very well onto what I am articulating as the perverse operation and as perversion overall, but they also provide the perfect foil for a consideration of perhaps the most misunderstood exploration of ethics by a psychoanalyst, Lacan’s *écrit* ‘Kant with Sade’ (Ec. 645–670). Earlier I merely hinted at the horrors of ‘what sublimation is capable of yielding in *Seminar VII*, and although Lacan’s discussion of the *Antigone* is also alluded to in this, the mere fact that the matheme of perversion appears for the first time in ‘Kant with Sade’ is an indication of the singular importance of this text. Anticipating this essay’s conclusion, but also as a distillation of the arguments around Bersani’s reading of Genet I confine my remarks to this: if the ‘politics of partial objects’ in Dustan offer only a small-scale repudiation of normativity, one which can perhaps be tolerated if not co-opted by the norms it disavows, but which, therefore, also provides a certain blueprint for the *content*

of a 'perverse politics' beyond the mere inversion of the perverse operation, the betrayal Bersani analyses in Genet represents not just a refusal of normativity but a complete *catastrophe*, a figure that literalizes the perverse operation in its absolute, its pure form. It is apocalyptic, in keeping with Lacan's equally terrible vision in 'Kant with Sade' – but it is also, I would want to argue, a razing of Symbolic reality that thereby paves the way for an entirely new Law, an unknown normativity that would respond to the high demands of what Lacan calls 'ex nihilo creation' (VII: 214).

- 21 Miller, 'On Perversion', 313.
- 22 For this notion of drive as fundamentally tropological, see Teresa de Lauretis, *Freud's Drive: Psychoanalysis, Literature and Film* (London: Palgrave, 2010).
- 23 Lacan's notorious slogan *il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel* (there is no sexual relation) is pertinent here.
- 24 I make this point as an exact structural analogy to the following exemplary gloss on *objet a*: '[I]n the fantasy $\$ \diamond a$, the real dimension of object *a* as absence of *jouissance*, castration, is that to which the subject of unconscious *desire* and its infinite conatus is ultimately related; while, at the same time, the real dimension of the object *a* as the presence of a residual *jouissance* is that to which the subject of the *drive* is related.' Lorenzo Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan* (London: MIT Press, 2007), p. 143.