



# Is the Rectum a Grave?: and Other Essays

By Leo Bersani

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Over the course of a distinguished career, critic Leo Bersani has tackled a range of issues in his writing, and this collection gathers together some of his finest work. Beginning with one of the foundations of queer theory—his famous meditation on how sex leads to a shattering of the self, “Is the Rectum a Grave?”—this volume charts the inspired connections Bersani has made between sexuality, psychoanalysis, and aesthetics.

Over the course of these essays, Bersani grapples with thinkers ranging from Plato to Descartes to Georg Simmel. Foucault and Freud recur as key figures, and although Foucault rejected psychoanalysis, Bersani contends that by considering his ideas alongside Freud’s, one gains a clearer understanding of human identity and how we relate to one another. For Bersani, art represents a crucial guide for conceiving new ways of connecting to the world, and so, in many of these essays, he stresses the importance of aesthetics, analyzing works by Genet, Caravaggio, Proust, Almodóvar, and Godard.

Documenting over two decades in the life of one of the best minds working in the humanities today, *Is the Rectum a Grave? and Other Essays* is a unique opportunity to explore the fruitful career of a formidable intellect.

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## Is the Rectum a Grave?: and Other Essays By Leo Bersani Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #990542 in Books
- Published on: 2009-12-15
- Released on: 2009-12-15
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x .80" w x 6.00" l, .66 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 224 pages

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"In this fascinating and disturbing book, two writers with prose styles and intellectual styles that are at once famously identifiable and intimately personal celebrate the possibility of relationships that defy identity and undo personality." - Stephen Greenblatt "This is a beautifully crafted book, one that underscores how the social life of the psyche is a matter of risk, wager, suspense, excitement, bodies, talk, and all manner of things both dangerous and sustaining." - Judith Butler"

### **About the Author**

**Leo Bersani** is professor emeritus of French at the University of California, Berkeley. He is the author of *Homos* and coauthor, with Adam Phillips, of *Intimacies*, also published by the University of Chicago Press.

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