



Intimacies

Leo Bersani, Adam Phillips

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Two gifted and highly prolific intellectuals, Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, here present a fascinating dialogue about the problems and possibilities of human intimacy. Their conversation takes as its point of departure psychoanalysis and its central importance to the modern imagination—though equally important is their shared sense that by misleading us about the importance of self-knowledge and the danger of narcissism, psychoanalysis has failed to realize its most exciting and innovative relational potential.

In pursuit of new forms of intimacy they take up a range of concerns across a variety of contexts. To test the hypothesis that the essence of the analytic exchange is intimate talk without sex, they compare Patrice Leconte's film about an accountant mistaken for a psychoanalyst, *Intimate Strangers*, with Henry James's classic novella *The Beast in the Jungle*. A discussion of the radical practice of barebacking—unprotected anal sex between gay men—delineates an intimacy that rejects the personal. Even serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer and the Bush administration's war on terror enter the scene as the conversation turns to the way aggression thrills and gratifies the ego. Finally, in a reading of Socrates' theory of love from Plato's *Phaedrus*, Bersani and Phillips call for a new form of intimacy which they term "impersonal narcissism": a divestiture of the ego and a recognition of one's non-psychological potential self in others. This revolutionary way of relating to the world, they contend, could lead to a new human freedom by mitigating the horrifying violence we blithely accept as part of human nature.

Charmingly persuasive and daringly provocative, *Intimacies* is a rare opportunity to listen in on two brilliant thinkers as they explore new ways of thinking about the human psyche.

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