

**From the holdings of the Department of Special Collections , Princeton University Library,  
Princeton, NJ**

These documents are either in the public domain, or can only be used for educational and research purposes (Fair use) as per U.S. Copyright law (text below). By accessing this file, all users agree that their use falls in the public domain or within fair use as defined by the copyright law. We do not charge any permission or usage fees for the publication of images of material in our collections, including those provided by Princeton University Library, via our website, catalog, or directly from staff. For more information regarding copyright, credit, and citation please review the information on the Copyright, Credit and Citation Guidelines page of our website.

<https://library.princeton.edu/special-collections/policies/copyright-credit-and-citation-guidelines>. If you have any questions, including how to order higher-quality images from the collection, contact Special Collections Public Services via our Ask Us! Form. <https://library.princeton.edu/special-collections/ask-us>

---

Doctoral Dissertations, 2011-2026

French and Italian

---

2018

# Deviant Sexualities: Placing Sexuality in Post-'68 French Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Literature/Politics

Rivas, Joshua Martin

Princeton, NJ : Princeton University

---

<http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/dsp01nk322h02h>

*U.S. Copyright law: The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, §108, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research. If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of fair use that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve a violation of copyright law. <https://www.copyright.gov/title17/title17.pdf>*

DEVIANT SEXUALITIES:  
PLACING SEXUALITY IN POST-'68 FRENCH LESBIAN, GAY, AND QUEER  
LITERATURE/POLITICS

Joshua Rivas

A DISSERTATION  
PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY  
OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE  
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

RECOMMENDED FOR ACCEPTANCE  
BY THE DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH AND ITALIAN

Adviser: Christy Wampole

January 2018

© Copyright by Joshua Rivas, 2017. All rights reserved.

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation, *Deviant Sexualities: Placing Sexuality in Post-'68 French Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Literature/Politics*, argues that modern French sexual minority politics, whose origins can be traced back to the student and worker uprisings of May 1968, has largely been about the making, unmaking, and remaking of space. In it, I analyze the artistic, theoretical, and activist work of four 20th- and 21st-century French figures politically invested in matters of gay, lesbian, and/or queer sexuality. Tracking the spatial configuration and logic of these thinkers' political visions brings to the fore the underappreciated ways in which post-'68 French LGBTQ thought is responsive to and conditioned by the French nation-state's foundational principle of Republican universalism. The first chapter's examination of iconic gay liberationist leader Guy Hocquenghem's activism, theory of desire, and the motif of travel in his understudied novels brings to light the "hyper-pluralistic universalism" that animates his politics. The second chapter dispels radical lesbian and materialist feminist Monique Wittig's reputation as the advocate of a parochial lesbian separatism by turning to Wittig's fiction to clarify her vision for the abolition of hetero-patriarchy called for in her essays. The third chapter elucidates the trenchant critique of Republican universalism at the heart of Guillaume Dustan's highly controversial "gay ghetto" autofiction. The fourth and final chapter addresses the emergence in the late 1990s of queer theory, culture, and politics in France and the nationalistic, anti-American overtones of its notoriously hostile reception. In it, I argue that French queer feminist performance artist, writer, and activist Wendy Delorme's work and the reactions it has inspired reveals sexual minority politics to be a site where the forces of sexism, heterosexism, cissexism, and nationalism converge.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The conception and completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the support, encouragement, expertise, and inspiration of a number of people. First and foremost, my utmost thanks go out to my advisor, Christy Wampole, for her attentive supervision, contagious commitment to feminist scholarship, and unwavering generosity with her time, kindness and insight. It would be difficult to overstate my gratitude to Nick Nesbitt for his mentorship from my very first days on campus. During my time at Princeton, I have benefited immensely from the wisdom and critical acumen of Gayle Salamon, Wendy Belcher, Katie Chenoweth, Göran Blix, and Heather Love, whose seminar on queer and feminist method forever changed the way I approach scholarly research. I would also like to thank Lucien Nouis and Emily Apter, who fostered my appreciation for French literature and feminist theory during my undergraduate years at New York University and encouraged me to pursue graduate study.

I will be forever grateful to Shamy Jean-Baptiste, Samana Gururaja, Megan Chirdon, Brittany Arnold, Mikalena Kenyon, Shannon Merck, Caitlin Kubota, Ashley Knierim, Rachel Hart, Lindsey Richter, Tuo Liu, Bridget Behrmann, and Liliane Ehrhart, whose camaraderie, companionship, wit, and benevolence have sustained me throughout my doctoral career. I would particularly like to thank Colin Azariah-Kribbs, my cherished friend, confidante, former housemate, and fellow enthusiast of eighteenth-century novels, horror films, and Bordeaux, for the countless laughs we've shared over the last five years.

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to Matthieu Garrigou-Lagrange, whose faith in me means more than he could ever know.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                                                                  |            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>ABSTRACT .....</b>                                                                            | <b>iii</b> |
| <b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>                                                                    | <b>iv</b>  |
| <b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>                                                                        | <b>1</b>   |
| France's Particular Universalism: Republican Universalism and French Sexual Citizenship .....    | 7          |
| The Uncertain Place of Sexual and Gender Minorities in France .....                              | 15         |
| Modern French Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Literary Politics and Political Literature.....            | 22         |
| <b>CHAPTER ONE: Guy Hocquenghem's Utopian Desire .....</b>                                       | <b>32</b>  |
| "Pour une conception homosexuelle du monde" .....                                                | 36         |
| Disorienting Desire.....                                                                         | 43         |
| The Blind Leading the Blind: Un-seeing Distance with <i>L'amour en relief</i> .....              | 55         |
| Conclusion .....                                                                                 | 74         |
| <b>CHAPTER TWO: <i>Où sont les lesbiennes ?</i> Monique Wittig's Runaway Lesbians.....</b>       | <b>78</b>  |
| A Life in Movement(s).....                                                                       | 80         |
| Wittig's Literary "Trojan Horses" .....                                                          | 93         |
| "Elles disent que c'est un monde nouveau qui commence:" Wittig's Lesbian Warriors .....          | 98         |
| Misplacing Wittig's Lesbians .....                                                               | 110        |
| Conclusion .....                                                                                 | 124        |
| <b>CHAPTER THREE: "On est bien dans le ghetto:" Placing Community with Guillaume Dustan.....</b> | <b>129</b> |
| Autofiction and the Location of Truth.....                                                       | 136        |
| Coming Out into the "Gay Ghetto" .....                                                           | 147        |
| Finding One's Way in the "Gay Ghetto" .....                                                      | 154        |
| The Limits of the "Ghetto" .....                                                                 | 165        |
| Conclusion.....                                                                                  | 170        |
| <b>CHAPTER FOUR: Much Too American (and Gay)! Wendy Delorme's Indecent Queer Feminism.....</b>   | <b>176</b> |
| <i>Qu'est-ce que le gender ?</i> .....                                                           | 177        |
| We Are Family: Queer(ing) Kinship.....                                                           | 188        |
| The Laugh of the Femme Medusa Warrior: Erecting Queer Feminist Bridges .....                     | 203        |
| "We'll Take Your ID and We Won't Give it Back:" Busting Borders with Post-porn .....             | 214        |
| Conclusion .....                                                                                 | 227        |
| <b>WORKS CITED .....</b>                                                                         | <b>233</b> |

## INTRODUCTION

Put simply, this dissertation argues that the project of modern French sexual minority politics (as well as that of politics *tout court*) has largely been about the making, unmaking, and remaking of space. In it, I examine the artistic, theoretical, and activist work of four 20th- and 21st-century French figures—Guy Hocquenghem, Monique Wittig, Guillaume Dustan, and Wendy Delorme—known for their proven commitment to gay, lesbian, and/or queer causes. By mapping the spatial configuration and logic of these thinkers' visions for society, this dissertation elucidates the underappreciated ways in which modern French LGBT and queer thought respond to and are shaped by France's guiding ideal of Republican universalism.

A so-called "spatial turn" in late twentieth-century critical theory has seen scholars across disciplines in the social sciences and humanities reconceptualizing geographic space as the product of social, material practices as opposed to the commonsense a priori perception of space as a naturally pre-given objective reality. Some of the foundational insights that sparked the spatial turn include Michel Foucault's groundbreaking look into the spatial dynamics of power through his analysis of carceral architecture and "panopticism" in *Surveiller et punir* (1975);<sup>1</sup> Michel de Certeau's exploration in *L'invention du quotidien* (1980) of the ways in which space is constructed and transformed through the mundane practices of everyday life;<sup>2</sup> and, last but certainly not least, Henri Lefebvre's pioneering, immensely influential *La production de l'espace* (1974),<sup>3</sup> which argues from a Marxist vantage that space is both socially produced and productive. This school of spatial thinkers was preceded by a wave of philosophers who

---

<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir : naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975). See also Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics*, no. 16 (Spring 1986): 22–27; in the essay, based on a lecture given in 1967, Foucault elaborates his concept of heterotopias.

<sup>2</sup> Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, vol. 1, *Arts de faire* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1980).

<sup>3</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace* (Paris: Anthropos, 1974).

considered the relationship between space and human experience in the 30s and 40s from phenomenological perspectives, such as Bachelard<sup>4</sup> and Merleau-Ponty; De Certeau,<sup>5</sup> for instance, explicitly draws upon Merleau-Ponty's distinction in *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945) between "l'espace géométrique" and "l'espace anthropologique."<sup>6</sup>

What unites the diverse, multi-disciplinary constellation of work of and inspired by the "spatial turn" is that it draws geographic space into the purview of social and cultural analysis. As far as humankind is concerned, all space is social space. The social and the spatial are not distinct, discrete phenomena that operate independently of one another; they are mutually constitutive and inextricable. Space should be approached as "a medium rather than a container for action, something that is involved in action and cannot be divorced from it."<sup>7</sup> One must, in Edward Soja's terms, "be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology."<sup>8</sup> Given the discursive dimension of space, literary analysis offers an apt methodological lens for the study of space, a complex enterprise that requires an interdisciplinary approach. Human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan understands literature to provide valuable insight into how space is experienced:<sup>9</sup> "a

---

<sup>4</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *L'expérience de l'espace dans la physique contemporaine* (Paris: Alcan, 1937); Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1958).

<sup>5</sup> De Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien*, 173.

<sup>6</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), 66, 332–333.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Y. Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths, and Monuments*, Explorations in Anthropology (Oxford and Providence: Berg, 1994), 10.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), 6.

<sup>9</sup> In *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), Tuan theorizes a distinction between space, which is abstract and boundless, and place, which is tangible, specific, and meaningful. "What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value. . . . Space is transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning" (6).

function of literary art is to give visibility to intimate experiences, including those of place. . . . Literary art draws attention to areas of experience that we may otherwise fail to notice."<sup>10</sup>

Yet, as Jack Halberstam has argued, the most prominent thinkers to carry forward the social constructivist paradigm of space have actively marginalized sexuality as an analytic; the canonical, spatially inclined neo-Marxist postmodern critical theory of Soja, Fredric Jameson, and David Harvey<sup>11</sup> tends to frame sexual matters as "part of a ludic body politics that obstructs the 'real' work of activism."<sup>12</sup> The spatial turn has nonetheless given rise to scholarship, like Halberstam's, that attends to the spatial dynamics of sexuality and other axes of social difference, like race and gender. Feminist geography, for instance, has brought to the fore the broad implications of the ways in which women's spatial mobility has long been constrained by the regulatory force of heteronormative gender ideals; the traditional place of women, in Western society, has often been the private, domestic realms of home and family.<sup>13</sup> Various social scientists, furthermore, have considered how the organization of space (e.g. urban policy, colonialism, tourism) colors the cultivation of racial difference and vice versa.<sup>14</sup> At the intersection of the fields of critical race theory, LGBT studies, and feminist philosophy, lesbian Chicana cultural theorist Gloria Anzaldúa's experimental autobiography *Borderlands/La*

---

<sup>10</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, 162.

<sup>11</sup> Jameson's *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), Soja's *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), and Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989) are characterized by Halberstam as glaring examples of this tendency.

<sup>12</sup> Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, Sexual Cultures (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 6.

<sup>13</sup> See, most notably, Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Brooke Neely and Michelle Samura, "Social Geographies of Race: Connecting Race and Space," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34, no. 11 (November 2011): 1933–52; Mary Eleanor Triece, *Urban Renewal and Resistance: Race, Space, and the City in the Late Twentieth to the Early Twenty-First Century* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016); John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London and Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1990).

*Frontera*, which has proven profoundly influential for queer theory, cartographically traces the experience of "borderlands" created by monolithic identity categories: "A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary."<sup>15</sup>

When it comes to sexuality studies, pioneering anthropologist Gayle Rubin has considered the spatial dimensions of sexual deviance—notably the "sexual migration" of "erotic dissidents" to large urban centers—via her iconic "charmed circle of sex," a model theorizing that consensual sexual practices and their practitioners are marginalized and constituted as aberrant, pathological, and/or immoral to the extent they transgress the bounds of socially sanctioned, "normal" sexual behavior.<sup>16</sup> Literary critic and novelist Samuel Delany offered a landmark look into the intersections of desire, space, and power in his critical-autobiographical account of the fate of the public sex culture around Times Square's pornographic theaters of yesteryear in the face of gentrification and urban renewal.<sup>17</sup> More recently, queer feminist theorist Sara Ahmed has applied a spatial, phenomenological lens to sexual orientation: "If orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence; of how we inhabit spaces as well as 'who' or 'what' we inhabit spaces with."<sup>18</sup>

The (largely French) social theory that gave rise to the spatial turn, Verena Andermatt Conley argues, reflects and responds to a context in which widespread malaise and discontent over the existing order had just boiled over into the historic student and worker uprisings of May 1968; space emerges as an operative critical concept in a moment of acute attentiveness to the

---

<sup>15</sup> Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 3.

<sup>16</sup> Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance (Boston, London, Melbourne, and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 281.

<sup>17</sup> Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, *Sexual Cultures* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

<sup>18</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 1.

disorienting developments of life under late capitalism, such as the rise in France of an "American-style" consumer culture, the technologically fueled ceaseless flow of information (crystallized in the rapid ascent of mass media and the 24-hour news cycle), an abrupt uptick in the influx of North African immigrants following Algerian independence in 1962, and the dizzyingly accelerating pace of globalization.<sup>19</sup> Incidentally, modern, organized French LGBT<sup>20</sup> politics grew out of the same socio-political context of insurrectionary upheaval.

What would come to be known retrospectively as the modern French LGBT movement began to take shape in the midst of the May '68 events proper, during which a small, ephemeral group of gay activists called the *Comité d'action pédérastique révolutionnaire* affixed manifestos to the main amphitheater of the occupied Sorbonne calling for an end to the oppression of all "minorités érotiques."<sup>21</sup> This represented a historic break with the expressly apolitical bourgeois, assimilationist agenda advocated since the 1950s by *Arcadie* (officially called the *Club littéraire et scientifique des pays latins*), France's premier homophile organization.<sup>22</sup> A few years later, an alliance between lesbian feminists affiliated with the *Mouvement de libération des femmes* and a few gay activists culminated in the formation in 1971 of the gay liberationist *Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire*, which sought the unequivocal destruction of the "phallocratic," capitalist social order and the rigid, restrictive hetero-patriarchal sexual and gender categories on which it relies.<sup>23</sup> The FHAR spawned several

---

<sup>19</sup> Verena Andermatt Conley, "Negotiating Space in Post-1968 French Thought," *Hagar* 10, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 9–21.

<sup>20</sup> I will return to the question of the acronym "LGBT" and its historical and cultural contingency below.

<sup>21</sup> Massimo Prearo, "Le moment 70 de la sexualité : de la dissidence identitaire en milieu militant," *Genre, sexualité et société* 3 (2010).

<sup>22</sup> See Scott Gunther, "Living with Dignity in the 1950s and 60s," in *The Elastic Closet: A History of Homosexuality in France, 1942-Present* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 38–44.

<sup>23</sup> Gunther, *The Elastic Closet*, 48.

splinter groups before it gradually dissolved, including the radical lesbian *Gouines rouges*,<sup>24</sup> the flamboyantly gender-nonconformist *Gazolines* (a group of "folles hystériques"<sup>25</sup> who conducted disruptive public actions in drag), and a number of regional *Groupes de libération homosexuelle*.<sup>26</sup> The decline of radical liberationist sexual politics over the course of the 70s ultimately gave way to the reformist, pragmatic paradigm of LGBT advocacy, starting with the establishment in 1979 of the *Comité d'urgence anti-répression homosexuelle*, which pursued the cause of LGBT rights primarily through legislative and legal channels.<sup>27</sup> In the 80s, the inefficacy of the French government's "Republican universalist"<sup>28</sup> reaction to the HIV/AIDS crisis<sup>29</sup>—for instance, in order to avoid stigmatizing particular populations, France did not officially recognize, let alone publicize, the existence of HIV risk groups<sup>30</sup>—led to Act Up-Paris' formation in 1989 and the importation of explicitly communitarian gay politics *à l'américaine*.<sup>31</sup> Subsequent years have seen two major developments in organized French LGBT politics: the convergence of different lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender movements and organizations into an "inter-associative" LGBT movement and collective identity—epitomized by the creation

---

<sup>24</sup> See Françoise Picq, *Libération des femmes: les années-mouvement* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), 104–11.

<sup>25</sup> Frédéric Martel, *Le rose et le noir: les homosexuels en France depuis 1968* (Paris: Seuil, 1996), 34–36.

<sup>26</sup> See Massimo Prearo, *Le moment politique de l'homosexualité: mouvements, identités et communautés en France* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2014), 135–38.

<sup>27</sup> Gunther, *The Elastic Closet*, 57–65.

<sup>28</sup> I will discuss the French tradition of Republican universalism below.

<sup>29</sup> See James N. Agar, "Queer in France: AIDS Disidentification in France," in *Queer in Europe: Contemporary Case Studies*, ed. Lisa Downing and Robert Gillett (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 57–70.

<sup>30</sup> Steven Seidman, "Difference and Democracy: Group Recognition and the Political Cultures of the US, Holland, and France," in *Difference Troubles: Queering Social Theory and Sexual Politics*, Cambridge Cultural Social Studies (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 250.

<sup>31</sup> Prearo, *Le moment politique de l'homosexualité*, 249–66.

of *la Maison des homosexualités*<sup>32</sup> in 1989 and the *L'Interassociative lesbienne, gaie, bi et trans* in 1999<sup>33</sup>—and the emergence in the late 90s of queer theory, culture, and politics.

### **France's Particular Universalism: Republican Universalism and French Sexual Citizenship**

One of the underlying premises of this dissertation is the simple, perhaps intuitive, yet all too easily neglected idea that national and cultural differences matter when it comes to understanding the politics of sexuality. My approach to the study of lesbian, gay, and queer political fiction in France is heavily informed by the concept of sexual citizenship, which emerged from the field of human geography in the 1990s beginning with David T. Evans' *Sexual Citizenship: The Material Construction of Sexualities* (1993).<sup>34</sup> Though there is no singular agreed upon definition, the idea of sexual citizenship emphasizes the dynamic interplay between the construction of sexuality and the construction of citizenship. It attends to the existence of local differences and inequalities along sexual lines in the exercise and fashioning of the rights, privileges, and responsibilities constitutive of citizenship (i.e. the diverse, distinct ways by which sexual practices and identity shape participation in the nation-state), but also to the ways in which these rights, privileges, and responsibilities are themselves always already embedded with culturally-specific sexual norms and values.

The nation tends to get lost, as it were, in the study of sexual minorities and LGBTQ literature, a perhaps unsurprising phenomenon given that "nationalism's power rests in its very

---

<sup>32</sup> It was renamed the *Centre gai et lesbien* in 1993 before changing its name once again in 2002 to *Le Centre LGBT Paris-Île-de-France* in the interest of fostering and reflecting inclusivity.

<sup>33</sup> It was called *Lesbian & Gay Pride Île-de-France* until 2002; as in the case of the *Maison des homosexualités* (1989), the name was changed to denote a commitment to inclusivity vis-à-vis sexual and gender minorities.

<sup>34</sup> David T. Evans, *Sexual Citizenship: The Material Construction of Sexualities* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

ability to remain invisible as a category within politics."<sup>35</sup> Geographer Jon Binnie has called attention to the undertheorization of the category of nation within the interdisciplinary fields of LGBT and queer studies, criticizing "the general failure of [scholars] . . . to adequately address questions of nationalism. . . . It is perhaps easier . . . to work across disciplinary boundaries than national ones."<sup>36</sup> This oversight is particularly glaring given the long-standing, tangible links between nationalism and sexuality; nationalist projects, for instance, have historically sought to crack down on deviant sexual behavior, for queer sexualities, Binnie argues, threaten to "destabilize fixed categories of identity, which are fundamental to the fixity of identity within nationalism."<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the modern, fixed concepts of national and sexual identity, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has pointed out (via Benedict Anderson and Foucault),<sup>38</sup> crystallize conterminously in the late nineteenth century.<sup>39</sup> In any case, inattention to questions of nation and nationalism leave scholars of sexuality ill-equipped to grapple with the context-dependent intricacies of sexual normativity and dissidence and can unwittingly contribute, for that matter, to the uncritical universalization of a *particular* (often Western if not specifically Anglo-American) set of assumptions about the workings of sexuality and gender. I will avoid the aforementioned pitfalls in this study by maintaining a critical posture toward the ways these texts both respond to and reflect their cultural and historical situation, even (and especially) when their Frenchness doesn't seem to be of consequence. I will at the same time, however, avoid a

---

<sup>35</sup> Jon Binnie, *The Globalization of Sexuality* (London and Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2004), 7.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>38</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, vol. 1, *La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).

<sup>39</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Nationalisms and Sexualities," in *Tendencies* (London, UK and Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 147.

paranoid, programmatic interpretation of these literary texts as mere ideological symptoms by way of a myopic and simplistic focus of the circumstances under which they were produced.

In order to understand the status of sexual minorities in France and the French politics of "minority" more generally, it is instructive to consider the French nation-state's official and *de facto* postures toward the matter of difference. The land of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* understands itself to be a nation made up of free, equal individuals united under its foundational Republican ideals: universalism, unitarism (i.e. *la République une et indivisible*), secularism (*laïcité*), and assimilation.<sup>40</sup> Unlike the American Revolution, which was waged primarily against the imperial tyranny of an absolute monarch, the French Revolution sought not merely the abolition of monarchy, but also that of a corporatist social order that rigidly and hierarchically divided the rest of *ancien régime* society into three estates (i.e. the clergy, the nobility, and the commoners). The French nation-state's particular brand of universal equality has from the outset been inextricably bound up with the principles of individualism, monism (as opposed to pluralism), and anticlericalism. In order to ensure the full equality and liberty of its citizens in the public realm, the quintessentially French tradition of Republican universalism relegates difference, broadly construed, to the private sphere; in the name of universalism, France refuses to officially acknowledge the existence of intra-national groups. As such, the French government interacts with its citizens purely as individuals and not as members of communities—as do the Belgian and Dutch governments, for instance, with respect to language and religion—and does not collect any information whatsoever on the racial, linguistic, ethnic, religious, sexual, or political diversity of its population. The Republican universalist attitude toward cultural particularity found clear expression during the earliest days of the Revolution. As Clermont Tonnerre famously declared at the États Généraux in 1789 during heated debates on

---

<sup>40</sup> Andrew Geddes, *The Politics of Migration and Immigration in Europe* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 57.

whether or not Jews should be granted full citizenship, "Il faut refuser tout aux Juifs comme Nation et accorder tout aux Juifs comme individus."<sup>41</sup> At the heart of Republican universalist ideology is the idea that there can be no "nations within the nation." Despite the fact that Republican universalism was conceived with France's Jewish minority in mind, the French State's most egregious, unambiguous failure to live up to its universalist ideals singled out French Jews in particular and continues to haunt public memory. During the first wave of acrimonious debates in the mid-90s over the legal recognition of same-sex partnership (that culminated in the 1999 introduction of the PaCS and then the 2013 passage of *le mariage pour tous*), one argument mobilized by its opponents (of various political orientations) was the prospect that civil unions would produce a de facto administrative log (*fichier*) that could theoretically be used to track down and exterminate France's LGB population;<sup>42</sup> the heavily mediatized apparent discovery in 1991 of the notorious *fichier juif* compiled by the Vichy regime, which had facilitated the roundup and deportation of Parisian Jews, had recently stoked anxieties surrounding the management of ethnic and cultural diversity in French society.<sup>43</sup>

The Republican universalist conception of citizenship, grounded in a vision of equality as abstract homogeneity, is singularly invested in the ideal of civic cohesion compared to that of

---

<sup>41</sup> *La révolution française et l'émancipation des juifs*, vol. 7 (Paris: EDHIS, 1968), 13.

<sup>42</sup> David Caron, *My Father and I: The Marais and the Queerness of Community* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 28.

<sup>43</sup> French Holocaust historian and activist Serge Klarsfeld claimed to have discovered in 1991 the *fichier juif* deep in the archives of the Ministry of War Veterans. The headline-making revelation reinvigorated longstanding suspicions that post-war French government was actively obscuring and downplaying the Vichy regime's role in the Shoah. A government commission headed by historian René Redmond later concluded that the documents uncovered by Klarsfeld were not exactly the infamous *fichier juif*, but a list of foreign Jews arrested in the (now-dissolved) Seine department. See Eric Conan and Henry Rousso, "The Archives: They Hide Everything, They Tell Us Nothing," in *Vichy: An Ever-Present Past* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998), 46–73; and Rebecca Clifford, *Commemorating the Holocaust: The Dilemmas of Remembrance in France and Italy*, Oxford Historical Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 113–116.

other countries.<sup>44</sup> It is for this reason that, unlike those of pluralist, multiculturalist societies like the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, the French model of civic integration is profoundly and explicitly assimilationist in character; both France's native (e.g. Bretons, Occitans, Basques) and foreign-origin minority populations alike are subject to the expectation to linguistically, culturally, and socially strive toward Frenchness. The Republican norm of integration—to which all French citizens are held—seeks to deter the expression of ethnic, religious, and cultural particularity in the public sphere in the interest of ensuring equal, fair treatment for all; France guarantees its citizens not so much a *droit à la différence* as a *droit à l'indifférence*, "le droit d'être regardé simplement comme un citoyen : il assure ainsi la liberté et l'égalité de la personne humaine au-delà de sa différence, lui permettant de déployer une fraternité ouverte sans idées préconçues."<sup>45</sup>

The French Republic—or republics, as it were—borne out of the Revolutionary desire for a socially just, egalitarian society, however, has from its very inception been criticized for failing to deliver on its promise of universal equality. Olympe de Gouges, for instance, famously decried the injustice of France's first constitution narrowly defining the subject of the "universal" rights inscribed in the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* as a French property-owning man at least 25 years old.<sup>46</sup> More recently, a long string of controversies on the topic of religious garb has called radically into question the Republican universalist positioning of *laïcité* as a culturally neutral pillar of civic equality; beyond the fact that a strictly secular public sphere

---

<sup>44</sup> W. Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 1.

<sup>45</sup> Louis Dupont, "« Où suis-je ? » Exploration du champ des possibles et des moyens de la (re)composition du « vivre ensemble », préalable à toute construction nationale majoritaire," in *Les nationalismes majoritaires contemporains: identité, mémoire, pouvoir*, ed. Alain-G. Gagnon, Geneviève Nootens, and André Lecours (Montréal: Québec Amérique, 2007), 143.

<sup>46</sup> See Olympe de Gouges, "Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne," in *Écrits politiques*, ed. Olivier Blanc, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Paris: Côté-femmes, 1993), 204–15.

unwittingly privileges at least one sort of "religious group"—those whose lives and worldviews are not organized around religious belief and identity—the brunt of its actual enforcement is often felt most directly by Muslim women in particular. International human rights observers notably criticized the 2004 law banning conspicuous religious symbols in French public schools, for its impact falls "disproportionately on Muslim girls, and thus violate[s] antidiscrimination provisions of international human rights law as well as the right to equal educational opportunity."<sup>47</sup> Though "crosses of manifestly excessive size" and yarmulkes are also banned, the law effectively singles out Muslim pupils by virtue of the lack of a religious obligation for Christians to wear crosses; the relatively wide availability of private Jewish schools, furthermore, mitigates the ban's impact on orthodox Jewish students.<sup>48</sup>

*Laïcité* emerged even more spectacularly still as a vehicle for the policing of gender norms as much as religious ones during the 2016 "burkini affair," during which a wave of French municipalities enacted ordinances requiring beachgoers to wear "une tenue correcte, respectueuse des *bonnes moeurs* et de la *laïcité*" (italics mine);<sup>49</sup> these policies meant to enforce "good moral standards" and secularism functioned as *de facto* prohibitions on the "burkini"—a full-body bathing suit and head covering donned by some Muslim women. The then prime minister (and soon-to-be failed presidential candidate), Manuel Valls, articulated his unequivocal support for the burkini bans with a misguided appropriation of Marianne, the allegorical symbol of the French Republic, as a paragon of French Republican *femininity*: "Sur la place des femmes

---

<sup>47</sup> "France: Headscarf Ban Violates Religious Freedom" (New York: Human Rights Watch, February 26, 2004), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2004/02/26/france-headscarf-ban-violates-religious-freedom>.

<sup>48</sup> Cécile Laborde, *Critical Republicanism: The Hijab Controversy and Political Philosophy*, Oxford Political Theory (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 65.

<sup>49</sup> "Burkini : le maire de Cannes interdit les vêtements religieux à la plage," *Le Monde*, August 11, 2016, [http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2016/08/11/le-maire-de-cannes-interdit-les-vetements-religieux-a-la-plage\\_4981587\\_3224.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2016/08/11/le-maire-de-cannes-interdit-les-vetements-religieux-a-la-plage_4981587_3224.html).

nous ne pouvons transiger. Marianne, le symbole de la République, elle a le sein nu parce qu'elle nourrit le peuple, elle n'est pas voilée parce qu'elle est libre ! C'est ça la République ! C'est ça Marianne !" <sup>50</sup> That Valls tellingly believes that Marianne bares her breasts because her role is to nourish the people, but that she would never choose to wear a veil because she is "free"—Valls seems to forget, however, that Marianne is typically represented donning a head-covering—betrays a distinctly limited, unwittingly prescriptive, and both Islamophobic and sexist understanding of the "place of women," as he puts it.

The examples cited above point to a "paradox" <sup>51</sup> at the heart of the French Republic's brand of universalism: it supposes a universality that requires the strategic suppression of difference. In practical terms, however, the normative, utopian ideal of a public realm inhabited by citizens wholly unmarked by ethnic, racial, religious, or sexual particularity translates into a social reality in which certain "particularities" with respect to embodiment and self-expression are treated as more "universal" than others. In its refusal to acknowledge the existence of identitarian affiliations other than with France's anti-identitarian national identity, Republican universalism seeks to guarantee equality in ways that threaten to perpetuate and obscure entrenched group-based inequalities and power asymmetries. The civic responsibility to refrain from gratuitous displays of identity in everyday life tends in practice to be interpreted from a majoritarian perspective and to therefore be inordinately burdensome on minority populations; minority cultural practices tend to register as obtrusively visible and *communautaristes* whereas dominant ones are seen as neutral, if not natural, on the rare occasions they fall under scrutiny in

---

<sup>50</sup> Manuel Valls, "C'est ça Marianne !" (Meeting socialiste, Colomiers, Haute-Garonne, August 29, 2016), [http://dicocitations.lemonde.fr/citation\\_auteur\\_ajout/88977.php](http://dicocitations.lemonde.fr/citation_auteur_ajout/88977.php).

<sup>51</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

the first place. In other words, one does not hear much of the nuisances posed by ostentatious public displays of heterosexuality or of white self-segregation.

Republican universalism confers to French citizens the dual right/responsibility of embodying the universal. In other words, the underlying implication of the French Republican privatization of particularity is that *being* a French citizen means striving to *pass* as a universal, abstract individual unmarked by difference; universality is something that must be achieved. Passing as a universal subject—as all of the writers considered in this dissertation illustrate in their respective work—is, paradoxically, a task more easily accomplished by some than by others. Furthermore, France's principled blindness to race and ethnicity poses serious obstacles when it comes to the matters of racially or ethnically motivated employment discrimination and police profiling; the lack of any official statistics related to diversity (beyond whether or not residents hold French nationality) or explicit legal protections for minority populations stymies attempts to assess, let alone address, the nature and scale of these problems.<sup>52</sup> As Joan Scott has persuasively pointed out in relation to the history of French feminism,<sup>53</sup> political minorities of all sorts seeking to redress systemic and institutional inequities find themselves confronted with the double bind of having to coalesce around differences that ought not matter politically in the first place and of having to articulate their grievances within a cultural context uniquely inhospitable to "identity politics" and the rhetoric of minority.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> See Alec G. Hargreaves, "Half-Measures: Antidiscrimination Policy in France," *French Politics, Culture & Society* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 83–101; Philippe Bataille, *Le racisme au travail* (Paris: Découverte, 1997); Didier Fassin and Eric Fassin, eds., *De la question sociale à la question raciale: représenter la société française* (Paris: Découverte, 2009).

<sup>53</sup> See Scott's *Only Paradoxes to Offer French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (1995) and *Parité!: Sexual Equality and the Crisis of French Universalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>54</sup> I return to the question of "minority" in France in chapter three's discussion of the status of French minority literature.

This brief sketch of the ideology and practice of French Republican universalism has focused primarily on its implications for gender, race, and religion. It is important to recognize, however, the specificities in how different "differences" operate vis-à-vis Republican universalism. Political subjectivities are constituted along multiple intersecting and overlapping axes of social differentiation—gender, for instance, cannot be experienced or understood in isolation from racial, class, or religious positionality— and the work of each of the four figures considered in this dissertation shed light, in different ways, on the implications of these intersections in the context of French Republican political culture. Guy Hocquenghem, for example, draws a link between the constitutive role of xenophobia in the construction of French national identity and the categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality. Monique Wittig insists on the inextricability of sex/gender and sexual categories under patriarchal heterosexuality. Guillaume Dustan highlights the ethnic character of a certain hyper-communitarian "gay ghetto" lifestyle. Wendy Delorme's translation/introduction of "queer" into a French cultural context (and its acrimonious receptions) discloses sexual politics as a site where the forces of sexism, heterosexism, cissexism, and nationalism converge. It is important to appreciate, however, that different forms of difference are lived, perceived, policed, and politicized *differently*.

### **The Uncertain Place of Sexual and Gender Minorities in France**

The modern French Republic has established a track record when it comes to LGBT and queer issues that can appear ambivalent and even inconsistent to those unfamiliar with its Republican universalist political tradition. For instance, the Revolutionary secular abolishment of all laws rooted in religious "superstition" made France the first Western nation to legalize

sodomy (in 1791).<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, France did not legalize same-sex marriage until 2013—significantly later than most of its Western European neighbors—due in part to opponents of same-sex marriage framing *le mariage pour tous* as a particularistic, communitarian demand for special rights fundamentally incompatible with French Republican values.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, France became in 2009 the first country in the world to declassify gender dysphoria as a mental illness, and gender-confirming treatments and surgeries are covered by French social security.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, recent years have seen patriotic French campaigners taking to the streets in droves to express their vehement hostility to *la théorie du genre*, queer theory, same-sex parenting, and all else that would purportedly compromise the very foundations of our social and symbolic orders: the universality of binary sexual difference and the traditional family unit.<sup>58</sup>

Despite Paris' longstanding reputation as a "gay Mecca,"<sup>59</sup> France's sole veritable "gay ghetto," Le Marais, a district located in the historic center of Paris spanning the third and fourth *arrondissements*, has been an enduring source of controversy, inflaming anxieties over the threat of *communautarisme*.<sup>60</sup> The term "ghetto" comes from Renaissance Venice, and originally

---

<sup>55</sup> Gunther, *The Elastic Closet*, 1.

<sup>56</sup> See chapter four's discussion of the *Manif pour tous* movement and Bruno Perreau, *Queer Theory: The French Response* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2016); Kevin Duong, "Gender Trouble in France: An Interview with Camille Robcis," *Jacobin*, December 8, 2014, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/12/gender-trouble-in-france/>.

<sup>57</sup> "Situation actuelle et perspectives d'évolution de la prise en charge médicale du transsexualisme en France" (Haute autorité de santé, November 2009), [https://www.has-sante.fr/portail/upload/docs/application/pdf/2009-12/rapport\\_transsexualisme.pdf](https://www.has-sante.fr/portail/upload/docs/application/pdf/2009-12/rapport_transsexualisme.pdf).

<sup>58</sup> I will discuss the nationalistic underpinnings of *la Manif pour tous* movement and the acrimonious reception of queer theory in France in chapter four; for an insightful analysis of the "familialist" ideology at the heart of modern French Republicanism, see Camille Robcis, *The Law of Kinship: Anthropology, Psychoanalysis, and the Family in France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

<sup>59</sup> Stéphane Leroy, "Le Paris gay. Éléments pour une géographie de l'homosexualité," *Annales de géographie* 646, no. 6 (2005): 579, doi:10.3917/ag.646.0579.

<sup>60</sup> Michael Sibal, "Urban Space and Homosexuality: The Example of the Marais, Paris' 'Gay Ghetto,'" *Urban Studies* 41, no. 9 (August 2004): 1739, doi:10.1080/0042098042000243138.

designated the district where Jews were forced to settle. It was subsequently taken up in the 1920s by Chicago School sociologists to refer to urban enclaves disproportionately populated by members of a given ethnic minority. The term "gay ghetto" was introduced by sociologist Martin Levine in 1979 to designate urban districts home to "gay institutions in number, a conspicuous and locally dominant gay subculture that is socially isolated from the larger community, and a residential population that is substantially gay."<sup>61</sup>

Paris has seen the rise and decline of many hubs of queer life (*avant la lettre*) before Le Marais' emergence in the 80s as the capital of LGBT nightlife, culture, and politics, starting with the seedy, bohemian Montmartre of the 1880s (depicted in Genet's *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*<sup>62</sup>).<sup>63</sup> There was furthermore a visible gay and lesbian presence in the vibrant post-war cultural and intellectual milieu around Saint-Germain-des-Prés. In the 60s, several upscale nightclubs and bars catering to a lesbian and gay clientele opened on rue Sainte-Anne, conveniently close to the Tuileries gardens, a well-known cruising spot since the *ancien régime*.<sup>64</sup>

The tension between gay communitarianism and Republican universalism came to a head during the *Affaire du drapeau*; in 1995, a number of gay-owned businesses in the Marais decided to display rainbow flags in order to advertise their "gay-friendliness." In response to complaints from an anti-gay watchdog group, the police invoked an obscure 19th-century ordinance to force the business owners to remove the flags on the grounds that "the grouped and quasi-systemic display of overly large emblems risks arousing hostile reactions."<sup>65</sup> The flags were soon replaced

---

<sup>61</sup> Martin P. Levine, "Gay Ghetto," *Journal of Homosexuality* 4, no. 4 (July 20, 1979): 364.

<sup>62</sup> Jean Genet, *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* (Paris: Morihien, 1943).

<sup>63</sup> Caron, *The Marais*, 59–60.

<sup>64</sup> Martel, *Le rose et le noir*, 89.

<sup>65</sup> Michael Sibalis, "Urban Space and Homosexuality," 1752.

by relatively discreet rainbow stickers, but the subsequent years saw the gay bars and clubs of the Marais systematically targeted by the police in a "crack-down" on noise pollution. The rainbow flag—an internationally recognizable symbol of LGBT unity, pride, and diversity—elicits suspicion over the communitarian threat of "nations within the nation;" flags, after all, have a long history as instruments of nationalism. More specifically, the rainbow flag conjures, argues David Caron, the menacing prospect of "foreign invasion."<sup>66</sup> The emergence of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer identities and political discourses—as will be discussed throughout this dissertation (and particularly in chapter four)—has been cast by proponents and opponents alike of LGBT and queer causes as fundamentally alien and inimical to Frenchness.

Coincidentally, the Marais is also one of the traditional homes of Paris' Jewish population, the French Republic's original communitarian menace. A small Jewish neighborhood took shape around the *rue des Rosiers* called the *pletzl* (Yiddish for "little place") following an influx of Ashkenazi Jews between the 19th century and World War II, followed by a second, post-Holocaust wave of Sephardic Maghrebi Jewish immigrants in the 1960s toward the end of the French North African decolonization process.<sup>67</sup> It is not just the Marais that unites France's Jewish and LGBT populations; the pink triangle used by LGBT activists since its re-appropriation by the LGBT HIV/AIDS activists of Act Up-Paris (following the lead of the original, American ACT UP) symbolically gestures to a shared experience of genocidal intolerance. Furthermore, a significant community of Chinese immigrants, mostly from

---

<sup>66</sup> David Caron, *AIDS in French Culture: Social Ills, Literary Cures* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 151.

<sup>67</sup> See Nancy L. Green, *The Pletzl of Paris: Jewish Immigrant Workers in the "Belle Époque"* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986).

Wenzhou province, has faced accusations related to their alleged *communautarisme* ever since they first settled in a small area in the northern Marais in the 1930s.<sup>68</sup>

This dissertation aims to provide a much-needed contribution to scholarly understanding of the historical, philosophical, and aesthetic dimensions of modern gay, lesbian, and queer politics in France and to offer novel insights into the logic and workings of French Republican political culture. There is a veritable dearth of scholarship on French LGBT politics, a dearth that is in many ways the logical consequence of France's commitment to Republican universalism. There are no LGBT studies (or any other "minority studies") departments or programs in any French universities; no more than a few hundred Ph.D. dissertations on LGBT topics have ever been defended in France; and academics conducting publicly funded LGBT-related research have faced harassment for their work.<sup>69</sup> At present, there are only two monographs devoted specifically to the history of modern LGBT activism in France:<sup>70</sup> Frédéric Martel's *Le rose et le noir : Les homosexuels en France depuis 1968* (1996) and Massimo Prearo's *Le Moment politique de l'homosexualité : Mouvements, identités et communautés en France* (2014). The former offers an interesting case study in itself on the French Republican posture toward sexual minorities. Though commercially successful, journalist (with a doctorate in the social sciences) Frédéric Martel's account of the history of modern French gay activism has attracted much criticism from scholars and activists alike for both its factual inaccuracies and its (only very

---

<sup>68</sup> Caron, "The Chinese Are Buying Up Everything Anyway," in *The Marais*, 48–55.

<sup>69</sup> Florian Bardou, "En France, les « queer studies » au ban de la fac," *Libération*, October 12, 2016, [http://www.liberation.fr/debats/2016/10/12/en-france-les-queer-studies-au-ban-de-la-fac\\_1521522](http://www.liberation.fr/debats/2016/10/12/en-france-les-queer-studies-au-ban-de-la-fac_1521522); Bruno Perreau analyzes the resistance to the institutionalization of LGBT and queer studies and knowledge production in *Queer Theory: The French Response* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2016). Chapter four of this dissertation addresses these and related questions.

<sup>70</sup> Scott Gunther's *The Elastic Closet: A History of Homosexuality in France, 1942–present* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) offers a history of homosexuality in France (largely from a political perspective), but organized LGBT politics is not the primary focus.

thinly veiled) ideological overtones;<sup>71</sup> the book reads like an extended, impassioned imploration that LGBT activists abandon the folly of parochial identity politics *à l'américaine* in favor of more authentically French tactics rooted in universalism. The crux of Martel's argument is his allegation that delusional, paranoid fears of totalizing, systemic homophobia originally propagated by Guy Hocquenghem and the gay liberationist *Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire* led "the gay community" to deny the gravity (and even the reality) of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in its early days and thus exacerbated its spread. In reality, scholarship has demonstrated that it was, quite to the contrary, the *absence* of a robust, politically active gay community (as well as the French government's Republican universalist reluctance to target gay communities for HIV/AIDS prevention efforts)<sup>72</sup> that contributed to France's calamitously late response to the HIV/AIDS crisis;<sup>73</sup> French gay activism saw a major decline after Mitterrand's election to the presidency in 1981,<sup>74</sup> the same year that the first cases of what would become known as AIDS were discovered.<sup>75</sup> *Le Rose et le noir* concludes on an unambiguously anti-communitarian note: "La plupart des tensions qui apparaissent au sein de la population homosexuelle reposent sur une problématique dont les pôles opposés sont d'un côté la défense du

---

<sup>71</sup> See for example Gunther, *The Elastic Closet*, 80–81; Ron Haas, "Utopia Aborted: May '68 in the Philosophy of Guy Hocquenghem," *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 32 (2004): 407–8; and Caron, *The Marais*, 81–84.

<sup>72</sup> Steven Seidman, "Difference and Democracy: Group Recognition and the Political Cultures of the US, Holland, and France," in *Difference Troubles: Queering Social Theory and Sexual Politics*, Cambridge Cultural Social Studies (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 250.

<sup>73</sup> Prearo, *Le moment politique de l'homosexualité*, 249–66; Caron, *AIDS in French Culture*, 155.

<sup>74</sup> Gay activists mobilized in droves to campaign for François Mitterrand, who in turn made and carried out a campaign promise to gay voters to equalize the age of consent for heterosexual and homosexual acts. Mitterrand's 1981 election marked the end of Gay Liberation's heyday in France. See Michael Sibalis, "The Spirit of May '68 and the Origins of the Gay Liberation Movement in France," in *Gender and Sexuality in 1968: Transformative Politics in the Cultural.*, ed. Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen (New York: Palgrave, 2014), 235–54.

<sup>75</sup> Caron, *AIDS in French Culture*, 155.

mode de vie communautaire et, de l'autre, la recherche d'une vie hors ghetto."<sup>76</sup> Martel dubiously argues that, because LGBT activism is no longer necessary (due to the supposed end of the HIV/AIDS epidemic),<sup>77</sup> French LGBT people have come to a proverbial fork in the road; they can either cling to an LGBT collective identity that destines them to sad, "ghetto" existence or they can "get a life," so to speak (i.e. a life not overdetermined by one's sexual identity).

It is highly ironic—and this speaks to the project's grasp of its source material—that the closing lines of a book that literally devotes hundreds of pages to denigrating the work and legacies of Guy Hocquenghem and his liberationist comrades in particular could almost have been lifted from *Le désir homosexuel*,<sup>78</sup> Hocquenghem's magnum opus:

Il faut tout faire pour que l'homosexualité n'ait plus de sens, plus de réalité. Que seuls les individus demeurent, *mobiles*. Pour retrouver un bonheur moins impossible, il nous appartient de défendre l'idée, au nom de l'autonomie de chacun, que la question homosexuelle n'a plus de sens, plus de raison d'être. En dépit du sida, l'« homosexuel » peut commencer à vivre. L'« homosexualité » n'existe plus.<sup>79</sup>

Martel concludes his history of modern French gay activism by making fully explicit his own vision for its *future* (or lack thereof, as it were): the end of the "homosexuality" as an operative category. Martel frames Hocquenghem as the champion of a staunchly separatist, ghettoizing gay communitarianism, yet—as I will discuss in chapter one—Hocquenghem's activist and intellectual work was, in reality, animated by the same fundamental desire as Martel: the end of

---

<sup>76</sup> Martel, *Le rose et le noir*, 397.

<sup>77</sup> I will discuss the gay cultural politics of HIV/AIDS in the 1990s and the "second wave" of HIV infections in France in chapter four's look at the life and work of Guillaume Dustan.

<sup>78</sup> Guy Hocquenghem, *Le désir homosexuel* (Paris: Éditions universitaires, 1972).

<sup>79</sup> Martel, "Epilogue : Un communautarisme improbable, un bonheur moins impossible," in *Le Rose et le noir*, 411.

"homosexuality." Given the "homophobic"<sup>80</sup> dimensions of Martel's book—it calls for the eradication of "homosexuality" in the public sphere—it is perhaps surprising to note that Martel himself is openly gay. Martel's, however, is not an isolated case; ambivalence and antagonism among French LGBT people toward the "ghetto" is a widespread phenomenon.<sup>81</sup> David Caron explains that gay hostilities toward the "ghetto" and *communautarisme* are "a manifestation of the tension arising from the perceptions that two identities, French and gay, are in conflict."<sup>82</sup>

### **Modern French Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Literary Politics and Political Literature**

The subjects of this dissertation are united by a shared project: sexual politics. The meaning(s) of sexuality will be discussed in each of the subsequent chapters, but, before proceeding, it is necessary to clarify what is meant here by "politics." Despite the ubiquity of the term, the meaning of "politics" proves difficult to pin down. There exist an array of definitions, ranging from the very narrow (e.g. politics as the art of statecraft) to the very broad (e.g. politics as a multifarious phenomenon that touches all areas of human life). For the purposes of this research, I approach politics not simply as governmental affairs or even as the exercise of or struggle for power, per se, but in terms of the "configuration of . . . community."<sup>83</sup> That is to say that politics is concerned with the organization of public life and space. The spatiality of politics is inscribed in the very etymology of the term; "politics" comes from the ancient Greek for "city"

---

<sup>80</sup> Caron, *AIDS in French Culture*, 153.

<sup>81</sup> I will return to the politics of the "gay ghetto" in chapter three's look at Guillaume Dustan's "ghetto" autofiction.

<sup>82</sup> Caron, *The Marais*, 82.

<sup>83</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Politics of Literature*, trans. Julie Rose (Cambridge and Malden: Polity, 2011), 4.

(*polis*).<sup>84</sup> I follow Rancière in understanding politics as "the construction of a specific sphere of experience in which certain objects are posited as shared and certain subjects regarded as capable of designating these objects and of arguing about them."<sup>85</sup> It follows that the political is broadly concerned with the making and unmaking of borders and boundaries; political activity is that which seeks to transform what Rancière calls the "distribution of the perceptible,"<sup>86</sup> the determination of whether and to what extent given bodies, subjects, groups, and discourses lie within or beyond the limits of intelligibility and legitimacy. In other words, what (and who) does or does not "count" is shaped by and constitutive of a complex, heterogeneous social landscape, and the mapping and resistant remapping of this landscape is part and parcel of the political.

Literature, then, is inherently political insofar as it occasions new, potentially transformative ways of perceiving, knowing, and responding to the world. Literature "intervenes . . . in this carving up of space and time, the visible and the invisible, speech and noise. It intervenes in the relationship between practices and forms of visibility and modes of saying that carves up one or more common worlds."<sup>87</sup> It is with this conception of politics in mind that I will consider the political activities of Hocquenghem, Wittig, Dustan, and Delorme. Though each of these figures (with the notable exception of Dustan) devoted much time and energy to pursuing social change through the mediums of direct action and social movement activism—Delorme continues to do so—what will interest us here is the broader question of if (and in what ways) their work unsettles the topography of the social world. This might entail the casting into relief

---

<sup>84</sup> "politics, n.," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, June 2017), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/237575?redirectedFrom=politics&>; "polis, n.2," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, June 2017), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/146859?qs4ED1&result=2>.

<sup>85</sup> Rancière, *Politics of Literature*, 4.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

of the manifold, otherwise unobtrusive inequalities and asymmetries in the distribution of power, agency, and space configured into the social ecology of everyday life and/or the proffering of alternative reimagining of how the social might be more equitably and justly *reconfigured*.

In this dissertation, I turn my attention to one specific avenue of political intervention: the writing of space. The literary treatment of space in particular has a distinctly political function, for as the spatial theorists discussed above have compellingly argued, space both shapes and is shaped by social relations, and representation is an integral mechanism through which space is "produced." Space offers an especially useful optic through which to consider sexual minority politics in France in particular because the foundational French tradition of Republican universalism is grounded in a distinctly spatial logic. It effectively posits that, in order to create a society in which all can be treated equally, certain identities, practices, and discourses are to be kept "behind closed doors," a mandate premised on the classic liberal bisection of social life into a public, political sphere of citizenship and a depoliticized private sphere of family, domesticity, and difference. Yet, the French pursuit of mapping social difference along these lines in a truly universal (i.e. apolitical) fashion, as highlighted above, proves difficult to realize in practice for many reasons, beginning with the instability and porosity of both the boundaries separating the private from the public sphere and those constitutive of the various collective and individual identities that Republican universalism seeks to privatize.

Spatial rhetoric and themes abound in the literary and theoretical works of French lesbian, gay, and queer political thinkers, yet their pervasiveness has not yet been examined, let alone theorized. The object of this research is not so much to narrowly track the mobilization of topographic rhetoric and themes by and in the name of post-'68 French LGBTQ social movements, however, as it is to examine the ways in which such spatial discourse provides a

vantage point for understanding how French lesbian, gay, and queer theorist-artists have imagined and articulated their politico-sexual projects against and/or through the logic of Republican universalism. The term "Republican universalism" is nowhere to be found in the writings of any of the writers examined in this dissertation. Their work, however, implicitly engages with the principle of Republican universalism in meaningful and significant ways.

Each of the four chapters of this dissertation will examine the place of space in the oeuvre of a politically oriented writer invested in questions of lesbian, gay, or queer sexuality. The four chapters, devoted to Guy Hocquenghem, Monique Wittig, Guillaume Dustan, and Wendy Delorme, respectively, will be organized chronologically in order to best trace the historical contexts within which each writer and their work was situated. This is not by any means to suggest, however, that the history of lesbian, bisexual, and queer politics is one of linear or even unidirectional progress. Though Hocquenghem, Wittig, Dustan, and Delorme in many ways constitute a highly heterogeneous group of thinkers, they have in common that they bring "a politics of disorientation," to borrow Sara Ahmed's phrase, to the matter of sexuality; their politico-literary explorations of the spatial dynamics of sexuality (and vice versa) foster "wonder about the very forms of social gathering."<sup>88</sup> More specifically, the figures considered in this dissertation all grapple (in theoretical and aesthetic registers) with borders of one kind or another—whether it be the boundary between homosexuality and heterosexuality (Hocquenghem); the borderline dividing humanity into men and women (Wittig); the insular confines of the "gay ghetto" vis-à-vis "le monde normal" (Dustan);<sup>89</sup> and the demarcation of national, sexual, and gender identities in the face of globalization (Delorme).

---

<sup>88</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 24.

<sup>89</sup> Guillaume Dustan, *Dans ma chambre*, in *Œuvres I: Dans ma chambre - Je sors ce soir - Plus fort que moi*, ed. Thomas Clerc, vol. 1 (Paris: P.O.L., 2013), 83

It is important to note that it would be anachronistic if not inaccurate to use the acronym LGBT to classify many of the texts and political frameworks discussed in this dissertation. "LGBT" represents a culturally and historically specific manner of grouping together sexual and gender minorities. The acronym LGBT did not take hold in France until the early 2000s,<sup>90</sup> nearly a decade after its invention in the Anglo-American context as a way of fostering broader political solidarity amongst lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities.<sup>91</sup> "LGBT" in this sense superseded the terms "gay" or "gay and lesbian" (and "homosexuel(le)" and "lesbienne" in the French context). Since then, however, an ever-proliferating number of competing initialisms (and sexual and gender identity labels) coined in the interest of greater inclusivity have emerged—facilitated by the rise of cyberspaces like online communities and social media—such as LGBTQIP2SAA, GSRM, QUILT BAG, and MOGAI,<sup>92</sup> which was originally devised by Tumblr user cisphobeofficial.<sup>93</sup> Beyond the simple fact that Hocquenghem's and Wittig's political and literary careers effectively preceded "LGBT," the dominant strands of the Gay Liberation and radical lesbian movements (of which they were leaders) perpetually found themselves at loggerheads over irreconcilable approaches to fundamental questions pertaining to gender and sexuality; a palpable sense of collective identity among French gay, lesbian, and other sexual and gender minority populations in the wake of the rise in France of

---

<sup>90</sup> Prearo, *Le moment politique de l'homosexualité*, 26.

<sup>91</sup> Massimo Prearo, "La naissance de la formule « LGBT » en France et en Italie : une analyse comparative des discours de mobilisation," *Cultures et conflits* 97, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 94.

<sup>92</sup> These acronyms stand, respectively, for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, pansexual, two-spirit, and asexual/aromantic; gender, sexual, and romantic minorities; queer and questioning, intersex, lesbian, transgender and two-spirit, bisexual, asexual and ally, and gay and gender; and marginalized orientations, gender identities, and intersex.

<sup>93</sup> Christine Feraday, "For Lack of a Better World: Neo-Identities in Non-Cisgender, Non-Straight Communities on Tumblr" (M.A. Thesis, Ryerson University and York University, 2016), 4.

"interassociative" LGBT politics is a distinctly 21st-century phenomenon.<sup>94</sup> Dustan's political and aesthetic attention, furthermore, is exclusively oriented toward the hyper-masculine world of "the gay ghetto." Delorme is the sole figure considered in this project to elaborate a political vision decidedly inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender perspectives.

The first chapter will examine the revolutionary work of Guy Hocquenghem. Hocquenghem, a Maoist libertarian political organizer during the student movements of 1968 turned gay liberationist leader and icon, was one of the central figures and chief theorists of the *Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire*. Hocquenghem's *Le désir homosexuel* (1972), a foundational text for queer theory, argues that homosexuality and the homosexual are social constructs rather than natural, pre-given categories. The very notion of "homosexual desire" is a political fiction; desire is, for Hocquenghem, an infinite, productive force inherently resistant to partition, organization, and control. The artificial, arbitrary, and ultimately untenable division of desire into heterosexual/homosexual variants serves to shore up the dominant capitalist social order; (what is crudely referred to as) homosexual desire is "undesirable" from a capitalist vantage in that it channels energy away from reproduction, broadly construed, and is therefore localized in the figure of the homosexual in order to be cast to the margins. Through a historically grounded analysis of Hocquenghem's work that bridges his activist career, theory of desire, and the motif of travel in his understudied fictional work, I argue unequivocally against the erroneous though widespread interpretation of Hocquenghem as an advocate of communitarian, "ghetto" gay politics and identity. On the contrary, this chapter sheds light on the "hyper-pluralistic universalism," as I call it, at the heart of Hocquenghem's sexual politics.

---

<sup>94</sup> See Prearo, "Un mouvement inter-associatif," in *Le moment politique de l'homosexualité*, 249–98; Prearo, "La naissance de la formule « LGBT » en France et en Italie," 77–95.

The second chapter turns to radical lesbian, materialist feminist activist, philosopher, and writer Monique Wittig. Wittig played in a central, founding, yet also divisive role in the *Mouvement de libération des femmes* (and its materialist feminist camp), the FHAR, and the radical lesbian movement during the 70s and 80s. Wittig's belief that heterosexually-identified women had no place in a truly radical feminist movement led to the breakup of the materialist feminist *Questions féministes* group and to her self-proclaimed "exile" in the US.<sup>95</sup> Wittig (in)famously argued that "les lesbiennes ne sont pas des femmes;"<sup>96</sup> for Wittig, despite the anatomical differences that define one's capacity for and potential role in biological reproduction, these differences do not justify the division of humanity into two, inherently unequal sex classes. Wittig understands "woman" and "man" to constitute oppositional social categories defined in hierarchical relation to one another; "woman" describes the subordinate position (vis-à-vis "man") within a set of hetero-patriarchal relations of social, economic, affective, and sexual exploitation. In other words, according to Wittig's materialist feminist framework, women are "women" because they are exploited; they are not exploited because they are women. Under the totalizing political regime that is heterosexuality, "women" are inevitably and unambiguously oppressed. It is possible, however, to go astray of and free oneself from the categories of sex; lesbians prove this by their very existence. Because they refuse to assume the position of "woman," lesbians manifest an outside to the regime of heterosexuality. The figure of the lesbian is thus an exemplary, politically potent one for Wittig insofar as lesbian existence denaturalizes and discloses the contingency of the heteronormative social order, leading the way toward its eventual dissolution. Wittig posits that lesbians occupy a space beyond the purview of "the

---

<sup>95</sup> Elaine Woo, "Monique Wittig, 67; Leading French Feminist, Social Theorist and Novelist," *The Los Angeles Times*, January 11, 2003, <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/jan/11/local/me-wittig11>.

<sup>96</sup> Monique Wittig, "La pensée straight," *Questions féministes*, no. 7 (1980): 53.

straight mind." Wittig's theoretical essays, however, do not clearly elaborate the nature of this space; is it a metaphorical or a physical space? Is it permanent or transitory? What kinds of people and bodies are welcome there? By looking to Wittig's fiction to answer these questions and elucidate in concrete terms her vision for the end of hetero-patriarchy, it becomes clear that Wittig is not the lesbian separatist she might appear to be. I demonstrate that Wittig's work espouses a competing universalism rooted in the universalization a radical lesbian point of view.

The avowedly "ghetto" autofiction and sexual politics of Guillaume Dustan are the focus of the third chapter. "Guillaume Dustan" is the pen name of the late William Baranès. Before he passed away in 2005 from an accidental drug overdose at the age of thirty-nine,<sup>97</sup> Dustan established himself through his polemical novels and late-night talk show appearances as the poster boy of gay libertinism, which for Dustan, who was openly HIV-positive, encompassed the right to *le bareback* (i.e. unprotected anal intercourse). Dustan's repudiation of the disciplinary rhetorics of "safe sex" and "community responsibility" quickly made him the undisputed *bête noire* of the HIV/AIDS activists of Act Up-Paris. Though Dustan eschewed organized gay activism, this chapter will lay bare the political implications of Dustan's allegiance to the "gay ghetto" through a historically grounded reading of his trilogy of "autopornographic" novels—*Dans ma chambre* (1996), *Je sors ce soir* (1997), and *Plus fort que moi* (1998)—which offer unabashed, first person accounts of their *séropo*<sup>98</sup> protagonists' sex- and drug-fueled navigation of the gay Paris of the 90s. What is most striking about Dustan's prose (besides, perhaps, its sexually explicit subject matter) is the almost clinical, anthropological lens through which it

---

<sup>97</sup> "La disparition de Guillaume Dustan," *Têtu*, October 9, 2005, <http://www.tetu.com/2005/10/09/news/france/la-disparition-de-guillaume-dustan/>.

<sup>98</sup> "Séropo(sitif)" is a (somewhat euphemistic) term in French for "HIV-positive."

looks at the subcultural world of the narrator and his "frères du ghetto;"<sup>99</sup> Dustan's autofiction archives the dialect, dietary habits, rites of passage, fashion, musical and literary tastes, ethical codes, and sexual and kinship rituals of the "gay ghetto." I argue that the distinctly ethnic, aggressively separatist model of gay identity and culture elaborated in Dustan's literary work offers an incisive critique of Republican universalism and the ways in which it fails to deliver on its promise of liberty for those whose desires lie too far outside the bounds of propriety.

The emergence of queer theory and culture in France since the late 90s has opened up new directions in French sexual minority politics, and the fourth and final chapter of this dissertation will examine the work and drag-inspired look and persona of one of the most spectacular exponents of "le queer made in France,"<sup>100</sup> Wendy Delorme. Delorme rose to subcultural fame in the early 2000s as a queer *performeuse* of stage and screen, headlining neo-burlesque cabaret revues like the *Queer X Show*, *le Cabaret des filles de joie*, *Kisses Cause Trouble*, and *Le Drag King Fem Show* and starring in *One Night Stand* (2006),<sup>101</sup> France's first "queer lesbian transgender" pornographic *long-métrage*.<sup>102</sup> In addition to her day job as a senior lecturer of communication studies (as Stéphanie Kunert), the multifaceted and prolific Delorme has also worked as a novelist, translator, sex educator, sex worker, and queer feminist activist. Delorme and her diverse oeuvre have proved provocative on many levels. Notably, renowned French feminist literary critic Anne-Emmanuelle Berger has leveled scathing criticism at Delorme for allegedly importing a queer theory of gender and sexuality fundamentally at odds with the fundamental aims of feminism and, just as egregiously, for acting as an unwitting

---

<sup>99</sup> Dustan, *Je sors ce soir*, in *Œuvres I*, 152.

<sup>100</sup> Marie-Hélène [Sam] Bourcier, *Queer zones 3: identités, cultures et politiques* (Paris: Amsterdam, 2011), 294.

<sup>101</sup> Émilie Jouvét, *One night stand* (Hystérie Prod, 2006).

<sup>102</sup> Émilie Jouvét, "One night stand," *Émilie Jouvét*, n.d., <http://www.emiliejouvét.com/one-night-stand>.

accomplice of American cultural imperialism. The anti-American under- and overtones of much of the French feminist critique of Delorme and "queer" in general echoes the nationalistic, Republican rhetoric mobilized by the social conservative *Manif pour tous* movement in their crusade against the existential threats posed by same-sex marriage, *la théorie du genre*, surrogacy (*tout court*), and all else that undermines the bedrock of French society (i.e. a "symbolic order" organized around the purportedly universal truths of *la différence sexuelle* and the heterosexual family). For many in France, across the political spectrum, American "queer propaganda . . . will not only pervert young people but also destroy the French nation itself."<sup>103</sup> However, Delorme's queer feminism, I demonstrate, is not "American" or un-French; Delorme's integrative sexual politics bridge a wide array of feminist, LGBT, and queer perspectives from across numerous national, generational, cultural, and linguistic divides. This chapter will examine the queer feminism elaborated in Wendy Delorme's experimental fiction and in the "post-pornographic" documentary *Too Much Pussy ! Feminist Sluts in the Queer X Show*<sup>104</sup> in which she is featured as well as the backlash it has invited for what it reveals about the status of French Republican sexual citizenship in an increasingly globalized world.

---

<sup>103</sup> Bruno Perreau, *Queer Theory: The French Response* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2016), 2.

<sup>104</sup> Émilie Jouvét, *Too much pussy ! Feminist sluts in the Queer X Show* (Solaris, 2010).

## CHAPTER ONE

### Guy Hocquenghem's Utopian Desire

It is not without a certain irony that Guy Hocquenghem, one of the driving forces of the French gay liberation movement, reportedly suffered from debilitating motion sickness,<sup>1</sup> for some of his fondest memories were of family holidays across Europe, and the exploration of foreign lands and cultures would be a lifelong passion and an integral theme in his political and creative work until his death from AIDS-related illness in 1988 at the age of 41. Hocquenghem was born on December 10, 1946 in an upper middle class Parisian suburb. Though he by all accounts enjoyed a happy childhood with his parents and four siblings, he recalls feeling acutely out of place from an early age:<sup>2</sup>

Quand j'étais petit, je croyais qu'on pouvait se déclarer apatride. Je songeais à me présenter à la mairie, et à rendre ma nationalité comme on rend un vêtement emprunté et malcommode. De folles rages puériles me sont venues à entendre que c'était impossible, impossible de n'être pas français [sic]<sup>3</sup>. . . . J'appris les larmes aux yeux qu'il n'y avait pas de justice supérieure pour réparer ce déni flagrant au libre arbitre. . . . On pouvait à la rigueur fuguer ses parents, pas sa nationalité.<sup>4</sup>

The son of two teachers who nurtured his intellectual gifts, he enjoyed a comfortably bourgeois upbringing before moving to Paris at fifteen to advance his studies. His educational pedigree is

---

<sup>1</sup> Ron Haas, "The Death of the Angel: Guy Hocquenghem and the French Cultural Revolution after May 1968" (Rice University, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Haas, in his unpublished doctoral thesis, a biographical study of Hocquenghem's place in the student and workers' movements in 1968 and the "cultural revolution" that followed, was the first to point to these feelings of "unbelonging" as a key impetus for and influence on Hocquenghem's later political projects.

<sup>3</sup> It is not necessarily "incorrect" in standard French to leave the "f" in "français" in lower case in this particular instance. It is ambiguous whether we are to read the word as a noun or an adjective; throughout his entire book-length essay *La beauté du métis: réflexions d'un francophobe* (Paris: Ramsay, 1979), Hocquenghem refuses to capitalize the words "France" and "Français" in order to best express the full extent of his "francophobia."

<sup>4</sup> Hocquenghem, *La beauté du métis*, 19.

an impressive one by any measure; he attended high school at the *Lycée Henri IV* before studying philosophy and Greek philology at the *École normale supérieure (rue d'Ulm)*.

Hocquenghem's sexual, intellectual, and political trajectories became closely intertwined at a young age. He began a sexual relationship at fifteen with his philosophy professor, René Schérer. He unabashedly recounts these formative sexual experiences in a historic 1972 "coming out" piece in *le Nouvel observateur*, one of the first of its kind in France, and whose publication was a landmark moment in French LGBT politics, announcing the "homosexual revolution" to come: "Je m'appelle Guy Hocquenghem. J'ai vingt-cinq ans. Il y a dix ans . . . j'étais en philo, j'avais quinze ans, et depuis quelques mois j'avais une 'liaison' avec un homme beaucoup plus agé que moi. . . . je devenais un homosexuel."<sup>5</sup> He and Schérer remained close friends, colleagues, and collaborators for the rest of Hocquenghem's life. It was under Schérer's tutelage that Hocquenghem made his way into Paris' subcultural gay scene and, in 1965, the ENS. Not long after beginning his studies there, Hocquenghem would take part along with thousands of other radical leftist students in the nascent movements that would become part of the political and cultural phenomenon now known as "mai 68."<sup>6</sup> The homophobia and heteronormativity Hocquenghem experienced within various *gauchiste* circles before, during, and following the May '68 student and worker uprisings led the perpetually "out of place" Hocquenghem to move from group to group before ultimately redirecting his political and philosophical attention almost exclusively to the question of homosexuality.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Guy Hocquenghem, "La Révolution des homosexuels," *Le Nouvel observateur*, January 10, 1972.

<sup>6</sup> Hocquenghem had already joined the youth faction of the *Parti communiste français* as well as the *Union nationale des étudiants de France* in 1962 while still a high school student, but he left during his first year at the ENS in order to join the Trotskyist group *La Jeunesse communiste révolutionnaire* (Bill Marshall, *Guy Hocquenghem: Theorising the Gay Nation* [Durham: Duke University Press, 1997]).

<sup>7</sup> The homophobia and heterosexism of many of the *soixante-huitards* is mockingly lambasted in the *Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire's* manifesto, *Rapport contre la normalité* (1971), and sociologist Frédéric

This chapter will consider Guy Hocquenghem's pioneering career as an activist for and theorist of gay liberation. I will be less concerned here with the historical specifics of Hocquenghem's political itinerary within the *mai 68* and French gay liberation movements than with his groundbreaking *theoretical* contributions to LGBT (and queer) politics and culture; a few scholars have already approached Hocquenghem's life and work from a historical perspective.<sup>8</sup> However, despite his place in the histories and cultural legacies of the May '68 and French LGBT rights movements, Hocquenghem has garnered surprisingly scant scholarly attention in France; a French biography of Hocquenghem was not published until 2015.<sup>9</sup> That scholars in France in particular have proved disinclined compared to their American and British counterparts to recognize the significance of Hocquenghem's contributions speaks to one of this dissertation's central premises: that the tradition of French Republican universalism does not readily "make room" for minority knowledges or political discourses. Moreover, much of the English-language work on or influenced by Hocquenghem—whose incisive critique of sexual identity in *Le désir homosexuel* (1972) has been identified as an influential precursor of queer theory<sup>10</sup>—as well as the few French studies of the May '68 and LGBT social movements that

---

Martel's *Le rose et le noir : les homosexuels en France depuis 1968* (Paris: Seuil, 1996) discusses at length the tensions between leftist revolutionary groups and the gay rights movement (see chapter five, "L'explosion militante"). Furthermore, bisexual libertarian communist militant and writer Daniel Guérin similarly decries the rampant homophobia he experienced within the French Left after he came out in 1965 in many of his autobiographical writings. See, for instance, *Homosexualité et révolution* (Paris: Le vent du ch'min, 1983).

<sup>8</sup> Ron Haas (see note one), Bill Marshall (see note six), and Cécile Voisset-Veysseyre (see note nine) all provide detailed historical accounts of Hocquenghem's long and complex career as an activist; Haas focuses more on Hocquenghem's work within the *mai 68* movements and subsequent "cultural revolution" whereas Marshall and Voisset-Veysseyre devote more attention to Hocquenghem's LGBT activism.

<sup>9</sup> Cécile Voisset-Veysseyre's short, 92-page biography, *Guy Hocquenghem : la révolte (1946-1988)* (Paris: Sextant, 2015), was the first (and is at this point the only) biography of Hocquenghem published in France. British scholar Bill Marshall's 1996 biography of Hocquenghem mentioned in note six.

<sup>10</sup> Downing, "Sexuality," ed. Christopher John Murray, *Encyclopedia of Modern French Thought* (New York: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2004); Tavia Nyong'o, "Do You Want Queer Theory (or Do You Want the Truth)? Intersections of Punk and Queer in the 1970s," *Radical History Review* 2008, no. 100 (January 1, 2008): 103–19; Adrian Rifkin, "Does Gay Sex Need Queer Theory?," *Paragraph* 35, no. 2 (July 2012): 197–214.

mention Hocquenghem tend overwhelmingly to focus on his more explicitly politically-oriented work, often ignoring his numerous short stories, novels, and personal essays, almost all of which have yet to be translated into English.<sup>11</sup> To be fair, it is not difficult to imagine why scholars have neglected to consider his fiction in relation to his radical sexual politics. Hocquenghem's creative writing was neither commercially successful nor critically lauded. He wrote most of his fiction after he had essentially withdrawn from gay activism, and homosexuality and sexual politics as such are far less explicitly treated or evoked in his creative oeuvre than one might reasonably expect from the work of one of France's foremost figures of gay liberation.<sup>12</sup>

Though most of Hocquenghem's fiction may seem to be at a far remove (as much thematically as temporally) from his theoretical work and activist efforts, it is my contention that Hocquenghem's creative work is, on the contrary, not merely congruous with his political writings, but that careful reading of his fiction elucidates some of the unelaborated aspects of his emancipatory sexual politics. In what follows, I will make good on this assertion by drawing out the political implications of Hocquenghem's fiction. I will begin by providing a sketch of Hocquenghem's activist career as it pertains to the founding of the modern LGBT rights movement in France before proceeding to unpack Hocquenghem's theoretical inquiries into the workings of sexual desire and identity. Finally, I will perform a reading of one of Hocquenghem's novels informed by the ideas laid out in his earlier philosophical writings and political manifestos. By examining the spatial logic that bridges the philosophical, political, and

---

<sup>11</sup> Of his book-length works, only Hocquenghem's theoretical essay *Le désir homosexuel* (1972) and novel *L'amour en relief* (1982) have as of yet been translated into English. See Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, trans. Daniella Dangoor (London: Allison and Busby, 1978); Guy Hocquenghem, *Love in Relief*, trans. Noura Wedell (New York: Sea Horse Press, 1986).

<sup>12</sup> This feature of his creative work sets him apart from his other writer-activists, notably his contemporary and one-time FHAR colleague Monique Wittig (see chapter 2).

aesthetic dimensions of his work, this chapter will shed light on the precise shape and character of Guy Hocquenghem's revolutionary utopian vision.

### **"Pour une conception homosexuelle du monde"<sup>13</sup>**

Though his name is almost certainly the first that comes to mind when one thinks of the *Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire*, the group that brought the gay liberation movement to France,<sup>14</sup> Hocquenghem was not actually a founding member. Its genesis can be traced back to a live radio broadcast on March 10, 1971. The theme of Ménie Grégoire's popular RTL radio talk show that day was "L'homosexualité, ce douloureux problème;" among the panel of "experts" assembled to discuss the "painful problem" of homosexuality were a psychoanalyst, a priest, and the socially conservative leader of French homophile organization *Arcadie*. During the broadcast, a few lesbian women (including Monique Wittig) interrupted the priest, yelling "Ce n'est pas vrai, on ne souffre pas !" and, what would become an unofficial *FHAR* motto, "À bas les hétéro-flics" before violently storming the stage.<sup>15</sup> The lesbian activists, almost all of whom

---

<sup>13</sup> Guy Hocquenghem, "Pour une conception homosexuelle du monde (3 juin 1971)," in *Rapport contre la normalité: le Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire rassemble les pièces de son dossier d'accusation : simple révolte ou début d'une révolution ?*, by Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire, 2013, 71.

<sup>14</sup> The *FHAR* was technically preceded by the *Comité d'action pédérastique révolutionnaire*, a small, extremely short-lived group whose activities consisted solely of affixing a few copies of the same tract denouncing homosexual oppression in the Latin Quarter during the May '68 events. The historical details surrounding the *CAPR* such as its founders, whether or not they may have held any meetings, and the writer(s) of the sole document it produced are disputed. Many testify to the existence, however, of an unsubstantiated rumor that Guy Hocquenghem, who at the time was devoted to the cause of the student and workers movement, tore down *CAPR* posters affixed to the walls of the Sorbonne out of fear that association with homosexuality would jeopardize the legitimacy of *mai 68*. See Martel, *Le Rose et le noir*, 21–22; Michael Sibalis, "Gay Liberation Comes to France: The Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire (FHAR)," *French History and Civilization: Papers from the George Rudé Seminar*, 2005, 269–70; Haas, "Death of an Angel," 160–62.

<sup>15</sup> Martel, *Le Rose et le noir*, 24–26; Sibalis, "Gay Liberation Comes to France," 265–67.

were (at the time) also active in the *Mouvement de libération des femmes*,<sup>16</sup> officially formed the FHAR with a handful of gay men the following evening.

A superficial comparison of the founding moments of the French and American gay liberation movements is instructive; the iconic Stonewall riots, which took place almost two years earlier on June 28, 1969, began as a violent, spontaneous response to systematic police violence against sexual and gender minorities,<sup>17</sup> whereas the Mérieu Grégoire incident constituted a calculated revolt against the symbolic violence of culturally institutionalized psychoanalytic and religious homophobia. In order to best understand Hocquenghem's work, it is essential to recognize that the politics of the French gay liberation movement were not, like those of its American counterpart, grounded (at least initially) in a logic or language of individual rights and personal liberty. In fact, there were at the time virtually no official restrictions in France on (private) homosexual activity. Following the Revolution, France became (in 1791) the first Western nation to legalize sodomy; in accordance with its newly consecrated secular ideals, the modern French republic abolished all crimes of "superstition." The most explicitly anti-gay law, enacted by the traditionalist Vichy regime, only went so far as to raise the age of consent for homosexual relations to 21.<sup>18</sup> As historian Scott Gunther explains, "the French Republic has protected its homosexual citizens . . . through [its] core values of secularism, separation between public and private spheres, liberalism, and universalism,"<sup>19</sup> producing for French LGB people

---

<sup>16</sup> See chapter two for a discussion of the troubled relationship between the *MLF*, its lesbian contingent, and the *FHAR*.

<sup>17</sup> Many of the participants of the Stonewall riots were gender-nonconforming people (of color). For an excellent history of the Stonewall events, see Martin Duberman's *Stonewall* (New York: Dutton, 1993).

<sup>18</sup> The FHAR manifesto *Rapport contre la normalité* cites this Vichy ordinance as well as the 1960 Mirguet amendment, which doubled the penalty for indecent exposure for public homosexual activity until it was repealed in 1980, as proof of state oppression of homosexuality. See FHAR, *Rapport contre la normalité*, 38–39.

<sup>19</sup> Scott Gunther, *The Elastic Closet: A History of Homosexuality in France, 1942–present* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1.

what he calls an "elastic closet" inherent to French Republican ideology that can serve both to shelter and confine. In the absence of state repression to confront, for one thing, it is no coincidence that the French gay liberation movement was more ideological and idealistic in its aims and methods than its American homologue; Hocquenghem and his comrades demanded no less than the destruction of the prevailing socio-cultural order, which constituted a total break with the respectability (anti-<sup>20</sup>)politics of the small, assimilationist, bourgeois homophile movement that had existed in France since the 1950s.<sup>21</sup>

At the time of the FHAR's founding, Hocquenghem's militant energies were being channeled exclusively into his active participation in the Maoist libertarian group *Vive la révolution* !,<sup>22</sup> an organization characterized by its focus on questions of "lifestyle" and *cultural* revolution. The first priority of the VLR was to revolutionize everyday life, that is, to "changer la vie," a phrase borrowed from Rimbaud<sup>23</sup> (in opposition to the orthodox Marxist call to change the *world*). Hocquenghem would get involved with the FHAR after dropping in on one of its regular (albeit still sparsely attended) meetings at the *École des Beaux-arts* in April 1971. The VLR would soon be torn apart (and ultimately disband formally) due to internal strife over

---

<sup>20</sup> The mission of *Arcadie* was decidedly nonpolitical, and Françoise d'Eaubonne, founding member of the *FHAR*, was expelled from *Arcadie* for trying to start a feminist subgroup within the organization. See Sibalis, "Gay Liberation Comes to France," 268.

<sup>21</sup> The French homophile movement was launched by André Baudry, a former seminarian and philosophy teacher, first in the form of a literary review in 1954 and then as a proper association (officially called the "Club littéraire et scientifique des pays latins") in 1957. For more on the homophile movement in France, see Scott Eric Gunther, "Living with Dignity in the 1950s and 60s," in *The Elastic Closet: A History of Homosexuality in France, 1942-Present* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 38–44; Martel, "« À bas l'homosexualité de papa ! », " in *Le rose et le noir*, 59–79.

<sup>22</sup> *Vive la révolution* was an example of one of the French *mao-spontex* groups. The term "mao-spontex" comes from a combination of Maoism and *spontanéisme*; VLR and other *mao-spontex* groups were so named because of their direct action tactics and the inspiration they drew from the notion of cultural revolution; before joining the VLR, Hocquenghem had been a member of the Trotskyist group *Jeunesse communiste révolutionnaire*.

<sup>23</sup> The phrase comes from Arthur Rimbaud's "Délires," in *Une saison en enfer* (1873). François Mitterrand was elected president in 1981 on the Socialist Party ticket using the same slogan. Chapter five of Kristin Ross' *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (London and New York: Verso, 2008) considers this and other examples of political appropriation of Rimbaud's work.

questions of sexuality; the women would leave en masse to join the MLF after being accused by the men of "sexual racism" in a scathing letter published in *Tout !*, their bi-weekly publication.<sup>24</sup> The outraged women, in what would find echoes in the later lesbian exodus from the FHAR, responded with a letter of their own: "Votre libération sexuelle n'est pas la nôtre !"<sup>25</sup>

Before the collapse of the VLR, however, Hocquenghem made use of his position in the group to elevate the FHAR and the cause of gay liberation to greater prominence. An influential member of the *Tout !* editorial staff, Hocquenghem organized a special issue devoted to sexuality that was published on April 23, 1971. The provocative issue was promptly banned and seized by the police on the grounds of its supposed obscenity, and Jean-Paul Sartre, who had lent his famous name to the newspaper, was as its nominal editor charged with "outrage aux bonnes mœurs" and pornography.<sup>26</sup> The "obscene" content included an anti-racist (or at least intended as anti-racist)<sup>27</sup> pastiche of the pro-abortion "Manifeste des 343 [salopes]":<sup>28</sup> "Nous sommes plus de 343 salopes. Nous nous sommes faits enculer par des arabes [sic]. Nous en sommes fiers et nous recommencerons."<sup>29</sup> A Jean Genet quote accompanies the manifesto: "Peut-être que si je n'étais jamais allé au lit avec des Algériens, je n'aurais pu approuver le FLN. . . . c'est l'homosexualité qui m'a fait réaliser que les Algériens n'étaient pas différents des autres hommes."<sup>30</sup> Though it

---

<sup>24</sup> "Lettre de Mohammed," *Tout : ce que nous voulons !*, no. 14 (June 7, 1971), 5.

<sup>25</sup> "Votre libération sexuelle n'est pas la nôtre !," *Tout*, no. 15 (June 30, 1971), 3.

<sup>26</sup> Martel, *Le rose et le noir*, 28–29.

<sup>27</sup> It is interesting to note that the FHAR opted to officially register their organization as the *Fédération humaniste anti-raciste* in order to avoid any potential police scrutiny on the grounds of obscenity or pornography.

<sup>28</sup> The manifesto has been remembered by many as the "Manifeste des 343 salopes" after left-wing satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* famously referred to it as such.

<sup>29</sup> *Tout !*, no. 12, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

has been regarded by scholars as a joke of little consequence,<sup>31</sup> a holistic consideration of Hocquenghem's life and oeuvre should give us pause to reconsider its significance; the same racial and intercultural questions the manifesto and Genet quote provocatively raise reemerge often and in a more sustained manner in much of his work.

On the heels of the *Tout !* scandal, attendance at the FHAR general assembly meetings skyrocketed, growing in the spring of 1971 from tens to hundreds of men and women invigorated by the prospect of an end to the heterosexist, bourgeois, misogynistic "phallocratie." Historian Jacques Girard has called this moment the "mai 68 des homosexuels,"<sup>32</sup> as the FHAR activists—many of them like Hocquenghem former May '68 activists—not only rivaled the *soixante-huitards* in enthusiasm, but also employed many of their methods (e.g. direct democracy, avoidance of cults of personality, consciousness raising). However, the "gay May '68" would ironically mark the FHAR's break with leftist line of May '68 proper. The FHAR was keen to distance itself from the infighting, political stagnation, and heterosexism<sup>33</sup> of the leftist milieu and broaden its reach to all corners of French society. Hocquenghem furthermore believed that the "problem" of homosexuality to be a perfectly legitimate grounds from which to mount a cultural revolution; the FHAR need no longer appeal to the abstract, universalist rhetoric of *gauchisme*. However, the strategy through which they intended to bring about the new socio-sexual order they so desired never had the chance to be meaningfully elaborated, let alone executed. Following the influx of eager (and disproportionately male) newcomers, the FHAR's

---

<sup>31</sup> Frédéric Martel and Ron Haas, for instance, mention the FHAR's pastiche only in passing. Todd Shepard, however, situates the manifesto in the context of the recent decolonization of Algeria; he explores in an article how the trope of male Arab sexuality was deployed before, during, and following Algerian decolonization for a variety of political ends in France. See Todd Shepard, "'Something Notably Erotic': Politics, 'Arab Men,' and Sexual Revolution in Post-Decolonization France, 1962–1974\*," *The Journal of Modern History* 84, no. 1 (March 2012): 80–115.

<sup>32</sup> Jacques Girard, *Le mouvement homosexuel en France, 1945-1980* (Paris: Syros, 1981), 84.

<sup>33</sup> See note 7.

general assembly meetings rapidly transformed from a space of discussion and debate into one of unbridled sexual indulgence. Though the opportunity to explore their sexualities in a "safe space" was reportedly an affirmative, pivotal experience for many of the *FHARistes*,<sup>34</sup> the same could not be said for the (now relatively few) *FHAReuses* (or for some of the more exclusively politically-oriented *FHARistes*). Co-founder Philippe Guy laments, "Dans ce cloaque de baise . . . le FHAR ne pouvait que s'effondrer."<sup>35</sup> Consequently, disillusioned over the sudden hypersexualization of the FHAR meetings as well as the misogyny of some of the men who had come to dominate the movement that they had founded, the lesbians of the FHAR began to leave the organization en masse that summer to form the splinter group *Les gouines rouges* in July of 1971.<sup>36</sup> Hocquenghem himself mourns the FHAR's failed promise in a collection of essays (somewhat bitterly) excoriating the state of post-'68 leftist politics in general; he recalls the embarrassment he experienced at a visiting American activist's reaction to one of the meetings: "What is it supposed to be?"<sup>37</sup> Optimistically, however, he grants that in spite of the "backroom-ization," so to speak, of the FHAR, "le Fhar a-t-il réellement transformé la géographie homosexuelle à Paris — et ça n'est déjà pas si mal."<sup>38</sup>

Despite the FHAR's indelible place in the collective memory of French LGBT activists and the challenge it so ostentatiously posed to dominant social mores, the group was ultimately short-lived and limited, at best, in its concrete achievements. Historian Michael Sibalís, however,

---

<sup>34</sup> Jacques Girard's *Le mouvement homosexuel en France, 1945-1980* (see note 32) includes the testimonies of several FHAR members who describe their experiences within the erotically charged community in overwhelmingly positive terms.

<sup>35</sup> Philippe Guy, quoted in Martel, 34.

<sup>36</sup> Françoise Picq, *Libération Des Femmes: Les Années-Mouvement* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), 104–11. For more on *Les gouines rouges* and women and the FHAR, see chapter two.

<sup>37</sup> Guy Hocquenghem, "Le mouvement homosexuel est glacé," in *L'après-mai des faunes* (Paris: Grasset, 1974), 195.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

credits the FHAR with a few modest accomplishments. For example, the group garnered a bit of publicity for gay issues in the (alternative) press; a contingent of its members became the first gays and lesbians to publicly demonstrate in France as part of the May Day parade of 1971; they staged a number of characteristically provocative public actions such as "kiss-ins" in Parisian cafés; and they collaborated with their Italian counterparts (the gay liberationist group FUORI) to disrupt a sexology conference.<sup>39</sup> Though the leftist underpinnings of their early rhetoric would fall by the wayside, their tactics of combining traditional forms of political demonstration with showy spectacles of sexual transgression and flamboyant theatricality would be taken up again in France by the HIV/AIDS campaigners of Act Up-Paris in the late 80s (see chapter 3) as well as by French queer and post-porn activists beginning in the late 90s (see chapter 4).

Though the chaotic FHAR meetings would continue for a few years, political discussion had long ceased to be a part of the agenda by the time the police banned the meetings at the behest of the *École des Beaux-Arts* in 1974,<sup>40</sup> effectively shutting the group down.<sup>41</sup> The FHAR was superseded by a number of other LGBT rights and advocacy associations, notably the FHAR regional offshoot *Groupes de libération homosexuelle* and the *Comité d'urgence anti-répression homosexuelle*, a coalition of several smaller lesbian, gay, and bisexual groups. The various groups that loosely constitute this "second wave" of French LGBT social movements abandoned the revolutionary ambitions of gay liberation in favor of a reformist, civil rights-oriented approach to "gay equality." Hocquenghem continued to write about and involve himself in gay political and cultural matters, but he opted to do so on a strictly individual basis and to remain unaffiliated with any post-FHAR LGBT associations: "Les mouvements homosexuels ont vécu.

---

<sup>39</sup> Sibalis, "Gay Liberation Comes to France," 272–73.

<sup>40</sup> Hocquenghem, however, had been one of several politically engaged FHAR members to lose faith in and stop attending its meetings long before its inevitable collapse.

<sup>41</sup> Martel, 36.

Certes ils se développeront encore, obtiendront des changements dans la condition qui est faite aux pédés. Mais comme *mouvement* ils sont morts" (italics Hocquenghem's).<sup>42</sup>

## Disorienting Desire

Having provided a contextual sketch of Hocquenghem's place in the French gay liberation and broader LGBT rights movements, we can now turn to his thought. In this section, I will be considering Hocquenghem's politics from a primarily theoretical rather than historical vantage, that is to say as a political thinker rather than an actor.

The title of *Le désir homosexuel*, Hocquenghem's most well-known and philosophically sophisticated study of sexuality, gestures misleadingly to the fields of psychoanalysis and sexology; however, it is clear from the first lines of its introduction that Hocquenghem has no grand theory of homosexual desire, per se, to offer us: "Ce qui pose problème n'est pas le désir homosexuel, c'est la peur de l'homosexualité ; il faut expliquer pourquoi le mot seul déclenche les fuites et les haines."<sup>43</sup> Hocquenghem offers instead an extended analysis of the social, psychological, and political dynamics of *homophobia*, for "le désir homosexuel," strictly speaking, is for him a fictitious concept of nefarious origins:

Il n'y a pas de subdivision du désir entre homosexualité et hétérosexualité. . . . Le désir émerge sous une forme multiple, dont les composantes ne sont séparables qu'a posteriori. . . . Tout comme le désir hétérosexuel, le désir homosexuel est un découpage arbitraire

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Hocquenghem, *Le désir homosexuel*, 23.

dans un flux ininterrompu et polyvoque. . . . La caractérisation homosexuelle du désir de façon exclusive est un leurre de l'imaginaire.<sup>44</sup>

Hocquenghem's understanding of desire as a ceaseless, undifferentiated "flux" resistant to any attempts at its organization, division, or restriction is indebted to Deleuze and Guattari's anti-psychoanalytic philosophy of desire (specifically as elaborated in *Anti-Oedipus* [1972]).<sup>45</sup> In *Le désir homosexuel*, Hocquenghem's point of departure is Deleuze and Guattari's conception of desire as an infinitely productive, chaotically creative force and their rejection of the psychoanalytic casting of desire as the representation of a fundamental lack or absence with respect to an eternally unattainable object. Freud locates the origins of desire in the Oedipal scene of the male child's coercion under the threat of castration by the father to renounce his intense libidinal investment in the mother. The most conspicuous influence on Hocquenghem's writing prior to *Le désir homosexuel* (e.g. his essays published in *Tout !* and *Rapport contre la normalité*) was the Freudian Marxist work of Wilhelm Reich (and to a lesser extent that of Herbert Marcuse) on sexual desire, namely the idea that the perpetuation of modern capitalism necessarily requires both the repression of libidinal energies and the frustration of bodily sexual gratification.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>45</sup> As Julian Bourg points out, the early 1970s saw the rise of "philosophies of desire" in post-'68 France, examples of which include, Jean-François Lyotard's *Économie libidinale* (1974) and Jean-Paul Dollé's *Le désir de révolution* (1972). See Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (Montreal and Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 107–10.

<sup>46</sup> It is important to note that Hocquenghem tends to employ a somewhat "piecemeal" approach in his engagement with the work of other thinkers, sometimes appropriating aspects of their thought reductively or superficially, often apparently strategically so. For instance, Hocquenghem ignores the fact that Reich believed that homosexuality arose as a consequence of the societal repression of heterosexual desire. Furthermore, though Reich was cited as an important influence by many of the student movements of May 1968, the VLR in particular looked to Reich's work as a primary theoretical foundation. On the importance of Reich's work within the context of *mai 68*, see Jean-Pierre Le Goff, *mai 68: L'héritage impossible* (Paris: Découverte, 1998), 283–95.

According to Hocquenghem,<sup>47</sup> homophobia operating in the service of capitalism is the source of the concept of homosexuality and not the contrary. For him, what we crudely refer to as homosexual desire animates us all to varying degrees, yet is fundamentally at odds with the capitalist social order; it channels energy away from reproduction (broadly construed) and must therefore be repressed.<sup>48</sup> The suppression of these specific "undesirable" desires *begins* with the invention of homosexuality and their localization within the figure of the homosexual: "Après le décodage capitaliste il n'y a plus de place pour [l'homosexualité] . . . que l'axiomatisation perverse."<sup>49</sup> This is a remarkably similar position to what the anti-essentialist French feminist sociologist Colette Guillaumin would propose the same year with respect to race and racism, that is that "racist ideology" naturalizes social relations of domination through the production of race and racialized subjects.<sup>50</sup> Hocquenghem cautions us to be wary of even the most seemingly neutral discourses around homosexuality, for the substantive "homosexuality" is always already freighted with homophobia: "il n'y a pas de position innocente ou objective sur l'homosexualité."<sup>51</sup>

Hocquenghem's belief that "homosexual desire" is constructed by and through homophobic discourses is a plainly proto-Foucauldian position. We can in fact identify in Hocquenghem's writings several insights that seem to anticipate Foucault's work on sexuality; *Le désir homosexuel* (1972) was published three years before Foucault's *Surveiller et punir* (1975)

---

<sup>47</sup> In his assertion that capitalism requires the repression (or at least the regulation) of homosexuality, Hocquenghem is essentially applying a reworking of Reich's theory of sexual repression under capitalism to homosexuality. As is often the case with Hocquenghem,

<sup>48</sup> Hocquenghem, "Famille, capitalisme, anus," in *Le désir homosexuel*, 91–122.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>50</sup> See Colette Guillaumin, *L'idéologie raciste: genèse et langage actuel* (Paris: Mouton, 1972); I will return to the relationship between radical materialist feminism to LGBT politics and culture and to the work of Colette Guillaumin in the following chapter on Monique Wittig.

<sup>51</sup> Hocquenghem, *Le désir homosexuel*, 59.

and four years before the first volume of his *Histoire de la sexualité* (1976). However, Hocquenghem's philosophy of sexuality is ultimately more Deleuzian than Foucauldian. The most glaring divergence between Hocquenghem's and Foucault's theories of sexuality is to be found in their understandings of desire. While they both agree that desire plays a critical role in subjectivity, Hocquenghem neglects to consider the extent to which desire is itself constructed through discourse; the ahistoricity of Hocquenghem's account of desire sets it starkly apart from Foucault's (and that of much of Anglo-American queer theory, for that matter). Furthermore, Hocquenghem's Reichian assertion that it is capitalist forces above all else that occasion the sublimation of homosexual desire is a glaring example of a "repressive hypothesis" that Foucault strongly rejects. Furthermore, Foucault was highly skeptical of the ideology of "sexual liberation" for, as he argues most forcefully in the first volume of his *Histoire de la sexualité*, sexuality is inextricably implicated in the very relations of power that liberationist projects would seek to subvert.

The repression of "same-sex" desire, for Hocquenghem, manifests itself not only within the realms of the social, the familial, and the individual; homophobia is inscribed on the body itself, establishing a corporeal cartography that orients us as we negotiate these different domains. During the Oedipal scene, the phallus is elevated to the position of chief signifier:

Il n'y a plus dans le monde de la sexualité oedipianisée de branchement libre des organes entre eux, de rapports de jouissance directe. Il y a un organe, un organe sexuel seulement, qui est au centre de la triangulation oedipienne, le Un qui donne leur place aux trois éléments du triangle. C'est lui qui construit le manque, c'est lui le signifiant despotique par rapport auquel se créent les situations des personnes globales.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 94.

In our "phallocratic" world,<sup>53</sup> our understanding of our bodies is organized around the phallus just as society at large is organized around phallic leaders; capitalism's masculinist hierarchies are in the end the consequence of our collective subjection to Oedipal law. For the Oedipal social structure to function properly, however, the supremacy of the phallus is shored up via the denial of the desiring function of the anus and its complete removal from the social field: "Si le phallus est essentiellement social, l'anous est essentiellement privé." The most private of parts, Hocquenghem points out, is not the genitals, but the anus,<sup>54</sup> the bodily site of non-productivity par excellence. Resolution of the Oedipal complex entails the domestication of the "polymorphously perverse" desires of the infant into the genital sexuality of the mature adult; the privatization of the anus—that which must be withdrawn from the social world—at once sutures our identities as discrete, individuated, private selves and discourages practices of desire incompatible with the capitalist imperative of heterosexual reproduction. Desiring use of the anus (and other forms of sexual play not centered around the genitals) holds the potential to shatter the very integrity of the sexed body, restoring it to a state of indefinite potentiality,<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Hocquenghem defines his (and the FHAR's) concept of "phallocratie" in slightly varying manners throughout his oeuvre. In his discussion of the dynamic interplay between the anus, familialism, and capitalism in *Le désir homosexuel*, he defines society as phallocratic insofar as "l'ensemble des relations sociales est construit sur le mode hiérarchique où se manifeste la transcendance du grand signifiant. Le maître d'école, le général . . . sont le père-phallus parce que tout est organisé sur ce mode pyramidal où le signifiant oedipien distribue les niveaux et les identifications" (95–96). In less psychoanalytically inflected of the FHAR, it "la phallocratie" is defined as a "forme de domination de la société, sous prétexte que le phallus (votre bite) est supérieur au vagin ou au clitoris. Tout pouvoir d'État est fondé sur cette « petite différence »" ("notre vocabulaire," in *Rapport contre la normalité*, 14–15).

<sup>54</sup> In the introduction, Hocquenghem states his theorization of homosexual desire is of "l'homosexualité masculine." It is difficult to imagine how heterosexual women or lesbians would figure into Hocquenghem's overall schema (*Le désir homosexuel*, 23). He stresses, however, in his discussions of the anus both that anyone—regardless of gender—can engage in anal sexual play and that "gay sex" cannot and should not be reduced to anal sex among men.

<sup>55</sup> Paul B. Preciado insists upon the importance of the anus in (his queer reading of) Hocquenghem's political thought in a companion essay to the 2009 Spanish language translation of *Le désir homosexuel*. See Beatriz [Paul B.] Preciado, "Terror anal," in *El deseo homosexual*, by Guy Hocquenghem, trans. Geoffroy Huard de la Marre (Barcelona: Melusina, 2009), 133–72.

threatening the sovereignty of the phallus as the chief organizing principle of the body, signification, and "phallocratic" society at large.

Hocquenghem points to "la machine de la drague," his Deleuzian coinage to refer to "cruising,"<sup>56</sup> as another concrete example of his liberationist philosophy in action. Hocquenghem has no qualms about strategically lending credence to the homophobic stereotypes of gay promiscuity and its emotional vacuity:

Il est généralement admis que ce . . . le fait que les homosexuels multiplient les relations amoureuses dont chacune peut ne durer qu'un instant, traduit une instabilité fondamentale de la condition homosexuelle. . . . Mais au lieu de traduire cette dispersion de l'énergie amoureuse en termes d'incapacité à trouver un centre, on peut y voir le système en acte de branchements non exclusifs du désir polyvoque.<sup>57</sup>

Hocquenghem construes the liberationist potential of gay casual non-monogamy to derive precisely from its supposedly categorical incompatibility with heteronormative configurations of intimacy; an ethics of promiscuity is, for Hocquenghem, an exemplary method of sexual liberation not just because it contravenes heteronormative codes of sociability, but because it de-centers these codes by inventing a multiplicity of alternatives. Hocquenghem, however, does not simplistically call on every individual to sexually liberate themselves by having more sex; to reduce the meaning of desire to sexual desires directed toward climax is already to participate in desire's territorialization. The idea that we "have sex" at all is an acutely anti-Hocquenghemian notion; sexual liberation, for him, must begin with the realization that, under capitalism, sex, more often than not, "has us." Hocquenghem understands desire to be at play in a limitless array

---

<sup>56</sup> *La drague*, however, essentially functions in *Le désir homosexuel* as a synecdoche for non-monogamous gay sexual practices more generally.

<sup>57</sup> Hocquenghem, *Le désir homosexuel*, 150–51.

of activities and relations, and liberating desire means freeing it to express itself, whatever that might look like. Desire is inherently promiscuous, and it should not be prescriptively *re*-oriented toward any specific end; desire must be restored to a state of *dis*-orientation.

As Deleuze writes in his preface to Hocquenghem's *L'après-mai des faunes*, "le désir agence, il machine, il établit des connexions."<sup>58</sup> Deleuze concurs with Hocquenghem's faith in the revolutionary potential of homosexuality, appreciating, unlike many of his later commentators, the profoundly anti-identitarian implications of Hocquenghem's theory of homosexual desire: "Loin de se fermer sur « le même », l'homosexualité va s'ouvrir sur toutes sortes de relations nouvelles possible . . . avec autant de sexes qu'il y a d'agencements n'excluant même pas de nouveaux rapports entre hommes et femmes."<sup>59</sup> Gay men and lesbians are uniquely well positioned in terms of their sexual liberation first and foremost because their marginalized sexual desires lack social utility (from the perspective of capitalist reproduction) and are therefore potentially less restricted by the force of sexual norms that they could never live up to.<sup>60</sup> Homosexuality therefore constitutes a fertile site for the generation of novel sexes, genders, ways of relating (to oneself and to others). Hocquenghemian "homosexuality" is in this sense at odds with the communitarian mode of "gay" culture that began to develop in France in the wake

---

<sup>58</sup> Gilles Deleuze, "Préface," in *L'après-mai des faunes*, by Guy Hocquenghem (Paris: Grasset, 1974), 9.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>60</sup> This is, perhaps obviously, Hocquenghem's view and not my own; the idea that non-heterosexual sexualities are in any way more impervious to the influence of heteronormativity unwittingly reinforces an essentializing dichotomy between homo- and hetero-sexual orientations that he elsewhere vehemently critiques. Furthermore, Hocquenghem's and Deleuze's assertion—it's not entirely clear in his preface to what extent Deleuze is endorsing or merely explicating Hocquenghem's view—that homosexual desire lacks social utility under capitalist ideology is a blatantly untenable position. As I mention earlier, Hocquenghem himself would later realize capitalism's ability to adapt homosexual desire to its own ends after the emergence of "gay" as a consumer category and of what we now call the "pink dollar." On LGBT and queer complicity with and appropriation by capitalist interests, see Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman, "Queer Nationality," in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. Michael Warner and Social Text Collective (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 193–229; and John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity," in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Barr Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 100–113.

of the FHAR. Hocquenghem's disengagement from (organized) gay politics at the dawn of its reformist, pragmatic "second wave" in the late 1970s coincided with a major shift in Parisian gay culture: the emergence of le Marais as an American-style gay "ghetto" as well an "ethnic" model of gay identity and culture, a development that he very much lamented.<sup>61</sup>

Yet, the question remains as to what Hocquenghem's ideal sexual landscape—one unbounded by a logic of reproduction—would resemble or how it might actually be achieved; would it necessarily follow from capitalism's collapse? If it seems unclear what exactly the social framework that would result from the universalization of a "homosexual conception of the world" would consist of in concrete terms, that is because Hocquenghem, in "utopian" fashion,<sup>62</sup> neglects to explore these matters in depth. Critics of Hocquenghem's Deleuzian politics of desire have pointed out the conceptual leaps Hocquenghem makes by presuming that desiring production (deployed as a method of resistance) might dismantle (or even upset) the social order and by leaving unexplained how desire can concretely be expressed without recourse to the capitalist, humanist signifying economy that it seeks to collapse. For instance, James Penney argues that "far from offering an alternative to an insipid politics of identity . . . the politics . . . proposed by Hocquenghem inevitably manifests its dubious humanistic voluntarism: in the

---

<sup>61</sup> Hocquenghem expresses his disappointment at the development of "the gay community" and its emergence as a consumer category in *La dérive homosexuelle* (Paris: Delarge, 1977).

<sup>62</sup> Hocquenghem acknowledges Charles Fourier as major influence on his own socialist thought. In particular, *L'après-mai des faunes* features an essay, simply called "Fourier," in which Hocquenghem explicates, via Deleuze and Guattari, Fourier's theorization of production: "Il convient de penser avec Fourier, la production comme désir et le désir comme production" (65). He opposes Fourier's to (and privileges it over) Marx's; classical Marxian production, for Hocquenghem, presumes humanity's domination over nature, whereas Hocquenghem reads Fourier to understand production to entail a mutually transformative dynamic between humanity and nature, of which man is ultimately a part. See "Fourier," in *L'après-mai des faunes*, 65–73. I will return later to the matter of Hocquenghem's utopianism.

unceasing flux of desire I can access “n” genders, “n” sexes, “n” identities. Such a politics simply reconfigures the conceptual apparatus of identitarian humanism by multiplying it.”<sup>63</sup>

What is certain, however, is that Hocquenghem demands the universalization of an anti-identitarian, "homosexual" ethic of equality. We see in the way that Hocquenghem mobilizes the category of (male) homosexuality even in his earlier, less theoretical political writings for the FHAR that, for him, homosexuality as a concept is of unequivocally universal significance and appeal. In a manifesto in the *Rapport contre la normalité*, Hocquenghem argues for the assimilation of the entirety of society to a "une conception homosexuelle du monde:"

Notre conception du monde, c'est : « Amour entre nous, guerre contre les autres », étant bien entendu que cet « entre nous » est indéfiniment extensible, que le but de cette guerre est de l'étendre. . . . L'amour homosexuel est actuellement le seul amour qui vise à l'égalité, parce que, marginal, il n'est d'aucune *utilité sociale* ; que les rôles homme/femme, baisé/baiseur, maître/esclave y sont instables et inversables à tout moment. C'est cela que nous défendons sous le nom d'« Homosexualité ».<sup>64</sup>

Analogous to the distinction Monique Wittig draws between her concept of the "straight mind" and heterosexuality, Hocquenghem's "homosexual conception of the world," has little to do with homosexuality; that the only sexual and romantic relationships that, according to him, truly achieve concrete social equality are homosexual ones is, again, a consequence of capitalism-inflected gender norms rather than biological determinism. It is in Hocquenghem's critique of "phallocratic" heterosexuality as a political institution that oppresses (heterosexual) women and marginalizes gays and lesbians that he most strongly concurs with the views the "materialist lesbian" theory of Monique Wittig. Their chief point of disagreement is in the proper response to

---

<sup>63</sup> James Penney, "The Schizoanalytic Protest," *Angelaki* 9, no. 1 (April 1, 2004): 81.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

the problem of patriarchal heterosexism; whereas Wittig's quasi-separatist lesbian feminist theory would have lesbians extricate themselves economically, politically, and ideologically from the oppressively heteronormative category of "woman," Hocquenghem calls instead for the egalitarian sexual ethics exemplified by homosexuality to be taken up by the whole of society.

Hocquenghem is in his writing resolute in his universalist approach to sexual politics. Commentators have, in my view, erroneously interpreted Hocquenghem theory as exemplary of "the current of 'differentialist' cultural politics born in the 'cultural revolution' of the '60s" and as a key precursor to post-gay liberation sexual "identity politics."<sup>65</sup> Julian Bourg, for instance, argues that Hocquenghem's position "valorize[s] difference in contradistinction to the *universalism* now classically associated with bourgeois morality, law, and patriarchy."<sup>66</sup> I would contend, on the contrary, that this is—at least in the case of Hocquenghem's work—a wholly false dichotomy. Hocquenghem's work does not correspond neatly to either the "communitarian" *droit à la différence* or Republican universalist *droit à l'indifférence* schools of French LGBTQ politics. Hocquenghem's work indeed calls upon French gay and lesbians to aggressively manifest their "homosexual desire" in the public sphere, but this exhibition of "deviance" is intended as part of a radically anti-identitarian assault on the very notion of "homosexual desire." When we read the flamboyant activism of the FHAR through Hocquenghem's theoretical writing, we see that, for him, by testifying through their public presence to the existence of resistant forms of sexuality and gender, the *FHARistes* were in effect inviting the rest of French society to join them in producing their own rather than staking claim to the right to a collective gay identity. Hocquenghem, though clearly a critic of the French Republican approach to

---

<sup>65</sup> Julian Bourg, "'Your Sexual Revolution Is Not Ours': French Feminist 'Moralism' and the Limits of Desire," in *Gender and Sexuality in 1968: Transformative Politics in the Cultural Imagination*, by Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 95–96; Frédéric Martel's *Le rose et le noir* casts Hocquenghem as the founding figure of "communitarian" French LGBT politics.

<sup>66</sup> Bourg, "'Your Sexual Revolution Is Not Ours,'" 96.

universalism, does not reject universalism in favor of a pluralist patchwork of diverse, coexisting "lifestyles" *à l'américaine*. Hocquenghem, instead, draws attention to the fact that the supposedly neutral liberal universalism posited by the French Republicanism is constituted through specific sexual, racial, and gendered exclusions. In other words, Hocquenghem suggests that French Republican ideal of universalism is really not so universal after all if it needs to be propped up by the heteronormative "policing" of gender and sexuality.<sup>67</sup> Hocquenghem, does not, however, throw the baby out with the bathwater, so to speak; he merely calls for the dislodging of the heterosexist norms that have long monopolized the universal position. Hocquenghem's universalism is radically inclusive to any and all ways of being, or, as René Schérer puts it in his preface to second edition of *Le Désir homosexuel*, "une hospitalité universelle et absolue."<sup>68</sup>

Hocquenghem's theory of desire in this way constitutes a profoundly "universalizing view" of homosexuality. In the introduction of *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick identifies two longstanding, competing approaches to the definition of the homosexual/heterosexual binary: a so-called "minoritizing" position according to which the definition matters only for a "small, distinct, relatively fixed homosexual minority"<sup>69</sup> and a "universalizing" position according to which the way in which society understands the homosexual/heterosexual divide is "an issue of continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities."<sup>70</sup> Hocquenghem is far less interested in the closely

---

<sup>67</sup> Hocquenghem often uses the metaphor of "policing" in his political and theoretical writing. In *Rapport contre la normalité*, the FHAR provides a glossary of their key terms, the first two of which are "hétéro-flic" and "homo-flic." A hétéro-flic is defined as someone "qui érige (!) son hétérosexualité en seule forme « normale » d'amour et en profite pour réprimer ceux ou celles qui ne l'imitent pas" ("notre vocabulaire," in *Rapport contre la normalité*, 14–15).

<sup>68</sup> Schérer, "Préface : un défi au siècle," in *Le désir homosexuel*, 17.

<sup>69</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 1.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

related binary of *essentialist* and *constructivist* approaches to the definition of homosexuality than in that of "minoritizing" and "universalizing" views. Hocquenghem's somewhat "essentialist" understanding of desire (as opposed to Foucault's understanding of desire as itself shaped through discourse) makes it problematic to characterize his understanding of homosexuality as purely "constructivist," per se, for though he is adamant in his categorical rejection of the (ultimately political) concepts of "homosexual desire" and "homosexuality," he is far less clear on whether or not he understands one's sexual desires to have an innate orientation (toward, for instance, masculinity or femininity); on the contrary, as we see in his fiction, Hocquenghem seems to make room for the existence of sexual orientations even if he is hesitant to explicitly name them as such. In any case, an essentialist perspective on homosexual identity, as Sedgwick points out, translates socially into a homosexually identified minority political population, and Hocquenghem is unambiguous in his repudiation of stable sexual identity *tout court*, let alone a politics rooted in such an identity.<sup>71</sup> An oppositional gay politics that would respond to the problem of homophobia by valorizing homosexual identity would ultimately be counterproductive to Hocquenghem's objective of the liberation of desire in that it would only further shore up the binary distinction between hetero- and homo-sexualities: "Revendiquer la perversité, c'est . . . reconnaître la loi de la normalité."<sup>72</sup> Hocquenghem understands desire to be universal (in the Sedgwickian sense) not in that it is experienced identically by all or that—in Freudian fashion—desire orients us universally toward specific kinds of objects, but, rather, that the movement of desire, in its purest form, is limitlessly and unpredictably productive, infinitely generating new connections and linkages among desirous objects and bodies. For Hocquenghem,

---

<sup>71</sup> Sedgwick, unlike Hocquenghem, expresses a clear understanding of the political utility and affective value of both "minoritizing" and "universalizing" approaches to sexual definition, identity, and politics.

<sup>72</sup> Hocquenghem, *Le désir homosexuel*, 171.

what we call "homosexual desire" is a profoundly universal matter in that it touches us all, for desire flows through and across everything and everyone.

Having considered Hocquenghem's trajectory within the gay liberation and May '68 movements as well as his philosophy of desire, I can now make more explicit the core of this chapter's argument. That is, the preponderance of spatial logic and rhetoric in Hocquenghem's work that bridges Hocquenghem's theory of "homosexual desire," his politics of gay liberation, and even his most seemingly apolitical creative work sheds light on how best to interpret his vision for society and how it is situated with respect to the existential tension between particularism and universalism; as we've seen, scholars and activists have erroneously designated him as a particularist, communitarian thinker. In the rest of this chapter, I will argue that the social ethos with which he approaches sexual politics is a profoundly universalist one—although a *different* sort of universalism than that envisioned and practiced by the modern French republic—and that this ethos is as evident in his politico-theoretical work as in his creative work by examining one of Hocquenghem's novels with particular attention to the universalist implications of its thematization of space and movement.

### **The Blind Leading the Blind: Un-seeing Distance with *L'amour en relief***

Ever the erudite *normalien*, Hocquenghem's fictional work is littered with references to the Western canon, and Guy Hocquenghem's first and most well known novel, *L'amour en relief* (1982), takes as its point of departure the well-worn literary and philosophical tropes of blindness;<sup>73</sup> the confrontation between East and West; and perilous journeys to distant, foreign

---

<sup>73</sup> The motif of blindness figures elsewhere into Hocquenghem's work. In his extended essay on his "francophobia," *La beauté du métis*, he excoriates French culture for its "blind" ethnocentrism: "Nous, Français, sommes nés aveugles dans le monde clos d'un pays sans rencontres, sans métissages" (9). The willed "blindness" of the French described here is a far cry from Amar's in *L'amour en relief*; for France's stems from a chauvinistic refusal to engage

lands.<sup>74</sup> It tells the story of Amar, an arrestingly handsome teenager from the Tunisian islands of Kerkennah who is blinded in a motor scooter accident caused by a group of French tourists. The accident sets in motion a fantastical chain of events that sees the young, newly blind Tunisian traveling around the world—from Tunisia, to Rome, to Paris, to California, to New York, to Soviet waters, and beyond. The novel is set in a post-'68 world of consumerism, globalization, feminism, and sexual hedonism. The novel's secondary narrator is Andrea, a globetrotting, socioeconomically privileged, and mentally unstable young French woman visiting Kerkennah following an abortion. After the accident, for which she wrongly considers herself responsible, she becomes obsessed with the young man and essentially devotes all her energies to pursuing him across the globe (until his untimely death in an earthquake). Perhaps somewhat ironically, considering the novel implores us to call into question any and all claims to political and epistemological authority, *L'amour en relief* has a political and epistemological agenda to offer, and a relatively unambiguous one at that. The novel, which develops in the realm of fiction many of the key concepts that Hocquenghem lays out in his earlier political and theoretical writing,

---

on equal terms with other cultures. Furthermore, Hocquenghem includes an interview with the leader of an association for gay blind people in New York in his experimental, semi-fictional travel guide, *Le gay voyage: guide et regard homosexuels sur les grandes métropoles* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1980).

<sup>74</sup> Bill Marshall has proposed that *L'amour en relief* is a take on the eighteenth-century French genre of the *conte philosophique* in its "explicat[ion of] abstractions through narrative with Amar as the Candide figure . . . buffeted by events in an absurd world" (*Theorising the Gay Nation*, 70). However, I would suggest that an even more striking intertext is to be found with Diderot's *Lettre sur les aveugles à l'usage de ceux qui voient*. In his *Lettre*, Diderot explores the matter of blindness, a topic very much on the minds of philosophers of the time following a string of breakthroughs in the treatment of acquired and congenital blindness. The letter grapples with a philosophical question known as Molyneux's problem: would someone born blind who was suddenly able to see be able to distinguish (by sight alone) between a sphere and a cube that she or he was previously familiar with by touch? Diderot effectively answers in the affirmative, arguing for the continuity and translatability of the senses. Furthermore, the blind are for him not merely able to perform (virtually) all of the same tasks as visually unimpaired people, but they are in certain respects capable of an even more penetrating perception of the world compared to that of "ceux qui voient." Diderot, drawing upon recent scientific research, points out that the inability to see can be offset by a drastically heightened sensitivity to other forms of stimuli beyond the visual, whether tactile, aural, olfactory, or gustatory. This could entail the strengthening not just of the basic faculties of touch, hearing, smell, and taste, but potentially also those of memory, reason, and imagination. Among the epistemological and ontological ideas explored by Diderot in the *Lettre* is that overreliance on the visual can profoundly inhibit or narrow our perception of reality—sight can blind us, so to speak. Hocquenghem's novel takes this idea as its premise.

offers an extended critique of stable identity and, more specifically, of how and to what effect identity is complicit in hegemonic power relations. Above all, *L'amour en relief* suggests that the physical and metaphorical borders that separates us from one another—whether they be geographical, cultural, sexual, or otherwise—are more illusory than would appear at first glance.

Amar's narration is marked by a double sense of estrangement vis-à-vis the world based both on his distinctly different phenomenological relationship with the world as a newly blind man and on his consequent nomadic trajectory across the globe following an initial displacement from his homeland. As readers, we are therefore privy to a defamiliarizing perspective of Western modernity. From Amar's "outsider" vantage point, he is increasingly conscious throughout his journey of adaptation of the primacy of visuality in contemporary life and its sociopolitical implications. Foucault posits the sovereignty of sight in modernity in *Les Mots et les choses*, arguing that, beginning in the Age of Enlightenment, vision becomes the most privileged of the senses:

L'observation . . . est une connaissance sensible assortie de conditions systématiquement négatives. Exclusion, bien sûr, du ouï-dire ; mais exclusion aussi du goût et de la saveur, parce qu'avec leur incertitude, avec leur variabilité, ils ne permettent pas une analyse . . . universellement acceptable. . . . Privilège presque exclusif de la vue.<sup>75</sup>

Given the authority it is vested as an instrument of knowledge, the gaze functions, according to Foucault, as a critical vector of disciplinary power.<sup>76</sup>

The novel paints the picture of a hyper-capitalist society blinded by its obsession with the visual. Yet, it would be a gross oversimplification to read the novel as a blanket indictment of

---

<sup>75</sup> Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses : une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 144–145.

<sup>76</sup> Foucault returns to and develops this idea in his subsequent work, notably in *Surveiller et punir* (Paris: Gallimard, 195).

Western superficiality. What is truly at stake in Hocquenghem's critique of the dominance of visuality is the idea that the monopolistic privileging of scopic modes of perception and knowledge give rise to (literal and figurative) distance between spectator and spectacle that is both inimical to genuine mutual understanding and politically consequential insofar as the relationship is asymmetrical and unidirectional. That is to say that, touch, for Hocquenghem, is preferable to sight from both ethical and epistemological standpoints. One cannot touch without at the same time being touched, and tactile perception necessarily entails a more sensuous, engaged experience of an object—human or otherwise—than sight alone could ever allow for.

Andrea's "relationship" with Amar represents the polar opposite of the reciprocal, interpersonal contact with otherness championed by Hocquenghem; this is blatantly exemplified when Andrea conceives and gives birth to Amar's child completely unbeknownst to him after seducing him under a false identity. Andrea's initial fascination with Amar is based on his physical beauty and enigmatic character; Amar is an exotic mystery to her, yet at the same time one that she never makes a concerted effort to "solve." Through their parallel narratives, we learn throughout the course of the novel that despite her ostensibly perfect vision, Andrea—who is in many ways a caricature of the post-'68 French subject—is ultimately more lost in the world than our blind protagonist could ever be precisely because of her faith in the visual.

Once he recovers from the Vespa accident, Amar is adopted by an elderly, wealthy American woman who brings him home with her and helps him adjust to his new condition before she is struck and killed by a truck right before his (unseeing) eyes on the Golden Gate Bridge. His release from the hospital into the care of Mrs. Halloween and subsequent move to California is an "anti-Oedipal" rebirth of sorts; the newly blind Amar is adopted by an infertile mother figure who teaches him how to function in the world and seduces him into quasi-

incestuous sex. Amar furthermore remarks that the only object he can no longer make use of is the mirror. This moment, a somewhat heavy-handed gesture to the Lacanian mirror stage, represents Amar's break with an Oedipal-psychoanalytic model of subjectivity: "ma seule différence avec un voyant est que je ne me laisse prendre à l'erreur qui lui fait voir, sur un objet plat, une perspective. Je dispose là d'une supériorité, à sentir un objet sans me le représenter."<sup>77</sup>

According to Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, identity is fundamentally reliant on external objects; the infant regarding herself or himself in the mirror, for Lacan, sees in her or his reflection a coherent self with which to identify and perpetually endeavor to live up to, a self that is always "other." One of the implications of the Lacanian model of subjectivity is that this identification is always therefore a *misidentification*, recognition of oneself in what is ultimately an image. Amar is in this sense not impaired, but, rather, liberated by his inability to see (whereas Andrea is literally driven mad by her "blind," uncritical faith in sight as an instrument of knowledge); he experiences in his blindness a sense of superiority over the sighted. His perception of the world (and of himself) need no longer be mediated by (visual) representation. Phenomenologically speaking, Amar would have us believe that dispossession of sight occasions a more direct contact with reality: "J'ai retrouvé une place au monde. . . . Mieux que les voyants, je perçois le monde comme un volume, un véritable relief sensuel, non une pâle perspective trompeuse."<sup>78</sup>

Freedom from visual culture ostensibly allows Amar to "forget" identity. Amar (somewhat bafflingly) appears to leave virtually all traces of his racial, national, religious, and

---

<sup>77</sup> Hocquenghem, *L'amour en relief*, 43.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

ethnic identities as a Tunisian Muslim Arab (as well as his sexual identity<sup>79</sup>) behind the moment he loses his sight; it is only others that identify him as such. *L'amour en relief* unsubtly suggests that "color blindness" is an ideal toward which to strive. We see further evidence of this when Amar regains his vision through experimental surgery and suddenly becomes sensitive to race; he describes the doctor as a "chirurgien noir."<sup>80</sup> The erasure of identity for Amar is in step with the vehement anti-identitarianism Hocquenghem expounds in his political and theoretical writings. However, though it would seem that the novel offers a look into what the post-racial, post-national (non)identity advocated in his theoretical writings might resemble, we see in its translation into the fictional realm that the institution of identity is not so easily transcended.

Scholars have rightly pointed out that the novel paradoxically trivializes and exploits the Arabness of its uprooted Tunisian narrator. It follows in this respect a long European tradition of deploying exotic Others as foils against which to advance a critique of Western society à la Montesquieu, Diderot, or Graffigny.<sup>81</sup> Prior to his accident, Amar is a largely opaque character defined almost exclusively by his vague, stereotypical Arabness. Once blinded, his Arabness essentially falls by the wayside, and he only then becomes a racially and ethnically unmarked "everyman" figure. Moreover, in pitting Amar, an ethically exemplary, exoticized Tunisian man, against Andrea, a literally hysterical, imperialistic, and sexually aggressive French woman,

---

<sup>79</sup> Once Amar becomes blind, he also becomes sexually fluid, or—perhaps more accurately—indiscriminate in his openness to sexual contact with strangers. The function of sex in Amar's life is fundamentally transformed; no longer merely a source of pleasure, sexual contact becomes a means of perception and communication, a way of coming to know others that the novel paints as profoundly ethical both in its inherent reciprocity and its (supposed) independence from prejudicial factors like race, age, class, and beauty. No longer able to visually identify people and forced take recourse in more sensual measures, he reverts to a state of polymorphous sexuality in which identity is irrelevant.

<sup>80</sup> Hocquenghem, *L'amour en relief*, 251.

<sup>81</sup> I am thinking here, for instance, of Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* (1721), Diderot's *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* (1796), and Françoise de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (1747). The story of Amar's injury plays into the Enlightenment trope of an idealized, uncorrupted Oriental Other irretrievably tainted by contact with the "civilized" world.

Hocquenghem unwittingly reinforces a number of deeply problematic, politically charged stereotypes that do more to shore up than to challenge dominant configurations of national, racial, gender, and sexual identity.

The specter of colonialism looms large in the novel from the very beginning; for one, it is set a mere ten years after Tunisia's independence from France (in 1958). Bill Marshall has defended Hocquenghem's treatment of ethnicity against claims of Eurocentricity, arguing that "the portrait . . . is, however, not Eurocentric, as the novel is concerned to problematise severely such certainties. . . . Since this novel is concerned to deconstruct and disperse identity, it is more appropriate to regard Amar's 'Arabness' as a strand or pathway that is culturally and thematically affirmed and surpassed."<sup>82</sup> It is true that *L'amour en relief*, like the entirety of Hocquenghem's theoretical oeuvre, is highly critical of identity. However, I disagree with Marshall's claim that Amar's Arabness is either "affirmed" or "surpassed" in any way. Hocquenghem's treatment of Arabness, like that of the FHAR, is self-serving and instrumental in spite of its best intentions.<sup>83</sup> The notion that Amar's curiously quick adaptation to life in America and Europe amounts to the transcendence or surpassing of his cultural heritage more than an assimilation or integration to Western society is to presume the universality of Western culture with respect to a supposedly particularistic Tunisian culture to be "overcome" in favor of a more global, secular, modern one. Though Amar would seem to embody the sort of Deleuzian nomadic statelessness advocated in

---

<sup>82</sup> Marshall, *Gay Nation*, 72–73.

<sup>83</sup> Historian Todd Shepard has shown how in the 60s and 70s, the era directly following the French decolonization of North Africa, actors of all political persuasions were politically deploying discourse around Arab male sexuality in France. For instance, far-right journalists in the 60s linked Algerian men to various sex crimes (e.g. rape, homosexuality, pedophilia) in the service of the argument that immigrants were perverting French society and stoke anxiety that the former inhabitants of *Algérie française* would turn France into a *France algérienne*. On the other hand, as we've seen with the FHAR's "Manifeste des 343," leftist and gay activists were at the same time invoking Arab masculinity in the service of the project of sexual liberation. See Todd Shepard, "'Something Notably Erotic': Politics, 'Arab Men,' and Sexual Revolution in Post-Decolonization France, 1962–1974\*," *The Journal of Modern History* 84, no. 1 (March 2012): 80–115.

Hocquenghem's critiques of national identity, the fact that he arrives at this condition only after his deracination from his Tunisian homeland, that he lives out this statelessness exclusively in the US and Europe and never so much as expresses the desire to return to Tunisia, and that he appears to all but forget his Arabness and faith makes it difficult to ignore the Western inflection of his cosmopolitanism. The very words "transcend" and "surpass" connote moving across or above an obstruction; if Amar can be said to transcend his Arabness, the end point of this transcendence is, both literally and figuratively, a Western point of view.

The novel's casting of identity as sufficiently contingent and fragile as to be shed without difficulty is unconvincing at best. It fails by grossly misjudging the materiality—or immateriality, as it were—of race and ethnicity as salient categories experienced as *social* facts irrespective of their dubiousness as *biological* realities. However, the novel is far more successful in its constructivist theory of identity as it pertains to disability. Following the gruesome demise of Mrs. Halloween, Amar is forced into an institution for the blind. Amar interprets its wards' daily routine as an apprenticeship: "Ils apprenaient à être aveugles."<sup>84</sup> There are two levels of meaning to Amar's observation. The priests teach the residents skills that will (theoretically) allow them to lead independent lives. However, the institution at the same time teaches them to *be* blind, to be defined by their disability. Amar describes his disdain for the vaguely religious and plainly Foucauldian "groupes de communication," group therapy sessions led by the priests, during which the residents are incited to speak—one by one—about their personal stories of hardship. There is no room for meaningful communication, strictly speaking, in these "communication groups," for the relationship between the *pensionnaires* and priests is not one of exchange. The speech takes the form of confession, and the priests' objective is to

---

<sup>84</sup> Hocquenghem, *L'amour en relief*, 60.

have wards "assumer leur handicap."<sup>85</sup> In other words, the institution induces the visually impaired to take on and take for granted (*assumer*) a "handicapped" identity that it plays a decisive role in conferring and constructing. Of the congenitally blind residents who have been institutionalized for most of their lives, Amar laments the disabling impact of such a setting:

En communauté, ces gens, qui démontraient de si étonnantes aptitudes, se transformaient en voix simplettes, croyant objectivement à leur « infirmité », eux qui n'avaient jamais rien connu de l'univers que l'en deçà de la grille du parc. Leur véritable infirmité était là : dans leur isolement loin du monde.<sup>86</sup>

Similar to his theory of the invention/marginalization of "homosexual desire" and homosexuality, these abandoned children—"unproductive" from a capitalist standpoint—are constructed as disabled and isolated from the rest of society for it in the same motion. The parallels between homosexuality and disability do not end here; the institutionalized blind children, like gay people, owe their situation according to Hocquenghem to the convergence of medical, psychoanalytic, religious, and legal discourses vested with sufficient authority to effectively supersede their own capacity to comprehend and define their condition. It is, Amar suggests, the violence of segregation that does damage to these children and gives rise to their disability and not the opposite. The institution episode offers a critique not just of the rhetoric of "handicap" and society's treatment of the disabled, but of the insidiously injurious impact of difference's subordination to identity more generally. The adoption or attribution of even—or perhaps especially—the most seemingly objective, natural forms of identity (e.g. gender, nationality, ability status) is, the novel suggests, a normative phenomenon insofar as it cultivates the differences that it purports to describe and "territorializes" them within identities. As I have

---

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 60.

been arguing, for Hocquenghem, the sociopolitical power of identity expresses itself through the modality of (physical and psychic) separation; group identity presumes boundaries that close us off from one another, limiting the ability of desire to establish connections among our selves, our bodies, and the rest of the world.

Amar eventually makes his escape and establishes a life for himself in Los Angeles as a "blind surfer" sideshow attraction by day and street-walking sex worker in the "gay ghetto" of West Hollywood by night. When we look back at the specifics of Hocquenghem's May '68 political trajectory (i.e. his participation in the VLR and FHAR) and theoretical writings, it should be no surprise that the novel's engagement with economic questions is hardly Marxist; the novel's politics are distinctly libertarian in orientation, even if the nature of its libertarianism is ambiguous. Despite the novel's scathing depiction of State authority, it is far less resolute in its critique of capitalist commodity culture than a reader of Hocquenghem's nonfiction may expect.

Amar is time and again objectified and swept up in the flow of economic and political forces. The novel opens with members of a certain post-'68 French leisure class embarking on a Tunisian getaway in the single-minded pursuit of diversion; they treat Amar as an exotic sexual object to be desired and toyed with, and it is within the context of the ensuing excitement that Amar is blinded and thoughtlessly discarded.<sup>87</sup> Amar is effectively left behind as collateral damage in the wake of the neocolonial tourist culture of post-independence Tunisia. Furthermore, his adoptive American "mother" essentially traffics an alone and vulnerable Amar overseas from his Italian hospital bed as her domestic sex worker and assistant. On a superficial level, it is easy to deplore Amar's repeated exploitation at the hands of tourists, amusement park entrepreneurs, pimps, biomedical researchers, and the US military, among others, and to place

---

<sup>87</sup> With the exception of Andrea, the cohort of tourists returns to their lives in France without visiting Amar let alone contributing to his medical expenses.

blame squarely on the unbridled forces of capitalism. Yet, upon closer examination we can observe that capitalism has a positive role, too, to play in Amar's story.<sup>88</sup>

The nature of Amar's narrative voice here becomes a problem. Amar is a remarkably (and sometimes jarringly) "hollow" narrator; he recounts even the most potentially trying travails of his Odyssean journey in a dispassionate, almost detached fashion. Potentially traumatizing events like witnessing Mrs. Halloween's grisly death or coercion into undergoing experimental surgery hardly evoke a discernable affective response. Amar provides valuable insight into the matter of his personality (or lack thereof) when he serves as a neurological research subject. Having learned much about the brain and reflected on his experiences as a blind person, he comes to the conclusion that the notion of a unified Cartesian subject at the heart of perception has no basis in objective reality:

Un voyant ne peut se représenter la vision sans s'y inclure lui-même comme spectateur. Moi je ne cherchais pas le « petit homme » installé derrière la vitre de mes yeux, ou dans ma tête. Mon cerveau : méduse flottant à l'intérieur de ma tête, il n'était qu'un relais, un capteur, un élément du monde relié à ce monde sensible par de multiples échanges, intrications, mosaïque de tensions, qu'aucun centre général ne résumait. Comme une plante, le cerveau était capable de reconstituer des morceaux manquants, pour assurer la survie du corps. Dans les replis enfouis, les molles cavités laiteuses, à coups de répétitions, d'échanges de signaux, une présence se formait qui se croyait elle-même

---

<sup>88</sup> It is instructive, in our attempt to parse the function of "capitalism" in the novel, to draw a distinction between the neocolonial, hierarchical, and insidiously authoritarian dimensions and acts of capitalist states in the context of the story and individualist liberal capitalism in the abstract.

simple ; une sensation, une vision, une odeur, somme toujours en cours de modification de petites actions chimiques, se prenait pour le centre du monde.<sup>89</sup>

According to Amar's theory of cognition, the brain is not the core of consciousness; it is not the home of a sovereign "little man" who contemplates the world from behind our eyes. Nor is it even an undivided whole. Amar conjures up a somewhat monstrous picture of the brain as a goopy pile of folds and slimy hollows. The components of the brain are nothing more (or less) than parts of a network of linkages with the rest of the body and the world. Amar furthermore rejects the notion of a stable, autonomous *mind*; thought is but the chaotic convergence of diverse stimuli and not the *product* of a Cartesian self.<sup>90</sup> Most importantly for our purposes, he sketches a continuity between cerebro-centric conceptions of the body and anthropocentric worldviews; both perspectives take for granted center/periphery and inside/outside binary spatial relations that presume boundaries and barriers that orient our navigation of the world. Sight necessarily implies a subject of perception; there is no spectacle without a spectator. Alternative sensory modalities (e.g. gustatory, tactile, olfactory) allow for and often require a more proximal, material engagement with their objects; reliance on an imaginary "little man" safely tucked away behind their eyes to understand the world keeps all things at a remove.

Amar's unaffected attitude applies to all areas of life, including work. Amar makes no complaints about the odd jobs he finds himself working, even when it comes to his survival sex work, which he admits is very dangerous.<sup>91</sup> On the contrary, Amar comes uncharacteristically

---

<sup>89</sup> Hocquenghem, *L'amour en relief*, 157.

<sup>90</sup> He effectively inverts the axiom of *cogito ergo sum* in asserting that it is our being in the world that gives rise to the "mind" at the heart of perception: *sum ergo cogito*.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 132.

close to exhibiting emotion when it comes to his fondness for "la vie de prostitué."<sup>92</sup> The sex industry offers more to Amar than a simple means of self-preservation. Amar identifies "red-light districts" and other overtly sexualized commercial spaces as some of his favorite places:

Je préfère à tout, dans les villes, les quartiers de plaisir et de nuit. Je ne pourrais plus me perdre à West Hollywood, pas plus que dans le Village à New York, ou Pigalle à Paris, sans doute. On ne se perd jamais dans un quartier de nuit. . . . Les musiques des bars, les corps, font un réseau si facile à suivre. . . . Dans les quartiers de plaisir, ma géographie complètement intuitive est efficace.<sup>93</sup>

Nowhere more than in these sex-oriented environments does Amar feel more at ease. It is in these spaces that Amar's sensuous internal compass serves him most effectively, for the bodies, music, and affects that occupy them are sutured together by the connectivity of desire into a network easily navigable by all those open to pleasure.<sup>94</sup>

Though Amar rhapsodizes at length about the anti-hierarchical inclusivity of sexual spaces, where identity is melted away by the collective pursuit of pleasure, this does not mean that *difference* is erased. Difference becomes at once both a potential source of pleasure in itself (via its eroticization) and something ultimately irrelevant to the broader, collective project at hand. At a nightclub, for instance, in one of the rare instances that Amar mentions his life in

---

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 134–35.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>94</sup> Amar's idealization of these "pleasure centers" evokes Samuel Delany's nostalgic, eulogistic defense of the culture of public sex that thrived in New York's Times Square prior to the sanitizing commercial redevelopment and gentrification project orchestrated by the Giuliani administration. Part memoir, part theoretical essay, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University Press, 1999) fondly recounts and analyzes Delany's experiences—sexual and otherwise—over more than three decades, beginning in the 1960s, in and around the adult movie theaters, porn shops, and street corners of "old" Times Square. Delany mourns Times Square's transformation from a chaotic, sometimes dangerous, affectively charged hub for sexual release into a sterile, safe family-friendly tourist attraction and global capital of wealth and finance as just one example of a larger phenomenon in late capitalism: the disappearance of spaces and genuine opportunities for "contact" between people of different races, ages, sexual identities, and classes. Similarly, Amar rhapsodizes at length about the anti-hierarchical inclusivity of sexual spaces, where identity is melted away by the collective pursuit of pleasure.

Tunisia, he reminisces about learning to dance back in Kerkennah: "Je ne connaissais de danse que celle du zikr, le cercle battant des pieds et des mains en répétant le nom d'Allah ; ou encore celle destinée à chasser les mauvais esprits, la djinn aux sabots de cheval. . . . J'ai glissé sur la piste. . . . L'air moite était devenu le ciel clair de la Tunisie."<sup>95</sup> Losing himself in the rhythm of the music, any disjunction between Tunisian spiritual dance and that of the other nightclub patrons effectively fades away. On the dance floor, he is at once at home in his own distinct cultural universe and fully at one with the other dancers. The scene allegorizes the ideal of the French Republican universalism, according to which individual cultural particularities are subsumed (though not elided) under a universal project, in this case that of pleasure, and in the case of the French republic that of the realization of its fundamental ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Amar touts his posture toward the world as ethically and epistemologically superior to that of most under visually dominated culture, but it is unclear just how *transgressive* or *revolutionary* it is—if it is at all. For instance, though Amar's fragmentary sense of selfhood means that he does not experience his sex work to amount to him "selling himself"<sup>96</sup> as such—there is no "self" to be sold, strictly speaking—we have no reason to think that his purportedly enlightened point of view vis-à-vis embodiment and subjectivity alters the experience of his paying clients. In other words, whether Amar considers himself to be a psychically animated assemblage of body parts or a person has no bearing on the social fact that his pimp and clients relate to him as a sexual commodity. The novel essentially suggests that the very idea of sex

---

<sup>95</sup> Hocquenghem, *L'amour en relief*, 137.

<sup>96</sup> Amar justifies his participation in sex work in precisely on these grounds: "Je n'avais pas le sentiment de me vendre ; je n'ai pas de sentiment de propriété bien défini sur mon corps. Je crois qu'il faut être voyant pour y tenir, pour compter ses doigts, pour regarder dans un miroir cette figure à soi, qu'on ne peut voir directement ; pour moi le miroir n'est qu'un instrument à se fabriquer un visage en se répétant : « tout cela est à moi. » Il faut connaître les lois de la perspective pour être vraiment un « moi »" (Ibid., 134).

work is grounded on a false premise: that we are unified subjects with bodies and sexualities with which we are free to do as we wish. This belief does not inspire Amar, however, to seek to disrupt the sex industry or even refrain from actively participating in it despite its dangerousness;<sup>97</sup> on the contrary, he is eager to let clients literally buy into their supposed delusion. Otherwise put, to what extent does "going with the flow" amount to complicity with the social dynamics that structure this "flow" in the first place? The Deleuzian metaphysical tradition that Hocquenghem so heavily draws upon conceptualizes freedom in terms of a "nomadic," deterritorializing logic of mobility, flow, and indeterminate becoming as opposed to the constricting "territoriality" of ontological and epistemological fixity. However, specifically within the context of the novel, Amar's nomadism can hardly be said to culminate in any observable deterritorializing force. He is in many ways a passive rather than an active agent in his own experiences. He makes reactive "moves" rather than decisions; his actions are intuitively motivated (either by self-preservation or the pursuit of pleasure) and not by calculated deliberation. These moves, furthermore, do nothing to challenge the sources of the oppression he systematically experiences and overcomes; for example, his astute, scathing critique of the institutionalization of disabled people amounts to nothing more than idle reflection. Furthermore, though Amar consistently finds a way to free himself from all that would stand in his way, the freedom he tangibly achieves for himself rarely has much if anything to do with his avowed transcendence of identity. Much to the contrary, Amar repeatedly benefits directly from the institution of identity despite claiming to have moved beyond it. For instance, he is able to support himself as a "blind surfer" *because* and not *in spite of* others perceiving him as a person with a disability, and he admits that he owes his success as a sex worker almost entirely to

---

<sup>97</sup> I do not mean here to denigrate sex work or sex workers in any way; Hocquenghem implicitly positions the novel's portrait of sex work against the belief held by some (but not me) that sex work is inherently damaging and demeaning. As I mention earlier, it is Amar himself that characterizes his sex work as dangerous.

eroticization of his Arabness. The problem here ultimately lies in Amar's underestimation of the gap that exists between others' and his own understanding of his identity (or lack thereof) and this gap's sociopolitical implications. It is difficult—for this reason—to take Amar at his word and regard him an exemplary figure of freedom from identity, for not only does he never truly succeed in transcending his social identities, he owes his very survival to these identities, no matter how fictitious in nature he understands them to be.

When he runs into difficulties with his pimp, Amar makes yet another getaway, this time to New York, where he becomes a successful dancer before embarking with his troupe on a European tour that ends abruptly in West Berlin when he is framed for drug trafficking, promptly arrested and prosecuted by the US government, and brought back to America to serve his sentence. He is released from prison under the condition he undergo experimental neurosurgery to restore his sight. The procedure—which essentially transforms him into a physically grotesque cyborg—proves successful, at least in the eyes of the government; the implant allows him not only to see, but also to detect encrypted radio transmissions. He is placed in the custody of the US military, who intend to use his superhuman abilities against the USSR. After narrowly surviving a Soviet attack on the submarine in which he'd been traveling, he flees to California in hopes of having a scientist remove the device, but dies in an earthquake before his blindness can be restored. Amar sums up his view of society in a scathing letter to the jury that erroneously convicts him of trafficking:

Messieurs les jurés, Je suis emprisonné, et je suis plus libre que vous. . . . je dois payer de deux cent quarante-six ans de prison le fait que vos habitudes, et vos règles morales, me sont aussi arbitraires que votre monde perceptif, *moi qui ne viens pas seulement de l'Arabie, mais d'un continent invisible*. Comme tous les voyants, vous ne comprendrez

pas que nous ne parlons pas du même monde, quand nous employons les mêmes mots.

*Nous sommes deux univers parallèles* (italics mine).<sup>98</sup>

Amar underscores his alterity with respect to the jury; he is doubly other in his foreign provenance and his different way of perceiving the world. By likening his status as a blind person to that of a foreigner who comes not just from another continent (i.e. Africa), but an *invisible* one (i.e. the "universe" of the blind), he stresses Western humanism's blindness to the contingency of its supposedly universal ideals; one cannot presume the applicability of "universal" values to experiences that one does not understand. What it is to be blind will always be opaque to the sighted, and that it is not a problem in itself. The problem lies in the assumption that this opacity doesn't *matter*. Amar asserts that our sense of morality and justice is informed by the specific lens through which we grasp the world, a perspective always inflected by one's social positionality. To pretend otherwise is to deny the existence and dignity of alternative perspectives.

As I have been underlining, *L'Amour en relief* is rife with political subtext, even if much of it is ambiguous or even inconsistent. However, it is perhaps misguided to read for a unified political "message" in a novel so invested in an ethic of incoherence. Despite the apparent absence of a unified political agenda, Hocquenghem does gesture in the novel toward a distinct albeit utopian vision for the (dis)organization of social life, one we are now equipped to recognize. Though the use of geographical metaphor in Amar's letter to the jury in order to articulate difference in terms of spatial distance and the novel's almost blatant call for the unqualified respect of *different* perspectives, Hocquenghem seems to come close to advocating an identity politics premised on a rigid, essentialist understanding of difference. However, the general turn toward the end of the novel away from a critique of identity's inevitable implication

---

<sup>98</sup> Hocquenghem, *L'amour en relief*, 211–12.

in ableist, racist, and (hetero)sexist social relations of domination toward a defense of the existence of differing, irreducible worldviews rooted in bodily and cultural difference is, however, far less contradictory than might at first appear. *L'Amour en relief* points to a "third way" between a rigidly identity-based, communitarian conception of social justice and a universalist, humanistic belief in the essential likeness of humanity.

As an alternative to the hypocritical, insidiously particularistic universalism of Western modernity that Amar so vehemently condemns, *L'Amour en relief* points to what we might call a "hyper-pluralistic universalism." At least in the context of French Republicanism, the concept of pluralism is generally thought to be inextricably bound up with universalism's maligned Other: *le communautarisme*. However, the pluralistic ethos at the heart of *L'Amour en relief* is ultimately more closely aligned with liberal individualism—one of French Republicanism's ideological pillars along with secularism and egalitarianism—than with communitarianism. What I mean by this is that the novel's is a pluralism taken to its logical extreme, one that embraces the limitless multiplicity of different ways of being in the world. At least theoretically, this way of approaching difference seems the most plausible one when it comes to the "organization" of society if we take as a point of departure Hocquenghem's Deleuzian understanding of the fragmented character of selfhood, let alone group identity. However, a truly infinite pluralism—perhaps counterintuitively—risks lapsing into the appearance of monism: if we are all wholly unique individuals, radically dissimilar from one another, the very notion of "uniqueness" ceases to retain its meaning, as we are all ultimately alike in our singularity. Difference and sameness collapse into one another.

The slipperiness of the opposition of hyper-particularism and monistic universalism is on full display in a passage toward the end of the novel in which Amar discusses the neurosurgery

he is forced to undergo by the US government. In order for the brain implant to function properly, it must be altered to the precise specifications of his brain, for, as he learns, "chaque empreinte du cerveau d'un homme est unique au monde, comme une empreinte digitale ou le fond de l'oeil."<sup>99</sup> Though the brain itself, as we've seen, is a false unity erroneously understood to be the locus of the self, perception, and power, it nevertheless exists in the world in a material, politically consequential manner; it can be concretely measured and represented in the form of a "brainprint" comparable to fingerprints, retina patterns, and other biometrics. In other words, Amar comes to the difficult realization that the subject can never fully transcend itself or its material conditions. Though Amar's bodily integrity has by now been undone in the most radical of ways—his skull has literally been opened and his brain pored over—and he is to be converted into a cyborg via the implantation of a grotesque helmet-like device in and on his head, he never quite ceases, for better or worse, to be human, or at least to be interpellated as such by medical and state authority. No matter how far his directionless, nomadic wanderings take him, Amar does not and cannot shake off the yoke of subjectivity and disintegrate into the fragmentary, inhuman state of being he feels himself to be approaching; the incoherence of the self has limits.

Ultimately, the larger implication of the novel's approach to "difference" is that the only universal that unites us all is the concrete uniqueness of experience, and that each individual's singular set of experiences is formative of a commensurately unique perception of the world.<sup>100</sup> That is to say that Hocquenghem deals with the existential tension between the universal and the particular by conceptualizing a singular universalism: a universalism conceived on the very basis of (and not in opposition to) singularity. The novel encourages us to be vigilantly attentive to the

---

<sup>99</sup> Hocquenghem, *L'amour en relief*, 250.

<sup>100</sup> I use the term "singularity" to characterize this notion of difference rather than "particularity" primarily because of the latter term's association with politics based on collective identities (i.e. political particularism).

inexhaustible diversity of beings, situations, and desires just as much as it cautions us to be wary of any authority or ideology that would seek to minimize these differences or underestimate their importance. In its emphasis on the heterogeneity of existence, the novel does indeed gesture toward an identity politics of sorts, only without fixed identity; it would have us take seriously the ways in which our experiences are concretely shaped by our situation with respect to factors like race, culture, language, ability, nationality, religion, and sexuality, but at the same time recognize that these factors (and how they matter) are more often than not the consequence rather than the cause of the prevailing social and political order; the novel's is a *reflexive* identity politics. The novel, like virtually all of his political and philosophical writings on and activism around the matter of gay liberation, is animated by Hocquenghem's belief that identity categories ultimately do more to impede than to enable meaningful connection and understanding among differently situated people.

## Conclusion

Despite Hocquenghem's fundamental impact on the fields of queer theory and LGBT studies, fields that for that matter have only recently begun to take hold in the French academic context,<sup>101</sup> his legacy has been less concretely visible, to say the least, in French LGBT political activism. One of the many contributing factors is, of course, the idealism of Hocquenghem's particular strand of gay liberationist political philosophy. Distinct from the comparatively pragmatic, rights-based strategies of North American and British iterations of gay liberation, Hocquenghem's libertarian gay liberationism had the more radically utopian objective of realizing the May '68 promise of changing life as we know it (i.e. "changer la vie"). Hocquenghem and the FHAR envisioned and fought for the full-blown overthrow of a capitalist

---

<sup>101</sup> I will discuss the matter of queer theory in France in chapter 4.

social order that suppresses the sexual desire—homosexual or otherwise, for desire, according to Hocquenghem, cannot be divided—on a societal scale in the service of its reproduction. Yet, nowhere in his oeuvre does Hocquenghem elaborate the specifics of what the society that would emerge following the dissolution of the capitalist social order and the oppressive institutions of gender, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnicity, and race that prop it up. It has been my intent in this chapter to consider how Hocquenghem's fictional work might shed light on his vision for a world shaped by the liberation of desire. As we've seen in this chapter's close reading of *L'Amour en relief*, however, this is no clearer in his fiction than it is in his theoretical work.

It is all too easy, for this reason, to dismiss the vision at the heart of Hocquenghem's political thought as utopian and unrealistic. Recent scholarship reevaluating Hocquenghem's work has picked up on the centrality of utopianism to his life and thought. For instance, Hocquenghem biographer Ron Haas has commented that "while the utopian spirit that motivated the students of May '68 inevitably died within a few years as it grew increasingly clear that another May '68 was not going to erupt, the theme of utopia continued to permeate everything Hocquenghem wrote."<sup>102</sup> Hocquenghem lambasted his former May '68 comrades for abandoning their own revolutionary idealism;<sup>103</sup> these "Maoist-come-Rotarians" went from marching under the banner of the iconic Situationist-inspired slogan "soyez réalistes, demandez l'impossible" to participating in and profiting from the very bourgeois social order they sought so earnestly to dismantle during their youths. More than anything, Hocquenghem regretted the demise of a certain revolutionary imagination in favor of a reformist agenda.

---

<sup>102</sup> Ron Haas, "Utopia Aborted: May '68 in the Philosophy of Guy Hocquenghem," *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 32 (2004): 417.

<sup>103</sup> Guy Hocquenghem, *Lettre ouverte à ceux qui sont passés du col Mao au Rotary* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1986).

It is not only his critique of identity, but also his utopian idealism<sup>104</sup> that establishes Hocquenghem as a key precursor of queer theory and politics. José Esteban Muñoz points in *Cruising Utopia* to the utopianism of queer inquiry:

Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. . . . We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. . . . We must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds. . . . Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world."<sup>105</sup>

It is easy to dismiss utopian thinking as naive, fantastical, and politically ineffectual, and any attempts to look to Hocquenghem for a programmatic agenda for the advancement of gay rights are indeed bound to come up wanting. However, I would argue that Hocquenghem's work is "useful" to us precisely in its imaginativeness; Hocquenghem's work encourages us to think beyond the struggles of a painful present and to have faith in the revolutionary potential of pleasure. Hocquenghem spent his entire adult life dreaming of and fighting for the "possibility

---

<sup>104</sup> Hocquenghem's utopianism is evident in several of his other novels—most of which take on religious history and themes—such as *Les voyages et aventures extraordinaires du frère Angelo* (1988), recounts the story of an Italian monk who takes part (alongside the conquistadors) in the European discovery/colonization of the Americas; *La colère de l'agneau* (1985), which explores the origins of the Christian church and the relationship between Jesus and John the Evangelist, "the disciple whom Jesus loved;" and *Ève* (1987), a modern-day re-imagining of the biblical tale of Adam and Eve. The prevalence of religious subject matter in Hocquenghem's later fiction would seem to set it apart from his earlier theoretical and creative work. I would argue, however, that these novels, like the rest of Hocquenghem's oeuvre, suggest that one can arrive at "the truth" from any avenue, whether it be through the optic of Christianity or sexual politics. For Hocquenghem, desire's reach has no limits, and a truly just society is one in which we all recognize and accept that the "flux de l'amour divin" pervades all things (*Les voyages et aventures extraordinaires du frère Angelo*, 308)

<sup>105</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, Sexual Cultures (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.

for another world," as Muñoz would put it, one in which desire would one day bring us together rather than separate us from one another.

Though his diverse body of work, Hocquenghem points to the political, ethical, erotic, and even spiritual potential of daring to blindly surrender oneself and one's self to the flow of desire, wherever it may lead us. As Hocquenghem queerly and hopefully declares in the closing words of *Le désir homosexuel*, what are crudely called "gay" politics are but the beginning of a "pente vers . . . la disparition des objets et des sujets, le glissement vers la découverte qu'en sexe, tout communique."<sup>106</sup>

---

<sup>106</sup> Hocquenghem, *Le désir homosexuel*, 182.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Où sont les lesbiennes ? Monique Wittig's Runaway Lesbians*

In the opening lines of *Le deuxième sexe* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir echoes the profusion of questions surrounding the uncertain place of women in post-war French society:

Ils chuchotent : « Même en Russie, elles restent bien femmes » ; mais d'autres gens . . .  
soupirent : « La femme se perd, la femme est perdue. » On ne sait plus bien s'il existe  
encore des femmes, s'il en existera toujours . . . quelle place elles occupent en ce monde,  
quelle place elles devraient y occuper. « *Où sont les femmes ?* » demandait récemment un  
magazine intermittent. Mais d'abord : qu'est-ce qu'une femme (*italics mine*)?<sup>1</sup>

Writing in a moment following another (albeit very different sort of) sociopolitical upheaval, post-'68 France, radical lesbian and materialist feminist Monique Wittig responds to these questions in her own work, which spans the realms of literature, philosophy, and political activism. More specifically, Wittig argues throughout her oeuvre that the questions of what it means to *be* a woman and of where women are *located* are essentially one and the same, for to be a "woman" is to be trapped in a hetero-patriarchal "hell"<sup>2</sup> from which there is no escape (so long as one opts to *remain* a woman). One of her most iconic essays<sup>3</sup> takes its name from de Beauvoir's declaration that "on ne naît pas femme,"<sup>4</sup> or, rather, the first half of the momentous assertion, for Wittig posits that one need not necessarily become (or stay) a woman at all, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, 2nd ed., vol. 1, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Wittig explicitly characterizes the situation of women under the totalitarian regime of heterosexuality as a literal living hell in *Virgile, non*, a lesbian feminist political allegory that borrows heavily from Dante's *Divine Comedy*. I will return the novel and its spatial politics in this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Monique Wittig, "On ne naît pas femme," *Questions féministes*, no. 8 (May 1980): 75–84. Wittig later published a definitive revised version of the essay in English ("One Is Not Born a Woman," in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1992], 9–20).

<sup>4</sup> Beauvoir opens the first chapter of the second volume of *Le deuxième sexe* with the claim that "On ne naît pas femme : on le devient" (Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, vol. 2, 2 vols. [Paris: Gallimard, 1949], 13.)

feminist liberation, for her, cannot begin until women resolve to "abstract" (*s'abstraire*) themselves from the category of "woman,"<sup>5</sup> which she argues to be—like "man"—a political before an ontological one. Wittig locates a state of being beyond the "political regime" of heterosexuality and the "category of sex" it simultaneously produces and relies upon in the figure of the lesbian, famously (and for some infamously<sup>6</sup>) proclaiming that "les lesbiennes ne sont pas des femmes."<sup>7</sup> She likens the situation of lesbians throughout her work to that of "runaway slaves."<sup>8</sup> However, the plight of women is for Wittig even more onerous than that of slaves for the reason that under heterosexuality "there is no escape . . . there is no territory, no other side of the Mississippi, no Palestine, no Liberia for women."<sup>9</sup> This chapter will explore the full implications of Wittig's highly spatialized characterization of the lesbian as a fugitive from her sex class and the totalizing reach of heterosexuality. That is to say, we will consider where (if anywhere) Wittig's runaway lesbians are headed, and what sorts of people, ideas, and things such a space might accommodate. Wittig has been criticized<sup>10</sup> for, among other things, allegedly

---

<sup>5</sup> Wittig, "On ne naît pas femme," 77.

<sup>6</sup> The original version of "The Straight Mind," as published in issue 7 of *Questions féministes* marked, if not directly led to, the scission between the "radical lesbian" and "straight-friendly" factions of the French women's movement. I will return to the implications of the essay and the conflicts between the two factions later in this chapter.

<sup>7</sup> Monique Wittig, "La pensée straight," *Questions féministes*, no. 7 (1980): 53. Wittig later published a substantially reworked, English-language version of the essay. ("The Straight Mind," in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1992], 21–32).

<sup>8</sup> For instance, the lesbian protagonists of Wittig's allegorical novel *Virgile, non* (Paris: Minuit, 1985) are explicitly described as "des runaways, des marronnes" (109), and several of Wittig's political essays make the comparison expressly, such as "The Mark of Gender," "La pensée straight," "The Category of Sex, and the preface to the *The Straight Mind*. Wittig was not the first in her cohort of French materialist feminists to compare the condition to women to that of slaves; Colette Guillaumin's writings on the parallels between construction of race and her theory of "sexage" does so as well, and are cited by Wittig as major influences on her own thinking.

<sup>9</sup> Wittig, "Preface" in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Annamaria Jagose, Diana Fuss, and Judith Butler, for instance, have offered critiques of Wittigian lesbian feminism on similar grounds. See Annamaria Jagose, *Lesbian Utopics* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Thinking Gender (New York: Routledge, 1990). I will directly engage with some of their appraisals of Wittig's work later in this chapter.

advocating that women flee a confining definition of *womanhood* in favor of what amounts to a commensurately essentialist, restrictive *lesbian* identity, one for that matter that is conceptualized purely in opposition to the heterosexual social order it seeks to destroy. By considering Wittig's work holistically, I will demonstrate that such views of her materialist lesbian feminism are distortingly reductive, and that it would be misguided to sweepingly dismiss it on these grounds. Careful attention to the spatial dynamics of Wittig's fiction and essays will reveal her political vision to be a far cry from the radically separatist one espoused by some of her American radical lesbian feminist counterparts and of enduring usefulness for lesbian, feminist, and queer political thought and praxis.

### **A Life in Movement(s)**

Monique Wittig never spent too much time in the same place geographically or politically. Wittig's very name evokes in French a sense of foreignness; Wittig's sister once remarked that their Alsatian patronym conjures the image of "des nordiques, des étrangères."<sup>11</sup> Wittig was born in 1935 in Dannemarie, an Alsatian town straddling the French, Swiss, and German borders,<sup>12</sup> but she would be uprooted a few years later by the breakout of World War II. She and her family fled first to Franche-Comté, then further west to Aveyron, and finally in 1950 to Paris, where she enrolled in university, conducting undergraduate studies in Chinese<sup>13</sup> at the *Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales* and in literature at the *Sorbonne*.<sup>14</sup> After achieving literary acclaim—she was awarded the *Prix Médicis* in 1964 for her first novel,

---

<sup>11</sup> "Introduction," in *Lire Monique Wittig aujourd'hui*, ed. Benoît Auclerc and Yannick Chevalier (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2012), 12.

<sup>12</sup> The town of Dannemarie is less than forty kilometers away from both the Swiss and German borders.

<sup>13</sup> "EHESS Alumni: Monique Wittig" (EHESS, July 23, 2015), <http://www.alumni-ehess.fr/expo-2/>.

<sup>14</sup> "Notice biographique," in *Lire Monique Wittig aujourd'hui*, 283.

*L'Opoponax*—she immersed herself in various political causes, which included at different points the *mai 68*, women's, gay liberation, and lesbian movements. She finished her days as a political exile of sorts (under circumstances I will return to later) in 2003 in Tucson, where she served as a tenured professor of women's studies and French at the University of Arizona.

Wittig, like Guy Hocquenghem, cut her teeth in political activism during the May '68 student and worker uprisings. However, her participation in the events was short-lived, as she quickly found herself unable to tolerate the sexism and homophobia that pervaded many of the leftist circles of the era.<sup>15</sup> In the wake of '68, Wittig effectively co-founded<sup>16</sup> the *Mouvement de libération des femmes* in the spring of 1970 with the publication of a feminist manifesto published in *l'Idiot international* cosigned by her sister Gille, Marcia Rothenburg, and Margaret Stephenson, originally entitled "Pour un mouvement de libération des femmes" before being changed without their knowledge by the journal's editors to the particularly unfortunate title "Combat pour la libération de *la* femme" (my emphasis).<sup>17</sup> The manifesto was followed by a historic demonstration at the *Arc de Triomphe* during which Wittig and a group of feminists laid a wreath in commemoration of the *wife* of the Unknown Soldier and the fiftieth anniversary of

---

<sup>15</sup> Anne Garréta, "Bref portrait des amantes," in *Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes*, by Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig (Paris: B. Grasset, 2011). See also chapter one's discussion of the exodus of women from the *Vive la révolution* ! group.

<sup>16</sup> For reasons will become clear, the precise details of the history of the MLF, its origins, and its "ownership" is a fraught topic. The information provided in this chapter corresponds to the narrative overwhelmingly agreed upon by the scholarly literature on feminism in France. As for the founding of the MLF, however, it is important to note that many of the early members of the MLF, including Christine Delphy and Anne Zelensky, were members of the Marxist feminist group *Féminin, masculin, avenir* (1967-1970), included both men and women and judged the appropriate place of feminist militancy to be within the larger struggle against capitalism. Wittig played an active role in the group before penning the feminist manifesto published in *L'Idiot international* that marked the beginning of the MLF. Many of the women of FMA joined the MLF, leading to the dissolution of FMA. The former members of the FMA constituted the "class struggle" faction of the MLF, which had a number of competing theoretical camps within its membership. See, for example, Picq, *Libération des femmes*, 11–23; Monique Wittig, "Monique Wittig Raconte," Interview with Josy Thibaut. *Prochoix : la revue du droit de choisir*, no. 47 (December 2008): 63–76; Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, "Les Féminismes : Des Mouvements Autonomes ?," in *Le Siècle Des Féminismes*, ed. Éliane Gubin (Paris: l'Atelier, 2004), 227–38.

<sup>17</sup> Monique Wittig, Gille Wittig, Marcia Rothenburg, Margaret Stephenson, "Combat Pour La Libération de La Femme," *L'Idiot International*, no. 6 (May 1970): 13–16.

women's suffrage in the United States.<sup>18</sup> From that point, the MLF began meeting regularly at the *École des Beaux-Arts*. The MLF understood itself to be a non-hierarchical *movement* rather than an organization, and, as such, refused to wed itself to any singular theoretical framework or to designate official leaders,<sup>19</sup> preferring to remain a loosely structured constellation of ideas, actions, and (overlapping, often ephemeral) subgroups. One of the first factions to emerge was a small group of lesbian feminists formed in November 1970 led by Wittig called *Les petites marguerites*,<sup>20</sup> who are most well known for their disruption of an *Elle* magazine event and press conference called "Les États-généraux de la femme"<sup>21</sup> before dissolving early the next year.<sup>22</sup>

Wittig was also one of the lesbian feminists who co-founded the *Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire* in 1971 along with a number of gay men.<sup>23</sup> However, she would abandon the FHAR and form the short-lived radical lesbian splinter group *Les gouines rouges* a few months later for some of the same reasons she withdrew from organized *gauchisme*, that is to say its domination by men and the marginalization of women's (let alone lesbians') voices and concerns, but also because of its uncritical view of sexuality as a vector of liberation.<sup>24</sup> Despite

---

<sup>18</sup> Picq, *Libération des femmes*, 16.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 98–99.

<sup>20</sup> David Paternotte and Manon Tremblay, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Lesbian and Gay Activism* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 127.

<sup>21</sup> The name is a play on the *Les États-généraux de 1789*, which marked the beginning of the French revolution. *Elle* accordingly held the event in Versailles.

<sup>22</sup> Sandra Reineke, *Beauvoir and Her Sisters: The Politics of Women's Bodies in France* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

<sup>23</sup> Frédéric Martel, *Le rose et le noir : les homosexuels en France depuis 1968* (Paris: Seuil, 1996), 24–26; Michael Sibalis, "Gay Liberation Comes to France: The Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire (FHAR)," *French History and Civilization: Papers from the George Rudé Seminar*, 2005, 265–67. See chapter one for more on the FHAR and its genesis.

<sup>24</sup> Françoise Picq, *Libération Des Femmes: Les Années-Mouvement* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), 104–11.

the complicated ecosystem of factions within the MLF, the main division within the movement separated what we might call the differentialist feminists from the materialist feminists.

The differentialist current, also known as *Psychanalyse et politique* (*Psychépo*), was centered around psychoanalyst Antoinette Fouque. The *Psychépo* group, drawing its primary influences from Lacanian psychoanalysis and Derridean deconstruction, believed that there exist irreducible differences between men and women and that these differences should be affirmed; for them, the feminist pursuit of "equality" is not merely misguided, but fundamentally incompatible with their ultimate aim of overthrowing a phallogocentric symbolic order. It is work associated with *Psychépo*, such as the *écriture féminine* movement,<sup>25</sup> that has come to be known in the US under the dubious rubric of "French feminism"<sup>26</sup> despite the fact that many of the women most associated with it (e.g. Cixous, Irigaray, Kristeva) distanced themselves from

---

<sup>25</sup> I will return to *écriture féminine* in my discussion of Wittig's materialist feminist stance toward language and literature.

<sup>26</sup> Christine Delphy details and decries the canonization of the "holy trinity" of Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous by American feminist academics (such as Alice Jardine and Toril Moi) under the banner of "French feminism," "a fabrication of American . . . scholars . . . created by a series of . . . voluntary or involuntary errors about what was happening in France from the mid-seventies on." Delphy describes the "invention" of French feminism as an imperialist move that served to "legitimate the introduction on the Anglo-American feminist scene of a brand of essentialism, and in particular a rehabilitation of psycho-analysis, which goes further than the native kind expressed by Sara Ruddick, Chodorow, or Gilligan" at the expense of distorting the actual history of the French feminism movement and marginalizing its key figures. See "The Invention of French Feminism: An Essential Move," *Yale French Studies*, no. 87 (1995): 190–221. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that most of the three chief "French feminists" are not actually French. Irigaray was not French, but Belgian; Kristeva was born and raised in Bulgaria; and Cixous is French, but she was born and raised in Oran, French Algeria.

the label of "feminism,"<sup>27</sup> which they skeptically understood to be based on a reformist, "bourgeois, egalitarian demand for women to obtain power in the present patriarchal system."<sup>28</sup>

The opposing, materialist tendency, which coalesced loosely around the journal *Questions féministes* (of which Wittig was an editor), staunchly rejected the concept of *la différence sexuelle*. The materialist feminism of the *Questions féministes* group is rooted in the premise that it is not "nature," but power dynamics—namely social relations of exploitation and appropriation—that give rise to the division of humans into the categories of "man" and "woman," a division that is thus always already hierarchical in character. Materialist feminist sociologist Colette Guillaumin, who was a scholar of race before turning her attention to feminism, pioneered the materialist feminist concept that a specific natural feminine condition was not the basis of women's oppression, but, rather, that it is by virtue of their collective oppression that women are ascribed a "nature" in the first place,<sup>29</sup> a theory that draws upon her earlier work on the correlation between the rise of the transatlantic slave trade and the coincident proliferation of racial taxonomies.<sup>30</sup> In other words, the subordination of *women* precedes the existence of "woman," a construct whose historicity is obscured by the ideology of sexual

---

<sup>27</sup> Hélène Cixous, in a 1977 interview, famously rejected the feminist label: "Pour moi, de façon extrêmement précise, le féminisme aujourd'hui est une idéologie qui, à la limite, est réactionnaire. . . . je ne suis pas féministe" ("Entretien Avec Françoise van Rossum-Guyon," *Revue Des Sciences Humaines* 42, no. 168 [1977]: 481–82). Kristeva, who has also rejected "feminism," which she has characterized as a "political perversion" ("My Memory's Hyperbole," trans. Athena Viscusi, *New York Literary Forum* 12/13 [1984]: 273). Luce Irigaray does not call herself a feminist either: "I don't particularly care for the term feminism. . . . I am completely willing to abandon this word, namely because it is formed on the same model as the other great words of the culture that oppress us" ("Interview: Paris, Summer 1980," in *Women Analyze Women in France, England, and the United States*, ed. Elaine Baruch and Lucienne Serrano [New York: New York University Press, 1980], 150).

<sup>28</sup> Toril Moi, *Sexual/textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, New Accents (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), 103.

<sup>29</sup> Guillaumin first introduced these ideas in a 1978 article published in *Questions féministes* entitled "Pratique de pouvoir et idée de nature," in which she theorizes the deployment of naturalist ideology in the service of "sexage," the term she coins to describe the collective and individual double appropriation of women by men. See "Pratique de pouvoir et idée de Nature (1) L'appropriation des femmes," *Questions féministes*, no. 2 (February 1978): 5–30.

<sup>30</sup> See Colette Guillaumin, *L'idéologie raciste: genèse et langage actuel* (Paris: Mouton, 1972).

difference. Feminist sociologist and founding co-editor of *Questions féministes* Christine Delphy characterizes a materialist approach to gender—or, rather, as many materialist feminists prefer, "les rapports sociaux de sexe"<sup>31</sup>—as one "qui se fonde sur les rapports sociaux," remarking that "ce qu'[on] appelle matérialisme pourrait aussi s'appeler constructivisme"<sup>32</sup> social.<sup>33</sup> Besides Wittig and Delphy, the principal figures of French materialist feminist thought include sociologist Guillaumin and anthropologists Nicole-Claude Mathieu and Paola Tabet, all of whom Wittig cites as influences on her own feminist methodology;<sup>34</sup> it was not just their views on sexual difference that divided *Psychépo* and the materialist feminists, but also their disciplinary backgrounds. The most eminent figures of *Psychanalyse et politique* were for the most part scholars and practitioners of either or both psychoanalysis and literature, whereas those of the *Questions féministes* group were virtually all social scientists (with the exception of Wittig).

The term "materialist feminism" was coined by Delphy to indicate the Marxian underpinnings of the framework, which draws upon historical materialist method; materialist feminist analysis consists of class-based examination of social relations of production, broadly construed, and the material conditions of their reproduction. However, materialist feminism's belief that women constitute a class on the basis of common oppression diverges from traditional

---

<sup>31</sup> Materialist feminists were hostile to the notion of gender and preferred the term "rapports sociaux de sexe" not because they believed in the primacy of the biological fact of sexual difference, but because they believed—much to the contrary—that the focus on "gender"—conceived of as the social and cultural dimension of sex—instead of sex participates in the naturalization of the division of society into two biologically-defined sex classes. In other words, for materialist feminists, "gender" is complicit in the production of sex (a view, for that matter, similar to Judith Butler's in *Gender Trouble*), the process that feminism should be concerned with interrupting.

<sup>32</sup> See the previous footnote. Materialist feminism offers a radically constructivist theory of sex (and gender). While they do not deny the existence of biological reproductive differences, they vehemently reject as arbitrary and unnecessary the recruitment of these differences as justification for the division of humanity into two sex classes.

<sup>33</sup> Christine Delphy, *Un Universalisme Si Particulier: Féminisme et Exception Française (1980-2010)*, Collection "Nouvelles Questions Féministes" (Paris: Syllepse, 2010), 160; Furthermore, this is not to say, however, that the meaning of the term "materialist feminism" was agreed upon by all. Materialist feminist anthropologist Françoise Héritier, for instance, identifies herself as a materialist on the basis that she "par[t] de la réalité des corps" in the introduction to *Masculin/féminin : La Pensée de La Différence* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1996).

<sup>34</sup> Wittig, "Preface," in *The Straight Mind*, XIV–XV.

Marxism, which defines class exploitation in strictly economic terms. Materialist feminism furthermore expands traditional Marxism's definition of the realm of the social to include the domestic and private spheres in order to shed light on the forms of unpaid work women are commonly expected to perform (e.g. housework, childcare, sex work/"conjugal duty").

Though the MLF still exists today in name, its reputation was irreparably marred in 1979, when Fouque—on behalf of the *Psychépo*-dominated *des femmes* publishing house she founded and runs—trademarked the name "Mouvement de libération des femmes" and the feminist symbol, effectively establishing herself as the authorized spokesperson of the French women's movement and betraying the MLF's commitment to remaining a fluid movement rather than an institutionalized organization.<sup>35</sup> The controversial legal appropriation of the French women's movement by the *Psychanalyse et politique* collective led many feminists to abandon the MLF and pursue their feminist projects through other avenues.

The materialist feminist *Questions féministes* group would itself be bitterly torn apart a few months later when longstanding frictions surrounding the relationship between feminism and (homo)sexuality came to a head. The place of lesbianism within the French women's movement was not initially a source of conflict; many of its founders identified as lesbians. However, it emerged as such when some of the lesbians within the MLF began to claim that lesbianism was politically and ethically superior to heterosexuality from a feminist standpoint, for—according to the dominant MLF line—the "purity" of feminists was largely judged based on the degree to which they broke with normative gender expectations.<sup>36</sup> For instance, materialist feminist anthropologist Nicole-Claude Mathieu defines lesbianism as "une attitude politique (consciente

---

<sup>35</sup> Diana Leonard and Lisa Adkins, "Reconstructing French Feminism: Commodification, Materialism and Sex," in *Sex in Question: French Materialist Feminism* (London and Bristol, PA: Taylor & Francis, 1996), 4.

<sup>36</sup> Sandrine Garcia, "Project for a Symbolic Revolution: The Rise and Fall of the Women's Movement in France," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 93, no. 4 (1994): 850–51.

ou non) de lutte contre le genre hétérosexuel et hétérosocial qui fonde la définition des femmes et leur oppression."<sup>37</sup> The radical lesbian contingent considered lesbianism the most logical way to apply in practice the theoretical insights of materialist feminist analysis. The irreconcilable differences within *Questions féministes* between the radical lesbian feminists who believed participation in heterosexuality to be a priori incompatible with feminist political commitment and the feminists—many of whom, like Delphy, were also lesbians—who did not culminated in a scission between the opposing factions that crystalized in the publication of the journal's February 1980 issue, which featured dueling essays on the matter. When we juxtapose the two, Wittig's "La pensée straight"<sup>38</sup> and Emmanuèle de Lesseps's "Hétérosexualité et féminisme,"<sup>39</sup> it becomes clear that the dispute was not as frivolous as might at first sight appear, for the rival camps put forward mutually exclusive conclusions regarding the nature of women's oppression. De Lesseps, pleading for unity amongst feminists regardless of sexual practices or identity, argues that "l'hétérosexualité est la forme spécifique *dans laquelle* s'inscrit l'oppression des femmes, mais non la forme spécifique *de* l'oppression des femmes. Car ce n'est pas l'hétérosexualité qui est un problème, c'est l'oppression."<sup>40</sup> De Lesseps claims that the oppression suffered by women vis-à-vis normative heterosexuality is but one manifestation of oppression among many under a larger, overarching oppressive patriarchal system; the objective of feminism should be to fundamentally transform the power dynamic between men and women from one of exploitation to one of equality, and this need not entail the interdiction of relations between men and women, sexual or otherwise. Wittig, on the other hand, refuses to recognize

---

<sup>37</sup> Nicole-Claude Mathieu, *L'Anatomie Politique* (Paris: Côté-femmes, 1992), 260.

<sup>38</sup> Wittig delivered an earlier version of the essay at the 1978 MLA conference in New York.

<sup>39</sup> Monique Wittig, "La Pensée Straight," *Questions Féministes*, no. 7 (February 1980): 45–53; Emmanuèle de Lesseps, "Hétérosexualité et Féminisme," *Questions Féministes*, no. 7 (February 1980): 55–69.

<sup>40</sup> De Lesseps, "Hétérosexualité et Féminisme," 66.

any meaningful distinction between heterosexuality and the oppression of women; heterosexuality and the oppression of women are, for Wittig, two sides of the same coin.

In "La pensée straight," Wittig critiques the discourse of "difference" as a totalizing ideological construct that naturalizes a host of relations of domination, of which sexual difference is but one example. Implicitly drawing upon Guillaumin's work, Wittig stresses that "difference" is a discursive political practice rather than an ontological fact. By "la pensée straight," a play on Lévi-Strauss' "la pensée sauvage," Wittig describes an epistemological framework organized around the optic of binary difference, a hegemonic, historically contingent way of making sense of the world that—when it comes to *sexual* difference—props up the institution of heterosexuality by casting the social pairing of "men" and "women" as natural, self-evident, necessary, and therefore outside the purview of political scrutiny:

Oui la société hétérosexuelle est fondée sur la nécessité de l'autre différent à tous les niveaux. Elle ne peut pas fonctionner sans ce concept ni économiquement ni symboliquement ni linguistiquement ni politiquement. Cette nécessité de l'autre différent est une nécessité ontologique pour tout le conglomerat de sciences et de disciplines que j'appelle la pensée straight. Or qu'est-ce que l'autre différent sinon le dominé ?<sup>41</sup>

The concept of difference is the central organizing principle of society, which obscures the fact that the attribution of difference is never benign and never symmetrical. The very existence of the idea of "woman" and all that it entails is an effect of the hegemonic status of heterosexuality within a male-dominated social order. As Wittig puts it elsewhere, gender is essentially "the linguistic index of the political opposition between the sexes and of the domination of women."<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Wittig, "La pensée straight," 50.

<sup>42</sup> Wittig, "The Point of View," in *The Straight Mind*, 60.

One might wonder why, if the "straight mind" is defined as the inability to think without recourse to the analytic of binary difference, Wittig understands society to be so fundamentally dominated by heterosexuality in particular (as opposed to other institutions structured around alterity) that she understands the heterosexuality to be "ce qui fonde la société, toute société."<sup>43</sup> Why, in other words, does she not speak, for instance, of the regime of white supremacy (especially considering her indebtedness to Guillaumin)? Wittig singles out heterosexuality in this way because, taking for granted Lévi-Strauss' claim that human society is based on the exchange of women, she claims that sexual difference shapes virtually all dimensions of social life and systems of knowledge production (e.g. biology, the social sciences, history).

The kind of radical political transformation that would free women from the gendered subordination inherent to normative heterosexuality would therefore require no less than the full-scale eradication of "the straight mind." It's easy to see, therefore, why the radical lesbians who coalesced around Wittig's thought rejected so completely de Lesseps' and the "straight-friendly" materialist feminists' implorations that feminism strive to transform the relationship between the two sexes in general and not get mired down in the problem of heterosexual relations in particular. For the radical lesbians, as long as there exists any relationship *between* the sexes, there is an asymmetrical power differential at play. Therefore, to even call oneself or act in the world as a "woman" or a "man" amounts to consenting to and abetting the survival of a hierarchical social order founded on women's oppression; "woman" is beyond redemption.

Wittig returns time and again to the analogy of the "runaway" lesbian's refusal to have her time, body, and labor fall under the control of a man such a husband or a father (through the institutions of marriage and the patriarchal family) or men in general (through the coercive weight of heteronormative social expectations) to the situation of fugitive black slaves fleeing

---

<sup>43</sup> Wittig, "La pensée straight," 48.

the appropriation of their bodies and labor by white slave owners: "only by running away from their class can women achieve the [new] social contract . . . even if they have to do it like fugitive serfs, one by one. We are doing it. Lesbians are runaways, fugitive slaves."<sup>44</sup> It is on these grounds that Wittig avoids the word "woman" at all costs: "I never use [the word 'woman'] in French. For me it is the equivalent of *slave*."<sup>45</sup> Wittig goes as far as to liken the term "woman" to "nigger," asking rhetorically "Can we redeem *nigger*, *negress*? How is *woman* different?"<sup>46</sup> In the absence of a "Liberia for women," a place of refuge from patriarchal oppression, "the only thing to do is to stand on one's own feet as an escapee, a fugitive slave, a lesbian."<sup>47</sup>

Wittig's essay would seem to offer a profoundly fatalistic evaluation of the condition of women; it identifies heterosexuality as a pervasive, totalizing political system whose reach has no bounds. However, though the regime of heterosexuality leaves little room for the prospect of meaningful agency for "women," Wittig does locate a space within this framework in which resistance is merely possible, but is already taking place; as she puts it in an article that appears in the final issue of *Questions féministes*: "par sa seule existence une société lesbienne détruit le fait artificiel (social) qui constitue les femmes en un « groupe naturel »."<sup>48</sup> By shifting the main target of feminist intervention from patriarchy to the institution of heterosexuality, or rather by diagnosing the former as an effect of the latter, Wittig identifies a common source of the oppression faced by women and stigmatized sexual minorities constituted as deviant vis-à-vis normative heterosexuality. According to this schema, lesbians are doubly marginalized by

---

<sup>44</sup> Wittig, "On the Social Contract," in *The Straight Mind*, 34.

<sup>45</sup> Wittig, "The Mark of Gender," in *The Straight Mind*, 86.

<sup>46</sup> Wittig, "The Straight Mind," in *The Straight Mind*, 30.

<sup>47</sup> Wittig, "Preface," in *The Straight Mind*, xiii.

<sup>48</sup> Monique Wittig, "On Ne Naît Pas Femme," *Questions Féministes*, no. 8 (May 1980), 75.

hegemonic heterosexuality; though women are subordinated in and through heterosexuality, they are privileged with respect to lesbians on the basis of the normalcy of their situation. Similarly, gay men benefit to some extent from the social status accorded to them as men (even if they are in essence *failed* men).<sup>49</sup> However, it is precisely in their quintessentially outsider status in heterosexual society that the lesbian is for Wittig such a politically potent figure.

Wittig provocatively concludes her essay with the assertion that "les lesbiennes ne sont pas des femmes."<sup>50</sup> Because "woman" is for Wittig an operative construct only in relation to "man," lesbians are not truly women by virtue of their unwillingness to assume the—not just sexual, but also economic and social—position vis-à-vis men that defines what it means to be a woman, and it is precisely by not being women that lesbians manifest a metaphorical outside to the regime of heterosexuality, a space in which (those classed under heterosexuality as) women need not necessarily be condemned to oppression. Wittig's understanding of lesbian positionality is therefore in irreconcilable conflict with that of her American radical lesbian feminist counterparts despite some basic similarities of approach. Though American lesbian feminists in the vein of Adrienne Rich and the Radicalesbians, like Wittig, may critique heterosexuality as a political institution inherently oppressive to women,<sup>51</sup> they take as granted the category of "woman" itself and posit the lesbian, for them the "woman-identified woman"<sup>52</sup> par excellence, as its most authentic manifestation. Wittig argues, to the contrary, that to be a lesbian means first and foremost to *not* be a woman, and it is for this reason she maintains that it is incorrect to

---

<sup>49</sup> Just as lesbians are women, gay men are not really men, for the categories of "man" and "woman" are operative only in relation to one another in the context of the logic and practice of normative heterosexuality.

<sup>50</sup> Wittig, "La pensée straight," 53.

<sup>51</sup> See Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs* 5, no. 4 (Summer 1980): 631–60.

<sup>52</sup> See Radicalesbians, "The Woman-Identified Woman" (Pittsburgh: Know, Inc., 1970), Duke University Special Collections Library, <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/womid/>.

claim that "les lesbiennes vivent, s'associent, font l'amour avec des femmes car « femme » n'a de sens que dans les systèmes de pensée et les systèmes économiques hétérosexuels."<sup>53</sup> The essential negativity of Wittigian lesbianism—Wittig defines the lesbian in strictly negative terms—is an underappreciated aspect of Wittig's thought and will be important to bear in mind when we turn later to the matter of the ontological character of Wittig's "lesbian society."

Given the fundamental incompatibility of de Lesseps' and Wittig's competing theories of heterosexuality, lesbianism, and ultimately feminism, the following issue of *Questions féministes* would be its last. The split of the *Questions féministes* group culminated in an embittered court battle over control of the journal, leading to the creation of *Nouvelles questions féministes* in 1981 by a group that included Delphy, de Lesseps, and Simone de Beauvoir. Wittig, however, had by this point long since been separated from her rivals, as much geographically as politically; she effectively retired from organized French feminism in the mid-70s by relocating to the US—a move that she reportedly considered an exile given the acrimonious circumstances surrounding her radical lesbian *prise de position* and its schismatic consequences—where she held academic positions at various universities until her death in 2003.<sup>54</sup>

As I have just outlined, Wittig understands the lesbian to occupy a space beyond the purview of "the straight mind." In what follows, I will consider precisely what kind of space this is. Where is the "lesbian society" that Wittig speaks of, what kinds of people populate it, and is it a metaphorical or a literal space? This is a point that Wittig is quite unclear about in her essays, a lack of clarity that has lent itself to accusations that her work purveys a naive lesbian separatism, allegations that—as we'll see—are not borne out when one considers how Wittig treats

---

<sup>53</sup> Wittig, "La pensée straight," 53.

<sup>54</sup> Elaine Woo, "Monique Wittig, 67; Leading French Feminist, Social Theorist and Novelist," *The Los Angeles Times*, January 11, 2003, <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/jan/11/local/me-wittig11>.

lesbianism in work more generally. It is a mistake to look to Wittig's essays for the final word on her politics of lesbianism, for, as should already be evident, Wittig judges language to be part and parcel of the political, for it both reflects and reifies social categories and power relations. If lesbians are somehow outside the realm of straightness due to having fled heterosexuality, Wittig does not propose for them to remain there for long. Unlike politically-minded gay writers like Dustan, Wittig does not traffic in the idealized notion of a "ghettoized" lesbian refuge from heteronormativity; Wittig calls, in no uncertain terms, for lesbians to stay and fight, with the ultimate aim being "a political transformation of the key concepts. . . . language is worked upon from within by these strategic concepts."<sup>55</sup> The battle against patriarchal heterosexuality must therefore be waged on and through language. Wittig points to literary language as a particularly promising "site of action."<sup>56</sup> In the next section, I will explain why and how Wittig deploys literature as a lesbian "Trojan horse" on "the straight mind" in order to elucidate the highly spatial logic of Wittig's thought and its (distinctly anti-separatist) political implications.

### **Wittig's Literary "Trojan Horses"**

An aspect of her life and work that sets Wittig starkly apart from her materialist feminist comrades is the fact that, while the other chief materialist feminist theorists of her time were all social scientists by training and profession, the source of Wittig's livelihood as well as her preferred medium of feminist expression was literature and literary criticism (despite the fact that she did eventually receive a doctorate from the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* in

---

<sup>55</sup> Wittig, "The Straight Mind," in *The Straight Mind*, 30.

<sup>56</sup> Wittig, "The Site of Action," 90–100.

1986—long after her MLF days—under the direction of Gérard Genette).<sup>57</sup> As I mentioned, Wittig officially embarked upon her literary career in 1964—well before the emergence of the May '68, women's, or gay liberation movements—with the publication of her debut novel *L'Opoponax*. This was followed by a number of creative works spanning a vast range of genres; her literary oeuvre includes plays, short stories, translations, novels, and even an experimental dictionary.<sup>58</sup> Despite the formal diversity of Wittig's work, literary and otherwise, her oeuvre is unified by its political intent. It is highly problematic to neatly divide her body of work between her theoretical political writing (e.g. her essays) and her literary creations (e.g. her fiction), for the relationship between the literary and the political in Wittig's writing is not one of simple intersection. I will be doing so, that is to say focusing in what follows on her literary work rather than her essays, precisely to trace the underappreciated continuity between the two.

For Wittig, language—what Wittig identifies as the "final social contract"<sup>59</sup>—is inextricably bound up within relations of power. Wittig is adamant that language is not just political; it is the material manifestation par excellence of the political. The importance of language to her political theory and method cannot be overstated. For Wittig, language is a "special material"<sup>60</sup> for a number of reasons. Firstly, language "is the place, the means, the medium" for conveying meaning despite the fact that "like the purloined letter of Poe's tale, [it] is constantly there, although totally invisible. For one sees, one hears only the meaning."<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> Wittig's 1986 thesis, entitled *Le chantier littéraire*, offers a materialist feminist analysis of the social and political functions of language and literature and revisits many of the ideas and themes explored in her previous essays. Her *diplôme de l'EHESS* allowed her to advance her academic career in the United States and ultimately be granted tenure at the University of Arizona in 1990. A reworked version of the thesis was published after her death. See Monique Wittig, *Le chantier littéraire* (Lyon: Presses univ. de Lyon, 2010).

<sup>58</sup> Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig, *Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes* (Paris: Grasset, 1976).

<sup>59</sup> Wittig, "On the Social Contract," in *The Straight Mind*, 34.

<sup>60</sup> Wittig, "The Point of View: Universal or Particular?" in *The Straight Mind*, 66.

Language, in other words, exists and acts materially in the world, yet it almost never becomes an object of perception in and of itself in everyday life. Secondly, language is a "special material" in that its critical dual social function; it both *reflects* social power dynamics and is a primary instrument through which power is *exerted*. No matter how seemingly abstract, all "language casts sheaves of reality upon the social body, stamping it and violently shaping it."<sup>62</sup>

Wittig conceives of language in distinctly spatialized terms: "Language exists as a *paradise* made of visible, audible, palpable, palatable words"<sup>63</sup> (my italics). This is to say that we all exist as political agents within (and only within) the realm of language, and it can be a hospitable space or a hellishly<sup>64</sup> hostile one based on how we use it or how it is used on us. It is not language that women must escape if they hope to achieve freedom, but, rather, "the straight mind." Though Wittig often characterizes the situation of the lesbian as one of flight from heterosexuality, this is not to say that running away is for her a desirable end in itself. Lesbianism offers the promise of refuge for women from the burdens of Womanhood, but this space of refuge outside of "heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems"<sup>65</sup> is for Wittig a provisional, temporary one from which lesbians can mount an assault on heterosexuality. The only way to meaningfully achieve the liberation of all those who are

---

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> This sentence appears in two of Wittig's essays. See "On the Social Contract," in *The Straight Mind*, 43–44; "The Mark of Gender," in *The Straight Mind*, 78. Both essays are revised versions of earlier published articles. See "The Mark of Gender," *Feminist Issues* 5, no. 2 (1985): 3–12; "On the Social Contract," *Feminist Issues* 9, no. 1 (1989): 3–12.

<sup>63</sup> Wittig, "The Site of Action," 94.

<sup>64</sup> The idea that the very same place can be both a heaven and a hell based on one's social positionality is explored in *Virgile, non* Wittig's lesbian take on Dante's *Inferno*, which I will consider in depth later in this chapter.

<sup>65</sup> Wittig, "The Straight Mind," in *The Straight Mind*, 32.

marginalized or oppressed under a male-dominated heterosexual social order is to dismantle and reform the social order, a transformation that must be effected from within.

The "special materiality" of language makes literary expression in particular an opportune medium for political action, for unlike with day-to-day language or expository writing, "in literature words are given to be read in their materiality."<sup>66</sup> Drawing upon Shlovsky's concept of defamiliarization, Wittig argues that literature galvanizes us into paying attention to words as opposed to just the meaning they convey. The work performed by literary writers takes readers on what Wittig calls a "detour" by which words' meaning can be diverted, unsettled, and transformed: "What is smothered by all kinds of talk, whether it be that of the street or of the philosopher's study, is the first language . . . the one in which meaning has not yet occurred, the one which is for all . . . and which everyone in turn can take, use, bend toward a meaning."<sup>67</sup> Literature affords anyone the possibility of taking meaning into their own hands.

Wittig claims that every would-be writer is faced with two choices, to replicate existing literary forms or to fashion entirely new ones, a choice whose stakes are particularly high for minority writers, who work within "hostile territory."<sup>68</sup> For Wittig, all great literary works (i.e. revolutionary ones) are like Trojan horses; though they bear resemblance to conventional literature, their "design and . . . goal is to pulverize the old forms and formal conventions."<sup>69</sup> The more foreign they appear, the less likely they are to be "let in" and accepted as Literature. When successful, these literary "war machines"<sup>70</sup> act as landmines, "sap[ping] and blast[ing]"<sup>71</sup> the

---

<sup>66</sup> Wittig, "The Trojan Horse," 71–72.

<sup>67</sup> Wittig, "The Site of Action," 93.

<sup>68</sup> Wittig, "The Trojan Horse," 69.

<sup>69</sup> Wittig, "The Trojan Horse," 69.

<sup>70</sup> Wittig, "The Trojan Horse," 68.

dominance of traditional forms and forcibly claiming cultural legitimacy. A literary Trojan horse is first and foremost a political weapon, a means by which to mount an assault (albeit a covert one) on a socio-cultural framework that condemns women (or other minority figures) to a state of Otherness and subordination. According to Wittig, however, minority literatures (e.g. gay literature, *écriture féminine*) can never truly hope to function as war machines insofar as they are understood first and foremost as such, that is to say in terms of their "particular" point of view. *Littérature engagée* is similarly incapable of rising to this challenge, both because it positions itself in opposition to cultural norms and that its significance is intrinsically dependent on the oppression of the group its writer speaks on behalf of. Minority or committed literatures, for Wittig, cannot function as Trojan horses because they ultimately do more to shore up the oppressor/oppressed dichotomy than subvert it. Wittig cites Proust (and elsewhere Djuna Barnes<sup>72</sup>) as a quintessential example of a minority writer successfully constructing a literary war machine in that he turns "the 'real' world into a homosexual-only world."<sup>73</sup> In other words, Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* is a literary war machine because it "succeeds in making the minority point of view universal;"<sup>74</sup> his work induces readers of all sorts into temporarily inhabiting what is effectively a gay subject position. When effective, minority writers explode the terms by which the group they represent is excluded from universality and relegated to the status of particularity, thereby transforming what qualifies as universal in the first place.

The mission of universalizing a specifically lesbian perspective is what lies at the heart of Wittig's literary-political enterprise, and it is by this method that she seeks to undo the hegemony

---

<sup>71</sup> Wittig, "The Trojan Horse," 69.

<sup>72</sup> Wittig, "The Point of View: Universal or Particular," in *The Straight Mind*, 59–67.

<sup>73</sup> Wittig, "The Trojan Horse," 74.

<sup>74</sup> Wittig, "The Point of View," 64.

of "the straight mind." Inscribing the Wittigian lesbian into the universal in this manner would radically call into question the givenness of "the straight mind" in all its corollary manifestations (e.g. sexual difference, "man," "woman," patriarchal heterosexuality), loosen its hold on human thought, and set the foundations for a more egalitarian society (at least from the perspective of gender and sexuality). Having briefly unpacked the theoretical underpinnings of Wittig's approach to literature, let us now consider how Wittig's "Trojan horses" translate into literary practice by taking a look at how one of Wittig's literary works in particular surreptitiously yet forcefully endeavors to introduce a lesbian point of view into the realm of the universal.

**"Elles disent que c'est un monde nouveau qui commence:"<sup>75</sup> Wittig's Lesbian Warriors**

The theme of violence figures prominently in virtually all of Wittig's literary works, an aspect of her writing that should not be surprising given the centrality of violence in her social theory. Even her debut novel *L'Opoponax*, far and away her least obviously political novel, features a number of "violent" combat scenes, even if the warfare in *L'Opoponax* is limited to childhood make-believe. *L'Opoponax* is nonetheless perhaps her most successful literary "war machine" of all based on Wittig's own standard; in a glowing review, Claude Simon describes that in reading the novel, "Je ne suis plus moi, je ne suis pas non plus une certaine petite fille: je deviens l'enfance." *L'Opoponax* is an exploration of childhood through the eyes of a young Catholic schoolgirl. If Simon's reaction is any indication, the female narrator-protagonist's voice speaks to the universal experience of childhood (as opposed to girlhood) in spite of her gender and immersion in an almost exclusively feminine social world. The violence in Wittig's subsequent novel, *Les guérillères*, is far from child's play. Though *L'Opoponax* garnered the most mainstream acclaim of all of Wittig's novels, *Les guérillères* became an instant, enduring

---

<sup>75</sup> Monique Wittig, *Les guérillères* (Paris: Minuit, 1969), 121.

classic among lesbian and feminist audiences around the world. The genre-bending novel, which draws upon elements of myth, epic, catalogue, and visual art, imagines the aftermath of a full-fledged war victoriously waged on patriarchy by a clan of *guérillères*, a strange neologism that combines the rarely encountered feminized form of the masculine-gendered French term for "warrior" (*guerrier*) with the equally rare Spanish loan word for "guerilla fighter" (*guérillero*), for which there is no feminine form. Though the novel makes no mention of lesbianism, the *guérillères* epitomize Wittig's definition of the lesbian in their uncompromising antagonism to all forms of male supremacy, whether physical or symbolic. Most of the novel is focused on detailing the warriors' bellicose anti-patriarchal campaign and the world they've created within the walled confines of their feminist stronghold, such that it is easy to overlook the purpose of this battle of the sexes. For much of the novel, it seems as if the warriors are fighting for the establishment of either a matriarchal social order or of a separatist women-only society that would exclude men all together. However, in a "bait and switch" of sorts, it is confirmed in the final pages that neither of these are the case. The war culminates in the negotiation of a new social contract between the victorious women and their defeated adversaries, an egalitarian one entered into with the good faith objective of social equality. For this lofty precondition to be achieved, however, all traces of the patriarchal past must literally be reduced to ashes. The countless casualties of the war are ultimately collateral damage; the main target of the women's violence is not men, per se, but rather "woman," "man," and the other discursive constructs that ideologically buttress women's subordination. This war is above all a war of ideas whose aim is something akin to the "transformation of the key concepts"<sup>76</sup> called for in "The Straight Mind."

Much of the violence doled out by the *guérillères* is therefore not obviously legible as such. We are warned from the outset that intervention comes in many forms. The poem that

---

<sup>76</sup> Wittig, "The Straight Mind," in *The Straight Mind*, 30.

opens the novel concludes with the assertion that "TOUT GESTE EST RENVERSEMENT;"<sup>77</sup> every element of the novel is an act of overthrow. It is important to note that the French term "renversement" conveys both "overthrow" and "inversion" or "reversal;" as we shall see, this double meaning encapsulates the methodological vision that informs both the *guérillères*' and Wittig's feminist projects. We are frequently reminded, furthermore, of the materiality of language. In the first pages, for instance, the voice of one *guérillère* is sonorous enough to cause ripples to form on the lake, distorting the appearance of the shadows reflected on its surface.<sup>78</sup>

The contestation of patriarchal domination on the level of its discourses is reflected in the novel's form. *Les guérillères* is composed of a series of temporally and thematically disjointed textual fragments that offers relatively little in terms of a linear plot, a sense of setting, or even a cast of characters. These fragments take many forms. Though some offer the tales of particular women revered by the *guérillères* as female *grand homme* figures of sorts, the majority are concerned with the *guérillères*' exploits. The primary grammatical subject of the novel, however, is not "les guérillères," per se, but the feminine third-person plural pronoun "elles;" the referent "elles" is never actually given in explicit terms. Because the pronoun "elles" is used relatively rarely in French and even more rarely still in literature—in French, the masculine "ils" is used to refer to groups including as few as one male person (or masculine noun)—the frequency of its use in the novel evokes a sense of unfamiliarity. The lack of a referent for "elles" raises questions about the status of men in the novel in a way that the use of "ils" simply does not when used in a similar fashion: do men exist in the world imagined in the novel? If so, where are they?

---

<sup>77</sup> Wittig, *Les guérillères*, 7.

<sup>78</sup> Wittig, *Les guérillères*, 17.

Similarly to the "on" of the schoolgirl narrator of *L'Opoponax*, *Les guérillères* conjures a world in which "elles" bears a universal perspective. Wittig offers insight on the intentions behind her use of "elles" in an essay on linguistic gender:

In *Les guérillères*, I try to universalize the point of view of *elles*. The goal of this approach is not to feminize the world but to make the categories of sex obsolete in language. I, therefore, set up *elles* in the text as the absolute subjects of the world. . . . I wanted to produce a shock for the reader entering a text in which *elles* by its unique presence constitutes an assault, yes, even for female readers.<sup>79</sup>

In other words, the text not only represents violence, but itself enacts a kind of "defamiliarizing" violence toward the reader by using ordinary, seemingly politically neutral language in a manner that jolts us into recognizing the gendered power dynamics firmly entrenched within it.

In addition to the sections that relate the story of *elles* and those of illustrious individual *guérillères*, there are also several pages interspersed throughout featuring lists of feminine names, which ostensibly constitute a pantheon of heroines. The lists include first names (without patronyms) that connote diverse cultural and temporal origins (e.g. "Maria,"<sup>80</sup> "Betje,"<sup>81</sup> "Zaïre,"<sup>82</sup> "Wouang-Qiang"<sup>83</sup>), underscoring the materialist feminist idea that women's subordination is a global phenomenon that cuts across geographical, racial, and class lines. Finally, there are also three pages featuring only an unexplained figure of what can be interpreted as a circle, hole, zero, and/or "O." Considering the novel's mythical tone, one also might read the

---

<sup>79</sup> Wittig, "The Mark of Gender," 85.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 83.

cryptic symbol as a gynocentric answer to the Holy Cross; by proposing a blatantly vulgar symbol as a counter to the cross, the novel seeks to throw into relief the androcentric character of Christianity and the phallic nature of the cross. Similarly, the *guérillères'* pantheon—comprised solely of great *women*—draws attention in its strangeness to the commensurate strangeness of a pantheon made up solely of *men*. This is all to say that the *guérillères'* feminized, gynocentric re-imaginings of dominant cultural discourses delivers a defamiliarizing effect by underscoring through juxtaposition the ways in which mainstream culture harbors a masculine bias.

Furthermore, the novel's at times almost ethnographic description of the workings of the *guérillères'* society as well as its fragmentary structure gives a distinctly archaeological quality to the text; its readers are forced to piece together and make sense of the cultural remains of a lost society that existed in some unspecified time and place without recourse to any kind of master narrative or narrator to guide them. The novel clearly proceeds from a materialist (feminist) view of history; that the plot of *Les guérillères* emerges only through the quasi-archaeological "unearthing" of interweaving, temporally disjointed narrative (i.e. "historical") passages and portions dedicated exclusively to the *guérillères'* cultural practices reveals over the course of the novel that the language and culture of their world are not merely marked by the state of relations between men and women, but that language and culture are themselves key agents in the evolution of this relationship. To borrow from Angelika Bammer, "Wittig's inquiry [in *Les guérillères*] is predicated upon the belief that not only is culture inherently political but that, conversely, the most insistent articulations of politics are cultural."<sup>84</sup> The underlying presumption of their political method is the materialist feminist idea that patriarchy's survival relies ultimately relies on the perpetuation of a host of myths about or told from the vantage of male supremacy to the extent that they successfully maintain an exclusive hold on truth status.

---

<sup>84</sup> Angelika Bammer, *Partial Visions: Feminism and Utopianism in the 1970s* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 121.

The high-stake implications of canonicity are on full display in the closing lines of *L'Opoponax*; as its protagonist matures and progresses in her education, she turns more and more to literary references to give words to the new experiences she accumulates. She is finally able to give expression to the burgeoning quasi-romantic feelings she develops for her classmate Valérie in the novel's final lines via a quotation from Maurice Scève's *Délie*: "On dit, tant je l'aimais qu'en elle encore je vis."<sup>85</sup> The narrator (literally) coming to terms with these feelings brings the novel to an auspicious end, but the fact that she takes recourse to a seminal Renaissance love poem penned by a man in honor of a woman in particular in order to do so introduces an uncomfortable ambiguity. When we read this conclusion through *Les guérillères*, the lack of alternative discourses in the Western canon from a non-male or non-heterosexual vantage for her to draw upon emerges as problem. It is on these grounds that the *guérillères* wage their war on male supremacy; women will not be able to free themselves collectively from subordination so long as there exist few culturally dominant models of women acting as subjects. The prerequisite task for the *guérillères*, therefore, is to convince themselves that such a world is possible, even if that means invoking imagination: "Il y a eu un temps où tu n'as pas été esclave, souviens-toi. Tu t'en vas seule, pleine de rire, tu te baignes le ventre nu. . . . tu dis qu'il n'y a pas de mots pour décrire ce temps, tu dis qu'il n'existe pas. . . . Fais un effort pour te souvenir. Ou, à défaut, invente."<sup>86</sup>

The ambitious project of "coming up with" (*inventer*) a cultural world in which women are free from gendered oppression is part and parcel of the *guérillères*' war effort. Their principal tactic, at least at the outset, consists of appropriating specific patriarchal cultural and linguistic constructs and modifying and redeploying them as counter discourses to suit their needs. The

---

<sup>85</sup> Monique Wittig, *L'Opoponax* (Paris: Minuit, 1964), 281.

<sup>86</sup> Monique Wittig, *Les guérillères* (Paris: Minuit, 1969), 126–27.

sacred writs of the *guérillères*' society are known as the *féminaires*, a neologism that parodistically blends the terms *séminaire*, *béstiare*, and *dictionnaire*. The *féminaires* are an immense collection of small books that document the ways in which women were written about under the previous social order; it is specifically by consuming and rewriting the contents of the *féminaires* that the *guérillères* construct their own sets of meanings about womanhood and the female body and thus displace the prior ones, all of which are irredeemably suspect by virtue of their implication—however indirect—in patriarchal power dynamics.

For instance, the *guérillères* read in one of the *féminaires* about the wide array of medical, literary, and vernacular terminology once used to refer to female genital anatomy. The majority of the expressions listed in this and other similar *féminaires* have become outmoded to the point of unintelligibility, but they are able to make sense of those that rely on analogy. The only reason that they don't dispense with these particular *féminaires* is that the comparisons become a source of amusement in their patent absurdity:

On a comparé les nymphes à des violettes, ou bien les vulves . . . à des oursins, à des étoiles de mer. . . . Les textes disent également des vulves qu'elles ressemblent à des ulves, à des volutes. C'est un œil enfermé dans ses paupières qui bouge qui brille qui s'humidifie. C'est une bouche avec ses lèvres sa langue son palais rose.<sup>87</sup>

By removing examples of language used to describe female genitalia from their proper contexts and juxtaposing them, the novel puts on display the arbitrary and incoherent character of the range of cultural meanings attached to women's bodies. The assorted supposedly vulva-like objects cited here, which include sea lettuce, violets, rings of smoke, moist eyes, starfish, and sea urchins, make for a *mélange* that is not merely disjointed, but grotesquely incongruous; tobacco smoke irritates the eyes, for instance, and starfish predate on sea urchins, which, in turn,

---

<sup>87</sup> Wittig, *Les guérillères*, 66–67.

consume sea lettuce. On the whole, the content of the *féminaires* draws attention to the slippery boundaries between purely descriptive and figurative language; myth and science; and truth and fiction. That is to say that Wittig's *guérillères* essentially overthrow (*renverser*) the discursive framing of women and their bodies by simply turning these discourses against themselves, such that patriarchal ideology collapses under the weight of its own internal contradictions.

Despite their cultural centrality, the *féminaires* are not immune to scrutiny; even concepts, knowledge, and language once indispensable to the *guérillères* may become outdated: "Elles disent qu'il se peut que les féminaires aient rempli leur office. . . . Tout ce qu'on peut en faire pour ne pas s'encombrer d'un savoir inutile c'est de les entasser sur les places et d'y mettre le feu."<sup>88</sup> The *guérillères* are well aware that knowledge is inextricably enmeshed with power, so they decide to literally reduce to ashes any discourses, no matter how cherished, inconsistent with the social world they hope to bring into being. The "book burning" in *Les guérillères*; Wittig's condemnation in "The Straight Mind" of pornography—though she addresses the topic directly only once in her published essays;<sup>89</sup> and the critical portrayal of sadomasochism in *Virgile*, *non* that I will return to later all bring to mind the methods (e.g. censorship) and beliefs (i.e. that there exists a causal link between the discursive treatment of women and women's lived experiences) of the (predominantly North American and British) anti-pornography radical feminism associated with the so-called "feminist sex wars" of the late 70s and 80s. However, as I've argued and will return to in this section, there is far less overlap between Wittig's and American cultural and anti-porn feminisms than would appear at first glance.

Once the *féminaires* have all been incinerated, the *guérillères* replace them with "le grand registre," an endless tome in which the warriors are all encouraged to inscribe anything they

---

<sup>88</sup> Wittig, *Les guérillères*, 67–68.

<sup>89</sup> I will return to Wittig's views on pornography in this dissertation's final chapter.

choose.<sup>90</sup> While the *guérillères* have by this point already freed themselves *physically* from the sex/gender binary by virtue of constructing a safe haven geographically closed off to men, by communally composing "the grand registre" they finally extricate themselves *epistemologically* from the ideology of binary sexual difference and emerge as the literal authors of their collective and individual identities and histories. "Le grand registre" in this way constitutes an anti-*écriture féminine* of sorts; it represents an antithetical response to the Cixousian call to "woman" (*la femme*) to "write herself;"<sup>91</sup> it is precisely by "writing themselves" that the *guérillères* deal the fatal blow to *la femme*, one of the most enduring constructs of patriarchal society.

As we trace the evolution of the *guérillères'* cultural tradition, it becomes clear that the construction of a feminist counter-canon and alternative pantheon through the *détournement* of the hegemonic discourses of the patriarchal past is part of the larger project of disassembling "the straight mind" in order to foster conditions under which a new society could be conceptualized and brought into existence. Accordingly, once the *guérillères* do away with the *féminaires*, they discontinue their adoring exaltation of vulvar symbols and imagery; the idolization of femaleness (though not "the feminine") is nothing more than a transitional (albeit necessary) stage in their overarching pursuit of a just social order. The mere inversion of gendered power dynamics is not a satisfactory end in itself, for the abolition of male supremacy would do nothing to subvert the category of sex or the hierarchical gender binary if it is simply replaced with an ideological framework based in female supremacy. The contingent status of the gynocentric culture imagined in *Les guérillères* reflects, I would argue, the underappreciated provisional character of the lesbian flight from the institution of heterosexuality that I underscored in the previous

---

<sup>90</sup> Wittig, *Les guérillères*, 75.

<sup>91</sup> "Il faut que la femme s'écrive. . . . Il faut que la femme se mette au texte" (Hélène Cixous, "Le Rire de La Méduse," *L'Arc* 61 (1975): 39).

section; the claiming of cultural, economic, and social autonomy—by both lesbians and the *guérillères*—from hetero-patriarchal norms is not about creating a "safe space" insulated from straightness, but a tactically conceived step toward straightness' eventual dissolution.

The *guérillères* are ultimately successful in their war on patriarchy, and the end of the novel sees the victorious women graciously welcoming their former adversaries into their fold. *Elles* introduce the men to the world that lies within the limits of their fortified haven. However, the victorious *guérillères* do not forcefully assimilate the surrendered men to the new, gynocentric culture they have so painstakingly constructed. Instead, they work in tandem with the men to construct an entirely new one:

Elles vont à la rencontre des jeunes hommes, leurs groupes se mélangent. . . . Elles les prennent par la main et leur posent des questions. . . . Elles montent avec eux les escaliers des hautes terrasses. Elles les font s'asseoir auprès d'elles sur les terre-pleins. Ils apprennent leurs chants au cours des après-midi chaudes. . . . Ils cherchent à reconnaître les fleurs qu'elles leur désignent dans les parterres les massifs les prés les champs. *Elles choisissent avec eux des noms pour ce qui les entoure.* Elles leur font regarder l'escape qui de partout s'étend à leurs pieds (*italics mine*).<sup>92</sup>

That the women and men build together, word by word, an original language suggests the promise of a brand-new, truly egalitarian social order; Wittig, as we've seen, considers language to be "the final social contract."<sup>93</sup> The *guérillères* are in the end willing and eager to surrender ownership of the world they so painstakingly conquered—or, constructed, as it were—for the very concept of possession is ultimately incompatible with the society they hope to build. Their war was never about claiming a territorial *space* for feminism, but, rather, about transforming the

---

<sup>92</sup> Wittig, *Les guérillères*, 197–198.

<sup>93</sup> Wittig, "On the Social Contract," in *The Straight Mind*, 34.

dynamics that make such a space desirable: Elles disent . . . Je refuse de prononcer les mots de possession et de non-possession. Elles disent, si je m'approprie le monde, que ce soit pour m'en déposséder aussitôt, que ce soit pour créer des rapports nouveaux entre moi et le monde."<sup>94</sup>

We might furthermore read this conclusion as a sort of anticipatory rejection *avant la lettre* of the concept of *écriture féminine* (and the premises of the differentialist school of French feminism more broadly). The term *écriture féminine*, which refers to the inscription of the feminine and the female body in language, was coined by Cixous in her 1975 essay "Le rire de la méduse," in which she implores women to "write themselves:" "Il faut que la femme s'écrive. . . . Il faut que la femme se mette au texte."<sup>95</sup> Though Cixous argues that "feminine writing" cannot be strictly defined, she claims that by "writing through their bodies,"<sup>96</sup> *écriture féminine* has the ability to disrupt and transform the dominant "phallogocentric" codes of signification. Wittig, on the other hand, staunchly rejects the concept of *écriture féminine* on materialist grounds, which should be unsurprising given her belief in literature as a site of universalization: "There is no 'feminine writing' and one makes a mistake in using and giving currency to this expression. . . . 'Woman' cannot be associated with writing because 'Woman' is an imaginary formation. . . . 'Feminine writing is the naturalizing metaphor of the brutal political fact of the domination of women."<sup>97</sup> Some have (erroneously) classified *Les guérillères* as a quintessential example of *écriture féminine* on the basis of the anti-patriarchal women-centric (though certainly not

---

<sup>94</sup> Wittig, *Les guérillères*, 153–54.

<sup>95</sup> Hélène Cixous, "Le Rire de La Méduse," *L'Arc* 61 (1975): 39.

<sup>96</sup> "Il faut que la femme écrive par son corps, qu'elle invente la langue imprenable qui crève les cloisonnements, classes et rhétoriques, ordonnances et codes" (Ibid., 48.).

<sup>97</sup> Wittig, "The Point of View," 59.

"Woman"-centric) discursive practices of the *guérillères*,<sup>98</sup> but such readings grossly misjudge both the nature and intentions of the text. It does not follow that just because the *guérillères* have developed their own distinct language and culture as women that their language and culture is a "natural" phenomenon, let alone the product of a feminine essence, and this becomes all but explicit by the end of the novel. That the post-patriarchal utopia that emerges at the end of *Les guérillères* is (more or less) a blank slate confirms that the *guérillères*' construction of a feminist counter-canonical history, mythology, and language is meant not to supplant patriarchal models, but to dislodge them from their place of singular cultural authority. This women-centric cultural tradition is a tactical manoeuvre meant to systematically dismantle the hegemony of an androcentric one, but only in order to clear the ground for the formation of a new, *ungendered* sociocultural order. If anything, examples of *écriture féminine* would be among the *féminaires* the *guérillères* reduce to ashes in laughter once *elles* sufficiently unlearn the ideology of male supremacy. This is to say that *Les guérillères* ultimately encourages readers to maintain a vigilant posture toward all discourses that shore up the gender binary and surely not to—as Wittig would accuse exponents of *écriture féminine* of doing—unwittingly create more of them.

The society now shared by (those formerly known as) *elles* and *ils*, however, is by no means a complete *tabula rasa* poised to be re-inscribed with a wholly new language, culture, and history. The "lesbian" ex-warriors are happy to live alongside and engage with men in good faith under the terms of this new social contract. The *guérillères* bury their weapons alongside those of the men deep in the earth to demonstrate as much: "Elles les enterrent en même temps que les leurs en disant, que s'efface de la mémoire humaine la guerre la plus longue, la plus meurtrière

---

<sup>98</sup> See, for example, Alex Hughes, "Écriture Féminine," ed. Alex Hughes and Keith A. Reader, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary French Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, June 1998), 170–73; Eleanor Ty, "Écriture Féminine," ed. Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 183–85.

qu'elle ait jamais connue, la dernière guerre possible de l'histoire."<sup>99</sup> Yet, despite their expressed dedication to expunge all traces of the war in order to turn the page on the trauma of the past and start their post-war egalitarian utopia on the right foot, the *guérillères* fail to live up entirely to the oath to "disremember" past hostilities. The *guérillères* are unable or unwilling to fully relinquish their collective cultural memory of the war. The page following the inauguration of the "new social contract" features yet another list of women's names, and the novel concludes with an assembly of women wistfully yet victoriously singing a funeral march in the honor of the countless women who courageously gave their lives on the battlefield in the pursuit of this end. This suggests to us that no matter how much progress is made towards the realization of a socially just society, it will always be essential to recognize the violence through which these gains were accomplished, lest we one day unwittingly allow old power dynamics to reemerge. In other words, it is perilously unwise to forget that "le paradis est à l'ombre des épées."<sup>100</sup>

### **Misplacing Wittig's Lesbians**

Having enriched our understanding of the under-articulated aspects of Wittig's radical lesbian project by teasing out the political dimensions of *Les guérillères*, we are now equipped to address a few of the chief critiques leveled at Wittig's theoretical framework; it is instructive, for our purposes, to consider some of these objections, for Wittig's detractors tend to reject her feminist vision based on unsound presumptions regarding its spatial logic that might have been resolved by a more thorough consideration of Wittig's fiction. One of Wittig's most notable critics has been Judith Butler, who has taken issue, among other things, with Wittig's failure to

---

<sup>99</sup> Wittig, *Les guérillères*, 184.

<sup>100</sup> Wittig, *Les guérillères*, 159.

consider "the rules of an inevitably patriarchal Symbolic"<sup>101</sup> that inform the very category of "the subject." For Butler, Wittig's alleged humanism leads her to grossly overestimate the imperviousness of subjectivity to the machinations of power and to therefore uncritically and erroneously conflate subjectivity for women with agency. Even if we grant that the category of the subject is mired in phallogentric ideological underpinnings—an idea Wittig, for the record, would surely dismiss as a politically disabling presumption that preemptively and unnecessarily surrenders the medium (i.e. a subject position) through which radical systemic change might be enacted—what Wittig proposes is not for women to passively "gain entry" into subjectivity and to effectively claim a "male-identified" subject position, but to wrest subjectivity from monopolistic male control. According to Wittig, the contestation of the masculine domination of subjectivity (i.e. the "othering" of women) requires nothing less than the appropriation of subjecthood by women and the renegotiation of its terms from "within" in "Trojan horse" fashion, and *Les guérillères* can be read as an allegoristic illustration of this method.

Butler alleges furthermore that "there appear to be two levels of reality, two orders of ontology, in Wittig's theory. Socially constituted ontology emerges from a more fundamental ontology that appears to be pre-social and pre-discursive;"<sup>102</sup> Butler's observation is in my view accurate, and can be understood in terms of Wittig's materialist feminist framework. However, Wittig in no way suggests that one could hope to have any sort of access to this pre-discursive, pre-social level of reality; for all intents and purposes, it does not exist for us. As I have highlighted, Wittig is very clear on the fact that, for her, our access to reality is always mediated by language; Wittig's materialist feminism is premised on a radically constructivist understanding of gender, embodiment, and knowledge. It follows that, as far as human beings are

---

<sup>101</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 61.

<sup>102</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 181.

concerned, there is no meaningful distinction to be drawn between "objective" and "social" reality from the point of view of experience. It is therefore highly problematic to dismiss her work on the grounds of her alleged endorsement of a "metaphysics of substance,"<sup>103</sup> for Wittig is exclusively concerned with the social, discursive level of material reality. Wittig leaves aside the "matter" of metaphysical truth or reality, for its inaccessibility without recourse to language effectively makes it irrelevant for her purposes; "Woman" and the oppression of women belong to the realm of the social regardless of their ontological groundedness (or lack thereof).

When we consider Wittig's theory of subjectivity, it is important to bear in mind the Beauvoirian existentialist influence on her thought; Wittig conceives of freedom in essentially existentialist terms, that is to say, as a "situated" freedom. When she stresses the necessity of a (both collective and individual) subject for feminist politics, Wittig is not, in my view, positing the subject itself an ahistorical phenomenon. Wittig conceives of political agency strictly in terms of what is thinkable within the constraints inherent to living in the present world. Linda Zerilli has pointed to the centrality of freedom in Wittig's work: "What interests me about *Les guérillères* . . . is . . . the textual elaboration of freedom (understood as the human power of beginning) and the new social contract. . . . [and] the potential space of freedom that her texts at once inaugurate and celebrate. . . . The freedom that concerns Wittig has an abyssal structure. It is not given in advance in the form of potentiality, it is not made necessary by something in the relations of oppression, and it is not legitimated by anything outside itself. It is a beginning that is completely arbitrary [and] contingent."<sup>104</sup> As we see in *Les guérillères*, the point of departure of Wittig's politico-philosophical vision is the idea that another world—a new one—is possible; radical social change can only proceed from the belief that it is possible to begin society anew.

---

<sup>103</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 62.

<sup>104</sup> Linda M. G. Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 70–71.

Butler concludes her extensive discussion of Wittig in *Gender Trouble* by decrying the "tragic mistake" Wittig makes by constructing lesbianism in strict opposition to heterosexuality; lesbian identity is, according to this definition, fundamentally *dependent* on heterosexuality:

Lesbianism that defines itself in radical exclusion from heterosexuality deprives itself of the capacity to resignify the very heterosexual constructs by which it is partially and inevitably constituted. As a result, that lesbian strategy would consolidate compulsory heterosexuality in its oppressive forms.<sup>105</sup>

Butler suggests that while Wittig's approach futilely seeks the abolition of the category of sex, the more appropriate, politically potent approach to the problem of normative heterosexuality would be "a thoroughgoing appropriation and redeployment of the categories of identity themselves . . . in order to render that category, in whatever form, permanently problematic."<sup>106</sup>

The problem with this line of analysis is that Butler's dismissal of Wittig is premised on the assumption that Wittig understands herself to be offering a "positive" definition of lesbian identity in the first place and, moreover, to be working with a simplistic theory of identity. As I've already outlined, however, the lesbian position is for Wittig a temporary and strategic one as opposed to an essentialist category. Wittigian lesbianism is not a sexual identity, as Butler characterizes it, but, rather, a *disidentification* with the expectations assigned to "woman" based on patriarchal social norms. In other words, the sexual dimension of lesbianism is merely one aspect of what it means to be a lesbian; Wittigian lesbianism is as much about refusing the responsibilities ascribed to women in their capacities as mothers, daughters, caretakers, or sisters, for instance, as it is about sexual object choice or the repudiation of the role of wife. In fact, one might even say that the matter of sexual orientation is *less* integral to Wittig's definition of

---

<sup>105</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 163.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

lesbianism than these other defining criteria based on her alignment of the position of lesbians with those of divorcées, older single women, single mothers, and other women whose social and economic situation has deviated significantly from that expected of "woman" under the dominant heteronormative schema as well as the fact that the topics of lesbian sexuality and eroticism are virtually untouched upon in Wittig's fictional and non-fictional work alike. It is for this reason that I've been avoiding the term "homosexuality" in my discussion of Wittigian lesbianism.

The major exception to this tendency is Wittig's third novel, *Le corps lesbien*, a pastiche of a number of obliquely intersecting genres: love poetry, the French Renaissance *blason anatomique du corps féminin*,<sup>107</sup> medical anatomical writing, and pornography. As opposed to anything obviously legible as sex or love, however, the lovers depicted in the novel—referred to only as "j/e" and "tu"—dismember, skin, eviscerate, and cannibalize one another's decomposing bodies in a host of increasingly gruesome, creative ways. *Le corps lesbien*, like virtually all of Wittig's literary "Trojan horses," triggers expectations only to provocatively contravene and deconstruct them; it delivers not *the* lesbian body promised by the title or the romantic narrative suggested by its form, but, rather, a poetic reflection on the malleability of the body, that is to say its susceptibility to "re-membling" via resignification, as well as the relational nature of subjectivity and identity—as they become consumed by one another, we quite literally do not know where the fractured narrator-protagonist *j/e* ends and *tu* begins.

The very title *Le corps lesbien* gestures toward the uncertain relationship between lesbianism and corporeality; Wittig confirms as much in an essay on the novel, explaining that

---

<sup>107</sup> The *blason anatomique (du corps féminin)* is a highly synecdochal form of poetry (that reached its peak in the sixteenth century) in which the poet rhapsodizes about the virtues of a female object of desire by focusing on one or several parts of her body.

the inspiration for *Le corps lesbien* initially stemmed from the peculiarity of the concept,<sup>108</sup> ostensibly a play on "le corps féminin" so often invoked as incontrovertible evidence of *la différence sexuelle*. If lesbians are not women, having "abstracted" themselves from the binary "category of sex," then what exactly would constitute a lesbian body? Is there even anything to be found beneath the layers of discourse that inscribe and shape bodies? One of Wittig's central contentions is that even though there exist anatomical traits that functionally differentiate individuals based on their biological reproductive potential, there is no inherent reason for humans to be divided along these lines beyond the context of reproduction and, in the case of women, reduced to these traits to oppressive effect. The heteronormative discourse of *la différence sexuelle* has become so profoundly integrated into institutionalized apparatuses of knowledge production (e.g. biology, medicine, law, psychology) that it is difficult to so much as imagine how a body could be legible as such without recourse to the optic of sexual difference. As we've seen, Wittig would seem to sidestep such questions, for even if there exists a level of materiality prior to signification, it is not and will never be accessible to us; we can only perceive and act on matter through the medium of language, and, as such, the gauntlet thrown down by Wittig is to undo the inscription of gender onto the body by propagating counter-discourses to dislodge the discourse of sexual difference from its hegemonic position. In other words, Wittig seeks not to rescue the body from cultural inscription, but, rather, to re-inscribe it with a corporeal cartography that does not presume the primacy of anatomical sexual difference. More

---

<sup>108</sup> "Suddenly giving me a big laugh . . . two words came in: Lesbian Body. Can you realize how hilarious it was for me? That is how the book started to exist: in irony. The body, a word whose gender is masculine in French with the word lesbian qualifying it. In other words 'lesbian' by its proximity to 'body' seemed to me to destabilize the general notion of the body. . . . Such was my 'Lesbian Body,' a kind of paradox but not really, a kind of joke but not really, a kind of impossibility but not really" (Wittig, "Some Remarks on The Lesbian Body," in *On Monique Wittig: Theoretical, Political, and Literary Essays*, ed. Namascar Shaktini [Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005], 47).

importantly still, like the *guérillères*' "grand registre," Wittig's theory of embodiment imagines the body to remain perpetually open to and welcoming of reinterpretation and reinscription.<sup>109</sup>

Butler furthermore alleges that Wittig's claiming of subjectivity in the name of lesbianism precludes the possibility of rendering these categories "permanently problematic," however this is a false dilemma. Wittig's fundamental objective in carving out such an identity is to draw attention to and undo the monopolistic hold on full subjecthood by (white, heterosexual, socioeconomically privileged)<sup>110</sup> men. More importantly still, and as we see reflected in *Les guérillères*, Wittig posits that the forceful appropriation of subjectivity by *inappropriate* subjects might set the stage for a fundamental, ongoing renegotiation of what subjectivity is and who or what counts as a subject. In other words, by locating and destabilizing the limits of the subject of universality in this way, Wittig's lesbian "Trojan horse" strategy endeavors to do precisely what Butler accuses of her of neglecting to even consider: to transform the fundamental character of subjectivity by leaving it perpetually open to critique and redefinition.

As we see in *Les guérillères*, though Wittig at times appears to espouse a politics tantamount to "separatist prescriptivism,"<sup>111</sup> as Butler puts it, Wittig's ultimate aim is for the invention of a lesbian subject position and its admission into the realm of the universal; theoretically, this would undermine the hegemony of a divisive binary gender/sex system that institutes and naturalizes the separation of humanity into two, hierarchically ordered groups

---

<sup>109</sup> Paul B. Preciado, in particular, has stressed the plasticity of the body in his queer readings of Wittig. See "Gare à la gouine garou !, ou comment se faire un corps queer à partir de la pensée straight ?," in *Parce que les lesbiennes ne sont pas des femmes... autour de l'oeuvre politique, théorique et littéraire de Monique Wittig*, ed. Marie-Hélène [Sam] Bourcier and Suzette Robichon (Paris: Éditions gaies et lesbiennes, 2002), 179–214; and *Manifeste contre-sexuel*, trans. Marie-Hélène [Sam] Bourcier (Paris: Balland, 2000).

<sup>110</sup> This qualification is ultimately redundant, because if we follow Wittig's logic, non-white, socioeconomically marginalized, and gay men are not fully "men" based on their potentially different positionality vis-à-vis the domestic, heteronormative familial framework through which both "man" and "woman" are constructed; she gestures at various points toward the racial and class dimensions of manhood and womanhood in her work though never explores them in depth.

<sup>111</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 162.

according to a heterosexual paradigm. Wittig's politics would be better described as *anti-separatist* in that their ultimate objective is to surreptitiously engineer a more inclusive universality; Wittig's strategy is not to carve out a permanent space external to heterosexuality for lesbian identity, but to have a lesbian subject count as a universal subject. Wittig's lesbians are not separatists who critique from without a falsely universal subjectivity denied to them by design and form their own in response; on the contrary, the Wittigian lesbian strategy consists of infiltrating the realm of universality and problematizing the category of the subject from within.

Teresa de Lauretis has characterized the Wittigian lesbian as an "eccentric subject" in that she occupies "a position of resistance and agency, conceptually and experientially apprehended outside or in excess of the sociocultural apparatuses of heterosexuality, through a process of 'unusual knowing' or a 'cognitive practice.'"<sup>112</sup> The lesbian ambiguously straddles the "inside" and "outside" heteronormativity's jurisdiction; though she is positioned outside the bounds of normative heterosexuality by virtue of her disidentification and disengagement from the socio-economic role of "woman," she remains, however, bound to some extent to it by the fact that her position is defined (negatively) in terms of its relationship to heterosexuality:

Wittig's lesbian is not simply an individual with a personal "sexual preference" or a social subject with a simply "political" priority, but an eccentric subject constituted in a process of struggle and interpretation, a rewriting of self . . . in relation to a new understanding of community, of history, of culture. And this is what I take Wittig's "lesbian society" to be: not a descriptive term for a type of (nontraditional) social organization, nor a blueprint for a futuristic, utopian, or dystopian society—like the ones imagined in Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* or even like the amazon community of Wittig's own *Les Guérillères*—

---

<sup>112</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, "Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness," *Feminist Studies* 16, no. 1 (1990): 139.

but rather the term for a conceptual and experiential space carved out of the social field, a space of contradictions, in the here and now, that need to be affirmed but not resolved.<sup>113</sup> In her characteristically militaristic register, Wittig argues that lesbians are situated "obliquely . . . standing at the *outposts* of the human" (italics mine)<sup>114</sup> which paradoxically affords them an optimal view on what lies within its bounds. For this reason, de Lauretis aligns Wittig's lesbians with women of color feminist subject positions like Gloria Anzaldúa's "new *mestiza*" or Barbara Smith's "home girl" that stress the importance of the knowledge and, ultimately, power that can be occasioned by experiences of border crossing, displacement, and relegation to the margins of normative society. The "lesbian society" Wittig theorizes is not the separatist community Butler imagines; it is a space for the cultivation of a uniquely marginal point of view from which to forge discourses capable of troubling and ultimately expanding what it means to be human.

Critics like Butler contend that Wittigian lesbianism is overdetermined by its relationship to heterosexuality, and they are not incorrect in this assessment; such an analysis is, however, misleadingly incomplete. Wittig's work is invested in drawing attention to the ways in which our normative sex/gender categories are, under a patriarchal social order, themselves overdetermined by heterosexuality. Wittig understands the totalizing "straight mind," as we've seen, to play a structuring role in virtually every dimension of modern Western culture, from the political, to the aesthetic, to the epistemological. It is for this reason that the negativity of Wittig's definition of lesbianism is so important. Though she is quite clear on the fact that lesbians are, for her, *not* women who engage in sexual and romantic relationships exclusively with other women, Wittig nowhere posits a substantive explanation—prescriptive or otherwise—of what it means to *be* a lesbian. To be a man or a woman is to assume a position vis-à-vis the complex set of

---

<sup>113</sup> de Lauretis, "Eccentric Subjects," 144.

<sup>114</sup> Wittig, "Homo Sum," in *The Straight Mind*, 46.

relationships of patriarchal exploitation that give rise to the hierarchal division of humanity into two sexes. For Wittig, sex and gender are formed by and through social relations, and the sheer existence of lesbians proves that it is possible, for better or worse, to go astray of these constructs. In other words, Wittigian lesbianism is essentially an embodied reverse discourse; by accepting the characterization of the lesbian as the very embodiment of failure at womanhood, Wittig draws attention to the fact that the naturalization of "the straight mind" *requires* the exclusion of those who do not fit within its framework.

This is not to imply, however, that failure to do womanhood "properly" is for Wittig a politically consequential posture in itself; transgression of a norm certainly does not necessarily amount to its subversion. Wittig instrumentalizes the disjunction that already exists between lesbian lived experience and the ideals constitutive of womanhood in order to cast women's—and men's, for that matter—compliance and identification with hetero-patriarchal gender roles as a repetitive social practice that is performative (though not necessarily volitional)—to borrow Butler's term (via J.L. Austin)—rather than a biological given. Insofar as the constitutive "outside" of heterosexuality, represented by lesbianism, ceases to remain a deviant position, that is to say that a lesbian subject position be accorded legitimacy on its own terms, binary categories of sex and gender would be dispossessed of their status as natural and inevitable, leaving them vulnerable to modification, or as Wittig would have it, destruction; in this sense, Wittig's lesbian Trojan horse strategy is to subvert heterosexuality as regulatory regime by turning it against itself. Just as the *guérillères'* reworking of the hegemonic patriarchal discourses exposes the arbitrary, contingent character of their predominance, Wittig demonstrates by articulating her definition of lesbianism through and against a "positive" definition of heterosexuality that the "straight mind" is not quite as totalizing as it may appear, and that the

social logic of heterosexuality itself provides the means for its own undoing. By holding up the figure of the lesbian as non-woman by virtue of her nonparticipation in heterosexual relations with men, Wittig points to heterosexuality as the ideological cornerstone of the binary sex/gender system that, when subjected to critique, is liable to come crashing down like a house of cards.

I have dwelled on Butler's critique of Wittig in order to demonstrate just how pivotal the question of separatism, and, more broadly, that of the spatial logic of Wittigian lesbianism, is to comprehending her thought; besides Wittig's faith in the category of the subject as the point of departure for a feminist political agency, Butler's rejection of Wittig's framework is premised on her reading of Wittig as a radical separatist—an interpretation that, for the reasons I have laid out, is essentially a misreading of her position. Butler casts Wittig as an advocate of an ill-advised and philosophically unsophisticated lesbian separatist isolationism that would "cut off any kind of solidarity with heterosexual women."<sup>115</sup> However, as I have just argued, this interpretation of Wittig's position, among other things, profoundly misjudges the ontological character of Wittigian lesbianism as well as its ultimate aims, construing it as something akin to an Anglo-American-style "political lesbianism" whereby women are called to confront the problem of patriarchal heterosexuality by voluntaristically deciding to become lesbians (i.e. "woman-identified women")<sup>116</sup> by refusing to engage sexually, romantically, or even platonically with men.<sup>117</sup> That Butler characterizes Wittig's work under the rubric of "lesbian-feminism"<sup>118</sup> as opposed to "radical lesbianism," the term preferred by Wittig and her French and Québécoise

---

<sup>115</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 162.

<sup>116</sup> See Radicalesbians, "The Woman-Identified Woman" (Pittsburgh: Know, Inc., 1970), Duke University Special Collections Library, <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/womid/>.

<sup>117</sup> See my earlier discussion of the fundamental differences between Wittig's radical lesbianism and the Anglo-American tradition of lesbian feminism.

<sup>118</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 162.

comrades, lends further credence to my suspicion that Butler is conflating or aligning too closely Wittig's thought with the overwhelmingly Anglo-American tradition of lesbian separatism à la Rita Mae Brown, Charlotte Bunch, or collectives like the Furies and the Sugarloaf Women's Village that have experimented with lesbian-only communal living (mostly) across North America. However, as I've argued in my own analysis of Wittig's project and how it is reflected in *Les guérillères*, though Wittig indeed calls upon women to join lesbians in their flight from heterosexuality, there is no idealized space or lesbian commune, as it were, toward which they are headed; Wittig harbors no illusions that there could ever exist a space radically beyond the reaches of normative heterosexuality's regulatory power. "Running away" from heterosexuality is about locating and mobilizing the sites of exclusion by which straightness has solidified its hegemony, that is to say by "naturalizing" patriarchal heterosexual social dynamics by positioning anything exceeds the limits of "la pensée straight" as deviant.

To Butler's credit, however, despite the theoretical inclusivity of Wittigian lesbianism to "heterosexual" women—"queer" women sexually attracted to and active with men could be accommodated within Wittig's definition of lesbianism insofar as they scorn normative gender roles and relations (i.e. participation in marriage, financial and affective dependence on men)—radical lesbianism, as we've seen, historically proved to be far from welcoming in practice to feminists unwilling to renounce heterosexual relations *tout court*. Wittig effectively doubles down on her earlier frustrated condemnation of "straight" feminists expressed in "La pensée straight" and that manifested in the acrimonious breakup of the *Questions féministes* group five years later in *Virgile, non* (1985), a lesbian *détournement* of Dante's *Divine Comedy* set in present day San Francisco that allegorically revisits this bitter episode in French feminist history. Wittig acknowledges and addresses the gap between theory and practice—specifically of how a

profoundly universalist vision of women's liberation risks lapsing into a highly separatist praxis once brought to bear on the social world in all its complexity—in this fifth and final novel, one whose unfortunate omission from Butler's analysis of Wittig's oeuvre lends itself to her (mis)characterization of Wittig's overarching position.

The novel's protagonist, referred to as "Wittig," makes her way through Purgatory and multiple circles of Hell, all of which are scattered across various locales in the San Francisco area. Though she never quite makes it there in the course of the novel, Wittig spots several times a utopian Paradise far in the distance, across the Golden Gate Bridge, inhabited by motorcycle-riding lesbian "angels." Wittig's guide in her harrowing voyage is an enigmatic feminine companion called Manastabal; unlike Dante's guide in the *Divine Comedy*, the Virgil referenced (and negated) in Wittig's novel's title, Manastabal does not rationalize or condone the fate of the souls damned to hell. Wittig and Manastabal lament the horrific lot of the "âmes damnées" and do all within their power to free them from their senseless, unjust torment. The "damned souls" are not sinners; they are innocent victims of patriarchal power, and as such, in the world of the novel, Hell is not a fixed place, but, rather, a situation. The very spaces that are a hell for women are a heaven for men. The novel sees Wittig and her guide witnessing scenes of gruesome violence against women such as female genital cutting, domestic abuse, sex trafficking, forced pregnancy, and marital rape. What is at once confounding and infuriating to Wittig is the fact that the women are not blind, but willfully impervious to the systematic workings of their suffering. Wittig's attempts to intervene on their behalf and to engage with them intellectually are met with horrified screams—Wittig's lesbianism manifests for them as a grotesque physical monstrosity—that prevent them from even hearing her emancipatory message; the ultimate objective of Wittig and other enlightened women is not the "lesbianization" of all women, but the

emergence of a social order under which relations between men and women would no longer be mediated by a grossly unequal power differential. These women's obstinate, literally lesbophobic resistance to learning the nature of their situation effectively renders them complicit in their own oppression. There exists no hypothetical divine redemption that could save the "âmes damnées" from their miserable fate; all it would take is for them to come to grips with their condition and take their freedom into their own hands. The few "damned souls" who have come to their senses find refuge in the female-dominated bars and cafés that make up Purgatory; though the women who occupy these spaces, having fled patriarchal domination, are certainly lesbians in the Wittigian sense of the term, not all of them are necessarily homosexual. Furthermore, Manastabal at one point admonishes Wittig for her idealistic over-celebration of the subversive charm of lesbian culture, reminding her that lesbianism is as much of a social construct as heterosexuality; the practices and accouterments that characterize the "beauté louche" of lesbian culture are ultimately the consequences of "la cruauté d'un monde qui force au crime."<sup>119</sup> Theoretically, lesbian particularity would cease to be remarkable in a sexually egalitarian society. The thorny problem of translating a (lesbian) feminist political consciousness into a large-scale feminist political movement encompassing of all kinds of women is reflected in the spatial logic of the narrative; perhaps even more than their lesbophobia, one of the major impediments to feminist consciousness is the fact that women's marginalization in the public sphere and familial obligations often keep them at a physical remove from one another, and much of the violence and oppression faced by women takes place behind closed doors: "On les enferme dans des chambres, des maisons, des appartements, des palais, des roulottes, des

---

<sup>119</sup> Monique Wittig, *Virgile, Non* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), 46.

cellules, des taudis."<sup>120</sup> The organization of society into public and private spheres conceals the ubiquity of a gendered oppression that cuts across class and ethnic—the mention of "roulottes" evokes Romani culture—lines. Notwithstanding its unsubtly condescending overtones, *Virgile, non* speaks to the hope that a post-patriarchal world is not be some utopian "elsewhere," but that it is fully within our reach, if only (straight) women are one day able to find the collective will to open their eyes to the reality of their common situation.

In this section, I have illustrated that and how Wittig's fiction can (and should) be read in conjunction with her political theory and activism in order to avoid misjudging the nature of the Wittigian lesbian flight from heterosexuality. By analyzing *Les guérillères* with particular attention to the spatial dynamics of *elles'* war on the patriarchy, we see that what might appear on the surface to be a battle for female supremacy on the part of the *guérillères* is, on the contrary, the struggle for the conceptualization and establishment of an egalitarian order. That the *guérillères* isolate themselves (as much discursively as geographically) from men during the war is not proof of a separatist agenda; the "feminine" culture the *guérillères* construct for themselves piece-by-piece through the deconstruction of patriarchal ideology is not a counter-ideology in itself à la *psychépo*, but, rather, the turning of patriarchy and its cultural forms against themselves in order to clear a space for the conception of a new, gender-neutral "social contract."

## Conclusion

Like many a French feminist and LGBT political activist before her, Wittig's work speaks to the double bind inherent to French Republican ideology, which imagines a nation comprised of a single universally inclusive community of citizens unmarked by particularities of race, gender, class, religion, national origin, and ethnicity. For the purposes of ensuring its

---

<sup>120</sup> Wittig, *Virgile, non*, 74.

foundational ideals of universalism and equality, the modern French republic refuses to recognize social categories or groups that would threaten the integrity of its citizenry, dividing it into a plurality of intra-national populations fundamental incompatible with its particular brand of egalitarian individualism. The underlying presumption that undergirds the French model of citizenship and its aversion to pluralism is the belief that the display in the public sphere of identitarian affiliations (other than with Frenchness) precludes the possibility of true equality. As discussed in the previous chapter, because French Republican universalism regards "difference" as at once immaterial and antithetical to citizenship, French culture is uniquely inhospitable to politicization of (minority) identity; French feminists are therefore confronted with the "paradoxical"<sup>121</sup> dilemma of having to articulate a political claim organized around sexual difference in a context wherein difference itself is considered a private rather than a public, political matter.

As I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, contrary to what its name and Wittig's critics might suggest, Wittigian "radical lesbianism" is, at its heart, decidedly *not* separatist or even communitarian in orientation. On the contrary, though certainly an identity politics, radical lesbianism is an identity politics distinctly *à la française* in its fiercely universalistic aims. Wittig instrumentally mobilizes lesbian identity—an anti-essentialist version of lesbian identity defined strictly negatively against a heterosexual gender and sexual framework—to bring to light that sexual difference has never been and can never be a purely private affair; the social world is, at least for now, divided along identitarian lines, and rigid ones at that, in at least one significant manner: according to the categories of sex, which are themselves discursive corollaries of the hegemonic dominance of patriarchal heterosexuality as a political-ideological regime. Sex and

---

<sup>121</sup> I borrow this term from Joan W. Scott (*Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1996]).

gender, according to Wittig, cannot possibly be relegated to the private or domestic spheres, for the hierarchical, binary, heteronormative logic constitutive of "la pensée straight" shapes virtually all facets of human experience, from the linguistic, to the political, to the cultural, to the epistemological. In reality, the impossible French Republican demand for the confinement of matters of gender and sex to the realm of the private, for Wittig, is a testimony to the triumph of the ideological sleight of hand that conceals the always already political nature of sexual difference. The categories of "man" and "woman" are first and foremost political constructs produced through and for the subordination of women by men; there is no ontological or transcendental ground for the binary division of humanity in this manner. The social construction of gender and sex via relations of domination precedes and renders possible and necessary the naturalization of sex and gender as objective, immutable realities devoid of historicity. In other words, French Republican universalism's depoliticizing, privatization of difference is an unrealizable project, at least when it comes to sexual difference, for "man" and "woman" are by their very essence political, social phenomena. Because they cannot be relegated to the private sphere, sex and gender pose an insurmountable barrier to universality and must therefore be done away with if women are to realize full equality; in other words, though she—in materialist feminist fashion—approaches women's oppression as a universal phenomenon and does not explicitly engage in her work with the French context specifically, Wittig's feminist vision of an egalitarian social world populated by individuals "unmarked"<sup>122</sup> by the category of sex constitutes the French Republican universalist ideal of the abstract, neutral citizen taken to its logical extreme (if only in terms of sex and gender).

As is reflected in Wittig's fiction, and particularly in *Les guérillères*, Wittig's objective is to construct a more universal society—in the French Republican sense—by undoing the

---

<sup>122</sup> See "The Mark of Gender," in *The Straight Mind*, 76–89.

unnecessary division of society into two classes. Wittig confronts the problem of a universalism that fails on its promise to women through a lesbian "Trojan horse" strategy that seeks to stealthily, through the vehicle of discourse, make a lesbian "minority point of view universal,"<sup>123</sup> which would in turn radically undermine the heteronormative logic on which the perpetuation of patriarchal dominance relies by legitimizing a third position irreconcilable with the binary categories of sex/gender. The universal is, for Wittig, a battleground that remains under the occupation of a particular kind of person (i.e. male, white, heterosexual); discourse, in the form of "weaponized" language, enforces the perpetuation of this state of affairs by confining all others within arbitrarily constructed categories of "particularity" at the margins of the universal, leaving full subjecthood just beyond their grasp. Because these discourses obscure but are not capable of fully concealing the ongoing, historical struggle that lies at the root of the current social order, there exists always the possibility for marginalized people to fashion their own discursive weapons and "take up arms" to stake their own claim to universality. Theoretically, the "universalization" of lesbian subjectivity would deal a fatal blow to the hegemony of patriarchal heterosexuality, rendering "man" and "woman" obsolete and paving the way toward a social order more closely in line with the French Republican ideal of egalitarian, universalist individualism. Wittig calls not for communitarian lesbian separatism, nor for female supremacy, but for a future wherein sex would cease to matter politically and gendered oppression as well as gender itself—the two for Wittig are effectively coextensive—would become a thing of the past.

Wittig's work—from her theoretical essays to her fiction—implores us to believe that a better, more just society is possible, and that the post-gender world that would emerge from the proverbial ashes of our hetero-patriarchal present is a prospect worth fighting for. Nowhere does Wittig speculate what, precisely, this social framework would resemble or how it would be

---

<sup>123</sup> Wittig, "The Point of View," 64.

organized; in *Les guérillères*, this world is likened to a new language yet to be articulated, and in *Virgile*, *non* to a glimmer off in the distance. Wittig's vision for society may be impossibly utopian, inconceivable, strange, and perhaps even irrational. However, at the very heart of Wittig's project is the cautionary assertion that rationality itself is a locus of power and must always be subject to political scrutiny. If we are to escape the epistemological confines of the "straight mind" and realize the lofty task of conceiving and building a truly just world, we will necessarily need to use our collective imaginations and dare to be unreasonable. As the protagonist of *Le Voyage sans fin*, Wittig's feminist re-imagination of *Don Quixote*, defiantly proclaims in the final line of the play, "Quand bien même le monde entier me prendrait pour folle et pas seulement ces arriérés dans le village qui n'ont jamais rien vu, je dirais que le monde entier est fou et que c'est moi qui ai raison."<sup>124</sup>

---

<sup>124</sup> Monique Wittig, *Le voyage sans fin* (Paris: Vlasta, 1985), 52.

## CHAPTER THREE

### "On est bien dans le ghetto:"<sup>1</sup> Placing Community with Guillaume Dustan

It would be an understatement to say that Guillaume Dustan caused a stir during his brief literary career. As David Caron recalls in *My Father and I: The Marais and the Queerness of Community*, in the months preceding the 1996 release of Dustan's debut novel, *Dans ma chambre*, the news of the impending release of a gritty, no-holds-barred semi-autobiographical look at Paris' gay sex culture spread through gay circles like wildfire.<sup>2</sup> Much of the gossip was focused on a rumor that the book would not only depict, but sing the praises of unprotected sex, a predictably provocative prospect in light of the HIV/AIDS crisis within the gay male population of Paris (and the rest of the world) in the mid-90s. This particular rumor would prove incorrect, strictly speaking, as Dustan's first novel is not the apologia for *le sexe à risques* that some made it out to be; unprotected sex is only very briefly represented and in a manner more matter-of-fact than celebratory. To fuel interest further, *Dans ma chambre* was published under strict anonymity with not so much as an author photo; Guillaume Dustan was the pen name of William Barranès, who finished the novel while working as a magistrate in the overseas territory of French Polynesia. Dustan would attract a lot more attention from both LGBT communities and the larger French public alike after shedding his cloak of anonymity and establishing himself as a media figure. In the years preceding his death in 2005 from an accidental drug overdose at the age of thirty-nine,<sup>3</sup> Dustan appeared regularly as a guest on late-night television talk shows,

---

<sup>1</sup> Guillaume Dustan, *Dans ma chambre*, in *Œuvres I : Dans ma chambre - Je sors ce soir - Plus fort que moi*, ed. Thomas Clerc, vol. 1 (Paris: P.O.L., 2013), 83; Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from *Dans ma chambre*, *Je sors ce soir*, and *Plus fort que moi* are taken from this first volume of Dustan's collected works.

<sup>2</sup> David Caron, *My Father and I: The Marais and the Queerness of Community* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 94–5.

<sup>3</sup> "La disparition de Guillaume Dustan," *Têtu*, October 9, 2005, <http://www.tetu.com/2005/10/09/news/france/la-disparition-de-guillaume-dustan/>.

shocking audiences with both his attire—he would often accessorize his conspicuously gay, hyper-masculine "leather" look with a flamboyant wig—and his impassioned advocacy of individual freedom and sexual liberty, which for Dustan included the right to *le bareback*, an anglicism used to refer to the practice of anal sex among gay men without condoms. Dustan's staunch, iconoclastic critique of the disciplinary, sanitizing rhetoric of "safe sex" and its effects on gay subjectivities and experience predictably attracted the ire of mainstream HIV/AIDS and LGBT activists in France. It is clear when we examine reactions to Dustan, however, that what made Guillaume Dustan such a particularly appalling and dangerous *bête noire* in the eyes of such activists was his apparent lack of consideration for "the gay community," a community that he personally profited from representing. His very public positions on sexual freedom and barebacking were, for them, mere symptoms of that more fundamental sin.

As far as Didier Lestrade and the rest of the leadership of prominent HIV/AIDS and LGBT activist association Act Up-Paris<sup>4</sup> were concerned, Guillaume Dustan and to a lesser extent his protégé, fellow autofiction writer Érik Rémès, were decadent liberal individualists of the worst sort whose egotistical pursuit of literary acclaim and libertine sexual thrills had led them to shirk their responsibility to the gay community.<sup>5</sup> Adding insult to injury, Dustan's autofictional account of the Parisian gay scene was, according to them, a patently false one whose alleged implicit claim to authority on "the gay community" was as revolting as it was dangerous: "La lecture des livres de Guillaume Dustan provoque très vite un sentiment de dégoût, de fatigue. . . . comme . . . [ceux de] tous ces gens qui parlent si bien de *nous*, qui

---

<sup>4</sup> The French chapter of the ACT UP movement (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) uses the name "Act Up-Paris."

<sup>5</sup> By far the most publicly vocal participant in the public debate over barebacking was Act Up-Paris president Didier Lestrade, and the rivalry between Lestrade and Dustan took on an increasingly personal tone. Tristan Garcia's critically-acclaimed debut novel *La meilleure part des hommes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008) provides a (very) thinly veiled account of the tumultuous relationship between the two.

prétendent être les experts de *nos* vies, de *nos* discours, de *nos* combats" (italics mine).<sup>6</sup> They feared that the influence of Dustan's autofictions risked undermining the hard-fought accomplishments of HIV/AIDS activists; it would banalize the practice of barebacking and provoke a massive resurgence of HIV infections particularly among impressionable gay youth. To the credit of Lestrade and Act Up-Paris, there was certainly reason for concern. According to a World Health Organization report, the number of self-reported acts of unprotected anal intercourse in France among gay-identified men doubled between 1997 and 2004,<sup>7</sup> and Europe saw a "second wave" of HIV cases beginning in 1999 that reached a peak in 2001.<sup>8</sup> These statistics would seem to beg the question of what role (if any) *Dans ma chambre* and Dustan's public endorsement of barebacking had to play in its increased popularity among French gay men as well as in the accompanying spike of European HIV infection rates. Yet, as the oft-repeated social sciences adage goes, correlation does not imply causation. The increase likely had a lot more to do with the introduction in 1996 of new and effective combination therapy approaches for the treatment of HIV than the words of one or two controversial novelists; HIV/AIDS had suddenly ceased to be an automatic death sentence and a reduction in the sense of fear and urgency around condom use among gay men is a logical albeit unfortunate consequence. Act Up-Paris nonetheless all but declared Guillaume Dustan public enemy number one of the gay community.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Act Up-Paris, "En finir avec Dustan," November 30, 2001, <http://www.actupparis.org/spip.php?article201>.

<sup>7</sup> Nielsen, Stine and Lazarus, Jeffrey V., "Annex: HIV/AIDS Country Profiles for the WHO European Region," in *HIV/AIDS in Europe: Moving from Death Sentence to Chronic Disease Management*, ed. Srdan Matic et al. (Copenhagen, Denmark: World Health Organization Europe, 2006), 254.

<sup>8</sup> Matic, Srdan, "Twenty-Five Years of HIV/AIDS in Europe," in *HIV/AIDS in Europe: Moving from Death Sentence to Chronic Disease Management*, ed. Srdan Matic et al. (Copenhagen, Denmark: World Health Organization Europe, 2006), 10.

<sup>9</sup> Christophe Broqua has argued that given the changing culture around HIV/AIDS following the introduction of combination therapy, Act Up-Paris intentionally fomented the controversy surrounding Guillaume Dustan in an

Act Up-Paris was founded in 1989 by a handful of French activists inspired by the original New York-based ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power). The founding members of Act Up-Paris aimed to import an American-style community-oriented approach to the combat against HIV/AIDS and homophobia in France in light of the French government's exceptionally late and ineffective response to the growing epidemic; it was not until 1987, for instance, that France launched a public awareness initiative about HIV/AIDS, making it the second to last country in the European Community to do so. Act Up-Paris' flagrantly un-French, *communautariste* strategy ultimately proved necessary, as the French government's fidelity to its Republican values informed its deplorably inadequate reaction to the epidemic. The French government's commitment to engaging with its citizens strictly as individuals and not as members of groups meant that for most of the 80s, at the height of the epidemic, there was absolutely no official recognition of HIV/AIDS risk groups, no separate units in hospitals for AIDS patients, and, perhaps most shockingly, no official input sought from the French gay population on HIV/AIDS policy.<sup>10</sup> However, the French government's *égalité*-minded approach did avoid much of the scapegoating and stigmatizing of "the gay community" that took place in the United States. Like their American counterpart, the mission of Act Up-Paris was to galvanize the gay community into confronting the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the light of state inaction. However, this undertaking would require the cultivation of a "gay community" in France capable of being mobilized to such a degree, and for reasons I have touched on in previous chapters, this aspect of ACT UP's modus operandi would prove uniquely challenging in the French context; Act Up-Paris' fight against HIV/AIDS would therefore need to begin with the promotion of a

---

attempt to maintain its cultural relevance. See Broqua, *Agir pour ne pas mourir ! : Act Up, les homosexuels et le sida* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Steven Seidman, "Difference and Democracy: Group Recognition and the Political Cultures of the US, Holland, and France," in *Difference Troubles: Queering Social Theory and Sexual Politics*, Cambridge Cultural Social Studies (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 250.

strong(er) sense of belonging and responsibility among French homosexual men to a community rooted in a shared sexual identity. It is for this reason that Guillaume Dustan's dissent from the gay "party line" on matters of sexuality, that is to say his ardent support for individual (over collective) liberty and responsibility, was perceived by Act Up-Paris as so menacing; it threatened to disintegrate the very basis on which their vision of gay community and gay politics was founded—a somewhat prescriptive understanding of gay sexuality and the identities to which it gives rise.<sup>11</sup> Act Up-Paris' faithful commitment to its principle of community solidarity led it to denounce even Dustan's support for the harm reduction-minded practice of sero-sorting among HIV-positive men (wherein seropositive *barebackeurs* choose to only have unprotected sex amongst themselves) on the grounds that "toute forme de ségrégation sexuelle nous est insupportable."<sup>12</sup>

For Act Up-Paris, Dustan's literary representation and public discussion of sex without condoms was tantamount to murder, and they made that very clear. On the occasion of the 1999 *Marche des fiertés de Paris*, Act Up-Paris designed and distributed an eye-grabbing flyer bearing the headline "Baiser sans capotes ça vous fait jouir ?" ("Fucking without condoms... That gets you off?") that excoriates Dustan and Rémès for eroticizing the deadly. The flyer aims to co-opt Dustan's own sexually explicit and colloquial style; below the headline is what appears to be a still image from a gay pornographic film of either anal or oral intercourse (depending on the version) without a condom in close-up. The main text of the flyer is startling in its strikingly direct and intimate mode of address:

Baiser sans capote ça vous fait jouir ? À cette question, sans doute répondez-vous instinctivement : oui. Comment nier, en effet, le plaisir qu'il y a, entre autre, à éjaculer

---

<sup>11</sup> Act Up-Paris did not—at least at the time—share ACT UP's more sex-radical political ethos.

<sup>12</sup> Act Up-Paris, "Oublier Dustan," November 23, 2005, <http://www.actupparis.org/spip.php?article2240>.

dans un cul sans capote ou à avaler du sperme ? Et comment n'auriez-vous pas envie de prendre ce type de risque alors que . . . des livres comme ceux de Guillaume Dustan ou d'Erik Rémés [sic] proposent une petite religion de la prise de risques. . . . Baiser sans capote, ça vous fait jouir ? Drôle de jouissance, en vérité, qui sous des airs de grand défi à la mort, dissimule mal un simple déni de la maladie. . . . Nous n'arrivons pas à jouir sans capote. Le risque de contaminer ou d'être contaminé continue de gâcher notre plaisir.<sup>13</sup>

The flyer was handed out and posted at an event intended for the celebration of gay pride—a space created by and for the gay community. The implicit "nous" of the flyer (and of Act Up-Paris' rhetoric more generally) is performative; though the flyer was designed by a small contingent of activists, within the context of the crowded, festive space of the annual *Marche des fiertés*, the admonishing, cautionary "nous" becomes that of "the gay community." The message is unambiguous: "you" probably find the idea of sex without condoms arousing, but, as such behavior is dangerous and inexcusably unethical, the rest of "us" certainly do not. Act Up-Paris' strategy in what became a veritable war on barebacking consisted in large part of moralizing peer pressure and de facto censorship: "Je crois que lorsqu'on a un effet si nocif sur la vie des homosexuels, la tolérance doit être complètement oubliée. C'est pourquoi je me mets en colère après les homosexuels qui adressent la parole à Dustan. Oui, Act Up représente un cordon sanitaire autour de ce type."<sup>14</sup> For Lestrade, not just Dustan's words, but also his person were a contagion that called for quarantine. Unsurprisingly, the leadership of Act Up-Paris was not exactly overcome with grief at Dustan's passing. They published an (anti-)eulogy only weeks after his death charmingly entitled "Oublier Dustan" that mocked his "disparition pathétique" and

---

<sup>13</sup> Act Up-Paris, *Baiser sans capote ça vous fait jouir ?*, Flyer, June 26, 1999, <http://www.actupparis.org/spip.php?article2720>.

<sup>14</sup> Didier Lestrade, "Répondre à Dustan...", *Act Up-Paris*, November 23, 2005, <http://www.actupparis.org/spip.php?article2240>.

condemned once and for all his "dangerous" and "criminal" words: "Pour nous, c'est définitif, la mort n'efface pas la responsabilité."<sup>15</sup> Responsibility is necessarily a responsibility to an other, and, for Act Up-Paris, Dustan's unpardonable irresponsibility was to the gay community.

Though LGBT activists painted Dustan as a callous, quasi-sociopathic egotist who turned his back on the very gay community whose hard work during the height of the AIDS crisis made the libertine lifestyle described in his novels a thinkable possibility, in the rest of this chapter I will argue that such a reading of Dustan's life and work is misguided insofar as it fails to recognize Dustan's uncompromising commitment to his own competing vision of gay community. I have begun this chapter with a brief sketch of the controversy that surrounded Guillaume Dustan during his lifetime in order to situate his work within its proper political context and to clarify the transgressive novelty of his model of gay community within the French cultural landscape. Dustan's autofictional novels and their acrimonious reception by Act Up-Paris takes us right to the heart of one of this dissertation's primary concerns: the recurrent tension within modern LGBTQ politics between revolutionary idealism and ameliorative pragmatism. The matter of surviving in an environment hostile to gay bodies, communities, and sexualities is a central preoccupation of both Act Up-Paris and Guillaume Dustan (as well as for the rest of the thinkers considered in this dissertation); however, they disagree fundamentally on what survival looks and feels like.

The autofictional world depicted in Dustan's novels comports with many of the most negative clichés and stereotypes associated with gay male culture in the French imaginary; its largely HIV-positive inhabitants are unabashedly superficial, materialistic drug- and alcohol-fueled narcissists driven by an apparently single-minded, hedonistic hunt for instant—and for the most part sexual—gratification. The gay-identified men of Dustan's novels flaunt the much-

---

<sup>15</sup> Act Up-Paris, "Oublier Dustan."

maligned parochial *communautarisme* commonly and disparagingly attributed in France to "the gay community." As Dustan succinctly and provocatively declared during one of his first public appearances, a roundtable discussion in June 1997 featuring several gay writers at *Les Mots à la bouche*, France's premier gay and lesbian book store located in the heart of the Marais, "Moi je suis très ghetto."<sup>16</sup> Dustan's unapologetic identification with the "gay ghetto" set him starkly apart not just from his fellow panelists that day; Dustan's nonchalant avowal of his "ghettoness" constitutes a deep transgression of French norms surrounding the expression and organization of cultural differences. The rest of this chapter will consider Guillaume Dustan's "gay ghetto," an alternative imagining of gay community and how it is materialized in space, and tease out the anti-universalist political implications of its depiction in his controversial autofictional novels.

### **Autofiction and the Location of Truth**

Short but prolific, Guillaume Dustan's literary career spanned just under ten years, beginning with his 1996 *Dans ma chambre* and ending in 2005 with the publication of *Premier essai* only a few months before his death. *Nicolas Pages* (1999),<sup>17</sup> which was awarded the prestigious Prix de Flore, marked a significant stylistic departure from Dustan's "trilogie autopornobiographique,"<sup>18</sup> and, incidentally, features a plot structured around the motif of travel. *Nicolas Pages*, like Dustan's earlier works, is a semi-autobiographical, first person narrative of a narrator-protagonist motivated by his passion for music, drugs, and sex. What sets *Nicolas Pages* apart from these earlier works is its more traditionally novelistic form and content; the action of

---

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Hendrickson and Marc Siegel, "The Ghetto Novels of Guillaume Dustan," *Paroles Gelées* 16, no. 1 (1998): 97.

<sup>17</sup> Guillaume Dustan, *Nicolas Pages* (Paris: Balland, 1999).

<sup>18</sup> Guillaume Dustan, *Génie divin* (Paris: Balland, 2001), 4.

*Nicolas Pages*, driven by a linear narrative, deals with the narrator-protagonist's quest to find and understand the meaning of love, a stark contrast to the "slice of life" style of Dustan's prior work. *Nicolas Pages* is concerned with the universal themes of happiness, love, and desire, whereas his "autobiopornographic" trilogy that is this chapter's primary focus, devotes almost all of its attention to an almost ethnographic exposition of a highly particular segment of the Parisian gay population largely at the expense of plot or character development. It is therefore unsurprising, perhaps, that it was *Nicolas Pages*—and not any of his prior autofictional novels—that was the first to attract significant critical and commercial attention outside of the French gay literary milieu. Dustan's subsequent oeuvre consists of a series of experimental works (*Génie divin* [2000], *LXiR, ou Dédratisation La Vi Cotidien* [2001], *Dernier roman* [2004], *Premier essai* [2005]) that blend the genres of political manifesto, personal journal writing, interview, literary criticism, short story, philosophical treatise, and essay as well as a number of short films. The scope of the chapter will be limited to Dustan's first three works, for, despite the fact that the "gay ghetto" appears or is discussed at least in some fashion in all of his published writings, it is through the medium of autofiction that Dustan provides his most complex and vivid renderings of questions of gay spatiality. In what follows, I will briefly consider the historical and epistemological underpinnings of the genre of autofiction as understood by some of its practitioners in France in order to underscore the important implications of the "autobiopornographic" trilogy's generic framing.

The neologism "autofiction," coined by Serge Doubrovsky in 1977 to describe his novel *Fils*,<sup>19</sup> and which has since been elaborated by Gérard Genette among others,<sup>20</sup> refers broadly to

---

<sup>19</sup> Serge Doubrovsky, *Fils* (Paris: Galilée, 1977). Though their narrator-protagonist's name is identical to the author's, Guillaume Dustan's autofictional novels would not qualify as proper autofictions according to Doubrovsky's 1977 definition, as "Guillaume Dustan" is a pseudonym.

writing that willfully blurs the distinction between the autobiographical and the fictional. The genre of autofiction, though notoriously difficult to define, is generally understood to consist of first-person narratives in which the author, narrator, and the protagonist share the same name and aspects of their identities and histories yet which present themselves as novels. In other words, autofiction is a type of autobiographical writing that explicitly breaks with the conventions and ideology of what has been called the "autobiographical pact,"<sup>21</sup> a tacit agreement (theorized in a seminal essay by autobiography scholar Philippe Lejeune) between autobiographer and reader according to which the autobiographer (implicitly or expressly) attests to the veracity of her or his writing, triggering the expectation that the subject and object of the autobiographical text are referentially coextensive with its flesh and blood author. The genre of autofiction by its very nature probes, pushes, and sometimes exceeds the limits of "truthfulness," enabling its practitioners to represent their experiences in ways that creatively fail to adhere to autobiographical standards of reportage be it on the level of form and/or content. Autofiction has been most typically associated with contemporary French writers and is reputed to have reached its peak in the 1990s and early 2000s. However, given that both practitioners and theorists of literature have of course long been aware of the inevitable interpenetration of autobiography and fiction, the concept of autofiction has been expanded and taken up to describe and reconsider a wide variety of novels written well before the term's invention whose autobiographical features had traditionally been downplayed by literary critics.<sup>22</sup> Some of the writers most commonly associated with the genre of autofiction besides Doubrovsky (despite the fact that a number of

---

<sup>20</sup> Gérard Genette, *Fiction et diction* (Paris: Seuil, 1991).

<sup>21</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique*, Poétique (Paris: Seuil, 1975).

<sup>22</sup> Some canonical examples (in the French context) include Philippe Gasparini's *Est-il je ? Roman autobiographique et autofiction* (Paris: Seuil, 2004), Vincent Collona's *Autofiction et autres mythomanies littéraires* (Tristram, 2004), Chloé Delaume's *La Règle du Je* (Paris: PUF, 2010), and Lejeune's subsequent revisiting of the question of autofiction, *Moi aussi* (Paris: Seuil, 1986).

them do not themselves describe their work in this way) include Christine Angot, Virginie Despentes, Catherine Millet, Chloé Delaume, Camille Laurens, Hervé Guibert, Annie Ernaux, Nina Bouraoui, Amélie Nothomb, and Guillaume Dustan as well as a number of the *nouveaux romanciers*, such as Alain Robbe-Grillet and Marguerite Duras.

Although the generic borderlines separating the categories of autobiography and autofiction (as well as fiction *tout court* for that matter) are hard to draw with precision, the distinction is nonetheless meaningful if only for what it has to say about a given author's relationship to "the truth." To frame one's work as autofiction—a mode of life writing that eschews any pretension to strict factual accuracy while at the same time gesturing ambiguously to a work's links, however uncertain, to the extra-textual world—places its implied reader in a position to judge for herself or himself the nature of the world conjured by the text in a markedly different way than in the case of autobiography. The simple opposition according to which an autobiographer in essence makes a commitment to the mimetic depiction of her or his lived experience with utmost fidelity to the truth whereas the practitioner of autofiction writes of her or his life unburdened by any concern for the matter of truthfulness is not, on its face, a necessarily inaccurate one; however, it fails to account for the fact that autofiction as well can be born from a commitment to "the truth" and its representation. As novelist Camille Laurens puts it in a joint interview with Annie Ernaux for *Le Monde* after being asked about the status of truth in her own autofiction:

Dans mes livres, les faits sont vrais, les choses sont arrivées. Il existe un pacte de vérité auquel je tiens énormément. C'est l'idée du "livre intérieur," tel que le conçoit Proust : *ce qu'il faut chercher, c'est à restituer ce que la réalité a imprimé en vous*. Mais le résultat

est une fiction. . . . Ce qui m'importe, en vérité, c'est de me connaître pour mieux comprendre les autres et vice versa (*italics mine*).<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, commenting on fellow autofiction writer Ernaux's observation that the classification of autofiction is disproportionately applied by critics to the works of female writers, Laurens rejects outright any notion of autofiction's supposedly inherent femininity and affirms the contrary. Accordingly to Laurens, "c'est par l'exigence stylistique et formelle que [l'autofiction] vise à l'universel."<sup>24</sup> For theorists and writers of autofiction like Laurens, while the "je" of the an autobiographical text belongs and refers solely to its author, the autofictionalist's "je" seeks to transcend pure self-referentiality. The "je" of autofiction offers itself as a universal "je;" the text's implied reader should ideally be able, at least to some degree, to recognize herself or himself within it. Similarly, at a conference on the topic of autofiction, novelist and autofictionalist Catherine Cusset argued that "when the writer [of autofiction] reaches a deep enough level of emotion, it becomes anybody's emotion: something *universal*. Paradoxically, the 'I' of the autofiction writer is anything but egocentric. It is not centered on the self, but erasing the self so as to make the truth of past emotion emerge" (*italics mine*).<sup>25</sup> Borrowing from Laurens' and Cusset's understandings of the autofictional enterprise, we might reframe the opposition I outlined above such that the autobiographer endeavors to express as truthfully as possible the reality of her or his experience whereas the autofictionalist, on the other hand, seeks to truthfully express her or his subjective experience of reality. In other words, while the

---

<sup>23</sup> Camille Laurens and Annie Ernaux, "Toute écriture de vérité déclenche les passions," interview by Raphaëlle Rérolle, *Le Monde*, February 3, 2011, [http://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2011/02/03/camille-laurens-et-annie-ernaux-toute-ecriture-de-verite-declenche-les-passions\\_1474360\\_3260.html#](http://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2011/02/03/camille-laurens-et-annie-ernaux-toute-ecriture-de-verite-declenche-les-passions_1474360_3260.html#).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Catherine Cusset, "The Limits of Autofiction" (Literature in France Today: Conference on Autofiction, The Center for French Civilization and Culture at New York University, 2012), <http://www.catherinecusset.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/THE-LIMITS-OF-AUTOFICTION.pdf>.

distinction may seem minor, autobiography and autofiction in effect both pursue "the truth," but in two very different sites. While they are both inherently self-reflexive genres, we might say that autobiography's pursuit of truth is oriented "outward" (in that it appeals to objective verifiability) whereas autofiction's pursuit of truth is oriented "inward" (in that it relies on affect as a primary methodology). I use the spatially inflected terms "inward" and "outward" advisedly, and I will return to this matter shortly.

If a qualifying characteristic of traditional autobiographical writing is that it takes for granted a stable, embodied subject that exists in the world that can be legibly inscribed in a literary text, autofictional writing takes for granted first and foremost the coherence and iterability of experience; the practitioner of autofiction exhibits a faith that the essence of experience can be justly transposed into a different context and medium. Therefore, despite autofiction's transgressive and postmodern reputation, autofiction does not necessarily break with a humanist paradigm altogether (or even at all), as we see, for example, in Cusset's and Laurens' reflections on the genre. In its most canonical forms—if the word "canon" can even be used in reference to such a definitionally elusive genre—autofiction is highly invested in the humanistic tenet of universalism, and, more specifically, in the idea that the universal can be located within the particular. The humanistic values at the heart of much autofiction are further evidenced, albeit in a less obvious manner, by the preponderance of the spatial logic and rhetoric of some of its theorist-practitioners (e.g. Laurens' suggestion that reality leaves a mark or impression in [*en*] the subject that can be examined as well as her reference to the Proustian "livre intérieur", Cusset's belief that autofiction might probe a "deep" enough level of emotion as to access the universal) appears to be informed by a humanist conception of the subject. Laurens and Cusset presuppose a Cartesian split between an "inside" realm of subjectivity and selfhood and an

"outside" world of factuality, materiality, and history. The autofictional endeavor is in this sense one of subjective excavation, the desired result being a work of art which contains the concentrated essence of a universal truth.

Though I reject along with Laurens the (frankly absurd) notion of autofiction's intrinsic femininity, it is, in my view, no mere coincidence that the genre has proved particularly popular in France among feminist, gay, lesbian, and queer authors.<sup>26</sup> Autofiction, in a manner unlike autobiography, promises the possibility for decidedly particular experiences to stand in for human experience and for their articulation to qualify as "high" literature;<sup>27</sup> the genre has served as a laboratory of sorts for "minority writers" to experiment with Monique Wittig's call to universalize the particular.<sup>28</sup> The appellation of "minority writer" does not translate very easily into the French context and is used very rarely by French critics to refer to authors of French nationality; the term (translated usually into the French language as "écrivain minoritaire"<sup>29</sup>) does, tellingly, appear with relative frequency in francophone North American literary criticism and in French literary criticism about the work of non-French francophone authors.<sup>30</sup> One obvious explanation for this is that the notion of a "minority writer" is by its very nature totally at odds with France's foundational Republican universalist ideals as crystallized in the *Déclaration*

---

<sup>26</sup> I will discuss the term "queer" and its applicability in the French context in the next chapter.

<sup>27</sup> For instance, Franco-Algerian lesbian novelist Nina Bouraoui's autofiction *Mes mauvaises pensées* was awarded the Prix Renaudot in 2005, and Abdellah Taïa (2010), Christine Angot (2006), Bruce Benderson (2004), and Guillaume Dustan (1999) have all been awarded the Prix de Flore for their "minoritarian" autofiction.

<sup>28</sup> See the previous chapter for a discussion of Wittig's universalist literary politics.

<sup>29</sup> The term "minority writer," as I use it here, is different from Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the "minor writer" (*écrivain mineur*) as developed in their essay "Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure" in a variety of ways, the most important of which for our purposes being that a "minor literature" is for Deleuze and Guattari ultimately constitutes a collective enunciation of a marginalized group whereas the "minority writer" of autofiction is engaged in what is first and foremost an individualistic pursuit.

<sup>30</sup> For just a few examples, see: Élisabeth Nardout-Lafarge, *Réjean Ducharme: Une poétique du debris* (Saint-Laurent, Québec: Fides, 2001), 134; Martine-Emmanuelle Lapointe, "Entre le propre et l'étranger : la réception québécoise des oeuvres de Ying Chen et de David Homel," in *Le Québec à l'aube du nouveau millénaire: entre tradition et modernité*, ed. Marie-Christine W. Koop (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2008), 210.

*des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*. The modern French republic understands itself, in theory, to be made up not of distinct groups (e.g. religious, regional, ethnic, sexual, gender, linguistic), but of individuals united in their collective adherence to the Enlightenment principles of *liberté*, *égalité*, and *fraternité*, principles that emerged from a Jacobin tradition that stressed political and cultural centralization and viewed pluralism of any kind as an existential threat to the cohesion and integrity of the nation. As such, the French government as a matter of policy has not kept any official statistics on the race, ethnicity, religious adherence, or political affiliation of its citizens since World War II, during which the Nazis and their French collaborators made use of its records of its Jewish population. This is all to say that, in France, group identifications of any kind other than identification with Frenchness are meant to belong to the (officially) non-political realm of the private sphere—itself a concept, like the "gay ghetto," freighted with uncertain spatial implications. Life writing, insofar as it consists of presentation of the self, is a quintessentially public act. This is perhaps why, just as one does not exercise citizenship in France *as* a minority, one is not typically understood to write *as* a "minority" in France.

However, Dustan's "ghetto novels" ostentatiously deviate from this norm; their representation of male homosexuality reflects an unmistakably ethnic model of identity and culture. The narrator and his "frères du ghetto"<sup>31</sup> have their own distinct language, dress style, dietary habits, rites of passage, ethical code, and sexual and kinship rituals. Despite the fact that some, such as Dominique Noguez,<sup>32</sup> for instance, have argued for the universality of Dustan's novels' themes, such an assessment of his (early) work tends to ignore the manifold ways that these autofictions forcefully resist assimilation to the paradigm of universality; Dustan's autofictions take pain to insist upon the particularity of the specific gay subculture they

---

<sup>31</sup> Dustan, *Je sors ce soir*, in *Œuvres I*, 152.

<sup>32</sup> Dominique Noguez, "Rayon littérature universelle," *Écritures* 14 (2004): 93–97.

represent. The fraternity that unites the "frères du ghetto," in other words, is decidedly not one of French Republican *fraternité*. The novels, furthermore, demand of their reader a degree of assimilation to the governing norms of the "gay ghetto" subculture. The narrator makes extensive use of slang and typographical choices rarely used in literary contexts (e.g. the designation of a cassette tape through the homophonic "k7"<sup>33</sup>), including gay sexual jargon (that frequently borrows from British and North American varieties of English) referring to a host of practices, identities, and concepts that may very well be entirely foreign and even unintelligible to a reader not herself or himself already "in the know." The trilogy in this way implicates its straight readers as marginal with respect to what Dustan frames as a distinct, established culture, a reversal of what one might expect from a work of French "minority" autofiction. The novels' tendency toward the estrangement of its non-gay readers is at its most pronounced in the scenes in which Dustan's narrator seeks out sex via Minitel, the French proto-internet online network:

Je me suis mis au minitel. Comme toujours il n'y avait rien. J'avais déjà fait  
Mégadéfonce. . . . Mekvir était chez nous la semaine dernière à dîner. Les autres étaient  
clairement des nazes ou alors vraiment dans d'autres trips. Et puis je suis tombé sur un cv  
plutôt marrant : JUMENT A FF, 35 180 85 BF BM, CH A SE FAIRE DEFONCER AU  
POING. J'ai tapé SALUT LIS CV. Une minute plus tard il a répondu LU INT. J'ai tapé  
LIBRE NOW ? TE DEPL ? AS JNT ? Il a répondu LIBRE NOW, REC OU ME DEPL,  
NON, TOI OU ? J'ai tapé LES HALLES, REC. Il a tapé OK. Alors j'ai demandé TEL ? Il  
m'a filé son tel.<sup>34</sup>

Dustan does not gloss any of the terms or expressions used by the protagonist or his interlocutor or even acknowledge in any way the fact that for the vast majority of (perhaps even gay-

---

<sup>33</sup> Dustan, *Dans ma chambre*, in *Œuvres I*, 55.

<sup>34</sup> Dustan, *Plus fort que moi*, in *Œuvres I*, 297.

identified) the novel's potential readers, much of this exchange verges on the indecipherable. Yet, the communication between the two characters is for them clear and efficient: the unnamed man arrives at the protagonist's apartment within the hour and it is unambiguously understood what sex acts will be performed (and to who and by whom) before they are even physically in the same room. The virtual space of the Minitel network is itself a potential source of unfamiliarity for contemporary readers; Dustan's novels were published in the 1990s, long before the advent and normalization of Meetic, Grindr and other sexually-oriented social networking applications and websites. The Minitel users are essentially "hooking up" in what is for many of its readers essentially a foreign space and language. The periodic appearance of Minitel throughout the trilogy serves to remind us that Dustan's "gay ghetto" is a nebulous space of gay community not geographically coextensive with *le Marais*. In other words, Dustan's "gay ghetto" is far from the "gay village" described in travel guides of Paris. While the novels' language and (often esoteric) gay cultural references make them deliberately disorienting, the reader is not alone in this sense of disorientation. The world of Dustan's "gay ghetto" can be just as difficult to navigate for its inhabitants. Though the narrator positions himself with respect to the reader as an expert, such expertise is achieved through an ongoing process of apprenticeship and mastery.

Dustan's generic choice of autofiction as the vehicle for his most sustained depiction of Parisian gay culture, I would contend, suggests that, for him, if there is a "truth" of the "gay ghetto," that it can be best located through the prism of experience. I have lingered on the matter of genre and its relationship to truthfulness, as the questions of veracity and verisimilitude are highly significant when considering Guillaume Dustan and his work in a political frame. One of Act Up-Paris founder Didier Lestrade's chief objections to Dustan was that he was supposedly a liar: "J'ai compris le point qui me révolte le plus chez lui. Il ment. . . . Il y a quelque chose qu'Act

Up ne peut accepter, en aucun cas : le mensonge. . . . C'est un mensonge qui touche à la base même de ce que nous sommes : la sexualité."<sup>35</sup> If Dustan was dangerous according to Act Up-Paris because his work allegedly promotes sexual risk-taking, he is offensive because he misrepresents gay sexuality. Leaving aside the question of what precisely, for Lestrade, would constitute an acceptably truthful or accurate representation of gay sexuality—he never specifies what that would entail—it is evident that he finds the autofictional genre of Dustan's work unimportant.<sup>36</sup> Yet, Dustan's autofictional novels are particularly instructive texts for our purposes because they provide a competing vision of gay community "fleshed out" in space and time. By approaching his experience of gay life in Paris in the second half of the 90s via the medium of autofiction, Dustan offers a unique look into a pivotal moment in the history of HIV/AIDS in the West: the sudden transformation of HIV from an imminent death sentence to a manageable chronic condition following the introduction of combination therapies. As a consequence of this momentous medical breakthrough, Act Up-Paris had, in a certain sense, lost its *raison d'être*—the dire sense of urgency surrounding the epidemic—and thus the cultural relevance of its justification for its vision of a militant gay community vigilantly unified against a common deadly threat.<sup>37</sup> Dustan's autofictional rendering of his personal experience of this cultural moment sheds light on a paradigm of community that arose in its wake in a manner that other modes of representation (e.g. traditionally autobiographical writing, quantitative or

---

<sup>35</sup> Lestrade, "Répondre À Dustan...,"

<sup>36</sup> Lestrade expresses this explicitly in another Act Up-Paris communication: "Après ça, on peut toujours essayer de nous faire le coup de l'autofiction, de la distinction auteur/narrateur, de la littérature et de la vie. On peut toujours tenter de décourager, en même temps qu'on la suggère, une lecture politique des textes. Il n'y a pas de second degré qui tienne pour nous faire avaler des couleuvres. Mais parce que nous savons aussi que l'ironie tire son efficacité politique d'un jeu malin sur la première personne, nous y répondons à la première personne. Les textes qui suivent sont signés par leurs auteurs." See Act Up-Paris, "En finir avec Dustan."

<sup>37</sup> As the statistics I cited earlier regarding the "second wave" of HIV infections in Western Europe that began in the late 90s suggest, the regrettable decline in vigilance surrounding HIV prevention, although understandable, was misguided.

empirical analysis) simply cannot. The autofictional "je" of his first three works is not his alone, yet it is not a universal one either. This "je" belongs to the "frères du ghetto."<sup>38</sup>

### **Coming Out into the "Gay Ghetto"**

In spite of themselves, perhaps, Dustan's novels paradoxically point to a problem of universal relevance by virtue of their thematic, idiomatic, and stylistic emphasis on particularity, that is, how the experience of and identification with difference shapes the ways in which one negotiates space. Dustan's "gay ghetto" is not a fixed place that can be mapped or charted; it is a queer space in its fluid, provisional ontology. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick reminds us, the word "queer" is, in its etymological sense, originally a spatial rather than a sexual term; "queer" can be traced back to the Indo-European root *twerkw* for "across" and its cognates include the German *quer* ("to transverse"), Latin *torquere* ("to twist"), and English "athwart."<sup>39</sup> Just as a queer sexuality is one that veers off the "straight," heteronormative path, a queer space in this etymological sense is a transient, oppositional one produced through "twisted" practices of occupying space; as Aaron Betsky puts it, queer space is "a misuse or a deformation of a place" that "lives only in and for experience."<sup>40</sup> Dustan's gay "ghetto" is comprised of a dynamic patchwork of *queered* places, places that have been appropriated and repurposed for the realization of gay desires. Navigation of the space of the "ghetto" is, therefore, far from intuitive. One must learn how to move through the subcultural gay world of Dustan's novels.

Each of Dustan's first three novels is primarily concerned, roughly speaking, with one aspect of gay life. *Dans ma chambre* explores the topography of the "gay ghetto." *Je sors ce soir*,

---

<sup>38</sup> Dustan, *Je sors ce soir*, in *Œuvres I*, 152.

<sup>39</sup> Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (London and Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), xii.

<sup>40</sup> Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire*, 1st edition (New York: William Morrow & Co, 1997), 5.

which tells the story of one night out at a dance party, is chiefly focused on nightclub culture, and, more specifically, the virtues of dance and recreational drugs. *Plus fort que moi* is a *bildungsroman* of sorts that deals with the protagonist's realization of his sexual orientation during adolescence and passage into gay adulthood.

Despite the fact that it recounts the protagonist's coming of age as a gay man, *Plus fort que moi* reverses the conventions of the traditional gay "coming out" story,<sup>41</sup> and not just because it is the final rather than the first installment of the trilogy. The cultural trope of "coming out of the closet," which is referred to in France both by the anglicism *le coming out* and *la sortie du placard*, carries strong spatial implications. The framing of the disclosure of one's sexual orientation and identity as a "coming out" implicitly construes it as a matter of location. A conventional "coming out" narrative often begins with a first-person narrator recounting a childhood (sometimes spent in a small town) marked by feelings of alienation, confinement, and intangible difference from her or his peers.<sup>42</sup> This is followed by the narrator's—usually gradual—realization and coming to terms with her or his sexual orientation. This sets the stage for the actual "coming out" rite of passage, in which the narrator reveals their gay identity (i.e. her or his "true self") to friends, family, and/or to the larger public. The narrator, whether rejected or accepted by friends and family, will typically proceed to venture out into the world (usually in the form of a migration to a cosmopolitan metropolis such as Paris, New York, or San Francisco) and find a supportive gay community, opening up manifold possibilities for love,

---

<sup>41</sup> An example of a recent French "coming out" narrative that exemplifies the norms I outline below is Édouard Louis' 2014 critically lauded autofictional debut novel *En finir avec Eddy Bellegueule* (Paris: Seuil, 2014), which was nominated for the *Prix Goncourt du premier roman*.

<sup>42</sup> My characterization of the norms and tropes of gay and lesbian coming out stories is, of course, a generalization; there are countless examples that differ from my description. Particularly in the last two decades, for instance, there has been a boom of coming out narratives that do not take for granted an essential, naturalized gay or lesbian identity and implicitly call into question the ritual of "coming out" and its implications. A few iconic examples include Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* (1993), Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), and, in the French context, Paul B. Preciado's *Testo junkie: sexe, drogue et biopolitique* (2008).

personal fulfillment, and happiness. In such stories, the decision to "come out of the closet" brings with it a sense of freedom from the isolation, marginalization, and captivity that characterizes life "in the closet." Simply put, these narratives tend to associate "coming out" with feelings of "openness" in several senses of the term, with the former enabling the latter. Dustan's narrator, on the other hand, recounts a "coming out" experience that decouples the concepts of personal liberty and freedom from the notions of constraint and confinement.

This disjunction is evidenced most conspicuously through the recurring motif of sadomasochism. The narrator's "coming out of the closet" can in many ways be better described as a "going in," so to speak. His coming to grips with his sexual orientation propels him into a self-imposed isolation from the non-gay world. The particular gay sexual identity assumed by the narrator has him enthusiastically delving into the cramped, dark, crowded spaces of backrooms and sex clubs and consensually subjecting himself to the restraints of sexualized bondage and submission. The very same can be said about the "gay ghetto" more generally given the extreme exclusivity of its nightclubs and parties and the elitist and rigidly conformist behavioral and aesthetic codes that govern one's access and inclusion. The figuratively—and sometimes literally—enclosed space of the "gay ghetto" is a far cry from the stifling oppressiveness suggested by the logic of "the closet." The "ghetto" is, for the protagonist, by the very virtue of its closedness, a space of safety, opportunity, and, most importantly, eroticism:

Ça fait quelques années maintenant que je suis entré dans ce monde. J'y passe la plupart du temps. . . . On est bien dans le ghetto. Il y a du monde. Il y en a tout le temps plus. Des pédés qui se mettent à baiser tout le temps et à ne plus aller aussi souvent qu'avant dans le monde normal. À part bosser, en général, et voir sa famille, tout peut se faire sans sortir du ghetto. Sport, courses, ciné, restau, vacances. . . . Le sexe est la chose centrale. Tout

tourne autour : les fringues, les cheveux courts, être bien foutu, le matos, les trucs qu'on prend, l'alcool qu'on boit, les trucs qu'on lit, les trucs qu'on bouffe.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the fact that he learns of the loss of several friends and ex-lovers from AIDS throughout the course of the three novels, Dustan nonetheless experiences his membership in his close-knit social network in utopian terms: "Je vis dans un monde où plein de choses que je pensais impossibles sont possibles."<sup>44</sup> This is a chosen world that exists alongside a host of others. In this one, the homophobia, HIV stigma, and entrenched heterocentrism that pervade the "monde normal" are essentially invisible if not non-existent, as everyone is gay and "tout le monde est séropositif."<sup>45</sup> There is safety and comfort in uniformity. The narrator's frequent use of the word "world" to describe his social circle is telling; it underscores the culturally and physically insular, separatist nature of the "gay ghetto." Dustan's vision of a social landscape made up of distinct cultural worlds in this way could not be more antithetical to the French Republican universalist vision of society.

The subcultural "world" depicted in Dustan's novels is inadequately encompassed by the term "the gay community," an expression that carries universalizing implications of its own in its tendency to downplay the extreme heterogeneity of the individuals it is meant to comprise. The narrator's social circle is made up of a highly homogenous, particular subset of gay men, and the relentless descriptive attention devoted to clothing, music, literature, sexual preferences, personal grooming, and other elements of style and taste here and throughout the rest of the trilogy drives home this point. By the same token, using the term "gay community" to describe the gay social milieu represented in Dustan's novels is problematic not only for this reason, but also because of

---

<sup>43</sup> Dustan, *Dans ma chambre*, in *Œuvres I*, 83.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 66.

the political and spatial implications attached to the expression. As Jack Halberstam remarks in *In a Queer Time and Place*, the distinction between the concepts of community and subculture, although unstable and contested within the social sciences, is for LGBTQ cultures an important one, given the frequent alignment of "community" with relatively conservative political projects that aim to assimilate "the gay community" into the institutions of the family and the nation.

Halberstam explains that the word "community" is "used to describe seemingly natural forms of congregation. . . . Subcultures, however, suggest transient, extrafamilial, and oppositional modes of affiliation."<sup>46</sup> The concept of community implies a more fixed, innately predetermined grouping, and, moreover, it often evokes a relationship to a specific place or neighborhood.

Dustan and his social network do not make up a community in this sense. Dustan's "gay ghetto" is not reducible to a place, and there is nothing natural or innate about this "world."

Though the milieu of the "gay ghetto" is highly homogenous, this is because continued membership is contingent upon the mastery of its norms, a labor-intensive and costly ongoing process. The activities cited in the above passage, for instance, are all organized around consumption and leisure: shopping, dining at restaurants, travel, working out (ostensibly at expensive gay gyms). What is more, the sexuality of the protagonist and his "frères du ghetto" is deeply invested in sex toys including but not limited to dildos, leather hoods, cock rings, dog collars, nipple clamps, whips, and ball gags. The narrator, looking at his vast collection remarks, "Ça fait des années que j'achète des trucs comme ça . . . Je les aime tous. Ils sont comme des parties de moi qui viennent se poser là où je l'ai décidé et y maintiennent mon emprise."<sup>47</sup> Objects like dildos and whips are so integral to the narrator's sexual identity and repertoire that they

---

<sup>46</sup> Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives, Sexual Cultures* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 153-4.

<sup>47</sup> Dustan, *Dans ma chambre*, in *Œuvres I*, 82.

essentially become parts of his body. Dustan's "ghetto" lifestyle is oriented by sexuality, but driven by consumerism. Accordingly, though Dustan's "gay ghetto" is, at least on the surface, constituted around shared tastes (e.g. sexual, dress, musical), the costliness of actually indulging these tastes is a very real (although largely invisible) barrier to entry into the "ghetto." The price of participation in the gay scene is a central concern in *Je sors ce soir* and structures its plot; Dustan's navigation of the labyrinthine Gay Tea Dance party at *la Loco* is dictated by his need to be economical with his money. He arrives early in order to benefit from a discount, strategically nurses a single drink as long as possible, and briefly leaves the club out of hunger to buy a hamburger at a fast-food restaurant with his remaining cash, which is only enough to afford the sandwich and not the combo. In this moment, economic constraint literally dislodges even the narrator—who we are led to assume enjoys a relatively privileged socioeconomic status<sup>48</sup>—from gay space albeit merely temporarily. Ultimately, though the subculture's fashion draws heavily upon symbols of white<sup>49</sup> working class masculinity (e.g. jeans, combat boots, cropped hair), we

---

<sup>48</sup> The sheer amount of time Dustan's narrator and his social circle seem to devote to leisure compared to work suggests a lifestyle inaccessible (or at the very least difficultly accessible) to most. The narrator's job, which is never explicitly revealed, is mentioned by the narrator only in passing, the most sustained example of which entails him accepting an offer of transfer to the South Pacific which he accepts at the end of *Dans ma chambre* in order to temporarily escape the stressors of his gay life in Paris before ultimately returning to it. This episode indicates both that he is senior enough in his position to have such a request granted and that he is likely a functionary of the state, ironic given the trilogy's implicit critique of France's fundamental ideals.

<sup>49</sup> The men of Dustan's world are implicitly coded as white; the narrator's appraising gaze is incessantly drawn to the bodies of the men around him, but he never so much as mentions their skin color or ethnicity. Men of color are either physically absent from the places that constitute the "gay ghetto" or are, like both lesbian and straight women, essentially invisible to the narrator given their sexual undesirability. The sole appearance of a black gay man in a gay space in the entire trilogy occurs in *Je sors ce soir*; the narrator describes receiving (unwelcome) sexual advances by "un black moche" (Dustan, *Je sors ce soir*, in *Œuvres I*, 214). Based on his interdisciplinary study of French gay men's relationship to Paris and the Marais, Denis Provencher confirms the relatively ethnically segregated nature of Parisian gay scenes and explains that socioeconomic concerns, the experienced racism of the gay culture of the Marais, and the existence of parallel gay scenes and subcultures (e.g. gay "Beur" culture) all contribute to the absence of Arab and black gay men from kinds of gay spaces frequented by Dustan's narrator. See Denis M. Provencher, "Gay Paris: Language, Sexuality, and Space in the French Capital," in *Queer French: Globalization, Language, and Sexual Citizenship in France* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 149–92.

can infer that the expensiveness of the "ghetto" lifestyle would to a large extent preclude the participation of actual working class gay men.<sup>50</sup>

The charge of complicity with capitalism is one frequently leveled against gay and queer "lifestyles,"<sup>51</sup> and the protagonist unapologetically embodies this stereotype ("J'achète tout ce qu'il faut pour être heureux"<sup>52</sup>). His consumerist tendencies inform every aspect of his life, and the supermarket is the paradigm of his relation to the world around him. He perceives himself to be surrounded by a host of goods to be quickly and easily acquired and consumed in order to satisfy his desires:

Marks and Spencer c'est fascinant. . . . les sandwiches oeuf-cresson, le poulet tikka en boulette, les brochettes de saumon irlandais, le cocktail de crevettes, le coleslaw, les légumes lavés et coupés à frire, les pâtés au porc, les fromages carrés. . . . Bientôt il y aura Marks and Spencer à l'Hôtel de Ville. Ce sera bien.<sup>53</sup>

*La carte* s'en trouve dans les revues communautaires que je lis assidûment. Bars. Boîtes. Restaurants. Saunas. Minitel. Rézo. Lieux de drague [. . .] Les mecs sont plutôt bars. Plutôt boîtes. Plutôt bars-boîtes. Plutôt sauna. Plutôt rézo. Plutôt minitel. Plutôt bruns.

---

<sup>50</sup> With a few key exceptions, the protagonist and his friends and lovers are implied to have well-paying professional careers despite the de-emphasis of work-life in Dustan's autofictional novels. In one of the rare cases in which a character's profession is directly mentioned, we learn that one of his sex partners is a doctor because a medical emergency calls for the solicitation of his medical advice (Dustan, *Dans ma chambre*, in *Œuvres I*, 105-6).

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2000); John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity," in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Barr Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, New Feminist Library (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 100-113; and Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman, "Queer Nationality," in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. Michael Warner and Social Text Collective, Cultural Politics, v. 6 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 193-229.

<sup>52</sup> Dustan, *Dans ma chambre*, in *Œuvres I*, 62.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

Plutôt bruns. Plutôt blonds. Plutôt musclés. Plutôt hard. Plutôt baise classique. On a le choix. Beaucoup de choix (*italics mine*).<sup>54</sup>

The parallelism between his description of the grocery store and the "meat market" that is the "ghetto" is telling; The narrator approaches cole slaw, cheese, brunettes, and blondes with the same enthusiasm. He makes of gay periodicals a map with which to orient himself in his pursuit of sex, a map that essentially doubles as a menu. Rather than any pre-existing cartography, the narrator's consumeristic desire drives his navigation of the "gay ghetto." Yet, though desire provides him a "sense of direction," he must learn how to maneuver within gay space.

### **Finding One's Way in the "Gay Ghetto"**

We can identify three pivotal moments in the protagonist's sexual formation in *Plus fort que moi*, an inverted "coming out" process of sorts in that the formative experiences take place in locations each smaller and more private than the last. He makes his first foray into gay life by experimenting with cruising in the Trocadéro Gardens while still a teenage high school student: "J'avais seize ans. La prof d'italien nous emmenait voir une pièce. Je suis arrivé en retard. . . . Alors j'ai voulu connaître le sexe. . . . Je suis descendu dans les jardins. J'avais lu dans *Le Nouveils Obs* que ça draguait. . . . Quand je suis rentré . . . j'avais envie de vomir."<sup>55</sup> At this very early stage in his sexual apprenticeship, the narrator is still very much *hors ghetto*.<sup>56</sup> Isolated from any sort of gay community and deprived of the gay periodicals that will soon serve as his

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>55</sup> Dustan, *Plus fort que moi*, in *Œuvres I*, 248.

<sup>56</sup> The term "hors ghetto" is an expression employed by gay men (most often on dating websites and applications) to express disidentification with or rejection of stereotypical gay culture and not necessarily the physical location of their dwelling. In its homophobic undertones, it is roughly equivalent to the English-language concept of "straight-acting." At this point in his life, Dustan's protagonist is still grappling with internalized homophobia and actively rejecting a gay identity. See Stéphane Leroy, "Le Paris gay. Éléments pour une géographie de l'homosexualité," *Annales de géographie* 646, no. 6 (2005): 579, doi:10.3917/ag.646.0579.

map of the gay world, he gleans information about gay sex by co-opting mainstream, sometimes homophobic media; anything that the *Nouvel Observateur* was publishing in the 80s about gay cruising in the Trocadéro Gardens was unlikely to have been celebratory. There are two other levels of gay appropriation of dominant culture at play in this episode. For one, the protagonist's first homosexual encounter—a profoundly educational experience—is occasioned by a school trip. Rather than attend a performance of a canonical piece of theater or dance at the *Théâtre National de Chaillot* with his classmates, he uses the occasion to learn instead about gay culture. That the impetus for his trip is an Italian class is also significant, for this gestures to the fact that gayness functions in Dustan's work as a quasi-ethnic culture complete with its own language. Secondly, the *Jardins du Trocadéro* is an iconic landmark that boasts one of the best vantage points in all of Paris of the Eiffel Tower. Though hardly an overtly gay place, it is queered through the ritual of cruising, even if the transformation is invisible to those not in the know.

The identity of a place, furthermore, does not for Dustan directly follow from the sexual orientation of its occupants. For instance, the party in *Je sors ce soir* is transformed into a straight space not by the arrival of straight people, but, rather, through song: "Le DJ passe Lemon, de U2. C'est l'hétérosound qui commence. Des filles arrivent et se mettent à danser."<sup>57</sup> *Je sors ce soir* devotes just as much attention—that is to say a great deal—to the music of the "ghetto" as *Dans ma chambre* does to an obsessive, Bret Easton Ellis-esque cataloging of its bars, clubs, restaurants. In this way, beyond their testimonial function, the trilogy offers itself as an archive. To assert, like Lestrade, that Dustan displays a single-minded concern for the present to the detriment of his survival as well as that of his "community" is therefore incorrect in that there are few activities more straightforwardly future-oriented than the construction of an archive. The seemingly superfluous references to specific songs, restaurants, bars, films, clubs,

---

<sup>57</sup> Dustan, *Je sors ce soir*, in *Œuvres I*, 215.

sex toys—most long out of fashion or no longer in existence—are meaningful in the work they do in documenting and memorializing the gay Paris of the 90s; Dustan's autofiction is in this respect a particularizing rather than a universalizing project, and its inscription of specific subcultural material discourages attempts to read it as a glimpse of an universal, timeless gay experience. It is through their references to cultural artifacts and ephemera like *Honcho*, a now out-of-print gay pornographic magazine,<sup>58</sup> the 1995 film *I Love You, I Love You Not*,<sup>59</sup> Kris Lord dildos,<sup>60</sup> and the long-closed *le Broad* club<sup>61</sup> as well as the citation of lyrics such as those of Alex Party's 1996 electro-pop hit "Saturday Night Party (Read My Lips)"<sup>62</sup> that Dustan's trilogy so effectively imbues the "ghetto" with such a concrete sense of time and place, complete with its sounds, sights, smells, and tastes.

Early in his "coming out" process, the narrator strives to maintain the privileges that come with passing as straight: "Je ne voulais pas arrêter de profiter de l'onde d'approbation qui m'accueillait quand j'entrais au restaurant avec Claire ou avec Laurence ou avec Nathalie, celle qui n'y était pas quand c'était avec Hervé ou Frédéric ou Christophe."<sup>63</sup> As his sexual orientation begins to play a larger role in his social life, the protagonist grows increasingly cognizant of its impact on his navigation of public space. He comes to perceive seemingly "neutral" places like restaurants as suddenly inhospitable. When he implicitly presents himself as straight, he enjoys a "sense of approval" emanating from no one in particular; though he never reports experiencing

---

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>59</sup> Dustan, *Dans ma chambre*, in *Œuvres I*, 83.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>61</sup> Dustan, *Plus fort que moi*, in *Œuvres I*, 257.

<sup>62</sup> Dustan, *Dans ma chambre*, in *Œuvres I*, 112.

<sup>63</sup> Dustan, *Plus fort que moi*, in *Œuvres I*, 249.

any explicitly homophobic abuse or blatant disapproval, he becomes acutely aware of the tacit, insidious heteronormativity operative even in supposedly nonsexual spaces.

Several years after first cruising in the Trocadéro Gardens, one of the narrator's newly acquired gay friends introduces him to *le Trap*, a "backroom bar" essentially invisible to unknowing passersby. His recollection of the night fixates on the closed off, enigmatic quality of the place:

Le Trap était un truc complètement barricadé. Depuis la rue on ne voyait rien de ce qui pouvait s'y passer. Emmanuel a sonné. La porte s'est ouverte. Après nous avoir détaillés de la tête aux pieds . . . le portier brun et ténébreux . . . nous a laissés passer. . . . À l'étage il faisait sombre mais on pouvait encore bien voir les visages des mecs qui attendaient d'aller plus loin, vers là où il faisait complètement noir et où je n'apercevais plus rien.<sup>64</sup>

At *le Trap*, the protagonist is once again confronted with the fact that gay space is not necessarily visible to the naked eye. In the Trocadéro Gardens the narrator needed to decrypt the codes of public cruising in order to behold the sexual opportunities in the most public of places. In *le Trap*, he must not only draw upon the norms of cruising but be able to do so in the pitch blackness of the backroom, relying strictly on highly codified gay modes of sexual communication in order to successfully navigate the space. When he first enters the dark backroom, he is initially overcome with a mix of disgust, confusion, and fear: "Et puis tout d'un coup une bouche s'est collée à la mienne. Je n'avais aucune idée de celui à qui elle pouvait appartenir (un vieux !, l'herpès !). . . . Euuuurk."<sup>65</sup> He manages to ease his feelings of revulsion and disorientation by surrendering himself wholeheartedly to them. He basks in the loss of his sense of individuality and bodily autonomy that he experiences in so doing:

---

<sup>64</sup> Dustan, *Plus fort que moi*, in *Œuvres I*, 250–1.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 251–52.

J'ai arrêté de pomper mais je suis resté plié en deux, fasciné par ce que je voyais, la bite que je suçais, ces mains, ces entrejambes, tous ces corps de plus en plus indistincts qui m'entouraient. Je pouvais m'engloutir dans ce magma de mains, de bites, de bouches. Je pouvais me mettre à ne plus rien en avoir à foutre de savoir à qui appartenait quoi, qui était gros, vieux, moche, contagieux.<sup>66</sup>

In spite of the darkness, he sees and feels his body melting away into a Dionysian mass of body parts. Losing himself to the throes of passion allows him to unburden himself of the shame and fear around his sexual desires he is still experiencing at this point in his "coming out."

Furthermore, this reprieve from homophobic shame is occasioned by the narrator's acceptance of the alterity of his backroom sex partners. His inability to make out their individual faces and bodies ceases to pose a problem for him; he no longer cares about their potential unattractiveness or even if they pose a threat to him (either in the form of violence or of transmission of sexually transmitted infections). To borrow from Tim Dean's scholarship on barebacking, this ecstatic brand of "unprotected" backroom sexuality effects a "disentanglement of intimacy from personhood."<sup>67</sup> Rather than view the narrator's relation to the personhood and bodies of others as callous, we might instead regard it, as Dean would encourage us to, as "ethically exemplary" insofar as it "represents a disposition of openness to the other."<sup>68</sup> When situated within the context of the "gay ghetto" and its codes of conduct, the narrator's lack of interest in the subjecthood of his sex partners reads not so much as narcissistic, self-interested exploitation, but as a morally neutral (if not "ethically exemplary") form of objectification. This anonymizing objectification of the backroom, furthermore, precludes the exclusion of uglier, older, or less

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>67</sup> Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 46.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., xii.

healthy-looking men, promoting an egalitarian erotics of mutuality and equivalence. Dustan in this way bridges the libertine sexual hedonism and ethical relation to the Other that activists like Didier Lestrade implicitly insist are mutually exclusive. The protagonist is ultimately seduced by the profound sense of freedom offered by *le Trap* and begins to frequent other backrooms and sex-on-premises venues.

The narrator reaches a third decisive juncture in his career as a gay man when he meets a man at *le Trap* who invites him to his apartment and initiates him to the pleasures of poppers,<sup>69</sup> house music, Levi 501s, and sex toys, paving the way for his total immersion into the "ghetto" and development into a self-assured gay man. What cements his break with straightness is the sheer intensity of the pleasure he derives from their evening of drug-enhanced sex:

J'ai appris à connaître la lumière violette au milieu de ma tête . . . quand je prenais du poppers pendant qu'il me baisait, par-devant, puis par-derrière, le velux était ouvert, on était en août, je regardais Paris en pensant à la scène (dans *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* ou *Pompes funèbres* ?) où les deux mecs baisent sur un toit. . . . c'était . . . tellement bon que je n'arrivais plus à bander pour baiser Nathalie . . . . alors je l'ai quittée.<sup>70</sup>

During the sex—reportedly so satisfying it leaves him no longer able to feign heterosexuality any longer—his attention wanders from the view through the apartment's skylight to a Genet novel. The scene referenced here is indeed from *Pompes funèbres*, set during the Liberation of Paris. The allusion—yet another instance in which potentially esoteric cultural references may estrange readers not themselves part of Dustan's specific milieu—says much about Dustan's political vision of gayness for those sufficiently conversant with Genet.

---

<sup>69</sup> "Poppers" is a gay vernacular term for alkyl nitrites, a class of vasodilators whose vapors can be inhaled in preparation for sex.

<sup>70</sup> Dustan, *Plus fort que moi*, in *Œuvres I*, 254.

At this final stage of his "coming out" process, he is essentially living out a scene from a Genet novel (and, as we've already seen, is using gay community publications as maps).<sup>71</sup> Literature broadly construed (e.g. music, magazines, pornographic film) frame and guide the protagonist's experience throughout the trilogy. The "ghetto" has its own distinct media and art,<sup>72</sup> and a crucial aspect of the protagonist's gay identity development is his shift toward exclusive consumption of them. Entering the "gay ghetto" is a first a matter of (dis)identification more than one of geographic location. The narrator doesn't physically remove himself from the straight world; he disassociates himself from its discourses. It is interesting to note that *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson's seminal work on nationalism, credits print culture with the rise of collective national consciousness;<sup>73</sup> we might therefore read the ubiquitous references to gay media as evidence of the not just ethnic, but quasi-national character of the "gay ghetto." In this way, the archival function of Dustan's work is not simply testimonial or documental; Dustan's autofictions gesture toward the continuance and survival of his "imagined community" into the future.

Accordingly, a common thread of Dustan's work is its distinctly pedagogical undertone. While—as I've argued—his novels adopt an exclusive posture vis-à-vis readers not familiar with gay Paris, the novels occasionally slip into a didactic mood, with the narrator offering glosses of particular cultural points. This provides (male) readers knowledge that they are free to apply in their own lives should they wish to. For example, in *Plus fort que moi*, his account of a night out is punctuated with an explanation of cruising, which he has long since mastered:

---

<sup>71</sup> The allusion to Genet circles back to the protagonist's first sexual experience with another man in that he learns that men cruise for sex in the Trocadéro Garden from a newspaper.

<sup>72</sup> Much, if not the majority, of the countless texts referenced or cited in the trilogy were not necessarily by or for gay men, but are gay by virtue of their appropriation by Dustan's gay (sub)culture.

<sup>73</sup> See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

Je me suis frayé un passage entre les corps jusqu'au coin de la piste et j'ai dansé. Danser était à la fois un plaisir et un atout. Après . . . je suis allé jusqu'au bar du fond, j'ai cruisé le long de la promenade où les gens . . . me remarquaient ou ne me remarquaient pas. Le code est simple à Paris. Ceux qui font comme s'ils ne m'avaient pas vu, je ne leur plais pas. . . . Personne ne m'inspirait alors je suis retourné à mon poste au milieu du promenoir, devant les marches qui descendaient vers la piste, un endroit stratégique.<sup>74</sup>

Here, the narrator decodes the ritualized manner in which the patrons of *le Boy* sexually navigate the nightclub. Though the name of the venue perhaps suggests a sense of a youthful recreation, the narrator's account of the night disabuses us of the idea of the gay club as a space of ludic play. For those seeking sex, a night at *le Boy* is serious business; his every move is plotted with tactical precision. Dancing, beyond a source of pleasure in itself, in this space becomes a valuable asset (*atout*) in the pursuit of sex. In the end, his adroit maneuvering pays off. After spotting a man meeting his desired specifications, he engages him and takes him back to his apartment without even learning his name.

Cruising is a learned, ritualized set of behaviors and not the result of natural instinct; the narrator reminds the reader of this several times throughout the the trilogy, all the while instructing her or him on how it works. In *Je sors ce soir*, for instance, he abruptly concludes a conversation, noting that, "Au bar c'est la foule. . . . Ça commence à être cruising time. Eye-contact. J'ai mis très longtemps à comprendre que quand on me regarde, c'est que j'intéresse."<sup>75</sup> Even if the rules are indeed simple, they nonetheless take time to master. It is important to note that Dustan generally opts for the Anglo-American euphemistic loan word "cruising" instead of the French term "la drague." Though English abounds in Dustan's writing, the word choice in

---

<sup>74</sup> Dustan, *Plus fort que moi*, in *Œuvres I*, 262.

<sup>75</sup> Dustan, *Je sors ce soir*, in *Œuvres I*, 170.

this case has the effect of emphasizing the gayness of the practice; the French language equivalent can be used to describe a relatively wide range of flirting and "pick-up" practices between people irrespective of their gender or sexual orientation, whereas the word "cruising" refers to a more specific set of practices and is used almost exclusively within the context of gay sex culture. Furthermore, the use of the English term evokes a sense of otherness, highlighting the foreignness of the practice with respect to mainstream (straight) French culture.

Dustan's taste for the foreign brings us back to the allusion to Genet. In the final pages of *Pompes funèbres*, the French Nazi collaborator narrator is anally penetrated from behind by a German soldier on a Parisian rooftop before facing the certain death that await the Nazis and collaborators at the hands of the victorious Allies: "Le dos appuyé au monument de briques en face de Paris qui veillait, Erik encula Riton. . . . Erik et Riton ne s'aimaient pas l'un dans l'autre, il s'échappaient d'eux-mêmes sur le monde, à la face du monde, en un geste victorieux."<sup>76</sup> Though Genet's circuitous syntax could not contrast more starkly with Dustan's flat prose, there is an unmistakable parallel between the scenes.<sup>77</sup> Dustan's protagonist, like Riton and Erik, may be having sex with another man, but the sex is ultimately more a matter of his relation to society than to his partner. As Leo Bersani puts it in his reading of the Genet rooftop scene: "Excluded from all triumphant communities (from the heterosexual family to the victorious Allies entering Paris), they are reduced, or elevated, to a kind of . . . fucking of the world rather than each other."<sup>78</sup> Following the transformative sex with the man from *le Trap*, the narrator is finally able

---

<sup>76</sup> Jean Genet, *Pompes funèbres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), 299.

<sup>77</sup> There is, however, a significant difference between the two scenes worth mentioning; Erik and Riton boldly expose themselves to the gaze of a hostile public thirsting for retribution on their rooftop whereas Dustan's protagonist enjoys the privacy and safety of a bedroom. As we can observe in the increasingly private nature of the sites of his sexual formation, the bedrooms, sex clubs, and other places that comprise the topography of the "ghetto" offer the narrator a sense of insular refuge from the homophobia of the larger culture.

<sup>78</sup> Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 165-66.

to embrace the outsider status he associates with gay identity. His exclusive desire for other men has once and for all dashed his heteronormative dreams of domestic bliss with a wife and children. However, his acceptance of his orientation and all that it entails is not a passive one: "J'ai *décidé* de devenir une bombe sexuelle" (my italics).<sup>79</sup> Like Genet's Riton and Erik, he unrepentantly looks out through the skylight in coitus onto a world whose norms he has forsaken.

That his adoption of a gay identity culminates in the decision to become a "bombe," a word used figuratively in French to refer to a person of great physical attractiveness, drives home the point that the protagonist's gayness entails an antagonistic position vis-à-vis French society, and especially so given the World War II-era setting of the novel he references. The parallel Dustan subtly draws between his protagonist and Nazi collaborator Riton framed being "très ghetto" as not a fate to which homosexual men resign themselves, but, rather, a consciously treacherous allegiance to gay identity and culture over Frenchness and its foundational Republican universalist ideals. Though the protagonist and his "frères du ghetto," like Riton and Erik, face a death sentence (in the form of HIV/AIDS<sup>80</sup>) as a result of taking "the wrong side," so to speak, he defiantly and shamelessly chooses to revel in its pleasures anyway while he still can. The reference to Erik and Riton's rooftop sex ultimately offers a paradigm through which to read Dustan's "autobiopornographic" project as a whole; Dustan's emphatic expression of his sexuality through his autofiction is his own way of "fucking the world."

The *Pompes funèbres* allusion, furthermore, invites us to read Dustan's treatment of gayness in the vein of Genet rather than in that of Hervé Guibert or Proust despite obvious reasons why readers might be tempted to do so. Proust and Dustan share both Jewish origins and

---

<sup>79</sup> Dustan, *Plus fort que moi*, in *Œuvres I*, 254.

<sup>80</sup> As I point out earlier, as far as the protagonist is concerned, virtually everyone in his gay subcultural scene is seropositive.

semi-autobiographical oeuvres dealing with homosexuality and its vexed relationship to community, and Guibert, Dustan's contemporary, is far and away the most well known and critically acclaimed French writer of HIV/AIDS literature. The absence of references to Guibert or Proust in Dustan's autofictional trilogy is therefore glaring, especially given his propensity for allusion.<sup>81</sup> However, Dustan's disidentification with the two via omission is completely understandable for several reasons, such as Proust's canonical status in French culture as well as his work's inexplicit—and comparatively prudish—portrayal of sexuality and Hervé Guibert's highly aestheticized, sentimental autofictional depictions of an *individual's* almost heroic battle with AIDS.

One should not, on the other hand, overestimate the kinship between Genet and Dustan; there are blatant differences between Genet's and Dustan's visions of homosexuality, notably in homosexuality's relationship to identity. In Genet's oeuvre, gay identity, strictly speaking, does not exist; male homosexuality does not imply feelings of fraternity. We instead find what Bersani calls "homo-ness,"<sup>82</sup> an "anti-identitarian identity," a purely oppositional stance toward normality. Dustan, on the other hand, is unambiguously invested in gayness. Though he positions gayness antagonistically against "le monde normal," this antagonism takes a pragmatic rather than a revolutionary form. The "ghetto" responds to straightness and normality through a logic of separatism and autonomy. Its form of gayness is an anti-essentialist yet not anti-identitarian identity. To be "très ghetto" means not just to be very gay, but, rather, to inhabit and participate (along with like-minded others) in the creation of a space decidedly closed off to straightness.

---

<sup>81</sup> As I've mentioned previously, Dustan's autofictions are positively littered with references to high and "low" culture alike to the extent that they function as an archive of Dustan's and his gay subculture's tastes and influences. *Je sors ce soir* concludes with an extensive, several-page-long list of acknowledgements and thanks to friends, former lovers, and cultural figures of various sorts that includes names ranging from Boy George, "le fils du footballeur," MC Lyte, Bret Easton Ellis, Laure Adler, Truman Capote, Renaud Camus, and Philippe Sollers (225-26).

<sup>82</sup> Bersani, *Homos*, 101.

## The Limits of the "Ghetto"

The narrator inaugurates his full transition into gayness with a commensurately drastic makeover into a gay "bombe sexuelle."<sup>83</sup> He shaves his head for the first time in his life and acquires a leather jacket, once and for all shedding the clean-cut, respectable image of his Sciences Po days. He judges the change a success when his mother fails to recognize him in the street. Dustan's Jewishness is acutely significant here because the specific gay look he adopts shares similarities with that of skinhead subculture (e.g. shaved heads, leather jackets). Given skinheads' strong association with neo-Nazism and anti-Semitism, I would argue that his misrecognition by his mother suggests a break with Jewishness as much as it represents a break with straightness. We see here that protagonist's assumption of a gay identity comes at the expense of other identifications, or, at the very least, the ability to publicly express them; the narrator's sole mention of his Jewishness is made in a recollection of life prior to realizing his sexual orientation.<sup>84</sup>

Dustan's protagonist did openly identify as Jewish earlier in life. The protagonist begins the novel as an apparently well-to-do, Gentile-passing Jewish urbanite soon to matriculate at one of France's elite *grandes écoles*. His educational pedigree and references to overseas childhood vacations suggest his family enjoyed a privileged socioeconomic status. The story of William Barranès' life certainly bears the hallmarks of prosperity in France. He grew up in a middle-class Jewish family; his father was a psychiatrist and his mother an interior designer. After studying at

---

<sup>83</sup> Dustan, *Plus fort que moi*, in *Œuvres I*, 254.

<sup>84</sup> Incidentally, the history of the Marais as a gay quarter is itself marked by a complicated relationship with Jewishness involving displacement, integration, and forgetting. David Caron provides an in-depth consideration of the history and implications of the Marais' transformation from *le Pletzl*, Paris' (Ashkenazi) Jewish quarter, into a gay village in *My Father and I: The Marais and the Queerness of Community* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

*Lycée Henri IV*, *Sciences Po*, and the *École nationale d'administration*, he began a career as a magistrate.<sup>85</sup> Before coming to terms with his sexual orientation, the narrator exemplifies a quintessential success story of the French model of integrating ethnic minorities; by the time he reaches adulthood, his cultural difference has become a purely private matter. His experiences in *haut bourgeois* French culture have taught him that the public display of cultural difference tends to inspire unease if not antipathy. He applies this lesson—at least initially—to his his burgeoning gay identity: "À Sciences-po déjà j'avais pris l'habitude de ne plus dire que j'étais juif. Ça m'évitait de voir cette grimace passer sur le visage des gens avant de se concrétiser en distance. Pour pédé il valait mieux faire pareil. Ne rien dire pour être accepté."<sup>86</sup>

The "gay ghetto," however, offers a space free from the ambient homophobia of French culture, a space essentially free from straightness *tout court*. The "straight" world can hardly even be said to exist for the protagonist. Dustan's narrator shows no interest in—and rarely even an awareness of—the broader French society; all that matters for him is the "ghetto." For instance, characters not either former or potential sex partners of the protagonist are virtually absent from the novels' action with the exception of a few (presumably straight) individuals that appear in passing only to serve instrumental purposes, such as a few doctors ("la doctoresse de Sos médecins,"<sup>87</sup> "ma doctoresse"<sup>88</sup>), a psychoanalyst ("le psy le plus proche"<sup>89</sup>), a waitress at a

---

<sup>85</sup> Oliver Davis, "Guillaume Dustan," *The Literary Encyclopedia*, June 11, 2008, <http://www.litencyc.com/php/people.php?rec=true&UID=11888>; Jean Birnbaum, "Guillaume Dustan, écrivain et éditeur gay," *Le Monde*, October 11, 2005, [http://www.lemonde.fr/disparitions/article/2005/10/11/guillaume-dustan-ecrivain-et-editeur-gay\\_698147\\_3382.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/disparitions/article/2005/10/11/guillaume-dustan-ecrivain-et-editeur-gay_698147_3382.html).

<sup>86</sup> Dustan, *Plus fort que moi*, in *Œuvres I*, 249.

<sup>87</sup> Dustan, *Dans ma chambre*, in *Œuvres I*, 69.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>89</sup> Dustan, *Plus fort que moi*, in *Œuvres I*, 321.

fast food restaurant ("la serveuse [du Quick]"<sup>90</sup>), a few policemen ("les flics"<sup>91</sup>), the first responders he calls following an ex's suicide attempt,<sup>92</sup> and the high school friends mentioned in *Plus fort que moi* he falls out of touch with once he "comes out." His only substantial interaction with his family consists of a weekend trip to Berlin at the invitation of his father. However, he all but stands his father up on the one days they plan to spend together by showing up late and exhausted to the point of complete enervation following a night (and morning) spent indulging in drugs, sex, dancing, that is to say doing exactly what he would have done had he stayed in Paris.<sup>93</sup> No matter where he goes, whether it be Berlin, Los Angeles, London, or even Tahiti, he never really leaves the "gay ghetto."

Only at one particular moment in his autofictional trilogy does Dustan's protagonist earnestly acknowledge his subculture's deviance from the mainstream. He is forced to leave the safety of the "ghetto" when an ex-boyfriend's suicide attempt requires him to seek emergency medical assistance. The impending trip to the hospital inspires a dramatic change in his frame of mind. When he calls for help, there is an abrupt shift in his register of language: "J'appelle les pompiers. . . . *Allo bonsoir monsieur j'ai quelqu'un chez moi qui vient de faire une tentative de suicide. . . . je n'ai pas de voiture, je ne peux pas l'emmener à l'Hôtel-Dieu*" (my italics).<sup>94</sup> As he waits, his anxiety is not over his ex's condition, but to how they will be perceived by the first responders: "On a l'air à peu près *normaux* quand les pompiers arrivent, enfin je pense"<sup>95</sup> (italics

---

<sup>90</sup> Dustan, *Je sors ce soir*, in *Œuvres I*, 155.

<sup>91</sup> Dustan, *Dans ma chambre*, in *Œuvres I*, 66.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>93</sup> Dustan, *Plus fort que moi*, in *Œuvres I*, 293–6.

<sup>94</sup> Dustan, *Dans ma chambre*, in *Œuvres I*, 106.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

mines). His efforts to feign "normality" (i.e. straightness) seemingly prove ineffective: "La surveillante, une brune solide, prend un air accusateur pour m'envoyer enregistrer 'mon ami.'"<sup>96</sup> Whether or not the nurse actually intended to convey any "accusatory" or pejorative implications—it is unclear—the protagonist nonetheless perceives her words and tone as stigmatizing. The episode confirms for the reader that the narrator's confidence vis-à-vis his sexuality is not a simple consequence of maturity; contact with (implicitly straight) authority is enough to strip him of his self-assurance. Yet, in another scene, the narrator not only has no problem kissing a friend on the lips in front of a group of policemen: "Et puis on se fait la bise sur la bouche juste devant les flics."<sup>97</sup> The nurse and the policemen are both wielders of institutional authority, but we can observe in the narrator's account of the two interactions that their differing locations have a major impact on his confidence. In other words, he is capable of confidently asserting his sexuality before agents of the state on the "home turf" of the Marais, but in the medical space of the ambulance and hospital, he is reduced to a state of debilitating self-consciousness that trumps even his concern for his friend's wellbeing.

By highlighting the painful experiences of stigma that can underlie obedience to the Republican universalist mandate to not ostentatiously express cultural difference, Dustan points to the unresolvable double bind faced by members of marginalized groups in France. One can face prejudice or discrimination based *specifically* on perceived belonging to a group. Yet, one is theoretically prohibited from—and in actual practice unlikely to be well received in—addressing group-based bias and inequity in proportionately specific terms. In France, public campaigns around questions of prejudice and discrimination are typically couched in the rhetoric of human

---

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 66.

(as opposed to group) rights.<sup>98</sup> What is more, despite the foundational incompatibility of French Republican universalism with *communautarisme*, it is ironically within the separatist, quasi-ethnic space of the "gay ghetto" that Dustan's narrator is able to most meaningfully realize the French ideals of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*. In other words, it is only by becoming a quintessentially "bad" citizen that he can actually make good on the promises of the French Republic. For instance, neither he nor any other characters so much as mention their gayness expressly in the rest of the trilogy, as the homogeneity of their particularistic microcosm simply makes it unnecessary. Though I have generally been using the term "gay ghetto" throughout this chapter for the sake of clarity, within the universally gay world of his novels, Dustan need only use the term "ghetto." The term "ghetto" itself is, of course, freighted with a host of historical and cultural resonances; it evokes various cases of persecution, forced segregation, and disenfranchisement of religious, socioeconomic, and racial groups throughout history. Given both Dustan's and the Marais' ties to Jewishness, the memory of the Shoah looms particularly heavily. Yet, it seems that the isolationist separatism of Dustan's "ghetto" is so complete as to insulate its inhabitants, for better or worse, from the memories of historical trauma.

The "ghetto" offers the promise of a haven for gay men who experience the larger culture as inhospitable or hostile, but it is far from a bastion of utopian inclusivity:

Au Boy à nouveau. Aucun problème pour rentrer. Je suis jeune. Suffisamment mignon. Les cheveux hyper-courts. Mon bomber vert tombe juste au-dessus de mon cul. Mon cul est hyper-ferme, rond, moulé, mais pas trop, dans un vieux 501. Je porte une chemise en

---

<sup>98</sup> Joan Wallach Scott explores this double bind, which she characterizes as a "paradox," in her historical analysis of modern French feminisms, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1996).

oxford à col boutonné bleu ciel pour ne pas être comme tout le monde, les manches  
roulées au-dessus du coude pour faire mec. . . . Moi je m'habillais dans les règles.<sup>99</sup>

Adhering to its unspoken rules, however, is an infinitely less daunting prospect than adhering to the norms of French society, which for the protagonist are closely connected to feelings of shame, self-abnegation, and unbelonging. The imperative to *faire mec*, to do the kind of masculinity privileged in his subculture, is itself too rooted in a logic and practice of exclusion (of, for one thing, femininity and effeminacy). Striving to achieve this obligation, however, is for the protagonist erotically bound up with his sense of agency; submission to constraints—as we can observe in his sadomasochistic sexual adventures—can be a source of great pleasure when one submits on one's own terms. Even the ageism that should ensure everyone's eventual retirement from the scene poses no problem for the protagonist, for, as he coolly remarks, "Jamais je ne vieillirai."<sup>100</sup> The (supposedly) universal seropositivity<sup>101</sup> of his social network means that he and his friends will ultimately be spared/deprived the experience of aging out of it. Within this closed universe, furthermore, they need not fear that their impending deaths will be marred by homophobic AIDS stigma; as should theoretically always be (yet is all too often not) the case according to French universalist ideals, AIDS-related deaths are in the "ghetto" mourned simply as deaths.

## Conclusion

Dustan's "ghetto" cannot be located on a map, but that is perhaps just as well, for not everyone is welcome. Somewhere between a geographical place and a collective frame of mind,

---

<sup>99</sup> Dustan, *Plus fort que moi*, in *Œuvres I*, 262.

<sup>100</sup> Dustan, *Je sors ce soir*, in *Œuvres I*, 174.

<sup>101</sup> "Il me dit Tu sais personne ne met plus de capotes . . . maintenant tout le monde est séropositif, je ne connais plus personne qui soit séronégatif." (Dustan, *Dans ma chambre*, in *Œuvres I*, 66.)

the "ghetto" is a space created for and through the pursuit of *gay* pleasure. As such, the gay "ghetto" is closed off psychically and often physically to the pernicious homophobia and heteronormativity of the broader French culture as much as to the disciplinary rhetoric of "safe sex" and the moralistic paternalism of those who seek to promote it in absolutist terms. The disidentification of the "frères du ghetto" with all that which would impede them in this primary, ceaseless pleasure-seeking is so unequivocal that they are said to occupy a "world" apart.

The subculture's head-in-the-sand stance vis-à-vis potentially injurious forces—the attitude for which Lestrade and Act Up-Paris so vehemently denounced Dustan as it pertained to HIV/AIDS—would seem to preclude the possibility of meaningful political engagement; after all, these men are supposedly in another "world," as it were. One will not find in Dustan's work the promise of (or even an expressed interest in) liberation, revolution, freedom, or justice, but his autofictional trilogy is nonetheless profoundly political in its vision of gay community.

Dustan's work is of political import in its implicit critique of the veiled normativity of universalism, but, also, in where it locates the site and object of the political. "Le monde merveilleux"<sup>102</sup> that is Dustan's gay "ghetto" flies defiantly in the face of the quintessentially French ideology of Republican universalism, which confines the expression of particularistic communitarian affiliation to the private sphere in the interest of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* for all. Dustan's novels expose how, for members of marginalized groups, fidelity to the norms of French Republican universalism can effectively impede rather than facilitate their realization. The gay "ghetto" is the very picture of the logic of *communautarisme* taken to its extreme, the partition of society and national space along subcultural lines. To add insult to injury, it is precisely by way of this spectacular failure to uphold the ideals of French Republicanism that the inhabitants of the "ghetto" are able to concretely manifest the liberty, equality, and fraternity that,

---

<sup>102</sup> Dustan, *Dans ma chambre*, in *Œuvres I*, 81.

within the larger culture, remain for them perpetually out of reach; as Hocquenghem and Wendy Delorme both compellingly argue,<sup>103</sup> certain particularities are in practice more readily assimilated to the universal than others. In this way, Dustan's work points to the hidden exclusions and hierarchies inherent to the way that the principle of universalism is translated and practiced in France. It does not, however, question the desirability of the French state's foundational Enlightenment ideals; it merely imagines a space, social topography, and model of citizenship in which these ideals are concretely accessible to Dustan and his "brothers." In other words, Dustan's Parisian "gay ghetto" models a (heretical) framework that divorces *liberté*, *égalité*, and *fraternité* from the discourse of universalism. Dustan's autofiction, as I have argued, is exceptional within the genre of French autofiction in its palpable resistance to any reading that would assimilate its highly particularistic, localized content to the level of universality.

Dustan does not, however, cast the gay "ghetto" as a space of unbridled freedom against the backdrop of an abjectly oppressive French society. Nor does Dustan's work so much as imply that French Republican universalism doesn't "work;" it simply doesn't work for *him*. Both the gay "ghetto" and French society at large demand adherence to their own particular norms of restraint and self-discipline in exchange for their own variants of *liberté*, *égalité*, and *fraternité*. Dustan's protagonist consistently experiences pain and conflict in his attempts to at once live out the principle of Republican universalism and accept and pursue (*assumer*) his sexual desire for other men (or publicly acknowledge his Jewishness, for that matter). The struggle to reconcile the publicly visible components of his sexual life and identity (such as going out in public with his romantic and sexual partners or sporting the trappings of his gay masculinity) with the social expectation to avoid "ostentatious" displays of cultural difference ultimately becomes too much

---

<sup>103</sup> See chapters one and four of this dissertation, respectively, for discussions of Guy Hocquenghem's and Wendy Delorme's theoretical and literary reflections on the exclusions that undergird French Republican sociability.

for him to withstand. It is for this reason that he emphatically decides to assume a subcultural form of gay identity.

Dustan's protagonist consciously decides to become "ghetto" when he comes to the conclusion that a way of life centered on sexual gratification is, for him, infinitely more appealing than one organized around the uncomfortable negotiation of French norms of respectability;<sup>104</sup> it is not a destiny to which he resigns himself. That Dustan consistently frames his narrator's identity as a chosen one—and, more than that, as an identity that requires significant effort to achieve and maintain—draws further attention to the rationality, another Enlightenment virtue, behind his renunciation of the dictates of Republican universalism. To physically reside within the geographical boundaries of Paris' gay village, participate in its social life, or simply be a man who has sex with other men is one thing; to proclaim oneself "très ghetto," that is to say to publicly pledge allegiance to a self-segregating form of gayness, is another entirely. The fixedness of the "gay ghetto" is not the fixity of essentialist conceptions of identity or place. The "gay ghetto" consists of a fluid, fragmentary patchwork of places that its "inhabitants" appropriate and invest with cultural meaning for and through their sexual expression, and the narrator-protagonist's quasi-ethnic gay community is constructed in every sense of the word. By focusing on the role of pedagogy and apprenticeship in Dustan's work, I have shown that virtually every aspect of "ghetto" culture and identity must be painstakingly learned and mastered; the cultural and physical homogeneity of its population is not preordained, but, rather, a consequence of its posture of extreme exclusivity. One achieves (or fails to achieve) this style of gayness. Even the bodies of these men are the products of regimented cultivation, whether it be through their workouts at the gym or strict adherence to an HIV combination

---

<sup>104</sup> See above discussion (on pages 37–39) of the way in which Dustan's allusion to Genet's *Pompes funèbres* frames the protagonist's decision to take on a subcultural gay identity as an act of treason vis-à-vis French norms of respectability for which he is fully willing to face the consequences.

therapy regimen. The narrator ultimately feels, however, that meeting the expectation to buy the proper clothes, affect masculinity adequately (*faire mec*), sculpt the right kind of body, and conform to a host of other subcultural norms is far more conducive to his personal quest for pleasure than endeavoring to meet those of French society at large.

It cannot be understated that the "ghetto" is, perhaps above all else, an affective space. It is the promise of positive affects like excitement, euphoria, passion, hope, and vitality that sutures the narrator and his "brothers" to one another. It is a contingent space in which a common devotion to an ethic of individual pleasure (somewhat paradoxically) gives rise to an unyielding feeling of togetherness and unity in which its inhabitants can take comfort. One might be tempted to read into Dustan's novels a vindication of American-style "identity politics" à la Act Up-Paris. However, as we can observe both in Dustan's literary work and his public battle with Act Up-Paris over barebacking, Dustan unambiguously privileges individual liberty over community solidarity; the community solidarity of the "gay ghetto" is ultimately a means to an end: personal satisfaction. The men of the "ghetto" show absolutely no interest in making claims for rights, for recognition, or even for the respect of their shared identity and culture; concern for such matters would require a posture of openness to the broader society. For Dustan, community solidarity is not a worthwhile pursuit in and of itself, and certainly not one for which one should be willing to abstain from self-indulgence (i.e. accede to Act Up-Paris' demand to refrain from unprotected sex). What propels the narrator to maintain his "ghetto" persona is the access it provides him to "un monde où plein de choses qu'[il] pensai[t] impossibles sont possibles."<sup>105</sup> He finds himself able to do, feel, and be incredible things that, for him, would be inconceivable within that of French identity.

---

<sup>105</sup> Dustan, *Dans ma chambre*, in *Œuvres I*, 84.

One may understandably question the reliability and rationality of a sense of purpose, security, and self firmly founded on pleasure, of all things. Pleasure—like all affects—is fleeting and complex. However, Dustan's narrator is a seropositive man keenly aware of his mortality who bears the weight of the entrenched homophobia and HIV stigma within and beyond "the gay community," and in a cultural and medical situation wherein one systematically experiences strains on one's bodily capacity and sense of worthiness to pursue one's desires, pleasure takes on an acutely political dimension. Dustan's ameliorative politics of the here and now ultimately make more sense to the narrator and his "frères du ghetto" than do idealistic politics of radical social transformation. They may not feel quite up—or have enough time—to take up the task of dismantling heterosexism once and for all, and isn't partying a lot more fun anyway?

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Much Too American (and Gay)! Wendy Delorme's Indecent Queer Feminism**

By day, Stéphanie Kunert is a senior lecturer in communication studies at *Université Lyon II*, but by night she becomes Parisian queer *performeuse* of stage and screen Wendy Delorme, star of neo-burlesque cabaret shows like the *Queer X Show Tour*, *Le cabaret des filles de joie*, *Kisses Cause Trouble*, and *Le drag king fem show* and of Émilie Jouvét's *One night stand* (2006),<sup>1</sup> a film billed as France's first queer lesbian transgender pornographic *long-métrage*.<sup>2</sup> Delorme, however, has since her emergence in the mid-2000s proved to be a remarkably multifaceted character; in addition to her performance art, Delorme is a novelist, translator, sex educator, pornographic actor, sex worker, and a feminist and queer activist. Delorme first appeared on the French scene as one of the leading figures of *Les tordu-e-s*,<sup>3</sup> a small, loosely organized radical queer activist collective formed in 2005 in protest of the heteronormativity and consumerism of mainstream LGBT culture and politics in France. Delorme's carefully crafted persona is provocative on many levels, but what has aroused the most interesting (if not unexpected) responses to Delorme and the ideas she embodies and expounds is their supposed foreignness. In recent years, "queer" and *la théorie du genre* have come to represent for many—across diverse segments of French society—glaring emblems and motors of globalization and American cultural imperialism. This chapter will consider what Wendy Delorme's brand of queer feminism and the reactions it has inspired have to say about the state of French sexual citizenship in an increasingly globalized world. More specifically, through a reading of both Delorme's

---

<sup>1</sup> Émilie Jouvét, *One night stand* (Hystérie Prod, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Émilie Jouvét, "One night stand," *Émilie Jouvét*, n.d., <http://www.emiliejouvét.com/one-night-stand>.

<sup>3</sup> For a historical look at *Les tordu-e-s* and the emergence, beginning in the late 1990s, of queer politics in France more broadly, see Bruno Perreau, *Queer Theory: The French Response* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2016), 75–112.

"trans-genre" work and the character "Wendy Delorme" as a site of confrontation between competing theories of sexuality, gender, and feminism, I argue that the queer feminism elaborated by Delorme is not the fundamentally anti- (or even un-)French American import that some of its critics make it out to be, but, rather, the product of a complex synthesis of a heterogeneous array of seemingly irreconcilable gay, lesbian, queer, and feminist perspectives that traverse national, generational, cultural, and linguistic borders. In order to fully grasp the import of Delorme's philosophical and creative enterprise, it is essential to consider the current intellectual and political landscape in France vis-à-vis queer theory.

### *Qu'est-ce que le gender ?*

In 2013, a momentous year for LGB civil rights in France for reasons I will discuss shortly, feminist literary critic and director of the *Centre d'études féminines et d'études de genre* Anne-Emmanuelle Berger published *Le grand théâtre du genre : identités, sexualités et féminisme en 'Amérique'*,<sup>4</sup> perhaps the first monograph to consider the transatlantic intellectual history of queer theories of gender, despite the conspicuous absence in the title of the word "queer." Its object of inquiry is plainly discernible, however, in the English translation's title: *The Queer Turn in Feminism: Identities, Sexualities, and the Theater of Gender*;<sup>5</sup> though the book argues for the American origin and character of queer gender theory, its main argument is that these American, queer accounts of gender are incompatible with—if not antagonistic to—feminism. For Berger, "the queer turn in feminism" has been a regrettable one.

---

<sup>4</sup> Anne-Emmanuelle Berger, *Le grand théâtre du genre: identités, sexualités et féminisme en "Amérique"* (Paris: Belin, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Anne-Emmanuelle Berger, *The Queer Turn in Feminism: Identities, Sexualities, and the Theater of Gender*, trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

Berger singles out Wendy Delorme in particular as a glaring manifestation of the growing influence in France of queer (post)feminist<sup>6</sup>—Berger affixes the prefix "post-" to feminisms that do not presuppose "woman" as the subject of feminism—thought. Based on a remarkably superficial reading of her work, Berger casts Delorme's political performance art as the arrival on the French stage of "the axiomatics of the 'gender theory' developed in the United States between the 1950s and the end of the twentieth century."<sup>7</sup> The hyper-feminine, drag-inflected, and overtly sexualized look and persona Delorme performs on stage draw upon a wide array of influences, including the aesthetic of the New Burlesque movement; the sex-positive principles and performance of feminist activist artists like Annie Sprinkle and Nina Hartley; and the camp, self-reflexive sensibility of drag queens as well as the performative theory of gender elaborated in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*<sup>8</sup> by way of an analysis of queens' parodic renditions of womanhood. Berger, however, reduces Delorme and her work to mere mimicry:

Wendy is . . . above all a perfect imitator of the American scene of 'gender trouble' from which she borrows her 'identity,' her language, her statements, in short all her theoretical and practical props. . . . Is Wendy Delorme 'subversive?' . . . I am not sure. . . . More or less intentionally, Wendy Delorme illustrates . . . this: the placement of questions of gender and sexuality on 'gay' terrain.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> In the preface, Berger glosses the terms "postfeminism" and "(post)feminism," qualifying as (post)feminist projects and thought still consistent with the overarching aims of feminism and as postfeminist those that repudiate any alliance with contemporary feminism (10–11). However, she goes on to essentially contradict herself in the final chapter by suggesting that virtually all (post)feminisms (i.e. queer/proto-queer feminisms) are in reality postfeminisms in that their alleged "turn" away from "macro-political" revolutionary politics to a Butlerian-Foucauldian-Deleuzian micropolitics of resistance renders them complicit with the (anti-feminist) forces of global capitalism (130). Berger points squarely to (post)feminist approaches to sex work in order to support this argument.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 11; In this chapter, I will be quoting from the English translation.

<sup>8</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Thinking Gender (New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 13–14.

Were Berger interested in offering a cogent analysis of Delorme's oeuvre, it would have served her to turn to the explanations of the inspirations and intentions for her art offered in Delorme's essays and autofiction; however, Berger's sole reference to her varied writings—which range from sex education manuals to novels and essays—is that a journalist once noted that Delorme's business cards bill her as a writer, for "she 'writes' as well."<sup>10</sup> It is evident, however, that Berger's portrait of Delorme is merely a prop—to borrow Berger's theatrical metaphors—to serve her characterization of queer critique as intellectually and politically impotent.

What interests me most about Berger's contemptuous dismissal of Delorme is its curiously territorial overtones. Berger effectively devotes the first chapter of the book to deriding Delorme for naively importing from the USA a paradigm of gender, sex, and sexuality that she argues to be irreparably deficient. Berger is determined to posit the foreign (i.e. American) provenance and nature of queer theory, gender studies, and even the very concept of gender to the point of committing what are at best egregious oversights and at worst unscrupulous omissions in her account of gender theory's history. For instance, Berger quite bafflingly cites the translation into French<sup>11</sup> of Joan Scott's iconic essay "Gender as a Useful Category of Historical Analysis"<sup>12</sup> by a group of female historians and its dissemination among French feminist academics in the late 80s as "the true foundation of 'gender studies' in France,"<sup>13</sup> in that it "defines gender as a 'primary way of signifying relationships of power,' and . . . calls for an

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>11</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, "Genre : une catégorie utile d'analyse historique," ed. Michèle Riot-Sarcey, Christine Planté, and Eleni Varikas, trans. Eleni Varikas, *Cahiers du GRIF*, no. 37–38 (1988): 125–53.

<sup>12</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender as a Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–75.

<sup>13</sup> Berger, *Queer Turn in Feminism*, 72.

elaboration of a theory of gender on the basis of this definition."<sup>14</sup> As we've seen,<sup>15</sup> materialist feminist scholars like Monique Wittig, Christine Delphy, and Colette Guillaumin were elaborating theories of gender as a marker of power relations, or to borrow Wittig's definition, as the "indice linguistique de l'opposition politique entre les sexes,"<sup>16</sup> in France and in French long before the publication, let alone translation, of Scott's essay.

In a commensurately territorial fashion, she understands Delorme to supposedly be following the American lead by allegedly "placing" matters of gender and sexuality in gay territory, a dubious claim she supports by arguing that the most notable exponents of American gender theory consists of a handful of lesbian (and lesbian-adjacent)<sup>17</sup> academics;<sup>18</sup> by pointing to the fact that it was specifically through his work with transgender and intersex children that pioneering sexologist John Money "invented"<sup>19</sup> the concept of gender roles in the 50s; and by dramatically mischaracterizing the extent and nature of the drag queen as "a major object of interest and an anchor point for 'American' gender theory."<sup>20</sup> The claim that American theorists have situated gender on gay "terrain" is a thoroughly unconvincing one for many obvious

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> See chapter two.

<sup>16</sup> Monique Wittig, "Avant-Note," in Djuna Barnes, *La Passion*, trans. Monique Wittig (Paris: Flammarion, 1982), 9.

<sup>17</sup> Berger asserts—based on no cited evidenced, for that matter—that even though the women she cites as the chief figures of the monolithic category of American gender theory do not all identify as lesbians, they are nonetheless "queer": "The principal theorists of gender in the United States (Gayle Rubin, Judith Butler, Teresa de Lauretis, Biddy Martin, among others) may not all be self-proclaimed lesbians (Judith Butler, for her part, manifests suspicion toward any label functioning as an assignment), but they have assumed their identity as queer persons" (15).

<sup>18</sup> Berger, *Queer Turn in Feminism*, 14.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 21.

reasons; beyond the fact that the sexual identities and relationship histories<sup>21</sup> of many eminent American exponents of queer theory are a crucial aspect of her argument and that she inexplicably classes transgender and intersex under the rubric of gayness, Berger above all fails to identify in any substantive way what, exactly, is "gay" about American gender theory.

In any case, it turns out that the "gayness" and "American-ness" of queer approaches to gender are for Berger far more interrelated than might appear at first glance. She makes it abundantly clear throughout that, for her, to be ostentatiously "gay" is always already to be ostentatiously American; what links American-ness and gayness for Berger's purposes is the matter of spectacle. Berger argues that the spectacular queer "politics of visibility"<sup>22</sup> that Delorme embodies can be best understood in terms of "American political, cultural, and intellectual history"<sup>23</sup> and that the queer "theatrical," performative paradigm of gender, which Berger construes as the notion that gender belongs solely to the realm of culture and representation, is extremely limited in its actual feminist political potential by virtue of its literal superficiality and can even unwittingly promote gendered oppression insofar as it blindly over-romanticizes the transgression of gender norms; the final chapter offers an extended critique of queer pro-sex work feminists' allegedly perilously misguided "'heroizing' of the prostitute figure"<sup>24</sup> as a site of gender trouble. Ultimately, though Berger does not frame it thusly, her critique of Delorme's emphatically visible queerness as un-French draws upon the idea that the public display of identitarian affiliation is anathema to Republican norms of universalism.

---

<sup>21</sup> Berger implies that the first half of Wendy Delorme's pseudonym is intended as a sign of devotion to Judith Butler, for "as our *performeuse* surely knows, Wendy [Brown] is . . . the name of Judith Butler's life partner" (12).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 137.

This begs the question: what, precisely, for Berger—if not "gayness"—is the appropriate conceptual terrain for the theorization of gender? Is it that of feminism? Is it "neutral" ground in the French Republican universalist sense, that is to say wholly unmarked by identitarian particularity, whatever that might mean? In a monograph published less than a year before Berger's, French feminist philosopher Sylviane Agacinski rejects outright the queer critique of *la différence sexuelle* in the names of both feminism *and* universalism. Agacinski, like Berger, continually stresses the supposedly foreign, un-French nature of the concept of gender, reminding us that the French term *genre* is only roughly equivalent to the English word "gender;"<sup>25</sup> "gender," Agacinski implies, verges on both linguistic and cultural untranslatability when it comes to the French context.<sup>26</sup> She goes so far as to liken all those who would question the facticity of a gender binary grounded in biological sexual difference to evolution denialists in their foolish lack of good sense, a comparison that metonymically gestures toward American folly.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, whereas Berger forgets—whether intentionally or not—the French constructivist analyses of gender advanced more than a decade before the emergence of queer theory in the U.S. by materialist feminists, Agacinski identifies their work, singling out Wittig in particular, as forerunners of queer theory. In any case, as is evident in Agacinski's comically reductive sketch of queer theory and (mis)reading of Wittig's iconic dictum, Agacinski's chief point of contention with queer accounts of gender is essentially the same as Berger's:

Certaines Américaines, héritières de théoriciennes françaises comme Monique Wittig, contestent aujourd'hui l'existence même des deux sexes . . . et revendiquent une autre appartenance et un autre nom en affirmant : « Les lesbiennes ne sont pas des femmes. »

---

<sup>25</sup> Sylviane Agacinski, *Femmes : entre sexe et genre* (Paris: Seuil, 2012), 7.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 55–56.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

*L'identité ne tiendrait pas au sexe mais à la sexualité* : les pratiques sexuelles

produiraient des « genres » subversifs prenant la relève des sexes (emphasis mine).<sup>28</sup>

Agacinski opposes queer constructivist accounts of gender for supposedly situating gender identity within the purview of (homo)sexuality. She understands queer theorists to be attempting to radically wrest gender away from biological sex and link it instead to sexual object choice and identity. For her, in its irrational denial of the universal truth of *la différence sexuelle*, queer analysis effectively dissolves "woman" as a unified, stable category by severing it from its natural foundations and, in so doing, a constructivist theory of gender fundamentally subverts the project of feminism: "Si l'on ne tient pas compte de la différence sexuelle . . . les femmes n'ont rien en commun, comme le soutient Judith Butler, [et] le féminisme n'a plus de sens. Cette position n'est pas l'expression d'un « féminisme subversif », mais celle d'une *subversion du féminisme* (emphasis in the original)."<sup>29</sup> Agacinski—it should be clear—grossly mischaracterizes Butler's work as much as she does Wittig's, reducing the political dimension of queer theory to an ill-considered overestimation of the subversive potential of deviant sexuality. As far as Agacinski and Berger are concerned, the joint (homo)sexualization and Americanization of gender represented by queer theory amounts to a much unwelcome trespass on feminist territory.

Sociologist Éric Fassin, in his 2005 preface to the (notoriously late) French translation of *Gender Trouble*, criticizes a certain French differentialist feminist reaction in the vein of Berger's and Agacinski's to Butler's work and queer theory—their French detractors tend to reduce the former to the latter. Fassin notes that a major trend among French feminist critics of queer theory is the assumption that it is intrinsically incompatible with feminist approaches to gender, and, therefore, with feminist political praxis. Such interpretations, Fassin argues, fail to appreciate the

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 10.

feminist underpinnings of Butler's project: "[Cette lecture] reviendrait à occulter le féminisme de cette entreprise, comme si la remise en cause des identités que résume le mot *queer* devait nécessairement reléguer dans quelque préhistoire politique le mouvement des femmes—comme si la question gaie et lesbienne devait dépasser la question féministe."<sup>30</sup>

French feminist opposition to LGBT and queer gender politics is not a recent phenomenon. One of the chief methods of the French feminist campaign that culminated in the passage of the 2000 *parité* law, which introduced a quota system promoting equality between men and women in terms of political representation, and of which Agacinski was a leading voice, was to argue that sexual difference was a different kind of difference, so to speak, in its universality; essential for procreation, male/female sexual difference is, for pro-parity feminists, the driving force and organizing principle of the heterosexual family unit—the foundation that structures all social and psychic life. As Joan Scott explains, the enactment of *parité* effectively reconceived "anatomical duality" as an essential feature of the abstract Republican subject; because sexual difference is a uniquely universal difference, cutting across all racial, class, and religious differences, *paritaristes* argued that the universalist promise of equality demands the political recognition of sexual difference.<sup>31</sup> Debate over *parité* was concurrent with that leading up to the 1999 introduction of the *PACS*,<sup>32</sup> a civil union contract open to two people regardless of gender, and many pro-parity feminists (including Agacinski<sup>33</sup> and Françoise Héritier<sup>34</sup>)

---

<sup>30</sup> Éric Fassin, "Préface à l'édition française (2005) : Trouble-genre," in *Trouble dans le genre (Gender Trouble) : le féminisme et la subversion de l'identité*, by Judith Butler, trans. Cynthia Kraus (Paris: Découverte, 2012), 8.

<sup>31</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Parité!: Sexual Equality and the Crisis of French Universalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 109.

<sup>32</sup> The French gender-neutral civil union is called the *Pacte civil de solidarité*.

<sup>33</sup> See notably Sylviane Agacinski, *Politique des sexes : précède de mise au point sur la mixité* (Paris: Seuil, 2011).

positioned their demands for the recognition of sexual difference in political representation against those of gay and lesbian campaigners, whose demands for political recognition in spite of their (homo)sexual difference constituted, for them, a negative "erasure of difference"<sup>35</sup> that, along with transgender, threatened the symbolic order.<sup>36</sup>

Though there remains much to say about feminist responses to the emergence of queer theory in France, what I would like to highlight, above all, before proceeding is that the nationalistic overtones of Berger's and Agacinski's critiques of queer theory as a "lavender menace"<sup>37</sup> of sorts mirrors the convergence of homophobic and nationalistic fervor in the recent *right-wing* mobilization against same-sex marriage. This is not to suggest, however, that Berger's or Agacinski's rhetoric is anti-gay (i.e. condemnatory of homosexuality as such), per se, but it certainly taps into homophobic misgivings about the threat posed by allegedly un-French models of LGBT identity and community. In other words, the sentiments expressed by feminist critics like Berger and Agacinski are more anti-Gay than anti-gay; their fundamental contention with "queer" is not on the basis of homosexuality, but the ideological and political implications of "American-style" manifestations of homosexuality. It is precisely this anti-Gayness that aligns their work de facto with the rhetoric of French religious and social conservative opponents of marriage equality. In the months leading up to the passage of the historic 2013 marriage bill—

---

<sup>34</sup> See Françoise Héritier, *Masculin/féminin: la pensée de la différence* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1996); Héritier, "Ne laissons pas la critique du PaCS à la droite !," *Le Monde*, January 27, 1999; and Héritier, "Aucune société n'admet de parenté homosexuelle," *La Croix*, November 1998.

<sup>35</sup> Sylviane Agacinski, "Contre l'effacement des sexes," *Le Monde*, February 6, 1999

<sup>36</sup> For an excellent discussion of opposition in France to same-sex rights—feminist and otherwise—in the name of the Republican universalism's foundational "familialism," see Camille Robcis, *The Law of Kinship: Anthropology, Psychoanalysis, and the Family in France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 213–61.

<sup>37</sup> The expression "lavender menace," first used by Betty Friedan while president of the National Organization for Women in 1969, originated as a negative euphemism for lesbianism (though it was later reclaimed by lesbian feminists). Friedan warned that mere association with lesbianism, let alone the full inclusion in feminist political activism of lesbians and lesbian issues, posed a threat to the nascent American women's movement.

known most commonly in France under the quintessentially Republican universalist name "le mariage pour tous" (although many of its opponents favored the name "la loi Taubira," which functioned for some as a racist dog-whistle)<sup>38</sup>—there were mass demonstrations across France in resistance not only to same-sex marriage, but to all that would threaten the integrity of the traditional family and the "symbolic order," notably the invasion of *la théorie du genre*, a catch-all term used by its critics (including Berger)<sup>39</sup> to refer monolithically to American queer theory. The *Manif pour tous* campaigners, Bruno Perreau argues, see so-called "gender theory" as "queer propaganda that will not only pervert young people but also destroy the French nation itself. Whether through marriage, parenthood, or school, they dread the possibility that lesbians and gay men may find a way to literally reproduce themselves."<sup>40</sup> One of Perreau's theses is that "the French notion of an American invasion is a fantasy expressing the fear of the propagation of homosexuality,"<sup>41</sup> and, more specifically, of an identitarian-communitarian model of homosexuality fundamentally at odds with prevailing norms of French national identity.

Accordingly, since the passage of same-sex marriage, the coalition of groups making up the *Manif pour tous* movement, which has lived on (albeit on a much smaller scale), have reoriented their attention to issues like LGBT parenting and the legalization of surrogacy in

---

<sup>38</sup> Bill 344, officially called "L'ouverture du mariage aux couples de personnes de même sexe," was introduced by justice minister Christiane Taubira. Taubira, who hails from the overseas department of French Guiana and who is black, personally bore the brunt of the outrage of the unsuccessful *Manif pour tous* partisans and was the target of much racist abuse. Notably, at one demonstration in Angers, the children of proud, on-looking middle-class parents taunted Taubira with banana peels amid the monkey-themed racial slur-laden chants and jeers of protestors. The use by racist, xenophobic campaigners of the appellation "la Loi Taubira" implicitly cast the marriage equality bill as somehow foreign or "other," as opposed to the highly universalist, quintessential name "le mariage pour tous." For more on the attacks against Taubira amidst the debate over and passage of same-sex marriage see Bruno Perreau, *Queer Theory: The French Response* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 59–65.

<sup>39</sup> In *The Queer Turn in Feminism*, Berger frequently uses this same dubious term to refer, in the singular, to American queer discourses on gender.

<sup>40</sup> Bruno Perreau, *Queer Theory: The French Response* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 2.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

addition to continuing their mission to protect children from the American scourge of "gender theory." A 2014 post on the Catholic political blog *Le Salon beige* denouncing the Ministry of National Education's inclusion of an anti-sexist children's book in its curriculum, for instance, inspired a concise response in the comment section emblematic of the *Manif pour tous*' blend of nationalism and homophobia in words that could have been lifted straight from the pages of Berger's *The Queer Turn in Feminism* albeit the otherwise divergent political commitments of Berger and Catholic traditionalist *Manif pour tous* campaigners: "Ce 'genre' d'ouvrages est le produit des théories mises au point par des universitaires lesbiennes californiennes."<sup>42</sup>

As the brief overview above illustrates,<sup>43</sup> recent political, academic, journalistic, religious, and legal discourses around LGBT matters in France are rife with evidence of a pervasive conjunction between anxieties vis-à-vis the threat posed to Frenchness by cultural imperialism and homophobic fears over the vulnerability of the French nation to the contagion of queer communitarianism observable among opponents to marriage equality of diverse ideological stripes—from Catholic internet conspiracy theorists to distinguished feminist scholars. Furthermore, this "anti-Gay" (let alone anti-queer) nationalistic, Republican universalist stance toward homosexuality is not unique to *straight* French citizens (and relatively marginal gay figures à la Frédéric Martel<sup>44</sup>), and a rapidly growing number of French gay and lesbians are suggesting as much at the ballot box. According to a recent study, married gays and lesbians voted in significantly greater proportion for the nationalist far-right *Front national*, the political

---

<sup>42</sup> Louise Tudy, "Le Livre Polémique : Que Font Les Petits Garçons ? En Images," *Le Salon Beige*, September 18, 2014, [http://lesalonbeige.blogs.com/my\\_weblog/2014/09/le-livre-pol%C3%A9mique-que-font-les-petits-gar%C3%A7ons-en-images.html](http://lesalonbeige.blogs.com/my_weblog/2014/09/le-livre-pol%C3%A9mique-que-font-les-petits-gar%C3%A7ons-en-images.html).

<sup>43</sup> For an incisive, comprehensive look into the nationalistic ethos at the heart of French antipathy toward LGBT marriage rights and queer theory, see Bruno Perreau's *Queer Theory: The French Response* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2016).

<sup>44</sup> See my discussion in the introduction of the controversy surrounding *Le rose et le noir*, Martel's highly Republican universalist (and for many revisionist) take on the history of French gay activism.

party most closely (if unofficially) aligned with the *Manif pour tous* movement, in the first round of the 2015 regional elections than their straight married counterparts,<sup>45</sup> with nearly a third (32.45%) voting for the FN.<sup>46</sup> The (recent)<sup>47</sup> party line on homosexuality of the *Front National* is thoroughly Republican in its universalist brand of inclusivity; in Marine Le Pen's words, "Qu'on soit homme ou femme, hétérosexuel ou homosexuel, chrétien, juif, musulman, on est d'abord français !" <sup>48</sup> With marriage equality now the law of the land, a rising tide of homonationalism is seeing French gays and lesbians—as HIV/AIDS activist Didier Lestrade<sup>49</sup> argues and laments—come to view their sexual orientation as politically inconsequential yet at the same time be persuaded by Islamophobic rhetoric positing the alleged culturally and religiously ingrained, fundamentally "un-French" homophobia of would-be Arab and Muslim immigrants as justification for radically restrictive immigration policy.<sup>50</sup>

## **We Are Family: Queer(ing) Kinship**

I have dwelled on the recent convergence in France between differentialist feminist, social conservative, and gay opposition to queer theoretical and political agendas on nationalistic and Republican universalist grounds in order to map the context from which Delorme's work emerges and to which it implicitly responds. Many opponents of *la théorie du genre*, as we've

---

<sup>45</sup> 28.98% of voters in opposite-sex marriages voted for the FN as compared to 32.45% voters in same-sex marriages.

<sup>46</sup> Sylvain Brouard, "Orientation Sexuelle et Action Publique : Les bénéficiaires du mariage pour tous votent-ils plus à gauche ?," *CEVIPOF : L'enquête électorale française : comprendre 2017*, February 2016.

<sup>47</sup> The National Front, under Jean-Marie Le Pen, was explicitly homophobic in its rhetoric. Jean-Marie Le Pen notoriously declared that people living with HIV/AIDS should be sent to "sidatoriums."

<sup>48</sup> Marine Le Pen, "Discours à la fête de Jeanne d'Arc" (Paris, May 1, 2011).

<sup>49</sup> For more on Didier Lestrade, see chapter three.

<sup>50</sup> Didier Lestrade, *Pourquoi les gays sont passés à droite* (Paris: Seuil, 2012).

seen, frame queer as a foreign threat to the very foundations of French society. In this section, I will demonstrate how Delorme's work sheds light on and politicizes the transatlantic, bridge-building character of queer theory and culture.

Delorme's autofictional debut novel, *Quatrième génération* (2007),<sup>51</sup> follows the twenty-something narrator as she shuttles between Paris and San Francisco. Her border crossing is not merely geographical—much of the novel's tension centers on the narrator's navigation of a complex web of French and American lesbian, queer, feminist, and straight spaces and (cultural and linguistic) grammars. Finding her way in the world is therefore by no means a simple feat, and the theme of disorientation runs through the entire novel.

*Quatrième génération* opens and closes with the narrator pondering her place within her family of origin, the community toward which her sense of belonging is most ambivalent. The framing of the novel around the narrator's fraught familial relations takes on a particular significance when read in the light of the novel's Frenchness. As I have underscored above (and throughout this dissertation more generally), a preoccupation with kinship and the reproductive heterosexual family unit is an ideological cornerstone of French political culture; modern French Republicanism is grounded in a conception of the family as the universal social institution on which society is founded.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, *la théorie du genre* has been constituted by French opponents as a "queer and present danger" to "the family" and—by proxy—the Nation insofar as it calls into question the putative facticity and universality of *la différence sexuelle*. However, Delorme's fiction offers a total inversion of this dynamic; in *Quatrième génération*, rather than a threat to the survival of the family, queerness play a *reparative* function vis-à-vis the integrity of

---

<sup>51</sup> Wendy Delorme, *Quatrième génération* (Paris: Grasset, 2007).

<sup>52</sup> This is the central thesis of Camille Robcis' *The Law of Kinship: Anthropology, Psychoanalysis, and the Family in France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

the narrator's family. It is queer knowledge and experiences that allow the narrator to reevaluate (and ultimately salvage) her relationship to a family that has long been eroded from within due to past traumas and to psychologically reintegrate herself within it.

She begins the novel estranged—both physically and emotionally—from most of her living relatives, but she nonetheless maintains a strong albeit troubled sense of affiliation to the women of her family. She sees herself as part of a lineage of "madwomen" beginning with a great-grandmother who spent the final years of her life institutionalized against her will in a psychiatric hospital following a lobotomy. From suicidal ideation to "deviant" sexuality—the narrator considers her divorcée mother a nymphomaniac and her sister takes her life shortly after moving in with her in Paris—the women of her family have all been *folle*. However, by the end of the narrator's long, transatlantic journey of discovery and self-fashioning—a process occasioned and colored by the sexual orientation that initially alienates her from her parents—she comes to see her family in a new light: "Je suis de la quatrième génération. . . . Quatre générations pour se refaire une idée de c'est quoi le monde. . . . que chacun de nos orgasmes c'est un défi lancé à la face du monde."<sup>53</sup> Through the queer feminist lens she cultivates throughout the the novel, she is able to literally come to terms with what she has vaguely suspected all along: that the madness suffered by the women of her family is not the manifestation of some genetic destiny, but, rather, the consequence of the sexual violence, domestic abuse, rigid gender norms, and other tribulations they've faced as women under a heteronormative, patriarchal culture. She grapples with this generations-long legacy of gendered, sexualized trauma by reconceiving of it as that which has set her on the path to understanding the intertwining social ills of sexism and heterosexism and to ultimately doing justice to her foremothers' suffering by claiming feminist agency. Delorme's narrator's transatlantic queer explorations of her sexuality

---

<sup>53</sup> Delorme, *Quatrième génération*, 321.

and gender are in this sense as much about breaking with the oppressive heteronorms as it is about finding a way to rehabilitate her profoundly tenuous familial bonds and rectifying her intimately related sense of existential disorientation.

The notion of deploying sexual pleasure as "un défi lancé à la face du monde" calls to mind the (homo)sexual liberationist political agenda of Guy Hocquenghem and the FHAR, but there is also a comparison to be made here with the work of Guillaume Dustan. There are clear parallels between Delorme's autofiction and that of Guillaume Dustan;<sup>54</sup> both Delorme and Dustan offer quasi-ethnographic, auto-pornographic, and at times didactic looks into their respective sexual subcultures. Dustan's and Delorme's autofictions shed light on the intense emotional and political charge that animates the sexual and gender play that suture their respective communities. However, the similarities effectively end there; juxtaposing the former's oeuvre with the latter's throws into stark relief the radical divergences between the gay "ghetto" paradigm represented in Dustan's work and the queer paradigm expounded in Delorme's. Whereas Dustan's "monde merveilleux"<sup>55</sup>—a gay world marvelous insofar as its denizens, Dustan's Parisian "frères du ghetto,"<sup>56</sup> are closed off to the straight world—is bounded by an exclusive, almost tribalistic communitarian ethic and its strictly policed standard of masculinity, the Delormian queer vision of the world is far less rigidly organized. The multiplicity of community attachments negotiated by Delorme's protagonist makes for a far more fluid sense of belonging(s). For instance, she feels as much at home in and fluent in the distinct mores and sensibilities of sex-positive feminist performance circles and queer sex worker communities in San Francisco as she does in Paris' LGBT activist spaces and largely anti-butch/femme lesbian

---

<sup>54</sup> See chapter three.

<sup>55</sup> Guillaume Dustan, *Dans ma chambre*, in *Œuvres I : Dans ma chambre - Je sors ce soir - Plus fort que moi*, ed. Thomas Clerc, vol. 1 (Paris: P.O.L., 2013), 81.

<sup>56</sup> Dustan, *Je sors ce soir*, in *Œuvres I*, 152.

bar scene. Despite her transatlantic lifestyle, however, the narrator's way of life is by no means cosmopolitan, strictly speaking, for she is not a "citizen of the world;" her transcultural meanderings give rise to an experience of the world as fragmented and incoherent. She leans into this sense of disorientation and—with various elements of subcultural knowledge that she amasses—assembles a hybrid cultural world distinct from the sum of its heterogeneous parts.

Delorme's queerness, furthermore, is not "American" even if Delorme's narrator initially experiences the concept of queerness as an import from the United States. She is introduced to "queer" by a French trans boyfriend freshly returned from San Francisco after top surgery:

Comme je vivais en France à l'époque je n'avais eu jusque-là que les mots homosexuelle, lesbienne ou gouine pour me coller une étiquette identitaire, mais Diego revenait tout juste de San Francisco où il s'était fait faire sa mastectomie, et il avait ramené plein de mots qu'on n'a pas en français : Queer, Fem, Fisting, Polyamorie... j'assimile assez vite tout nouveau vocabulaire et celui-ci, je l'ai adopté.<sup>57</sup>

Diego brings back to France, as one would a souvenir, a hodgepodge of queer language that the narrator takes up with delight. The sudden availability of new, English words with which to identify herself and her sexual practices leaves her with an acute sense of the limitations of her mother tongue and -land. However, it is not the French language or "Frenchness" themselves that are limiting per se, but, rather, the perceived insularity of French culture vis-à-vis the globalization of sexual identity discourse. The idea that one can "se coller une étiquette identitaire" makes for a cumbersome phrase in (continental) French, and the concept of "labeling oneself" as a way of assuming an identity flies in the face of the French Republican conception of identity as a private affair. Yet, as far as Delorme is concerned, the relative poverty of the French language in terms of sexuality and gender "labels" does not necessarily mean that French

---

<sup>57</sup> Delorme, *Quatrième génération*, 22.

"lesbians," "dykes," and "homosexual women" unfamiliar with queer argot are somehow less politically or sexually sophisticated or even less *queer* than their counterparts across the pond.

The narrator perceives her gender and sexuality to have been queer *avant la lettre*. When we look closely at the passage above, we see that she does not simply adopt a San Franciscan style of doing gender and sexuality (or at the very least understand herself to be doing so); she takes up a San Franciscan queer vocabulary to *reassess* her gender and sexuality. For instance, Diego informs her that she is (already) a *fem*: "C'est [Diego] qui m'a dit le premier que je suis une fem."<sup>58</sup> The nuance here is important. Delorme's narrator is not a "perfect imitator of the American scene . . . from which she borrows her 'identity,' her language, her statements, in short all her theoretical and practical props;"<sup>59</sup> what she acquires above all from the American scene is less a queer dialect or style than an enhanced political consciousness of her gender and sexuality. By peppering her prose with English-language words like "sex work," "butch," and "tranny" as opposed to using readily available French equivalents—the French terms "travail du sexe" and "trav(elo)," for example, are virtually synonymous with "sex work" and "tranny"—or venturing her own translations, Delorme is not suggesting that the French language cannot accommodate such ideas. On the contrary, outside of her fiction, Delorme has been in the vanguard of queer linguistic innovation in French; for the purposes of activism since her days with *Les tordu-e-s*, Delorme prefers the term *transpédégouine*—a combination of the words for "trans," "faggot," and "dyke"—in lieu of the term "queer" when she addresses a predominantly French public because of its "abrasive[ness]"<sup>60</sup> to francophone ears, for it reproduces the strategy of reappropriating pejorative epithets underlying the usage of "queer" as a political construct in the

---

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>59</sup> Berger, *The Queer Turn in Feminism*, 13–14.

<sup>60</sup> Perreau, *Queer Theory: The French Response*, 105.

first place. Delorme's use of American queer argot in her novels serves to draw attention to the global(ized), diasporic dimensions of contemporary LGBTQ and feminist cultures and politics.

The sense of novelty with a touch of déjà vu that marks the narrator's horizon-broadening encounter with "queer" mirrors, to some extent, the historical trajectory of queerness in France. It is problematic to characterize the emergence of queer theory in France—as its French opponents have—as one of reception. Much queer theory, of course, draws upon French sources (e.g. Foucault, Wittig, "French Feminism"), and, as we've seen in the previous chapters, the various activist movements that inspired queer theory (i.e. HIV/AIDS activism, Gay Liberation, lesbian and materialist feminisms) were transnational. Furthermore, as Perreau has noted, "queer" was making its way through French activist circles in the early 90s as an umbrella term for non-normative sexual practices and identities more or less interchangeable with the word "gay."<sup>61</sup> "Queer" first emerged in the French public sphere as a critical posture toward the sexual and gender normativity of dominant straight and LGBT cultures alike with the creation by sociologist and activist Marie-Hélène/Sam Bourcier in 1996 of the Zoo collective, a short-lived group which organized seminars on queer theory and culture. Bourcier, who first encountered queer theory by coming across a copy of *Gender Trouble* in a bookshop in London in 1995, organized the Zoo with the intention to "*queeriser* et de politiser les savoirs français via un activisme culturel qui redonnait son sens sociologique et politique à la culture avec un grand 'C' à la française."<sup>62</sup> At the core of the "queer made in France"<sup>63</sup> elaborated in Bourcier's *Queer zones* trilogy<sup>64</sup>—some of the

---

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 81–82.

<sup>62</sup> Bernard Andrieu, "Entretien avec Marie-Hélène Bourcier," *Corps* 1, no. 4 (2008): 6.

<sup>63</sup> I borrow this term from Bourcier. See Bourcier, "*Queer made in France* à la fin des années 1990," in *Queer zones 3: identités, cultures et politiques* (Paris: Amsterdam, 2011), 294–97.

very first self-described works of queer theory in French—is the idea that queer critique should first and foremost be concerned with fashioning theoretical tools for embodied resistance to normativity; queer theory should never lose sight of its activist underpinnings. Queer emerges in France shaped largely in response to the perceived depoliticizing, elitist academicism of American queer interpretations of French thinkers. Bourcier is vocal in his denunciation of the so-called second wave of American queer theory, singling out the work of Judith Butler—who he describes as its reigning "queen"<sup>65</sup>—following *Bodies That Matter* (1993),<sup>66</sup> for misappropriating French thought in the pursuit of intellectual prestige at the expense of the militant dimension of queer critique, an allegation with strong echoes to French materialist feminist Christine Delphy's scathing rejection of the American invention of "French Feminism."<sup>67</sup>

After the resexualization and repoliticization of French post-structuralist philosophers or psychoanalysts such as Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida and Lacan, which allowed American queer theory and cultural studies as it were to 'drag up' French Theory, we were presented with the spectacle of American theorists craving for the privilege of being crowned as philosophers or public intellectuals in the old French style.<sup>68</sup>

Bourcier's queer critique effectively (and counter-intuitively) taps into the same quasi-nationalistic territorialism as France's most vocal opponents of queer theory, who cast the

---

<sup>64</sup> Marie-Hélène [Sam] Bourcier, *Queer zones: politiques des identités sexuelles, des représentations et des savoirs* (Paris: Balland, 2001); Bourcier, *Queer zones 2 : sexpolitiques* (Paris: La fabrique, 2005); Bourcier, *Queer zones 3 : identités, cultures et politiques* (Paris: Amsterdam, 2011).

<sup>65</sup> Bourcier, *Queer zones*, 176.

<sup>66</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>67</sup> See chapter two.

<sup>68</sup> Marie-Hélène [Sam] Bourcier, "Cultural Translation, Politics of Disempowerment and the Reinvention of Queer Power and Politics," *Sexualities* 15, no. 1 (January 2012): 94.

phenomenon of *la théorie du genre* as American cultural imperialism at its most insidious. However, while *la Manif pour tous* and Anne-Emmanuelle Berger see queer theory as a foreign menace, Bourcier characterizes American queer theory as a product of cultural appropriation. In other words, Bourcier argues both that queer theory was always already French<sup>69</sup> and that the proper site of queer critique is not the proverbial ivory tower of elite American academic institutions, but, rather, the public arena.<sup>70</sup> Lucille Cairns argues that French queer theory "falls prey to an anti-Americanism that is perhaps more common there than in other European countries."<sup>71</sup> As is evident in Bourcier's homegrown queer theory, French queer critics tend to portray their predecessors from across the pond as agents of the very (American) cultural hegemony that queer critique seeks to disrupt in the first place. Given the profound suspicions vis-à-vis American imperialism primordial in much French queer theory, it is significant that Delorme offers an unambiguously rosy portrait of the transnational dynamics of queerness. The absence of any trace of the Franco-American tensions that shape in no small way the emergence of queer theory "made in France" in her autofictional staging of the transatlantic migration of "queer" should be read as a political gesture reflective of Delorme's overarching project of building bridges between different and sometimes opposing political and philosophical vantages in hopes of assembling a more comprehensive resistance to patriarchal heteronormativity, a crucial dimension of Delorme's work I will return to later in this chapter.

---

<sup>69</sup> Bourcier argues that "cerner l'apparition de la théorie et des politiques queer, même aux États-Unis où l'on peut avoir la fausse impression que 'c'est là que tout a commencé' n'est pas aisée. La théorie queer ne dispose que de référents récalcitrants." See Bourcier, *Queer Zones*, 176.

<sup>70</sup> Lisa Downing remarks that one of Bourcier's principal "strategies" of her queer critique "is to trace the kind of international, inter-cultural history of queer . . . with the specific aim of reclaiming the French origins of queer." See Downing, "Interdisciplinarity, Cultural Studies, Queer: Historical Contexts and Contemporary Contentions in France," *Paragraph* 35, no. 2 (July 2012): 227.

<sup>71</sup> Lucille Cairns, "Queer, Republican France, and Its Euro-American 'Others,'" in *What's Queer About Europe? Productive Encounters and Re-Enchanting Paradigms*, ed. Mireille Rosello and Sudeep Dasgupta (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 92.

It is, ironically, precisely by refusing to partake in the anti-American hostility in the vein of Bourcier that Delorme's work performs the primary task Bourcier sets for French queer critics: "French queer [takes] up the tool of identity politics in order to fight a form of republicanism and universalism which, supposedly inclusive, egalitarian and neutral, effectively excludes minorities."<sup>72</sup> Transatlantic travel as a plot device in *Quatrième génération* sets the stage for the novel's critique of the insidious, hypocritical sexual and gender conservatism built into and perpetuated by French Republican universalism. This is most clearly illustrated when the narrator goes to the airport to pick up Leo, her transgender San Franciscan boyfriend, who has come to Paris for a visit. The disapproving gaze of an onlooker instantly mars their first moments together on French soil. When the narrator accidentally knocks over her luggage cart in her excitement to welcome Leo with a kiss, "Un père de famille se plante devant nous très sérieux, sûr de lui : « Il faut vous comporter comme il faut ici, vous êtes en France. »"<sup>73</sup> The implied meaning of the paterfamilias' vague, presumptuous admonition regarding French standards of decorum is ostensibly that their public display of affection is unacceptably indiscreet for French standards, even in the "city of love." The man is furthermore operating under the incorrect assumption that anyone willing to shamelessly indulge in such a kiss could not possibly be French, for any self-respecting French person would surely know that the ostentatious display of "difference" is patently taboo in France; Delorme must be American! However, Leo is soon to learn that the task of comporting oneself properly in France (i.e. being unobtrusive with one's queerness) will not be as easily achievable for him as the man's disdainful interjection suggests.

As she and Leo make their way to her apartment in the Barbès neighborhood in northern Paris—a historically working-class area largely populated by recent immigrants, located at a

---

<sup>72</sup> Bourcier, "Cultural Translation, Politics of Disempowerment and the Reinvention of Queer Politics," 96.

<sup>73</sup> Delorme, *Quatrième génération*, 170.

considerable geographic and cultural remove from the "gay ghetto" of the Marais—they are met with a barrage of anti-lesbian and misogynistic abuse (despite the fact that Leo is neither a lesbian nor a woman, but a trans man). For instance, a woman next to them in the metro gives them a dirty look before getting up to find a new seat; a group of men shove them on the moving walkway in Châtelet-Les Halles station while hurling lesbophobic slurs ("sales gouines"<sup>74</sup>); and their taxi driver aggressively interrupts their kissing ("ça se fait pas"<sup>75</sup>) and remarks patronizingly that an attractive young lady like the narrator could make a man very happy.

What is particularly interesting, for our purposes, about the narrator's account of their travel from the airport to her home is her observation the pair "provoque soit l'incompréhension soit le rejet immédiat, en tout cas notre couple ne laisse personne *indifférent*"<sup>76</sup> (italics mine). Let us remember that the French Republican model of citizenship is grounded in the universalist notion of "droit à l'indifférence"—the right to be treated as an equal irrespective of "difference"—as opposed to a multiculturalist "droit à la différence," the right to have one's cultural and ethnic identities respected in public. According to France's official conception of itself, a good-faith effort to assimilate to French social norms should theoretically be enough to preclude the threat of discriminatory public harassment. However, the couple's experience diverges spectacularly from the French universalist ideal; this scene, and Delorme's fiction more broadly, sheds light on the "blind spots" and limits of Republican universalism. Leo—who has even gone so far as to learn as much French as possible prior to his arrival—and the narrator are denied at every turn the "indifference" supposedly guaranteed to all in France despite the fact that they have done nothing to intentionally draw attention to their queer otherness; as a

---

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 170.

feminine-presenting woman and masculine-identified and -presenting trans man, there is little they could conceivably do—within their abilities—to be *less* visibly queer. However, their presence as a couple on the streets of Paris registers as obtrusively lesbian for the simple reason that Leo fails to "pass" as a man in spite of his efforts. Leo has by this point been undergoing hormone replacement therapy for over five months, wears a binder to flatten his chest, and uses masculine pronouns. That Leo's masculinity is illegible (or intentionally dismissed) in public space despite his wishes and actions is enough to elicit conspicuous—sometimes hostile and never "indifferent"—reactions. Berger, as I have highlighted, dismisses queer feminists like Delorme on the grounds of their supposedly futile (and overly American) visibility politics. What this critique misses, among other things, is that sexual and gender identity—whether heteronormative or queer—is always already bound up with the matter of visibility; sexuality and gender have an inevitably public dimension. Though Delorme deliberately deploys a hyperbolic performance of straight femininity in her stage shows and activism in order to shed light on the artifice behind the "doing" of gender, one of the central concerns in Delorme's fiction is the notion that for many people of minority sexualities and genders—as well as cisgender women, for that matter—their *inability* to control the visibility of their sexuality or gender in public can attract unwanted attention and even render them vulnerable to harassment and violence. Through the motif of transatlantic exchange, Delorme illustrates that the often-inescapable visibility of queerness is a glaring "blind spot" of the Republican universalist model of sexual citizenship; the universalist right/responsibility to confine one's difference to the private sphere is, for some, an unrealizable one.

The ineluctably transnational character of the narrator's sex-positive queer lesbian feminism is on full display in her definition of *fem* identity: "L'identité Fem, c'est un truc sur

lequel le féminisme de troisième génération a beaucoup planché. La première génération a dit *on n'est pas des femmes, on le devient*, la deuxième génération a dit *les lesbiennes ne sont pas des femmes*, et la troisième génération a dit *les fems aussi sont des lesbiennes*" (italics in the original).<sup>77</sup> She goes on to liken her own hyper-feminine *fem* gender presentation to that of a drag queen, for they both proceed from the idea that being a woman is not simply a matter of biology, but of performance: "J'ai ça en commun avec . . . les drag-queen de savoir qu'être une femme ça relève de la performance de théâtre au final, qu'on soit sur les planches d'un cabaret transformiste ou bien dans une salle de réunion à la Défense."<sup>78</sup> In order to articulate the political and philosophical underpinnings of her *fem*-ness, the narrator offers a sketch of each of the three feminist waves' critical contributions to our understanding of femininity and womanhood. She begins with a paraphrase of de Beauvoir's iconic anti-essentialist assertion that femininity and "woman" are socio-cultural constructs rather than biological facts. Second wave feminism has shown us, she claims via a direct quote of Wittig's Beauvoir-inspired iconic dictum, that lesbians are for all intents and purposes not "women" insofar as the definition of "woman" and the category of sex are overdetermined by their implication in heterosexuality. Delorme's positioning of Wittig as an emblematic voice of second wave feminism is significant, for it performs a reparation vis-à-vis the schism during the height of the French women's movement between radical lesbianism and feminism.<sup>79</sup> Wittig, as we've seen, has for a variety of reasons been marginalized in the history of French feminism. Let us remember that the dubiously named

---

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>79</sup> See chapter two for a discussion of the split between differentialist and materialist feminists and the subsequent secession of "radical lesbians" from the materialist feminist *Questions féministes* collective over the issue of heterosexuality.

category "French Feminism," much like "French Theory,"<sup>80</sup> is an "invention"<sup>81</sup> of American scholars that relies upon a reductive, fallacious dichotomy between French and American feminisms that, among other things, overplays the importance of "straight,"<sup>82</sup> differentialist psychoanalytic theory to feminist activism in France and obscures the momentous importance of the dynamic transatlantic exchange of ideas and practices in the rise of modern Western feminisms.<sup>83</sup> Third wave feminism, she explains through a play on Wittig's words, has seen the feminist valorization of diverse forms of femininity, a notion completely at odds, however, with Wittig's unequivocal rejection of femininity as an irredeemably oppressive social construct. By then evoking the figure of the drag queen to articulate her Butlerian understanding of gender as a repetitive performative practice the narrator frames her queer lesbian femme feminist consciousness as the logical descendant of previous generations of feminist critique.

Delorme articulates even more explicitly still the implications of her usage of English-language queer terminology when she revisits the question of "fem" identity in her novel-manifesto *Insurrections ! en territoire sexuel* (2009):

Tu es Fem. Tu t'es amputée de la seconde moitié du terme pour ne pas qu'on te confonde avec ton sexe. . . . Il y en avait d'autres avant toi mais longtemps elles n'avaient pas de nom dans votre langue et vous avez eu besoin d'un mot pour exister, alors vous avez pris celui-là, qui a voyagé depuis les États-Unis pour vous revenir diminué de longueur, modifié de prononciation et rempli d'une nouvelle force. De femmes fatales vous êtes

---

<sup>80</sup> For more on "French theory" in the American academy, see François Cusset's *French theory : Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Cie et les mutations de la vie intellectuelle aux États-Unis* (Paris: Découverte, 2003).

<sup>81</sup> See Christine Delphy, "The Invention of French Feminism: An Essential Move," *Yale French Studies*, no. 87 (1995): 190–221.

<sup>82</sup> I use the term in the Wittigian sense, that is to say that the psychoanalytic feminist theory to which I'm referring (i.e. that of Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva) takes the irreducibility of binary sexual difference as a point of departure.

<sup>83</sup> For more on "French feminism," see chapter two of this dissertation, and footnote 26 in particular.

devenues femmes cyborgs. . . . Elles ont toutes une histoire de signes à trier et à choisir, de rôles à endosser et de stratégies discursives à adopter en fonction du lieu et du moment de vie, parce que ce qu'elles ont en commun c'est le souci du décodage.<sup>84</sup>

Femme, for Delorme, is a highly localized affair. There is no singular way to be a femme, for femmes are not defined by their traditionally feminine presentation, but, rather, by their shared political awareness of the inherently situational, contingent nature of femininity itself. Femme, in this sense, is a queer identity in that it "acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm. Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. . . . It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer,' then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative."<sup>85</sup> How one interprets femme will depend radically on context.

Delorme's "fem"-ness epitomizes the transnationalism of her queerness. The very term "fem," in the sense it is used here, is neither (American) English nor French. The word "femme," just as much as its meaning, is fundamentally transformed and imbued with a "nouvelle force"<sup>86</sup> in its crossing of linguistic and cultural borders. It is not possible to unproblematically transpose "femme" into a French context without comprising its meaning, for the word "femme" already exists in French, and their homonymic status suggests a semantic relation diametrically incongruous with the construct's intended purpose: to conceptually uncouple gender expression from sex assignment. Its translation thus calls for a change in pronunciation and an orthographic "amputation;" given Delorme's frequent discussions in this book and elsewhere of trans and female masculinities, this word choice evokes gender confirmation surgery like mastectomy, which reorients the association of "femme"/"fem" in French with womanhood and wifeliness

---

<sup>84</sup> Wendy Delorme, *Insurrections ! en territoire sexuel* (Vauvert: Au diable Vauvert, 2009), 26–27.

<sup>85</sup> David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62.

<sup>86</sup> Delorme, *Insurrections*, 26.

toward gender agency. Delorme's characterization of femmes as "cyborgs," furthermore, gestures to Donna Haraway's seminal posthumanist feminist essay "A Cyborg Manifesto,"<sup>87</sup> which calls on feminists to jettison the essentialist, naturalistic, binary categories of identity entrenched in traditional feminist critique in favor of a postmodern understanding of identity as a site of disunity, incoherence, and potentiality. The adaptation of "femme" into the not-quite-American, not-quite-French neologism "fem" occasioned by its transatlantic transposition indicates the irreducibility of Delorme's brand of queer politics to any one national or cultural context.

Delorme's work (re)imagines a transatlantic, intergenerational genealogy of feminism according to which her own is situated as part of a nascent fourth wave. The narrator's proud realization in the closing lines of *Quatrième génération* that she is "de la quatrième génération"<sup>88</sup> can be read to refer to not just to the resolution of her sense of familial alienation, but also to her political consciousness. By the novel's end, the narrator is able to confidently assert her place within the still unfolding legacies both of her family line and that of the feminist movement.

### **The Laugh of the Femme Medusa Warrior: Erecting Queer Feminist Bridges**

The conciliatory integration of diverse, divergent elements of feminist, LGBT, and queer theory and culture highlighted above is a project that extends across Delorme's oeuvre. Michèle A. Schaal has characterized Delorme's feminism as "syncretic," for it "bridges and claims the legacy of American and French [feminist] theorists, activists, and writers—at times even antagonistic ones."<sup>89</sup> Schaal's astute analysis of Delorme's writings lays bare the

---

<sup>87</sup> Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149–81.

<sup>88</sup> Delorme, *Quatrième génération*, 321.

<sup>89</sup> Michèle A. Schaal, "Bridging Feminist Waves: Wendy Delorme's Insurrections ! En Territoire Sexuel," *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 70, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 178.

intergenerational dimension of her queer feminist framework; Schaal argues that Delorme's feminism is borne out of the bridging of first, second, and third wave feminisms. While this is certainly true, this observation about Delorme's feminism can be expanded to encompass not just the traversal of generational divides, but of sexual and national boundaries as well.

The influence of 70s radical gay liberationist politics on Delorme's own approach to gender and sexuality, as I've discussed, has been evident since the beginning of her activist career. The flamboyant claiming of "étiquette[s] identitaire[s]"<sup>90</sup> in Delorme's creative work that critics like Berger ascribe to her supposed (not so subversive) imitation of American queer culture is as much in line with Hocquenghem's Deleuze-inspired anti-identitarian identity politics than with the queer understanding of identity as performative. Mat Fournier locates Delorme's work "in the non-identitarian perspective opened up by Hocquenghem. . . . Circulation against structure, desire against reproduction, role play against identity, Delorme's narratives evoke the Deleuzian theoretical framework embraced by Hocquenghem."<sup>91</sup> Hocquenghem, let us remember, is vehemently critical of the institution of identity, and, for him, the very concept of homosexuality is a political fabrication operating in the service of a patriarchal capitalist social order that marginalizes all desires—sexual and otherwise—in any way at odds with its reproduction. Hocquenghem argues, however, that identity can nonetheless be enlisted in the liberation of desire, for the proliferation of sexual and gender identities lends itself to the invention of new, ever-expanding ways of relating to oneself and to others and would thus propel us toward a social order (dis)organized around infinite pluralism, under which all are alike in their fundamental dissimilarity. According to Hocquenghem's proto-queer sexual-political

---

<sup>90</sup> Delorme, *Quatrième génération*, 22.

<sup>91</sup> Mat Fournier, "'Insurrections en territoire sexuel': Wendy Delorme's War Machines," *L'Esprit Créateur* 53, no. 1 (2013): 92–99.

vision, the mass production of non-normative identity formations as political method holds the potential to decenter hegemonic ones and set the stage for identity to become a fluid site of productivity and openness to the world as opposed to one of fixity, closure, and division.

There is of course an undeniably communitarian dimension to Delorme's work; the protagonists of her novels are deeply entrenched—as much affectively as physically—in the queer, feminist, LGBT, and sex-positive communities in which they take part. However, the *communautaurisme* of Delorme's autofictional world is not mutually exclusive with a Republican universalist conception of equality. Far from a decidedly "ghetto" communitarianism à la Dustan, Delorme's protagonists' multiple, varied, and continually evolving communitarian attachments do not hinder or preclude connection with the broader world. On the contrary, in Delorme's novels, rather than an obstruction, identitarian "difference" becomes a means of relating to differently-identified others, a notion very much in line with the Hocquenghemian principle that hyper-particularity and universality are effectively two sides of the same coin. This is epitomized in *Quatrième génération* in the narrator's recollection of a brief romance while on holiday in Thailand with a cisgender male German exchange student. The fact that she (loudly and proudly) identifies as a lesbian in no way prevents her from indulging in her attraction to him, nor does it mean that, in doing so, that she is in any way compromising her lesbian identity, despite the fact that the man is practically the embodiment of heteronormative masculinity: "C'était un Allemand géant et musclé doté d'une bite énorme, tellement énorme que la plupart des filles prenaient peur devant l'engin redoutable et qu'il avait dû apprendre à se servir de sa langue et de ses doigts comme toute lesbienne digne de ce nom."<sup>92</sup> The colossal size of the man's penis discourages most women from consenting to penile-vaginal intercourse with him. The well-endowed German possesses what is often considered the symbol *par excellence* of manhood, yet it is precisely his

---

<sup>92</sup> Delorme, *Quatrième génération*, 144.

considerable "manhood" that prevents him from actually living up to the dominant heteronormative scripts for male sexuality. In other words, his hyper-virility ironically *lesbianizes* him. According to the narrator, the two effectively have lesbian sex; nothing about her encounter with him (beyond the novelty of his cisgender status) sets it apart in any meaningful way from those in which she partakes with the butch women and trans men with whom she typically has sex. She looks back on the fling so fondly that she wishes she could meet him again if only to disabuse him of his anxiety over his penis size; following her subsequent introduction to vaginal fisting in the pro-sex lesbian scene of San Francisco, she finds herself in a position to declare with authority that his partners' misgivings are misplaced. This moment constitutes something akin to the universalization of a lesbian point of view called for by Monique Wittig; through the prism of Delorme's lesbian experience, the man's de facto incapacity to engage in "straight" sex—which is for him a source of considerable insecurity and pain—and the skillset this has prompted him to cultivate are what enable the two to enjoy an unforgettable, mutually gratifying moment together. The narrator is counterintuitively able to "lesbianize" their encounter, furthermore, without subjecting her partner to emasculation; the narrator's queer lesbian perspective displaces the heteronormative ideal according to which sex between a man and woman should culminate in penile-vaginal intercourse and thus unsettles the link between gender and sex (both in the sense of anatomical sex and sexual activity). Her male lover can therefore have "lesbian" sex without sacrificing his manhood, and she can have sex with a man without feeling like any less of a lesbian. He reportedly gives her one of the best orgasms of her life, and she pinpoints the night she spends with him as the moment she realized she was a "size queen," a revelation that greatly impacts her subsequent sex life (with women and trans men). Given the narrator's fluid approach to gender and sexuality, the very lesbian

identity that should ostensibly pose an insurmountable barrier to their coming together instead makes for an opportunity for the narrator and her straight male partner to learn from one another and renegotiate their respective sexual boundaries. I do not mean to suggest, of course, that Delorme is advocating an ethic of indiscriminate sexual openness; what I am arguing is that this brief episode illustrates how, for Delorme, the embrace of difference itself can occasion unexpected, transformative ways of connecting to one another. Communitarian affiliations are looked upon with suspicion from a French Republican universalist ideological vantage based on the assumption that public assertion of difference inevitably divides and isolates people (and therefore obstructs the realization of civic equality). Yet, as we see when the narrator and her trans boyfriend are confronted with lesbophobic and misogynistic abuse at every turn during his visit to Paris, one can be marginalized, degraded, and "othered" irrespective of how discreet and unobtrusive one may endeavor to be in terms of one's otherness. As we see in her interaction with the German, however, it is precisely by leaning into particularity that the narrator actually makes good on the underlying promise of Republican universalism—the opportunity to associate with and relate to others as equals irrespective of that which differentiates us.

Queerness, furthermore, figures centrally into Delorme's "syncretic" work vis-à-vis rival feminisms. The proverbial "common ground" between contending feminist positions that Delorme constructs through her work is located squarely in queer territory, so to speak. This comes into relief most sharply in Delorme's engagement with second wave French feminisms. One of the most politically and philosophically consequential conflicts in the history of contemporary French feminisms is the schism beginning in the mid-70s between differentialist psychoanalytic and materialist radical feminists (discussed in chapter two). Berger is mistaken in her assertion that Delorme leaves behind or forgets French feminism(s) in her turn to queer

theory and "postfeminist" politics; on the contrary, Delorme takes up queerness as lens through which to integratively reinterpret what have historically been seen as mutually exclusive feminist positions (i.e. differentialist and materialist feminisms).

To begin with, Delorme's entire oeuvre can be read as a response to the both "French feminist" and materialist feminist idea that in order to extricate themselves physically and psychically from patriarchal domination, women (as well as queers, for that matter) must appropriate language for themselves and supplant the sexist and heterosexist myths that undergird Western culture and deprive them of agency, sexual or otherwise. The title of her 2012 epistolary novel *La mère, la sainte et la putain* gestures toward three of the Judeo-Christian tradition's most paradigmatic figures of womanhood: "La mère porte le fils de l'homme, la sainte lave les péchés. La putain baise la lie de l'humanité."<sup>93</sup> The novel, the fictional pregnancy journal of a queer touring performance artist and expectant single mother (i.e. "je"), begins with the conception of her future child (i.e. "tu"). It ends, however, not with the birth of her baby, but with the still pregnant narrator's letter to her daughter in which she expresses gratitude for the inspiration to radically call into question and renegotiate on her own terms her identity as a woman: "Parce que je t'ai écrite, je peux réinventer."<sup>94</sup> Children are born into a culture that interpellates them into sexed, gendered subject positions from the very moment of their birth (i.e. "It's a girl!"), if not several months earlier; by writing *to* and *for* her baby in utero, she is also *writing* her baby (and herself as a mother) in that she is constructing the discursive frame into which her daughter emerges as such. That the novel ends before Swann's birth—the narrator decides on the gender-neutral name Swann Douceur—despite the fact that the "je" of the narrator functions in relation to Swann's "tu" and thus linguistically conjures her into existence

---

<sup>93</sup> Wendy Delorme, *La mère, la sainte et la putain* (Vauvert: Au diable Vauvert, 2012), 84.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 181.

*prepartum*<sup>95</sup> reflects the notion that people are implicated as characters in narratives larger than themselves long before than can ever say "I." The name Swann, furthermore, is an implicit (albeit obvious) allusion to Charles Swann of *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Swann is an apt namesake given the narrator's understanding of the always-constrained nature of agency and self-determination. Proust's Swann suffers socially and psychologically in the anti-Semitic atmosphere during the Dreyfus Affair as a result of his perceived Jewishness. After coming to the painful realization that he does not truly pass as a gentile in the genteel aristocratic circles he frequents despite his best efforts to assimilate, he ultimately opts to "come out" as a secular Jew and double down on his poorly received outspoken Dreyfusard convictions in spite of the ostracizing consequences. Delorme's Proustian reference points once again to the idea that it is preferable—from both political and affective points of view—to assume wholeheartedly the unending, sometimes perilous, and to some extent impossible task of making sense of oneself and one's life, lest others do it for us. The narrator understands that it is likely impossible to fathom, let alone build, a society free of oppressive gender expectations: "Je cherche . . . le monde où on ne suit pas le script écrit par avance. On n'a rien inventé, et je ne sais pas si on peut récrire l'histoire, réinventer des scénarii inscrits dans le coeur humain depuis toujours. Depuis qu'il y a des mères, des saintes et des putains."<sup>96</sup> By the end of the novel, however, she has developed a renewed, robust sense of freedom vis-à-vis her sexuality and gender not by "writing her way out of" or by merely exposing as mythical the pervasive sexist cultural constructions of femininity that have long constrained women's relationships to their bodies, but by brazenly taking on these constructions and redefining their implication in her own life. In her journal, she

---

<sup>95</sup> The use of "je" and "tu" in *La mère, la sainte, et la putain* in this sense evokes *Le Corps lesbien*, discussed in chapter two of this dissertation, Wittig's Benveniste-inspired gruesome erotic poem in which two lovers dis- and remember their bodies and selves through language.

<sup>96</sup> Delorme, *La mère, la sainte et la putain*, 84.

elaborates and valorizes the motherly, saintly, and "whorish" facets of herself; though she is a mother, a saint, and a whore, however, she refuses to be reduced to any of these figures.

Though Delorme shares the central preoccupations of differentialist and materialist feminists, that is to say the discursive dimension of women's gendered subordination, the objective of Delorme's queer feminist approach to writing is decidedly more modest than *écriture féminine's* quest for a heretofore-unseen authentic expression of feminine experience or Wittigian materialist feminism's mission to destroy gender in language. Delorme's work seeks to destabilize hegemonic norms and scripts around gender, sex, and sexuality by reconfiguring them into a host of alternatives rather than attempting to eradicate or radically step outside of them. For Delorme, the problem is not gender itself, but, rather, the sexism, heterosexism, classism, and racism—among other mechanisms that cultivate difference into social inequality—inscribed in and perpetuated through dominant articulations of gender. Though traditional gender norms are long-standing, they are not ahistorical, natural, or inexorable; the seemingly self-evident status of binary sex and gender categories is contingent upon the ceaseless performative reiteration of its regulatory norms. Gender, in Butlerian parlance, is an "ongoing discursive practice . . . open to intervention and resignification."<sup>97</sup> Because individual subjects are, however, at once constituted and constrained through the gendered discourses in which they are situated, one's capacity to transcend or subvert these discourses is inherently limited. Delorme's feminism turns away from the relative prescriptivism and essentialism inherent to both psychoanalytic and materialist feminist approaches to femininity in favor of a vision of gender itself as a site of indeterminacy and multiplicity fertile for feminist intervention. Though Delorme's queer (re)writing of womanhood and femininity in this respect represents a break with

---

<sup>97</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 33.

French second wave feminisms, Delorme takes pains to frame the relationship as one of continuity rather than rupture.

The blending of Cixousian and Wittigian perspectives in particular is a central motif of Delorme's experimental novelistic manifesto *Insurrections ! en territoire sexuel* (2009). It opens with a warrior-like "conquistador de la rue"<sup>98</sup> marching triumphantly down the streets of Pigalle—Paris' rapidly gentrifying former red light district—donning bright crimson lipstick and nail polish like war paint and armed with stilettos with perilously sharp high heels; Delorme's high femme "glamazon" is a thinly veiled sex-positive adaptation of Wittig's lesbian "guérillère,"<sup>99</sup> and the title of the first chapter, "Sexe est politique," appears to be a sexualized take on the Wittigian axiom that "la catégorie de sexe est une catégorie politique."<sup>100</sup> When the femme warrior boards the metro on her way to meet her girlfriend, a fellow passenger gropes her thigh. She rebuffs his unwelcome advances by thrusting the heel of her stiletto into his foot. When he responds in turn with misogynistic invective, her feminist rage metaphorically transforms her into Medusa: "Il t'insulte de plus belle et tu hurles plus fort que lui, des crapauds et des vipères te sortent de la bouche pour lui sauter en pleine face, tu es Méduse."<sup>101</sup> Delorme's evocation of Medusa gestures toward the title of the iconic essay in which Cixous first introduces the differentialist feminist concept of *écriture féminine*, "Le rire de la méduse."<sup>102</sup>

When the femme protagonist ultimately reunites with her butch partner, the description of their coupling performs the seemingly impossible, the convergence of psychoanalytic and

---

<sup>98</sup> Delorme, *Insurrections*, 13.

<sup>99</sup> See chapter two's discussion of Monique Wittig's *Les guérillères* (Paris: Minuit, 1969).

<sup>100</sup> Monique Wittig, *La pensée straight*, trans. Marie-Hélène [Sam] Bourcier (Paris: Balland, 2001), 46.

<sup>101</sup> Delorme, *Insurrections*, 17.

<sup>102</sup> Hélène Cixous, "Le rire de la méduse," *L'Arc* 61 (1975): 39–54.

materialist feminist approaches to sexual difference: "Elle est ta butch. Ton opposé complémentaire. . . . si vous appartenez bien au même sexe, votre genre s'inverse. . . . Tu collabores et tu subvertis, tu reproduis et tu pourris de l'intérieur le monde qui t'a faite."<sup>103</sup> By characterizing herself and her butch partner as complementary opposites, she draws upon the logic and rhetoric of *la différence sexuelle*. The erotically charged femme/butch "same-sex" sexual difference of sorts described here is materially "real" despite the fact that both of them understand it to be performatively and oppositionally constituted; that she and her partner are "playing at" polar sexual difference to some extent by playing up their respective femininity and masculinity does not make their sexual difference any less substantive or legitimate. Nor does the narrator mean to suggest that their sexual difference is stable or totalizing, nor that binary "sexual difference" is in any way prerequisite for sexual engagement. The couple's sexual repertoire is expansive and varied; she and "her butch" alternate between roles of passivity and dominance with each other and in their sexual relations with other partners. Though this "sexual difference" is a veritable cornerstone in the lives and identities of the narrator and her queer circle of lesbian friends and lovers, there is no obvious, self-evident correlation between their sexual difference(s) and their sexual behavior. In other words, Delorme here queerly recuperates and de-essentializes the notion of *la différence sexuelle* by wresting it partially from biological reproductive sex and placing it within the purview of gender (and gendered sexual play): "Tu as parti-pris de resémiotiser à outrance les mots de l'ennemi, et tu remplis tes mots et ton vagin d'une nouvelle signifiante réitérée chaque fois que tu baisses."<sup>104</sup> This queer model of *la différence sexuelle* does not reject outright the existence (or even the importance) of biological sex; it merely testifies to the existence of meaningful, tangible sexual differences not explicable

---

<sup>103</sup> Delorme, *Insurrections*, 21–23.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 25.

through the lens of ontological sexual dimorphism. Delorme locates sexual difference at the intersections of gender, sexuality, and sex. Delorme's work points to the idea that sexual desire is inextricably bound up with both gender and sex, for sexual desire inflects the ways that sex and gender are understood and lived. Delorme effectively (re)introduces sexuality into sexual difference; the term "sexual" refers, after all, both to sexuality and to biological sex.

Delorme does not so much to seek to dismantle and supplant differentialist feminism's psychoanalytic account of sexual difference as it seeks to resignify it by redeploying it in a novel, improper context. Her femme warrior launches an assault on the heteronormativity of the "categories of sex," to borrow Wittig's terminology, through a resistant, eroticized complicity with the heteronormative discourse of *la différence sexuelle*. This is to say that Berger's critique of Delorme in particular (as well as the project of queer feminism more globally) on the grounds of her supposed disavowal of earlier (French) feminist thought in favor of American "postfeminism" is mistaken. Delorme's queer feminism seeks to build upon the tradition of French feminism by repairing the ideological divisions that have fractured its legacy.

The "bridge" Delorme constructs between materialist and differentialist feminisms through the queer amalgamation of Wittigian and Cixousian concepts and methods ultimately leads to ends distinct from those expressly intended by either Wittig or Cixous. Delorme's queerly "syncretic" approach to feminist history allows her to affirm her indebtedness to and shared ethico-political commitments with feminists and feminisms of the past without binding herself to a rigidly dogmatic interpretation of their contributions. In what follows, we will turn to one such way in which Delorme's "respectfully unfaithful" integration of divergent feminisms pushes French feminism's legacy in an unexpected direction.

## "We'll Take Your ID and We Won't Give it Back:" Busting Borders with Post-porn

Perhaps the most significant point of convergence between differentialist and materialist feminisms Delorme exploits to her own ends is located in "sexual territory." Materialist and psychoanalytic feminists alike have historically found themselves in agreement on the matter of pornography (and sex work more broadly). Wittig, for instance, points to pornography—which for her includes "pornographic images, films, magazine photos, publicity posters on the walls of the cities"<sup>105</sup>—as an emblematic example of a "straight-minded" discourse that signifies and reifies the subjugation of women through heterosexuality:

The discourses which particularly oppress us, lesbians, women, and homosexual men, are those which take for granted that what founds society, any society, is heterosexuality. . . .

These discourses of heterosexuality oppress us in the sense that *they prevent us from speaking unless we speak in their terms*. . . . Their most ferocious action is the relenting tyranny that they exert upon our physical and mental selves (italics mine).<sup>106</sup>

For Wittig, the pervasive, multifarious discourse that is pornography exerts violence on women in that "it orders us to stay in line, and it keeps those who would tend to forget who they are in step; it calls upon fear;"<sup>107</sup> Pornography is according to Wittig a normalizing, "straight" discourse that naturalizes patriarchal, heteronormative gender roles. Coming from a psychoanalytic feminist perspective, Irigaray similarly understands pornography to function as a pedagogical implement implicated in the sexual subordination of women. In "'Françaises,' ne faites plus un

---

<sup>105</sup> Monique Wittig, "The Straight Mind," in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 24–25.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 26.

effort . . ." <sup>108</sup> she writes that the "pornographic scene can be viewed paradigmatically as the initiation and training of a woman. . . . designed to subject them to an exclusively phallogocentric sexual economy." <sup>109</sup> Furthermore, in the context of the (heterosexual) pornographic text, depiction of the female orgasm according to Irigaray serves as "proof that the techniques for pleasure men have elaborated are valid, that man is the contested master of the means of production of pleasure." <sup>110</sup> She has particularly harsh words for women for whom sexual liberation translates into sexual libertinism: "Full-fledged female libertines speak and act like phallograts: they seduce, suck, screw, strike . . . those weaker than themselves, like the strong men they are." <sup>111</sup> Irigaray suggests here, in other words, that women cannot reclaim their sexuality within a patriarchal, phallogocentric symbolic order by merely asserting themselves sexually; in so doing, "female libertines" effectively adopt a "male-identified" sexuality that precludes them from experiencing, let alone articulating, their sexualities as women. Ultimately, for both Wittig and Irigaray, the omnipresence of pornography—broadly defined—does profound damage to women, lesbians, and non-heterosexual men insofar as it hinders them from understanding themselves and their sexualities on their own terms and therefore from emerging as truly autonomous human subjects.

Delorme, as we've seen, agrees unambiguously with the underlying premise of differentialist and materialist feminisms' objections to pornography; culture and language both reflect and shape the way in which we perceive and experience gender, sex, and sexuality, and it

---

<sup>108</sup> Irigaray's "'Françaises,' ne faites plus un effort . . ." is a parodistic pastiche of Sade's "Français, encore un effort . . .," a fictional political pamphlet inserted into *La philosophie dans le boudoir* which elaborates a political system based on an ethic of *libertinage*.

<sup>109</sup> Luce Irigaray, "'Frenchwomen,' Stop Trying," in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 199.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

is therefore imperative that women become agents as opposed to mere objects of sexual representation. Delorme disagrees, however, on how to go about this task. From her queer feminist vantage, there exists no elusive feminine or feminist language yet to be uncovered or forged from the ashes of patriarchal language.<sup>112</sup> Delorme's work, as I have highlighted, seeks "not to establish a point of view outside of constructed identities. . . . [but], rather to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and therefore present the immanent possibility of contesting them."<sup>113</sup> Delorme's queer method consists of cultivating feminist queer agency through the resistant rearticulation of the very hegemonic discourses that have historically marginalized, silenced, and in some cases rendered invisible women and queers. As Delorme's autofictional protagonist lays out in *Insurrections*, "On t'explique que tu ne peux pas parler comme ça, c'est un langage de mecs, les dominants, toi tu dois réinventer la langue, te dégager de l'emprise. . . . Tu as parti-pris de resémiotiser à outrance les mots de l'ennemi, et tu remplis tes mots et ton vagin d'une nouvelle signifiante réitérée chaque fois que tu baisses."<sup>114</sup> It is through this lens that we should view the pornographic dimension of Delorme's oeuvre.

Delorme's work often ventures into pornographic territory both in the original, etymological sense of the term<sup>115</sup>—much of her autofiction explores its protagonists' diverse

---

<sup>112</sup> I refer here to both Cixous' and Irigaray's respective notions of "écriture féminine" and "parler-femme" as well as Wittig's materialist feminist belief that the destruction of "straight-minded" patriarchal language is a fundamental prerequisite for the realization of gender equality. Wittig's *Les guérillères* is an allegorical account of this pursuit. See chapter for a discussion of the novel.

<sup>113</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 187–88.

<sup>114</sup> Delorme, *Insurrections*, 25.

<sup>115</sup> The word "pornography" comes from the Greek *pornographos* (writing about prostitutes), an amalgamation of the Ancient Greek words *porne* (prostitute) and *graphos* (writing) ("pornography, n." OED Online. June 2017.

experiences with sex work<sup>116</sup>—and in the modern sense of the deliberately titillating depiction or exhibition of sexual activity; Delorme stars in Émilie Juvet's queer pornographic film *One night stand* as well as in Todd Verow's sexually explicit experimental film *The Final Girl* (2010).<sup>117</sup> Delorme's autofiction, furthermore, features much unabashed, Dustan-esque "auto-pornographic"<sup>118</sup> discussion of her sex life, including her fondness for fisting,<sup>119</sup> BDSM,<sup>120</sup> group sex,<sup>121</sup> and role-playing.<sup>122</sup> Delorme's queer response to mainstream pornography's deleterious consequences for women is to subversively appropriate its representational codes for feminist ends. In her characteristically "syncretic" fashion, Delorme frames her politicized pornographic self-representation as a queer articulation of *écriture féminine* or feminist reinscription of the body (à la Wittig's *Le Corps lesbien*) through the conspicuous albeit unfaithful deployment in her work of differentialist and materialist feminist idiom, iconography, and concepts. For Schaal, "Delorme writes as a third-wave post-pornographer, producing post-cixousian 'sexts' that unabashedly describe, embrace, demystify, and criticize the ongoing stigmatization of all

---

Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/148012?redirectedFrom=pornography> [accessed June 14, 2017]).

<sup>116</sup> Delorme's autofictional protagonists engage in various form of sex work, ranging from professional domination (as a dominatrix) and fetish modeling to nude burlesque performance and pornographic film acting.

<sup>117</sup> Todd Verow, *The Final Girl* (Breaking Glass Pictures, 2010).

<sup>118</sup> See chapter three for a discussion of Dustan's "auto-pornographic" autofiction and its aesthetic and political implications.

<sup>119</sup> Delorme, *Insurrections*, 71–75.

<sup>120</sup> Delorme, *Quatrième génération*, 84–98.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 139–32; Delorme, *Insurrections*, 61–69.

<sup>122</sup> Delorme, *Insurrections*, 57–59.

women's sexualities. . . . She provides a literary agency to practices and people regarded as deviant or made invisible in mainstream society or pornography."<sup>123</sup>

Delorme's work—both her writing and performance—inscribes itself within the post-porn movement, a transnational offshoot of French queer critique, and of which Delorme is considered a pioneering figure.<sup>124</sup> Though the post-porn movement has since its emergence in the early 2000s been almost exclusively Western European (and French and Spanish/Catalan in particular)<sup>125</sup> in its reach,<sup>126</sup> post-porn has its roots in the work of American sex-positive feminism of the 80s and 90s. The origins of the concept can be traced back to American feminist performance artist, pornographic actress, and sex worker Annie Sprinkle's iconic one-woman stage show "Post Porn Modernist;" the protagonist of *Quatrième génération* claims Sprinkle (as well as other leading sex-radical feminists Susie Bright, Carol Queen, and Nina Hartley) as one of her idols.<sup>127</sup> The term "post porn," which Sprinkle ascribes to Dutch artist Wink van Kempem, describes "a new genre of sexually explicit material that is perhaps more visually experimental, political, humorous, "arty," and eclectic than the rest. Post-modern sex art could contain elements that were not necessarily focused on the erotic—humor, intellectual ideas, politics, and

---

<sup>123</sup> Schaal, "Briding Feminist Waves," 185.

<sup>124</sup> Julie Lavigne, "La post-pornographie comme art féministe: la sexualité explicite de Carolee Schneemann, d'Annie Sprinkle et d'Émilie Juvet," *Recherches féministes* 27, no. 2 (2014): 73.

<sup>125</sup> Prominent figures within the post-porn movement include Spanish artists and collectives Maria Llopis, Diana Pornoterrorista, Itziar Ziga, Go Fist Foundation, Post Op, and Girlswholikeporno as well as French theorists, writers, and filmmakers Bourcier, Preciado, Virginie Despentes, Émilie Juvet, and Ovidie.

<sup>126</sup> According to research on pornography produced by women financed by the *Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada* yet to be published, the concept of post-porn has not yet taken firm root in North America. Feminist and queer pornographers (ethically, politically, and aesthetically aligned with the post-porn movement) have generally classified their work under the rubrics of feminist porn, alt(ernative) porn, and queer porn. See Julie Lavigne, "La post-pornographie comme art féministe: la sexualité explicite de Carolee Schneemann, d'Annie Sprinkle et d'Émilie Juvet," *Recherches féministes* 27, no. 2 (2014): 72–73.

<sup>127</sup> Delorme, *Quatrième génération*, 103–04.

feminism."<sup>128</sup> "Post-porn" has since been taken up in the light of queer theory by subsequent thinkers, artists, and activists. Paul B. Preciado's *Manifeste contra-sexuel*<sup>129</sup> has been identified by many<sup>130</sup> as the foundational text of contemporary post-porn politics,<sup>131</sup> and the first volume of Marie-Hélène/Sam Bourcier's *Queer zones* trilogy begins with a chapter dedicated to post-porn.<sup>132</sup> Following Linda Williams and Foucault,<sup>133</sup> Bourcier understands mainstream hardcore pornography to be—like sexological and psychoanalytic discourses—a disciplinary regime intimately implicated in the production of the hetero- and cis-normative "truth" about sex it appears to merely represent: "La pornographie ne doit . . . pas être envisagée sous un angle libérateur mais bien plutôt productif... obligeant."<sup>134</sup> The post- of post-porn does not signify a desire to do away with pornography altogether (i.e. to bring about the kind of post-porn society called for since the 70s by American anti-pornography radical feminists like Andrea Dworkin and Catharine Mackinnon as well as French differentialist and materialist feminists), nor the

---

<sup>128</sup> Annie Sprinkle, *Post-Porn Modernist: My 25 Years as a Multi-Media Whore*. San Francisco, Calif: Cleis Press, 1998, 160.

<sup>129</sup> Beatriz [Paul B.] Preciado, *Manifeste contra-sexuel*, trans. Marie-Hélène [Sam] Bourcier (Paris: Baland, 2000).

<sup>130</sup> Tim Stüttgen, "Before Orgasm: Fifteen Fragments on a Cartography of Post/Pornographic Politics," in *Post/Porn/Politics: Symposium/Reader: Queer-Feminist Perspective on the Politics of Porn Performance and Sex-Work as Culture Production*, ed. Tim Stüttgen (Berlin: B-Books, 2009), 11; Rachele Borghi, "Post-Porn," *Rue Descartes* 79, no. 3 (2013): 12; Julie Lavigne, "La post-pornographie comme art féministe: la sexualité explicite de Carolee Schneemann, d'Annie Sprinkle et d'Émilie Jouvét," *Recherches féministes* 27, no. 2 (2014): 65.

<sup>131</sup> Other works commonly identified as hallmarks of post-porn theory include Itziar Ziga's *Devenir Perra* (Barcelona: Mesulina, 2009), Virginie Despentes' *King Kong Théorie* (Paris: Grasset, 2006), Maria Llopis' *El postporno era eso* (Barcelona: Melusina, 2010), and Diana J. Torres' *Pornoterrorismo* (País Vasco: Txalaparta, 2011).

<sup>132</sup> Bourcier, "Post porn," in *Queer Zones*, 21–60.

<sup>133</sup> See Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and The "Frenzy of the Visible"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Michel Foucault, *La volonté de savoir*, *Histoire de la sexualité* 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).

<sup>134</sup> Bourcier, *Queer Zones*, 39.

intent to construct a "pornutopia érotique libératrice,"<sup>135</sup> an ethically pristine sexual representational practice unmarred by the forces of sexism, heterosexism, and cis-sexism, for such pursuits are doomed to failure; pornographic discourse is part and parcel of Western sexual modernity. The consumption of or participation in pornography is not inherently oppressive or liberating for women; pornography is a discursive formation open to resignification. Practitioners of the at once aesthetic and political-critical practice of post-porn redeploy pornographic representation in the service of anti-heteronormative critique.

It is, by design, difficult to define in precise terms what constitutes post-porn, for a significant part of post-porn's critical force lies in its troubling of the boundary between the pornographic and the non-pornographic. There are, however, a number of characteristics common to the genre. Post-porn seeks to destabilize binary oppositions such as the public and the private; subject and object; spectator and participant; legitimate and deviant sex acts; and the erotic and the mundane. Post-pornographic art, furthermore, tends to de-center the genitals as a privileged locus of sexual pleasure, directly engage with its audience, refuse verisimilitude through representational reflexivity (i.e. post-porn draws attention to its textuality), and feature pedagogical elements. Post-porn, above all, seeks to co-opt pornographic pleasure in order to draw attention to the social and political dimensions of sexuality. To borrow Bourcier's words, "ce qu'il faudrait appeler *l'arousing consciousness* est l'arme radicale du post-porn."<sup>136</sup>

In what remains of this chapter's final section, we will approach Wendy Delorme not just as an thinker and practitioner of post-porn in her own right, but as one of the subjects of Émilie Juvet's 2010 post-porn documentary road movie *Too much pussy ! Feminist sluts in the Queer X*

---

<sup>135</sup> Marie-Hélène [Sam] Bourcier, "La post-pornographie," ed. Philippe Di Folco, *Dictionnaire de la pornographie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2005), 380.

<sup>136</sup> Marie-Hélène [Sam] Bourcier, "Bildungs-post-porn : notes sur la provenance du post-porn, un des futurs du Féminisme de la désobéissance sexuelle," *Rue Descartes* 79, no. 3 (2013): 18.

*Show*.<sup>137</sup> The film documents the 2009 European tour of an international troupe of six young French, American, and German queer, sex-positive feminist performance artists. The *Queer X Show* is a variety act incorporating elements of neo-burlesque, spoken word, sex education, performance art, storytelling, and techno music. Travel is itself a central motif of film. The countless cutaways to traffic signs, a hallmark of the "road movie" genre, gesture toward journey and border crossing. Much of the dialogue, furthermore, takes place in and around the small minivan they rent to make their way to their various gigs in Paris, Brussels, Berlin, Cologne, Copenhagen, and Stockholm. What is especially significant, for our purposes, is the way the film thematizes and problematizes the spatial and transnational dynamics of queer feminist politics.

Both the film and the performances it depicts exemplify the aesthetic and political commitments of the post-porn movement. To begin with, Jouvét's documentary makes no pretense of objectivity; Jouvét is one of the producers of the *Queer X Show* and appears periodically on camera, and Delorme is credited as a writer on the film. *Too much pussy* blends, furthermore, the codes of documentary and pornography; the film features a number of fictional pornographic interludes in which two or more of the troupe members sexually engage with one another. Notably, in an obviously staged sequence that humorously evokes a poorly acted porn film, the ostentatiously queer performers are stopped in the street by a (drag king posing as a) police officer for a *contrôle d'identité*—in France, the police have the right to conduct "identity checks" at their discretion.<sup>138</sup> The women overpower the "officer," tie him up, and taunt him sexually before leaving him alone in a dark empty room. In a subsequent scene, the "policeman"

---

<sup>137</sup> Émilie Jouvét, *Too much pussy ! Feminist sluts in the Queer X Show* (Solaris, 2010).

<sup>138</sup> Law enforcement officers have the ability to briefly detain individuals for the purposes of checking their identity, even without evidence of a crime having been committed. The disproportion targeting of young Arab and black men for *contrôles d'identité* in recent years has attracted the attention of human rights campaigners. See Human Rights Watch's 55-page report on the matter: "France: Abusive Identity Checks of Minority Youth: Misuse of Police Powers Damages Community Relations" (Human Rights Watch, January 26, 2012), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/01/26/root-humiliation/abusive-identity-checks-france>.

performs a drag king striptease act before an adoring audience (as part of the *Queer X Show*) on a stage resembling the location he'd previously been left tied up. The act culminates with the "officer" covering himself with a rainbow flag he pulls out of his briefs. This drag sequence playfully and erotically gestures to the performative nature not just of identity, but of French Republican universalism. The uniformed, on-duty police officer is a quintessential agent of the State and an embodiment and arbiter of its norms and ideals. In this sequence, however, the "officer" divulges, once titillated to the point of abandon, that underneath the trappings and accouterments of Republicanism lies an identitarian impulse—in this case a gay one, as represented by the rainbow flag—waiting to be coaxed out. Furthermore, the theatrical nature of the "officer's" disclosure suggests the commensurately performative nature of his gayness; the drag king police officer, not once breaking character, "reveals" himself in the end to be a gay man rather than a queer woman. In other words, there is no "real" identity underneath the uniform—only another layer of performance. What this post-porn drag performance ultimately implies is not that his gay identity is somehow more primordial or natural than his Republican universalist, "identity policing" expression of Frenchness, but the limits of Republican universalism itself; identity cannot be fully "controlled" in any sense of the word, even by those vested with the authority to perform *contrôles d'identité*.

One of the key post-pornographic dimensions of the film is the current of didacticism that runs across the performances, performers' discussions with one another, and the content of their interviews with Jouvett. The partially pedagogical intent of the *Queer X Show* is made explicit in one of the first featured performances, during which American performer Sadie Lune shouts at the audience, "Baby Play! Animal Play! You will be educated! You will be beaten down! We'll

take your ID and we won't give it back!"<sup>139</sup> Over the course of the film, the performers offer various (and sometimes conflicting) explanations of feminism, post-porn, sex positivity, and exhibitionism. For instance, one of the showcased performances is essentially an eroticized (albeit proper) breast self-examination. Delorme, furthermore, discusses (and mimes in great detail) teaching her partners about vaginal fisting, a sexual practice of which she sings the praises—as we've seen—across much of her writings.

Based on the definitions provided toward the beginning of the film, the object and stakes of feminism are framed in distinctly spatial terms. One of the guiding principles of the film is the claiming of public/private divide as a feminist issue. In one of the first featured interviews, San Francisco-based feminist porn director and actress Madison Young explains that, for her, feminism is about ensuring that everyone, regardless of gender, is able to exercise agency over their bodies. She feels most empowered as a feminist when she "can give consent over what elements of [her] sexuality [she] make[s] public and what elements of [her] sexuality . . . [she] share[s] with others."<sup>140</sup> Young's vision of feminism reflects the post-pornographic preoccupation with the spatial organization of sexuality. For Paul B. Preciado, "the notion of post-pornography suggests an epistemological and political break, another way of knowing and producing pleasure through vision and body-machine assemblage, but also a new sexual definition of . . . public space."<sup>141</sup> The determination of which aspects of sexuality and which kinds of bodies and body parts are understood to be acceptably or permissibly manifested or discussed in public space (e.g. kissing, dating, the male chest) and which are generally relegated

---

<sup>139</sup> Jouvet, *Too much pussy*.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Beatriz [Paul B.] Preciado, "The Architecture of Porn. Museum Walls, Urban Detritus and Stag Rooms for Porn-Prosthetic Eyes," in *Post/Porn/Politics: Symposium/Reader: Queer-Feminist Perspective on the Politics of Porn Performance and Sex-Work as Culture Production*, ed. Tim Stüttgen (Berlin: B-Books, 2009), 30.

to the private sphere (e.g. pornography, fat corporeality) relies upon politically-defined social boundaries inextricably bound up with sexist, heterosexist norms of propriety. The very notion of a "public woman" has long been associated in the French imagination with sexual indecency; during the Middle Ages, the term "femme publique" was used to refer to sex workers, for "a whore was one who brought her sexuality out of the private and into the public arena."<sup>142</sup> In the context of French society in particular, these boundaries are conceived (and policed) in part through the optic of universalism. As is thrown into relief in the scenes in *Quatrième génération*, discussed earlier, in which the narrator and her trans boyfriend suffer abuse due to the inescapable visibility of their queerness ("Il faut vous comporter comme il faut ici, vous êtes en France."<sup>143</sup>), certain expressions of sexuality and gender are seen as overtly identitarian (and thus inappropriate in public) on the simple basis of their deviance from heteronormative expectations.

*Too much pussy*, furthermore, underscores the performativity of everyday life by drawing attention to the porousness of the distinction between performance and authentic experience. On the one hand, the *Queer X Show*'s performances incorporate acts typically reserved for the private, domestic sphere (e.g. masturbation, eating breakfast), and, on the other, the troupe members are depicted occupying public space in their extra-theatrical lives just as they would the stage. For instance, after a montage of clips from the *Queer X Show*, the film cuts directly to Delorme and two other performers parading topless through the streets of Paris. It is as if the show spills seamlessly from the fictional realm of the stage onto "real" life. The women look directly into the camera, smiling and blowing kisses, and Delorme announces laughingly that

---

<sup>142</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England*, Studies in the History of Sexuality (New York Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), 138.

<sup>143</sup> Delorme, *Quatrième génération*, 170.

"it's a live street striptease!"<sup>144</sup> The camera then follows Delorme and her colleagues from behind for over thirty seconds as they strut in the middle of the road, capturing the reactions of onlookers. Initially, the spectacle of their display is enough to literally stop traffic. As they proceed, however, the passersby appear less and less fazed. Their rapid inurement to the women's gratuitously public exposure of their breasts seems to mock the very notion of "private parts;" neither the performers' breasts nor the public are ostensibly in need of protection. However, the fact that we are not privy to the performers' facial expressions suggests a sense of insouciant disregard for the response of onlookers in the first place. Their unflappable confidence in the face of potential danger—they are virtually nude, late at night, walking in traffic—evokes the collective power of the insurrectionary legion of femme warriors imagined in *Insurrections*: "Avec elles tu es puissante et ensemble vous êtes un bataillon en marche."<sup>145</sup>

When the "bataillon" makes a pit stop at a makeshift "antifa radikal queer" communal enclave, Sadie Lune performs an impromptu rendition of Annie Sprinkle's iconic "Public Cervix Announcement" performance piece. She inserts a speculum and invites her audience to examine her cervix one-by-one with a handheld flashlight. By using a vaginal speculum and anatomical terminology, Sprinkle's piece redeploys the codes of medical gaze without reproducing the doctor/patient power differential characteristic of the clinical paradigm that largely governs cultural understanding of much of the female reproductive system. She places herself in a position of vulnerability and humility to help provide women access to knowledge of their own bodies. "Public Cervix Announcement," in its bawdy tone, pushes the genre of sex education into the realm of the pornographic; Sprinkle's piece, however, substitutes the voyeuristic "peep show" dynamic of distance and anonymity common to mainstream pornographic spectatorship with one

---

<sup>144</sup> Juvet, *Too much pussy*.

<sup>145</sup> Delorme, *Insurrections*, 24.

of proximity and reciprocity. The performance makes a spectacle out of a part of the female body that is all too often shrouded in mystery and even shame when spoken of or represented at all; commercial pornography tends to depict only external female genitalia.

Lune's DIY interpretation of "Public Cervix Exam" takes on a new dimension by virtue of its setting. The image of the European radical queers who comprise her audience taking turns peering at Lune's cervix with curiosity and enthusiasm after she explains (in very slow, basic English) the sex-positive feminist premise of Sprinkle's original performance seems on its face to imply a unidirectional transmission of American feminist thought. Yet, as we look at the sequence in its entirety, it becomes clear that the film presents the campground as a site of cultural exchange and synthesis that transcends national boundaries. The prominent banner at the entrance that claims the space as antifascist, radical, and queer implicitly suggests as much, for "antifa radikal queer" is a uniquely transnational formation. The anti-fascist movement (as well as modern radicalism, for that matter) is of European origin. Though the feminist "sex positivity" Sadie Lune seeks to share with her European audience is marked as an American import—Lune articulates pro-sex feminism through the recreation (in English) of an Annie Sprinkle performance—the audience is not represented as passive objects of American cultural imperialism; as evidenced by their eagerness to line up and take their turn with the flashlight, the European queers play an active, deliberate role in the process of communication. The very existence of the "antifa radikal queer" campground itself testifies to the notion that cultural translation entails transformation in that its occupants have literally constructed by way of their localized reinterpretation of received "American" ideas a geographic and conceptual space "un-mappable" in terms of national borders; unlike the countless other places visited by the performers, it is never made clear where precisely in Europe the campground is located.

Though virtually all of the European performers—notably Delorme and French pornographic actress Judy Minx—articulate explicitly and at length the immeasurable influence of American sex-radical feminist and queer thinkers on their own work and lives, the film takes pains to disrupt the reputation of queer (and pro-sex) feminisms as foreign ideological imports not native to European cultures. The bidirectional nature of the transatlantic traffic of feminist and queer thought comes up explicitly in an interview with American performance artist and sex worker Mad Kate. She relates that having the chance come to Paris and meet French peers eager to learn about the queer and feminist scenes of San Francisco and New York has reminded her of the formative impact of "French theory" on the queer and feminist theory she studied at university. For her, the Franco-American reciprocal flow of influence invigorates the project of queer feminism. The continuous passage of ideas, people, and time has set the stage for heretofore-unimaginable ways of conceptualizing and doing queerness and feminism: "We're the ones creating it. . . . Finally it's our chance to . . . create something new. . . and further . . . 'queer' and to figure out what that means."<sup>146</sup> The queer feminism making its way across Europe via the *Queer X Show* is not a coherent, fixed doctrine capable of being simply transmitted from one cultural context into another, but rather, a collective, perpetually evolving movement itself borne of promiscuous intercultural hybridization. Mad Kate suggests that the meaning of "queer"—that which she is excited to at once "further" and "figure out"—resides in communal interpretation.

## Conclusion

The queer feminism Wendy Delorme espouses and embodies is not just far from the inherently un-French, American import that its critics in France of various ideological and political orientations (e.g. feminist, nationalist, social-conservative) have made it out to be; quite

---

<sup>146</sup> Jouvett, *Too much pussy*.

to the contrary, Delorme's queer critical framework calls radically into question the coherence and implications of the very categories through which "queer" comes to be constituted for some as foreign in the first place. Delorme is not "above all a perfect imitator of the American scene,"<sup>147</sup> but, rather, a cultural mediator. Her post-pornographic queer feminist oeuvre and persona represent the inventive amalgamation of diverse, disparate, and sometimes rival conceptual, methodological, and aesthetic resources offered by feminist and queer theories and cultures, from the proto-queer (homo)sexual liberationism of Guy Hocquenghem, "first wave" American queer critique of Judith Butler, and queer theory "made in France" of Marie-Hélène/Sam Bourcier to the pro-sex feminism of Annie Sprinkle, materialist lesbianism of Monique Wittig, and differentialist feminisms of Cixous and Irigaray. In Delorme's oeuvre, the traversal and bridging of various national, generational, sexual boundaries gives rise to an anti-sexist, anti-heterosexist (as well as anti-xenophobic) vision and praxis of social justice distinct from the sum of its constituent influences. Through her conciliatory, "syncretic" approach, Delorme at once pays homage to, situates herself within, and brings together the legacies of her feminist, LGBT, and queer forebears in spite of the deep historical and theoretical conflicts that would seemingly make such a rapprochement inconceivable. Delorme takes up American queer theory not to supplant feminism, French or otherwise, but to construct a more unified, unifying feminist project.

Though her transnational queer feminism is neither American nor French, Delorme's work does respond to the uniquely French problem of Republican universalism. The French Republican principle of universalism, despite its intended function as a guarantor of social equality, inadvertently cultivates the very social inequalities it purports to preclude when translated into practice. As Delorme demonstrates in her work, "passing" as a universal citizen

---

<sup>147</sup> Berger, *The Queer Turn in Feminism*, 13.

unmarked by particularity is a task more easily and successfully accomplished by some than by others. Women, queers, and transgender people are often unable to exercise the "right to indifference" promised by Republican universalism as freely as their straight cisgender male counterparts, for the invisible pervasiveness of sexism and heteronormativity means that the presence of the former in public tends to prove more conspicuous than that of the latter. In other words, the egalitarian space of the French Republican public sphere is not universally accessible to all citizens. Certain differences prove more "different" than others, and as Delorme underscores—in particular through her depictions and discussions of the quasi-nationalistic character of the homophobic, transphobic, and/or misogynistic abuse routinely confronted by queers, trans people, and women who dare to occupy public space—sexual differences tend to register as obtrusive manifestations of identitarian particularism insofar as they visibly depart from dominant hetero-norms, including heteronormative standards of propriety,<sup>148</sup> irrespective of the intentions behind one's self-presentation. As such, the French Republican exclusion of particularism from the public sphere in the interest of universal equality effectively participates in the literal and figurative marginalization of sexual and gender minorities.

Though Delorme's work illustrates the limitations and "blind spots" of French Republican ideology, Delorme does not reject universalism outright. Like many a French LGBT political thinker before her (e.g. Hocquenghem, Wittig, Dustan), Delorme gestures toward a future in which the Republican promise of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* would be more universally realizable. In other words, Delorme's social vision is animated by the desire for a more concretely universal universalism. As a corrective to the concealed hierarchies and exclusions at once obscured and reproduced by a universalism of abstract homogeneity, Delorme's work implicitly offers a Hocquenghemian hyper-pluralistic universalism of difference. Whether it be

---

<sup>148</sup> I refer here to the harassment suffered by women erroneously perceived to be inviting sexual attention.

through the "lesbian sex" with a straight cisgender man in *Quatrième génération*, the queer rewriting of family scripts in *La Mère, la Sainte et la Putain*, or the (homo)sexualization of *la différence sexuelle* in *Insurrections*, Delorme's protagonists illustrate that the universality/particularity binary is a false dichotomy. Their "subversively collaborative"<sup>149</sup> queer rearticulations of the purportedly universally foundational social categories of heterosexuality, the family, and sexual difference disrupt the normative bounds that limit what kinds of people and experiences these categories can accommodate by detaching them from heteronormative, essentialist notions of gender, sex, and sexuality; the queering of these categories ultimately points toward a more flexible, inclusive universalism, one by which the very identitarian particularities that the French Republican imaginary generally construes as divisive and "ghettoizing" become a point of entry rather than a barrier to social connectivity and integration.

\*\*\*

Wendy Delorme's oeuvre, like Hocquenghem's, Wittig's, and Dustan's, illustrates that, for sexual minorities in France, the processes of "finding oneself" and making space for oneself are effectively one and the same. This dissertation has looked to the place of space in the literary, theoretical, and activist work of four French figures intimately engaged in the politics of lesbian, gay, and/or queer sexuality since the dawn of modern LGBTQ militancy in France. By examining the spatial dynamics of these thinkers' social visions, I have brought to light the fact that and some of the ways in which French LGBT and queer political thought and praxis respond to and are conditioned by the French nation-state's foundational ideal of Republican universalism. While politics is always to some extent about the "configuration of . . .

---

<sup>149</sup> "Tu collabores et tu subvertis, tu reproduis et tu pourris de l'intérieur le monde qui t'a faite" (Delorme, *Insurrections*, 23).

community,"<sup>150</sup> a national political culture organized around the banishment of "difference" from the public sphere in the name of universal equality—as I have demonstrated by "spatializing" the diverse, sometimes divergent politico-sexual projects advanced by Hocquenghem, Wittig, Dustan, and Delorme—makes the making, remaking, and unmaking of space a vital, requisite concern in sexual minorities' pursuits of social justice.

The liberationist philosophy of desire elaborated across Guy Hocquenghem's work posits the wholly political character of the mechanisms by which sexual minorities are constructed as such and cast to the margins in one fell swoop. The "hyper-pluralistic universalism" at the heart of Hocquenghem's utopian thought imagines a post-identitarian world in which difference becomes a point of convergence rather than one of division. For Hocquenghem, we are all united by our profound, fundamental unlikeness from one another; the transitory, infinitely fragmentary status of our selves and bodies; and the ceaseless, chaotically promiscuous flow of desire.

Monique Wittig's radical lesbian, materialist feminist philosophy and fiction point hopefully toward a realm beyond the reach of the oppressive, totalizing force of "the straight mind." This emancipatory space is the refuge of lesbians, who are—for Wittig—"runaway slaves" who flee the social, economic, affective, and sexual exploitation by "men" constitutive of the position of "woman" under the political regime that is patriarchal heterosexuality. However, Wittig is no separatist, strictly speaking; Wittig's overarching political project, like Hocquenghem's, is profoundly universalist. Her fiction makes abundantly explicit what remains largely implicit in her political essays: that Wittig's "lesbian society" is not an essentialist, communitarian, "woman-only" space, but a transitory, metaphorical site for the conception of a new, post-gender "social contract," language, and culture. The ultimate objective of Wittig's war

---

<sup>150</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Politics of Literature*, trans. Julie Rose (Cambridge and Malden: Polity, 2011), 4.

on heterosexuality is not the foundation of a lesbian world, but, rather, of one in which a more genuinely egalitarian universalism would be possible.

Guillaume Dustan's "ghetto" autofiction testifies to the fact that the primordial French Republican interdiction of *communautarisme* in the name of universalism is, for some, more of an obstacle than a means to *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*. The resolutely separatist, "monde merveilleux"<sup>151</sup> of the "gay ghetto" offers a space in which its HIV-positive, unapologetically hedonistic denizens are treated as "frères du ghetto"<sup>152</sup> rather than as loathsome, toxic sexual deviants. Paradoxically, it is only in their aggressively communitarian "ghetto"—a veritable world apart from the "monde normal"<sup>153</sup> of mainstream French society—that Dustan and his "brothers" are able to truly make good on the egalitarian promises of Republican universalism.

The recent emergence of queer theory, culture, and politics in France and the fiercely hostile, overtly nationalistic reactions *le queer* has inspired have brought to the fore the heteronormative underpinnings of dominant conceptions of French national identity and Republican sexual citizenship. Wendy Delorme's multidisciplinary oeuvre articulates and engages politically with the profound sense of disorientation occasioned by her intersecting identities as a French lesbian queer feminist sex-positive woman, artist, and activist. The "syncretic" queer feminism elaborated across her work—which reparatively bridges feminist, LGBT, and queer perspectives from across various national, generational, cultural, and linguistic boundaries—seeks to destabilize the very foundations of the French Republican social order (i.e. *la différence sexuelle*, heterosexuality, the family) not in order to subvert or dismantle it, but to unsettle and expand the limits of France's particular universalism.

---

<sup>151</sup> Guillaume Dustan, *Dans ma chambre*, in *Œuvres I : Dans ma chambre - Je sors ce soir - Plus fort que moi*, ed. Thomas Clerc, vol. 1 (Paris: P.O.L., 2013), 81.

<sup>152</sup> Dustan, *Je sors ce soir*, in *Œuvres I*, 152.

<sup>153</sup> Dustan, *Dans ma chambre*, in *Œuvres I*, 83

## WORKS CITED

- “Burkini : le maire de Cannes interdit les vêtements religieux à la plage.” *Le Monde*, August 11, 2016. [http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2016/08/11/le-maire-de-cannes-interdit-les-vetements-religieux-a-la-plage\\_4981587\\_3224.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2016/08/11/le-maire-de-cannes-interdit-les-vetements-religieux-a-la-plage_4981587_3224.html).
- “EHESS Alumni: Monique Wittig.” EHESS, July 23, 2015. <http://www.alumni-ehess.fr/expo-2/>.
- “France: Abusive Identity Checks of Minority Youth: Misuse of Police Powers Damages Community Relations.” Human Rights Watch, January 26, 2012. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/01/26/root-humiliation/abusive-identity-checks-france>.
- “France: Headscarf Ban Violates Religious Freedom.” New York: Human Rights Watch, February 26, 2004. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2004/02/26/france-headscarf-ban-violates-religious-freedom>.
- “La disparition de Guillaume Dustan.” *Têtu*, October 9, 2005. <http://www.tetu.com/2005/10/09/news/france/la-disparition-de-guillaume-dustan/>.
- “Lettre de Mohammed.” *Tout : ce que nous voulons !*, no. 14 (June 7, 1971): 5.
- “Situation actuelle et perspectives d’évolution de la prise en charge médicale du transsexualisme en France.” Haute autorité de santé, November 2009. [https://www.has-sante.fr/portail/upload/docs/application/pdf/2009-12/rapport\\_transsexualisme.pdf](https://www.has-sante.fr/portail/upload/docs/application/pdf/2009-12/rapport_transsexualisme.pdf).
- “Votre libération sexuelle n’est pas la nôtre.” *Tout : ce que nous voulons !*, no. 15 (June 30, 1971): 3.
- Act Up-Paris. “Oublier Dustan,” November 23, 2005. <http://www.actupparis.org/spip.php?article2240>.
- . *Baiser sans capote ça vous fait jouir ?* Flyer, June 26, 1999. <http://www.actupparis.org/spip.php?article2720>.
- Agacinski, Sylviane. “Contre l’effacement des sexes.” *Le Monde*, February 6, 1999.
- . *Politique des sexes : précède de mise au point sur la mixité*. Paris: Seuil, 2011.
- . *Femmes : entre sexe et genre*. Paris: Seuil, 2012.
- Agar, James N. “Queer in France: AIDS Dissidentification in France.” In *Queer in Europe: Contemporary Case Studies*, edited by Lisa Downing and Robert Gillett, 57–70. Burlington: Ashgate, 2011.
- Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983.
- Andrieu, Bernard. “Entretien avec Marie-Hélène Bourcier.” *Corps* 1, no. 4 (2008): 5–11.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria E. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987.
- Auclerc, Benoît, and Yannick Chevalier, eds. *Lire Monique Wittig aujourd’hui*. Lyon: Presses Univ. de Lyon, 2012.
- Bachelard, Gaston. *L’expérience de l’espace dans la physique contemporaine*. Paris: Alcan, 1937.
- . *La poétique de l’espace*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1958.
- Bammer, Angelika. *Partial Visions: Feminism and Utopianism in the 1970s*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

- Bardou, Florian. "En France, les « queer studies » au ban de la fac." *Libération*, October 12, 2016. [http://www.liberation.fr/debats/2016/10/12/en-france-les-queer-studies-au-ban-de-la-fac\\_1521522](http://www.liberation.fr/debats/2016/10/12/en-france-les-queer-studies-au-ban-de-la-fac_1521522).
- Barnes, Djuna. *La passion*, translated by Monique Wittig. Paris: Flammarion, 1982.
- Bataille, Philippe. *Le racisme au travail*. Paris: Découverte, 1997.
- Berger, Anne-Emmanuelle. *Le grand théâtre du genre: identités, sexualités et féminisme en "Amérique."* Paris: Belin, 2013.
- . *The Queer Turn in Feminism: Identities, Sexualities, and the Theater of Gender*. Translated by Catherine Porter. New York: Fordham University Press, 2014.
- Bersani, Leo. *Homos*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Betsky, Aaron. *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire*. 1st ed. New York: William Morrow & Co, 1997.
- Binnie, Jon. *The Globalization of Sexuality*. London and Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2004.
- Birnbaum, Jean. "Guillaume Dustan, écrivain et éditeur gay." *Le Monde*, October 11, 2005. [http://www.lemonde.fr/disparitions/article/2005/10/11/guillaume-dustan-ecrivain-et-editeur-gay\\_698147\\_3382.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/disparitions/article/2005/10/11/guillaume-dustan-ecrivain-et-editeur-gay_698147_3382.html).
- Borghini, Rachele. "Post-porn." *Rue Descartes* 79, no. 3 (2013). <http://www.cairn.info/revue-rue-descartes-2013-3-page-29.htm>.
- Bourcier, Marie-Hélène [Sam]. *Queer zones: politiques des identités sexuelles, des représentations et des savoirs*. Paris: Balland, 2001.
- . *Queer zones 2 : sexpolitiques*. Paris: La Fabrique, 2005.
- . "La post-pornographie." Edited by Philippe Di Folco. *Dictionnaire de la pornographie*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2005.
- . *Queer zones 3 : identités, cultures et politiques*. Paris: Amsterdam, 2011.
- . "Cultural Translation, Politics of Disempowerment and the Reinvention of Queer Power and Politics." *Sexualities* 15, no. 1 (January 2012): 93–109.
- . "Bildungs-post-porn : notes sur la provenance du post-porn, un des futurs du féminisme de la désobéissance sexuelle." *Rue Descartes* 79, no. 3 (2013).
- Bourg, Julian. *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought*. Montreal and Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007.
- . "'Your Sexual Revolution Is Not Ours': French Feminist 'Moralism' and the Limits of Desire." In *Gender and Sexuality in 1968: Transformative Politics in the Cultural Imagination*, by Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen, 85–113. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Broqua, Christophe. *Agir pour ne pas mourir ! : Act Up, les homosexuels et le sida*. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2006.
- Brouard, Sylvain. "Orientation sexuelle et action publique : les bénéficiaires du mariage pour tous votent-ils plus à gauche ?" *CEVIPOF : l'enquête électorale française : comprendre 2017*, February 2016.
- Brubaker, W. Rogers. *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- . *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York and London: Routledge, 1993.

- Cairns, Lucille. "Queer, Republican France, and Its Euro-American 'Others.'" In *What's Queer About Europe? Productive Encounters and Re-Enchanting Paradigms*, edited by Mireille Rosello and Sudeep Dasgupta, 91–113. New York: Fordham University Press, 2014.
- Caron, David. *My Father and I: The Marais and the Queerness of Community*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009.
- Certeau, Michel de. *L'invention du quotidien*. vol. 1, arts de faire. Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1980.
- Cixous, Hélène. "Entretien avec Françoise van Rossum-Guyon." *Revue des sciences humaines* 42, no. 168 (1977): 479–93.
- . "Le rire de la méduse." *L'Arc* 61 (1975): 39–54.
- Clifford, Rebecca. *Commemorating the Holocaust: The Dilemmas of Remembrance in France and Italy*. Oxford Historical Monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Conan, Eric, and Henry Rousso. *Vichy: An Ever-Present Past*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998.
- Conley, Verena Andermatt. "Negotiating Space in Post-1968 French Thought." *Hagar* 10, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 9–21.
- Cusset, Catherine. "The Limits of Autofiction." The Center for French Civilization and Culture at New York University, 2012. <http://www.catherinecusset.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/THE-LIMITS-OF-AUTOFICTION.pdf>.
- Cusset, François. *French theory: Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Cie et les mutations de la vie intellectuelle aux Etats-Unis*. Paris: Découverte, 2003.
- Davis, Oliver. "Guillaume Dustan." *The Literary Encyclopedia*, June 11, 2008. <http://www.litencyc.com/php/people.php?rec=true&UID=11888>.
- De Beauvoir, Simone. *Le deuxième sexe*. 2 vols. Paris: Gallimard, 1949.
- De Gouges, Olympe. "Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne." In *Écrits politiques*, edited by Olivier Blanc, 1:204–15. Paris: Côté-femmes, 1993.
- Dean, Tim. *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- Delany, Samuel R. *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. Sexual Cultures. New York: New York University Press, 1999.
- Delorme, Wendy. *Quatrième génération*. Paris: Grasset, 2007.
- . *Insurrections ! en territoire sexuel*. Vauvert: Au diable Vauvert, 2009.
- . *La mère, la sainte et la putain*. Vauvert: Au diable Vauvert, 2012.
- Delphy, Christine. "The Invention of French Feminism: An Essential Move." *Yale French Studies*, no. 87 (1995): 190–221.
- . *Un universalisme si particulier: féminisme et exception française (1980-2010)*. Paris: Syllepse, 2010.
- Despentes, Virginie. *King kong théorie*. Paris: Grasset, 2006.
- Dobrovsky, Serge. *Fils*. Paris: Galilée, 1977.
- Downing, Lisa. "Sexuality." Edited by Christopher John Murray. *Encyclopedia of Modern French Thought*. New York: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2004.
- . "Interdisciplinarity, Cultural Studies, Queer: Historical Contexts and Contemporary Contentions in France." *Paragraph* 35, no. 2 (July 2012): 215–32.
- Duberman, Martin B. *Stonewall*. New York, N.Y., U.S.A: Dutton, 1993.
- Duong, Kevin. "Gender Trouble in France: An Interview with Camille Robcis." *Jacobin*, December 8, 2014. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/12/gender-trouble-in-france/>.

- Dustan, Guillaume. *Œuvres I : Dans ma chambre - Je sors ce soir - Plus fort que moi*. Edited by Thomas Clerc. Vol. 1. Paris: P.O.L., 2013.
- . *Nicolas Pages*. Paris: Balland, 1999.
- . *Génie divin*. Paris: Balland, 2001.
- Evans, David T. *Sexual Citizenship: The Material Construction of Sexualities*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Fassin, Eric. “Préface à l’édition française (2005) : Trouble-genre.” In *Trouble dans le genre (Gender Trouble) : le féminisme et la subversion de l’identité*, by Judith Butler, 5–19. translated by Cynthia Kraus. Paris: Découverte, 2012.
- , and Didier Fassin, eds. *De la question sociale à la question raciale: représenter la société française*. Paris: Découverte, 2009.
- Feraday, Christine. “For Lack of a Better World: Neo-Identities in Non-Cisgender, Non-Straight Communitites on Tumblr.” M.A. Thesis, Ryerson University and York University, 2016.
- FHAR. *Rapport contre la normalité: le Front homosexuel d’action révolutionnaire rassemble les pièces de son dossier d’accusation : simple révolte ou début d’une révolution ?* Paris: Champ libre, 1971.
- Foucault, Michel. *Lets mots et les choses*. Paris: Gallimard, 1966.
- . *Histoire de la sexualité*. Vol. 1, la volonté de savoir. Paris: Gallimard, 1976.
- . *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison*. Paris: Gallimard, 1975.
- . “Of Other Spaces.” *Diacritics*, no. 16 (Spring 1986): 22–27.
- Fournier, Mat. “‘Insurrections en territoire sexuel’: Wendy Delorme’s War Machines.” *L’Esprit Créateur* 53, no. 1 (2013): 87–100.
- Fuss, Diana. *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Garcia, Sandrine. “Project for a Symbolic Revolution: The Rise and Fall of the Women’s Movement in France.” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 93, no. 4 (1994).
- Garcia, Tristan. *La meilleure part des hommes*. Paris: Gallimard, 2008.
- Geddes, Andrew. *The Politics of Migration and Immigration in Europe*. London: Sage Publications, 2003.
- Genet, Jean. *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*. Paris: Morihien, 1943.
- . *Pompes funèbres*. Paris: Gallimard, 1953.
- Genette, Gérard. *Fiction et diction*. Paris: Seuil, 1991.
- Girard, Jacques. *Le mouvement homosexuel en France, 1945-1980*. Paris: Syros, 1981.
- Green, Nancy L. *The Pletzl of Paris: Jewish Immigrant Workers in The “belle Epoque.”* New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986.
- Guérin, Daniel. *Homosexualité et révolution*. Paris: Le vent du ch’min, 1983.
- Guillaumin, Colette. *L’idéologie raciste: genèse et langage actuel*. Paris: Mouton, 1972.
- . “Pratique de pouvoir et idée de nature (1) L’appropriation des femmes.” *Questions Féministes*, no. 2 (February 1978): 5–30.
- Gunther, Scott. *The Elastic Closet: A History of Homosexuality in France, 1942–present*. Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Haas, Ron. “Utopia Aborted: May ’68 in the Philosophy of Guy Hocquenghem.” *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 32 (2004): 404–24.
- . “The Death of the Angel: Guy Hocquenghem and the French Cultural Revolution after May 1968.” Ph.D. Dissertation, Rice University, 2007.
- Halberstam, Jack. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. Sexual Cultures. New York: New York University Press, 2005.

- Halperin, David M. *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." In *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, 149–81. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Hargreaves, Alec G. "Half-Measures: Antidiscrimination Policy in France." *French Politics, Culture & Society* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 83–101.
- Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1989.
- Hendrickson, Daniel, and Marc Siegel. "The Ghetto Novels of Guillaume Dustan." *Paroles Gelées* 16, no. 1 (1998): 97–119.
- Hennessy, Rosemary. *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Héritier, Françoise. *Masculin/féminin: la pensée de la différence*. Paris: Odile Jacob, 1996.
- . "Aucune société n'admet de parenté homosexuelle." *La Croix*, November 1998.
- . "Ne laissons pas la critique du PaCS à la droite !" *Le Monde*, January 27, 1999.
- Hocquenghem, Guy. "La révolution des homosexuels." *Le Nouvel observateur*, January 10, 1972.
- . *Le désir homosexuel*. Paris: Éditions universitaires, 1972.
- . *L'après-mai des faunes*. Paris: Grasset, 1974.
- . *La dérive homosexuelle*. Paris: J.-P. Delarge, 1977.
- . *Homosexual Desire*. Translated by Daniella Dangoor. London: Allison and Busby, 1978.
- . *La beauté du métis: réflexions d'un francophobe*. Paris: Ramsay, 1979.
- . *Le gay voyage: guide et regard homosexuels sur les grandes métropoles*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1980.
- . *L'amour en relief*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1982.
- . *La colère de l'agneau*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1985.
- . *Lettre ouverte à ceux qui sont passés du col Mao au Rotary*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1986.
- . *Love in Relief*. Translated by Noura Wedell. New York: SeaHorse Press, 1986.
- . *Ève*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1987.
- . *Les voyages et aventures extraordinaires du frère Angelo*. Paris: Michel, 1988.
- Hughes, Alex. "Écriture Féminine." Edited by Alex Hughes and Keith A. Reader. *Encyclopedia of Contemporary French Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, June 1998.
- Irigaray, Luce. "Interview: Paris, Summer 1980." In *Women Analyze Women in France, England, and the United States*, edited by Elaine Baruch and Lucienne Serrano, 149–64. New York: New York University Press, 1980.
- . "'Frenchwomen,' Stop Trying." In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, translated by Catherine Porter, 198–204. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- Jagose, Annamarie. *Lesbian Utopics*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.
- John D'Emilio. "Capitalism and Gay Identity." In *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, edited by Ann Barr Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, 100–113. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983.
- Jouvet, Émilie. *One night stand*. Hystérie Prod, 2006.
- . "One night stand." *Émilie Jouvet*, n.d. <http://www.emiliejouvet.com/one-night-stand>.

- . *Too much pussy ! Feminist sluts in the Queer X Show*. Solaris, 2010.
- Karras, Ruth Mazo. *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England*. Studies in the History of Sexuality. New York Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998.
- Kristeva, Julia. "My Memory's Hyperbole." Translated by Athena Viscusi. *New York Literary Forum* 12/13 (1984): 261–76.
- La révolution française et l'émancipation des juifs*. Vol. 7. Paris: EDHIS, 1968.
- Laborde, Cécile. *Critical Republicanism: The Hijab Controversy and Political Philosophy*. Oxford Political Theory. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Lauren Berlant, and Elizabeth Freeman. "Queer Nationality." In *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, edited by Michael Warner and Social Text Collective, 193–229. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- Laurens, Camille, and Annie Ernaux. Toute écriture de vérité déclenche les passions. Interview by Raphaëlle Rérolle. *Le Monde*, February 3, 2011.
- Lauretis, Teresa de. "Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness." *Feminist Studies* 16, no. 1 (1990): 115.
- Lavigne, Julie. "La post-pornographie comme art féministe: la sexualité explicite de Carolee Schneemann, d'Annie Sprinkle et d'Émilie Juvet." *Recherches féministes* 27, no. 2 (2014): 63–79.
- Le Goff, Jean-Pierre. *Mai 68: L'héritage impossible*. Paris: Découverte, 1998.
- Le Pen, Marine. "Discours à la fête de Jeanne d'Arc." Paris, May 1, 2011.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *La production de l'espace*. Paris: Anthropos, 1974.
- Lejeune, Philippe. *Le pacte autobiographique*. Paris: Seuil, 1975.
- Leonard, Diana, and Lisa Adkins. "Reconstructing French Feminism: Commodification, Materialism and Sex." In *Sex in Question: French Materialist Feminism*, 1–24. London and Bristol: Taylor & Francis, 1996.
- Leroy, Stéphane. "Le Paris gay. Éléments pour une géographie de l'homosexualité." *Annales de géographie* 646, no. 6 (2005): 579.
- Lesseps, Emmanuèle de. "Hétérosexualité et féminisme." *Questions féministes*, no. 7 (February 1980): 55–69.
- Lestrade, Didier. "En finir avec Dustan : répondre à Dustan..." *Act Up-Paris*, November 30, 2001. <http://www.actupparis.org/article202.html>.
- . "Répondre À Dustan..." *Act Up-Paris*, November 23, 2005. <http://www.actupparis.org/spip.php?article2240>.
- . *Pourquoi les gays sont passés à droite*. Paris: Seuil, 2012.
- Levine, Martin P. "Gay Ghetto." *Journal of Homosexuality* 4, no. 4 (July 20, 1979): 363–77.
- Llopis, Maria. *El postporno era eso*. Barcelona: Melusina, 2010.
- Louis Dupont. "« Où suis-je ? » Exploration du champ des possibles et des moyens de la (re)composition du « vivre ensemble », préalable à toute construction nationale majoritaire." In *Les nationalismes majoritaires contemporains: identité, mémoire, pouvoir*, edited by Alain-G. Gagnon, Geneviève Nootens, and André Lecours, 127–56. Montréal: Québec Amérique, 2007.
- Louis, Édouard. *En finir avec Eddy Bellegueule*. Paris: Seuil, 2014.
- Marshall, Bill. *Guy Hocquenghem: Theorising the Gay Nation*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.
- Martel, Frédéric. *Le rose et le noir: les homosexuels en France depuis 1968*. Paris: Seuil, 1996.
- Mathieu, Nicole-Claude. *L'anatomie politique*. Paris: Côté-femmes, 1992.

- Matic, Srdan. "Twenty-Five Years of HIV/AIDS in Europe." In *HIV/AIDS in Europe: Moving from Death Sentence to Chronic Disease Management*, edited by Srdan Matic, Jeffrey V. Lazarus, Martin C. Donoghoe, and World Health Organization, 1–14. Copenhagen, Denmark: World Health Organization Europe, 2006.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phénoménologie de la perception*. Paris: Gallimard, 1945.
- Moi, Toril. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. New Accents. London and New York: Methuen, 1985.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press, 2009.
- Neely, Brooke, and Michelle Samura. "Social Geographies of Race: Connecting Race and Space." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34, no. 11 (November 2011): 1933–52.
- Nielsen, Stine, and Lazarus, Jeffrey V. "Annex: HIV/AIDS Country Profiles for the WHO European Region." In *HIV/AIDS in Europe: Moving from Death Sentence to Chronic Disease Management*, edited by Srdan Matic, Jeffrey V. Lazarus, Martin C. Donoghoe, and World Health Organization, 243–74. Copenhagen, Denmark: World Health Organization Europe, 2006.
- Noguez, Dominique. "Rayon littérature universelle." *Écritures* 14 (2004): 93–97.
- Nyong'o, T. "Do You Want Queer Theory (or Do You Want the Truth)? Intersections of Punk and Queer in the 1970s." *Radical History Review* 2008, no. 100 (January 1, 2008): 103–19.
- OED Online*. Oxford University Press, June 2017. <http://www.oed.com>.
- Paternotte, David, and Manon Tremblay. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Lesbian and Gay Activism*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016.
- Penney, James. "The Schizoanalytic Protest." *Angelaki* 9, no. 1 (April 1, 2004): 67–83.
- Perreau, Bruno. *Queer Theory: The French Response*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016.
- Picq, Françoise. *Libération des femmes: les années-mouvement*. Paris: Seuil, 1993.
- Prearo, Massimo. "Le moment 70 de la sexualité : de la dissidence identitaire en milieu militant." *Genre, Sexualité et Société* 3 (2010).
- . *Le moment politique de l'homosexualité : mouvements, identités et communautés en France*. Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2014.
- . "La naissance de la formule « LGBT » en France et en Italie : une analyse comparative des discours de mobilisation." *Cultures et conflits* 97, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 77–95.
- Preciado, Beatriz [Paul B.]. "Gare à la gouine garou !, ou comment se faire un corps queer à partir de la pensée straight ?" In *Parce que les lesbiennes ne sont pas des femmes... autour de l'oeuvre politique, théorique et littéraire de Monique Wittig*, edited by Marie-Hélène Bourcier and Suzette Robichon, 179–214. Paris: Éditions gaies et lesbiennes, 2002.
- . *Testo junkie: sexe, drogue et biopolitique*. Paris: Grasset, 2008.
- . "Terror anal." In *El deseo homosexual*, by Guy Hocquenghem, 133–72. translated by Geoffroy Huard de la Marre. Barcelona: Melusina, 2009.
- . "The Architecture of Porn. Museum Walls, Urban Detritus and Stag Rooms for Porn-Prosthetic Eyes." In *Post/Porn/Politics: Symposium/Reader: Queer-Feminist Perspective on the Politics of Porn Performance and Sex-Work as Culture Production*, edited by Tim Stüttgen, 23–33. Berlin: B-Books, 2009.
- . *Manifeste contra-sexuel*. Translated by Marie-Hélène Bourcier. Paris: Balland, 2000.

- Provencher, Denis M. *Queer French: Globalization, Language, and Sexual Citizenship in France*. Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2007.
- Radicalesbians. "The Woman-Identified Woman." Pittsburgh: Know, Inc., 1970. Duke University Special Collections Library. <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/womid/>.
- Rancière, Jacques. *Politics of Literature*. Translated by Julie Rose. Cambridge and Malden: Polity, 2011.
- Reineke, Sandra. *Beauvoir and Her Sisters: The Politics of Women's Bodies in France*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Signs* 5, no. 4 (Summer 1980): 631–60.
- Rifkin, Adrian. "Does Gay Sex Need Queer Theory?" *Paragraph* 35, no. 2 (July 2012): 197–214.
- Robcis, Camille. *The Law of Kinship: Anthropology, Psychoanalysis, and the Family in France*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013.
- Rose, Gillian. *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- Ross, Kristin. *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune*. London and New York: Verso, 2008.
- Rubin, Gayle. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." In *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, edited by Carole S. Vance, 267–319. Boston, London, Melbourne, and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984.
- Schaal, Michèle A. "Bridging Feminist Waves: Wendy Delorme's Insurrections ! En Territoire Sexuel." *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 70, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 175–96.
- Scott, Joan Wallach. "Gender as a Useful Category of Historical Analysis." *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–75.
- . "Genre : Une catégorie utile d'analyse historique." Edited by Michèle Riot-Sarcey, Christine Planté, and Eleni Varikas. Translated by Eleni Varikas. *Cahiers du GRIF*, no. 37–38 (1988): 125–53.
- . *Only Paradoxes to Offer French Feminists and the Rights of Man*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- . *Parité!: Sexual Equality and the Crisis of French Universalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990.
- . *Tendencies*. London, UK and Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993.
- Seidman, Steven. "Difference and Democracy: Group Recognition and the Political Cultures of the US, Holland, and France." In *Difference Troubles: Queering Social Theory and Sexual Politics*, 237–54. Cambridge Cultural Social Studies. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Shepard, Todd. "'Something Notably Erotic': Politics, 'Arab Men,' and Sexual Revolution in Post-Decolonization France, 1962–1974." *The Journal of Modern History* 84, no. 1 (March 2012): 80–115.
- Sibalis, Michael. "Urban Space and Homosexuality: The Example of the Marais, Paris' 'Gay Ghetto.'" *Urban Studies* 41, no. 9 (August 2004): 1739–58.

- . “Gay Liberation Comes to France: The Front Homosexuel d’Action Révolutionnaire (FHAR).” *French History and Civilization: Papers from the George Rudé Seminar*, 2005, 267–78.
- . “The Spirit of May ’68 and the Origins of the Gay Liberation Movement in France.” In *Gender and Sexuality in 1968: Transformative Politics in the Cultural.*, edited by Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen, 235–54. New York: Palgrave, 2014.
- Soja, Edward. *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Theory*. London: Verso, 1989.
- Sprinkle, Annie. *Post-Porn Modernist: My 25 Years as a Multi-Media Whore*. San Francisco, Calif: Cleis Press, 1998.
- Stüttgen, Tim. “Before Orgasm: Fifteen Fragments on a Cartography of Post/Pornographic Politics.” In *Post/Porn/Politics: Symposium/Reader: Queer-Feminist Perspective on the Politics of Porn Performance and Sex-Work as Culture Production*, edited by Tim Stüttgen, 9–21. Berlin: B-Books, 2009.
- Thibaut, Josy. “Monique Wittig raconte.” *Prochoix : la revue du droit de choisir*, no. 46 (December 2008): 63–78.
- Tilley, Christopher Y. *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths, and Monuments*. Oxford and Providence: Berg, 1994.
- Torres, Diana J. *Pornoterrorismo*. País Vasco: Txalaparta, 2011.
- Triece, Mary Eleanor. *Urban Renewal and Resistance: Race, Space, and the City in the Late Twentieth to the Early Twenty-First Century*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977.
- Tudy, Louise. “Le livre polémique : que font les petits garçons ? en images.” *Le salon beige*, September 18, 2014. [http://lesalonbeige.blogs.com/my\\_weblog/2014/09/le-livre-pol%C3%A9mique-que-font-les-petits-gar%C3%A7ons-en-images.html](http://lesalonbeige.blogs.com/my_weblog/2014/09/le-livre-pol%C3%A9mique-que-font-les-petits-gar%C3%A7ons-en-images.html).
- Ty, Eleanor. “Écriture Féminine.” Edited by Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace. *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Urry, John. *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*. London and Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1990.
- Valls, Manuel. “C’est ça Marianne !” presented at the Meeting socialiste, Colomiers, Haute-Garonne, August 29, 2016.  
[http://dicocitations.lemonde.fr/citation\\_auteur\\_ajout/88977.php](http://dicocitations.lemonde.fr/citation_auteur_ajout/88977.php).
- Verow, Todd. *The Final Girl*. Breaking Glass Pictures, 2010.
- Voisset-Veyssere, Cécile. *Guy Hocquenghem: la révolte (1946-1988)*. Paris: Sextant, 2015.
- Williams, Linda. *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and The “Frenzy of the Visible.”* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.
- Wittig, Monique. *L’opoponax*. Paris: Minuit, 1964.
- . *Les guérillères*. Paris: Minuit, 1969.
- , Gille Wittig, Margaret Stephenson, and Marcia Rothenburg. “Combat pour la libération de la femme.” *L’idiot international*, no. 6 (May 1970): 13–16.
- , and Sande Zeig. *Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes*. Paris: Grasset, 1976.
- . “La pensée straight.” *Questions féministes*, no. 7 (February 1980): 45–53.
- . “On ne naît pas femme.” *Questions féministes*, no. 8 (May 1980): 75–84.
- . *Virgile, non*. Paris: Minuit, 1985.
- . “The Mark of Gender.” *Feminist Issues* 5, no. 2 (1985): 3–12.

- . *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.
- . *La pensée straight*. Translated by Marie-Hélène Bourcier. Paris: Balland, 2001.
- . “Some Remarks on The Lesbian Body.” In *On Monique Wittig: Theoretical, Political, and Literary Essays*, edited by Namascar Shaktini, 44–48. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005.
- . *Le chantier littéraire*. Lyon: Presses univ. de Lyon, 2010.
- Woo, Elaine. “Monique Wittig, 67; Leading French Feminist, Social Theorist and Novelist.” *The Los Angeles Times*. January 11, 2003. <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/jan/11/local/me-wittig11>.
- Zancarini-Fournel, Michelle. “Les féminismes : des mouvements autonomes ?” In *Le siècle des féminismes*, edited by Éliane Gubin, 227–38. Paris: l’Atelier, 2004.
- Zerilli, Linda M. G. *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Ziga, Itziar. *Devenir perra*. Barcelona: Mesulina, 2006.