Visualizing Violence in Francophone Cultures

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Edited by

Magali Compan

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 1
Violent Thoughts about the Visual
Magali Compan and Madelaine Hron

Part I: Violent Delights, Spectacles of the Body

Chapter One 9
Symbolic Violence and Public Displays of Difference
Luke Eilderts

Chapter Two 25
The Guillotine in Perspective
Lela Graybill

Chapter Three 49
Bitten by a Graphic, Rwanda Stray Dog: Postcolonial Discourse
and Jean-Philippe Stassen's *Deogratias*
Magali Compan

Part II: Witnessing: The Politics and Ethics of Aftermaths

Chapter Four 67
Auto-Documenting Violence Within the Cinema of Me: Counter-Archives
of the Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda
Alexandre Dauge-Roth

Chapter Five 93
Les Coups d'état or the Totemic Truncheon: The Visual Politics
of Depicting the Violent Police of French "Civil Society"
in the Radical New Media of Paris, 1890-1914
Kevin Robbins

Chapter Six 131
Performing Off-Staged Violence in Rachilde's Drama
Anna Rosensweig

Chapter Seven 147
The Humanitarian Gaze and the *Sans-Frontièrisme* of Suffering
Madelaine Hron

Bibliography 173

Contributors 187

INTRODUCTION

VIOLENT THOUGHTS ABOUT THE VISUAL

MAGALI COMPAN AND MADELAINE HRON

From prehistoric cave paintings to CGI animations of war, and from photographic evidence of atrocity to performance art promoting reconciliation, the power of visual representation is undeniable, as is its complex connection to violence. In fact, seminal scholarship on visual media seemingly cannot escape discussing violence, be it Susan Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) or Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), among many others. Though there have been numerous publications on the subject, this project constitutes both a contribution to and a departure from previous theorizations of violence and the visual, in that it foregrounds a set of foundational questions from both culturally-specific and transdisciplinary perspectives. Namely, some of the queries this collection investigates include, what is the role of visual cultures in generating or resisting violence in the French and francophone worlds? What are the unique possibilities, limitations, and difficulties for particular visual cultures in representing and responding to violence? What are the aims and functions of specific representations of violence? Do they enable or disable subjects of aggression? Do visual texts offer underrepresented communities a more efficient means of expression, one that is more accessible to a global audience? What is the role of the viewer of violence—that of passive accomplice or that of active witness? More generally, how do we respond to the aesthetic and ethical questions elicited by representations of violence and trauma? Lastly, when either representing or resisting violence, how do visual cultures work in relation to, in tension with, or in contrast to, other cultural media, such as literary texts?

From symbolic re-enactments in Greek tragedies to postcolonial denunciations of hegemonic power, discourses of violence have taken on disparate perspectives, from those focusing on the *factum brutum* of

physical force enacted on the self and the other, to those struggling with the epistemic violence contained in, and constituting, the practices of everyday life. Particularly salient in the francophone context is Frantz Fanon's revolutionary Marxist perspective in *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961); in a time of intensifying African independence struggles, Fanon both exposed the mechanics of violence between the colonizer and colonized, and clamored for violence as a means of cathartic liberation from political and mental states of colonization. Fifty years later, in *La Violence* (2004), Michel Wieviorka argued that, in a post-Cold War world, the phenomenon of human violence, rather than diminishing, has in fact increased, and is taking on increasingly intricate and precariously insidious structural forms. Developing on this wide spectrum of debates about violence, this collection thus oscillates from oppression to liberation, from the particular to the ubiquitous, and from the specious to the suspicious. On one hand, it problematizes the relationship between violence and memory, history, and counter-history, and on the other hand, it celebrates visual expressions of culture as fertile sites of creation and illumination, sites that can not only illustrate, but also productively intervene in tangible workings of violence.

The pervasive human compulsion to engage in acts of violence is coupled with the parallel drive to make sense of such acts of violence, as is amply attested by the abundance of publications on the representations of violence in the recent decade of the "war on terror." This volume differs from previous publications, however, as it conjoins two complex and powerful loci of meaning: violence and the visual. As such, this volume's first goal is to offer a comprehensive overview from which one can gain a better understanding of the complexity of the visual rhetoric of violence. The visual representations of violence explored in this volume include both fictional works (e.g. narrative films, graphic novels, theatre) and non-fictional genres (e.g. advertisements, news media, cultural artifacts). Moreover, this volume offers a heterogeneous yet comprehensive study of the rhetoric of the image, because it considers these cultural products as both sensory expressions with cultural meaning, as well as aesthetic interventions with political connotations. This volume's strength is also grounded in its interdisciplinary approach. By bringing together scholars from a variety of academic fields (e.g. history, anthropology, cultural, film and literary studies), who examine a broad range of visual artifacts, such as photographs, graphic novels, films, paintings, and objects, our intention is to build a substantive corpus focusing on the visual rhetoric of violence.

The essays collected in this volume explore the ways in which visual expressions of violence have infiltrated diverse narrative forms and as

such, how they both construct and challenge our general understandings of contemporary violence. The authors gathered in this volume are therefore not narrowly concerned with intentionally aestheticized images of violence, but rather they consider the ramifications of such aesthetics in everyday praxes of violence. Our examination of visual representations of violence thus transcends an investigation of aesthetic, generic and narrative conventions, and delves into the works' social and political contexts. Violence thus becomes a modality of cultural analysis, practice, and critique, just as visual texts are viewed as evolving with the readers who interact with them, resulting in a complex process that shapes contemporary understandings of the world.

One of the objectives of this collection is also to interrogate the spatial contours and temporal imbrications of violence and politics across different periods and cultural spheres. By surveying a variety of spatial and temporal contexts, this volume emphasizes the fluctuating definition of contemporary understandings of violence. One constant, however, is the popular nature of violent visual representations, most evident today in our increasingly graphic mass media, wherein spectators derive a certain vicarious pleasure, or "violent delight," in beholding extreme acts of violence. In their studies of visual violence in a spatially and historically heterogeneous francophone world, the essays in this volume refute the attribution of violence to a constructed "other" space and/or time. Rather, the collection underscores the pervasiveness of everyday practices of violence as well as the interdependent relationship between a civilized "us" and a violent "other." As such, working across time and space, the volume works to analyze, deconstruct and blur the long-standing cultural distinctions between a peaceful, civilized, Western "us" and a primitive, savagely violent "other."

While some essays here reflect on the role of visual art in times of social crisis, others decry more mundane, systemic structures of violence. Similarly, just as some essays call to attention the role of representation in bearing witness and truth telling, others point to its role in authenticating or trivializing. For others yet, visual expressions of violence signal the triumph of human agency over demonic forces, while others still warn of the epistemic and material consequences of visual violence. Their aim notwithstanding, all of the chapters here understand and posit violence as a historically-situated phenomenon that takes many forms and is affected by many factors, be it aesthetics, gender, religion, politics and so on. Furthermore, all advocate for the continuing need for social, political, and cultural critique, and for imagining alternatives to the violence which inhabits current socio-political, economic, and cultural configurations.

Part One, entitled "Violent Delights, Spectacles of the Body," is composed of three essays that focus on the body as the recipient or perpetrator of violence. The first chapter, "Symbolic Violence and Public Displays of Difference" by Luke Eilderts, proposes an examination of the symbolic violence in Strasbourg's *marche des visibilités homosexuelles, bisexuelles et transgenres.* Reacting to the denial of fully-equal citizenship rights, participants take to the streets to demonstrate and in so doing, provide a moving canvas of changing images and configurations. Drawing on Slavoj Žižek's theorization of violence, Eilderts examines the Strasbourg gay pride parade as a way of grasping the workings of symbolic violence and power in this public display of non-normative sexuality. Furthermore, the author argues that these reconfiguring images take on a transitive property, wherein their goal is to convey to spectators a message so powerful, that it invites them to examine their own personal ideas about sexual deviancy and non-normative family configurations. Through an analysis of images of the parade, Eilderts examines the role violence plays from the points of view of both participants and spectators.

In the second chapter, "The Guillotine in Perspective," Lela Graybill considers the guillotine, the decapitating machine that the French adopted in 1791, as a technology for visually legitimating violence for the French people. Graybill focuses on the visual effects of the guillotine, analyzing a key set of images to argue for the guillotine's central role in constructing a new individualistic social order during the Revolutionary decade. Expatiating on the spectacle and spectacular of beheading, Graybill argues that the phenomenological effect of the guillotine was to locate the time of violence primarily in the time of the viewing, in the experience of the spectator, rather than that of the victim.

In Chapter Three, "Bitten by a Graphic, Rwandan Stray Dog: Postcolonial Discourse and Jean-Philippe Stassen's *Deogratias*," Magali Compan focuses on the violence enacted on the text and on the body, which gives rise to the metamorphic body of the text and of the main character Deogratias, as well as on delineating the disappearance, or blurring of previously defined borders. Compan argues that Stassen's graphic novel proves to be a uniquely effective mode of delivery, which fosters its readership's ability to track and theorize contemporary social constructions of power and privilege both within and outside the text. She considers *Deogratias* as a powerful weapon of change, which both transcends the status quo but also presents itself as a monstrosity. It is this alternatively "graphic," violent, stray-dog literary agency that makes a case for a uniquely revealing contribution to postcolonial discourse and francophone literary and cultural production.

Part Two, entitled "Witnessing: The Politics and Ethics of Aftermaths," includes four essays that examine the complexities of witnessing as related to the visual image, be it as form of commemoration, denunciation, subversion or restitution. Chapter Four, "Auto-Documenting Violence Within the Cinema of Me: Counter-Archives of the Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda" by Alexandre Dauge-Roth analyzes the auto-documentary *By the Shortcut* (2009) by Maximo Mwicira Mitali, which not only bears witness to the 1994 genocide, but also documents the post-genocide process of memorialization and agency by a survivor filmmaker. Dauge-Roth explores how Dady de Maximo's auto-documentary refuses the aesthetic of the ineffable, while forging an unprecedented space of witnessing and remembrance for those whose bodies are at risk of drowning in oblivion. Dauge-Roth argues that Dady de Maximo shoots for a new social recognition of the Tutsi genocide and positions himself polemically within the competing representations of the past, in order to assert the value of this knowledge, as well as his own subjectivity within the memorialization process.

The fifth chapter, "*Les Coups d'état* or the Totemic Truncheon: The Visual Politics of Depicting the Violent Police of French 'Civil' Society in the Radical New Media of Paris: 1900-1914" by Kevin Robbins focuses on the irreverent and deeply critical illustrated weekly *L'Assiette au beurre*, an anarchist publication which sought to smear the vicious malfeasance of Europe's wealthier governing classes. Robbins outlines the socio-political and cultural contexts that fostered the development of publications like the *Assiette au beurre*, and then closely examines select images that were vital to the publication's focused art of political protest. Particularly striking are the numerous scenes of quotidian brutality that the state police unleashed against various hapless human targets. In his conclusion, Robbins suggests that many of the graphics he analyzes work to thwart the Third Republic's violent efforts at imposing a neo-colonial police state on suspect urban populations, by evoking deeply contested imagery and symbols of the modern French state.

In Chapter Six, "Performing Off-Staged Violence in Rachilde's Drama," Anna Rosensweig investigates the techniques of gendered self-fashioning that are deployed in two of Rachilde's one-act plays, *La Poupée transparente* (1919) and *La Femme peinte* (1921). In both plays, which stage domestic scenes and feature women in archetypical feminine roles, women undertake deliberate projects to re-fashion themselves in the image and the service of a ghost, spirit or apparition. Arguing that such projects constitute a form of commemorative mourning, Rosensweig demonstrates how, in the wake of World War I, these women respond to

forms of institutional and social violence ranging from pathologies of female hysteria to those of collective trauma. Appealing to the visual as a site of truth and (male) authority, these plays implicate the audience in the forms of violence faced by the protagonists, while destabilizing the visual through illusion, disguise, and the power of the immaterial.

The concluding seventh chapter, "The Humanitarian Gaze and the *Sans-Frontièrisme* of Suffering" by Madelaine Hron, explores the ethical complexities associated with the global humanitarian gaze, in particular, the *sans-frontièriste* gaze promulgated by Médicins Sans Frontières/ Doctors Without Borders (MSF) since the mid-seventies. Countering the long-established stance of neutrality, *sans-frontièrisme* sought to transcend borders by witnessing to the sufferings of distant others with the use of media. In her comprehensive overview, Hron surveys the history of the humanitarian gaze from its beginnings in eighteenth-century sentimentalism to its present-day hypermedia modulations; she delves into the possibilities, challenges and limitations of this gaze, by elaborating on discourses of proximity, compassion and neo-colonialism, and finally, she considers more subversive forms of humanitarian representation, from humorous Youtube parodies to "outrage porn."

Ultimately, all of the essays in this collection aim to chart, with cultural and historical specificity, the way in which images of violence shape the visual imaginary of our ethical worlds. Certainly, some of the works analyzed here reveal surprising and even seditious elements that are perhaps particular to their specific francophone context; however, all of them also share common tropes and motifs that transcend space and time. Our sincere hope is that, upon perusing this collection, readers will better understand the interstices of violence and the visual, and how these conjunctions inform our daily lives and our minds. Ambitiously, this collection would also hope to offer some small insight into how to curtail the violence in our midst, or how to transform it in positive ways. More practically, it would be content in granting readers new ways of seeing, despite and in light of, the many acts of violence in our world.

PART I:

VIOLENT DELIGHTS,
SPECTACLES OF THE BODY

CHAPTER ONE

SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE AND PUBLIC DISPLAYS OF DIFFERENCE

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Gay pride parades are messy affairs.[1] At times they may promote a politically and socially radical message that resists traditional heteronormative family constructions, while at others they may uphold these normative structures as the model to be embraced, and at still others they may not favor any particular message at all. And this, sometimes even within the same event. While authors such as David Bell and Gill Valentine have described the transformative powers of gay pride events and rallies, that is to say their ability to queer the city streets and underscore the heteronormative construction of public space, others like David Caron are critical of the idea of "pride" altogether since this discursive construction creates limits on the myriad manifestations of sexuality by constructing a binary in which people must either be proud or ashamed of their sexual identity.[2] What this author hopes to contribute is a discussion of the normalizing discourses and the symbolic violence they inflict on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT)[3] population, not only from the point of view of the parade itself, but also from the French model of republicanism. To achieve this goal, the author will examine a key moment in the genesis of the *Marche des visibilités*[4] [March of visibilities] held every year since 2002 in the eastern French city of Strasbourg as well as a striking moment from the parade itself. First, however, let us briefly situate Strasbourg's gay pride rally before turning to the issue of symbolic violence, French republicanism, and a moving display of S/M play.

Gay Pride and Strasbourg's *Marche des visibilités*

At the surface, gay pride parades conjure up images of joy and happiness, seemingly with the aim of dispelling the belief that being

LGBT is shameful and disgraceful. In the words of Anne and Marine Rambach,

> La Gay Pride est aussi l'expression du bonheur et du plaisir d'être homosexuel/lesbienne…La Gay Pride s'acharne à être légère, à privilégier la danse, à préférer le sourire au poing tendu et le baiser au slogan…Le Bonheur d'être un pédé ou une gouine, la réjouissante obscénité d'être heureux quand on est discriminé, de prendre du plaisir à ce qui vous marginalise, et de patiner sur l'insulte.[5]

> Gay Pride is also the expression of the joy and the pleasure of being gay/lesbian…Gay pride aims to be light, to privilege dance, to prefer a smile to a raised fist and a kiss to a slogan…The joy in being a fag or a dyke, the gratifying obscenity of being happy when one is discriminated against, to take pleasure in that which marginalizes you, and to skate on insult.[6]

By appearing in the light of day, gay pride rallies invite LGBT people and their allies into full view of the public, whether in person or through media outlets like newspapers, television, and the Internet. Indeed, as Rambach and Rambach suggest above, gay pride rallies function as a kind of response to a generalized society that views non-normative sexuality negatively. And yet, while gay pride parades often elicit disapproval in conservative heteronormative circles, disapproval can also come from the LGBT community the rally is supposedly trying to represent. The author will return to this idea in the following sections.

Public demonstrations are a part of the French cultural landscape, embedded into the collective consciousness and memory of the Nation. The French Revolution of 1789, as well as the many revolutions that followed, has been stamped onto the French cultural collective through its repetition, and this "genealogy," to borrow from Judith Butler, gives rallies of this nature their legibility.[7] As Sarah Waters argues,

> Social movements may represent a different set of groups in society and may invent new ways of acting and expressing themselves, but the processes which they reveal are very old, manifesting a legacy of social and civic mobilization that has deep historical roots.[8]

Waters uncovers through several case studies the manner in which groups representing different parts of the French social landscape employ similar methods and aim for similar goals, and that these goals often revolve around "rights and about the struggle to obtain rights by different groups in society."[9] One of the underlying ideas that informs Waters's

work comes from Jacques Guilhaumou's proposition that many social movements are able to draw upon the history of the French Revolution in order to bolster their claim to legitimacy.[10] According to Guilhaumou, then, social movements that take to the city streets can claim the French Revolution and all the (glorious) violence that it represents within the French collective consciousness.

The French version of the gay pride parade shares its lineage on both sides of the Atlantic.[11] In many respects, it has a Franco-American heritage: as mentioned above, it shares a genealogy with the respected and highly legitimate French Revolution. On the American side, it has the Stonewall riots of June 1969, where during a police raid on the Stonewall Inn of Christopher Street in New York City, the patrons of the establishment decided to resist systematic abuse and to fight back against the police..It can be argued that "Stonewall" has come to mark the beginning of the modern gay and lesbian movement—and the bar itself still stands and represents a *lieu de mémoire*[12] [realm of memory] for many. In fact, Berlin's gay pride rally is called "Christopher Street Day," named after the street upon which the Stonewall Inn still stands.[13]

The Alsatian capital of Strasbourg has been the host of the region's gay pride parade since 2002, when the first one made its way through the city streets. Regional capital and one of the capitals of Europe, the city of Strasbourg has a population of about 274,394, which makes it the seventh-largest city in France.[14] If we include the Communauté urbaine de Strasbourg (CUS or Urban Community of Strasbourg, which includes 28 villages surrounding Strasbourg proper), the population grows to 474,500, and there are about 6 million inhabitants within the transnational Rhine community.[15] Seat of the European parliament, it is also home to the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights. In addition to these European institutions, Strasbourg is home to seventy-five embassies and diplomatic representatives, which places it on par with other world cities like New York City and Geneva as a diplomatic hub outside the capital of the country.[16] With these characteristics in mind, some have found this late addition to the list of gay pride rallies across France striking, often pointing to the traditionally conservative political climate of the region to provide explanation.[17]

Symbolic Violence and the Interpretation of the Body

Violence does not need to be spectacular. Indeed, its ability to take on many forms and influence multiple social dimensions all the while remaining nearly imperceptible underscores the threat violence represents

in everyday life and the complacency it can produce. Slavoj Žižek illustrates this point when he writes that we need to reevaluate the way we consider violence in its many forms:

> At the forefront of our minds, the obvious signals of violence are acts of crime and terror, civil unrest, international conflict. But we should learn to step back, to disentangle ourselves from the fascinating lure of this directly visible "subjective" violence, violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent. We need to perceive the contours of the background which generates such outbursts. A step back enables us to identify a violence that sustains our very efforts to fight violence and to promote tolerance.[18]

Žižek continues by explaining that "subjective" violence is that which is most visible, that which disturbs the "normal" state of affairs, while "objective" violence endeavors to uphold "the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent."[19] What Žižek expresses here is that society's fascination with overt violence often masks the underlying systemic (symbolic) violence that may actually be one of the root causes of these more spectacular displays of violence. The gay pride event that the author investigates in this essay does not demonstrate "subjective" violence; rather, the political struggle to launch this event as well as the demonstrators themselves present an interesting opportunity to grasp the workings of symbolic violence and power in this public display of non-normative sexuality.

As social beings, our bodies are forever tied up in the innumerable connections with other social beings. The body is linked to a larger network, enmeshed in issues of power, representation, and agency. As Judith Butler writes, "Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own,"[20] where our bodily actions are at once new to our own experience and understanding, and yet can also find themselves inscribed in a long history of similarly marked movements. Butler continues by saying that "the body has its invariable public dimension. Constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine."[21] Through our own actions, we may choose to present our body to the public, to the public gaze, joining with others in order to form a larger, more easily identifiable, and—maybe even more importantly—a less easily ignored body that, through its presence in certain situations and locations, may influence social change and political power. Through these actions, our social body becomes interpretable, readable, and consumable alongside those other social bodies. Through this interpretation of the social body, the control over the meaning, transmission, and consumption of our body

is no longer fully within an individual's control, echoing Butler's statement above. For example, the people who "consume" the rally may conflate the event they see before them with the entirety of the LGBT population. To borrow from Pierre Bourdieu, the "image," that is to say the linguistic and visual messages portrayed, "peut faire voir et faire croire à ce qu'elle fait voir. Cette puissance d'évocation a des effets de mobilisation. Elle peut faire exister des idées ou des représentations, mais aussi des groupes"[22] [can make visible and make believable that which it (the image) makes visible. This power of evocation has mobilizing effects. It can make ideas and representations exist, but also groups]. That is to say, what is performed during the rally functions as a kind of synecdoche for the entire LGBT population, thus giving the impression that there exists a coherent community of LGBT people. For those who do not identify with straight society, the rally may present a model to emulate. Alternatively, people who identify as LGBT may reject the event since it does not represent them as they wish to be represented, if they want to be represented at all.

While people may lament the loss of the radical nature of the early gay pride parades, there is an equally insistent cry that participants who visually perform these sexually suggestive and/or radical roles give a bad name to LGBT people who wish to be perceived just like everyone else. As David Halperin writes, these sexually suggestive participants are an "embarrassment" to the official gay identity:

> Gay pride celebrations in major urban centers still do have their uniquely queer, transgressive, carnivalesque contingents—from dykes on bikes to boy-lovers, from drag queens to porn starts. But such figures represent a distinct embarrassment to the official, public image of American gay identity, with its politics of respectability, social responsibility, and affirmation. In the week following any gay pride parade, dozens of letters typically appear in the local newspapers (both mainstream and gay) complaining that gay pride has become a freak show and that the presence of all those flaming creatures at the march gives homosexuality a Bad Name and is Bad For The Cause.[23]

Although Halperin here is speaking about the American gay identity, the same concern over these "embarrassing" LGBT participants can be found within a French context. In her ethnographic research, Jeanne Robineau summarizes the reactions of one of her participants (here named "A") to the media's preference for displaying the image of the effeminate male to its audience:

> les clichés et stéréotypes seraient aussi, et principalement véhiculés par les médias, friands de l'image de l'homme efféminé. Cela leur permettrait d'attirer l'attention des téléspectateurs et de faire de l'audience télévisuelle. Aussi A prend l'exemple de la Gay Pride, dont les images (montrant des drags queens et des travestis), diffusées par les médias ne seraient pas représentatives de la réalité.[24]

> clichés and stereotypes, principally spread by the media, would also be partial to the image of the effeminate man. This allows them [the media] to attract the viewers' attention and to create a television audience. As such, "A" takes the example of Gay Pride, whose images (showing drag queens and cross-dressers), broadcast by the media, would not be representative of reality.

Moreover, in the summer of 2008 during preliminary fieldwork for another project, many of the self-identified gay men to whom the author spoke commented that their sexuality had very little to do with their overall identity, and that Strasbourg's rally was not representative of the average gay Alsatian. Some even voiced their concern over how the event represented them to those who saw it, often referencing the image of the drag queen as one of the worst of all comparisons. To return to Bourdieu and Žižek and the media's preference for the spectacular, the coverage that Strasbourg's 2008 rally received confirmed some of the participants' biggest fears: the image chosen to accompany the story was indeed that of a drag queen dressed in a 1960s go-go girl outfit, complete with white boots and big hair.

French Republicanism and Public Displays of Sexuality

Many French studies scholars who examine the idea of community must confront French republicanism, which banishes communitarian (*communautaire*) identities to the private sphere. Carl Stychin writes that republicanism "depends upon a belief in citizenship as a national project in which individuals *in fact* will transcend their particular affiliations, towards full and foundational membership in a wider community of citizens."[25] Enda McCaffrey also states that citizenship in France relies on a kind of "forgetting" of difference by its citizens who believe in the good of a common identity: "The modern French state is founded on the notion of equality for all citizens regardless of difference. Inherent in this concept is the 'oubli' of difference in favour of a core of common citizenship that is shared by all."[26] Finally, David Caron takes it one step further by phrasing his explanation in such a way as to underscore the almost active

nature of the republic in its policing of intermediary identities when he writes,

> The French republic…tends to have a problem with community, which it has a hard time distinguishing from essentialized identity. In a universalist nation such as France, where the structuring poles of society are the State at one end and free and equal individuals at the other, intermediate markers of identity—religion, ethnicity, sexuality, national origin, and the like—must be confided to the private sphere and never *ever* serve as the basis for political claims.[27]

Gay pride parades that demand for equal rights therefore cannot claim those rights in the name of their non-normative sexuality; rather they must adopt a universalizing discourse where their rights are rights that belong to *everyone*. As Denis Provencher explains,

> the French language of sexual citizenship involves the articulation of unspecified "difference" related to a republican universalistic model that does not tout individualism. This is most evident in the 1999 PaCS legislation that does not differentiate between same-sex and opposite-sex couples in terms of access to civil union.[28]

Debates over the PaCS as well as the more recent *mariage pour tous* [marriage for all] demonstrate these discursive formations and, with the passage of both laws, the political success they can achieve.[29] Despite these political victories, Provencher points out that the French republican system represents a kind of "paradox," where on one hand it "protects gays and lesbians by providing them equal rights," but at the same time, "does not provide them visibility as a particular group."[30] Moreover, these discourses are bound up in the culturally specific realms of traditional marriage and normative gender, which favor a "we're-just-like-everyone-else" rhetoric that can preclude substantive reconfigurations of society. While some LGBT people may find comfort in the normalizing discourses of marriage—often those that benefit most from those institutions—the respectful and agreeable demonstrations do not always please everyone, especially those who wish to question bourgeois family norms.

To demonstrate the normalizing influences and discourses on non-normative sexuality in the public sphere, let us now revisit an interview accorded to the French gay and lesbian magazine, *Têtu*, by the then sitting mayor, Fabienne Keller.[31] In their work, Rambach and Rambach touch upon a few parts of Keller's interview, but the author would like to investigate Keller's remarks more closely as he feels that they do not address the manner in which she employs republican universal discourse

to criticize what was then the upcoming first gay pride rally in 2002.[32] While the author does not disagree with Rambach and Rambach's assertion that Keller's words and actions, among others, helped facilitate the creation of a "community,"[33] it is interesting to see the manner in which Keller employs familiar republican values to question the event. What follows is the author's close reading of some of Keller's most striking remarks.

During the interview Keller expresses her hesitation to an event that privileges a sexualized identity in the public sphere. For her, an event of this kind does not uphold traditional republican values; instead it creates communities within communities, which threaten the integrity of the nation. When asked why she was hesitant to be interviewed by *Têtu*, she answered,

> J'ai une vision un peu duale sur la question. D'un côté, les gens sont libres d'avoir la vie sexuelle qu'ils souhaitent en privé, dès lors qu'elle préserve les enfants. En revanche, je suis un peu plus réticente sur tout ce qui concerne l'affirmation et la démonstration de pratiques sexuelles. Les choix personnels de chacun ne doivent pas être affichés comme une bannière. *Têtu* est présenté avant tout comme le magazine des gays et des lesbiennes. J'ai perçu dans les quelques articles que j'y ai lus une affirmation forte d'une identité liée à une pratique sexuelle. C'est là que je ne suis pas d'accord: un être humain ne se limite pas à cela. De là ma réserve.[34]

> I am of two minds concerning the question. On one hand, people are free to have the sexual life they wish in private, as long as it protects children. However, I am a little reticent when it comes to the assertion and display of sexual practices. Each one's personal choice should not be displayed like a banner. *Têtu* is presented before all else as the Gay and Lesbian magazine. In the few articles that I read I found a strong affirmation of an identity based on sexual practices. It is with this that I do not agree: a human being is not limited to just that. Thus, my hesitation.

Keller's remarks demonstrate a very traditional republican discourse whereby difference is to be relegated to the private sphere. She declares that the private sphere is the correct location for sexual activity, and by stating that people are free to have the sexual life that they want *in private*, she frames her response in very republican terms. In so doing, she does not condemn any kind of sexual practice explicitly, be it opposite- or same-sex activity. Interestingly, however, Keller does remark that whatever the sexual activity may be, it should not put children in danger. A familiar charge of conservatives, Rambach and Rambach rightly call Keller out,

remarking that "elle sous-entend que l'homosexualité mène à la pédophilie" [she implies that homosexuality leads to pedophilia].[35]

Keller continues her statement by saying that while she believes that people's sexual choices *in private* are to be respected, she does not believe that these sexual practices should be displayed openly *in public*. Here Keller demonstrates her strict adherence to republican ideology by clearly marking the border between acceptable public and private behavior: do what you wish in the private sphere, but do not overtly display this choice in the public sphere.

In the latter half of her response, Keller continues to call upon republican ideology to justify her "*réserve*" [reserve] in according an interview with *Têtu*. Although she does not explicitly say that she is against a magazine that describes itself as "*le magazine des gays et des lesbiennes*," [the magazine of gays and lesbians] what follows seems to suggest it. After reading a few articles in the magazine to familiarize herself with its content, she concludes that it too strongly favors a sexual identity. And in favoring a sexual identity, her underlying conclusion is that *Têtu* endorses a communitarian conception of society. That is to say that the magazine is geared towards a specific group of people who favor their sexual identity more than any other, to the point that they close in on themselves—a "*repli sur soi*" [withdrawal into oneself] to use Keller's words.[36]

Finally, Keller states that she believes that people should not be limited by their sexual identity. For her, a human being is more than his/her sexual identity. In this way, Keller dissociates identity and practice when she says that an identity should not be linked so strongly to a sexual practice. Keller employs the discourse of the universal to disqualify any identity that would be favored over the "universal" identity of French republicanism. Furthermore, in favoring a sexual identity at the cost of a "universal" identity, Keller sees this as "limiting" oneself from fully entering the public sphere to participate in society. In other words, one is not able to assimilate fully into the French "melting pot."[37]

In this short response, Fabienne Keller outlines what it means to be a "bad" (sexual) citizen.[38] First, public display of sexuality: one is not supposed to make one's difference "known." In her words, it should not be "*affiché comme une bannière*" [displayed like a banner] for all to see. An act such as this disrupts the "universal" (silent?) public sphere by drawing attention to difference. Although she does not explicitly state it, her reader is to understand her universal discourse as applying to any kind of sexuality to which attention is drawn in the public sphere. This being said, Keller acknowledges that the magazine is read primarily by French gays

and lesbians, and therefore her remark rings as a disapproval of non-normative sexuality in the public sphere. For both instances, the "*affirmation*" [assertion] and the "*démonstration*" [display] of sexual practices, these two acts seem to point to a public display, namely gay pride celebrations where participants march down the street proclaiming their (sexual) preferences/differences.

Keller continues to show her hesitation to the idea of having a demonstration that emphasizes, in her words, an identity strongly linked to a sexual practice. In her experience, these kinds of events only serve to further distance people with (implied) non-normative sexual practices from fully assimilating into society:

> Dans les Gay Pride que j'ai vues, notamment à San Francisco, il y avait des choses choquantes, excessives. Ce qu'on nous montre dans ces manifestations appartient à la vie privée, un domaine à respecter. Il faut être extrêmement vigilant. Franchement, à titre personnel, je ne pense pas que cela facilite l'intégration des homosexuels dans la société. Cette affirmation très forte, presque violente, est une manière de se différencier des autres et de s'en écarter. Ce n'est pas la bonne méthode pour s'intégrer.[39]

> In the gay pride parades that I have seen, notably in San Francisco, there were some shocking things, excessive. What is shown to us in these demonstrations belongs to private life, a domain to be respected. One must be extremely vigilant. Frankly, I personally do not think that this helps facilitate the integration of homosexuals into society. This very strong affirmation, almost violent, is a way to differentiate oneself from others and to move away from them. This is not the right method for integration.

Interestingly, Keller evokes the threat of "*l'Amérique*" [America] when she references the San Francisco parades that she saw there. As much of the debate that went on over the PaCS employed the United States as the model to avoid at all costs, it is, in some ways, no surprise that Keller would also deploy the same discourse of "danger" to support her dislike of a parade that, in her mind, favors a sexualized identity over all others. And yet, as Eric Fassin argues, "*l'Amérique*" is a kind of "empty signifier" that is able to take on whatever meaning the speaker wants.[40]

In this case, Keller wishes to place France in opposition to an "*Amérique*" where society supports these kinds of overt displays of sexuality, which, as she states in the earlier quote and then reiterates here, is something that should only be located in the private sphere. In so doing, Keller places France and the United States at opposite ends of the spectrum: France is to represent a society where identity is not linked to, in

her mind, such a limited view of the human being ("*l'être humain*"), rather it is a society that transcends difference for the common good; the United States represents a society where people privilege a (politicized) identity strongly linked to sexuality, religion, or ethnicity (to name a few), thereby splintering into competing groups. The trope of the United States as the model-to-avoid has already been well entrenched in the common memory of the French,[41] therefore by evoking San Francisco as a kind of synecdoche for the United States and the supposed form of society that it represents, Keller is able to subtly discredit any parade that would be similar to the ones she has seen simply by the fact that the United States is very often placed in opposition to the French model.

Finally, Keller states that this kind of violent public display does not facilitate the integration of homosexuals into society. Whereas in the previous quote Keller did not specifically name the group as "homosexuals," instead referring to sexual practices in order to privilege a universal human being who just happens to exhibit same-sex desire, here she names them explicitly. In so doing, Keller has designated them as the "other," a group that calls attention to its difference and therefore places itself outside of the greater "society" into which it wants to integrate. So strongly does she feel about this act of difference that Keller repeats at the end of her quote that this parade only drives a larger wedge between gays and lesbians and "society," assumed in this case to be heterosexual.

In these brief passages, we see that Keller uses a language that evokes fear, violence, and the specter of the United States to support her distrust of gay pride, all the while employing familiar republican ideologies to support her claims. Despite the concerns of the mayor's office, however, Strasbourg's first gay pride rally finally did take place in June 2002 and has continued annually ever since. In the last section of this essay, the author will briefly discuss an image from the first rally to illustrate some of these concerns and why displays of this kind can be perceived as dangerous to heteronormative society.

Visualizing S/M Violence and Power

Let us turn now to a scene of the parade and its participants, for it is they who give it life. From year to year, of course, the number of participants changes and the overall impression the parade leaves on the spectators may be different. Indeed, the organizers change, the organizations that participate change, and so on. By placing themselves under the gaze of the spectators, they aim to demonstrate their numbers by coming together with other like-minded people in an act of social and

political power. They make themselves visible, possibly even vulnerable to the spectators' gazes.

What is also very interesting in a parade of this kind is that the participants, through their construction of a visual identity, highlight the blurry nature of violence. In an image taken during the 2002 parade, we find several participants surrounding another participant who is lying on his back in a sling with his legs in the air.[42] All participants expose a titillating amount of skin, dressed in leather and leather-like garments that all index a scene of S/M. Highlighted here is the role of the body, through its nearly unimpeded presentation, but also the question of pain and pleasure and the private/public distinction in S/M and leather culture. In his exploration of the subculture leathermen, Peter Hennen remarks on the public dimension of S/M sex as well as the more and more voyeuristic turn many "old guard" S/M participants lament.[43] The author believes that the presence of these men engaging in a display of S/M activity engages the audience into a kind of reevaluation of violence and its role. Similarly, Marie-Hélène Bourcier, writing in response to a decision handed down by the European Court of Human Rights, sees S/M as able to uncover the

> caractère politique du S/M, le fait qu'il puisse générer une autre vision des rapports entre personnes, une dimension contractuelle différente pour ne pas dire concurrente, une autre conception de la violence et des rapports de pouvoir.[44]
>
> political character of S/M, the fact that it is able to generate another vision of human relations, a different contractual dimension, if not to say competing [dimension], another conception of violence and power relations.

Furthermore, what may be disturbing to many is that, as Bourcier explains,

> Le S/M dégenderise, dé-hétérosexualise en montrant qu'il est possible de penser le dit rapport sexuel autrement qu'à travers la différence sexuelle exprimée par une conception binaire voire biologique du genre.[45]
>
> S/M de-genderizes, de-heterosexualizes by showing that it is possible to consider said sexual relation differently than through sexual difference expressed through a binary, even biological conception of gender.

As Bourcier describes, participants such as this trio may bring to light the possibility for configurations that diverge from the traditional gender and sexual binary, into which the great majority of people are born and in which most are raised.[46] Moreover, just as the societal imperative to be

"proper citizens" influences and constrains the social body through a kind of symbolic violence, so, too, through demonstrations of this kind can we make these often invisible imperatives more visible. To return to one of Fabienne Keller's remarks discussed earlier, this must arguably be similar to one of those excessive, shocking, and almost violent displays she experienced in San Francisco and against which she cautioned the readers of *Têtu.* Does the "violent" reading of the display come from what Bourcier stated earlier, that it has the ability to question normative sexual relations, therefore uncovering the constructed and normative nature of the opposite-sex procreative couple?[47] For the self-identified LGBT person, however, does this display act to reinforce stereotypes and clichés? As Robineau's participants express, "[La Gay Pride] semblerait donc comme un mal nécessaire. Elle permettrait de se faire entendre, mais pourrait aussi avoir pour effet de reproduire et d'enraciner les stéréotypes" [Gay Pride would seem to be a necessary evil. It is able to make itself heard, but it could also have the effect of reproducing and implanting stereotypes].[48]

Conclusion

Let us return to the opening line of this essay: gay pride parades are messy affairs. On one hand, they may construct what appears to be a coherent community within the larger national community, one where identities seem to be fixed, and this from the point of view of both those who do and do not identify as LGBT. On the other, they may challenge normative constructions and configurations of sexuality and sexual citizenship. These "embarrassing" figures, to return to Halperin, provide alternatives to the overarching narrative of responsible adulthood, something Judith Halberstam has described as "the conventional binary formulation of a life narrative divided by a clear break between youth and adulthood."[49] Within a French context, this event stands as another example of the state's struggle with groups who seek greater access to visibility, rights, and protections. The recent passage of France's *mariage pour tous* [marriage for all] may indicate the growing acceptance of certain forms of same-sex desire in the public sphere—i.e. the stable married couple—with LGBT visibility serving as one of the possible sources of societal and political change; however, have these changes strengthened the power these existing—some would say normative—models have on expressions of sexuality and sexual identity? This author, for one, hopes not.

Notes

[1] A version of this paper was given as a presentation at the Northeast Modern Language Association held in Boston, Massachusetts on March 24, 2012. I would like to thank Robert St. Clair for his expertise in critical theory, and to Magali Compan for her support. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the anonymous reviewers for their sage advice and critique.

[2] David Bell and Gill Valentine, "Introduction: Orientations," in *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities*, ed. David Bell and Gill Valentine (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 1–27; David Caron, "Shame on Me, or the Naked Truth about Me and Marlene Dietrich," in *Gay Shame*, ed. David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 117–31.

[3] Although the majority of current theoretical considerations on sexual identity agree that it is fluid rather than static, the manner in which Strasbourg's rally presented itself for many years highlighted these identities (see note 4 below). It is for this reason that the author uses LGBT with the understanding that it is an imperfect system.

[4] The organizers of Strasbourg's rally have generally eschewed the title of "Gay Pride." In years past, the event went by the longer title "*Marche de la visibilité homosexuelle, bisexuelle et transgenre*," changing to the plural for visibility and its adjectives in 2010, and then recently removing the adjectives altogether.

[5] Anne Rambach and Marine Rambach, *La culture gaie et lesbienne* (Paris: Fayard, 2003), 99–100.

[6] Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

[7] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: Contemporary Scenes of Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 51.

[8] Sarah Waters, *Social Movements in France: Towards a New Citizenship*, French Politics, Society and Culture (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 43.

[9] Ibid., 41.

[10] Jacques Guilhaumou, *La parole des sans: Les mouvements actuels à l'épreuve de la Révolution française* (Paris: ENS, 1998).

[11] For a short history of the Paris gay pride parade, which is the largest and oldest one in France, see Michael Sibalis, "'La Lesbian and Gay Pride' in Paris: Community, Commerce and Carnival," in *Gay and Lesbian Cultures in France*, ed. Lucille Carins (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002), 51–66. For an overview of gay pride in France, see Marianne Blidon, "La Gay Pride entre subversion et banalisation," *Espaces populations sociétés*, no. 2 (2009): 305–18. For histories of LGBT movements in France, see generally Scott Eric Gunther, "Building a More Stately Closet: French Gay Movements since the Early 1980s," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 13, no. 3 (2004): 326–47; Scott Eric Gunther, *The Elastic Closet: A History of Homosexuality in France, 1942-Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Julian Jackson, *Living in Arcadia: Homosexuality, Politics, and Morality in France from the Liberation to AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Jean Le Bitoux, Hervé Chevaux, and Bruno Proth, *Citoyen de seconde zone: Trente ans de lutte pour la reconnaissance de l'homosexualité en*

France (1971-2002) (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 2003); Frédéric Martel, *Le Rose et le noir: les homosexuels en France depuis 1968* (Paris: Seuil, 1996).

[12] Stonewall has become one of the rallying points of the contemporary LGBT movement. However, its internationalization is cause for concern since this ignores the culturally specific constructions of sexual identity. For an example see Martin F. Manalansan IV, "In the Shadows of Stonewall: Examining Gay Transnational Politics and the Diasporic Dilemma," in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, ed. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 485–505. The idea of a "realm of memory" comes from Pierre Nora, ed., *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1997).

[13] "Berliner CSD Official Website," accessed March 19, 2015, http://csd-berlin.de/.

[14] Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques, "Taille des communes les plus peupleés en 2012," accessed May 24, 2015, http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg_id=0&ref_id=nattef01214.

[15] Strasbourg.eu et Communauté urbaine, "Atouts de Strasbourg," accessed December 31, 2013, http://www.strasbourg.eu/fr/developpement-rayonnement/atouts.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Rambach and Rambach, *La culture gaie et lesbienne*, 45–46; Generally, see Hervé Le Bras, *Une autre France: votes, réseaux de relations et classes sociales* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2002), 26.

[18] Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (New York: Picador, 2008), 1.

[19] Ibid., 2.

[20] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life : The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London; New York: Verso, 2006), 26.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Pierre Bourdieu, *Sur la télévision* (Paris: Raisons d'agir, 1996), 20.

[23] David M. Halperin, *How to Be Gay* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 74.

[24] Jeanne Robineau, *Discrimination(s), Genre(s) et Urbanité(s): La Communauté Gaie de Rennes* (Paris: Harmattan, 2010), 153.

[25] Carl F. Stychin, "Civil Solidarity or Fragmented Identities? The Politics of Sexuality and Citizenship in France," *Social & Legal Studies* 10, no. 3 (2001): 352.

[26] Enda McCaffrey, *The Gay Republic: Sexuality, Citizenship and Subversion in France* (Hampshire and Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), 109.

[27] David Caron, *My Father and I: The Marais and the Queerness of Community* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 76.

[28] Denis M. Provencher, *Queer French: Globalization, Language and Sexuality in France* (Hampshire and Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 53.

[29] See the special issue dedicated to the *mariage pour tous* editied by Éric Fassin, as well as his introductory article, "Same-Sex Marriage, Nation, and Race: French Political Logics and Rhetorics," *Contemporary French Civilization* 39, no. 3 (2014): 281–301, doi:10.3828/cfc.2014.17.

[30] Provencher, *Queer French*, 193.

[31] Fabienne Keller was mayor of Strasbourg from 2001-2008. She currently serves as a senator for the Bas-Rhin region, a post she has held since 2004 and to which she was reelected in 2005 and 2014.
[32] Rambach and Rambach, *La culture gaie et lesbienne*, 50–53.
[33] Ibid., 57.
[34] Christian Nicolas, "Fabienne Keller," *Têtu*, February 2002, 10.
[35] Rambach and Rambach, *La culture gaie et lesbienne*, 51.
[36] Nicolas, "Fabienne Keller," 10.
[37] Gérard Noiriel, *Le creuset français: Histoire de l'immigration, XIXe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1992).
[38] For discussions on sexual citizenship, see generally David Bell and Jon Binnie, *The Sexual Citizen: Queer Theory and Beyond* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000); Jon Binnie, *The Globalization of Sexuality* (London: SAGE, 2004); McCaffrey, *The Gay Republic: Sexuality, Citizenship and Subversion in France*; Diane Richardson, "Constructing Sexual Citizenship: Theorizing Sexual Rights," *Critical Social Policy* 20, no. 1 (2000): 105–35; Diane Richardson, "Claiming Citizenship? Sexuality, Citizenship and Lesbian/Feminist Theory," *Sexualities* 3, no. 2 (2000): 255–72; Denis M. Provencher, "Tracing Sexual Citizenship and Queerness in Drôle de Félix (2000) and Terik El Hob (2001)," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 12, no. 1 (2008): 51–61; Stychin, "Civil Solidarity"; Carl F. Stychin, "Sexual Citizenship in the European Union," *Citizenship Studies* 5, no. 3 (2001): 285–301.
[39] Nicolas, "Fabienne Keller," 11.
[40] Clarissa Fabre and Éric Fassin, *Liberté, Égalité, Sexualités* (Paris: Belfond, 2003), 30.
[41] Sophie Meunier, "Anti-Americanisms in France," *French Politics, Culture & Society* 23, no. 2 (2005): 126–41.
[42] Photos can be found at the organizer's website, http://www.festigays.net/index.php/la-marche-des-visibilites/archives/2002/54-la-marche-en-2002.
[43] Peter Hennen, *Faeries, Bears, and Leathermen Men in Community Queering the Masculine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 152.
[44] Marie-Hélène Bourcier, *Queer zones: politique des identités sexuelles et des savoirs* (Paris: Balland, 2001), 94.
[45] Ibid., 90.
[46] One of Halperin's main arguments in *How to be Gay* is that the overwhelming majority of children who grow up to be LGBT are born into heterosexual family situations and thus must learn of LGBT culture through sources other than their immediate families.
[47] See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).
[48] Robineau, *Discrimination(s), Genre(s) et Urbanité(s): La Communauté Gaie de Rennes*, 155.
[49] Judith Halberstam, "Shame and White Gay Masculinity," *Social Text* 23, no. 3–4 (2005): 153. See also her book, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).