

Building a More Stately Closet: French Gay Movements since the Early 1980s

SCOTT GUNTHER

Wellesley College

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea!

—Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The Chambered Nautilus”

IN THEIR *MYTHES FONDATEURS* most contemporary gay organizations in France have sought to portray themselves as heirs of the revolutionary ideas introduced by the gay political groups that were formed in the aftermath of the events of 1968. However, this teleological interpretation of the period since 1968 is misleading in at least two respects: it does not recognize the magnitude of the disruption to French gay organizations that occurred in the early 1980s, and it fails to account for the ethos of assimilation that now prevails in many of France's active gay groups. In the early 1980s the French government eliminated any explicit legal distinction between heterosexual and homosexual acts through the repeal of two laws: the first law, promulgated in 1942 and repealed in 1982, had established a higher age of sexual majority for homosexuals than for heterosexuals; the second, dating from 1960 and annulled in 1980, had doubled the penalty for public indecency when the people involved were of the same sex. Immediately following the repeal of these two laws the

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political and cultural arenas of French homosexuality changed markedly. As figure 1 indicates, virtually all of the then extant French gay cultural and political organizations were abruptly dissolved, and new groups were formed.¹ Moreover, as representations of homosexuals fell into alignment with society's longstanding and unwavering requirements for assimilation and acceptance, the legal and public constraints of the earlier period were replaced with internalized, private self-controls.

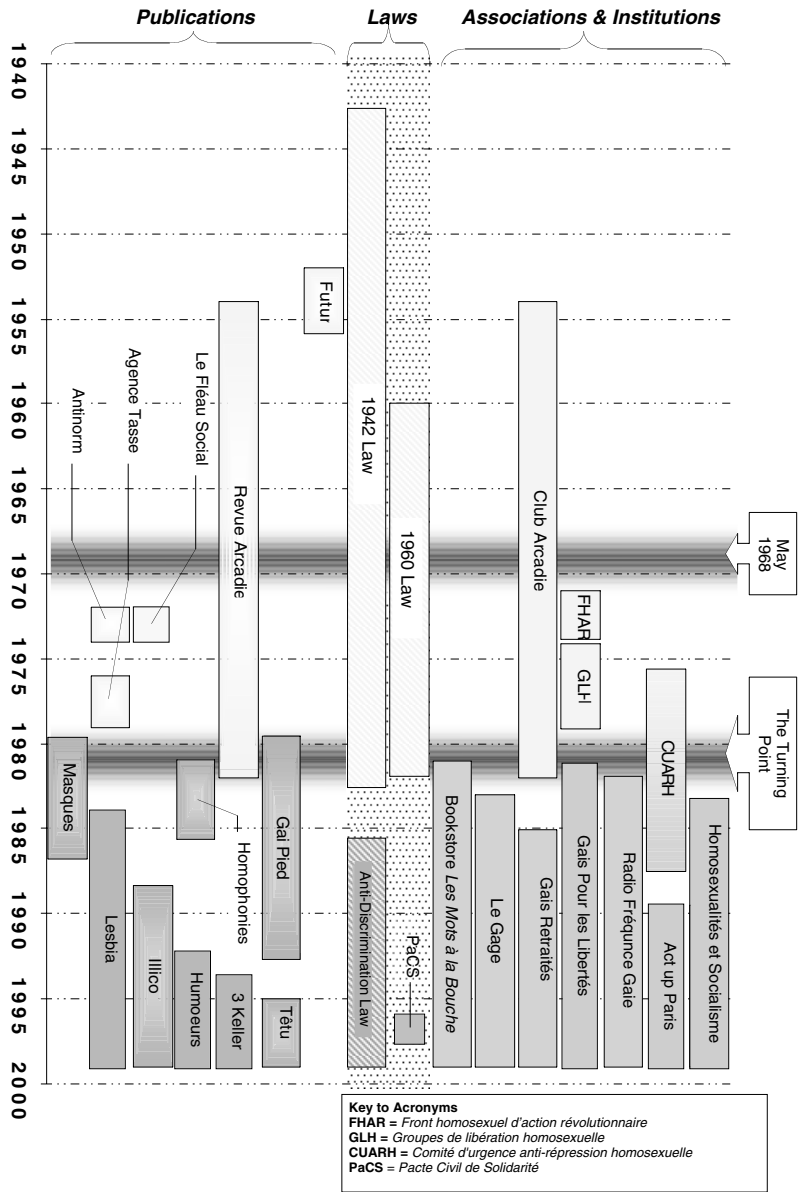
In place of the prevailing myth noted above, I would like to propose a more nuanced and more accurate, albeit decidedly less fashionable and less politically appealing, interpretation of recent French gay political history. It is one of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. For nearly two decades after its founding in the mid-1950s the dominant political and social organization for French homosexuals was Club Arcadie. The aim of its founder, André Baudry, was to present homosexuals as respectable, cultured, and dignified individuals deserving of greater social tolerance. Through social activities and a publication, *Revue Arcadie*, Baudry hoped to "educate adult homophiles, who, too weak and lacking knowledge, could not on their own live with dignity."²

In the early 1970s this thesis of homosexual respectability was challenged by an antithesis. Newly formed groups, Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire (FHAR) and Groupes de libération homosexuelle (GLH), sought to replace assimilationist strategies with confrontation.³ According to these "in-your-face" radicals, gay people were no longer supposed to

¹The notable exception in this timeline is the Comité d'urgence anti-répression homosexuelle (CUARH). However, it is not as exceptional as this chart might indicate, since while it is true that CUARH did not dissolve entirely between 1979 and 1981, it did lose most of its membership and underwent a restructuring of its goals in order to bring it more in line with the prevailing political ideas of the early 1980s. Therefore, while the association survived technically intact, it would be misleading to see this as a simple continuation of its earlier, 1970s self.

²Jacques Girard, *Le mouvement homosexuel en France, 1945–1980* (Paris, 1981), 61. Girard explains the origins of the term *homophile*: "It is a Dutchman, Arent Van Sunthorst, who in 1949 invented the term *homophile*, which was taken up again by André Baudry in September 1953 in Amsterdam, during a meeting of the International Committee for Sexual Equality. 'Homosexual' is a barbarism, because 'homo' comes from Greek, while 'sexual' comes from the Latin *sexualis*. . . . One could ask whether the term 'phile' would not also carry with it traces of the old Judeo-Christian guilt. It is as if all it took in order for homosexuality to be more acceptable in the eyes of religion and the powers of the State was this small makeover: love became henceforth an excuse for sex" (49).

³For more information on the French homosexual movements of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s see Girard; Janine Mossuz-Lavau, *Les lois de l'amour: Les politiques de la sexualité de 1950 à nos jours* (Paris, 1991); Gérard Bach-Ignasse, *Homosexualité: La reconnaissance?* (Boulogne-Bilancourt, 1988); Antony Copley, *Sexual Moralities in France, 1780–1980: New Ideas on the Family, Divorce, and Homosexuality* (New York, 1989); and Frédéric Martel, *The Pink and the Black: Homosexuals in France since 1968* (Stanford, Calif., 1999).



Key to Acronyms
 FHAR = Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire
 GLH = Groupes de libération homosexuelle
 CUARH = Comité d'urgence anti-répression homosexuelle
 PaCS = Pacte Civil de Solidarité

Figure 1

change themselves but work to change society at large. In its campaign for sexual liberation GLH opposed the social institution of marriage, promoted public nudity, and advocated the “liberation of pederasts.”⁴ The goal of FHAR, as its journal explained, “is not to achieve a place in society; we are striving to disturb rather than be accepted.”⁵

In turn, these competing views were incorporated in the historical synthesis of the new gay political and cultural communities founded in the 1980s. After the repeals of legislation noted above French gays seized the new opportunities to gain increased social acceptance and integration. Indicative of this is the shift that occurred in the early seventies from calls for a “right to difference” to claims for a “right to *indifference*.”⁶ Generally, the word “indifferent” is understood to mean “having no bias, or preference; neutral.”⁷ However, it is possible to hear in this word a second meaning of “not different” or “the same.” At least implicit in the call for a right to

⁴The radicalism of these 1970s groups is apparent in their perspectives on:

1. Pederasty. In 1976 the GLH’s journal explained that “the fight for the liberation of pederasts . . . is essential. This fight for liberation is essential, perhaps, more fundamental than that of homosexuals, perhaps even more than that of women. It radically questions all of society; subversion par excellence” (“Veculs,” *Anales du GLH 14-XII*, no. 1 [Summer 1976]: 1). In its Charter of Fundamental Principles the GLH provided twelve specific goals for which the organization was fighting. The sixth principle states: “The blossoming of an individual in all areas including sexuality begins in childhood; this is why the GLH fights for the recognition of a right to sexuality without any age limitation” (“Principes fondamentaux de la charte d’adhésion au Groupe de libération homosexuelle,” *Journal du GLH*, no. 0 [June 1976]: 1). For the FHAR the age of sexual majority served the interests of an authoritarian order: “Puberty is precisely when in all families without exception, the sharpest conflicts arise between adolescents and parents. The goal of repressing sexual activity [during adolescence] . . . is to produce an individual who fits into the authoritarian order and who will submit himself to it regardless of all of the misery and all kinds of degradation” (“Plateforme du Sexpol,” supplement to *L’Antinorm*, no. 3 [1973]: 11).

2. Same-sex marriage. In the seventh principle of its Charter of Fundamental Principles the GLH explicitly presented itself as against the model of a traditional nuclear family and against the social institution of marriage: “The GLH does not seek equality with heterosexuals, who, also prisoners of legislation and of a way of thinking reproduced by the family . . . , remain incapable of living socially and sexually as free men and women” (“Principes Fondamentaux,” 1).

3. Public nudity. The FHAR’s defense of public nudity was couched in terms of class: “Nudity blurs the visible criteria of wealth based on clothing (a worker wears blue, the petit bourgeois wears a suit and tie, a student has the hippie look)” (Gay Maës and Anne-Marie Fauret, “Homosexualité et socialisme,” *L’Antinorm*, no. 1 [December 1972–January 1973]: 3). In addition, some of the FHAR’s members held meetings with everyone naked (“Entretien, en mai 1992, de Jacques Girard avec Alain Huet,” <http://www.multimania.com/jgir/huet.htm>, June 12, 2004).

⁵Interview with the FHAR, *Actuel*, February 17, 1972, in Girard, 94.

⁶Gay political groups were not the first to use the expression “right to indifference.” It was originally used by French civil rights groups and, in particular, SOS racism.

⁷*Webster’s New World Dictionary*, 2nd college ed. (Cleveland, Ohio, 1986), 716.

indifference, then, were two demands: first, that society have no bias toward homosexuals; and second, that homosexuals have the possibility to be the same, to assimilate. It is true that by the end of the 1980s French society did express less bias and more neutrality toward homosexuality. However, it is also clear that by this time the public representations of gay people had become less different, that is, more indifferent.

In exchange for successful assimilation, the less palatable elements of the early seventies movements—particularly the pedophilic, sadomasochistic, transsexual, transvestite, promiscuous, and public-sex elements—had to be excluded or at least ignored by those occupying the new gay spaces of the eighties.⁸ Thus, by the mideighties, through a process of exclusion within the gay community itself, the more radical demands of the early seventies were effectively silenced if not left behind.⁹ Control was no longer exerted “downwardly” through legal restrictions but “inwardly.” The subjects of control accomplished this themselves through their interior knowledge of what was acceptable and their overriding desire for social normalization. After years of legal censure, French homosexuals had learned that external control was possible, that it would remain a threat, and that to escape future censure and to preserve society’s new degree of tolerance they had to replace external controls with self-control.

In the 1980s, like the chambered nautilus in Oliver Wendell Holmes’s poem, French gay people created a new space for themselves, a space that in many ways was better than the one from which they had emerged. Opportunities for social assimilation increased, and gay political groups successfully lobbied for an antidiscrimination law in 1985 and for legally recognized partnerships for same-sex couples in 1999.

⁸An article in *Gai Pied*, signed only with author’s initials, G.B., entitled “Une loi peut en cacher une autre” (One Law Can Conceal Another), attests to the distance between the gay movements of the 1980s and the fringe elements. The author’s statement demonstrates that homosexual pedophiles, for example, were afraid of being left behind: “More fundamentally, we can ask whether the affirmed assimilation of clean, adult, and healthy homosexuals has not led at the same time to a reinforcement of the repression of pedophiles” (*Gai Pied Hebdo*, July 6–12, 1985: 5).

⁹It is important to note that this process of exclusion occurred primarily at the level of *representations* made by lesbians and gays of themselves. The intent is to avoid suggesting that in the 1980s lesbians and gays were collectively repressing some innate desire for pedophilia, pederasty, promiscuity, sadomasochism, transvestitism, or public sex but, rather, that at the level of representations those who had no interest in these practices began to present themselves under the new label of “gay” and to distance themselves from the minority that did have an interest in these practices. In representations of homosexuality in the 1970s the homosexuals who did have an interest in these practices were put together with those who did not—it was a time when little distinction was made between acceptable and unacceptable homosexuality. In the 1980s, however, the distinction between acceptable and unacceptable became increasingly visible. This is quite different from saying that in the eighties within every lesbian or gay person there was a pedophile, a pederast, a sadomasochist, a transsexual, a transvestite, or a practitioner of public sex waiting to get out.

This article examines the shifts in the construction of French homosexual identity during the 1980s in three interrelated spaces: the geographic space of the Marais, the cultural space of gay publications, and the legal-political space created by the passage of an antidiscrimination law in 1985 and a law for civil unions available to same-sex couples in 1999. The discussions of the Marais and of the new publications of the eighties are relatively short and serve mostly as contextual background for a consideration of the legal and political changes. It is important to remember, however, that these geographic, cultural, and legal-political spaces are deeply interrelated and not as distinct as the separate discussions below might suggest.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF THE MARAIS

In the early 1980s the Marais, a small district in Paris located between the Pompidou Center and the Bastille, underwent a thorough transformation.¹⁰ During that time this affluent area in the oldest part of Paris was gradually converted into France's answer to the American-style "gay ghetto"—albeit a reluctant ghetto by U.S. standards.¹¹ This transformed Marais provided a space for the development of a new identity, a "gay identity," for French homosexuals. As the community grew, "gay" became synonymous with "respectable," with "socially assimilable," and, as Jean LeBitoux points out, with "affluent."

After cleaning itself up the Marais of the 1980s was finally ready to welcome a new kind of population or, perhaps, a new kind of "clientele," one that would have not only more dynamism but also more spending power. The gay flag did not appear in individual apartment windows on the first Lesbian and Gay Pride Day but, instead, in the windows of stores, and it stayed there for the rest of the year. Visibility or obscenity? Identity or commercial exploitation?¹²

The story of a French gay community grounded in the Marais begins in 1978 with the opening of a new bar, Le Village, in the heart of the district. Le Village presented itself as an alternative to the nocturnal homosexual life

¹⁰Portions of the discussion of the Marais that follow appeared in Scott Gunther, "Le Marais: The Indifferent Ghetto," *Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review* 6, no. 1 (1999): 34, 36, and in "Building a More Stately Closet: The Assimilationist Strategies of French Homosexuals," in *Farväl hetero-normativitet: Papers Presented at the Conference Farewell to Heteronormativity*, University of Gothenburg, May 23–25, 2002 (Lund, Sweden, 2003), 104–14.

¹¹The term *ghetto* is used by some French gay political actors to describe what in the American context might simply be referred to as a *community*. According to Jacques Girard, the first political group to use the expression "gay ghetto" was the early 1970s Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire ("Entretien, en mai 1992, de Jacques Girard avec Alain Huet," August 22, 1999, <http://www.multimania.com/jgir/huet.htm>, June 12, 2004).

¹²Jean Le Bitoux, "Marcher dans le gai Marais," *La revue b*, July 16, 1997, <http://www.france.qrd.org/media/revue-h/001/marcher.html>, June 12, 2004.

that occurred on the rue Sainte-Anne in the shadows of the Opera Garnier. Le Village symbolized a new kind of visibility: open both day and night and offering beer for the meager sum of ten francs, the bar attracted large crowds at once. Over the next decade waves of entrepreneurs followed, investing not only in bars but in restaurants, boutiques, inns, and so on. The result has been the transformation not only of a neighborhood but of Parisian gay life in general.

Now, more than twenty years later, the opening of Le Village has a mythic significance: it fostered a post-Stonewall gay identity in France. Proclaimed the first issue of *La revue h*:

From Le Village to the Duplex, from the Piano Zinc to Le Central, the gay quarter set itself up in the 1980s. . . . Today we have attained a new level with boutiques, nightclubs, a bookstore, postcard shops, sex shops, restaurants, bars, clothing stores (as well as laundromats), and recently a pharmacy waving the gay flag that was inaugurated by “the entire community.” Paris could at last have the honor of joining the other modern capitalist capitals with its gay neighborhood.¹³

This transformed Marais provided a space for the development of gay identities that had not existed before in France. As the community grew French gays gained a reputation as respectable, resourceful, and socially palatable. The rainbow flag began to appear in store windows—a symptom of commercialization, certainly, but also of a new kind of visibility. As sociologist Michaël Pollak remarked at the time, “Homosexuality has come out of the shadow and from the domain of the not-talked-about.”¹⁴

In 1981 Paris held its first Lesbian and Gay Pride parade in the Marais. This event had a double significance: it was a victory in the fight for visibility, but it was also a symptom of the growing normalization of the movement.¹⁵ However, as one critic of these developments observed:

It was this “happy” event that accompanied the collapse of the gay and lesbian movement due to a sudden lack of political demands: the Minitel [a terminal with a screen connected to the telephone that could be used for online chat], the neighborhood of the Marais, the Americanization of looks and lifestyles began to take over, neglecting

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Michaël Pollak, “L’homosexualité masculine, ou le bonheur dans le ghetto?” in Philippe Ariès and André Béjin, eds., *Sexualités occidentales* (Paris, 1982), 56.

¹⁵There is some reason to doubt that the early Gay Pride parades were actually signs of normalization. The first parades were small and were dominated by the presence of transvestites and those who came to watch them. By the end of the 1980s, however, the parades’ participants grew significantly in number as the parades shifted their attention away from transvestites and toward the broader group of socially acceptable homosexuals.

those who did not fit in or who were outside of this nocturnal effervescence. Gay Pride was nothing more than a commercial carnival.¹⁶

The emerging community in the Marais, which may initially have been defined by a sexual orientation, became increasingly united by shared tastes, cultural preferences in music and food, and even a distinct “Marais look” among the gay male inhabitants, who have been described as “handsome, young, muscular, white, [with an] appropriately tanned and/or shaved body with skin-tight clothing . . . without which the penalty was a gaze that could kill.”¹⁷

In the new Marais acceptability was determined not only by the gaze of its residents but by the attention of French society (and its marketing teams). At last the rest of France was interested in accepting the new, fresh, respectable consumers of the gay community—and why would it not be? The gaze of the transformed Marais assured one that upon entering the neighborhood one left behind any residual radicalism of the early seventies, including desires for perverse sex practices and residual Trotskyist leanings. In this way the gaze of the Marais itself prevented the resulting community from posing any serious threat to the status quo.

With hindsight it is now clear that the establishment of a gay space in the Marais was inseparable from the emergence of a new kind of visibility and respectability for gays in other spaces. As sociologist Frédéric Martel explained:

In the 1980s a veritable gay “citizen” was born. He lived in Paris, ate his breakfast while listening to [the gay radio station] *Fréquence gaie*, worked in a gay establishment (there were over a hundred of them in Paris already), and informed himself by reading *Gai Pied*. . . . In the evening he would have dinner in a restaurant in the Marais and then dance until dawn at the Palace or the Broad. . . . [It was] the beginning of the era of the body, a cultish narcissistic wave that continued to develop through countless gyms and saunas. The new gay had arrived with string bikini and leather jacket. The queen and the sissy were gone.¹⁸

THE NEW GAY PRESS

In June 1982, shortly after the laws that distinguished homosexual from heterosexual conduct were repealed, Club Arcadie, the longest surviving homosexual association, was dissolved, and its magazine, *Revue Arcadie*,

¹⁶“Souvenez-vous, militantes,” in L’Association Gay Pride, ed., *Programme Gay Pride Paris 1994*, June 1984, 13.

¹⁷Le Bitoux.

¹⁸Frédéric Martel, *La longue marche des gays* (Paris, 2002), 59.

ceased publication. From the late 1950s until the early seventies Arcadie had “been the monopoly of militant homosexuality, or more precisely, of militant ‘homophilia,’ since this was the term the magazine had always preferred. . . . Until 1971 no other movement disputed the star-status of Arcadie. It was not until after May 1968 that the Arcadie’s monopoly would be broken [with the arrival of groups like the FHAR and the GLH].”¹⁹ Throughout the seventies Arcadie’s membership declined, and its strategy of respectability and dignity became subject to ever harsher criticism. The dominant strategy of the newer gay movements, which involved asserting difference and working toward changing society rather than changing oneself, conflicted directly with Arcadie’s approach of presenting homosexuals as socially acceptable.

Despite its diminished importance, the end of both Club Arcadie and its magazine in 1982 was a significant event for French homosexuals, spawning a number of articles in the new magazines *Gai Pied* and *Masques*. The general consensus, as evidenced by the articles in these magazines, was that Arcadie had served a purpose during the repressive decades of the fifties and sixties but that as times changed Arcadie had stubbornly refused to evolve with them, and Arcadie’s policy of “respectability” and “dignity” had proved to be entirely incapable of producing social change. In a letter dated May 15, 1982, the editors of *Revue Arcadie* explained their policy and their reasons for ceasing publication:

[Arcadie], created in 1957, decided upon its dissolution during a general meeting on May 13. The goals that each of us had fixed upon [Arcadie’s] creation have been a constant concern during its twenty-five years of activity, and regardless of what has happened, they generally have been kept. Times have changed, far too much, some would say. The painful declaration was made over the last months that this club could no longer justify itself, from the time when it became for most uniquely a space for pleasure, for frivolity, and for far too few a space for reflection, for courtesy, for respect, and for friendship. It was not created just to provide a better environment for unique weekend dances. The so-called cultural activities are dead. Those of you in Paris who are reading this, moreover, did NOTHING to maintain them by participating even a little through your presence. . . . This world of permissiveness, of irresponsibility, of frivolity, of obscenity—and the homophile people beat the records in this sad domain—breaks down our energies and makes the continuation of activities that no longer correspond to those of the club’s founders entirely futile.²⁰

¹⁹“Arcadie ou la préhistoire du mouvement gai,” *Masques: Revue des homosexualités* 15 (1982): 85.

²⁰“La fin d’Arcadie?” *Gai Pied* 40 (July 1982): 7.

Just prior to writing this letter the leader of Club Arcadie, André Baudry, had been interviewed in the pages of *Gai Pied*:

Gai Pied: What do you think of the new modes of homosexual affirmation, such as bars, magazines like *Gai Pied*, or even the radio station, Fréquence gaie?

André Baudry: The bars and the clubs are commercial phenomena. There is a potential clientele, and it seems, since we are behind in terms of what's happening in America, that this market is now up for grabs for both homosexuals and nonhomosexuals; the same thing for cinema, theater, clothes, shoes. . . . What I hold against *Gai Pied* is its excessive advertising. . . . As for radio . . . they are trying to please a certain, very limited audience of homosexuals, rowdies, eccentrics; an audience of frivolous, superficial, and shallow individuals.

Baudry's view of the French gay situation in the early eighties was, of course, an easy target for ridicule, yet his observations about rising consumerism and frivolity may not have been so far off the mark. After the legal victories it seems that French homosexuals abandoned political causes en masse and became more noted for their consumption of gay merchandise and services in the Marais than for political action. Like Baudry, other critics of the new generation of French homosexuals saw them as opportunists. They had benefited from the hard work of their elders but were incapable of understanding that Club Arcadie's strategy of respectability was probably necessary, given the difficult environment of the 1950s and 1960s. A kinder interpretation of the new generation in the eighties might have pointed to other factors: the absence of political leaders to mobilize political engagement, the growing opportunities for gay consumerism in the Marais, and the general sentiment that all political demands had been met, that there was nothing left to fight against, and that it was time, at last, to have fun, to be gay.

A writer in *Gai Pied* remembered Baudry's contribution this way:

[According to Baudry, if Arcadie had remained,] the "homophile" milieu would have been devoured in the path of vice and irresponsibility, exhausting forever our caryatid's efforts of "good presentation"—a lame justification for M. Baudry's Gaullist retreat from business. M. Baudry hasn't gone out enough and has read too much heterosexual press.

If anything, modifications to the homosexual condition these last few years in France have entirely removed the guilt associated with "our problem," which Arcadie buried under tons of autorepression and paternalistic threats. . . .

[The closing of *Arcadie* means an end to] Baudry's lyrical carrying on about our unfortunate destiny and our obstinate refusal to modify our image in front of others.²¹

By the time *Arcadie* closed down, its meaning in the history of French homosexuality had been settled: the club and its journal had served a purpose, but changes in society's opinions of homosexuality no longer required such a "closeted" approach. What is implicit here, of course, is the idea that *Gai Pied* and *Masques* were quite different from *Revue Arcadie*: they were magazines for the new generation of French gays; they opposed restrictions on personal freedom; they were a projection of seventies ideals. What is masked in this account are the ways in which the new magazines resembled *Revue Arcadie*: they too were promoting respectability for French gays.

The new, well-produced magazines of the eighties gradually filled the cultural void left by the disappearance of *Revue Arcadie*. *Gai Pied's* first issue in 1979 foretold the arrival of a new cultural climate. Its articles portrayed homosexuality differently from the provocative magazines of the early seventies, offering images of stable gay couples whose sex took place in a bedroom, hard-working folks who presented no threat to the status quo. In short, gay partners were suddenly represented in the same way as any other bourgeois French couple. It seems that the demise of *Revue Arcadie* provided an opportunity for other publications to exploit the desire for a respectable image of homosexuality and that *Gai Pied* was simply the first magazine to seize it.

In the gay imagery of the 1980s glossy pictures of handsome men began to appear with greater frequency. Unlike the images of waiflike adolescents that dominated the revues of the early seventies, with their pederastic implications, the prevailing images of the eighties were quite clearly of adults—men with fully formed, strong bodies and abundant facial hair. Sociologist Frédéric Martel described this aesthetic transformation: "With the arrival of the Village People and Helmut Berger's photos, a new virile aesthetic dominated. Omnipresent in the first Brentwood erotic films or in Tom of Finland's legendary comic strips and its beefcakes, the aesthetic invaded personal ads. . . . You had to be muscular, virile and especially, young. These examples illustrate the profound mutation in gay imagery of the last 30 years."²²

Conspicuously absent from magazines like *Gai Pied* were articles and images related to pedophilia, pederasty, transsexuals and transvestites, sado-masochism, and public sex—subjects that had appeared frequently in the homosexual press of the early seventies. Instead, articles began to focus on issues such as adoption by gay couples, coming out in the workplace, legal and property issues specific to gay couples, reviews of new restaurants and

²¹Ibid.

²²Martel, *La longue marche des gays*, 59.

bars, vacation ideas, fashion trends, and other opportunities for spending “gay money.” These are all topics that would have been considered too “bourgeois” by the standards of the early seventies.

In the early eighties French writer and political militant Guy Hocquenghem expressed his dissatisfaction with the image of the new gay man:

The classic queens (both the friendly and malicious ones); those who appreciated troublemakers; the tearoom specialists and all those who could trace their colorful ways back to the 19th century are disappearing before the comforting modernity of the 25- to 40-year-old mustached homosexual with his attaché case, without psychological complexes or pretensions, unwelcoming and hairy; advertising executives and salesmen at fancy stores; enemies of anything that shocks; respectful of authority, they are fans of enlightened capitalism and culture. It’s the end of the sordid and grandiose, the comical and the nasty; sadomasochism is now nothing more than a way of dressing for the proper gay man.²³

As this quote illustrates, a simple reading of *Revue Arcadie* as “closeted” and of eighties gay imagery as “out” is misleading. A more accurate understanding of the shift in representations is that *Revue Arcadie*’s images of homosexuals who possessed “dignity” were replaced with images that did nothing to threaten bourgeois norms. While *Arcadie*’s strategy had been transparent, the images of the eighties were not. A veil of seventies autonomy served to mask an underlying message of respectability.

FRENCH GAY POLITICS IN THE 1980s: APATHY AND PRAGMATISM

In the early 1980s the general consensus among French gay people was that the days of political activism were over. By repealing discriminatory laws, the new Socialist government appeared to have met all the demands of the seventies radical gay movements.²⁴ Consequently, the *raison d’être* for the radical GLH and FHAR had vanished—as had that for Club *Arcadie*. Not surprisingly, these organizations ceased to exist. When asked the question, “Gay political activism seemed to die out with the legal repeals in the early eighties; were the two events linked?” Jan Paul Pouliquen, former leader of the Comité d’urgence anti-répression homosexuelle (CUARH), responded: “Yes, of course. As soon as we got the repeal of the laws, well, there was no more discrimination against homosexuality. What could we fight for at the time? . . . At the time the idea of homosexual marriage or

²³Ibid., 60.

²⁴In fact, this was not the case. Among the unmet demands of seventies gay groups was one to abolish (rather than standardize) the age of sexual majority and another to permit sexual acts in public.

pseudo-marriage didn't interest anyone—it just made people laugh. Why did it make people laugh? Well, no one could see the point.”²⁵

In July 1985 *Gai Pied* published an article, based upon interviews with men in gay bars in the Marais, that illustrates this point. The article was titled “Do you get off on politics? Today, militancy is not very ‘in!’” Perhaps playing off the potential double meaning of the word “indifference,” it began with the observation: “Faced with indifference, gays respond with indifference.” It then cited a series of responses that, altogether, upheld the widespread notion that the days of militant politics were a thing of the past: “If a guy flirts with me and begins to ask my political opinions, I run.” “I come to [gay bars] with friends to talk over drinks in an environment filled with men; we talk about everything except politics.” “I come to [gay bars] alone only to pick up guys. What interests me the most are the guy's ‘sexual opinions.’” “If you want to pick up a guy, don't talk politics. It's more revolting than a zit on your face!”²⁶

The expressions of political apathy in these interviews frequently contained the notion that political militancy was simply old-fashioned—a particularly damaging criticism in the context of a gay bar in the Marais, where at least the appearance of youth was de rigueur. This kind of ridicule against older gay political leaders took various forms, from the subtle to the explicitly ad hominem: “We need to put the dinosaurs in the Museum of Prehistory” or “[CUARH] could use a good facelift!”²⁷

Despite the prevailing apolitical ethos in the early 1980s the political arena was not entirely empty. One gay political group appears to have survived the 1979–81 turning point, the CUARH, and several new associations were formed. However, the new organizations, which included Homosexualité et socialisme, the Gai retraités, and Gais pour les libertés, served initially as spaces for meeting others and for discussion rather than as structures for political action.²⁸ CUARH's continued existence after 1981 was problematic. While it preserved an official legal status, many members withdrew, and those who remained lost a sense of purpose. In 1985

²⁵Jan Paul Pouliquen, interview by the author, tape recording, Paris, April 3, 1997.

²⁶“La politique, ça vous fait bander?: Aujourd'hui, le ‘militante-isme’ c'est pas très câblé!” *Gai Pied Hebdo*, June 30–July 5, 1985: 22–24.

²⁷Ibid., 24; Marco Lemaire, “Gais pour la liberté, un nouveau carburant,” *Gai Pied Hebdo*, January 26–February 1, 1985: 8.

²⁸Homosexualité et socialisme, like the other organizations, was primarily a group for meeting other people of the same political tendency, as opposed to some kind of structure for political action. The group's name is indicative of the kinds of identity problems it has suffered over the years, as its members periodically have asked which part, “homosexualité” or “socialisme,” was more central to its purpose. Generally, the group provided limited dissent with regard to the actions of the Parti socialiste, focusing its political energies instead on combating the *libéralisme* of the Right. In this way, the group's respectability and legitimacy among mainstream socialists has never been called into question. The group Gais pour les libertés presents the strongest evidence of a move toward respectability among groups of this time. This is apparent in its own description of itself “not as a frustrating

CUARH's leaders, recognizing that the only way to survive was to change, held a membership meeting to discuss the future. The situation was described in an October 1985 issue of *Gai Pied* in an article headlined "Le CUARH nouveau est arrivé!"²⁹

In 1985 what purpose could an "Urgent Committee against the Repression of Homosexuals" possibly serve? The answer to this question, on which CUARH's very existence depends, was what approximately fifty militants and political leaders tried to produce. . . . Prior to this national convention . . . many had already proclaimed the burial of . . . a committee whose urgency today is not widely felt. . . . Everyone recognizes that the situation is not the same as before 1981. The homophobic laws have disappeared, and the powers of the state appear more understanding toward homosexuals. [But] CUARH does not want to die. It is mobilizing once again to try to find new members, to take new kinds of actions. "Today, it's necessary to take into account the changes in attitudes and the new ways people live out their homosexuality. We're not in the seventies anymore." . . . It seems that a new desire for professionalism risks a confrontation with the old militant demons of this organization.³⁰

The author of this article could express with ease the notions that "the situation is not the same as before 1981," that "the homophobic laws have disappeared," and that it was time to take "new kinds of actions." These ideas were then floating in the air and, given the ease and frequency with which they were used in magazines like *Gai Pied* and in the political discourse of the new associations, were widely understood and accepted as self-evident. While CUARH stood alone in the early eighties as an advocate for political militancy, after the end of the legal repeals even its members became unclear about the objectives of this militancy.

Whatever the specific legal and political goals of French gays might be, by 1985 it was clear to at least one patron of a bar in the Marais that the strategies for achieving them would be pragmatic. As he put it, "Gays threw hardcore militancy with its leftist leanings into the dustbin of historical determinism. . . . Afterwards, there was something like a big void, and it

militant structure but rather a place for meeting one another, for imagination, for debates and proposals" (Lemaire, 8). Its primary purpose was to shatter the assumption that "gay" was equivalent to "leftist" by arguing that there was no contradiction between supporting laissez-faire economics and being gay. *Les gai retraités* was created primarily in response to the "ageism" present in other gay meeting spaces. It sponsored social events or *bals* regularly for its members as well as discussions relevant to the population of older gay men.

²⁹In English, "The new CUARH has arrived!" The statement alludes to the announcements made each November for the wine Beaujolais Nouveau that appear in café windows all over France: "Le Beaujolais Nouveau est arrivé!"

³⁰Claude Cocand, "Le CUARH nouveau est arrivé!" *Gai Pied Hebdo*, October 12–18, 1985: 12.

didn't encourage much of a gay 'community.' . . . Now there's a new militancy, which seems more pragmatic and more open."³¹

In July 1985 the French legislature passed the first of two important pieces of legislation affecting gay people, a law prohibiting discrimination against homosexuals, and in the 1990s it passed the second, the *Pacte civil de solidarité* (PaCS), establishing civil unions available to two individuals regardless of their sex. These two laws are fundamentally different from earlier legislation affecting homosexuals in France because they addressed affirmative rights as opposed to restrictions on gay people's freedom.³²

The 1985 law prohibited discrimination based on an individual's sexual orientation in matters such as housing, employment, and other civil rights.³³ One way of explaining the appearance of this law is to stress that, during the 1980s, lawmakers' attitudes had moved toward greater acceptance of homosexuality. While this explanation may be true, it seems that the law's passage was primarily due to the success that gay groups had in equating the category of sexual orientation with the more "legitimate" categories of race and gender.³⁴ As gay political groups appeared more respectable during the eighties, they found themselves in a better position to forge important political alliances with other powerful groups—SOS racism, feminists, and the Socialist party. Each of these three alliances proved critical to the passage of the 1985 antidiscrimination law.

The alliance with SOS racism encouraged legislators to think of homosexuality as a category similar to race, that is, an immutable category to which one belongs from birth and a category for which there exists no legitimate reason for discrimination. The importance of this alliance can be seen in discussions of the antidiscrimination law, where the term "anti-homosexual racism" was used instead of the term "homophobia."³⁵ An informal alliance began in late 1984, when leaders of SOS racism and groups such as *Gais pour les libertés* began meeting to form common strategies. As a result of these meetings, in December 1984 *Gais pour les*

³¹Lemaire, 24.

³²There is a potential for the phrase "affirmative rights" to be misinterpreted. Adding a new category to the law protecting individuals from discrimination is in a sense "affirmative," but it can also be understood as eliminating various forms of extralegal inequalities. Similarly, the creation of a legally recognized partnership can be seen as a response to the unfair exclusion of homosexuals from the institution of marriage, as opposed to some kind of special privilege. The term *affirmative* is used here to emphasize that these laws increased the rights of homosexuals (as opposed to earlier laws that penalized or restricted the actions of homosexuals). The intended meaning of the term is not that homosexuals were seeking some kind of "special rights."

³³*Journal officiel, lois*, law no. 85-772, July 25, 1985: 8471.

³⁴For a critical evaluation of similar strategies in the American context see David A. J. Richards, *Women, Gays, and the Constitution* (Chicago, 1998), and *Identity and the Case for Gay Rights: Race, Gender, Religion as Analogies* (Chicago, 1999).

³⁵See, for example, X.L., "Le rendez-vous gai de SOS racism," *Gai Pied Hebdo*, October 19–25, 1985: 5.

libertés published a new charter that explicitly stated its shared mission: “The work that remains to be done for women, immigrants, *beurs* (i.e., individuals born in France of North African descent), and young people is of equal importance to homosexuals.”³⁶ In June 1985 gay leaders organized a march to support the antidiscrimination law.³⁷ They chose as the march’s slogan “Don’t touch my lifestyle,” a slight modification of the SOS racism’s slogan, “Don’t touch my buddy.”³⁸ Throughout 1985 *Gai Pied* published advertisements for SOS racism along with invitations to its protests, and *Gai Pied* encouraged its readers to attend so that “homophobia will at last be recognized as a form of racism.”³⁹ Malek Boutih, the current president of SOS racism, remembers that “the militants who fought for gay rights were active in our organization. We had, for example, friends at *Gai Pied*. Journalists from [the radio station] *Fréquence gaie* joined us very early. [Their struggle] is thus also part of our history.”⁴⁰ Soon after the passage of the antidiscrimination law the new charter of SOS racism was modified to include the goal of “making public and denouncing every antihomosexual action.”⁴¹

The gay alliance with feminists was also important, primarily because the law prohibiting discrimination against homosexuals came in the form of an amendment to a law initially aimed at preventing discrimination against women. During the parliamentary debates supporters of the “antisexist” bill, such as the Socialist deputy Ghislaine Toutain, accepted the additional category of “discrimination based on lifestyle.”⁴² Finally, the connections with the Socialist party that created the new political group Homosexualité et socialisme, and with Deputy Jean-Pierre Michel in particular, facilitated the passage of the bill through both the National Assembly and the Senate.

It should be noted that the bill that was introduced in 1985 was not the first version. In 1981 a bill prohibiting discrimination against “male homosexuals, female homosexuals, or transsexuals” was introduced.⁴³ However, when the antidiscrimination bill was reintroduced by Deputy

³⁶“Manifeste du GPL,” *Gai Pied Hebdo*, December 22, 1984–January 4, 1985: 3.

³⁷Francis Lacombe, “Tous à la marche,” *Gai Pied Hebdo*, June 22–28, 1985: 6.

³⁸In French, “touche pas à mes mœurs” and “touche pas à mon pote.”

³⁹P. Roy, “SOS racisme à la Concorde le 15 juin,” *Gai Pied Hebdo*, June 8–14, 1985: 6.

⁴⁰Malek Boutih, “Contributions,” in Michel Taube, ed., *Pour le PaCS* (Paris, 1999), 71–72.

⁴¹X.L., 5.

⁴²*Journal officiel*, Assemblée nationale, 1ère séance, May 23, 1985: 1104. Not everyone viewed the association of sexism with homophobia positively. During the legislative debates Deputy Louis Boyer explained his opposition: “Besides the fact that the term [lifestyle] is excessively vague, it would encourage an association between women and homosexuals, which would be entirely negative for the feminine gender” (Hervé Liffra, “L’Assemblée nationale dit oui aux homos,” *Gai Pied Hebdo*, July 6–12, 1985: 5).

⁴³*Proposition de loi*, no. 279, Sénat, second ordinary session of 1980–81, registered May 13, 1981.

Jean-Pierre Michel in 1985, the language was changed to refer to discrimination based on “sexual orientation,” leaving out the category of transsexuals. Eventually, the reference to “sexual orientation” was also removed, and, in the final form of the law, the terminology “discrimination based on lifestyle” replaced any mention of sexuality.⁴⁴

Prior to sponsoring the bill, Jean-Pierre Michel had met with the minister of justice, Robert Badinter, who suggested that the phrase “based on lifestyle” would allow the bill to pass more easily.⁴⁵ Michel recalled:

I talked with Badinter, minister of justice at the time, and he said that the best term would be *moeurs* [in English, “lifestyle” or “mores”], which was a very broad term that covers discriminations against homosexuals but that also goes further. That’s the way it happened. I gave a very broad explanation of the term during the debates. And it worked partly because at the time there had been a trial for someone who was fired because he had long hair. So it was Badinter who told me that with the word *moeurs* it would pass more easily, and it’s a term that covers homosexuals, among other things.⁴⁶

Michel’s use of this strategy is clear, for example, in his statement to the National Assembly, that “[this amendment] concerns all those who, by their behavior, their lifestyle, their clothing, their haircut, or who knows what, could have a particular service denied to them.”⁴⁷ By employing the phrase “based on lifestyle,” Michel made an appeal to the Socialists’ notions of French universalism. With the amendment couched in universal terms rather than in terms referring specifically to sexual orientation, the parliamentary debates were focused less on homosexuality and more on notions of equality.

The 1990s legislation creating a legally recognized partnership structure available to same-sex couples in the form of the PaCS is perhaps the ultimate sign of French gay people’s successful assimilation.⁴⁸ As sociologist

⁴⁴In French, the terminology was “en raison de mœurs.”

⁴⁵Some articles have falsely credited Jean-Pierre Michel rather than Robert Badinter with developing the phrase “based on lifestyle” (see, for example, N.B., “Touche pas à mes mœurs,” *Gai Pied Hebdo*, June 1–7, 1985: 6).

⁴⁶Jean-Pierre Michel, interview by the author, tape recording, Paris, April 3, 1997. Former president of CUARH Jan Paul Pouliquen offered a similar explanation: “We at CUARH had proposed the term ‘sexual orientation.’ But there were some risks with that: for one, the term ‘sexual orientation’ could refer to pedophilia. It’s true that *lifestyle* could also refer to pedophilia, but no one would imagine that. Besides, we saw the case of the guy who got fired for long hair, and well, having long hair, that’s covered by ‘lifestyle’” (Pouliquen interview, 1997).

⁴⁷*Journal officiel*, Assemblée nationale, 1ère séance, May 23, 1985: 1103.

⁴⁸In the discussion that follows “PaCS” refers to all the various forms of legally recognized same-sex partnerships proposed during the 1990s. The proposed structure went under a variety of acronyms, including the PaCS, the CUC, and the CUS. The term used in the final draft was “PaCS.”

Eric Fassin points out, in the initial debates over the PaCS, many saw it as a mechanism that could serve “to bring homosexuals out of their counter-culture and integrate them into the bosom of the Republic—that is, to normalize homosexuality in order to make it acceptable in the eyes of everyone.”⁴⁹

The idea of some form of legally recognized partnership had come up before, as early as the 1970s, but it was not until the mideighties that anyone began to take the idea seriously. Jan Paul Pouliquen, a former GLH militant, remembers the reactions of early gay militants to the idea of gay marriage: “I remember a meeting when we militants talked about the possibility of what we called at the time ‘a life in common.’ The conversation lasted about five minutes because we immediately said, ‘No way, that’s something from the hetero-cops—it’s a bourgeois thing.’ And that was it. It never came up again.”⁵⁰

Legal scholar and gay militant Gérard Bach-Ignasse noted the dramatic change in attitudes: “It wasn’t until the mideighties that the idea of family or of a homosexual partnership became a positive thing. Until then, the gay discourse had always been an antifamily discourse. Then in the eighties it changed to issues of how to integrate homosexuality into the family, how to form partnerships, how to have children, etc. These became legitimate questions, and the movement’s ideas about family made a complete U-turn.”⁵¹

The shift in attitudes is linked in part to the spread of AIDS in France in the late eighties and early nineties, when gays were suddenly facing the legal and financial consequences of premature deaths. Pouliquen, who led the *Collectif pour une union sociale*, the original political movement that fought to establish civil marriage for same-sex couples, remembered the urgency of the situation and explained that his awareness of the consequences of AIDS is what first led him to take an interest in the project of a civil marriage for gay couples:

Unfortunately, there was AIDS, and homosexuals were dying—the homosexuals who were fifty or sixty years old, they had prepared for their deaths, they had wills, etc. But now we had people dying at twenty-five, and they weren’t prepared. . . . I became interested in the project in September 1991 because I had read an article in *Gai Pied Hebdo* talking about a guy who died of AIDS, and his partner was kicked out of the apartment before the cadaver was even cold. I was completely revolted, so I went to see my representative [at the National Assembly], and I said, “You have to do something about this.”⁵²

⁴⁹Eric Fassin and Michel Feher, “Parité et PaCS: Anatomie politique d’un rapport,” in Daniel Borillo, Eric Fassin, and Marcela Iacub, eds., *Au-delà du PaCS: L’expertise familiale à l’épreuve de l’homosexualité* (Paris, 1999), 23.

⁵⁰Pouliquen interview, 1997.

⁵¹Gérard Bach-Ignasse, interview by the author, tape recording, Paris, May 2, 1997.

⁵²Pouliquen interview, 1997.

Jean-Pierre Michel, the deputy who sponsored the antidiscrimination bill in 1985 as well as the bill for the PaCS in the nineties, explained that AIDS may have been responsible not only for its getting heard but also for gaining the sympathies of many lawmakers: “Unfortunately, AIDS created a certain urgency for taking care of homosexual couples’ problems, and when we talked about that, we hoped to get people’s sympathies, even from the most hostile opponents. Because even the most hostile had contacts, sometimes friends, in very difficult situations, and so through some kind of compassion with regard to AIDS, it made things easier.”⁵³

Once Pouliquen, Bach-Ignasse, and Michel had begun discussions with legislators, they recognized the need for compromise, particularly with regard to the question of adoption. In the first draft of the law adoption was included among the rights offered; however, this provision was eventually removed and did not appear in the final version of the law. Michel explained its exclusion in terms of political necessity: “There was no point in sinking the boat by overloading it. [If we included adoption,] it would have provoked very hostile reactions. . . . One and a half years ago we tried to reform adoption law in a positive way. . . . But [the National Assembly] didn’t even want to allow heterosexual unmarried couples to adopt, much less lesbian and gay couples.”⁵⁴

Pouliquen also believed in the political necessity of excluding adoption from the law: “We refused [the provision on adoption] right away! . . . We said no for a number of reasons: the first is that we conducted surveys, and 70 percent of French people had a favorable attitude toward the text, but with adoption only 10 percent had a favorable attitude. So we’re not crazy—we’re not going to ruin the whole project just for one article.”⁵⁵

Despite the desexualized rhetoric surrounding the PaCS, legislators were clearly not willing to allow PaCS couples to adopt.⁵⁶ It was probably the association of homosexuality with pedophilia, which was stated rather explicitly by some lawmakers, that heightened the fears of including adoption in the measure.⁵⁷ During the final debates over the PaCS, anti-PaCS protests used slogans such as “One child: one dad and one mom. One child, two dads, that’s trouble,” and children carried signs saying “I want

⁵³Michel interview, 1997.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Pouliquen interview, 1997.

⁵⁶Recently, with the debates over gay marriage, the issue of adoption has come up again in France, and the notion of same-sex families is being discussed with greater frequency. Sociologist Eric Fassin explains, “For the first time, people are talking about homosexuality and family at the same time. The word *homoparentalité* entered the language in 1997 and [appeared] in the *Petit Robert* dictionary in 2001” (Clarisse Fabre and Eric Fassin, *Liberté, égalité, sexualités* [Paris, 2003], 50).

⁵⁷Another justification was based on psychoanalytical arguments dealing with the need for a “symbolic order that respects sexual difference.” These kinds of arguments were presented in the legislative debates, particularly by Irène Théry, author of a report titled “Couple

a mom and a dad.”⁵⁸ Bach-Ignasse remembers the exclusion of adoption as a political necessity: “There wasn’t a single deputy who would support adoption for homosexuals. There wasn’t even a possibility of discussing it because of the possible association with pedophilia.”⁵⁹

In its final form the law makes no reference to the sex of the two individuals entering a PaCS—the partnership is available to heterosexuals and homosexuals alike, to any two individuals who are not married or members of the same family. However, as Eric Fassin explains, in the early stages of the debate over the PaCS French homosexuals were not in agreement over this issue:

[T]he ambiguity of the motives quickly translated into a tension between two groups. One side, . . . led by Jan Paul Pouliquen, insisted on the neutrality or universality of a project that could apply equally to same-sex couples . . . but also to the situation of two old ladies or a priest and his maid. . . . On the other side, groups who were fighting AIDS, and in particular the group AIDES, maintained that the essential objective of the project . . . was more than anything the recognition of same-sex couples.⁶⁰

In the end, Pouliquen’s camp came to dominate the debate. Pouliquen, who believed that the only politically viable proposal was one written in universal or neutral terminology, explained:

There is marriage, and then there is this other structure besides marriage, regardless of whether there is a sexual relationship between them, it can be two people who just live together, whether they have sexual relations or not is irrelevant. They can take care of issues with their estate, their homes, their social security benefits, etc. It concerns gays and lesbians, of course, who now have no rights whatsoever, but it also concerns everyone else.⁶¹

The use of universal terminology in the final draft of the PaCS was particularly important in the French context, where political activists do not embrace “identity politics” with the same enthusiasm as their American counterparts. As Fassin explains, “The French rhetoric of a Republic ‘indifferent to differences’ defines the image of France, even as far away as

filiation et parenté aujourd’hui” (Fiammetta Venner and Joël Métreau, “Le PaCS, enfin!” *Têtu* 39 [November 1999]: 61).

⁵⁸The slogan in French (“Un enfant, un papa et une maman; un enfant, deux papas, bonjour les dégâts!”) is modeled after a public service advertisement in France against drunk driving, which said, “Deux verres, ça va; trois verres, bonjour les dégâts!”

⁵⁹Bach-Ignasse interview, 1997.

⁶⁰Fassin and Feher, 24–25.

⁶¹Michel interview, 1997.

American campuses.”⁶² Pouliquen speaks for many French political activists when he insists:

I think that . . . minorities in general cannot resolve their problems as long as they are specifically designated. They killed [*sic*] Rodney King because he was black. They deported Jews because they were Jewish. We discriminate against homosexuals because they are homosexuals, so we should not designate them as a separate group anymore. . . . What bothers me is the way the European Council has dealt with this, with homosexuals as a separate category—I find that very *communautariste*, like what happens in northern European countries. A text for homosexuals—that shocks me, and I also think it’s very dangerous. I understand that northern European countries might do that, but in France there were 30 . . . 40 . . . 50,000 homosexuals who were deported [*sic*] because of their homosexuality—because the police had kept lists of them—when they were cruising in public parks, etc. So for us, we have that history. . . . If Jean Marie LePen came to power tomorrow, he would have a list of who is homosexual. It’s dangerous. And also, the idea of homosexuals as a different group is not a French way of seeing things.⁶³

In the end, phrasing the PaCS in general terms turned out to be a politically effective choice.⁶⁴ It allowed supporters of the bill to couch the law in universal terms compatible with the French Republican model of assimilation and also to desexualize the debate and to avoid criticisms (like those heard in American debates over homosexuality) of establishing “special rights” for homosexuals.

In contrast to the relative ineffectiveness of early seventies radicalism, it is clear that assimilationist strategies have proved politically effective for

⁶²Fabre and Fassin, 28.

⁶³Pouliquen interview, 1997. *Communautarisme* is a pejorative term in French for political strategies that emphasize the need for political mobilization around distinct identities. The only evidence of deportations of French homosexuals comes from the region of Alsace, a region that at the time was part of Germany. In that region the numbers were probably not as high as those that Pouliquen mentions here, although there are, of course, many difficulties associated with establishing a precise number. See, for example, Pierre Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual: A Memoir of Nazi Terror* (New York, 1995).

⁶⁴Of course, some of this rhetoric might seem insincere, since in fact the main groups pushing for the PaCS were gay and lesbian groups. However, since the PaCS was enacted in 1999, one of the biggest surprises has been the discovery that more than half of the PaCS have been entered into by two people of different sexes. A recent study concluded: “Contrary to the fears of the prophets of doom, the arrival of the PaCS has done nothing to cause a drop in marriages. . . . In addition, everything seems to indicate that the PaCS has also not led to increased ‘*communautarisme*,’ since approximately sixty percent of those entering a PaCS are individuals of different sexes” (*Observatoire du PaCS*, <http://www.chez.com/obspace/>, April 13, 2004).

French gay people. Recent legal changes, including the antidiscrimination law and the PaCS, demonstrate that it was not until compromise became acceptable as a political strategy that positive, legal change occurred.

In writing about the situation of homosexuals in other countries, we Americans are sometimes tempted to speak in terms of their retarded development. However, in comparing the progress of American and French gay political groups during the last twenty-five years, it becomes difficult to see in what ways French political activists have fallen behind relative to their American counterparts. Assimilationist strategies have served French homosexuals very well, being responsible for an impressive series of legal reforms, particularly in contrast to what has happened in the United States during the same time. France has removed all explicit legal discrimination against homosexuals, but the U.S. military policy of “don’t ask, don’t tell” explicitly discriminates against gays and lesbians. Moreover, consensual sexual acts conducted in private between same-sex individuals were a crime in many American states until the recent Supreme Court decision in *Lawrence v. Texas*. France passed legislation protecting individuals from discrimination based on their sexual orientation, but most American gays and lesbians do not benefit from such protection: none exists at the federal level, and the scope of the antidiscrimination laws in various cities and states is limited. Finally, France has made a legally recognized partnership structure available to French same-sex couples. While civil unions in Vermont and same-sex marriages in Massachusetts provide limited benefits, a number of states and the federal government have passed “defense of marriage” acts that explicitly define marriage as between a man and a woman.

The recent history of French gay politics challenges the notion that, compared to the United States, France is caught in a more primitive stage of political evolution and that by stubbornly remaining “in the closet” contemporary French gay people have not lived up to the example of their American counterparts. In the end, the history that has been presented here is a reminder that in foreign places other logics can produce different, yet equally legitimate, outcomes.