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# Aggregation and segregation: gays in the Paris urban area

**Renaud Boivin**
**Translator: Claire Hancock**

"The right to the city manifests itself as a superior form of rights: right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habitat and to inhabit. The right to the œuvre, to participation and appropriation", Lefebvre [1967].

To deal with the intersection between spatial justice and sexuality is a daunting task. In France, until recently, the question of gays'[1] relation to space was ignored in cultural geography (Blidon, 2008a) and there was little interest for it in sociology, where most work focussed on ways of life and the major change in health issues related to AIDS. This lack of interest probably has to do with academia's heterosexism and unease in the face of any challenge to boundaries between private and public, homo- and heterosexual, female and male. Serious research also encounters methodological difficulties: since there are no data on homosexual people's places of residence, research tends to focus on businesses, and follow the example of gay residential enclaves in North America. These however differ greatly from European "gay neighbourhoods", which hardly allow for the sort of "community inscription" that they are defined by. The study of homosexual spatialities also tends to omit the social dimension of sexuality, with the dominant model of gay sociability being seen as the only way of experiencing homosexuality. In this perspective, the tensions and contradictions that spaces of gay encounters produce or reproduce remain hidden. Lastly, the striking visibility of central neighbourhoods such as the Marais overshadows the persistence of other, less visible, forms of homosexual spatial production, and thus renders invisible some situations of spatial injustice. Taking all this into account, I chose to consider the question from a different perspective: rather than assume that gay commercial or residential neighbourhoods signal to "empowerment" or "liberation" of sexual minorities, I start from the opposite assumption. The territorial huddling together of gays, in the case of Paris, can be interpreted as a result of social and spatial exclusions suffered elsewhere. I see this spatial strategy not as an instance of "communitarianism", but as an effect of heterosexual normativity inscribed in space. The success of a neighbourhood like the Marais reflects a process of "aggregation", in the quest for common places in which to meet *as well as* a consequence of forms of segregation of practices and self-expression found *outside* the gay milieu.
This paper is organized in two sections, the first of which reviews the evolution of the Marais since the first gay bars opened there, in order to show that commercial specialization and gentrification have produced new forms of exclusion, stronger inequalities, and decreased pluralism. The second section is based on interviews with gay residents and users of the Marais[2], and discusses *regimes of engagement* in their experiences, both intimate and public, of the system of place assignation active in the *cité*[3]. The aim is to show that relations to the gay milieu and individual strategies for exposing sexual orientation are diverse, and dependent on the social characteristics of the agent..

[1] The word gay has a specific history in France: it started being used in a context in which the stigma started being reversed, as part of efforts on the part of the homosexual movement, which was attempting to challenge traditional dichotomies (passive/active). It has to do with a middle-class homosexual culture (Pollak, 1982). What I call homosexual here are men who engage in sexual activity with other men, but who do not necessarily take part in gay sociability.
[2] Twelve interviews, averaging more than three hours, were carried out. Respondents were recruited from various places in the Marais, and answered questions about their residential and professional experiences, their love lives and relation to the neighbourhood.
[3] I refer to Abel's definition (1995), as quoted in Pattarroni (2009, 286) : "The cité is the city as institution of space and the political and social distribution of "places", locations, roles. And this distribution has to be justified by a principle of allocation of space, which both gives a rule for community space, and a rule of differentiation accepted by subjects".

## The gay neighbourhood, from aggregation to gentrification

### An ecological definition

Gay commercial concentration in the Marais[4] started in 1978 with the opening of the bar *Le Village*, and developed throughout the 80s. It results from a threefold transformation. First, a social displacement, with a claim for different ways of living homosexuality from that promoted on the very commercial cruising area of the rue Sainte-Anne, which came under severe criticism of activists at the time. The move to the Marais was related to the desire, on the part of some homosexual people, to establish places both open and visible to all (Sibalis, 2004), at a distance from what was seen as a "commercial ghetto", with its associated limited accessibility and openness. Secondly, the move to the Marais of pioneering entrepreneurs and activists went hand-in-hand with a political or symbolic shift. It had to do with a vision of homosexuality as more marginal, and working-class, as well as with the shift of the gay movement to pragmatism. In the eighties, revolutionary ambitions were sidelined by a different activism, centring on the development of a gay culture. Activism and business concerns came together around health issues, as evidenced in the creation of the National Syndicate of Gay Businesses (*Syndicat National des Entreprises Gaies,* SNEG), in 1990[5].

But this gay commercial specialization also resulted from the gradual consolidation of barriers between spaces of sociability for men having sex with other men, according to gender and social class[6]. As was demonstrated by Chauncey (2003), the construction of homosexual identity relies on a spatial construction. This means, 1) that spaces of sociability and for sexual activity between men existed well before the collective *coming out* in the 70s; 2) that spaces were specified as new categories were invented to define identifiable forms of sexuality; 3) the view in terms of liberation/repression, as apparent is the discourse of gay movements, is inadequate to account for the changes in these spaces and their sociological meaning. In the late seventies, the growing success of the rue Sainte-Anne caused a greater social differentiation, as prices became prohibitive, and women were denied access. The ambiguity which spiced up homosexual cruising in these original places disappeared. Homosexuality underwent a process of re-definition, exemplified by the spread of the use of the term "gay". AIDS also played a part in redefining agents, their behaviours, and representations of homosexuality.

The Marais as we know it today is the result of these generational changes, and its history as gay neighbourhood is caught up in the consolidation of a unified discourse, in culture and specialized media, for a gay audience. The phrase "gay neighbourhood", which gained pride of place in the 90s, as opposed to "ghetto" which was used by radical homosexual groups, is the result of social, and discursive, rather than a mere description of a spatial concentration of gay businesses. It signals other changes in ways of life and representations of homosexuality, about which I shall say more later.

It is therefore possible to read the gay neighbourhood in an "ecologic" perspective, that goes beyond mere "visibility". Reading gay spaces from this perspective is all the more relevant since, by becoming a symbol of gay success and liberation, the neighbourhood was also established as a

[4] The Marais is located in part of the 3rd and 4th arrondissements, in central Paris.

[5] I can only outline very briefly the complex change in homosexual discourse between 1970 and 1985. The group Arcadie (1953-1982) promoted a discrete and respectable image of homosexuals (rejecting more effeminate, subversive, images of the ostentatious queen) which was challenged as early as the 1970s with the creation of the Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire (Homosexual Front of Revolutionary Liberation), and new mores (Jackson, 2006). The FHAR was dissolved in 1974 and the Groupe de Libération Révolutionnaire took over, then the Comité d'urgence anti-répression homosexuelle (CUARH, 1979-1987), which carried a more communitarian discourse during the move away from political action in the early 80s (Marchant, 2005).

[6] See depictions quoted by Martel (2001, 118-136)

place of recognition for some homosexual people, a sort of "moral region" (Park, 1929). Proth (2002, 127) rightly pointed out that "the inscription in space and the stabilization of a minority in a neighbourhood is tantamount to the installation in a deliberately chosen, and consented, segregation, whilst also simultaneously laying a claim to recognition…every homosexual living in, or going to, the Marais neighbourhood, is substituting new forms of sociability to other, commonly accepted ways of being in a large city". This is how the dialectics of aggregation and segregation can be read in the evolution of areas such as the Marais, or Chueca in Madrid: rather than see gay neighbourhoods as "spaces of resistance" (Leroy, 2005), I propose to see them as *spaces of recognition*[7].

## Gentrification: homosexuality rehabilitated

Various studies have established the contribution of gay presence, both residential and commercial, to processes of gentrification of central working-class areas (Castells, 1983; Knopp, 1990; Bouthillette, 1994). In the case of the Marais, gentrification occurred with the arrival of professionals and the departure of workers, as early as the 1980s (Carpenter, Lees, 1995). Gays were attracted both by the centrality of the area and the lost cost of housing, and they were active in the private rehabilitation of it. Djirikian (2004) has shown how in studio flats, working-class families were replaced by students and one-person households, usually men of the middle or upper-middle class. This is the type of housing gay men took over.

Giraud (2009) underlines the convergences between the renewed social profile of residents and the commercial evolution of the gay Marais, i.e., between residential gentrification and *consumption gentrification* (Beauregard, 2003). In recent decades, only certain types of gay businesses have chosen the Marais: shops and services are on the increase, whereas they are shrinking in Paris overall. Conversely, businesses with a strong sexual connotation (backrooms and saunas), of which there are relatively few in the Marais, are more dispersed throughout Paris. Former gay bars tend to be replaced by clothing shops and hairdressing salons, and the cheaper, more affordable, bars are becoming rarer. Leroy (2005) has shown that this reflects the increase in prices for leases, and that the gay businesses that made the Marais attractive and consolidated rent values are victims of their own success. For gay people, access to places of sociability has become economically selective.

## Gay normalization of the Marais

This commercial gentrification also results from profound changes in modes of being, thinking of oneself as, and showing oneself to be homosexual. Some have pointed out the "over-visibility" of gay neighbourhoods, in Europe, tends to render invisible other practices, less well accepted and which take place in more peripheral areas (Grésillon, 2000; Redoutey, 2002). In fieldwork carried out in Chueca, Madrid, I found that gentrification contributes to more positive representations of homosexuals, by facilitating forms of *normalization*[8]. Very visible lifestyles, considered more acceptable, take form in the *gay neighbourhood*, which tends to reproduce exemplary images in specifically gay institutions. These rely on a manly, hyper-masculine representation, of the homosexual, as both well-heeled and full of entrepreneurial spirit: the gay in bow-tie and tuxedo as

[7] I refer here to recognition in another (identification) and by others (acceptance and respect). According to Honneth (2000), all social relations imply a quest for recognition: its denial, and social contempt, are fundamental in the experience of injustice. Nancy Fraser (2005) has shown that struggles for recognition of cultural difference have gained over class struggle and the quest for redistributive justice.

[8] In the double sense of becoming more banal in relation to heterosexual majority, and gay normativity, in reference to a number of behaviours, lifestyles and fashions (translator note: this seems very close to what has been described by Lisa Duggan, in English, as homonormativity).

seen in *Têtu*[9]. This normalization seems to have taken place during the eighties, as a response to the stigmatization linked to AIDS, in a period of dissociation between sex and homosexuality, as perceived by some of my interviewees:

> "Obviously AIDS cut things short (...). Perhaps there was this underlying, unconscious desire on the part of the population to appear squeaky clean, and therefore, that's it, more normalized. I think that was what drove the homosexual community, but it was probably also a political will from the outside, and probably, most probably, a necessity."
>
> (Pierre, 46 years old, middle-ranking executive in civil service).

The adaptation of homosexual lifestyles, its shift to couples and *safer sex*, brings about a stereotypification of gay "married life"[10], in opposition to the lifestyle of the unattached male who uses backrooms (Broqua; De Busscher, 2003), and cruises in places "of egalitarian and gregarious character (...) which set themselves apart from the ordinary world of hierarchies and social conventions and its imperative of respectability " (Pollak; Schiltz, 1987, 88). In the nineties, gays started articulating their sociability on the basis of the couple and multiple partners became less common: "the quest for happiness in private life nowadays combines the desire to be in a stable couple, with a life project, with a different relation to cruising (...) seen more as recreational than as part of one's identity" (Adam, 1999, 62).

This normalization sees pluralism reduced, transphobia has become more common, along with the rejection of the "queen" and anything or anybody likely to discredit homosexuals. Non-conventional expressions of sexuality are sidelined and earlier dichotomies, passive/active, feminine/masculine have resurfaced in discourse and in practice. There are dual processes of uniformization and differentiation:

> "With the move there was a gradual uniformization, because that's when we started having a gay fashion, and racism too. There were so few places in Opéra[11] that people preferred to be all together (...) there was 25%, or say, a third of girls (...) In the Marais (...) things got ugly for fat guys (...), for hairy guys, so gradually we got the café for hairy guys (...), and places opened for lesbians."
>
> (Jacques, 48 years old, white-collar worker).

Hence a paradoxical change: while the first gay bars that opened in the Marais were meant to promote democratization, the success encountered by the neighbourhood has fostered new exclusions, based on appearance, age, gender, and increasingly, on income. The Marais has become a male, exclusive space, that renders invisible and discriminates against categories designated as marginal, in particular transsexuals and effeminate homosexuals. It has become a meeting-place, representation and stage for homosexuals who subscribe to a specific gay social and spatial organization, which can be characterized, if somewhat simplistically, in a worldly and respectable homosexuality, opposed to the so-called "black homosexuality"[12] perceived as working-class, ambiguous and excessive. Aggregation also operates a deliberate segregation. As Pollak and Schiltz (1987, 81) point out: "The conquest of sexual liberties was gained by reinforcing a specific sociability and, indirectly, the segregation implied in the term "ghetto" which refers to its most ostentatious manifestations" and "this is representative of a minority of all homosexuals", the transformation taking place "at different times in different social classes", with the middle-class coming first.

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[9] Têtu, which started appearing in 1995, is one of France's best known magazines aimed at the gay readership (translator's note).

[10] Normalization and couples go hand in hand: "The homosexual couple functions as a factor of social integration when it is perceived by others as "conform" to the model of the heterosexual couple", says Adam (1999, 60).

[11] Translator's note: the area around the rue Sainte-Anne referred to above as the earlier concentration of gay bars.

[12] The phrase refers to practices of cruising in anonymous public spaces, picking up people of another race or class, and to images of the sordid and transgression (see Marchant, 2005). It was used by Hocquenghem, a FHAR activist, in the 70s, about the "cruising vagrancy that made the homosexual a short-circuit in the class system" (quoted in Marchant, 2005, 95).

## Gay socialization and segregation

The previous sections of this paper centred on the evolution of spaces of gay sociability, and showed how they are produced by a specific, dominant way of living homosexuality. Furthermore, these places express a differential emancipation. Shifting now to a different scale of analysis, the following sections will attempt to delineate segregation on the basis of individual strategies of exposure of sexual preference, which also influence relations with metropolitan space and the gay neighbourhood of homosexual populations. I rely here on Préteceille's (2006) definition of segregation as the unequal spatial distribution of social groups.

## Homosexual places of residence

A geographic analysis of the distribution of the Pacte Civil de Solidarité[13] (Ruelland, 2005) shows a concentration in central Paris, in the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 10th *arrondissements*[14]. This distribution conforms with that of gay businesses, which become much rarer in peripheral *arrondissements.* It appears from this research that gay sociability also determines residential choices to some extent, as "one stop in quite complex social and spatial itineraries" (Leroy, 2005, 591), allowing for the coming out of younger men (Schiltz, 1998).

This concentration, both residential and commercial, points to the importance of the gay neighbourhood in strategies, choices, and gay lifestyles. Areas occupied by gay couples are also the ones undergoing processes of gentrification, which indicates a double deliberate segregation, linked to social and sexual preferences. Access to this place of residence is restricted to a small number of young people with independent means, and to older gay couples. It is likely that geographic distance reinforces social isolation for young homosexuals in the *banlieue*, both more deprived and physically remote from the gay centre of the metropolis, and "who still endure the constraint of "hiding", conforming to dominant rules, all the more as they often live with their family, who knows nothing or does not want to know of their homosexual proclivities" (Pollak, Schiltz, 1987, 80). Consequently, over and above the micro-segregation of the "closet" (the need to hide and pretend) they are the victims of both economic and geographic exclusions from the space of recognition granted by the gay neighbourhood. Segregation of homosexual love is therefore related to residential and commercial gay segregation.

## The closet's socio-economic determinations

In a recent analysis of a survey conducted among readers of *têtu.com*, Blidon (2008b) has shown that, contrary to a commonly held assumption, the size of cities does not systematically have an influence on public displays of affection on the part of homosexuals: kissing or holding hands vary more in accordance with the distance from places where one is known than in accordance with city size. The determinations at play here seem to be social in nature rather than geographic. Therefore, injustices faced by homosexuals are not felt equally by all, they vary according to economic means and individual competences, which in turn have effects on *motility*[15], as some have no access to the gay neighbourhood. The process of coming out, which can be interpreted as both an "integration" in a gay milieu, and an assertion towards others, requires a degree of identification with a

[13] Translator's note: the Pacte Civil de Solidarité, or PACS, is a form of civil union (created in 1999) which concerns either same-sex or opposite sex couples (with the former a small minority).

[14] The analysis of data on people registered with a dating site that I am currently carrying out confirms this, with the 1st arrondissement, where many young workers live, added to the list.

[15] This notion developed by Vincent Kaufmann (2007, 179) refers to different forms of mobility (spatial, social, professional, residential, daily commutes as well as migrations). Motility is defined as "an agent's ability to be mobile, spatially or virtually" and depends on the context, on accessibility, on an agent's competences and on appropriation.

communitarian lifestyle. Degrees in one's coming out, or public exposure of one's homosexuality, vary according to one's age, and on whether one is part of a couple, and how stable the partnership is (Blidon, 2008b), as well as other factors such a education, social position and background. The relation to the gay milieu is correlated to the degree of acceptance in one's professional or family environment. Pollak and Schiltz (1987, 80) described three broad categories of homosexuals: different in terms of professional backgrounds;, in terms of degree of implication in gay sociability; and of the ability, or not, to assert their sexual preferences outside the "ghetto". They considered "social acceptance and the chances of being able to comes to terms with homosexual dispositions are correlated with cultural capital more than with economic capital". In the middle classes, as defined in terms of their educational achievements, homosexuality would therefore be better accepted and more assertive. The degree of attachment to the gay milieu appears stronger in those from a modest background and from outside Paris, who often experienced rejection in their place of origin, with social stigmatization reinforcing communitarian forms of withdrawal (Adam, 1999). My own observations suggest that the distance between the two ways of life, the couple ideal, on the one hand, and the gay ghetto, on the other, is in fact a function of a process of social distinction, which on the ground takes shape in the division between a normalized lifestyle (more widely acceptable and considered respectable) in gentrified central areas, and more "peripheral" lifestyles outside these areas.

## Regimes of engagement with the Marais

The relationship of individuals to the gay milieu and gay spaces appear to be becoming more diverse and complex. To account for ways in which gays engage with the Marais area, two types of notions appear useful. A first subset, based on research conducted in urban sociology in the 1980s, sees social identity as dually constructed between residential and professional contexts, and identifies different *modes of compensation* through territorial inscription (Collet, 2008). By extending them to all modes of habitation, these analytical categories can be used to understand the different *regimes of engagement* that homosexuals can have with their environment and the symbolic reference area of the Marais. The notion of *regime of engagement* (or *suitable action*) enables one to work beyond rigid, *a priori* sociological categories, and to account for the diversity and individual flexibility of action[16] : "Pluralism cannot boil down to a spatial division of public and private places, or to a differentiation in identities conceived as suits that can be worn whenever. By circulating from a relation to another, consequences are more weighty than those from just switching hats. There is a constant tension between the close and the public, with a variable geometry" (Thévenot, 2006, 54). In my research I attempt to work out the meaning of people's relation to the world, and more precisely, how gays "invest in" the *cité*. I focus here on the life experiences of younger men, in order to concentrate on factors other than age that are likely to influence ways of living, expressing and exposing one's homosexuality.

## Thee Marais: a desire for upward mobility

> "I had to find a solution (...), I stopped in this bar that was called the Amnésia, that I instantly liked, a lot (...). I met journalists, I met a singer who wanted me to go with him (...), lawyers (...), fantastic people with good positions, who loved me, and that I loved too, incidentally, it was

[16] Thévenot analyzes the adjustments made by individuals in the execution and coordination of their actions, in order to move beyond Bourdieu's sociology of distinction. His is a pragmatic sociology, particularly apt to integrate a discussion of spatial justice, since it insists on specific moves to put things in common or coordination, a notion which emphasizes an agent's relation to his/her environment, and which has to do with his/her relation to him/herself: "The relation to the environment is crucial to comprehend a behaviour, and to guide one's own, on the basis of relevant elements of the situation, and to make sure of others'" (Thévenot, 2006, 13).

> mutual. I took that as a sign. To make it, I had to stay in the Marais. All my life I believed in signs (...). And I took that as a sign, so I started looking for a job in the Marais".

Alex arrived in Paris with a couple of hundreds of euros, found a job as waiter in the 1st arrondissement and stayed with a friend in the Marais. A few months later, he went back to his parents' home, before returning two years later, with a qualification that meant he didn't have to wait tables any more.

For Alex, 23 years old, from a provincial town, who became a salesman and lives in the *banlieue*, sexual emancipation is strongly related to a desire for social mobility: he has had a large number of platonic relations with well-heeled older men, which gave him access to a gay lifestyle:

> "The atmosphere, the encounters, the interesting people (...) as it happens interesting people usually have good jobs (...). We play the seduction game: they invite me to good restaurants, we drink a lot, they like wine, we go to bars (...) I enjoy myself, we have fun together. Their objective is to get me drunk enough to get me to bed with them. So we sleep together, we kiss and after two weeks, usually, I go off and find someone else. (I'm) not a gigolo, I never ever ask for money".

Alex is not openly bisexual with his friends or colleagues. His strategy is to preserve appearances:

> "I've never had any trouble because I'm your average guy, and even if I wear tight clothes, it doesn't prevent you from acting like a guy (...) People see me, they see me as open, respectable, which allows you to have an image, err, you fit in everywhere!".

Respect for the norms and boundaries between the gay and heterosexual milieus, and the impossibility of being openly gay outside the Marais, are totally interiorized by Alex:

> "It doesn't have to do with shame, it's a matter of education, it's a matter of respect, it's like when you're invited to someone's place (...). You have to be respectful of the place you're in and to integrate. Me, I think in a heterosexual environment, you have to act straight... even if you aren't: two men don't hold hands, you respect that (...)".

Hiding therefore makes one worthy of others' respect, and it is also to appear masculine.

### At home in public[17] : the familiar mode

Fabien, 27 years old, from a tourist village, arrived in Paris aged 17. He left home very early and started working at a young age to finish his secondary schooling. His parents were employed in a football club, and he broke away from his traditional family for years, feeling he couldn't admit his homosexuality to them:

> "All around me there were these tough playboys, so you had to show you were a real man, you see, no way you could, err... then after a while, well, I asserted myself".

He went off to Paris "on impulse" and found a refuge at the *Tropic Café*. He quickly became friendly with waiters and regulars, who took charge of him and helped him find a job as waiter in a gay restaurant, and then a flat right opposite his workplace. He rapidly became integrated in local life and enjoys its tight-knit character:

> "You're in the Marais, you work in the gay milieu, you meet lots of people, you go out often, there you are, and then (...) you have lots of acquaintances, say. Because they're not really friends before a while". He's also familiar with gay night-life, the "debauchery and bad trips".

His current friends and outings are all within the gay milieu, and his boyfriend is a waiter in the Marais. He prefers the cheaper gay bars that have been open for a while, as well as the backrooms and saunas, all of which are gradually disappearing. With slight nostalgia, Fabien explains that the Marais has changed: youngsters have overrun the neighbourhood and "heterosexuals have fucked it all up". He experiences these changes as a denial of recognition:

> "I have to laugh when I hear what the young managers of new bars will say (...) You put your hand on their shoulder and say "do you have any idea who you're talking to". Take for instance (some newly opened bar), I met some pals there and the manager looks me up and down and

[17] The phrase is from Brawley (2009). Thévenot's theorization of the familiar engagement regime is very close.

> says "who the hell are you? (...) You just shut up, you're in my place, this is my bar". Says I: "I didn't come here for your bar, I didn't come here for you, I came to see these guys I know".

This may be just about a personal conflict, but it seems also to point to two different, or even competing, modes of appropriation. These refer to divergent principles: Fabien challenges the underlying social inequality ("the boss, or, well, the boss, the manager, 'cause this young 24-year old lad is only the manager") and invokes an undifferentiated, more egalitarian, homosexual culture: "We're all equal, don't you denigrate me". He then calls not on his social capital (his friends), but on his economic capital: he switches from being a member of the same homosexual minority, to anonymous customer, on a different note: "I'm going elsewhere to spend my money". Fabien feels threatened by the quick success of the new manager and takes on the language of social distinction vis-à-vis the newcomer. The time spent in the neighbourhood is what characterizes his relation to the gay milieu. He feels at ease in the Marais, in a relation of familiarity that is inherent to his sense of self and personal construction. Familiarity with others, gay sociability, grant him a degree of social recognition, coupled with his homosexual identity. The Marais is his home. He identifies with it, recognizes himself in it, in a singular relationship. Living there is his priority:

> "We're still looking for a place to live together, D. and me. We want to settle in the Marais but it's become impossible: way too expensive! But I've lived here for ten years, it's really the place where I feel best. It may not sound like much, but it is a big deal. You walk out, you go out shopping, you have a drink, and people say "Hi Fabien, how are you?", in the end everybody knows you (...) No way I'm leaving the Marais!".

**The Marais is other people: the detached mode**

Nicolas has lived in the Paris area for the past five years, in the *banlieue*. Aged 31 years, he manages a wine-bar. When he was eighteen, he left his parents' home in a rural area of southern France. He is from a humble background and his parents reluctantly "accepted" his homosexuality. He has little formal education and learned the cooking trade "on the job" in a number of places. He often finds seasonal employment, abroad in particular, and enjoys travelling. "I came to Paris because I'd wanted to try for a while (...) it came to a point where I said to myself, maybe I can set up a different way of life, unlike my parents', maybe a more "middle-class" lifestyle, so to speak (...) I figured in Paris it might work, I could make a good living. I was quite ambitious", he confides. He has a much more unstable lifestyle than he had imagined, "shacking up" with lovers, moving around, taking badly paid jobs, and often unemployed. Nicolas says he would have "enjoyed travelling regularly, having a job that calls for regular travel, like in relief work, something like that", but he also considers he has learnt a lot working in restaurants, enjoys the work and plans to open a bar some day. In professional contexts, he doesn't discuss his sexual orientation but "after a while, people catch on, gradually, I don't like to be placed in a category. I prefer to be judged on what I do".

It's often through his relationships that he finds accommodation and jobs, in particular in a restaurant in the Marais. But when he discusses the neighbourhood, he's very detached. He never identified to the place, and only goes there to "pick up guys", a phrase also used in the context of drug use, which implies that his explorations in the neighbourhood are purely functional, in relation to his desire, a craving for casual sex. He goes out alone, to clubs, and meets partners there. He admits he wouldn't know how to meet them in other circumstances. His friends, even the gays, he met "outside the milieu" and he has more fun in environments that are not male-only. Even if he's had a job in the neighbourhood, he describes it only as a night place, not a day-time one, and sees it strictly as a "ghetto". The Marais, as far as he is concerned, is the others, their outlook, the lack of communication:

> "I don't find it all that fun. There's a sort of concrete screed (...) and the kind of fussy "yeah I so want to meet someone, but I pretend I'm not trying to meet anyone" (...) I just don't get it!".

### A place to circulate in: the distanced mode

For others, the Marais is a place they pass through, a sort of *territoire circulatoire* ("circulatory territory", Tarrius, 2007). For instance Adrien, a national of Luxembourg and 31-year old architect, the son of farmers, owns a flat in the Marais. He's in a stable relationship, but works in France frequently and likes to slum it in the Marais. I met him on a week night in a bar, where he was with two young provincials he'd just met, exhibiting with no perceptible embarrassment a piercing on his penis to the waiter. He invited all of us back to his place, to show off his best hospitality, and finally suggested we have an "orgy". He said that he enjoys the Marais for "partying and sex", and boasted, always in the active form ("I fucked him"), of his many conquests and his accumulated orgasms.
His choice of the Marais as residence, however "has nothing to do with being gay! I don't give a shit for all those ...! If I'm here, it's because it's the only place where I managed to buy a flat. Because in Paris, they won't sell easily to foreigners, they need guarantees", he explains. Adrien accounts for his choice by the good reputation of the Marais, its art galleries, the fact that it is an expensive area with a longer tradition of sales to foreigners than other Parisian neighbourhoods. His purchase is first and foremost an investment, a way of profiting from his economic capital.
According to Adrien "to be happy, gays have to remain hidden. I find it absolutely devoid of interest to lock oneself up in a ghetto!". He claims homosexuals no longer encounter discriminations as used to be the case. The Marais, in his view, is an expression of what he calls "gayness", a place for those who have difficulties coming to terms with their homosexuality. He's very critical of the "vulgar camps in the 11th *arrondissement*" and says:

> "You have to accept who you are! I'm myself in every circumstance, in my work relationships, with my family, my friends, I have no problem with that. In my life, people know I'm gay. You either like me as I am or pack up".

Adrien's relationship with the Marais is instrumental: when one of his young acquaintances praises the friendliness and cheapness of a bar in the area, he retorts "you have it wrong, I pay and I want to be treated accordingly". His social position allows him to dismiss economic constraints completely: "No, I just find the means. Of course, I do come from a well-off family, so today I'm well-off, because I have a good job, but you can always find means". It also allows him to take the upper hand in his sexual relations. Adrien absolutely doesn't identify with the gay milieu. His "indifferent ease" illustrates one way of experiencing homosexuality, between contempt and distance, already analyzed by Pollak and Schiltz (1987, 85) in professionals and the upper-middle class, from well-heeled and tolerant backgrounds, who in "setting themselves up as models for the others, are characterized by a common optimistic view of the homosexual condition, which they perceive less as a source of discrimination and marginality than as an asset allowing for a freer life".

### The social distribution of the right to recognition

Lefebvre saw the right to the city both as a right to difference and a right to appropriation. In this way, the right to the city is a function of access to space, either material or virtual, of recognition, which in turn depends on an individual's social position. These portraits show that recognition is by no means shared equally between all homosexuals who live in the Marais or spend time there, and that the injustice of heterosexism in public space is not experienced in the same way by all. Individuals can call on different forms of capital to relate to the gay milieu, which influences their relation to the neighbourhood. This relation can be either familiar or detached, or completely distanced. Adrien boasts of his economic capital and uses the Marais as a means to assert his status, Fabien compensates for the rejection experienced in his family with his friendly relations, experienced as rootedness, and finds a degree of symbolic compensation. Nicolas's position is intermediate, and stresses work life over the gay milieu: he constructs his social identity around the

former, and its multiplicity. He is aware that going out in the Marais is the only way of meeting people like him, but he is critical of them and would like to detach himself from them. Alex, who keeps his sexual preferences secret, uses discretion as a strategy in social and professional mobility: respectability and respect for norms are central to his world-view, and the choice to remain silent has to do with the internalized obligation to adapt his behaviour according to the ruling principles of the spaces he finds himself in.

Finally, the degree of engagement with the gay neighbourhood also depends on how the interviewee experiences his homosexuality in other contexts: for Fabien, there is a local convergence between his work and residence, and if he goes elsewhere to show off with his partner, it's because he wants to separate his work environment from his love life, in order to preserve it. The experience of discrimination has led him to emphasize community dimensions. Alex leads a double life, and his attachment to the Marais is related to his silence "outside". He constructs his identity by going out with people he finds interesting in terms of their social position, people he envies and wants to emulate. Gay sociability is a part of his social capital, that allows for both identification and recognition. For Nicolas, detachment has to do with fleeing the obligation to confess. In between two worlds, he juggles his professional and his personal lives, and goes back and forth between gay and straight spaces. Paradoxically, the person who materially is most invested in the territory is also the one who takes most distance from it, and most deftly, because he belongs to a flexible, mobile, professional elite.

**Return to the gay ghetto**

Rather than challenge the heterosexual norm and assert homosexuals' right to the city, the gay neighbourhood appears as both a product and a producer of a specific gay sociability. It reinforces, through gentrification and normalization, the segregation of affective practices and self-expression for working-class groups, and displaces a culture of cruising that was more egalitarian and class-blind. Socio-economic and sexual hierarchies re-emerge, and polarize two homosexual cultures, even as they dominate sexual relations. The space of gay recognition, a crucial reference for a young homosexual, is steeped in social differences, which it reproduces by allowing only practices deemed acceptable; it excludes precisely the people who suffer most discrimination from their places of origin and who are likely to seek a refuge in community sociability. By projecting a representation of the gay as at peace with himself, well-off and proud, the gay neighbourhood ratifies the status quo, and renders invisible conflicts for spatial (the Marais) and social (homosexual identity) appropriation. Life stories show that for some homosexuals, the investment in the neighbourhood allows for symbolic compensation, a way of finding a place of one's own, a degree of social recognition that compensates for the rejection experienced in their work or family environment, and the constraint of having to hide in other places. For others, the spatial experience is recounted in a distant mode, as though it were mere recreation, and appearance mattered more than being.

The possibility of mobilizing the gay milieu as a resource is shrinking for those who do not have the competences to access this place of gay sociability, while those who are accepted as they are by their family or colleagues have easier access and a more detached relation with it. For some, it is a crucial necessity, for others, it is a mere stage, a choice. Issues of accessibility and motility therefore deepen the injustices associated with being in the closet: some do not have the necessary means to leave their isolation and are obliged to remain within their assigned place. Paradoxically, aggregation, in the long run, leads to segregation. It ratifies an unfair situation (the need to hide) and doesn't challenge the city's inability to accommodate diversity.

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