Sex, Profit, and Political Power: California and Its Influence on Paris's Queer Business, Press and Politics in the Late 1970s and 80s

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ABSTRACT

In late 1970s Paris, San Francisco Nights and Far West, popular institutions in the city's new queer nightlife, helped fashion new sexual norms. They were part of a constellation of California-inspired places that stimulated new imaginings of how queerness could be expressed and embodied. Indeed, large Californian cities, San Francisco in particular, provided a profit model based on queer consumption that participated in the creation of a new queer Paris. As the decade came to an end, the mobilisation of a gay vote in California also fed Parisian activists with the inspiration to organise a queer voting bloc in Paris to influence national elections and lobby for an end to discriminatory, anti-gay sections of the penal code. These re-imaginings of politics and urban economy challenged cherished French universalist ideals. As such, opposition accompanied the embrace of California-inspired visions of queer life. Both support and resistance attested to the growing global power of California, and of the United States. Drawing upon archival research, this paper explores California as a cultural reference, commercial brand, and political aspiration in the construction of a new queer Paris at the end of the 1970s and the dawn of the 1980s.

KEYWORDS: Queer california; transnational history; queer paris; gay urban economy; transnational queer identities; French queer history; Queer history; Queer Paris; HIV; AIDS

Introduction

When André Gauthiez, a French journalist, landed in San Francisco in 1975, it was the pleasant assault on his senses that inspired him to encourage his fellow Parisian readers to visit California. He would later explain in *Olympe*, a magazine with a bisexual target audience, that the promise of delight was thanks to a uniquely Californian public policy environment (Gauthiez 1975). After being to other parts of the United States, he concluded that it was in California, and specifically in San Francisco, that layers of policymaking had produced an aesthetically pleasing balance between humans and their environment. Establishing his own ranking of American cities, graded on the richness of their local cultures and the humanity of their public policies, he placed San Francisco in the top two, along with New Orleans.

The intention of his visit was to gauge whether San Francisco was indeed what his French compatriot, the author Roger Peyrefitte, had dubbed the gay capital of the world. Parisian readers of queer press already held a range of enduring, positive stereotypes of California and San Francisco in particular. 'Queer' being the apt adjective here for a readership whose gender and sexual identifications were diverse, under debate, and yet to be settled. The queer community publication launched in 1973, *L'antinorm*, underscored the tensions that surrounded definitions of gender and sexuality triggered at the time. The works of Freud and Wilhelm Reich on psychology and sexuality were only recently becoming widely available in French, triggering new discourses on sexual

orientation. The direction and prospects of sexual revolution were yet to be seen as French opinion on contemporary queerness took form under the voices of a widening range of commentators on sex, sexuality, and gender (L'antinorm. 1973, 8–9). 'Gay' entered into this context of contestation over how to speak about sex and sexuality as part of what would become what Provencher (2016, 35–36) 'vague English Creole'. If, as Browne and Nash (2010, 5) assert, 'queer' as an adjective is concerned with forms of sexual and gender identification that question the stability of the relations between sex, gender, and sexuality, then this is an especially apt way to speak of the press corps and other actors who were fighting for the right to inhabit this space of sexual and gender indeterminateness. 'Queer' is, then, used in this article to speak of Parisians who did not conform to traditional heterosexual norms of sexual orientation, gender expression, and sexual practice.

At the dawn of the 1980s, the queer Parisian world that Gauthiez was writing to was negotiating a new burst of US cultural influence as US-style queer businesses began to multiply in the centre of Paris. While Paris had its own history of queer bars, restaurants, and cafés, the American concept of enclaves where several businesses agglomerated to overtly attract queer customers had not been viable. As Sibalis, one of the pioneering academic writers on queer Paris contended, the idea of a Parisian version of a 'gay ghetto' only became somewhat feasible on the back of depressed rent prices in the *Le Marais* neighbourhood of the late 1970s and early 1980s (Sibalis 2004, 1739–174). The concept of purposefully segregated queer urban life had also struggled against resistance. For instance, when complaints rose of a growing number of bars and cafés specifically targeting a queer client base grew in the late 1940s, Paris's town hall responded with decided opposition. Roger Léonard, who was the *préfet* of the city, issued ordinances that banned dancing between men, on the basis of regulations issued between 1790 and 1927. Drag balls that had a faithful following during the interwar years and persevered through occupied Second World War Paris were now effectively banned as a means of discouraging queer-only establishments. Justification for this crackdown included the assertion that such establishments attracted an euphemistically dubbed 'special clientele' that 'facilitated perversion and acts of debauchery [une clientèle special (qui) facilitent ainsi la perversion et les actes de débauche]' (Leonard 1949).

On streets like Rue Sainte-Anne, where queer Parisians cruised for sex and patronised bars that welcomed them despite the risk of police raids, a form of queer nightlife persisted. Sibalis would later record the opinions of observers of queer life on Rue Sainte-Anne who saw Les Marais emerge as something of a gayborhood at the dawn of the 1980s: Quoting Fabrice Emaer a bar owner who attracted queer clients to his bar, it was the assertive nature of the new queer neighbourhood and the affirmation of a collective identity that was to be admired despite the personal risk of lost business to the new competition. To him, in Le Marais, queer Parisians were following 'in the footsteps of Americans' and the city's 'gay world (was now) revealing itself' and this was cause for celebration (Sibalis 2001, 32).

The notion of gay culture was (and continues to be) however fiercely challenged in France, where identity-based politics are perceived as an existential challenge to national identity. The French national narrative is founded on an aspired commitment to universalism and equality and construes any departures from a shared national identity towards pluralistic visions of French society as problematic (Provencher 2016). Such a commitment to universalism has typically meant that movements for minority rights have faced sustained opposition. California's queer politics and urban economies in 1975, therefore, appeared to be far removed from the lived experiences of gender and sexual minorities in Paris. When Gauthiez finally reported his observations of California, his language was peppered with anglicisms, a mark of the American origins of the lexicon of queer cultural politics at the time. San Francisco was thus spoken of in Gallicised English as the capital of 'la Gay-Life … . la Gay-Press, et du Gay-People' (Gauthiez 1975, 30).

If San Francisco and California appeared to have a vibrant form of queer life that inspired imitation, it was arguably a function of global geopolitics and macroeconomics. The US was asserting itself as the centre of a new global political and macroeconomic order. The coastal economies of the United States, and particularly those of San Francisco and New York, had grown into strategically important ports and vital urban economies over the course of the Second World War, while Paris suffered significant economic contraction under Nazi occupation. Indeed, the Second World War bore significant implications on the structure and content of global trade, in favour of the US economy. The gradual setting of the US dollar as the currency of world trade and the creation of new international financial institutions to set global trade by and in the US also placed American ideas, goods, and services in position for global reach. This represented a significant historical shift. Within the two years following the end of the Second World War, the US held close to 70% of the world's gold reserves, while European economies that were the global economy's leading creditors before the war, notably the United Kingdom, emerged as leading debtors in 1945 (International Monetary Fund (IMF) 1947, 32–36). The centre of international finance shifted from London to the United States, and New York, in particular, establishing a new political and economic order (Eichengreen 1996). For queer people on both sides of the Atlantic, these global macroeconomic shifts also had implications on their relative levels of income, the ease of access to debt and capital, the size of their labour markets, and therefore their capacity to borrow, purchase properties, and establish businesses.

The developmental boost of the wartime economy, distance from the theatres of physical conflict, and massive population influxes provided favourable conditions for property ownership and the kind of intricate gay urban economies that grew in California. In contrast, the economic conditions of Paris emerging from the war would not immediately lead to the distinct residential and commercial queer quarters that expanded in California in the second half of the twentieth century. Roger Lotchin (2003) illustrates the Second World War's implications on the Bay Area's economy, spatial planning, and even its sociological and sociocultural composition. Far removed from the European theatre of war, San Francisco underwent a rapid demographic transformation as demand for labour in wartime industries attracted a growing labouring class. It also became the second-busiest port in the United States, receiving 1.7 million military personnel during the war (Turhollow 1983, 46). The largely male character of both military and employment-seeking arrivals also created what Berubé's seminal work on the period *Coming Out Under Fire* underscored. These proved to be ideal conditions for queer men to meet under extraordinary conditions that only availed themselves in these busy port cities on scales and at speeds unattainable elsewhere in the world at this particular moment in time (Bérube 1990, 125–127).

Sibalis (2017,131–152) reflects on how, at the same moment, the Vichy republic in Paris was imposing a new criminalisation of consensual sex for men under the age of 21, effectively introducing a penalty that did not exist in France since the late eighteenth century. However, even with this regression, and while the war meant that Paris had been relatively more materially diminished, Parisian queer men were not subject to the sweeping anti-sodomy laws in the US.

Parisian queer men were also emerging from the war into a geopolitical context that not only translated into US economic influence, but augmented cultural and political power. Ikenberry's seminal International Relations text on the future of the balance of power departs from a reflection of what made the rise of US global power and influence historically significant. He notes, for instance, that while 'Charles V, Louis XIV, Napoleon I, Wilhelm II, and Nazi Germany all inspired massive counterbalancing responses', the United States seemed to wield a multifaceted form of military, cultural, economic power that appeared to be less threatening during the second half of the twentieth century (Ikenberry 2002, 5). Ikenberry (2002, 1–5), is emboldened to read the significance

of the US's power to derive from its multifaceted nature and the seeming difficulty of its rivals to sustain and succeed at resisting its rise.

Reflecting on the global order born in the latter half of the twentieth Century, Scott, Agnew, Storper, and Soja (2001, 11) also include 'global-city regions' as a part of the geography of global power. These are described these as 'ranging from familiar metropolitan agglomerations dominated by a strongly-developed core such as the London region or Mexico City, to more polycentric geographic units as in the cases of the urban networks of the Randstad or Emilia-Romagna'. This reading of global economic geography built on that of Hall (1966), John and Wolff (1982), and Sassen (1991) who had begun to study the uneven distribution of economic and sociocultural weight that certain agglomerations exert on a global scale (Scott, Agnew, Storper, and Soja 2001, 11–12). O'Connor (2010) has more recently looked at these powerful regions through more quantifiable means, paying attention to the density of logistical and transport networks.

The position of California within the global economy's largest economy and its growth as a powerful region were also accompanied by widening inequalities. This arguably worked to the advantage of a globally mobile class that could afford to gain access to new ideas, international finance, and integrate into transnational networks. Gauthiez appeared to at least be proximate to this rung in the global economy as he travelled at a time when flight companies were struggling to attract customers due to steep oil prices (France 1975, 3). Indeed, in 1973, the cost of fuel constituted about 9% of Air France's operating costs, but in the first eight months of 1974, this proportion had leaped up by 14% (France 1975, 9). Globally, those who could travel constituted a minuscule percentage of the world's economy. Per capita incomes in high-income countries were growing at about 3.6% per capita or about US$102, yearly, while the same incomes grew at about 3.1% or US$2.48 in low to middle-income economies (Hackett 1975, 10–11). While a wider social security net in France meant that inequalities were less steep, access to international travel, networks, and ideas in a world before the internet arguably marked access to global economic, social, and cultural capital (Soppelsa 1975, 11–12). Against this backdrop, in what follows, we see images and ideas of California circulate in Paris, as an energetic and connected queer Parisian body of journalists, entrepreneurs, and activists seek to simultaneously advance queer rights and profit from selling California in France at the dawn of the 1980s.

Following in the Footsteps?: Californian Influence and the Reconstruction of Queer Identities in Paris

When Gai Pied, which would become the most-read queer magazine in France (5/5. 1983, 5–6) launched, its very first article was dedicated to San Francisco and Harvey Milk. Its admiration, while not immediately apparent, suggested that there was an attentive observation of the processes and tactics that underpinned the city's queer community's political action. In the inaugural article, Gai Pied celebrated the role that queer-owned publications were playing in diffusing political messaging and language and in mobilising queer community support for politicians and policies that worked in their favour, such as, they argued, Advocate magazine was doing (Brooks 1979, 1). The adjacent editorial thanked the US's queer community for coining 'gay' as a 'joyous [joyeux]' concept that not only shed traditional negative misconceptions about queerness but promised to yield political capital (Le Gai Pied 1979, 1). The American conception of 'gay', they argued, lacked the baggage of older terminologies that did not hold a political history of successfully attracting political support. This rebranding of queerness as 'gay' would help 'command the attention of public authorities [exiger une écoute des pouvoirs publics]' who could help advance queer community policy priorities (Le Gai Pied 1979, 1). The transplantation of 'gay' in the American sense into the French lexicon, they hoped, would also reconfigure queer self-perceptions transmitting a 'certain gentleness [une certaine tendresse]' in how queer people constructed their identities (Le Gai Pied 1979, 1).

That ‘California’s homosexual community … (was) … still living under the euphoria of defeating the Briggs initiative [la communauté homosexuelle californienne … vivait encore sous l’euphore de la victoire contre l’amendement 6 de Briggs] (Le Gai Pied 1979, 3) was partly attributed to the discursive shift in how California’s queer community presented itself in policy discourse. (The Briggs Initiative would have legalised the dismissal of queer Californian teachers.) Beyond the pages of Paris’s queer press, queer Californian life would also inform and inspire a class of entrepreneurs who capitalised on queerness as a commodity but also created affirming spaces for the socialisation of Paris’s queer community.

A Queer Reading of California’s Global Geopolitics and History: Extracting History from Paris’s Late 7Os/Early 80s Queer Porn Cinemas and Clubs

A significant influence that California played in the construction of queer identities in Paris lay in the representation of queer male sexuality in pornography in cinemas and nightclubs that emerged in Paris in the late 1970s and 1980s. At the least, these spaces provided a novel source of affirmation and, at their most significant, made a political statement about the possibility of chiselling out spaces dedicated to a minority group in a universalist French political culture that tends to eschew self-imposed forms of segregation.

Feature-length gay pornographic films emerged in the United States in the early 1970s after decades of judicial groundwork in California, and in the US more broadly, that allowed for their screening in cinemas. Projecting pornography in French cinemas remained illegal until the mid-1970s, when it would experience a boom. California’s judicial system had arguably helped create the conditions for a commercial industry for gay pornography to emerge within that particular context. During the Second World War, California’s court system had adjudicated cases that narrowed the scope of what sexual acts could be understood to be offences under anti-Sodomy laws (see People v. Wheeler (1943) and People v Sing Chang (1944)). The risk of closure for businesses that served queer clients has also been somewhat diminished through the courts (seeStoumen v Reilly 1951). More significantly, perhaps, by the late 1950s, the right to publish and distribute printed material previously deemed as obscene had been secured through a series of appeals against Los Angeles’s postmaster that had escalated to the Supreme Courts (One, Incorporated v Olesen, 1958). The judicial and cultural environment was ripe for the kind of bold production of queer pornography emerging out of California in the early 1970s.

The beginnings of profitable feature-length gay pornography in the United States are often traced back to Wakefield Poole’s 1971 Boys in the Sand, three years before such a film could be legally screened in Paris. Between Poole’s pioneering work and the legalisation of pornography in French cinemas was a period of a prolific production of films that established the aesthetics, vocabularies, and symbols that defined a taxonomy of gay identities and sexual practices. Increasingly affordable technology further fuelled the expansion of gay pornography in the US and demonstrated its profitability (Rodriguez 2016, 19). Filmmakers on the US’s West Coast and as the genre spread across the Atlantic replicated the stylistic and editorial choices of Boys in the Sand, which prioritised realism through documentary-like cinematography. In effect, the feature-film-length gay pornographic film performed an anthropological and historical function by capturing as realistic a depiction of queer sexual practice as was possible through the use of cinéma vérité techniques (Escoffier 2017, 88–113). Poole would repeat his filmmaking formula, using cinéma vérité, in other productions including his 1972 film, Bijou. Other filmmakers like Jerry Douglas, Jack Devau, Avery Willard, Arch Brown, and Ian McGaw, among others, followed Poole’s cue. Collectively, these works documented American queer sexual subcultures, practices, and geographies rooted in American urban experiences (Escoffier 2017, 88). The eventual legalisation of pornography in French cinemas presented a bold

reflection of queer sexuality in places that served as communal venues of socialisation and sources of profit for operators (Lavau and Tarik 2018).

The profitability of the new industry motivated enterprising French film producers, distributors, and theatre owners to develop a local network of cinemas that would bring both American and new French titles to Parisian screens. The first gay feature film to be distributed in Parisian theatres, in this respect, was produced by Tom de Simone, who had started his career at the University of California, Los Angeles, and had already begun to establish himself as a filmmaker of gay and horror films. Norbert Terry, a French entrepreneur who would become a leading distributor of gay films in France, chose De Simone's Good Hot Stuff, marketed in France as Histoires d'hommes (Barnier 1979, 12). That visions of queer sex and sexuality, more broadly, were being shaped by commercially minded American and French businesses attracted philosophical debate over the ethics of pornography, and the parallel markets that emerged alongside it, and profit. On one hand, the proliferation of sex shops selling paraphernalia on the margins of queer cinemas sold affirmation of the sexuality of their clients (Lejeune 1980, 12). However, the trend towards commodification was also seen as an attempt to impose uniformity: Claude Lejeune, who regularly wrote for various queer publications including Le Gai Pied, Samourai, and 3KELLER, gathered and articulated this opinion. These spaces of consumption, he provocatively contended, were ultimately a form of prostitution rather than places of validation. He argued that sex shops and pornography cinemas were not as radical a challenge to morality as they seemed. It would be when queer people make public displays of affection in everyday places 'quand un pédé prend la main son amant dans un bistrot [when gay people hold the hands of their lovers in a bistro]' that societal mores would have truly been transformed (Lejeune 1980, 13).

The profitability of queerness awakened the entrepreneurial spirits of a growing set of Parisian small business owners who shook off precious hesitations of cultivating specifically queer client bases (5/5. 1984, 1; Girard 1983, 2). This arguably accelerated the validation of queer sexuality, as profit incentives motivated business owners to promote tolerance. This is perhaps especially pertinent in the Parisian context where, as will be discussed later, queer Parisians had a contentious relationship of unrequited love with the labour movement. The world of business was acting as a champion of queer acceptance.

Leaders of a queer collective, Comité Homosexuel de l'Ouest Parisien, attempted to show how the commercialised queer life emerging in the centre of Paris did not necessarily reflect the experience of all Parisian queer men (Bach, Gérard and Gillonette 1980). By the mid-1980s, witnessing the explosion of Americanised queerness, Audrey Coz would attempt to launch his own Paris-centric queer newspaper that enjoyed a short run (Coz 1985, 2). However, even in his publication, traces of US influence were unmistakable, from reports on the US-born tradition of gay tea dances in Paris to the place names of the city's queer life that ranged from Mocambo, ostensibly inspired by the older, eponymous West Hollywood club, to Far West and in the numerous advertisements for queer pornographic material with American-inspired titles (Paris Capitale a 1985).

Scepticism about the influx of California-made pornography notwithstanding, the arrival of new imagery depicting queer desire met other commercial and emotional demands. Roland Barthes, the French semiotics thinker, who frequented Le Dragon, a gay theatre, rather saw the value of his visits to consist not only in the consumption of sexually explicit content. Repeated visits reinforced his confidence in his sexuality, while the films themselves educated viewers about codes, outward markers, and signals of shared sexuality (Barthes 1992).

Whether Barthes' and other queer Parisian leaders thinking represented the thinking of all queer Parisians can be reasonably assumed to be unlikely. However, their archived views offer an

opportunity to recover and organise the past. Barthes, and other queer people who wrote, travelled, and owned businesses, were arguably part of a queer minority that was documenting a moment of historical inflection towards an Americanised queerness, thanks to their access to capital and resources. Their positions of power, then, raise a classic question about the definition of history (versus memory). That is, whether their privilege disqualifies their experiences from being valuable accounts of the past. Or, indeed, if these sources sustain the long-contested historiographies that organise the past through the gazes of the powerful. From Hegel's controversial thought interrogating memory, history, and justice (Nuzzo 2012), to Pierre Nora's polarising writings on history and memory in the French context (Nora 2010), to the philosophical positions assumed by and derived from, Marx, Engels, Derrida, and Benjamin (Fritsch 2006), there is little to suggest a complete discarding of perceived voices of power.

In this context, Paris's queer 'elite' is an instructive and arguably subversive site upon which to read the nature of the US's global geopolitical and macroeconomic power. Claude Lejeune' the journalist mentioned earlier, recollection of the workings of Le Dragon arguably revealed the nature of the transatlantic shift in queer urban cultures that was underway in the late 1970s and early 1980s, under US and Californian influence. The queer patrons of the establishment agreed to pay dues of 30 francs (about 14 euros today) to join a club that offered a selection of largely American-made pornography, and thereafter paid a minimum of 19 francs (about 8.40 euros in 2021) per visit (Lejeune 1980, 13). In effect, there is an atomisation of queer sex and the extraction of rent from cinema operators, and distributors of pornography, who assume ownership of queer sex and pleasure within these settings. An exponential multiplication of these encounters across the world over time arguably aggregate (d) into a larger exercise of a form of US economic and cultural power on a global scale.

In popular hangouts including Far West, the images of the eroticised cowboy, the desert, tumbleweed, cacti, and the frontier were repackaged to attract customers and derive profit. Uprooted from their geographical and historical colonial context, the images of the Far West also served as a sexualised, innocuous, commercial branding of enduring tropes about masculinity and virility. The imagined, homo-eroticised west notably appeared in magazine photography and text, too, as an 'Eden' where the 'sun kisses the ocean' in Masculin International, the queer magazine whose inaugural edition was themed 'virile image of America' (Masculin International 1979). The double motion of dissociating the Far West from past histories of displacement and the reframing of the west as paradisaical are attached to a larger narrative of the desirability and goodness of US power for queer men, even as the legislative and cultural dispositions towards homosexuality were arguably predominantly hostile.

Opening night of Hollywood Bar, a successor to New York themed, Le Village at 12 rue du Plâtre, 75,004, Paris 5 September 1984. Some of Paris's most vocal advocates for queer spaces and queer press. Identified are: Front: Zaza Diors, contributor to various queer press outlets chronicling queer Paris at the time. Back, Center: Sebastien Dietrich, leading journalist and editor of 5/5, popular queer publication. Other two figures, unconfirmed; first names 'Philippe' and 'Manuel.' Source: *Centre* LGBT, Paris.

Cheekily but tellingly captioned as 'The entirety of Paris's gay press': L-R David Girard (Gay International, 5/5), Jacques Ktorza (Guy Magazine, Gay Men); Gérard Vappereau (Gai Pied), Partick Oger (Gay International), Audrey Cox (5/5, formerly Paris Capitale) Source: *Centre* LGBT, Paris.

California in Paris: Place Names and Belonging

Beyond the circuit of cinemas and the pages of magazines, queer place names betrayed their Californian influence. If one took the metro to today's Louvre-Rivoli station, one could walk to 4, rue Balleuil in the first arrondissement to Castro, a shop that claimed to be "La Première Boutique Gay des Halles for Men [the first gay men's boutique in the Les Halles area] with the last words in the phrase left in untranslated English. This homage to San Francisco's gayborhood stocked books, magazines, 'video gadgets' (assumedly, VHS cassette players), underwear, and sexual enhancement products (Centre LGBT Paris 1983). A two-minute walk to 15 rue de Roule could lead to San Francisco Nights, a bar and restaurant that promised an opportunity to discover San Francisco 'sans passeport' although once one entered the space there was little that was actually American about it, Zaza Diors, a fixture of Parisian queer nightlife quipped. California, however, served as a profitable marketing tool (Diors 1983, 12). On any other day but Monday, at 20 rue de Mazagran, about 20 minutes away from these California-inspired places was Le tram-way whose upper floor was a 'bar gay mixte [mixed gay bar]' for gay and lesbian patrons while the first floor was reserved for women only, details that the bar advertised in English next to a sketch of a San Francisco-esque tramway (Centre LGBT Paris). In September 1984, what had been the first American-style bar to open in Le Marais, Le Village named after New York's West Village, at 12 rue du Plâtre, a 15 minute walk from San Francisco Nights and Castro, became Hollywood Bar, changing its 'decor, hands, customers, and name' as Norman Darden, an American journalist for a popular Parisian magazine 5/5 observed at the time (Darden 1984, 38). A sketch of a shirtless cowboy advertised Far West that opened for business before September 1984 at 47, boulevard St-Martin, an 8-minute walk away from Le Tramway. Open between lunchtime and 1am, it performed multiple roles in an area known for prostitution and sex-shops: Providing darkrooms for casual sexual encounters, projecting pornography, and selling 'superhard' and 'super in' videos (Paris Capitale b 1985).

While California's place names acted as rentable brands for these establishments to profit from, they also furnished symbols and references with which a transnational queer identity was being, consciously or otherwise, being reimagined. In the context of Paris and France, this presented an implicit challenge to French republican ideals that hold identity-based self-segregation in contempt. As VHS technology spread and made sexually explicit images and a queer lexicon from US and Californian experiences accessible in Parisian homes, the communal rituals that were contained in West Coast-inspired places became increasingly individualised. Yanko Diffusion at 10 rue Daulancourt in Paris's 17th arrondissement, for instance, operated what it claimed was the largest mail service importing VHS cassettes 'straight from the United States, without intermediaries [En direct des Etats-Unis, sans intermédiare]' (Yanko Distribution 1984). The exact claim was also made by competitors who promised to decrease the distance between Parisian queer men, California, and the US more broadly, through their video mail service and extensive American catalogues, among them International Aesthetic Man (IEM), Universal Men Center, and Librarie Men.

The supply of American images of queer sex appeared to be assumed to be evidently desirable given the overwhelming quantity of US titles that dwarfed other sources. However, while there was the expectation of sufficient demand, the glut of American pornography reflected broader global macroeconomic realities. At the least, US exporters and producers of film and other similar merchandise benefitted from economies of scale. In general, the gap between what France exported versus the US consistently widened from the late 1970s into the 1980s. In 1970, for example, the gap between total French exports of merchandise, in current US dollars, was about US$ 25.13 billion, to the US's advantage. By 1982, France earned US$ 119.75 billion less compared to the US from its exports of merchandise at current dollar values (World Bank). Concurrently, France imported larger quantities of communications related technology over the same period, while the US depended less on imports of such goods (World Bank). The volumes of US trade and the size of its domestic market

meant that French producers of pornography and other similar goods were at a distinct disadvantage position to compete at the same scale.

Criticism emerged in reaction to the growth of a Parisian queer urban economy approached the moment not necessarily as an economic question but rather as philosophical, and sometimes, as moral. In addition to the usual Catholic suspects, critiques who were queer presented nationalistic arguments against a perceptible Americanisation (Sud-Ouest. 1980, 7) For others who observed the new, Americanised queer culture and economy as queer members of far right nationalist groups, France was already buffeted by threats to its sovereignty (Girard 1985, 5; Dénis 1987, 22–25). Yet for others, the Americanised queer urban culture and economy appeared heavily masculine. Among those who critiqued the perceived virility of the queer urban culture were the growing number of Brazilian immigrants and other Latin American transgender arrivals to Paris. These ranged from the two transgender stars of 'Les Étoiles', a Bossa Nova show staged at Palais des Glaces, to the transgender sex workers who occupied what was nicknamed 'Silicon Valley.;' Silicon Valley was an adopted Californian reference, now used to speak of Brazilian transgender sex workers who used silicone implants to enlarge their chests to attract clients. Several of them clustered between rue Caroline and rue Darcet in the 17th arrondissement, then moved towards Pigalle and Batignolles before ending up in the Bois de Boulogne. Paris's transgender 'Silicon Valley' represented a subculture that felt marginalised by the new Americanised queer culture to the extent that it appeared to rarely represent or value femininity in men (Gay International 9, 1985) Guidoni (1981), a queer Parisian performer in the early 1980s, went so far as to caricature the new Americanised gay culture's influence as an extreme virilisation of French homosexuality.

In retrospect, one can wonder whether, then, whether it was admiration that inspired entrepreneurs and journalists to bring California to Paris of the late 1970s and 1980s, or if this was essentially a confluence of global macroeconomic and geopolitical shifts allowing for a period of intense Americanisation. The latter reading presents the prospect of posing questions about, whether, then, economies and geopolitical force have consciences or ethics that produce certain changes in values and norms. There is an arguably positive moral change towards tolerance that result from California's global political and economic positioning. Or, then again, if markets are only concerned with profit, and nothing else, then, the fact that California-inspired queer businesses created spaces of queer affirmation would simply be the result of amoral calculation. These are questions that are unanswerable here. In the realm of politics, California also presents a tension between profit and love/political commitments.

Parisian Queer Politics, Guy Hocquenghem, and Late 1970s/early 1980s California

If California-inspired images were presented to Paris's world of queer press and nightlife by a niche of enterprising business and media minds, Guy Hocquenghem performed a similar role in the world of queer politics. While his focus and that of other queer Parisian activists was primarily local, he retained a global perspective. In Idier's *Les vies de Guy Hocquenghem* a fuller biography of his activism is crafted, including a brief recounting of Hocquenghem in San Francisco and a border crossing into Mexico (Idier 2017). His travel diaries, too, painted his picture of California and the promise and pitfalls of the versions of queerness that were emerging in Los Angeles and San Francisco in particular.

One of his last works, an 'open letter', before his passing in 1988, captured the tension that he generally grappled with – a tension that was also evident in his thinking about California and the US. How was one to reconcile revolutionary ideals that he encapsulated in the metaphor of Mao's Chinese collar shirt, and the attraction of comfortable bourgeois life epitomised for him in the

Rotary club membership card? This echoed global Cold War ideological fault lines (Hocquenghem 1986).

On one hand, Hocquenghem's, and other queer activists, ideological commitments placed them in the company of orthodox Marxists with Hocquenghem being an acolyte of Trotsky's thought. However, as Healey (2002), the historian of homosexuality and the Soviet Union, notes, queer activists like Hocquenghem inevitably found themselves in a 'peculiar relationship' with the Soviet Union. While Trotsky belonged to an early revolutionary phase that had decriminalised homosexuality, by Hocquenghem's 1970s and early 1980s, this had been overshadowed with a strong mistrust and rejection of homosexuality as a Capitalist's' vice. As Nicolas (1976, 131–135), Hocquenghem's fellow Trotskyist noted, homosexuality was not only perceived as bourgeois decadence but as being irreconcilable with a morality of the proletariat.

In the global geopolitical context of the Cold War, the United States intrinsically represented an antithesis to the ideological commitments that radical queer activists held. However, even in the United States, he found language that sounded familiar in the discourse of Black liberation and Black Power that emerged in California. It was to them that he attributed an important role in triggering his trajectory towards coming out. He recalled, 'I had the desire to speak about my first gay experiences after the publication of the first edition of Tout! With a text by Huey Newton politically defending the rights of gay American organizations [J'avais eu envie de raconter mes premières expériences homosexuelles la suite de la publication dans le premier numéro de *Tout* d'un texte de Huey Newton qui défendait politiquement les mouvements d'homosexuels américains.]' (Hocquenghem 1972).

Before Hocquenghem, Jean Genet, from an older generation of queer Parisians, had also drawn inspiration from California's Black Panther movement. Genet, though, sought to lend support and build trust between Black Panther activists and white audiences while advocating for them to adopt a more favourable view on queer rights. Indeed, it is not far-fetched to assume that the Huey Newton letter that Hocquenghem drew inspiration from was partly the fruit of Genet's labour. Genet had visited the US in early the 1970s, entering the country illegally, to drum up support among young white college students for the Black Panther Party. Genet had also entered the US to 'lend his name and voice to the defense of Bobby Seale', the Black Panther Party's national chairman, who had been arrested on charges of murder and kidnapping. He saw the trial rather as 'a political trial of the Black Panthers and, on a more general basis, a race trial against all American Blacks'. Genet spoke at university campuses across the US, protesting alongside Panther activists during court trials, and participating in press interviews in which he railed against racism in the US and argued that the Black Panthers were the 'hope for a revolution in the US'. Genet had won the 'unanimous admiration' of his hosts, regardless of his homosexuality. By May 1970, Charles R. Garry, the general counsel of the Black Panther Party, acknowledged a mutual 'idolization' between the Black Panthers and Genet (Darnton 1970, 40).

Part of the challenge that the queer movement faced in France at the time was the *de jure* permissive context towards homosexuality, although in practice, queer people did not enjoy equal rights to their heterosexual peers. From the late eighteenth century, France's penal code did not mention homosexuality at all, but the mid 20th Century saw the return of sanctions against homosexuality – firstly under the French Vichy government and, in the post-war years, under Charles de Gaulle's post-war government. In 1942, the Vichy government introduced a higher age of consent for gay men into article 334 of France's penal code as a way of preventing the 'corruption of youth' effectively chipping away at the relative freedom that Parisian queer men enjoyed.[1] The disparity in age after the war remained in place with an adjusted range for the fines payable for violating the age of consent stipulation.[2] The discrimination in age of consent – at 21 versus 15 for heterosexuals –

invited muted disgruntlement that was a far cry from the angst of American gay liberationists who were contending against Victorian-era anti-sodomy laws. Arcadie, a Paris-based homophile organisation led by an André Baudry had unsuccessfully sought to overcome these hurdles through a form of respectability politics (Jackson 2009). The mistreatment of queer men was explained in correspondences between activists at the time as the fruit of a 'policy of repression' established by the 'Gaullist regime' citing a 'law as recent as 1960 classif[ying them] as a social scourge, along with tuberculosis and drugs!' (GLF. 1972) Homosexuality had indeed been added to a list of social evils that the government was determined to fight through the law.[3]

The challenge, then, lay in looking for strategies to effectively advance queer rights in Paris. What could be imported from California would need to be selected judiciously due to the ambiguities of the French situation, they were not in the same model of boat. When Guy Hocquenghem sat down with Douglas Crimp, the late American art historian, he parsed out what he perceived as valuable to draw upon from the struggles of queer Americans. It was their structure and sense of political strategy (Crimp and Hocquenghem 1981, 113–115).

For Dominique Robert, a Parisian journalist reporting on California, it was San Francisco's local government's decision to allocate part of its budget to gays and lesbians over 60, in response to an association for queer doctors that attested to the foresight that he found lacking at home. The long-term thinking that he witnessed in organisations for senior queer Californians as he visited Project Rainbow on the Angelus Plaza that provided them with social services was the kind of 'dynamism' that 'la vielle Europe [Old Europe]' needed, in his view (Robert 1983, 17).

These assertions that California offered examples of how to substantively advance the rights of queer people joined the opinions of other, earlier admirers. The Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire (FHAR), as a case in point, had argued that the kind of policy and political change that queer Parisians needed to envisage would address the effects of institutions such as the military and Catholic religious practices including confession that were seen as repressive, while paying particular attention to reform of the education system. In this respect, they had looked to California's Free School concept of the 1960s as a long-term solution to repression and advocated for its adoption in France. The Free School concept eschewed grades and did not assign homework nor give tests and did not group students according to age (Graubard 1972; Barr 1973, 454–457). The model was understood by the FHAR as transcending beyond an obsession with preparation for exams and assessment by providing alternative providers of education beyond the state. Alternative education and a collectivist ethic as modelled in California provided a potential response to the French centralised approach to education headed by 'sadistic professors' seeking to develop 'overt fascism', as well as 'racism and a fear-filled and heavily policed system of learning'. Education needed to be 'democratized' as a way of providing new sources of information and choice to the young. In this, FHAR saw the effort to 'liberate' education as intrinsic to a wider effort to empower all minorities and disenfranchised voices, including children and adolescents – and eventually – queer adults over time (FHAR. 1973).

Over the course of the 1970s and the early 1980s, queer politics in California gathered the reputation of being a purposeful and organised template to emulate. Thus, when news reports of the appointment of John Laird as mayor of Santa Cruz arrived on the pages of the Parisian queer press, this was explained to be the fruit of organised action and presented as motivation for queer Parisians to emulate and seek similar political power (Gai Pied 1984). Similarly, when the city of San Francisco allocated US$ 25,000 towards a program to assist senior gays and lesbians, this was explained to be the justified fruit of consistent organising and a fundraising savvy that was to be aspired towards (Robert 1983, 17). Similarly, when San Francisco hosted the 1982 Gay Games, an international queer version of the Olympics, it was also held as a demonstration of queer San

Franciscans' capacity to mobilise resources and organise (Neumann 1982, 78–81). The most optimistic readings of California's queer politics declared them to have 'one foot in the White House' when they celebrated the political career of Harvey Milk's successor on San Francisco's Board of Supervisors, Harry Britt (Feuillère and Fougeray 1983, 32–33). Political power of this kind had proven elusive for queer candidates in Paris including Guy Hocquenghem, Alain Secouet, and Jean Le Bitoux, the founder of Le Gai Pied (Colombani 1978). While part of their struggle to gain support could be attributed to discrimination, their lack of organisation and strategy sabotaged their political ambitions (Idier 2015, 275 − 85).

Lessons there were to be gleaned from California were captured in Guy Hocquenghem's unique travel writing for a French audience on California. From San Francisco, he developed an appreciation for the importance of mass mobilisation, placing his reservations about the adverse effects of queer San Franciscans' gentrification of poor neighbourhoods aside. In Los Angeles, he was disturbed by the excess of wealth and the participation of queer Angelenos in Hollywood, which he described as a giant factory of heterosexual dreams. However, even in this, he construed a sense of strategy and intentional exertion of influence (Hocquenghem 2013). The early 1980s would witness a similar, intentional queer politics attempt to take root in Paris.

The 1981 Election and the Arrival of the American-Style Queer Voting Bloc

While successful collective action is rarely easy to attribute, given the multiple factors, contextual dynamics, and degrees of fortune that steer new political moments – the kind of queer political mobilisation that was now entrenched into Californian politics made an arrival in the run-up to Paris's presidential election in 1981. The centralised nature of France's political system meant that Parisian queer voters could more readily insert themselves into national politics without mobilising as many resources and time that would have been needed to generate national attention in the US. Unlike previous elections, Paris's queer press that had been interested in the dynamism of queer politics on the other side of the Atlantic assumed a more energetic approach to promoting a French queer vote. For the first time, serious discussions about the 1981 French presidential elections factored in the potential influence of queer voters and queer issues. Prior to the poll, Raymond Guillaneuf, a professor at the Sorbonne at the time, suggested that a queer vote had the potential of swaying an extremely tight presidential election. France's queer electorate needed only be oriented towards a coherent set of community political positions that they would vote on, as had proven successful in the US. Equally so, a queer voting bloc needed to demonstrate its power by building up its own funding and threatening to withhold votes if none of the parties represented its interests. A queer boycott, he argued, would be an effective electoral strategy that would conclusively demonstrate the newfound power of a French queer voting bloc. Queer voters could also choose to punish candidates who did not explicitly demonstrate their support for gay rights – in this case, the two top contenders, Jacques Chirac and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. François Mitterrand, who had voted to repeal the penal code's article 331 that maintained a higher age of consent for gay men relative to that of heterosexuals, garnered queer support (Guillaneuf 1981, 7). The notion of gay identity in particular was beginning to translate into a more concrete discussion of how to churn the new identity into political capital Le Bitoux 1981, 1).

While there was still some scepticism about transplanting the concept of queer votes and queer politics into the French system, 1981 saw the very first mass mobilisation of queer voters prior to and during the election as they sought to get issues onto various political platforms (Barbedette 1981, 5). Sceptics saw the risk of being instrumentalization by politicians with no real intention of fulfilling their commitments (Pingaud 1980, 3). Similarly, Hocguenghem described scepticism about French queer voters to an American audience as rooted in a history of 'shameful' betrayals of promises of support (Crimp and Hocquenghem 1981, 115). Ultimately, it was the Socialist Party, with

its candidate François Mitterrand, that took a stance in support of queer issues. On 4 April 1981, Paris's queer community, with reinforcements from the French provinces, filled Paris's streets as a show of force and to bring the age of consent issue to the fore of voters' minds. François Mitterrand, who would become France's first Socialist would keep his promise to equalise the age of consent. A precedent of a French queer vote and of queer political interests had been set (Homophonies 1981, 3).

The late 1970s and early 1980s are arguably, then, an inflection point in which the influence of the US and California is both explicitly and discretely manifest. This moment is arguably often lost in an effort to assimilate the early 1980s into explanations of the HIV pandemic that was about to explode. Well into 1984 and 1985, the gravity of the threat of HIV did not seem to yet be fully understood, even though a collective cautious eye was kept on the troubling uncertain new health challenge. Michaël Pollak, who was researcher at Paris's Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS) who conducted a survey of 1,500 queer men found an overarching delay in realising and responding to the health threat, arguing that there was a striking prevalence of the sentiment that the virus would bypass respondents. There is little evidence in the early 1980s queer press of overwhelming panic as the virus began to spread, life appeared to go on as usual. In 1985, only 5% of Pollak's survey sample used condoms (Pollack 1988, 51–60). The latter half of the 1980s would, however, see Parisian transatlantic links to Californian and US HIV activism assume a new life that falls beyond the scope of this discussion.

Conclusion

The imprint and influence of California's queer politics became manifest at the end of the 1970s and as the 1980s began. These were processes that were, arguably, independent of the HIV and AIDS crisis that was beginning to emerge. In Paris, California and the US provided a scheme of social, bodily, political, economic, and cultural practices that globally conscious queer activists, entrepreneurs and journalists sought to emulate. Their motives for looking to California were a web of entangled factors, including a global geopolitical and macroeconomic context that made promoting California and the US good for business. There was also the inspiration from California's queer community's political success, although admiring it from across the Atlantic posed moral and intellectual conflict for Parisian queer activists whose Cold War alignments were incompatible with what the US represented. Transatlantic queer exchanges also raised important questions about citizenship, belonging, and the relationship between queer identity, urban economies, and politics. Almost four decades later, questions at the intersection between queerness and citizenship persist as France becomes a more pluralistic society straining to maintain the ideal of a universalist republic, as both the extreme right and left grow and introduce new challenges to questions of sexuality and belonging. The study of queer transatlantic exchanges, the global political economy, and their impact as counterbalances to domestic forms of queer repression continues to be, arguably, crucial in a sparsely populated field of work that explores the queer links broached in this paper.

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Notes

1. Amendment of Article 334, Clause 1 of the Penal Code, 6 August 1942.

2. Amendment of article 334, Clause 1 and addition of Clause 3 to article 331 of the Penal Code, 8 February 1945.

3. Loi n°60-773 du 30 juillet 1960 authorised the government to take, through an application of Article 38 of the Constitution, 'necessary measures to combat "certain social scourges," with homosexuality being understood as a social scourge'. [Loi n°60-773 du 30 juillet 1960 autorisant le gouvernement à prendre, par application de l'article 38 de la Constitution, les mesures nécessaires pour lutter contre certains fléaux sociaux].

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