

Introduction:

The Language of the Tribe

Our point of departure will be the following passage from Proust's *The Captive*:

M. de Charlus did not care to go about with M. de Vaugoubert. For the latter, his monocle stuck in his eye, would keep looking round at every passing youth. What was worse, shedding all restraint when he was with M. de Charlus, he adopted a form of speech which the Baron detested. He referred to everything male in the feminine, and, being intensely stupid, imagined this pleasantry to be extremely witty, and was continually in fits of laughter. As at the same time he attached enormous importance to his position in the diplomatic service, these deplorable sniggering exhibitions in the street were constantly interrupted by sudden fits of terror at the simultaneous appearance of some society person or, worse still, of some civil servant. "That little telegraph messenger," he said, nudging the scowling Baron with his elbow, "I used to know her, but she's turned respectable, the wretch! Oh! that messenger from the Galeries Lafayette, what a dream! Good God, there's the head of the Commercial Department. I hope he didn't notice anything. He's quite capable of mentioning it to the Minister, who would put me on the retired list, all the more so because it appears he's one himself."¹

How can one not recognize, in this scene written nearly a century ago and so precisely linked to the time of its writing (by, for example, the reference to the "telegraph messenger"), something that might just as well be taking place today, a scene that perhaps many gay people will have experienced, or whose equivalent they will have witnessed? How many of them speak in the feminine, about themselves or about boys passed on the street, yet police

their gestures and language as soon as they cross the path of a colleague or an acquaintance? It might seem that there is nothing to be done but applaud the genius of the writer who managed to provide this characterization that seems to transcend its time. Yet all of the elements that come together in these lines from Proust to create such a truthful portrait also work precisely to encourage a deeper look at what they have to say about homosexuality.

Let us begin with this crucial observation: two homosexuals are speaking with each other here, and they are speaking about homosexuality. This presupposes that they are each aware of the other's tastes² and indicates that their complicity is based upon what we can only call a shared affiliation. We might also note that both of them are insistent about hiding their homosexuality from those who do not belong to their "race."

What, one might ask, is so extraordinary about that? About the fact that two homosexuals are speaking together about their homosexuality while making sure not to let anything be noticed by any outside observers? There is something in this scene that is less obvious than one might at first think: Is not the question of affiliation somehow the central point in so many of the discussions of homosexuality of the past one hundred years? Do homosexuals form a particular group, a specific minority, or are they merely individuals like everyone else, except that they have different sexual practices? Are they "different than the others," as suggested by the title of Richard Oswald's 1919 film (*Anders als die Anderen*)? Or are they the same as anyone else? If one accepts the second hypothesis, how do we account for the rapport that has been established between these two characters in Proust? Why would Charlus choose to speak to Vaugoubert about his love life—for that is the reason they go for a walk together—unless it is because he feels the need to speak to someone, and that person must necessarily be another homosexual? What would form the basis of such a bond? Is it not the sheer multitude of bonds of this kind that forms the network Proust described as the "free-masonry" of the "sodomites," and that we today would call gay subculture?

Charlus does not much care for Vaugoubert. He finds him too flashy and exuberant. Charlus strives to appear virile and detests effeminacy. He aims for discretion and worries about the possible effects of Vaugoubert's exuberance. Here too we find a characteristic trait of (male) homosexuality: the polarity of masculinity and effeminacy. The scorn, the hatred, of those who prefer to think of themselves as masculine or virile for those they deem "effeminate" has been one of the major dividing lines in the self-representations of gay men. And not only in their self-representations, but

also in all of the discourses proposed by certain gay men in the twentieth century, for they seek to distinguish themselves, to distinguish their story Christopher Isherwood's tale of a man in Berlin in the early 1920s who feels a certain repugnance to accept that he too belongs to the unconscious mechanism of other members of his society. They feel enormous amounts of revulsion and even revulsion against one's homosexuality?

What Charlus finds most important in this way is that he speaks of masculinity, we also know, today. But where does he press himself in this way? In the words of the Baron de Charlus, "I have a vocabulary" (*RTP*, 2:63). He has backgrounds and differences from these specific kinds of members of any "profession." He speaks to each other without having to make aspersions, and so on? In French, this is referred to as "langage." And what can be said about the next? And what can be said about speaking, postures and points of which so many could be provided for?

Vaugoubert cuts himself off from the Department passing by, or, as Proust put it, "they are not the same as you are with your friends. But

also in all of the discourses accompanying these images, even in the theories proposed by certain gay advocates—in Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century, for example. More generally, one often finds that the kinds of discourses offered up by gay men harbor the desire to disassociate themselves, to distinguish themselves, from other gay men. Think of the story Christopher Isherwood tells of visiting Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute in Berlin in the early 1930s. On seeing the photographs on display, he first feels a certain repugnance, and only then takes a moment to reflect and accept that he too belongs to the same "tribe."³ By what odd conscious or unconscious mechanisms does a gay man come to associate himself with the other members of his "tribe" (Charlus and Vaugoubert) while spending enormous amounts of time denigrating those other members and finding detestable, even revolting, those who exemplify other manners of living out one's homosexuality?

What Charlus finds annoying in Vaugoubert's behavior is first and foremost that he speaks of other gay men in the feminine. This linguistic particularity, we also know, extends across time and has lost none of its appeal today. But where does this shared culture—which allows Vaugoubert to express himself in this way and still be understood by the nonetheless exasperated Baron de Charlus—come from? Proust speaks of an "identity . . . of vocabulary" (*RTP*, 2:639–40) that unites individuals coming from different backgrounds and different social conditions. How are these linguistic codes, these specific kinds of slang, learned—the ones that allow gay men, like members of any "professional organization" (Proust's term), to understand each other without having to spell things out, to grasp jokes, allusions, aspersions, and so on? How are these forms of humor—like "camp" or what in French is referred to as "*l'humour folle*"—passed on from one generation to the next? And what can be said about codes of dress, or of gesture, ways of speaking, postures and attitudes, and all the other "cultural" reference points of which so many examples—including the "inversion" of language—could be provided for today or for yesterday?

Vaugoubert cuts himself off when he sees the director of the Commercial Department passing by, resuming his ordinary social image. Thus gay people, or, as Proust puts it, "inverts," know how to play with what Erving Goffman has called "the presentation of self." In different social situations they present different self-images.⁴ Of course, this is the case for everyone. You are not the same person in your employer's office that you are dining with your friends. But it is especially true for gay people. Goffman speaks of

their "double biography."⁵ Gay lives are often dissociated lives, producing dissociated personalities.

Notice the final remark of Vaugoubert's peroration. It emphasizes how this disassociation within gay lives, together with the necessity of self-concealment, leads to shame and self-hatred. It also shows that it leads to a hostile and repressive attitude toward other homosexuals—in order to safeguard one's own secret and ward off any suspicions on the part of other people. If Vaugoubert is fearful of how the minister would react, it is because "it appears he's one himself."

One more observation about this passage. It is impossible to read it without being struck by the structure of class relations that it reveals: two aristocrats are chatting while taking a stroll. It is noteworthy that they are speaking of telegraph boys and delivery boys as sexual objects. Even more noteworthy is the transgression of these class boundaries: these "men of society" spend their time seeking out liaisons with the youthful members of what are called in Paris "*les petits métiers*." The literature of the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth attests to the fact that heterosexual men from the monied classes had no hesitation about establishing relationships with milliners, florists, and shopgirls. Still, the social mixing seems more systematic and more clearly marked among homosexuals. It has even been described as one of the characteristics of their way of life, both in order to praise and to condemn it. (This was one of the aspects of Wilde's life that most scandalized his judges.) The forms of sociability, meeting-places, literary and journalistic representations, private imaginings—all the different modes of existence of the "gay subculture"—gave a large place to this abolition of class barriers. However artificial it may have been, however detestable it may have sometimes proved in what it implied about social exploitation and domination by money, it nonetheless remains one of the invariants of gay life of at least the past two centuries (and perhaps earlier ones as well).

» So many cultural changes, so many social transformations, so many shifts in sexuality and in homosexuality have taken place since Proust that it is a bit disturbing to come across, in a text already quite old, situations, codes, ways of being, and identities that have scarcely changed. Why might contemporary experiences seem so close to those described by Proust? Is it merely an optical illusion?

Joan Scott, in a well-known article, discusses the "evidence of experience," that aspect of a past that is often unknown. The same meanings in different contexts can be reinserted into their histories. "Sexual experience," Scott writes, "is a history of sexual experience."⁶

A "subject," then, is a history of sexual experience, the "experiences" of a person who has experienced the temptation to see through the reality of things, obscuring the reality of things over time. Today those facts are no longer obvious, whereas we can still see the sexual mechanisms that produced the "subject" in and through the various stages of his or her life, and so on. This is true of all subjects, even more the case for those who are subordinated to a system of class relations. By the social and sexual mechanisms that shaped the culture, society shaped the culture between people of the same sex. Those who received and lived out their sexual experience and the delivery of that experience in short, we would do well to spontaneously recognize their "self-evidence,"

Would that not be to make them historicizing them?

Given that we are talking about the "experiences" of a person, which I mean the personal experiences of a person, with a look at this figure, we can suggest that, whatever happened in the last century, the system

Joan Scott, in a well-known article, has called into question exactly this, the "evidence of experience" that leads one to recognize oneself in this or that aspect of a past moment whose whole cultural configuration is in fact unknown. The same words, gestures, or characteristics can have different meanings in different contexts, and thus can only be understood if they are reinserted into their proper historical "sites." "It is not individuals who have experiences," Scott writes, "but subjects who are constituted through experience."⁶

A "subject," then, is always produced by the social order that organizes the "experiences" of any individual at a given historical moment. This is why the temptation to see oneself in those past facts and gestures runs the risk of obscuring the reality of the complex systems that governed experience at that time. Today those facts and gestures might stir up in us a sense of the obvious, whereas we should rather inquire into the social, ideological, and sexual mechanisms that gave them their meanings in their own moment and that produced the "subjects" that enacted them. A "subject" is always produced in and through "subordination" to an order, to rules, norms, laws, and so on. This is true for all "subjects." To be a "subject" and to be subordinated to a system of constraints are one and the same thing.⁷ This is even more the case for those "subjects" assigned to an "inferiorized" place by the social and sexual order, as is the case for gay men and lesbians.⁸ Reading the passage from Proust, we are led to ask: what could this description of homosexuality teach us about its society, about the ways in which that society shaped the categories of gender and sexuality, about the relations between people of the same sex, about the ways those relations were perceived and lived out by people from different social milieux (M. de Vaugoubert and the delivery boy from the Galeries Lafayette). What might we learn about the imbrication of each of these levels with wider social realities? In short, we would do well to ask this essential question: Is not the act of spontaneously recognizing oneself in these categories a way of ratifying their "self-evidence," when in fact we should be looking at them critically? Would that not be to naturalize them at exactly the moment when we should be historicizing them?

Given that we are here undertaking a reflection on "subjectivation," by which I mean the production of "subjects," might we not begin the analysis with a look at this feeling of self-evidence?⁹ That feeling would tend to suggest that, whatever transformations have occurred over the course of the last century, the systems of the sexual order have maintained a certain con-

tinuity. Pierre Bourdieu asks a similar question about women in *Masculine Domination*: How have structures of domination managed to reproduce themselves across time despite all the changes that have so altered the relations between the sexes?¹⁰ Could we not pose an analogous question about homosexuality? Of course, things have changed since Proust wrote this description, and one should even be wary of imagining that a single situation could be taken to characterize a given historical moment. There have been marvelous studies done of the differentiated modes of existence of "homosexuality" at this or that moment in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, in this or that country, in this or that city. They have shown ways in which each time and place is singular and incomparable. We have learned from all these studies of the past that the notion of "homosexuality" is more recent than one might have thought, and that even for periods not so very far in the past that notion is too massive, too unwieldy, too normative, to take into account all these multiple and heterogeneous experiences. Figures of "homosexuality" are always specific to a given cultural situation. There is no reason to deny any of this, and it is in no way my intention—this should go without saying—to challenge the value and the importance of all this historical work. Yet it remains the case that there is a particular type of symbolic violence that is aimed at those who love members of the same sex and that the schemas of perception, the mental structures, that underlie this violence (doubtless largely based on an androcentric worldview) are more or less similar everywhere, at least in the Western world, and have been so for at least the past century and a half.¹¹ This explains the sense that gay men and lesbians might have of their relation to gay or lesbian experiences from another country or another historical moment when they read works that reconstruct those experiences. We need therefore to investigate the perpetuation of this symbolic violence, its effects, and the forms of resistance to it.

» This is the double task I have set myself here: first, to study the gay experience of "subjectivation" today, and second, to study how, in many ways and despite many changes, it is not so different from what it was a century ago. I have made use of work in the social sciences (contemporary work as well as work from ten or twenty years ago) as well as of works of contemporary or older literature, especially Proust. My heavy reliance on Proust is in part to avoid endlessly multiplying references, thereby giving the

reader easier access to the work, tantly because his work seems astonishingly modern in regard to its subject matter.

I begin with the question of the nature of "subjectivation" today as previously. I try to show how it is "gated" by the sexual order, in which they resist life, spaces of freedom, a "space of possibility." Those processes of subjectification are "resigned" to the possibility of recreating a particular kind of subjectivity. It implies that the acts through which subjects are created are dependent on the identity that is created out of nothing, certain acts of "reappropriation," or, to use Foucault's term, "resignification" is an act of creation, one, for it opens the door to a new kind of subjectivity.

In the second part of this chapter, I turn to the question of the nature of "subjectivation" on the historical level, a vast process in which a particular kind of subjectivity is created. The goal of legitimizing gay men and lesbians is the "homosexual code" in the nineteenth century through the writings of Oscar Wilde, a man who loved access to legitimate pleasure in the form of what Foucault calls "erotic discourse." He himself by way of a strategic reappropriation of the language of the sexual order that of course condemned him to death, shaped it from within. His attempt to create a new kind of subjectivity has nourished the debate over the nature of "erotic discourse." My attempt here is to study the history of this discourse.

If today's gay culture is a continuation of the tradition of Gide, if its inventiveness is a continuation of the tradition of Proust, if today's gay men and women are a continuation of the tradition of Oscar Wilde, if their biographies while reading them, surely necessary to sift through them, are a continuation of the tradition of the "erotic discourse."

reader easier access to the works I am citing; but it is also and more importantly because his work seemed to me, despite what is often said of it, astonishingly modern in regards to gay issues.

I begin with the question of insult, so important in gay and lesbian lives, today as previously. I try to reconstruct the ways in which gays are "subjugated" by the sexual order, as well as the ways, different in different moments, in which they resist domination through the production of ways of life, spaces of freedom, a "gay world." My attention is therefore drawn to those processes of subjectivation or resubjectivation, by which I mean the possibility of recreating a personal identity out of an assigned identity. This implies that the acts through which one reinvents one's identity are always dependent on the identity that was imposed by the sexual order. Nothing is created out of nothing, certainly not subjectivities. It is always a question of reappropriations, or, to use Judith Butler's term, "resignification."¹² Yet this "resignification" is an act of freedom par excellence, in fact the only possible one, for it opens the door to the unheard of, the unforeseeable.

In the second part of this book, "Specters of Wilde," I examine how, this time on the historical level, a form of gay "speech" was invented by way of a vast process in which a literary and intellectual discourse emerged with the goal of legitimizing something that had been forbidden. From the "homosexual code" in the writings of the Hellenists at Oxford in the mid-nineteenth century through André Gide's *Corydon* in 1924, by way of certain writings by Oscar Wilde, a wide range of discourses strove to give same-sex loves access to legitimate public expression. This will-to-speech always took the form of what Foucault called "reverse discourse": it always formulated itself by way of a strategic response to the values, norms, and representations that of course condemned it in advance, but that also more fundamentally shaped it from within. Historically speaking, the repression of homosexuality has nourished the determination toward self-expression. But inversely, that expression has shaped itself to the modes of thought that despised it. My attempt here is to study the imbrication of gay speech and homophobic discourse.

If today's gay culture is still haunted in many ways by the ghosts of Wilde and of Gide, if its inventions are attached via numerous threads to a subterranean history, if today (as Neil Bartlett has shown so well) gays write their biographies while reading the biographies of those who preceded them, it is surely necessary to sift through this heritage in a critical fashion.¹³ To in-

herit, Jacques Derrida has said, is to choose.¹⁴ A selection must be made between what it is possible to keep and what must clearly be rejected. After all, however important the figure of Wilde has been, nothing could be more detestable than his elitism, his aristocratic aestheticism. Yet how could we do without his praise of self-fashioning: the idea that one could create oneself, make of one's life a work of art?

The evocation of this very theme calls to mind immediately the name of Michel Foucault. In a whole series of texts, Foucault offered numerous reflections on the gay question. He insists, for example, on the idea that a process of self-fashioning must proceed by way of the invention of new kinds of relations between individuals and by the development of what he called a "gay culture." It has seemed to me that often he was simply reproducing, in modern garb, discourses that had preceded him—those I have just mentioned, that must be critically sifted through before they can be reappropriated. I have therefore tried to engage with Foucault's arguments—not always perfectly coherent ones—in order to clarify both their promise and their limitations.

Foucault's name is inevitably associated, as regards the questions we are dealing with here, with the radical dissolution of the notion of homosexuality that he undertook in *La Volonté de savoir*, the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*.¹⁵ In that volume he describes the invention by psychiatric discourse—toward the end of the nineteenth century—of the "personage" of the "homosexual." Before that time, he says, there were only condemnable "acts"; after that time, people who practiced those acts were assigned a psychology, a set of feelings, a particular kind of childhood, and so on. Foucault has thus become a powerful antidote to John Boswell and his "essentialist" conception of gay history. Foucault's analyses have become the Bible of "constructionist" historians, which is to say that he is the source of inspiration for almost everything written in the United States and for almost everything written elsewhere as well. The idea that there is no invariant reality to homosexuality, that Greek love is not a prefiguration of modern homosexuality, has become widely accepted. The case has been won. Still, it equally remains the case that the Hellenists in Oxford in the mid-nineteenth century thought of themselves as different kinds of "personages" than those around them and that they had this sense of being different from childhood onward. They wrote well before psychiatric discourse got hold of "sexual inversion" as a concept, before that discourse pigeonholed acts between

persons of the same sex "identities."

There is another difference up before. It is the case fifteen years before La invention of the "personality."¹⁶ In the earlier book "Volonté de savoir" is invented that have already been considered of "sensibility" of which the most visible symptom available that psychology can appear and develop

I do not juxtapose the presentations merely or in commentary on his political matters are at gives us an analysis of the project is to make audible silence. In *La Volonté de savoir* the constitutive elements of speak. It is easy enough implied by these two interviews from the 1980s and to go beyond that would involve the

There is thus an attempt to see Wilde, seen in the manner of resistance, to take their place within a history of authors who, from the creation of spaces—practical which to resist subjectivity.

Thus the three distinct idea: I have tried to reconstruct the life and the work

persons of the same sex in their large nosological table of perversions and "identities."

There is another difficulty that has, to my knowledge, never been brought up before. It is the case that Foucault himself, in *Madness and Civilization*, fifteen years before *La Volonté de savoir*, suggested a different date for the invention of the "personage" of the "homosexual": the seventeenth century.¹⁶ In the earlier book he describes a process through which "homosexuality" is invented that is nearly the opposite of the one described in *La Volonté de savoir*: it is only because the "homosexual" and the "mad person" have already been constituted (notably through a profound transformation of "sensibility" of which the internment of the insane and the debauched is the most visible symptom), it is only because these objects are now readily available that psychology, which will take hold of them for its own purposes, can appear and develop in the nineteenth century.

I do not juxtapose these two books by Foucault with their contradictory presentations merely out of a sense of the need for exactitude and precision in commentary on his work and its evolution. Many other cultural and political matters are at stake here as well. In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault gives us an analysis cast in the terms of prohibition and repression: his project is to make audible the speech of those who had been reduced to silence. In *La Volonté de savoir* he describes the act of speech as one of the constitutive elements of an apparatus of power that incites individuals to speak. It is easy enough to imagine how different the political perspectives implied by these two analyses would be. Yet I have the impression that in his interviews from the 1980s Foucault was trying to integrate these two positions and to go beyond them through the idea of an "aesthetics of existence" that would involve the creation of new subjectivities.

There is thus an astonishing intellectual kinship between Foucault and Wilde, seen in the manner in which they both sought to invent gestures of resistance, to take their distance from instituted norms. Foucault should be placed within a history of the coming to speech of gay people and in the line of authors who, from the end of the nineteenth century onward, have tried to create spaces—practical spaces as well as literary and theoretical ones—in which to resist subjection and in which to reformulate oneself.

Thus the three distinct sections of my book are organized around a single idea: I have tried to reconstruct, in lived experience, in literary history, and in the life and the work of Michel Foucault, the movement that leads from

subjection to the reinvention of the self—from a subjectivity shaped by the social order to a chosen subjectivity.

» The French title of this book is *Réflexions sur la question gay*. French readers will have little difficulty noticing the reference to Sartre.¹⁷ It is more than a passing reference. Sartre is not read as much nowadays as he used to be. When he is read, it is usually not with an eye toward finding tools for thinking about politics. Yet perhaps it is time to return to Sartre, whose thought—both its practical and philosophical sides—contains a great conceptual richness for those who wish to understand struggles for cultural recognition or minority movements. His work, along with that of Bourdieu, Goffman, and Foucault, constitutes one of the major points of reference for the reflections I offer here.

I owe a great debt to certain American authors, such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, David Halperin, and a few others. Their works have provided me with endless inspiration. The polemics against gay and lesbian studies that have flourished in France in recent years in a certain sector of cultural journalism as well as in academic circles have had a certain absurd quality about them—offering us nightmarish visions and waving banners saying “You must not read this.” Of course those waving the banners haven’t read anything and are merely asking others to follow their example. Who has ever had the idea of “reducing Proust to his homosexuality,” to cite the phrase used over and over again? The point is to analyze what Proust said about homosexuality, which is something quite complicated. Would one say of George Chauncey that he wanted to reduce New York to its homosexuality, in recreating for us the “Gay New York” of the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth?¹⁸ Should we refuse to read this masterpiece of historical analysis? Refuse to learn? To pursue knowledge?

Of course that would be ridiculous. Important works have been published (even if most of them are not translated into French). Perhaps in France a different name will be chosen for gay and lesbian studies, given how many misunderstandings have occurred around this expression, one which seems to call for the establishment of a new discipline. Whereas it is in fact much more a question of opening a whole group of disciplines to new approaches and new objects of study. But gay and lesbian studies, which is to say, the whole set of works published and of research projects undertaken in this area, have at their best always first and foremost been about adding to

knowledge, inciting thought from the authors I ways this book is my ack

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knowledge, inciting thought, provoking reflection. I will often take my distance from the authors I refer to; I will sometimes oppose them. But in many ways this book is my acknowledgment of all I have learned from them.

I use the word gay for the simple reason that it is the word the people who are in question in this book today use to designate themselves.¹⁹ Language is never neutral; acts of naming have social effects: they provide definition for images and representations. The choice of the word "gay" is a recognition of both the legitimacy and the necessity of the movement of self-affirmation that mobilized the word. In this regard, this book is an engaged act.

I am not unaware of certain problems resulting from the choice of the word gay, and I do not wish to minimize them. I will be criticized, given that I am talking about "gay questions," for remaining silent about lesbians. This is a deliberate choice, but not because I am uninterested in lesbian questions. It is not my intention to reproduce the classic gesture of leaving out women when speaking of homosexuality in general. Far from it. To the contrary, I am convinced that, as far as contemporary politics are concerned, lesbians and gay men are quite close to each other, and for very good reasons. Their common enemies (as we have seen frequently in France in the past few years) make no distinction between them, denouncing them with the same gesture and fighting against them without distinction.

My choice is also not due to any belief that certain fields are reserved for specific people, inaccessible to those who do not belong to the group that is the focus of the work or the research. Just as I have never thought that one had to be gay to write about homosexuality—be it historically, sociologically, or theoretically—I do not think that one must be a woman to write about women or a lesbian to offer thoughts on lesbians. The richness of intellectual labor suggests that anyone can intervene in any debate, and that works cannot be disqualified ahead of time by those who imagine they possess the monopoly over a given field. The quality of the work is what matters, not the sex or the sexual orientation of the author.

Yet, given that I wanted to pose the problem of "subjection-subjectivation" (what is a gay subjectivity and how is it constituted?), it seemed to me that the analyses would rarely be able to apply both to men and to women. To evoke socialization in the family, at school, in relation to professions, and, of course, in relation to sexuality and to the construction of "gender" would require very different approaches for boys and for girls, for men and for women. From this point of view it seems impossible to approach the question of gay men and lesbians as if they were a homogenous group.

Still, when it seems to me that my analyses bear with equal validity on men and on women, I indicate this. The process of subjection-subjectification may not always be the same for gay men and lesbians, but it sometimes is.

» This is, then, a book on the gay question. Yet there will be no theory of homosexuality to be found in it, not even of male homosexuality. I want merely to present a set of reflections, sometimes incomplete, provisory, and hypothetical. They will perhaps provoke further reflections; in fact they are intended to do so, without regard for borders—be they national, disciplinary, or sexual. This is an open book, open to debate, discussion, dialogue.

POSTSCRIPT

At the moment that I am finishing this introduction, I read in the newspapers that a young gay man was murdered in a small town in Wyoming. He was tortured by his two attackers and left to die, tied to a barbed-wire fence. He was twenty-two. His name was Matthew Shepard. I know he is not the only gay man to have had such a tragic fate in the United States in the past few years, just as I know that numerous gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transsexuals are regularly and systematically victims of such violence. A report by Amnesty International recently provided a terrifying list—one that was, alas, far from complete.²⁰ But it is Matthew Shepard's photograph that I have in front of me today, along with the account of what he suffered. How can I not think of him as I prepare to publish this book? How can I not ask the reader to remember, in reading it, that there are more than just theoretical problems at stake?