

to this milieu. It is beyond these findings, that no one questions anymore, that homophobia begins.

If one follows an inverse diachrony, one must note, even to this day, the refusal of a large part of the biographies and research on Villon to face the facts of his sexuality. Most of them do not take them into account or, worse, deliberately hide them. Homophobia thus is present, expressed in the negation of a truth almost established: the uneasiness of researchers is evident. This appears to have contributed to the interference in the image of the poet, and in particular, led to misinterpretations of his poetry, as evidenced in the work of Thierry Martin and Christine Martineau-Génieys. One can still read exhaustive critiques of Villon which make no mention of his homosexual penchants or even allusions to it. Certain (braver) researchers have, however, proposed translations of his homosexual ballads, such as Pierre Guiraud, as early as 1968, or more global interpretations of his work, such as Gert Pinkernell since 1975. Nonetheless, it is clear that Villon remains a victim of homophobia long after his death.

One must also take into account the homophobia that occurred in Villon's time, specifically that of the church, tribunals, and medieval society in general. This problem largely exceeds the poet or his work and thus is not further developed here, other than in its consequences for Villon's own personality. Villon's work, and the manner in which he expressed himself, prove that he frequented places where male homosexuality was practiced, and we can hardly believe that he himself had remained a stranger to those practices. However, the poet expressed himself in veiled terms. The *Ballades en jargon* are in particular ambiguous: the use of jargon make them difficult to access. Their interpretation in gay terms is not apparent at first glance and it seems as if the poet were trying to hide a part of their true meaning. In fact, on this same model, the entire work of Villon hides a reflexive homophobia: the author is often the mouthpiece of Nature and life; his poetic work seems to be opposed to the general perversion of society, as well as its **vice** and **sterility**. This is evidenced, for example, in Villon's violent criticisms against Bishop Thibault d'Aussigny, who had Villon arrested, and whom the poet accused of sodomy and practices **against nature**. After all, in poetry that was clearly more accessible than his *Ballades*, Villon integrated and assumed the homophobia of his era.

—Thierry Revol

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## VIOLENCE

The notion of "gratuitous" violence is a fallacy. There is a reason for every human action, and homophobic violence does not break this rule. But a serious reflection on homophobia (as on all forms of racism) cannot be confined to vague and impoverished notions of prejudice, representation, or even ideology. In refusing to reduce violence to simple irrational impulses, these notions try to wrest them from arbitrary madness and succeed in part to make them less absurd and less unintelligible. But if we try to identify the causes of physical or verbal aggression in a psychological coherence, we will fail to see their social and practical ground, and, more widely, their sociological "necessity."

To avoid repeating the errors and proceedings of idealists and the politically correct—which believed they could change reality and make social violence disappear by simply changing the words through which it is expressed—homophobic violence (both verbal and physical) must be understood within a general economy of heterosexist domination. Certainly, this system of oppression translates into language and ideas, but it also materializes in the functioning of institutions (e.g., **school, army, marriage**, family, the state, and the legal system); it objectivizes itself in the structures of physical space (particularly urban), and is inscribed even in bodies, crystallized in most everyday practices which put into play social dispositions that are durably interiorized by individuals and groups. The understandable interest for linguistic subtleties and the violence of micro-interactions must then be inserted in a global and historical

understanding of the phenomena. One can understand, particularly, how social order and its agents abuse homosexuals and regularly collide with their "nature," their identity, only if one understands at the same time that this identity (gay, lesbian, etc.) is constructed by oppression and in response to heterosexist domination. Homophobic violence is not absurd: it is the violence that a society reserves for its other, that part of itself which negatively defines it. To be gay or lesbian today is to be a child of that violence.

#### *From Plural to Singular*

Violence is defined as any number of abusive acts: physical, verbal, or symbolic; those that we feel, that we hear, and that we experience, ranging from the verbal **insults** of daily life to the mortal brutality of a baseball bat, through harassment, blackmail, and public demonstrations. As French sociologist Daniel Welzer-Lang contends, these homophobic acts of violence are perhaps more aptly described as **transphobic**: they are aimed less at same-sex love *per se* than "masculine" traits in women and "feminine" traits in men (i.e. therefore aim at persons who possess these traits without being homosexual). Often instigated by men, homophobic violence is usually motivated by sexuality and the reduction to the sexual, as is the case in the extreme example of the punitive rape of gays or lesbians. When the target is a lesbian, or perceived as such, the assault can be a punishment for the sexual unavailability of the victim toward not only the particular aggressors (there is often more than one), but also men in general, with whom the aggressors feel solidarity. When the rape victim is a gay man, it is, conversely (but not solely), his refusal or incapacity to "hold his rank" that is targeted.

Revealingly, while rapists do not always perceive the imposed and punitive sexual relation with a male homosexual as posing an explicit threat to their own heterosexuality (particularly because they do not think of the act itself as sexual relation, but as an action), they often take certain virile precautions intended to prevent the act from becoming **contagion**. These small yet significant rites are seen as necessary reparations for breaching the socio-sexual order.

However, the social efficacy of this physical violence—which, even in its most brutal forms, is never solely physical—and this verbal violence—which, even in its most euphemized forms, is always more than simply words—is not completely in the gesture or words which actualize it. Verbal and physical abuse hurts, but

it hurts that much more if it means "This is what you are, a second-class citizen, an abnormal and inferior being." By this interpolation, the attacker has the power to name without being named himself, to classify without being classified himself; to push his victim back into his social place by reminding him with each blow the superiority of "objective" norms and hierarchies. If these assaults can act inextricably on minds and bodies, it is because they are based on a **symbolic order** that they recite and reinforce. Such being the case, this order does not identify with a simple intellectual or political context that would be purely exterior to social actors, and would be exercised on them only in the mode of influence. Much more radically, the symbolic order penetrates to the most intimate of subjectivities, which it tends to produce in its image by creating individuals who spontaneously function according to its laws. Through "open" violence (which sometimes presents itself as only a threat), it literally summons the homosexual (or virtually homosexual) subject. Sometimes, it even paralyzes and renders him mute—as very often one does not have the words to describe oppression.

Thus, the violence of verbal or physical assaults draws its vexatious efficacy from a continuous social conditioning that precedes it, in part, and which results in thinking habits, practical reflexes, and schemes of perception. The assault acts somewhat like a trigger which, activating our acquired psychological mechanisms and our conditioned reactions, liberates and mobilizes in an instant all social violence and energy accumulated by the history of an individual and his collective oppression. In other words, if physical and verbal aggressions sometimes have apparently disproportionate consequences in relation to their tangible and material reality (a "simple" word, a "slight" look, a "minor" hazing), it is because they are only recalling what is under everyone's nose, what is known and felt to the deepest of socialized consciences and bodies: they are that much more cruel and effective because what they say goes without saying.

The consequence of this systemic violence, reproduced in ordinary interactions, is often that it causes the repeated "enchanted submission" of victims, and this brought certain homosexuals to think of themselves in the language that is "**against nature**." It is this "symbolic violence"—to recall sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's concept—which is exercised, whenever oppression is felt as legitimate or "normal," and each

time that a position dominated in the social relationships of gender or sexual identity come to be lived in the mode of "natural" evidence.

*Symbolic Order & Social Order*

As a matter of logic, this established symbolic order, which increases the effects of physical and verbal violence, also allows the injunctions of the sexual norm to exercise their most material effects without even having to be set out as explicit orders. One has to take seriously, for example, the concordant testimonies of those who committed homophobic crimes, who affirmed that they sincerely believed they were doing something good on behalf of the "homeland" or "morality," and did not understand what was wrong with their actions. If they continued to affirm it, it is because they correctly perceived that behind the guilty ambiguities of official declarations and the entanglement of signals which the society broadcasts, there exists a form of social suppression, and even encouragement, for their acts of hate.

How can one not see, in particular, that violence of individuals is rooted in the violence of law or, more indirectly, in normative anthropological theories and in certain psychoanalytical readings which ratify the inequality of rights? The violence of the state, which can be judicial, symbolic, or itself physical (through incarceration, torture, execution), survives in democratic societies in the form of discriminatory legal dispositions which continue to curb political struggles against homophobic violence. To cite only one example, it remains rather difficult, if not contradictory, to demand public action against everyday homophobia from a state that continues to approve an inequality of rights between heterosexuals and homosexuals. Could we imagine an "Anti-Semitism Act" whereby the state prohibits Jewish couples to marry or adopt children?

Open violence is, in some way, the "application decrees" of symbolic and judicial laws. It can often function as informal disciplinary actions or a call to order because this order is already present and observable on a daily basis, not only in consciousness but also in structures of the heterosexual world, which imposes them and imposes itself on homosexual persons ("No one is supposed to ignore symbolic order"). Even if they manage to partially free themselves from it subjectively, it would suffice to raise our eyes without hiding our faces in order to observe the denial of the facts. Thus, to contest these social rules or laws brings about the immediate accusation of denying them like

we deny brutal reality and, at best, being described as a politically correct hypocrite who runs away from the evidence and pretends to not recognize natural hierarchies or, at worst, as a mentally ill individual deserting the "real" world and substituting it with the delirium of one's illusory escapes.

In other words, symbolic order could not "naturalize," with as much success, the sexual divisions and hierarchies instituted by history if it were not based on an "objective" social world made of real **discriminations** and real inequities. For the homophobic vision of the world (which, as all dominating visions, tends to magically reverse the logic of its own effects), the subordinate position of gays and lesbians in the "order of things," of detectable visibilities and identities (a position that remains unknown as a product of domination), functions as an "objective" confirmation of their "just" downgrading in the order of senses, symbols, and dignities ("Homosexuals hide, so they must be ashamed of something!"). Further, the combined orchestration of homophobic reactions feeds the well-founded illusion ("well-founded" in the sense that it helps produce what it declares) of the transcendence and universality of social judgments that they contain and which, when they are not disarmed by counter-discourses and counter-practices, can function as real verdicts. Thus the most visible and scandalous forms of homophobic violence are nothing but the singular visible part of the heterosexual iceberg.

But this invisible violence of the sexual norm is also suffered, in one sense, by the same ones who are its main agents: aggression against homosexuals, "queens," and "abnormals" is a means to emphasize the distance (physical and symbolic) from the other by forgetting and detracting from the distance from oneself ("Be a man"). Thus by assaulting his victim, the violent homophobe is unloading the weight of the continuous struggle against failures of masculinity. In this way, homophobic violence is inscribed within a socio-psychic economy of sexist and heterosexual domination, and one cannot separate it from its incomprehensible character unless one understands that those who exact it feel not only authorized to commit it, but also viscerally attacked by their victim in return, whose very existence threatens to reveal their own vulnerability—the aggressors became the dominants dominated by their own domination. Hence, those who commit homophobic crimes are not simple puppets of the socio-sexual order: rather, they are the interested interpreters of its hierarchies.

Finally, there is without a doubt something such as a "law of conservation" of accumulated violence: there always remains the risk that the homosexual victim will turn the violence he experiences against his peers, even against himself, in self-destructive behaviors which can go as far as **suicide**. However, the political counter-violence of individual and collective resistance movements is often interpreted as "aggressive" or "hysterical" by the condescending dominant group (here, heterosexuals) which feels ill at ease in its own "normality."

It is thus an entire social and symbolic machinery which confers its strength to the varied forms of homophobic violence, from the most flagrant and odious brutalities to subtler forms, which deny their own violence, oppose all attempts at contestation through the rhetoric of common sense and nature, and are backed by social order and its main, so-called evidence. This leads to a fear among some gays and lesbians that attempts to contain homophobic violence are focused on the effects without attacking the causes. But if it is true, as mentioned by Didier Eribon, that it is always difficult to "criminalize common sense," one must not forget that, in spite of its unrelenting logic, each time it was decided to attack its real roots, "common sense" never proved itself to be completely unchanged, nor absolutely invincible.

—Sébastien Chauvin

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## VOCABULARY

Examining the words of homophobia requires a linguistic understanding of the gay phenomenon. Do the words used to express the homosexual reality stem from a logic that is representative of the world, or of rejection? The term "homosexual" echoes a simplistic behavioral dimension of the individual; some have preferred "homosensual," which they believed was more positive and less limited to the sexual dimension. Of the latter, enough cannot be said, since despite the sexual revolution of the 1970s, homosexuality remains largely taboo at the level of language—that is, outside of intimate or schoolyard conversations. The rhetoric and debate on the integration of the sexual dimension in democratic society are still particularly lacking. Thus, homosexuality is reduced to the congruent portion of the language of representation, that is to say, to silence. One will note that the terms "heterosexual" and "heterosexuality" only appear after, and as foils to, the terms "homosexual" and "homosexuality." The consideration *a priori* of the evidence might not impose denomination. Everyone is straight, aren't they? Why then the need to talk about it?

When examined closely, language has for centuries been expressing a standard that could be qualified as **heterosexist**. The world continues to be seen through the prism of the "normal" man, who is heterosexual, and who perpetuates his social dominance by language. For many, the words of homosexuality are then the words of homophobia. This is the risk that affects, in the social dynamic, all designations of human groups, which proceed by classification on the basis of normative criteria, the source of all prejudice and **discrimination**. As Didier Eribon explained, the homosexual is born from **insult**; it is by insult that he integrates this