

Sometimes Sex Is Just a Pain in the Ass; or, The Paradox of Sexual Politics

Ed Cohen

Homosexuality exists and does not exist, at one and the same time: indeed, its very mode of existence questions again and again the certainty of existence.

—Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*

Apparently 2015 was a great year for sexual politics in America. With the US Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell et al. v. Hodges* affirming the existence of a right to marriage on the Friday before Pride Weekend, it seemed self-evident to many that sexual politics in the United States had achieved a substantial victory. More than in its finding that sodomy statutes violate a person's constitutional rights to privacy, more than by overturning the Defense of Marriage Act to determine that a lesbian spouse was entitled to her dead partner's assets without having to pay estate taxes, in *Obergefell* the Supreme Court affirmed a right to marry without regard for the genital anatomy of the couple marrying. And so the celebrating began. (Cue sound of wedding bells.) Yet is this really what sexual politics is all about? Or is this what sexual politics has been reduced to? Indeed, what if anything was sexual about the legal and political decision rendered in *Obergefell*?

Although the idiom *sexual politics*, which famously appeared as the title of Kate Millett's 1970 book, exudes a rather musty aroma these days, it nevertheless, implicitly or explicitly, continues to underwrite the way claims concerning legal rights about sex and gender are made in the United States—and often, by extension or imitation, around the world.

Although one now hears less about sexual politics per se and more about feminism, LGBT rights, reproductive rights, and, increasingly, activism against rape culture and toxic masculinity as frameworks for challenging normative and legal limits, the import of sexual politics still persists. To apprehend the persistent (if unvoiced) power of sexual politics, consider its negative incarnations in the now ubiquitous tropes of queer theory, *homonormativity* and *homonationalism*: both terms deploy the ancient Greek prefix *ὁμός* (one and the same, common, joint) as a recognizable shorthand for *homosexual*, while the unarticulated *sexual* (from the Latin *sexus*, a declension of the verb *seco*, meaning to cut surgically; to operate on; to cut off or out, amputate, excise; to scratch, tear, wound, hurt, injure) remains implicit. As Jasbir Puar's powerful critique makes clear, the problem with homonationalism has less to do with sameness and everything to do with the politics implicit in claims to legal redress made on behalf of sexual actors, claims that paradoxically supplement the legitimacy of the nation-states that produced these legal exclusions in the first place.¹ Moreover, these claims engender new exclusions and establish new normative imperatives predicated on the centrality accorded to the newly established legal precedents. Thus, while the bright star of sexual politics as a rallying cry for transformation may have dimmed, its stellar effects continue to exert a strong gravitational pull, which the critiques of homonormativity and homonationalism try to help us escape.

In this sense, it might be helpful to consider the recent Supreme Court decisions as the culmination of a sexual politics that has been in play, either overtly or covertly, since the 1960s. In *Obergefell*, the Supreme Court seemed to realize a dream that numerous—but by no means all—LGBTQ folks had been holding dear for decades. If sexual politics had an apotheosis, this seemed to be its fulfillment—proof that sexual politics can work to undo even the most entrenched homophobic and heteronormative entitlements. Yet more than forty years before *Obergefell*, a twenty-five-year-old French militant, Guy Hocquenghem, had unabashedly avowed: “There is no chance of a peaceful coexistence between the gay movement and the more traditional forms of politics.”² Seemingly *Obergefell* proved he was entirely wrong—except perhaps he wasn't. Is there something oxymoronic about the concept of sexual politics realized in the *Obergefell* decision that might return us to the significance of this concept itself? Was the channeling of sexual politics into the right to marry a historical contingency, or does the conjunction of politics and sex always only lead us to marriage? What does politics do to sex, anyway? And moreover, is this something desirable? To answer such questions, it might be worth taking a little trip in Mr. Peabody's Wayback Machine to 1972, when Hocquenghem wrote *Homosexual Desire*, to ruminate a bit more on how we got to where we are today.

Hocquenghem's name probably doesn't still ring the same bells that those of his more famous May '68 *confreres* and *consoeurs* do. Nevertheless, he steeped in the same crazy cauldron of political ferment as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, H el ene Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Christine Delphy, among others, and he managed to maintain his militancy (albeit from a number of different positions) until his death from AIDS in 1988.³ Although in the years immediately following the unwinding of the *soixante-huitard* exuberance he belonged to various *gauchiste* groups (including Jeunesse Communiste R evolutionnaire and Vive la R evolution), after 1971 Hocquenghem increasingly channeled his political and pleasurable desires toward affirming a transformational sexual practice. He helped to found the Front Homosexuel d'Action R evolutionnaire to create a space for feminism and sexual radicalism that had been excluded and/or denigrated within the traditional Left (where they were often dismissed as "bourgeois deviations"). In 1972, Hocquenghem became the poster boy for the possibility of a homosexual militancy in France when *Le Nouvel Observateur* published his autobiographical declaration, "Je devenais un homosexuel" ("I Became a Homosexual"), featuring a rather fetching head shot directly below this headline.

In the years following this media moment, Hocquenghem evinced an ambivalent relation to his iconic status, rejecting it in principle while relying on it in practice to foster his ability to make a living as a journalist and writer. Yet, despite these employment considerations—and often to their detriment—he assiduously resisted both the normativity implicit in any exemplary representation of homosexuality and the normalizing limits of *homosexuality* as such. For example, in his 1980 book *Le Gai Voyage*, based on his travels through the gay metropolises of Europe and New York, he lambasted the increasing involution of the scene: "Everyone will fuck with his own social class, the yuppie will savor the bouquet of his partner's after shave, and not even the Pope will find anything wrong with it."⁴ Indeed, by the time he died of AIDS in 1988, Hocquenghem was as harshly criticizing his own earlier hopes as he was those of others. Yet, despite his vocal, and often vicious, critiques of the "becoming gay" of sexual politics, Hocquenghem's first book, *Homosexual Desire* (1972), had in many ways set the movement in motion.

When Hocquenghem published *Homosexual Desire*, his manifesto cum cri de coeur, he rubbed a labile reading of Gilles Deleuze and F elix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, which had first appeared just months earlier, against the hard homophobia of Left politics in France to penetrate the multiple aporia of revolutionary praxis (with little or no lubrication). Needless to say, the resulting intellectual intercourse proved seminal both for thinking sexual politics and for the politics of sexual thinking. Hocquenghem's book not only offered one of the first applications of Deleuze

and Guattari's equally germinal/seminal text to the contemporary political milieu but also inaugurated a queer theoretical tendency within the thinking of the political itself. Not bad for a twenty-something's first publication. Yet, it was this seminal intervention that Hocquenghem would himself deride in a short essay, "L'Homosexualité est-elle un vice guérissable?," which appeared in *Gai Pied Hebdo* the year before his death.

In the wake of AIDS, of the "collapse [*écroulement*] of 'liberationist' values," and of the recrudescence of "anti-pedophile hatred," Hocquenghem considered that although his first book may have been "perfect for the time," its "formula was mistaken. . . . Things revealed themselves to be more complex."⁵ Thus, instead of reaffirming his investment in "homosexual desire" as an idiom that he found good to think with or through, Hocquenghem now averred that "homosexual sense" (*sens homosexuel*)—rather than homosexual desire—offered "the most efficacious model to think homosexuality (if one wants to retain this term to express a certain 'attitude towards life' more than an identity)."⁶ This caveat makes sense in part because the term Hocquenghem now prefers, *sens homosexuel*, entails a double entendre in French, homosexual meaning and homosexual direction, suggesting that the significance attributed to *homosexuel* depends on which garden paths it leads us down. Needless to say, in the fifteen years between 1972 and 1987, during which Hocquenghem's thought traveled from homosexual desire to *sens homosexuel*, much happened to him and to the sexual-political-intellectual movement that he helped inseminate. The thinking and living of homosexuality as a vital experience changed radically during this period, as did the notion of sexual politics. If nothing else, the manifest tensions between the sexual and the political that appeared over this decade and a half induced the famous resignification of *queer* in the late 1980s to denominate a new subject position that critically and politically distinguished itself from the earlier personal-political affirmations of *gay* and *lesbian* (or *gay and lesbian*).

Today, another twenty-five years later, the emergence of the Q-word, along with its familiar cohort of initials (e.g., L, G, B, T, A, I), bespeaks the proliferation of possibilities that currently lays claim to the domain of sexual politics. The usual justification for adding new initials to the series—which needless to say implies that they actually form a coherent series—is inclusion; that is, by appending new idiomatic expressions of sexual identity to the roster of approved sexual-political agents, we democratically enhance the domain of sexual politics itself. The subtending sexual-political ethos seems to be that if we just keep adding the names of sexual subjects as they make claims to self-representation (in other words, as announce their names), we may come closer and closer to encompassing the fecund freakiness of the sexual within the political. Furthermore, it suggests that, if this additive assemblage composes an infinite series

(rather than what Hegel called a bad infinity), then perhaps one day it will orgasmically explode the confines of the political altogether. Nice work if you can get it.

However, beneath this tendency toward alphabetic promiscuity, might there lurk a paradox concealed within the very notion that sexual politics constitutes a coherent field mappable by a series of identities or their initials? What is sexual politics anyway, and what assumptions do we make about the meaning of each of these terms when we ask them to consort conceptually, if not to cohabit conjugally? Perhaps revisiting *Homosexual Desire* four decades after it first erupted from the ferment of post-'68 Paris might allow us to address these questions anew. For example, we might ask, does Hocquenghem's suspicion of sexual (de)nomina-tions, along with his preference for conceiving a "certain 'attitude towards life'" rather than affirming an identity, trouble the political position of the sexual as well as the sexual positions of politics? Could his "sense" that, rather than taking its place in the political, homosexual desire must displace the political as it had been traditionally conceived help us realize (both recognize and actualize) the paradox of sexual politics? Must the sexual (whatever that is) become political (whatever that is) to make sense, let alone to make "homosexual sense"? Or might homosexual desire help us realize the limits of sexual politics and thereby make politics seem less desirable? After all, sometimes sex is just a pain the ass, so maybe we need to learn to fuck with these categories as well (pardon my French).

• • •

Consider homosexual desire then. In his debut monograph, Hocquenghem espoused homosexual desire as a productive potential that opened up the body of politics and the politics of the body to pleasure: "Homosexual desire is in fact a desire for pleasure whatever the system and not merely inside or outside the system" (*HD*, 114). For Hocquenghem, homosexual desire for pleasure (though curiously not the pleasure of desire, which somehow he never considers) short-circuits the normative systematization of desire, in other words, its Oedipalization; hence it scrambles the Oedipal ambitions to bifurcate us as subject/object, active/passive, masculine/feminine, hetero/homo, etc. Instead, homosexual desire both returns desire to and returns to desire its originary, undifferentiated, unsystematic force. Thus, homosexual desire manifests "a descent towards the abyss of nonpersonalized and uncodified desire . . . [and t]his leads us to desire as the plugging in of organs subject to no rule or law" (*HD*, 95).⁷ Homosexual desire, for Hocquenghem, bespeaks desire's abyssal promise to form a black hole of signification sucking all codings and personalizations within its event horizon. As a consequence, it defies rule and law as the limit conditions from which subjects—and subjectifications—emerge.

However, but highly appropriately, the semantic valence of Hocquenghem's eponymous concept varies promiscuously in his book (is it the desire of homosexuals? the desire for homosexuals? the desire that makes homosexuals homosexual? a desire that troubles the hetero/homo binary? an originary pre-Oedipal mode of desire? a non-Oedipal and non-Oedipalizable mode of desire? etc.). As a consequence, we might consider that the book's underlying theoretical passion lies not only in its affirmation of such polyvalent desiring possibilities but also in its commitment to the belief that "there is no chance of a peaceful coexistence between the gay movement and the more traditional forms of politics" (*HD*, 145).⁸ Hocquenghem's notion that homosexual desire fucks with politics, with the games of "rule and law," introduces an intriguing conundrum: Does homosexual desire inevitably elude or preclude the domain that we call politics? Does politics exclude homosexual desire as a relation of and to pleasure? Of course, in the book's original post-'68 context *traditional forms of politics* primarily refers to revolutionary Marxist politics of the postwar French variety; nevertheless, Hocquenghem also sees this revolutionary modality as leaning on a more general political system that encompasses the basic form of representative democracy. Hence, Hocquenghem introduces the notion that an irreducible tension emerges between homosexual desire and traditional politics, which constitute two distinct modes of human relating that must always face each other with at least some degree of enmity.

On the face of things, Hocquenghem's crystal ball seems to have failed him here. Clearly in both the United States and France, as well as in a number of other nations (primarily those on the receiving end of capitalist appropriation), the gay movement and traditional forms of politics have learned to commingle from time to time—most recently within the Oedipalizing struggles for marriage equality (or in the somewhat more felicitous French idiom, *mariage pour tous*). Today, as even the US Supreme Court declares the existence of a right to marry, and following the French president's ratification of a law permitting marriage between men and between women, it would seem that homosexual desire and traditional forms of politics have ended up becoming very strange bedfellows indeed. Given that our contemporary situation seems to belie Hocquenghem's prognostications about traditional political forms and the gay movement, it might seem that we can only take up *Homosexual Desire* as a historical artifact that testifies to the esprit de corps and the joie de vivre of its young, impassioned author. But is this really the only way to read *Homosexual Desire* today? Has history really rendered Hocquenghem's early formulation as passé as he himself seemed to think it was by the end of his life? Or, if we think about homosexual desire in relation to Hocquenghem's hesitations about its place in traditional forms of politics, might this reveal some of the problems with assuming that sexual politics

provides the best way to incorporate, let alone proliferate, the desire for pleasure?

To approach these questions, let me begin at the end, or indeed, ass backward (which in light of Hocquenghem's famous celebration of anality probably provides a privileged point of entry anyway). The last sentences of *Homosexual Desire* read:

Homosexual desire is neither on the side of death nor on the side of life; it is the killer of civilized egos. Civilization is the assumption of sex or the repression of it, through the individual/society double-bind. . . . Grouped homosexual desire transcends the confrontation between the individual and society by which the molar ensures its domination over the molecular. It is the slope towards transexuality through the disappearance of objects and subjects, a slide towards the discovery that in matters of sex everything is simply communication. (*HD*, 150)

An enigmatic conclusion no doubt worthy of a sphinx, but what the fuck does it mean? By "matters of sex" does he mean fucking, or genital anatomy, or some other matter altogether? What kind of inclination would this slippery slope bespeak? And how does communication slide into it? Like a communion? Like a commune? Like a communicable disease? And is any of this ever simple? While pondering these question, I chanced to remember a *New York Times* article from 2013 that I had discussed not long ago with my undergraduates, titled "Generation LGBTQIA," which seemed to suggest something of an answer.⁹ The essay focused on gender activist students at American universities and prominently featured Stephen Ira, the trans son of movie stars Warren Beatty and Annette Bening, whose uploaded video on the website We Happy Trans went viral in 2012.¹⁰ Somewhat surprisingly, the *NYT* article actually framed the LGBTQIA issue as a slide from homosexual desire to transexuality; however, it might not necessarily have been the slide that Hocquenghem imagined: "If the gay-rights movement today seems to revolve around same-sex marriage, this generation is seeking something more radical: an upending of gender roles beyond the binary of male/female. The core question isn't whom they love, but who they are—that is, identity as distinct from sexual orientation."¹¹ Here the *NYT* depicts the ambitions of the trans generation as affirming identity (who they are) over desire (whom they love), an affirmation that in turn seems to distinguish sexual orientation from identity (which in the context of American sexual politics might be an even more radical notion than the *NYT* understands). Much as this characterization might represent the self-understanding of some self-nominated trans spokespeople, when a *NYT* article declared that ending the gender binary is more a radical aim than same-sex marriage, I got the feeling that we're not in Kansas anymore.

The irony of this declaration's appearing in a featured story in the Fashion and Style section of America's newspaper of record (as the *NYT* used to promote itself) surely would not have been lost on Hocquenghem—especially with the *NYT* freely editorializing on the relative radicality of the two styles. (Needless to say, contests about who is more radical inevitably threaten to resemble the old *Saturday Night Live* skit “Quien es mas macho?”) Incontestably, “upending . . . gender roles beyond the binary of male/female” constitutes a radical proposition—in the etymological sense of *root*—but we might ask if it is actually a political one, especially in the identitarian terms that the *NYT* portrays it. Conversely, the now apparently less radical gay-rights movement didn't start out in pursuit of gay marriage, as Hocquenghem's early manifesto illustrates, but seemingly that is where it now finds itself in part as a result of its own political ambitions. It appears that the nexus of sex and politics has become even more entangled than Hocquenghem foresaw in 1972. Today the identity form prescribed by American personal and political affirmation inevitably seems to inform the terms within which sexual and gender radicals both represent themselves and are represented. Yet the *NYT*'s pitting of the identity claims of these young (and often economically privileged, we might note) transgender activists against forms of homosexual desire, however Oedipalized they have become, once again underscores the problem that Hocquenghem first raised four decades ago. Thus, rereading Hocquenghem's 1972 conclusion in light of the fact that even four years ago (exactly forty years after *Homosexual Desire* first appeared) the *NYT* seemed comfortable affirming the radicality of transgender identity claims over and against the putatively political claims of the gay-rights movement today (albeit in the Fashion and Style section) makes a new kind of homosexual sense.

• • •

So what might this sense of the supposed generational tension between radical gender identity and (apparently) less radical gay rights suggest about the paradox of sexual politics anyway? To answer this question, I want to detour briefly through the thinking of another post-'68 militant, Michel Foucault. In his first course at the Collège de France (1970–71) titled *La Volonté de Savoir* (The Will to Knowledge), Foucault offers us a genealogy of how politics emerges as a decisive technology of the truth that seems to foreclose in advance the very indecisiveness, or undecidability, “subject to no rule or law,” that Hocquenghem ascribes to homosexual desire. For if, as Foucault indicates, truth comes to define itself in opposition to—and as the exclusion of—nontruth, and if politics comes to predicate its decisions on such truthful discourse, then it seems that homosexual desire, construed as that which fucks with the law of non-

contradiction and with binary oppositions more generally, might have a hard time representing itself in political terms without experiencing some serious self-mutilation (which some no doubt will also experience as pleasurable and/or desirable).

In his lectures, Foucault offers a complex analysis of how the nexus of politics and truth first realizes itself in the passage from archaic Greece to classical Athens.¹² Eschewing the associations between politics, philosophy, and writing that frequently characterize Western reflections about the “Greek miracle”—including or especially Derrida’s—Foucault instead traces the development of Greek truth practices in relation to a range of technological transformations: metallurgical, military, monetary, medical, religious, and juridical. In particular, he focuses on how, during the period between the seventh and the fifth centuries BCE, the primary locus of truth shifts from the ordeal/event (*verité-défi*, *verité-ordalique*) to knowledge (*verité-savoir*).¹³ In archaic Greece, Foucault argues, truth seekers beheld the truth as the result of a decisive clash between competing claimants: “The responsibility for deciding—not who spoke the truth, but who was right—was entrusted to the fight, the challenge, the risk each one would run.”¹⁴ A few centuries later in classical Greece, however, truth begins to appear instead as a regulatory principle emerging within a process of judgment that links it to justice (*dike*).¹⁵ This incorporation of truth within the exercise of the law and hence within politics transforms the way truth operates and hence alters what it is: “The uncovering [*dévoilement*] of the truth and the exercise of sovereignty are interdependent [*solidaire*] and interdependently [*solidairement*] substitute for the designation of an antagonist and the risk he voluntarily accepts.”¹⁶

As a result of this substitution, truth enters into political decision making as persuasive form of adjudication that introduces both “rational forms of proof and demonstration” and “an art of convincing people of the truth of what is said, of winning victory for the truth or, what is more, by means of the truth.”¹⁷ This concatenation of changes links politics and truth internally: “In Greece, there was then, a sort of revolution that, through a series of political struggles and contestations, resulted in the elaboration of a specific form of judicial, juridical discovery of truth. The latter constituted the mold, the model on the basis of which a series of other knowledges—philosophical, rhetorical, and empirical—were able to develop and to characterize Greek thought.”¹⁸ The coimplication and codevelopment of Greek politics and philosophy rest on a transmutation of the value of truth (as Nietzsche might say) in relation to the means of its determination. Politics and philosophy, then, lean on a truth practice that emerges during the transition from archaic to classical forms of governance in Greece and that still, according to Foucault, informs the meaning of the truth that we inherit: “The transformation of the fulgura-

tion of the event into a certified fact [*fait constaté*], and access to the truth given only to someone who respects the *nomos*, these are the two great historical constraints that have been imposed since ancient Greece on the true discourse of Occidental societies.”¹⁹ To appreciate such geopolitical specificity, it helps to remember that truth has not existed universally, a “fact” that Francois Jullien confirms in his comparative studies of ancient Chinese and Greek thinking. Unlike Chinese thought of the same period, where the importance of wisdom, rather than truth, entailed recognizing “the unity and complementarity of opposites,” in classical Greece the invention of truth (predicated on the law of noncontradiction) created a “rational” basis for the collective decision making that philosophy seeks to elucidate. Jullien identifies this decisive logic as underwriting the triumph of European reason and emphasizes that the success of Western truth practices results from the privileging of identity and noncontradiction over complementary contraries—a privilege that makes politics make sense.²⁰ Prioritizing the stable and clear-cut over the variable and indistinct, politics (conceived as a technology of truth) avows that only determinate distinction offers a firm enough ground upon which to make decisions concerning how those who inhabit the shared life-world of the polis can live together. Such convivial decisions define the process that we have come to call—following the Greek *etymon*—politics.

The political way of truth, then, decides *deciding*, and as its etymology (from the Latin *de + caedere*: to cut, slice, sever, hew, kill) implies, such deciding always entails violence: decisions cleave the virtual from—and to—the actual (to mime Deleuze’s idiom miming Henri Bergson’s). They divide the domain of possibilities and thereby define what becomes inscribed within the real as true.²¹ But if truth is not decision’s only possible face, how does truth become the way of deciding the experiment of life and thereby transforming it into experience? In Foucault’s account, truth comes to govern experience in classical Greece—and thus Greece becomes the “fictive place where power finds itself on a truth that is only accessible under the guarantee of purity”²²—because truth begins to operate there as a way of purifying the “dangerously mixed”: “The truth separates. . . . The truth is that which permits exclusion; to separate that which is dangerously mixed; to distribute as necessary interior and exterior; to trace the limits of that which is pure and impure.”²³ In classical Greece, Foucault argues, “the demonstration of truth becomes a political task,” insofar as the *Nomos* separates itself from the *Thesmos*, that is, insofar as ordering by law disambiguates itself from ordering by custom or tradition.²⁴ Experience thus becomes the way (living) being gives itself to being thought (as living) by creating games of truth. Insofar as it emerges by way of truth games, experience decides how life is lived both individually and collectively—that is, it excludes some possibilities

as unplayable or unlivable (and therefore makes them such). Moreover, the Greeks invest in truth's decisiveness in order to govern the processes through which the convivial form of life that we call politics takes place (and thereby actually becomes the polis). However, do games of truth constitute the only way of living—or playing—together? And conversely, if do we not invest in such truth games, or if we alter the stakes we wager on them, could other forms of conviviality emerge?²⁵

• • •

Returning now to Hocquenghem's affirmation in *Homosexual Desire* that "there is no chance of a peaceful coexistence between the gay movement and the more traditional forms of politics" (*HD*, 145) in light of Foucault's political genealogy, we might read into it a new homosexual sense. Perhaps rather than a statement of fact, we can read Hocquenghem's declaration as an admonition, or as a warning, that we *should not* seek "a peaceful coexistence between the gay movement and the more traditional forms of politics." Perhaps it helps us understand that politics inevitably demands homosexual desire bifurcate itself in a noncontradictory way in order to represent itself truthfully. But if so, then what happens to the "desire for pleasure whatever the system and not merely inside or outside the system" (*HD*, 114)? To "desire as the plugging in of organs subject to no rule or law" (*HD*, 95)? Can homosexual desire constitute the basis for a politics, or might homosexual desire ask us instead to consider the paradox that something like sexual politics must incorporate in order to count as a "true politics" in the first place? These questions lead us back to Foucault's famous considerations in volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality*, where he attempts to elucidate how sex comes to be constituted as desirable in the first place, how this "fictitious unity," this "ideal point," this "idea," produced internal to the discourses of sexuality comes to seem more important than "our soul, more important than our life" (an especially poignant insight in retrospect given that Foucault will die of AIDS less than ten years later).²⁶ If, as Foucault avers at the end of the first lecture of *The Birth of Biopolitics*, sexuality is real but does not exist, if "the coupling of a set of practices and a regime of truth forms an apparatus [*dispositif*] of knowledge-power that effectively marks out in reality that which does not exist and legitimately submits it to the division between true and false,"²⁷ then we can better understand why Hocquenghem admonishes us to avoid pacifying the intrinsic enmity between an irreducibly polyvalent homosexual desire and the binary imperatives of traditional politics predicated on the division between true and false.

Following Hocquenghem's affirmation of homosexual desire as that which runs athwart all the bifurcating impulses of rule and law; as that which desires pleasure as a productive possibility beyond any decisions

that distinguish a one and an other, an individual and a society, a subject and an object; as that which provokes the non-Oedipalizing processes of what Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* called desiring production;²⁸ we might consider that when homosexual desire and politics enter into the peace treaty called sexual politics they inevitably submit these domains of desiring pleasure to the bifurcations of the truth. Sexual politics necessarily seeks to make desire conform to the rules and laws insofar as politics is defined as a truthful way of deciding. It entails submitting nonpersonalized and uncodified desire to codification and personalization, which in the United States at least means through the identity form. This subjection of that which Hocquenghem defined as “subject to no rule or law” may in part explain why sexual politics in the United States and France, among other countries, has resulted in the apparently not quite so radical investment in *mariage pour tous* (rather than something like *mariage pour personne*, “marriage for no one,” that is, the end of marriage once and for all). In other words, the right to marriage does not represent what homosexual desire *desires* but, rather, reflects what politics does to desire more generally. It makes desire decide, even if that means to decide to “take this person to be your lawfully wedded spouse by the power invested in me by the state,” and so forth.

However, what Hocquenghem suggested to us more than forty years ago is that perhaps desire is not something that we should submit to politics, and especially not to political decisions. Perhaps desire opens up other ways of choosing that are not predicated on the opposition true/false and are not governed by the law of noncontradiction. Perhaps when we subject homosexual desire to the truth games that govern politics, we cut off some of what makes desire pleasurable or at least of what makes us desire pleasure in the first place. In this sense, perhaps, the paradox of sexual politics indicates that Hocquenghem was actually correct when he claimed “there is no chance of a peaceful coexistence between the gay movement and the more traditional forms of politics.” Or, maybe he was saying that there *should be* no chance? Instead, perhaps what we are witnessing today is a result of the capitulation of homosexual desire to politics and its concomitant self-mutilation. Indeed, perhaps what rereading Hocquenghem’s *Homosexual Desire* now offers to us is the possibility of realizing that we may not always want to desire to become political, that politics may not represent the most pleasurable mode of organizing conviviality, and that the paradox of sexual politics might actually prevent us from desiring the pleasure that it purports to help us achieve. And wouldn’t that be a pain in the ass?

Notes

1. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*.
2. Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 145; hereafter cited in text as *HD*.
3. Very little critical work on Hocquenghem exists. The notable exceptions are Marshall, *Guy Hocquenghem*; Haas, “Death of an Angel”; and Haas, “Guy Hocquenghem’s Critique of Radical Leftism.”
4. Quoted in Haas, “Death of an Angel,” 282.
5. Hocquenghem, “L’Homosexualité est-elle un vice guérissable?,” 64.
6. *Ibid.*
7. We might notice here that in 1972 Hocquenghem’s position also short-circuits the tension between pleasure and desire that famously distinguished Foucault and Deleuze. On Foucault’s theoretical hesitations about desire and preference for pleasure see, for example, “Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity,” where Foucault avers: “We have to create new pleasure. The desire may follow” (384). On Deleuze’s theoretical hesitations about “pleasure” and preferences for desire, see Deleuze, “Desire and Pleasure.”
8. The whole quote appears as a gloss on a quote from Huey Newton concerning the homosexual’s revolutionary potential:

There is no innocent association between these two words [*homosexual, revolutionary*], no chance of a peaceful coexistence between the gay movement and the more traditional forms of politics. The political system operates on the relation between signifier and signified, on the pyramidal relation between representative and masses. The gay movement questions the signified “masses,” first of all by showing that the separate division of these masses is itself the product of “civilized ideology.” (*HD*, 145)
9. Schulman, “Generation LGBTQIA.”
10. Jen, “Seven Questions—Stephen,” *WeHappyTrans*, 29 March 2012, wehappytrans.com/qa/7-questions-stephen/.
11. Schulman, “Generation LGBTQIA.”
12. Foucault, *Leçons sur La Volonté de Savoir*, 97–190. These lectures followed his inaugural lecture “L’Ordre du Discours” (translated as “Discourse on Language”). In a series of lectures that he gave in Brazil two years later in 1973, Foucault recapitulates some of the material he presented in the 1970–71 lectures, explaining to his listeners:

The hypothesis I would like to put forward is that there are two histories of truth. The first is a kind of internal history, the history of a truth that rectifies itself in terms of its own principles of regulation: it’s the history of truth as it is constructed in or on the basis of the history of the sciences. On the other hand, it seems to me that there are in society (or at least in our societies) other places where truth is defined—games through which once sees certain forms of subjectivity, certain domains, certain types of knowledge come into being—and that consequently, one can on that basis construct an external, exterior history of truth. (Foucault, “Truth and Juridical Forms,” 4)
13. Foucault, *Leçons sur La Volonté de Savoir*, 103. Foucault returns to this topic in *Psychiatric Power*, 235–39. Here he juxtaposes the two modes of veridiction as “truth-thunderbolt” and “truth-sky.”
14. Foucault, “Truth and Juridical Forms,” 55.
15. Foucault specifies four significant differences between archaic and classic Greek truth practices: 1. Imprecation/contestation; 2. Challenge between two parties/introduction of a third non-implicated party; 3. Division between two parties/division

within the law; 4. Create a decision/decided by a Judge” (ibid., 75). In “Plato’s Doctrine of the Truth,” Martin Heidegger also locates the emergence of truth as a governing and regulatory precept during this epoch, specifically in the seventh book of Plato’s *Republic*; however, despite the fact that the *Republic*, whose original title is *Peri Dike (On Justice)*, constitutes one of the ur-texts of Western political philosophy, Heidegger does not pursue the link between politics, justice, and truth that Foucault underscores.

16. Foucault, *Leçons sur La Volonté de Savoir*, 104.

17. Foucault, “Truth and Juridical Forms,” 33–34.

18. Ibid., 34.

19. Foucault, *Leçons sur La Volonté de Savoir*, 189.

20. Jullien, “Did Philosophers Have to Become Fixated on the Truth?,” 805.

21. In ancient Greece, decision also became a central element of Greek tragedy and Greek philosophy. See Snell, *Discovery of the Mind*, 106, 182.

22. Foucault, *Leçons sur La Volonté de Savoir*, 186.

23. Ibid., 180.

24. Ibid., 177.

25. Foucault’s formulation resonates with the analysis in Jean-Pierre Vernant’s *Myth and Thought*, where Vernant claims that Greek rationality excludes the ambiguity and ambivalence inherent in earlier mythic epistemologies that based themselves on an “implicit assimilation of physical phenomena with divine agents” and “the ancient image of the union of opposites” (380). As a result, a new “mode of intelligibility” appears so that “the social order, now conceived as purely human, could be elaborated rationally” (388). Thus, Vernant concludes, “Greek reason is the type of reason that makes it possible to act in a positive, deliberative, and methodical manner upon men. . . . In its limitations, as well as in the innovations it brought about, it was truly the product of the City” (397). We might add that in the city—that is, in the polis—truth made such decisive actions political. Concomitantly, as Vernant goes on to argue, the truth of politics made philosophy possible: “The rules of the political game—open discussion, contentious debate, the confrontation of opposing arguments—become the rules of the intellectual game. . . . A new notion of truth takes shape and is affirmed: open truth, accessible to all, and justified by its own demonstrative force” (405). Like Foucault, Vernant affirms the play between Greek politics and philosophy as revealing a congruence derived from “games”—intellectual and political—predicated on a “new notion of the truth.”

26. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 154–56.

27. Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 19.

28. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*.

References

- Deleuze, Gilles. 1997. “Desire and Pleasure.” In *Foucault and His Interlocutors*, edited by Arnold Davidson, 183–92. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. 1983. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen Lane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1972. “Discourse on Language.” In *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith, 215–37. New York: Pantheon.

- Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*. Translated by Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage.
- Foucault, Michel. 1996. "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity." In *Foucault Live*, edited by Sylvère Lotringer, 384–90. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Foucault, Michel. 2001. "Truth and Juridical Forms." In *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault: Power*, edited by James Faubion, 1–89. New York: New Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 2006. *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France 1973–1974*. Translated by Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Foucault, Michel. 2012. *Leçons sur La Volonté de Savoir: Cours au Collège de France 1970–1971*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Haas, Ron. 2007. "The Death of an Angel: Guy Hocquenghem and the French Cultural Revolution after May 1968." PhD diss., Rice University.
- Haas, Ron. 2008. "Guy Hocquenghem's Critique of Radical Leftism." *Radical Philosophy Review* 11, no. 1: 21–26.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1998. "Plato's Doctrine of the Truth." In *Pathmarks*, edited by William McNeill, 155–82. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Hocquenghem, Guy. 1980. *Le Gai Voyage*. Paris: Albin Michel.
- Hocquenghem, Guy. 1987. "L'Homosexualité est-elle un vice guérissable?" *Gai Pied Hebdo*, no. 278: 60–70.
- Hocquenghem, Guy. 1993. *Homosexual Desire*. Translated by Daniella Dangoor. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Jullien, Francois. 2002. "Did Philosophers Have to Become Fixated on the Truth?" *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 4: 803–24.
- Marshall, Bill. 1997. *Guy Hocquenghem: Beyond Gay Identity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Puar, Jasbir. 2007. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Schulman, Michael. 2013. "Generation LGBTQIA." *New York Times*, 9 January. www.nytimes.com/2013/01/10/fashion/generation-lgbtqia.html.
- Snell, Bruno. 1982. *The Discovery of the Mind*. New York: Dover.
- Vernant, Jean-Pierre. 2006. *Myth and Thought among the Greeks*. Translated by Janet Lloyd and Jeff Fort. New York: Zone.