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Post-Queer (Un)Made in France?

CLAIRE BOYLE

Abstract:

This article notes the historical tendency in Anglo-American queer theory to draw extensively on French thought to formulate its theoretical positions and explores the extent to which this tendency is manifest in more recent writings which take Anglo-American queer thought in a new direction. To this end, it examines writings on the emerging concept of the 'post-queer', tracing their debts to French thought — particularly that of Deleuze and Guattari. The article also evaluates how adequately such analyses translate to the context in which sexual minorities and queer theory exist in France and thus how likely it is that the concept of 'post-queer', as formulated in North America, will be adopted in French queer thought. It is suggested that French queer theory should not be seen as a consumer of Anglo-American queer theorization, but rather as its critical interlocutor.

Keywords: post-queer, queer theory, Deleuze, Guattari, the virtual, universalism

Totemic American queer theorist Judith Butler is famously reluctant to readily allow herself to be slotted into stable identity categories. Early in her career she outed herself as a lesbian, only to question what being a lesbian means; more recent proclamations of her butch identity are similarly undercut by temporal distancing.¹ Yet in one respect she has maintained a consistent identity position: in common with many Americans, she roots herself in Europe: 'I am an American, but I am trained in European philosophy. Only decades ago, I was part of a family that understood itself as European Jews,' she says, the European-ness of her thinking borne out by the vast and forensic knowledge of European philosophy which she deploys throughout her oeuvre, engaging sustainably with such thinkers as Hegel, Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, Freud, Žižek, and Irigaray (*Undoing Gender*, 2011). Many of

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the most influential thinkers on her work have been French, or are at least associated with French intellectual life. A similarly strong French influence is perceptible in the work of other pioneering American queer theorists, such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Leo Bersani and Diana Fuss. Sedgwick develops her notion of the glass closet and its epistemologies in part through a reading of Proust; Bersani also reads Proust, and develops his notion of 'homosexuality' by reading Jean Genet; Fuss draws on Lacan and Fanon to scrutinize identification and sexuality, whilst Butler draws heavily on both Foucault and Irigaray already in *Gender Trouble*, establishing a pattern to be reiterated frequently in later works.² It is fair to say, then, that American queer theory is deeply rooted in European, and specifically French, thought. At least, the first wave of it has been, but it does not necessarily follow that this remains the case. Today, American queer theory no longer looks to the canonical queer thinkers I have cited above to power its ideas. To fully understand the extent to which a traffic in thinking between France and the US lies behind the development of queer thought on both sides of the Atlantic, it is important to look beyond the canonical names associated with the first wave of American queer theory to consider more recent State-side formulations of the queer project articulated by a new generation of scholars. This will update and renew our understanding of the transatlantic queer dialogue, enabling us to discern the extent to which later articulations of queer may perpetuate a transatlantic intellectual exchange by informing or drawing on French thought. This article will therefore consider contemporary French and American theorizations of queer specifically in relation to a recent departure in Anglo-American queer theory: the rise of 'post-queer'.

Post-Queer Born in the USA

The concept of 'post-queer' emerges somewhat hesitantly in the new millennium as a result of various developments both within and beyond queer theory. Crucial to understanding its emergence is an awareness of the tensions and fractures which materialized in Anglo-American queer studies and lesbian and gay studies in response to the development of the concept of 'queer'. Ultimately, the notion that the deconstructive logic of 'queer' could serve as an intellectual powerhouse able to unlock and scramble systems of meaning, and also function as a politically potent force able to effect material change to the benefit of sexual minorities, comes to be very considerably

weakened in Anglo-American academic and activist circles alike. This follows a sustained critique from within queer studies and queer activist circles of the ideas, ideologies and logic espoused in certain seminal texts of queer theory, particularly Butler's *Gender Trouble*. These criticisms, and the counter-criticisms which answered them, tended to crystallize around issues of identity: on the one hand, deconstructive queer theorists were accused of being 'anti-gay' or of 'de-gayng gayness' (Bersani, *H*, 5) because of their refusal to straightforwardly accept concepts of identity built around categorizations of sexuality, such positions provoking considerable antipathy amongst those anxious to reclaim a stigmatized sexual identity by asserting a positive force to that identity, and who saw little promise in assertions of the power of resignification. On the other hand, deconstructive queer theorists attacked 'identitarian' approaches which, as they saw it, colluded with the oppressive mechanisms of power responsible for stigmatizing dissident forms of sexuality by insisting on fixed categories for sexual orientation. Meanwhile, the whole enterprise of using 'queer' as an umbrella term to try to foster inclusiveness, not segregation, by bringing together lesbians, bisexuals, gay men, and trans or intersexual people was sorely challenged when 'queer theory' was seen to be based on exclusionary logic — or even prejudice — that left minority ethnic groups and trans or intersex people isolated. Queer theory thus comes to be perceived as stuck in an impasse largely created by the politics of identity and identity politics, and faith in queer as a productive mode of thinking capable of effecting change, be it within the academy or beyond it, ebbs away.³

This is a significant part of the backdrop against which 'post-queer' comes into being. Yet 'post-queer' does not just react to the quarrels that play out within the field of queer theory. It arises too in response to changes in social organization occurring in the western world in the new millennium, particularly those brought about by globalization and the growing power of internet technologies, and it reflects a perception that the discursive environment relating to minority sexualities has significantly altered.⁴ In some quarters, it is also seen as a product of a neo-liberalism which has been able to take root in American culture after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. Yet however it may be ideologically measured, the essential quality of 'post-queer' is that it marks a break (and a need for a break) from the American queer theory that had gone before it, as is explained in a volume of *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* devoted to exploring what relevance and resonance (if any) the concept has in a (mostly) French context:

Setting out a new term of post-queer is an invitation to think about recasting and rethinking our concepts of the queer, our ideas about the representation of same-sex desire, our notions of Western generalities and the specificities of some of the aspects of queer theory that may need to be modified in light of recent practices and developments, new textualities, different ways of conceiving of the self and its writings in sexual terms. ('EI', 1)

As these introductory words make clear, no fixed determination of what 'post-queer' is (or even what exactly it does) yet exists; indeed the validity of the term or the concepts attached to it may yet be questioned. In what follows I therefore do not intend to attempt to define what is meant by this neologism; rather, my goal will be to trace the outlines of some of its avatars and discuss their relation to French thought and theorizations of the queer.

The ready access to the internet now enjoyed by large proportions of the population in the United States and Western Europe has allowed for the generation of online communities which allow queer activists, gays, lesbian and trans people to come into easy contact with like-minded citizens without needing to enter into the public arena, and without being obstructed by the difficulties of overcoming geographical and other forms of isolation. In the past, the need to negotiate such hurdles was a defining feature of the gay, lesbian and trans experience—hence the late Lawrence R. Schehr's use of the term 'novels of arrival' in his study of inscriptions of male sexuality in twenty-first-century French culture to describe the trope in French cultural production of young gay protagonists making long journeys from the provinces to urban gay population centres.⁵ By contrast, the twenty-first century, with its promise of transnational instant connections to remote others, is the era in which the experience of citizens of minority sexual identities becomes increasingly defined by the endless potential afforded by their instant connectivity. Post-queer addresses this phenomenon by putting the virtual at the heart of its thinking.

The virtual is important to theorists who associate themselves with the Anglo-American post-queer because it brings about changes in what it means to be a subject, and hence what it means to be a queer subject. The virtual has the capacity to profoundly alter the very concept of subjectivity, in at least two different respects. In the first place, the virtual can be understood as a realm of existence opened up by internet technologies, which provide us with a platform that makes it possible to supplement our 'real' life with a (potentially quite separate) online life in cyberspace. This virtual, which corresponds to

the world of cyberspace, is the one with which Schehr is concerned in his monograph. Noting the life-enriching promise of the virtual, Schehr points out that access to the virtual comes at a price: the price of being 'plugged-in' to the network which forms the infrastructural life-blood of the virtual domain. The 'plugged-in' subject not only loses the capacity to be anonymous or invisible — by being connected to the network 'we are all always visible' (*FPM*, 12) — but also loses the contours of individuation that mark the boundary between one human being and another, and between the human and the machine. The post-queer thus operates, Schehr notes, within the paradigm of the post-human, the space of the cyborg — as theorized by Donna Haraway — and articulations of queer subjectivity are to be elaborated accordingly.⁶ For Schehr, this involves, amongst other things, accepting that the very sovereignty of the human subject is compromised: 'we are always, in the sense of the film *The Matrix*, simulacra of the nineteenth-century subject, but free no longer' (*FPM*, 12). As a result, in Schehr's analysis, exploring post-queer subjectivity requires attentive examination of the various networks in which subjects whose desire is directed toward the same sex inscribe themselves (the virtual network is only one, even if it is the most significant); it is no longer viable to attempt to consider the individual in isolation from these structures which contribute to enacting his self.⁷ Moreover, the implication of Schehr's vision is that it is no longer possible to think of 'queer subjects' in the way that we have been used to: models of subjecthood based on the subject's interpellation into the symbolic order of discourse (as posited by Lacanian theory) or else its always already subjugated self-formation within the parameters of internalized disciplinary norms (as in the Foucauldian model of subjectivity) no longer speak to the experience of humans who come into being in part through contact with machines, and the virtual others made available to them via connections mediated by machines. Not only this, but Schehr's conception of a new paradigm of existence which circumscribes the experience of those twenty-first-century citizens who are sexually oriented toward their own sex is predicated on the idea that the regulatory discourses that instilled heteronormativity as a social norm and produced homophobia are evacuated, dead: they no longer shape the perceptions of same-sex desire, which is no longer socially stigmatized. The person experiencing this desire therefore has a wholly different relationship with his or her sexuality, for this concept itself no longer has its categorizing force. In consequence, the political struggle to de-stigmatize and re-signify homosexuality (and the gender

and sexuality of other minoritized sexual groups) is obsolescent, with the result that the notion of 'queer' such as we know it today becomes meaningless:

If, as I have suggested, sexualities, for lack of a better word, have now completely moved beyond the confines of their juridical, psychiatric, and medical origins, then the disidentificatory processes associated with queer are themselves now superfluous, because that process of disidentification was a rebellion associated with sexualities and their power grids. If these are no longer in place in the same way, then we have ostensibly moved into a post-queer moment that is fully integrated with the actualization of the post-modern and the experience of the post-human. (*FPM*,14)

In Schehr's work 'post-queer' equates to a condition or set of conditions that, as he sees it, define not only the cultural environment inhabited by men in the West in the twenty-first century, but these men themselves. Discussion of the virtual here recalls Jean Baudrillard's concept of the 'hyperréel', and it takes its place centre-stage in Schehr's analysis as a vital aspect of the environment he describes, for networks and virtual environments play a critical formative role in the constitution of selfhood and desire, as well as a crucial role in extending the parameters of lived experience (including virtually lived experience).⁸ However, elsewhere we can find the virtual contributing to the elaboration of the post-queer in a different sense, forcing us to re-conceive subjectivity in another way. We can find 'post-queer' articulated not as a condition, but as a theory; in this theory, we will find that the virtual does not correlate to cyberspace, and is no longer an environment that produces post-queer subjects; rather, it connotes a direction of travel, standing as a domain in which the potential of a yet-to-be-realized future stands waiting to be unlocked for the benefit of the present, as well as the future. This is the post-queer as theorized by David Ruffolo, and it is to this understanding of the post-queer that I shall now turn.

Ruffolo provides a sustained critique of first-wave American queer theory in order to explain what has driven him to develop his concept of the post-queer.⁹ Amongst his most significant criticisms, he cites what he considers queer theory's limiting habit of focussing on the dyad of heteronormativity and queer, which for him is unproductive. Moreover, he resoundingly rejects queer theory's insistence on following Foucault and Butler and conceiving of the (non-heterosexual) subject as being discursively produced through language, disagreeing with the priority that is given to the signifying

system in such theorizations. Instead, Ruffolo draws very extensively on the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in an attempt to devise a theory that will release the potential of the queer body (and indeed other — non-corporeal — bodies besides), for he finds this has been insufficiently accounted for in existing queer theories. To this end, he opts to side-step the question of subjectivity and its relation to the signifying systems or discourses which bring it into a confined state of being, adopting instead a Deleuzian approach that looks past the subject in favour of a focus on life, in particular its quality of being in a perpetual state of ‘becoming’ (*P-QP*, 6–7). Accordingly, the familiar concern for the subject in queer theory is replaced in Ruffolo’s post-queer theory with an engagement with the body (not necessarily only the human body) as an agent of transformation and the site of potential:

[A] post-queer politics of dialogical-becomings is less interested in, for example, what bodies *are* (what seems to have consumed poststructural theorizations over the past few decades) and more concerned with what they can *do*. I am referring to the critical and necessary shift from *being* to *becoming*—one that offers an important political philosophy for contemporary queer studies to consider the flows and connections of life rather than how life is represented in and through meaning structures such as language (*P-QP*, 42).

Extending his concept of the body to include bodies of knowledge, institutional bodies and cultural bodies (amongst others), Ruffolo conceives of bodies as having the capacity to make connections between themselves in the way of Deleuzian ‘[d]esiring machines [which] are comprised of breaks and flows where movement is a process of becoming rather than a site of re/signification’.¹⁰ The connections being made are ‘rhizomatic’—that is, ungoverned by any sense of hierarchy or order. As such they are both unpredictable and have the power to effect change, since they participate in the evolution of the organism, in its becoming what it previously was not. It is from this conceptualization of the body that Ruffolo derives his conception of its endless potential for (self-)transformation. Since his concept of the body extends so far beyond the human body, his theoretical approach allows him to take as the object of his scrutiny all manner of bodies that operate in society to control human bodies, both those that experience same-sex desire and those that do not. In this way, Ruffolo expands his critical horizons beyond the concerns of sexual minorities in relation to their lived experience of their sexuality, seeking to participate in a Deleuzian ‘political philosophy that is useful in rethinking life itself’ (*P-QP*, 93). The discussions

Ruffolo undertakes in his monograph are intended to indicate how the development of a post-queer philosophy enables post-queer thinking to embrace broader concerns relating to democracy, capitalism and globalization. This approach speaks to the appetite apparent in contemporary American queer theory for exiting a closed circle created by what have come to be often negatively cast as narrow identitarian concerns, in favour of engaging instead with broader issues, particularly those arising out of globalization (such as human trafficking), which may impact particularly on non-heterosexuals, but not solely.¹¹ This move to extend the parameters of queer inquiry comes in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 11 September, after which US-based queer theorists felt the need to ask themselves questions such as, ‘What does queer studies have to say about empire, globalization, neoliberalism, sovereignty, and terrorism? What does queer studies tell us about immigration, citizenship, prisons, welfare, mourning, and human rights?’ (*WQ*, 2).

Just as it did for Schehr, the virtual plays a pivotal role in Ruffolo’s vision of the post-queer. However, on this occasion the virtual is not to be understood as an ‘alternative reality’, but rather in its Deleuzian sense as ‘the realm of the *potential*’ (*P-QC*, 384, emphasis Ruffolo’s). The philosophical realm of the virtual that emerges from the theories of Deleuze and Guattari to drive Ruffolo’s conception of the post-queer is defined principally by being future-directed. Unconcerned with signifying systems, semiotics or the concept of representation, and without the consequent need to untangle anteriorities — this impulse, in Ruffolo’s view, dogs any linguistics-based post-structuralist theory (including Foucauldian theory) — the Deleuzian virtual is pregnant always with the unrealized potential that is intrinsic to life-forms, a potential unknowable in advance. What unlocks this potential is the process of ‘actualization’, which follows from movement, or, to gloss it in Deleuzian terms, ‘becoming-other’. This virtual, in other words, supplies the basis on which Ruffolo is able to refer to his post-queer philosophy as one concerned with *becoming* rather than being. This distinction is crucial for Ruffolo, for it enables him to insist on a productive difference between his post-queer theory, characterized as forward-looking, and the queer theories that have come before. These he considers to be unproductive and limited, not least because, as he sees it, they deal only in possibility (in other words, that which can be envisaged) and not in potentiality (that is, that which cannot be envisaged or predicted). Ruffolo’s work can thus be seen to channel anew (and indeed offer a theoretical grounding for) the enthusiastic

optimism which Donald E. Hall expressed for queer theory in his 2003 guide to this body of thought. Whilst convinced that ‘our current sexual “selves”, norms, and notions are not simply going to go away’, Hall affirms: ‘we must remember always that they *are* changing, slowly and inevitably, most obviously because everything does change over time, as the history of “sexuality” itself demonstrates’.¹²

Post-Queer Lost in Translation?

It is clear what debt these North American formulations of post-queer owe to French thought. Ruffolo’s work stands in dialogue with the thought of Foucault as much as the Foucauldian Butler, and we have seen that his theorization of post-queer itself is heavily dependent on the philosophy developed by Deleuze and Guattari, especially in the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.¹³ Meanwhile, Schehr fashions his concept of the post-queer out of diverse intellectual influences, and while not all of these are French (as evidenced by the discussion of cyborgs alluded to above), the presence of French thought within the volume is nevertheless strong. Like Ruffolo (albeit less single-mindedly), Schehr draws on Deleuze and Guattari as he discusses networks, plug-ins and rhizomatic connections, while elsewhere his discussion is filtered through the ideas of thinkers such as Foucault, Jacques Lacan, and—as we have seen—Baudrillard. In thinking the post-queer, Schehr and Ruffolo thus emulate the intellectual journeys of so many first-wave American queer theorists, such that their work too becomes deeply infused with French thought. The question is, how far are these continuing intellectual peregrinations by American queer theorists mirrored in contemporary French thought on sexuality? To what extent might the concept of ‘post-queer’, rooted in French thought but formulated in North America, be productive in a French context?

When considering the possible influence of North American conceptualizations of the post-queer on contemporary French queer theorizations, it may seem self-evident to conclude that there can be none. After all, as we have seen, post-queer marks an attempt to branch out beyond the terrain staked out by queer theorists before the close of the twentieth century, and by Butler in particular. Yet in France, as is well-recognized, translations of the seminal texts produced by these theorists have been very slow to appear (*Gender Trouble* was first published in French translation as late as 2005, as *Trouble dans le genre: pour un féminisme de la subversion*; the translation of Sedgwick’s

Epistemology of the Closet appeared only in 2008¹⁴). If France has yet to have had the chance to fully digest the first wave of American queer theory, how could it be ripe for American theorizations of the post-queer?

However, to advance a judgement framed in such terms on the French readiness to accommodate an American concept of post-queer would be to fall prey to some misguided assumptions. Firstly, to conclude that a more thorough absorption of that American queer theory of the 1990s would be a pre-requisite for France's engagement with American articulations of the post-queer suggests almost an inevitability to the migration of queer thought across the Atlantic to France, as if post-queer would follow queer in returning to the land of so many of its intellectual origins, just as night follows day. Yet post-queer does *not* follow queer, not in any straightforwardly temporal sense, at least. For Ruffolo, the term 'post-queer' has no connection with temporality whatsoever, and therefore should not be seen as sequentially following anything: 'my explicit intention [is] to avoid a reading of "post-" as a definitive time and space that come after something' (*P-QP*, 4), he writes, affirming that, in his use of 'post-queer', 'the "post-" is aimed at creating new flows of production with queer—flows that (...) remain in contact with queer, yet uphold distinct differentiations from queer.' (*P-QP*, 6) By contrast, the accounts given by Schehr and in the editors' introduction to *Post-Queer* do instil a sense of linear progression into the concept of 'post-queer', since in both cases the term is positioned as the successor to an older, more familiar, yet putatively obsolete vocabulary. According to these accounts, 'the queer revolution that was seen initially as a non-identitarian replacement for "gay" is, by and large, over' (*FPM*, 14), whilst 'sexualities have fallen to the wayside' (*FPM*, 15). As for "'homosexuality'", it is an exhausted concept:

its time has come to be *dépassé* or *aufgehoben*, and this by something we have named 'post-queer': a congeries of discourses, praxes, and representations so far removed from the originary discourses attached to the juridico-legal and the medico-psychiatric realms as to be no longer recognizable. (*EI*, 4)

Whilst these claims do not nullify the entirety of the analyses offered in these recent publications, there are nevertheless evident shortcomings whenever statements which seek to describe the cultural environment pertaining to sexual minorities 'in the West', as Schehr puts it (*FPM*, 14), are cast in such sweeping terms. In the French context, it is far

from clear (as I have discussed elsewhere¹⁵) that such an optimistic view of the situation of sexual minorities is warranted. Indeed, Bourcier urges great caution before applying the term ‘post-queer’ to France, pointing out, importantly, that there are ‘inherent risks in the rhetoric of post- and more particularly of post-queer’, a theme which she develops in the rest of her piece by dissecting ‘the potentially anti-queer aspects of “post-queer”’¹⁶

The certainty with which proclamations are made of the extinction of homophobic discourses throughout ‘the West’ is admittedly the weakest point of the analyses given by Schehr and the editors of *Post-Queer*. It is also true that, importantly, their concept of post-queer clearly responds to a set of changes occurring in the twenty-first century environment that can—unlike the extinction of homosexuality as a stigmatized category—be uncontroversially registered. However, this problem points us to a further reason why the concept of post-queer, as formulated in North America, may well not quickly or easily travel to France: once again, there is a problem of translation—albeit not a problem that professional linguists or publishers might resolve. This time, it is in conceptual translation that difficulties lie.

Post-Queer Unmade in France

I have already suggested that certain concepts underlying the contemporary development of post-queer thought in North America do not apply equally on the other side of the Atlantic, and specifically not in France. Where a different relation exists to the category of sexuality, as well as a different relation to the discipline (if I may use the term) of queer theory, it is unsurprising if theories and approaches which are steeped in quite specific local conditions (from the North American reception of Butlerian queer theory to the post-9/11 rise of neo-liberalism), and which address perplexing questions that dominate their *domestic* context, do not offer exactly the same promise once exported to a country where the debates and priorities respond to rather different environmental cues. This phenomenon is apparent already in the reception of Butler’s early work in France, which has received criticism for—amongst other things, and doubtless somewhat unfairly—failing to address the problem that French republican universalist values pose for queer theorists and activists, and failing to address the postcolonial dimension to debates around queer in France.¹⁷

Such critiques serve to remind us, should we need reminding, of the importance of French republican universalist paradigms for any debate or theorization of queer in France. This is an area which has received much attention within Anglophone French studies, but whilst there have been numerous accounts of the very particular implications of the republican system and its anti-communitarian stance for the status of France's queer citizens and the way they articulate their demands vis-à-vis the state (and the way these demands are received), there has been rather less consideration of what this implies methodologically for queer *theory* (and queer theorizing).¹⁸

The key problem which an academic queer theory that will speak to the contemporary concerns of French queer citizens must address is the question of how to deal with difference. By this I do not mean the cultural difference that separates one society from another. Difference — and its opposite, indifference — are at the heart of the struggle faced by sexual minorities in France, who are pitted against the logic of French republicanism whenever they stake claims for equal civil rights. They face the conundrum of how to articulate their claims to a French state that, upholding a universalist concept of the citizen, refuses in principle to recognize differences that separate citizens from one another — yet, at the same time (even post-PaCS), breaches this principle of equality for all by failing to confer on citizens belonging to sexual minorities the same rights enjoyed by their heterosexual counterparts. Consequently, France's queer citizens are forced to confront not only inequality, but the edifice of 'Frenchness', as sexuality, difference and national identity commingle in France in a highly distinctive way.

One drawback, from a French point of view, with the Deleuzian-inflected post-queer theory that has emerged from the other side of the Atlantic is that it does not satisfactorily deal with difference. Discussing the connections (erotic or otherwise) made between bodies in terms of a traffic between 'desiring machines' obscures any individual characteristic pertaining to any of those bodies, leaving no room to register inequalities that may impact on those bodies due to material differences in class, colour or religion (for example). Indeed, avoiding difference would seem to be a deliberate strategy in this work, a way of avoiding what is characterized there (as I noted above) as the sterility of an outdated identitarianism.¹⁹

However, this kind of identitarianism is not present in France, for it involves individuals defining their identity primarily in terms of a sexual category, whereas in France, as Scott Gunther points out, 'the

a priori existence of sexual categories (...) is far from axiomatic'.²⁰ Sexuality (including heterosexuality) belongs, according to French republican discourse, to the private sphere, and in consequence 'the French rhetoric of universalism has stymied French homosexuals from mobilizing politically around sexual identities' (*EC*, 2). As a result, French citizens of queer sexuality project their identity differently in different circumstances, according to whether or not they find themselves 'in private'. So French queer identity can be said to be marked, to an extent, by *self-difference*.²¹

This analysis of how French people belonging to sexual minorities construct their identities concurs with that of Denis Provencher, who argues that homosexually-oriented French men will articulate their sexual orientation using a language he calls 'queer French', which represents a linguistic practice apparent already in the richly homoerotic prose of Jean Genet. This involves avoiding the expression of sexuality in terms of an identity (being something), and instead referring to practices (doing something). Such usage conforms with the demands French universalist republicanism makes on how its citizens express their identity. Importantly, however, it also enables the expression of 'a more traditional queer French identity that attempts to resist Anglo-American models of gay identity'.²² Once again, the importance of difference is underscored, but it is not only a matter of *self-difference* here. What is at stake too is asserting a difference between a specifically *French* mode of living out one's sexual orientation, and a globalized, neo-liberal *American* model of sexuality, typically referred to as 'global gay'.²³

When North American post-queer theory travels to France, then, it arrives at the intersection of these rival conceptions of sexuality and sexual identity. For that reason too, we may expect French queer theory to be wary of automatically importing its ideas—not least when they involve deploying the thought of philosophers like Deleuze and Guattari, whose work had in any case started to be exploited within French queer theory some years ago.²⁴ As a result, we may expect French queer theory to continue to resist being merely a grateful consumer of queer theories originating on the other side of the Atlantic, but to develop a different relationship with them.

Under the terms of this relationship, theorizations of queer produced in France may, rather than merely ingesting American (post-)queer theory, hold up a usefully critical mirror to it—thus creating the potential for a two-way Atlantic traffic in specifically queer thinking. Arguably, this productive act of reflection is what occurs if we

read Maxime Cervulle and Nick Rees-Roberts's *Homo exoticus: race, classe et critique queer* in dialogue with the Deleuzian formulations of post-queer that I have been discussing.²⁵ Cervulle and Rees-Roberts argue that queer theory and critique — on both sides of the Atlantic — have so far failed adequately to interrogate the intersections of queer sexuality and ethnicity in France, and in particular the white privilege that follows from these. This urgently needs to be corrected: 'one of the crucial challenges for LGBTQ cultures today is for gay, lesbian and trans people of colour to call into question a hegemonic identity based on the North American model' (*HE*, 18).

They contend that an exoticizing tendency exists in the French gay erotic imaginary, which leads to gay male sexuality in France being characteristically constructed around colonial paradigms which have the effect of 'othering', and thereby silencing, those belonging to non-white ethnic minorities. Significantly, they see this imposition of difference in French gay culture as the product of what we might call a failure to deal with another kind of difference — that is, the difference which must be silenced in order to conform to French republican ideology. They conclude that French gay men resort to the homonormative strategy of 'manufacturing exotic figures the better to reconstruct a white gay subject all ready to assimilate' (*HE*, 18) with the aim of achieving acceptance for a privileged subset of gay citizens into the French republican model — this at the cost of exacerbating the inequalities experienced by non-white gay French citizens, and exacerbating the very social fragmentation that the principles of universalist republicanism are supposed to prevent.

Cervulle and Rees-Roberts's study thus makes a powerful case for incorporating the thinking of difference within any queer theory that now seeks to address itself to the French population. Showing up the ramifications of indifference to difference for France's sexual (and other) minorities, and for the country as a whole, they may also — if their work travels that far — alert queer theorists on the other side of the Atlantic to a potential ethical blindspot within their own thinking.

NOTES

- 1 See Judith Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination' in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, edited by Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 13–31; and *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 213.
- 2 See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (London: Penguin, 1994); Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,

- 1995), hereafter *H*; Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).
- 3 See an early account of this problem in Steven Seidman, 'Identity and Politics in a "Postmodern" Gay Culture: Some Historical and Conceptual Notes' in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, edited by Michael Warner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 105–42.
 - 4 For more on the precise nexus of conditions that give rise to post-queer, see 'Editors' Introduction' in *Post-Queer*, edited by Roger C elestin, Eliane DalMolin and Lawrence R. Schehr, special issue of *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 12:1 (2008), 1–8. Hereafter this introduction will be abbreviated to 'EI', and the volume title abbreviated to *Post-Queer*.
 - 5 Lawrence R. Schehr, *French Post-Modern Masculinities: From Neuromatrices to Seropositivity* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 126; hereafter *FPM*.
 - 6 See Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991).
 - 7 The pronoun 'his' is used deliberately, since Schehr is not concerned with women in his book.
 - 8 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et simulations* (Paris: Galil ee, 1981). Baudrillard characterizes the 'hyperr eel' as a domain from which any referentiality is extracted, with only the simulacrum of an externally-existing reality to replace it.
 - 9 See David V. Ruffolo, *Post-Queer Politics* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), especially 1–22. Discussions of Ruffolo's concept of the 'post-queer' are based on this text, except where otherwise stated, and further references to it will be made using the abbreviation *P-QP*.
 - 10 David V. Ruffolo, 'Post-Queer Considerations' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory*, edited by Noreen Giffney and Michael O'Rourke (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 379–94 (386). Later references will follow the abbreviation *P-QC*.
 - 11 For an early call from within American queer theory for queer theory to widen its remit and address global problems, see especially (along with other contributions to the volume) David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam and Jos e Esteban Mu oz, 'Introduction' in *What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?*, edited by David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam and Jos e Esteban Mu oz, special issue of *Social Text* 23:3–4 (2005), 1–17. Subsequent references to this article will follow the abbreviation *WQ*.
 - 12 Donald E. Hall, *Queer Theories* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 186, emphasis Hall's.
 - 13 Gilles Deleuze and F elix Guattari, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia, I: Anti-Oedipus*, translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane

- (New York: Viking, 1977) and II: *A Thousand Plateaus*, translated by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
- 14 Butler, *Trouble dans le genre: pour un féminisme de la subversion*, translated by Cynthia Kraus (Paris: La Découverte, 2005); Sedgwick, *Epistémologie du placard*, translated by Maxime Cervulle (Paris: Amsterdam, 2008).
 - 15 See my 'An Ethical Queer Cinema? Hypervisibility and the Alienated Gay Gaze in Ducastel and Martineau's *Ma vraie vie à Rouen*', *Modern & Contemporary France* 20:1 (2012), 53–69.
 - 16 Marie-Hélène Bourcier, 'Excitables post-' in *Post-Queer*, 107–21 (109).
 - 17 For the French reception of Butler, see, for example, Bourcier, *Queer zones: politiques des identités sexuelles, des représentations et des savoirs* (Paris: Balland, 2001), *Sexpolitiques: Queer Zones 2* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2005); and Jérôme Vidal, 'A propos du féminisme: Judith Butler en France: Trouble dans la réception', *Mouvements*, 47–48 (2006), 229–39.
 - 18 See, for example, Cristina Johnston, '(Post-)Queer Citizenship in Contemporary Republican France', *Post-Queer*, 89–97; and Enda McCaffrey, *The Gay Republic: Sexuality, Citizenship and Subversion in France* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).
 - 19 This is not to say that Deleuze and Guattari's work has nothing to offer queer studies: see *Deleuze and Queer Theory*, edited by Chrysanthi Nigianni and Merl Storr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009) for more ways in which it might be productive.
 - 20 Scott Gunther, *The Elastic Closet: A History of Homosexuality in France, 1942—present* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 122. Hereafter *EC*.
 - 21 I use 'self-difference' to refer to an internal division created by the co-existence within one individual of the mutually incompatible good republican citizen (who does not project their non-heterosexuality) with the citizen whose self is marked by, and who lives out, an attraction to the same sex.
 - 22 Denis M. Provencher, *Queer French: Globalization, Language, and Sexual Citizenship in France* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 184.
 - 23 As described by Murray Pratt, 'Post-Queer and Beyond the PaCS: Contextualising French Responses to the Civil Solidarity Pact' in *In A Queer Place: Sexuality and Belonging in British and European Contexts*, edited by Kate Chedzoy, Emma Francis and Murray Pratt (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 177–206 (178–9).
 - 24 See, for example, Beatriz Preciado, 'Multitudes queer: notes pour une politique des "anormaux"', *Multitudes* 12 (2003), 17–25.
 - 25 Maxime Cervulle and Nick Rees-Roberts, *Homo Exoticus: race, classe et critique queer* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2010), hereafter *HE*.