The Figure of the Arab in *Three Billion Perverts*

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I. Introduction

Why write about a journal issue? Even if the notoriety of the journal in question, the *Three Billion Perverts* issue of *Recherches*, had not survived the decades since its publication, returning to the scene of the crime, as it were, may still prove valuable for historical and philosophical and political purposes within Deleuze and Guattari scholarship. Critical, though, is the focus on the journal itself within the project of understanding the lifework of Félix Guattari. If there were a constant in Guattari’s brand of activist-intellectualism, it was his involvement in the collective production of journals by trans-disciplinary editorial assemblages. He went down this road from his teenage years when he engaged in a collective auto-unfolding of a peripatetic youth group dedicated to far left politics in one of the splinter groups within the youth hostel association in France. The journals we have come to associate with him – *Recherches* and *Chimères* – are predated by the broadsheets and reviews of the far left groupuscules for which he worked, and the little experiments such as *Change international* in which he participated, not to mention all the newspapers, mainstream and otherwise, for which he wrote. The journal is a favoured micro-institutional matter produced by editorial assemblages seeking to realise collectively their projects and create new worlds of reference. The journal issue under discussion in this paper may be appreciated in these general terms, but it also underlines the challenges of collective production and quasi-anonymous authorship, especially when a volatile subject such as sexuality is at issue. *Three Billion Perverts* demonstrates something about which Guattari constantly reminded his readers: that it is not possible to exclude, as one skates along the plane of immanence, the worst excesses of multiplicity. Since this journal, to the extent that it survives, is the kind of enduring
micro-institutional matter that is available for revisiting (unlike all the other meetings and so forth lost to time), it provides an opportunity to study how one figure, that of the Arab, appeared to catalyse the collective self-production of the micro-institution called CERFI – Centre d’Etudes, de Recherches et de Formation Institutionnelles (Centre for Study and Research into Institutional Functioning).

II. Background

In March of 1973, CERFI published in its house journal *Recherches* a special issue (#12) devoted to homosexuality in France, ‘Trois milliards de pervers: Grande Encyclopédie des Homosexualités’ (see Figure 1). Guattari was listed as director of the publication and held legally responsible for it. Those familiar with Guattari’s writings will know that his ‘Liminaire’ [“Introduction”] to the special issue has been reprinted here.

**Figure 1** Cover of the *Three Billion Perverts* issue.
and there and translated into English, with additions, in The Guattari Reader (Guattari 1996). The events that followed the issue’s publication are well-known and are summarised in a footnote: ‘The March issue . . . had been seized, and Félix Guattari, as the director of publications, was fined 600 francs for affronting public decency. Number 12 . . . was judged to constitute a ‘detailed display of depravities and sexual deviations’, and the ‘libidinous exhibition of a perverted minority’. All copies of the issue were ordered destroyed (Guattari 1996: 192).

Readers of Guattari are aware of these circumstances, but very few have actually seen a copy of the issue in question. In 2002, however, a copy that had been ‘graphically adapted’, in the words of the designer Olivier Surel, surfaced on the Internet on the site of the French journal Critical Secret, under the direction of Aliette Guibert and courtesy of Florence Pétry of Editions Recherches. Access to the issue is password protected. To this day, then, the issue is censored since, it is explained, ‘the seductive boldness of 32 liberatory pages under the generic title Pedo-Philia was the object, without issuing a moral judgement, of a resolute self-censorship’ (Guibert and Pétry 2002). Anyone who applies for a password in order to view the issue will notice the absence of the original section on paedophilia. On the whole, what is ordered destroyed is not necessarily enforced and paper copies of the issue are still to be found in private libraries of Deleuze and Guattari scholars. All further references to Recherches 12 will be to the original printed copy generously loaned to me by Paul Patton.

III. Overview of Three Billion Perverts

Generally, Three Billion Perverts mixed politics with pleasure, amateur with professional academic debate, journalistic modes of address with diary writing; the photos (often no more than snapshots) and drawings of a delightful lasciviousness (ribald and ridiculous), are playful and at times silly, but obviously in debt to Tintin (and at some points Dennis the Menace!). Aficionados of the French avant-garde can duly note the influence of Situationist aesthetics in these counter-deployments of comic strips (Wollen 1989: 27).

The list of original contributors runs to at least 35 persons. Many of the best-known contributors have since died: Guattari, Deleuze, Foucault, Sartre, Châtelet, Genet, Hocquenghem. The issue retains an aura of mystery, though the story of its creation has been recounted in part by Anne Querrien, and Guattari never failed to mention it when looking back on the highlights of Recherches. In 1972, several members
of the Front homosexuel d’Action Révolutionnaire (FHAR) crossed over into CERFI and, eschewing funding or the quaint term ‘commissions’ from the French state, produced the issue in question and thus, ‘With them CERFI became what we wanted, and feared, from the outset: a gathering place for resistances and interconnecting singularities’ (Querrien 2002). Querrien adds that the issue took six months to put together, with the aid of Guy Hocquenghem.

What exactly caught the attention of the court? In an interview with George Stambolian, Guattari explained that at the time ‘among the things that most shocked the judges was one of the most original parts of this work – a discussion of masturbation. I think that a work devoted to homosexuality in a more or less traditional manner would have had no difficulty. What shocked perhaps was the expression of sexuality going in all directions. And then there were the illustrations – they were what set it off’ (Guattari 1996: 204). The wide-ranging section on masturbation (‘Masturbations’ 1 and 2 occupies pages 64–94) meditates on a range of pertinent questions across the sexes – to lubricate or not and, if so, with what substance, and from which source? What is the relationship between masturbation and lack? And between lack and guilt? Solo or assisted? Intellectual or physical? Manual or non-manual? Genital or non-genital? ‘Gilles’ and ‘Guy’ (first names only) explore these and other themes in a speculative mode, while their discussion is punctuated by interjections from two frisky interlocutors, and then turned away from its overt phallicism by ‘Anna’. The line drawings inserted into the dialogue stage all kinds of psycho-sexual scenes: the question of size (a carrot on a ruler); a penile film projector; prisoners masturbating, and so on. There is no hint of the scaffolding of objective social science: no holds barred, if you will. The only critical comment on any of the illustrations beyond that of Guattari is in the ‘New Introduction’ to Hocquenghem’s *Homosexual Desire* in which Michael Moon tarries with a cartoon, ‘La Pouissance ou Jouissance’ [‘Power or Pleasure’]. Although he does not comment on other contents that he has listed dutifully, this cartoon by Copi held his attention. Perhaps Guattari was correct regarding the gripping nature of the illustrations that they set many machines in motion, some more fascistic than others. The cartoon by Copi is a parody of pop psychobabble – ‘what’s on a man’s mind’ – but with little line drawings showing that other men are on a man’s mind. And what’s on a woman’s mind is sex with other women, as well. What strikes Moon is the absence of ‘liberated gay men’ in the cartoon, and that the humorous insight into fantasies that unlock otherwise blocked male desire also enable lesbian desire (Moon 1993: 12–15).
IV. The Figure of the Arab

Other sections of the publication are equally candid yet visually diffuse the discussion through art historical referencing (as in the section on lesbian culture) and by means of graphic novel formats (in the case of paedophilia). However, running through the sections of the journal may be found contributions regarding the volatile sexual dimension of French colonialism in North Africa. Indeed, if there is a ‘problem’ the issue tackled across its different sections, or subject (group) positions, it is that of the Arabs – the use of scare quotes around this term will be reserved for later in the discussion – who populated certain articles and were the (displaced) subjects of several submissions which sought to grapple with the racist and fascist desiring machines unleashed in the publication. My approach to the journal is based on a strategy of reading that critically follows the movements of race across the journal’s sectional-sexual specificities. In this way the figure of the Arab serves the unrestrained expression of desire, providing the basis for a myriad of statements and observations, from the overtly racist to meta-editorial wrangling about which articles are in and which are out. This figure tells us about the transversal dimension of the journal and the group desire that it unleashed and conducted toward diverse referential anchors: autobiography (Arabophilia in French gay culture), sociohistorical specificity (the legacies of French colonialism in North Africa, understood at a specific historical juncture), and a certain kind of political critique of the journal itself (writing about Arabs yet without them).

This article presents a reading of Three Billion Perverts through the problem of the status of the figure of the Arab in French homosexual desire at a specific moment in a transversal social ecology. What is it to write, as one contributor put it in identitarian terms, ‘on Arabs, but without Arabs’? This is the lesson of Deleuze’s ‘Letter to a Harsh Critic’ inasmuch as it concerned issue number 12, especially Michel Cressole’s contribution to ‘Us and the Arabs’, soundly criticised as ‘completely Oedipal – more Oedipal than my daughter’ – by Deleuze in his comment on the text ‘Sex-Pol en Acte’ (Deleuze 1995). The status of the figure of the Arab is made a subject of critical reflection and lively debate within the journal’s pages, without cancelling out the masturbatory fantasies and field reports of several contributors, who cruised immigrant neighbourhoods in urban France, or enjoyed sex junkets to Morocco or Algeria. This field of desire is heterogeneous and complex, and as soon as we wade into it, apparently progressive political statements arise beyond the superficially correct sentiments that would be appropriate to
the period (that is, the late 1960s and early 1970s in French–North African relations). In this spirit it will be necessary to revisit some of the early and largely forgotten work of French sociologists and philosophers on North Africa. The references may seem a bit dusty, but this is intentional. Who is an ‘Arab’ anyway? What about the Arab/Berber distinction? What would Frantz Fanon have said? After all, Fanon diagnosed the racist character of French culture and exposed psychoanalytic apologists for colonisation. Problematically, he also fell back on over-simplistic Freudian symbolic equations – ‘the Negrophobic man is a repressed homosexual’ (1967: 155–6). Still, Fanon connected the trauma of white Negrophobes with the inversion of a fear of a passive practice of fellatio into an active fellating of Black men already reduced to penises and nothing more in a racist economy of desire.

I want to revisit *Recherches* 12 without imposing upon it an order and organisation inadequate to the period in which it was produced. I will, however, reveal its hitherto undervalued status as a key moment in French gay historiography and as a neglected episode in Deleuze and Guattari’s collaboration. I also take seriously Guattari’s observation that the collective production of the journal was a key to understanding its effects. This will become obvious in my discussion of his remarks before the court about the limits of intentionality and authorship.

Politics also joins with play, for it needs to be acknowledged that the issue is staged as a game, a bit of Snakes and Ladders, suitably queered, and viciously parodied – what else can one say about a little hand-drawn penis the head of which is wrapped in a turban and bears a sultanate moustache (‘Sexe Arabe’)? What about the high-rise HLM (habitation à loyer modéré – council estates) penis? *Three Billion Perverts*, Guattari explained, gave voice to homosexual desire without the mediations, the vast apparatuses of representation and interpretative scaffolding, of social science, psycho-sexology and the media – Kinsey for France. To this extent, then, directness and freedom appear as affronts before the court, as pornographic in their vividness, and perhaps even as academically lewd.

V. On the Stand

It is worth revisiting in some detail Guattari’s defence before the 17th Magistrate’s Court. In 1973, the social and political predicament was very much a matter of the opportunities and consequences of ‘giving voice’ to an oppressed minority. Guattari rejected or, rather, reformulated this issue in a two-fold manner: first, he rejected the ‘formal and Jesuitical’ version of ‘giving voice’ to one’s ‘research subjects’ under the guise of a
problematic pseudo-objectivity, and the many alibis of social scientific methodology; second, he wanted to use the special issue to ‘create the conditions for a total, indeed a paroxysmic, exercise [of that scientific enunciation]’ (Guattari 1996: 186). This rejection of method and scientific pretension is continued along Guattarian lines through the deconstruction of the figure of the ‘native informant’ (Spivak 1999: 6). These conditions would entail a decentred scientificity in three senses: against the logic of the survey à la Kinsey; beyond psychoanalytic prejudices (sameness fixation); and outside the isolated conditions of a classical union-based militancy that did not yet connect with the burgeoning social liberation movements. Indeed, for Guattari, the problem of militancy is its (in)ability to connect with other progressive movements and currents. This was the institutional task that CERFI attempted to ameliorate by engaging the expressive desires of FHAR and MLF (Mouvement de libération des femmes) during this period. By the same token, this did not mean that Guattari was hyper-valorising the figure of the gay activist: ‘Incidentally, for the deaf: the gay, no more than the schizo, is not of himself a revolutionary – the revolutionary of modern times!’ (Guattari 1996: 186).

Rather, Guattari considered the potential of what the gay activist could become; this becoming would constitute a critique of sexuality as such, to the extent that homosexuality ‘concerned all normal sexual life’. In this expanded field of becoming, ‘homosexuality would be, thus, not only an element in the life of each and everyone, but involved in any number of social phenomena, such as hierarchy, bureaucracy’ (Guattari 1996: 187). This would not be an ethnographics of a minority, but a non-uniform becoming in which opportunities would be pursued and tendencies would be mined across the social field. In the process, for Guattari, homosexuality becomes trans-sexuality: ‘From this perspective, the struggle for the liberty of homosexuality becomes an integral part of the struggle for social liberation’ (Guattari 1996: 187). Recall here the three principles of minoritarian becoming: i. Dig: burrow, carve, crack open and find what is foreign within the familiar, and then carry it off; ii. it’s not pornographic representation that is at stake, for as Guattari put it, *Recherches* wasn’t competing with the sex shops precisely because everything minoritarian is political (‘impropriety is political’); iii. create an assemblage of enunciation (collective, implying cooperation). Guattari explained: ‘We dispensed here with the notions of an author and a work. When the examining judge asked me, for example, who had written this or that article, supposing I would even answer, I was not able to do so . . . Even the layout was done collectively’ (Guattari 1996: 191). The refusal of individuation (resisting the demands of the legal system) operated through the indiscernibility of
becoming that ran between those involved in the issue’s production. This becoming was an objective feature that made it impossible for Guattari to link single names with tasks and products. Of course, since he was listed on the masthead as Director, he was readily identifiable.

These are rather abstract considerations, to be sure. What Guattari found himself facing was a day in court. His lifelong passion for the work of Kafka was about to be put to the test in a becoming Joseph K. The ‘ridiculous side’ of the charge began with his return from a conference in Montréal, Canada, in April 1973. Upon return to his flat he was met by several patients sitting on the stairs awaiting their consultations, and found his door padlocked shut. His flat on the rue de Condé had been trashed by police executing one of dozens of warrants for the seizure of *Recherches* 12. All the while, Guattari wrote, *Recherches* had been available for weeks in bookstores around Paris: ‘When I protested these proceedings to the examining judge, I must say that he remained largely perplexed. I thought then that there had been a mistake and that the case would be adjourned *sine die*’ (Guattari 1996: 190). No such indefinite adjournment would be offered. Anyway, it may be remembered from Kafka’s *The Trial* (1968: 160–1) that certain drawbacks, the prevention of actual acquittal, most certainly, are entailed by preventing the trial to progress towards the accused’s sentencing. Limbo of a sort was described in these very terms by Deleuze, but with reference to the passage from disciplinary to control societies: an *endless postponement* to which Guattari’s case did not accede. Guattari stood next to Kafka in this shift, but failed to convince the ‘perplexed’ judge who was stuck in the disciplinary society. Hence, the fine of 600FF.

The other side of this Kafka machine is, perhaps, just as serious. The issue was ‘indefensible’, Guattari believed, if the representational illogic of the court were to be granted. Of course, defence counsel would not grant this. First, Guattari was held responsible for a collective assemblage of enunciation as a matter of convenience:

What does the fact of holding someone responsible for something signify?
– I am responsible, I represent *Recherches*
– You represent the law
– Members of Parliament represent the people
– The President of the Republic: France
– Universities: knowledge
– Gays: perversion
– *Recherches* wishes to have done with this sort of representation, with all the bad theatre to which officials and institutions resort. (Guattari 1996: 188–9)
The court and counsel conveniently decided upon a signifying semiology (a bad theatre of representation) that specified in advance a regime of signs from which there would be no deviation. On the levels of content and form the issue was both rich and uncategorisable. Guattari did not distinguish between contents, citing a range of specific examples that included the sexual misery of youth, masturbation, among two explicit mentions of race and ethnic themes: ‘the way in which different immigrant groups from North Africa live their homosexuality’ and ‘the racist fantasies which are sometimes invoked in relations of sexual dependency’ (Guattari 1996: 190–1). The form of the publication did not answer to any ‘pre-established category’ (that is, it was not tied to a specific discipline or national professional society; nor was it undertaken in the name of a legitimated method). That it let some gays and straights communicate directly their experience ‘without precautions and without supporting documentation’ made it dangerous. The shock issued from the absence of interpretive ‘screens’ and the ambience of a deterritorialising semiosis. Guattari, too, took some abuse from disgruntled contributors.

*Recherches* 12 was a tool used to overcome the stultifying signifying semiology Guattari attributed to the court. This was not an isolated incident. Collective autoproduction centred on publishing was a constant in Guattari’s life from his teenage years forward. *Recherches* contributed to the creation of institutional matter (CERFI) and is not itself a mere product engendered by an institution; rather, the institution is in part a product of a journal’s collective elaboration and refinement over time, including everything that befalls a project of this kind, even the plight of its director. Collective autoproduction in the formation of institutional matter gives pride of place to the journal-artifact – as a surviving document and therefore resource – even though it is only one feature of the institutional matter engendered by editorial and other activities (including all the meetings, communications, fantasies, scribblings on scrunched pages, etc.). In other words, there are many a-signifying features (and some partially-formed semiotic as well) upon which projects of this sort depend; such a semiotic always has some use for signifying semiotics, even if only as a foil and to underline the passage from one (individuated subject held responsible) to another (collective editorial and authorial assemblage of enunciation). Remember that autoproduction of institutional matter is not exhausted by the finished product and remains partially unmediated by (certainly not reducible to) the sort of representational logic that demands clarity of comprehension and hierarchies of power so as to assign responsibility.
VI. Game On, Reader

Recherches 12 began with a game (see Figure 2). There are six players: Arabe, Petit Garçon, Femme, Enseignant, Travesti, and Pédé. The board is numbered 1 through 30 from Start to Finish along an involuted, segmented penis. The Rules of the Game dictate movement forward and backwards. Land on segment 1 – ‘Les Arabes et Nous’, which corresponds to the first article – and you are directed to ‘Sip a mint tea until you have rolled a 6’, which is another article ‘Les Arabes et les Blancs’. Or, if you find yourself on segment 16, then ‘Get the Arab to fuck you and keep his cock in your ass until either one of you rolls a 5’ which is ‘L’autre côté des ténèbres’ (1973: 4–5). And so on and so forth, with a range of substitutions, trips to the hospital, indications of sadism or masochism, and even the fate of having to read most of the issue, etc.

This is a ‘screen’, of sorts, not of interpretation, but of deferment (of important questions) in a fully parodic mode. For as much as interpersonal intellectual politics shaped the issue – Cressole could be counted among other oedipal ‘guilt cops’ from Gay Lib, as Deleuze (1995: 4) suggested – and a certain reflexivity was achieved with regard to the overtly racist

Figure 2 Penile snakes and ladders with player tokens.
content on display, the game-form was up-front: *Jeu de l’oie* or Snakes and Ladders, with instructions (‘Jeu de l’oie: Mode de l’emploi’), no less.

The game is played by six persons corresponding to the six detachable pieces beside the board and 2 copies of this issue. On each roll of the dice, consult the Rules of the Game for the number upon which you have landed. Between turns, read the article in the second copy corresponding to your position on the board. (1973: 4)

This editorial contrivance suggests a device that keeps one moving along the segments, according to the roll of the dice. This gaming doesn’t permit an easy reduction to a static identity of the player/reader because in the next game you can try your luck as the Arabe or the Travesti, or someone else altogether. A static overcoding of identity would freeze these player tokens into subject positions with inventoried attributes and stable descriptors. Patience. After all, the game complements the idea that there are many ways to make a book work. Game on.

VII. Arab and Berber

Let’s begin with one of several collective ‘political’ statements in support of indigenous North Africans: ‘Vivent Nos Amants de Berbérie’ (1973: np). ‘Long Live Our Berber Lovers’ is a detachable pictorial (colour) tableau of young North African men assembled for a group photo; it may be used, the collective suggests, as an alternate cover for the journal. The supporting text is a manifesto and declaration of love that begins with the recognition that ‘Berbers’ are not reducible to ‘Arabs’. In fact, the authors continue, Berbers have been oppressed for centuries, and their struggle continues today: ‘Arabs destroy their language and culture.’ This problem is ‘taboo’, but we do not know for whom (for members of the collective, presumably). A few historical facts are mentioned: ‘The first great rebellion of North Africans against colonial oppression was the war of Rif. The first experience of freedom we want to acknowledge here was the République berbère des Rifains, founded in 1921 by Mohamed Abdelkrim Alkhalta.’ The text continues:

We, the homosexuals who have found a voice in this issue of *Recherches* are in solidarity with their struggle. Because we have sexual relations with them. Because their liberation will also our liberation. Long live our friends from
The facts are correct: the Riffian (Berber) Republican State was declared by Moroccan tribal leader Abd el-Krim in 1921 in a war against the Spanish (surrendering to French and Spanish troops in 1926/27). That el-Krim, a heroic precursor of anti-colonialist struggles, instituted Sharia Law (mixing it with tribal traditions at odds with certain Islamic prescriptions) is not mentioned for the obvious reason that homosexuality is condemned in the Koran and is, on strict interpretations, punishable as either adultery or sodomy. This makes the declaration of love, even despite itself, an intense provocation. The fact that this declaration is not signed, as opposed to the statement in support of a French schoolteacher fired for being gay (‘Sale Race! Sale Péde’, 1973: np – text on recto of ‘Ça branle’), creates ambiguity beyond the obvious fact that the only ‘voice given’ to the unidentified loved ones by the lovers is pictorial.

The declaration is, however, grounded in a fundamental focal point of French–North African relations: that is, the role of language. For in the Maghreb there are two major language groups: Arabic and Berber. Language proved to be a key point of division, since both the Arabs and Berbers in question were largely Sunni Muslims (and it was Albert Camus (1966: 124) who preferred in his political writings of the late 1950s to link the future of Algeria with the French rather than any ‘empire of Islam’ and Arab nationalist-imperialism), but with different tribal traditions thrown into the mix, not discounting numerous dialects, local traditions, and hybridities. There are thought to be many other relevant distinctions that, despite their deconstructability, inform us about perceived social and political realities: urban (Arab) versus rural (Berber); veiled (urban Arab women) versus unveiled (rural Berber women) (Hart 1972: 26ff). As Fanon (1965: 36, n. 1) subtly explained, this latter observation was used by the colonising French to emphasise the positive aspects of Berber identity against the ‘opacity’ of veiled Arab women in the cities, despite the fact that Berber women in urban settings may be veiled as well.

The politics of language under the colonial regime can be an expression of a typical ‘divide and rule’ (Quandt 1972: 286) strategy, in which co-optable aspects of cultural identity were emphasised, while resistant aspects were criticised, criminalised, or re-categorised as ‘foreign’. For example, the colonial curriculum rendered Arabic a ‘foreign’ language and even the post-colonial psycho-existentialist problematic favoured French as the language of the elite – of the writer, thinker, and modern citizen (and private school teachers and students). Jacques Derrida once exclaimed, in
reflecting on his linguistic choices as a French Algerian lycéen, that Arabic was an option permitted but interdicted: ‘Arabic, an optional foreign language in Algeria!’ (Marabou and Derrida 2004: 81). In Algeria, the post-colonial linguistic policy of Arabisation stumbled on the colonalist legacy since Arabic (classical versus spoken dialects) had to be ‘recovered’ and elevated to the official language – after 1962 (Naylor 2000: 63–4; Said 1993: 267). But if a certain Arabic became the official language, where did this leave Kabyle and other Berber tongues? Whither French? On the side of multilingualism, Fanon wrote stirringly of the radio station The Voice of Fighting Algeria in the anti-colonialist struggle and the significance of the use of Arabic, Kabyle and French which ‘had the advantage of developing and of strengthening the unity of the people’ in the cities and in the countryside (Fanon 1965: 84). The term Kabyle is thought to be misused when it describes a linguistic territory from which political consequences (such as separatism) are drawn by those far removed from the territory – in this sense it is a political projection (Favret 1972: 321).

Does one exacerbate the colonialist legacy by signalling the Arab/Berber distinction and by underlining in a declaration of love the oppression of Berbers by Arabs? Pierre Bourdieu (1962: xiii) once observed, after remarking on a series of obvious differences, that ‘it would be dangerous to exaggerate the opposition between Arabs and Berbers. Between these two ways of life there are frequent transitions and deeply rooted affinities.’ Obviously, these observations differ from place to place, from Algeria to Morocco, across different periods (Rabinow 1975). These considerations might compel one to read ‘Long Live Our Berber Lovers’ as a fundamentally incoherent document that does not make clear, beyond its dichotomising, how it is breaking a ‘taboo’: the official post-revolution Arabisation (linguistic) and then Islamicisation (religious erasure of civil society) of Algeria and Berber resistances with longstanding colonial shadows. Yet in a way this declaration is actually prescient since it would not be until the late 1980s that the spectre of an accelerated Islamism would help to articulate the predicament of linguistic minorities, especially the Kabyle political elite (or any elite for that matter) who were francophones and profited from colonial favouritism (or capitalised on the failures of decolonisation) (Naylor 2000:180–1). The real ‘taboo’ at issue here still seems hidden: Algeria’s independence.

VIII. Minoritarian Becomings

Although it was not Guattari who was being interrogated in the previous section, it is helpful to refer to his basic orientation with regard to
both sexuality and racism. In an interview published two years after the *Three Billion Perverts* affair, Guattari explained that ‘all disruptive semiotisation involves a disruptive sexualisation. Thus it is not necessary, in my view, to pose the question of homosexual writers, but rather to search for what is homosexual, at any rate, in a great writer, even if in other respects, s/he is heterosexual’ (Guattari 1975: 15). The excavation of the minoritarian becoming, the becoming homosexual of the heterosexual writer, has its parallel in Guattari’s tactics of anti-racism. Circa 1983 he wrote: ‘All nations require immigrants and the relations to alterity posed though their coming. I am claiming that a nation’s vitality corresponds to its capacity to engage itself in all the components of a becoming immigrant’ (Guattari 1986: 40). Hence this becoming immigrant of all is a refusal of racism in a rather bleak neo-liberal period in which the opportunities for subjectification were being limited and/or tightly scripted through failures of the socialist government and the reemergence of dangerous archaisms and fictions that quickly filled the void (‘France is France’ of the Poujadists all the way to Le Pen).

Becoming immigrant was for Guattari a tactic for refusing uniformity and the anguish that results from it. Becoming minoritarian, whether gay and/or immigrant (becoming *beur*), may be soundly criticised as sterile if it actually reduces particularity and fails to deliver on the passages into the cracks, or inhibits the release of components the assemblage of which would build new solidarities and opportunities (at least for a practical modification of racism). Now, a gay becoming Berber would not entail a Gallic embrace or liberal-minded statement of sympathy and solidarity, but would burrow into the majoritarian dichotomy Arab/Berber in order to find the site of detachable components in a transformative process that would need to acknowledge hybridity, exchange, alterity and at the same time deflation, slowing down, sticking. The valorisation of Berbers must reckon with a partial becoming Arab and Gallic (not a becoming majoritarian) that would reveal paradoxical elements – does the absence of a transnational Berberism entail a rapprochement with Islamism? – that attach to all lines of escape/inscape. Becoming is practically speaking paradoxical.

**IX. Racist Desire**

The controversial ‘transcription of a discussion’ between P. 22, G. 32, and M, 24, ‘Les Arabes et Nous’, is quite ordinary in its prejudice towards so-called Arabs, a bloc that is barely differentiated and only vaguely identified. The conversation is peppered throughout with
negative stereotypes – stealing, lazy, lying, greedy – tempered at times with self-recognition that such things are not particular to this targeted group. This is no politics of fucking: it is either politics or fucking. At one point M reflects: ‘When I was a militant, we would explain that it was a matter of descending into the working class in order to have political relations with young workers. Basically, our requirement was to establish with them a relation of seduction, and cruise them for the organisation. I just couldn’t accept that. Whereas with the Arabs, whether at the hotel or elsewhere, it’s true that our relations were not hidden behind political cruising’ (1973: 19). This is the moment at which Deleuze (assuming he was the author of the unsigned ‘Sex-Pol en Acte’) dug into the text. He wrote: ‘This remark is understood to be that of a lapsed former militant who has substituted homosexual activity for political action, making the former the litmus test’ (1973: 29). What interested Deleuze was not so much the many scattered examples of racist or fascist desire expressed by the interlocutors, but the magical appearance (‘diffuse and mobile’) of racism (informed by a basic sexism) in those Arabs who did not speak. Things have gone from bad to worse: ‘la bête Arabe’ (to whom G is happy to deliver himself) may himself be racist towards ‘us’ (G and others), it is claimed, because ‘for them, the homosexual relation is same as their relation to women in which there is great contempt, and a taste for domination’ (1973: 17). For Deleuze, this was just one displacement among many in which Oedipal traps were set by the interlocutors themselves. Such traps included the distinction between Europeans (parents) and Arabs (husbands), with disdain for the former functioning, snapped Deleuze, as an incest prohibition, while the animalisation motif served as a focal point of racist desire. Deleuze even ventured a symptomatic reading of the telephone call that interrupts the proceedings at one point as ‘the sign of Oedipus and Cain’. Oedipus, Oedipus, Oedipus. Deleuze’s Oedipus, as Slavoj Žižek (2004: 83) has argued from a fortified Lacanian position, sometimes functions as an order-word: For example, gay conjugality is Oedipal because it crystallises a micro-fascist trap for desire set by coupledom and perhaps even by the right to marry. By repeatedly trumping the discussion with Oedipus, Deleuze says too little and too much, because Oedipus is supposed to contain within it a knockdown argument – evidence that serious thought has failed – yet the trump card seems infected by the very failure it identifies, that is, it is a trap for critical thought. This may be to give too much credit to Žižek because, after all, he is not specifically reading Deleuze’s contributions to Three Billion Perverts. But the commentary on ‘Les Arabes et Nous’ is volatile, incensed, flashing with emotion as the
case is made: if you lubricate a homosexual desiring machine with Oedipus you get heterosexuality.

X. Activist-Intellectualism Redux

‘Sex-Pol en Acte’ is not the only response to ‘Les Arabes et Nous’. The ‘beautiful cocks’ lubricated by saliva rather than Vaseline – the latter is so Saint Germain; so Roland Barthes! – extolled by G, despite the serial sameness of Arab men complained about by L, are not really the issue in ‘Le Sexe “Arabe”’. As disagreeable as ‘Les Arabes et Nous’ may be, the author of ‘Le Sexe “Arabe”’ (1973: 32–7) observes, it is acceptable if it provokes discussion – but among a small group and like-minded audience. What returns immediately is a set of provisos: to always refer to ‘Arabs’ in scare quotes and to invoke in this qualification the Arab/Berber distinction: the men at issue are Berbers, more or less Arabised and Islamicised, but in the political context that ‘le vrai nom du Maghreb, c’est la Berbérie’. The socio-sexual context is also significant. The author underlines the same distinction that Deleuze saw as Oedipal: it is easier to cruise ‘Arab’ men than Europeans, both in Europe and in North Africa. Why? Because, as knowledgeable members of FHAR will attest, that is, for those members who only sleep with ‘Arabs’ (the so-called ‘Arabophiles’), Europeans live their homosexuality ‘pathologically’, while ‘Arabs’ live theirs ‘sans problèmes’ and ‘sans culpabilité’. There is a constant recourse to sans: without Arabs, who are then marked diacritically as a qualified referent ‘Arabs’, and are without problems and without guilt. Imposing a negative, qualified existence is the very violence of colonialist representation.

The article under discussion is staged as vaguely sociological and proto-ethnographic (asking for the responses of ‘Arab’ students in Paris to ‘Arabes et Nous’, but receiving nothing but promises and signs of danger that Zionists will seize upon the racist desires expressed there and use them to fan the flames of anti-Arab French racism). This ‘study’ (this is where scare quotes come in handy) took place in the Parisian university milieu, among Maghrebian students whose sexuality was fundamentally bisexual owing to the character of homosexuality in Islamic countries (‘un fait culturel collectif’, so it is put). By the time these students graduate, they will have apparently broken with their bisexuality, and thus separated off their homosexuality, for the sake of a normalised desire for a European opposite-sex partner.

These so-called findings are not worth disputing. Their truth or falsehood is not at issue. Rather, readers may ask themselves how this
academic call and response is being played out as it fills the pages of the issue. The effect, as M explains at length in a brief exchange (with G) embedded in a series of texts under the heading ‘Les Arabes et les “Blancs”’ (1973: 206–9) is alienation. M is a ‘real’ white straight male, non-university-based writer (‘white-hetero-bourgeois’), among ‘imaginary Arabs’. The editorial committee, in rejecting his contribution as ‘too literary’, showed its true face: ‘A section was done on cruising without cruisers, another on Arabs but without Arabs, and only the thinkers of homosexuality can speak about homosexuality.’ But the ‘blanc’ positions himself among the ‘blanks’ at the heart of a journal in which the editors publish themselves, and it is necessary to ‘sublimate’, M complains, before Guattari using the politically correct ‘salad’ of jargon (Bataille-Genet-Guattari). Sour grapes or excavation of a syndrome? No doubt there is a crowd of subjects expelled from the issue. Yet even the personal problem of having one’s text refused is reconfigured as an opportunity to contribute another article to the issue in which one raises objections about lingering concerns. The privilege is that expression may be achieved by abandoning the company of the silenced. The white bourgeois non-academic writer molarises the collective process by insisting on being represented as someone who was excluded, in this way accounting as an individual for all elisions, and joining the collective process but with qualifications.

XI. Conclusion

*Three Billion Preverts* was a masterpiece of political impasse, implosive sexuality (Oedipal, phallocratic, myth of primitivism . . .), and legal transgression. Perhaps it should be stated, along with the author of the delirious and interminable contribution ‘Les Culs Énergumènes’, that in the end when all is said about ‘Les Arabes et Nous’, we are truly stuck between ‘the ivory cock and the ivory tower’ (1973: 230). And everybody is a dupe. But it doesn’t end here.

*Three Billion Perverts* appeared only a year after Hocquenghem’s important book *Homosexual Desire* (1993 [1972]). The one is a foundational text of queer studies *avant la lettre*; the other, a ‘lost’ period piece. But that is a matter of circumstance. The queering of Deleuze and Guattari studies can find its own ‘original’ points of reference in this issue, if it so desires, and there is no shortage of lingering notoriety attached to the recovery operation. My reading does not attempt to present an overview of the issue’s contents. There is more work to be done on that point. Rather, I wanted to work through some of the problems associated with
the figure of the Arab as it circulated through the text because it was on this point that desire and revolution seemed to part ways. Yet great effort was taken to put them back together again, like the King’s men and Humpty Dumpty. And we know how that story turned out. There is little doubt for the author of ‘Les Culs’ that any reader of ‘Les Arabes et Nous’ would classify it as a ‘pathological episode’ between ‘phalluses without penises and penises without phalluses’ (1973: 229) – Us (with editorial privileges intact) and the ‘Arabs’ (who are without a number of real and imagined attributes). My selection of the figure of the Arab is not random; it is the transversal contraption at work in the issue that exposed the soft tissues to long overdue critical scrutiny. With all of its problems, such a figure is a broken-down machine of missing parts and replacement representations that within its limits has the virtue of probing the worst attitudes, blunders, and repressed values circulating in one French intellectual circle at the time. Admittedly, it is not possible to reconstruct – towards which ideal – verisimilitude based on interviews or archives? – the scenes of the journal’s production and reception; too many of the protagonists are deceased. However, the strategy I have adopted here attempts to reach a density of socio-sexual-political description that provides a context for the debates which retain some features of the period and the tenor of the specific undertaking within all of the workings of CERFI. There are many other markers of historical context stirring in the background, of course, and these include the oil crisis, Yom Kippur War, Vietnam, and the Charter of the Agrarian Revolution in Algeria (see Ruedy 1992: 222ff). While in principle every issue of Recherches has a lesson to communicate about the formation of institutional matter, Three Billion Perverts occupies a special place for it the most notorious issue in Guattari’s memory. And by focusing on it, this paper signals that specific episodes, political and personal junctures, despite their somewhat ‘old-fashioned’ appearance (they were already so in 1973!), may serve as valuable nodes for organising research in Guattari Studies.

References


— ‘Vivent Nos Amants de Berbéride’
— ‘Sale Race! Sale Pédé!’ signed protest.
— ‘Règle du Jeu’
— ‘Sex-Pol en Acte’, attributed to G. Deleuze.
— ‘Masturbations: (1) and (2)’
— ‘Les Arabes et Nous’
— ‘Le Sexe “Arabe”’
— ‘Les Arabes et les “Blanc”’
— ‘Les Culs Énergumènes’