Recent years have seen a profusion of titles under the rubric of contemporary gay novels and autofictions in France. Largely set in the Marais, these works often share certain plot mechanisms and similar approaches to their subject. The trajectories of many of the protagonists involve settling in Paris, having as much sex as possible, often becoming sero-positive in the process. There is a shared vision of a high-tech world in which gay pornography fills the characters’ imaginations and sets the tone for their own behavior patterns. This article maps this new version of “gay Paris” in an examination of the recurring motifs of the fictions.

— Ok, quelques minutes pour recharger les batteries, et on inverse les rôles (Voirenlion 67).

I shall start with a quote that is more funny than offensive, in part because of its total lack of literary value:

J’étais en confiance. Je me suis étalé comme une étoile de mer. J’ai fini par m’ouvrir comme une huître. Après plusieurs tentatives qui s’étaient soldées par un ‘je t’avais bien dit...’, il est arrivé à m’empaler. J’étais devenu une motte de beurre fendue. Son membre large et long glissait lentement. Plus il venait plus j’en voulais. (Duroi Retour 65)

We are very far from the proper, subtle, and understated world of Marcel Proust. We are now in a world in which, to quote two other
authors: “Les mecs de magazine de cul étaient donc maintenant en 3D” (Batlo 27) and we are looking at “l’impact du porno sur les gens” (Jonard 202). It is this world that I would like to explore in this article. But first, some personal and historical background as a way of sketching out a trajectory and the problematic at hand.

Some twenty years ago, I was at a dinner in the United Kingdom with an elderly Oxbridge don as the guest of honor. The host of the dinner, who has a mischievous sense of humor, made numerous, albeit slightly veiled, remarks about my “sexual preference,” as it was then known. Finally the elderly gentleman caught on, and in his best Oxbridge tones, he declared, “I can imagine doing all sorts of things about sex, except talking about it.” This was 1984, and while some people were talking about it, it was nothing like contemporary discourse.

By that point, we had lived through approximately fifteen years of women’s and gay liberation, as it was then known. And while the former was both text-based and event-based, the latter was predominantly event-based. For the former, the bestseller, Our Bodies, Ourselves, had been in print for over a decade. Women were urged to take knowledge into their own hands, to know about themselves, and to educate themselves about reproductive rights. In England, Scotland, and Wales, abortion had been legalized in 1967; in Canada, in 1969. The landmark case of Roe vs. Wade legalized abortion in the United States in 1973; abortion would be legalized in France two years later. As laws and mores changed and as the secular weighed ever more heavily on Western societies, sexual liberation and sexual education were accompanied by a production of discourse — both official and non-official — that ranged from the sensation produced by Deep Throat (1972) to open talk about sex clubs, swinging, and the like.

In the gay world, the discourse and behavior of liberation took a different path from the progress narrative of women’s liberation. Despite groundbreaking work by Guy Hocquenghem and others, gay liberation did not have as much of a text-based component as women’s liberation, for it did not arise out of middle-class discursivity, but out of popular action that rapidly metamorphosed into jouissance. While the seventies were breathtakingly reckless for many, we now know that there had been a time bomb ticking since the middle of the decade, ultimately to go off in 1981 with the first reported cases of