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Reconceptualizing Time, Space and Social Relationships: Queer Acts of Resistance by an AIDS Patient in Hervė Guibert's *To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life*

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Although Hervé Guibert's poignant account of his life as an AIDS patient in his 1990 novel with autobiographical elements *To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life* (original French title: *À l'ami qui n'a pas sauvé ma vie*) earned him staggering critical and commercial success in his native France, the novel's highly personal depiction of the AIDS crisis did not please French AIDS crisis activists, who criticized that it favored the author's individual experiences with AIDS rather than documenting the sociopolitical processes that led to its development as a public health crisis disproportionately affecting sex and gender minorities (Caron 114.) However, while it is true that Guibert's novel follows a tradition in French literature and in Guibert's own work to expose the individual dimension of suffering (Caron 118), the novel was still a highly subversive text that allowed the author and, by means of representation, other queer people affected by the AIDS crisis, to comment on and actively challenge the sociopolitical structures that affected them during this crisis. Guibert's novel, in fact, eventually became part of the French AIDS literature canon, which included a diverse group of texts by people with AIDS, many of whom were gay men who boldly challenged the linking of gay sex and promiscuity to disease and social decay and humanized AIDS patients (Clum cited in Poirier 3.) In this essay, I argue that Guibert's novel contributed to the denunciation of the oppression of queer people with AIDS in the late 1980s through its reconceptualizing of three life elements as queer: time, space, and social relationships. In his work, Guibert proposes a different interpretation of these life elements guided by the protagonist's gay identity and AIDS; these reimaginations helped him

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navigate his life before, during, and after the diagnosis, confront the social and medical practices that affected his quality of life, and build a network of support composed of friends and acquaintances, several of whom were also AIDS patients. Although it is true that Guibert's novel ultimately still presents events in the life of a white, cisgender, able-bodied and famous writer, and therefore does not represent the experiences of many less privileged AIDS patients in France in the late 1980s, the novel still presents an unsanitized, sincere account of a gay man who shapes his life and writing to resist AIDS in its multiple manifestations as a public and private health crisis (Caron 113.)

I. Literary AIDS Writing As Resistance

Before delving into the specific ways in which Guibert's novel rethinks time, space and social relationships for queer subjects during the AIDS crisis, it is important to point out how his decision to document his experience with this health condition in a literary format is by itself an act of resistance. Indeed, critics have considered that narrative literature, from an anthropological standpoint, has the power to give meaning and erase the uncertainty of personal and public crises (Libasci 51.) By writing from the perspective of an exceptional witness to the AIDS crisis, Blanckeman states, Guibert is able to put into words the intimate yet collective experience of AIDS, to articulate processes which society had not dared to speak of (28.) Furthermore, Guibert's own biography is an important consideration when talking about the broader sociopolitical significance of his AIDS literature. Blanckeman considers that the fact that Guibert was already a prolific photographer and writer before his diagnosis, one whose main interest was the exploration of the self in relation to the vulnerable other, turned him into the ideal subject to communicate the unconscious and conscious processes and acts of resistance that accompany

being diagnosed with AIDS (28.) Guibert effectively used his platform as an established, if not famous before the publication of his novel, to bring attention to the suffering caused by AIDS; Caron comments that Guibert utilized his appeal as a "young, handsome" embodiment of "romantic ideal of creativity and early death" in order to describe to the general reading public his experience with AIDS beyond the tangible, medical side, but rather contextualized in "universal human concerns with life, love, creation, and death" (112.) Although activists reproached him for the intertwining of universal themes with the AIDS crisis—which certainly affected people through very specific channels—Guibert's novel successfully introduced the AIDS crisis to a contemporary general audience, which was at the time a crucial task as the crisis worsened and the distribution of information and creation of allies became essential strategies to fight against it (Caron 113.) In short, in spite of the shortcomings of his narration, Guibert's literature dealing with his experience with AIDS is credited with giving AIDS a "literary dimension against the dehumanized, non-subjective discourse of medicine and publishers alike" (Schehr 73.)

Even though activists have commented that the structure of Guibert's novel—with its brief, journal-entry-like chapters, first-person narrator and inclusion of celebrities with changed names to hide their identities—does not lend itself to AIDS activism, in reality, these features do contribute to its subversive stance. Although scholars concede that such writing is not as explicit and confrontationally-minded as other prominent pieces of writing about AIDS of the period (Caron 113), these features still have important political implications. The brief, one-hundred journal-entry-like chapters in first-person narration that compose the novel take the reader through an intimate look at the author's life as he deals with AIDS and its physical, social and

emotional repercussions. Hughes insists that this structural choice is not arbitrary, but rather part of an act of resistance: "the resistance that Guibert's *autofiction* proffers, by dint of its play with self-inscription/self-description, is reader-related. It involves a resistance to the disciplinary function of identificatory, evaluative individualization—a function at stake in autobiographical reading" (115.) Furthermore, Cavallo points out that Guibert's serialization of his AIDS literature—*To the Friend* is one of three novels in a series documenting the author's experience with AIDS, with all three sharing characters, situations and spaces—evokes nineteenth-century writer Honoré de Balzac's *La Comédie Humaine* project, which through its interlinked characters and plots sought to document French society (58.) The role of Guibert, by virtue of this analogy, is then to document and expose the effects of AIDS on his life and that of his friends and relatives.

When discussing the characters, many have commented that the inclusion of many of Guibert's famous friends with changed names, such as Michel Foucault and Isabelle Adjani, contributed to both the commercial success and backlash against the novel for divulging private information about his close friends and turning it into gossip (Caron 145-148.) Shortly after publication, many readers commented that the effect of sharing sensitive information about high-profile figures is making the reader uncomfortable (Alos 25), and that commenting on Michel Foucault's private life was at best scandalous and at worst a shameless tactic to publicize the novel (Boulé 1.) To this, Caron has replied that gossip is not necessarily negative, since it allows for liberation and is a queer mode of communication (140-141.) "For Guibert," Caron declares, "the unacceptable scandal is not in his gossipy novels but in the dominant representations of people with AIDS" (145.) Ultimately, Carlson affirms that the novel's

structure, which merges personal narrative with the experimental act of autobiography ought to be valued as a site of critique of the cultural-historical treatment of AIDS in the 1980s, and that it is a shame that critics and the public often view it instead as either plain gossip or literature-as-personal-therapy (29.) Guibert's novel is political because of its structure, not in spite of it; it also notably contributes to a queer defiance of the AIDS crisis through its creative reimagining of time, space and social relationships.

II. Reconceptualizing Time

To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life's structure is not only relevant because it allows for a frank, personal depiction of Guibert's struggles with AIDS, but also because it exemplifies how a queer individual with a terminal illness conceives time differently than his heterosexual counterparts and uses it to his advantage. Before looking at the specific ways in which the text conceptualizes time, it is worth to revisit Jack Halberstam's idea of queer time, which is a highly useful theoretical framework to discuss the novel's plot. Halberstam speaks of queer time as a conception of time among queer people emerging from the AIDS crisis: queer time is "not only about compression and annihilation; it is also about the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing" (2.) Furthermore, Halberstam affirms that "[q]ueer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life existence—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death" (2.)

The notion of queer time is evident in Guibert's novel, starting with the novel's structure. The temporality of the text is not stable: the novel does not follow the progression of an orderly series of events. Rather, its narration moves spontaneously in the past, present and future, which

Blanckeman believes contributes to Guibert's rebellion against an uncertain, compressed future due to his diagnosis (33.) Blanckeman believes that by destroying the integrity of time and instead proceeding the narration by juxtaposing anecdotes that happened at different points in his lifetime, Guibert is questioning the importance of temporality altogether (33.) Boulé comments that this attitude towards time is certainly related to the author's conscious struggle against AIDS, since Guibert starts using changes in his health status and that of his friends and relatives' rather than typical units of time measurements to express temporality (45.) Guibert further interrogates the nature of time by remarking that it seems to have different consequences for different individuals; while the progression of time deteriorates some people's health issues, it ameliorates other people's life conditions (Boulé 45.) Lastly, Casarino has also pointed out that the narrator values coming-into-being over the *productive* realities of being (66.)

Pertinent examples of the protagonist (who like Guibert is also named Hervé Guibert) challenging heteronormative temporality in the novel are plentiful. In addition to the narration that challenges chronological temporality and the novel's journal-like format, there are passages that display the protagonist's tendency to meticulously describe episodes that are not related to the main subject of the novel, his health condition, but rather show an appreciation for what happens in his life a specific moment. Of special interest is a trip he made to Mexico City; like his trips to Japan, Portugal and the island of Elba in Italy, this trip provides him with an opportunity to escape his occupation and responsibilities in Paris and Rome, where he lives, and meet other people. Chapter 21, where he describes an experience in Mexico City, is notable because it is surrounded by two chapters where he narrates his experiences with the medical

establishment. It disrupts an already loose chronology and takes the reader to a lively, puzzling scene in the heart of a new city:

> "J'avais été ébloui, au Teatro colonial, place Garibaldi à Mexico, de voir les hommes se battre pour s'abreuver au sexe des femmes, se hisser de leurs sièges en traction sur leurs bras, après avoir assommé un pote à soi ou un vieux cochon pour qu'ils y renoncent, vers la passerelle ou elles défilaient dans leur pinceau de lumière …."
>
> "... je les buvais des yeux le coeur battant, disparaissant quasiment sous mon siège de crainte d'être élu par une des strip-teaseuses, car pour moi fourrer mon museau dans leur triangle c'était s'évanouir définitivement du monde…" (Guibert 64.)

The vocabulary and syntax of this passage display the narrator's attempt to lose himself in the crowd. The opening sentence, which is also the opening sentence of the chapter, is effectively "J'avais été ébloui" (English translation: I had been dazzled), which indicates the protagonist is intentionally lost in this environment. He goes on to describe the men whistling at and fighting for the women's attention at the theater and insists on his role as a mere observer when he says he "drank" this scene "through his eyes, beating heart," and that he evaded the strippers because to receive attention from them (or, as he expresses it, "for me to stick my nose in their triangle") would lead him to completely evaporate from the world. The entirety of the chapter consists, in fact, of a description of his brief stay at that theater (presumably, a sex club or a venue with shows by exotic dancers). The syntax of this passage and the rest of the chapter is notable because the multiple thoughts are interrupted only by commas, not by periods. The effect of this is showing the reader the mental state of rush of the protagonist, who finds himself enthralled by the lively nightlife of the venue. The content and temporality of this brief description of his stay

at this venue in Mexico City have on the novel are not only a great example of Guibert's tendency to disrupt chronology in his autofiction, but also of how he spontaneously reminds the readers of his rich, unusual life experiences and his need to live, capture and share them in spite of his struggle with AIDS. Another such episode when the protagonist lives in the moment occurs in chapter 52, ironically, shortly after him and his partner Jules are confirmed to be infected:

> Quand il revint de chez l'ophtalmo, Jules m'annonça qu'il n'avait pas de conjonctivite mais un voile blanc sur la cornée, et que ce devrait être une manifestation du sida, il avait peur de perdre la vue, et moi, devant sa panique, sans lui opposer aucun frein, j'etais pret a me dissoudre sur place. Je reattaquai ses tétons, et lui rapidement, mécaniquement, s'agenouilla devant moi, les mains imaginairement liées derrière le dos, pour frotter ses lèvres contre ma braguette, me suppliant par ses gémissements et ses grognements de lui donner ma chair, en délivrance de la meurtrisse que je lui imposait. (Guibert 156.)

In this passage, Jules tells Guibert that the ophthalmologist has determined a recent white spot in his eye could be a sign of AIDS, and could eventually lead to blindness. Guibert attempts to distract Jules by seducing him and having sex with him. His detailed, sensual descriptions of their movements and of the suddenness and inevitability of the act are juxtaposed with the grim diagnosis in the first part of the passage. Furthermore, the last sentence explicitly links the sex scene to an attempt to redeem himself from having infected his partner, as he says Jules begged for his "flesh" to deliver him from the guilt of having sentenced him to death. This passage describes that in the face of adversity, Guibert and his lover choose to continue to live life to the

fullest, even if the physical changes their bodies are going through often represent obstacles for such an enjoyment of life.

In addition to queer time, an additional valuable framework of analysis for the temporality the protagonist experiences and narrates is what Alison Kafer refers to as crip time. As a terminal illness patient, Guibert inevitably conceives time differently than his peers. Although in her book *Feminist, Queer, Crip* Kafer focuses primarily on the altered futurity and atypical conception of time for individuals with disabilities, she acknowledges that her notion could apply to people affected by other health phenomena: "[a]nxiety about aging, for example, can be seen as a symptom of compulsory able-bodiedness/able-mindedness, as can attempts to "treat" children who are slightly shorter than average with growth hormones; in neither case are the people involved necessarily disabled, but they are certainly affected by cultural ideas about normalcy and ideal form and function" (8.) Guibert's AIDS diagnosis, which radically alters his life experience in a physical, social and emotional sense, fits into the framework of health phenomena that turn him into an identifiable Other in the eyes of society. Furthermore, Kafer's definition of crip time as "flex time not just expanded but exploded; [requiring] reimagining our notions of what can and should happen in time, or recognizing how expectations of "how long things take" are based on particular minds and bodies" (27.) The word "particular" refers, of course, to able-bodied and able-minded individuals. Guibert acknowledges he lives a crip temporality when he acknowledges that due to AIDS, he has to adjust his projects to an uncertain temporality. One such project is the writing of the novel itself, which causes him great distress. When he finally finishes it, he inevitably rushes to start writing a new one; he recognizes that he has a finite amount of time to produce art in chapter 78:

> Je finis mon livre le 20 au matin. Je plongeai dans l'après-midi en avalant ces deux gélules bleues que je me refusais à prendre depuis trois mois (...) Le 21 au matin je commençai un autre livre, que j'abandonnai le même jour, suivant le conseil de Matou, qui m'avait dit : "Sinon, tu vas devenir fou, et arrête tout de suite de prendre ce produit, ca m'a l'air d'une sacrée saloperie." Le 22 je me sentis parfaitement bien, mais j'eus de violents maux de tête le 23, et bientôt des nausées, un dégoût pour la nourriture et spécialement pour le vin, qui était jusque-là le principal réconfort de mes soirées. (Guibert 227.)

Passages like this are particularly illustrative of the temporality of AIDS patients like Guibert. He starts by mentioning he finished writing his book, and then hesitates to take two pills which might have secondary effects. The following morning he rushes to start writing again, but soon abandons his new project after his friend Matou advises him to relax and not to take the medication. The next two days show the uncertainty of his condition, as he feels "perfectly well" the 22nd but experiences violent headaches and nausea the 23rd. By exposing the general public to the these inconvenient, specific ways in which AIDS patients' sense of time differs from that of a healthy person, Guibert brings attention to the special needs of this population.

To finalize the analysis of temporality in Guibert's novel, it is worth looking at a passage where Guibert unknowingly describes his particular relationship with time as a queer person, which has only become more complicated as a result of his diagnosis:

> Quand j'avais quinze ans je voulais en avoir vingt, échapper à toutes les attitudes de l'adolescence. L'adolescence est une maladie. Quand je ne travaille pas je redeviens adolescent, et je pourrais aussi devenir criminel. J'adore la jeunesse. Ce moment où l'on

> est en train de devenir homme ou une femme, mais où ça n'a pas complètement basculé. Ce moment dangereux. C'est une vraie tragédie de vouloir rester dans l'enfance. Souffrir du manque d'enfance. On appelle ca "bleeding childhood," une jeunesse qui continue de saigner. (220-221.)

In this passage, Guibert evokes his fascination with youth, a fascination that he finds tragic because it implies a lack of progress beyond this stage of human development. Halberstam in fact talked of these feelings in regard to the link between adolescence and queerness: "in Western cultures, we chart the emergence of the adult from the dangerous and unruly period of adolescence as a desired process of maturation; and we create longevity as the most desirable future, applaud the pursuit of life (under any circumstances), and pathologize modes of living that show little or no concern for longevity" (4.) Indeed, Guibert's anxiety as he deals with two temporalities—queer and crip, respectively—has its origins in society's pathologizing and ostracizing of those who live, either willingly or unwillingly, outside a heteronormative, capitalism-guided temporality. Guibert's multiple approaches to alternative temporalities in his AIDS literature, in the words of Caron, "does away with linearity, this repudiating the idea of a teleological narrative which has framed dominant AIDS discourses" (135.)

III. The Significance of Space

To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life exposes its readers to the particular significance of space for a queer person with AIDS in late 1980s France. According to Hughes, "Guibert's AIDS narrative, in its transcription of its moribund narrator's relationship with Parisian medical spaces of the late twentieth century, echoes sections of Foucault's 1975 essay" *Discipline and Punish* (106), which argues that "[s]patial distribution (the distribution of bodies in

environments, and the disposition of environments themselves) organizes individuals so they become optimally supervisable and useful, and enables masses to be carved up controlled" and "tactical partitioning and enclosure—modes of spatial and human organization that allot individuals to be cellularized, codified places, defuse the threat the plurality poses and permit the 'deficient' (the sick, the mad, the delinquent) to be separated from the normal" (Foucault cited in Hughes 106.) Indeed, it is likely that Guibert intentionally considered aspects of Foucault's theory in his novel, since he was his close friend and even made him one of the main characters in the novel. Hughes affirms that the fact that Guibert utilized Foucault's own biography to prove his theory is not only a homage to his friend, but also "holds a reflexive clue to the resistance [*To the Friend*] mounts against the power-saturated practices its narrator is subjected to in the medical realm" (111.) Indeed, the protagonist's experiences in multiple French and Italian clinics before and after his AIDS diagnosis show the process through which AIDS patients are made into an identifiable Other (Hughes 107.) A scene that demonstrates Guibert's awareness of this process occurs when he and his partner Jules go to get tested after suspecting they were infected:

> Il nous conseilla de faire le test anonyme et gratuit organisé par Médecins du monde, tous les samedis matin, non loin de la statue de Jeanne d'Arc qui s'élève sur le boulevard Saint-Marcel, à l'angle d'une petite rue, la rue Jura, devant laquelle, des mois après, je ne pouvais plus passer, sur le trajet de l'autobus 91 que j'empruntais pour me rendre a mes dîners avec David, sans ressentir aussitôt un frisson intolérable. Le samedi matin de janvier ou nous nous y sommes rendus, Jules et moi, nous fîmes la queue parmi une grand quantité d'Africains et d'Africaines, dans une population très mélangée, de tous les âges, de prostituées, d'homosexuels, et de gens atypiques. (145.)

Guibert's doctor advised him to attend a free testing session offered on Saturdays at a specific location by a non-profit organization. His detailed description of the location and his insistence that approaching it when he rides the bus causes to tremble intolerably demonstrates the emotional trauma associated with that space, since it was there that his experience as a formally diagnosed AIDS patient would begin. Furthermore, he remarks the diversity of the people who get tested at this location: "African men and women," "a very mixed population of all ages," "prostitutes," "homosexuals" and "unusual people." Guibert, like most people during this time, is fully conscious that AIDS disproportionately affects ethnic and gender minorities, sex workers and drug users. Another poignant episode that appropriately demonstrates Guibert's understanding of the spatial confining of AIDS patients is the entirety of chapter 18 which, according to Carlson (25), concedes to the terror caused by the medical establishment when the narrator makes an explicit link between the hospital specialized in treating AIDS and a Holocaust concentration camp:

> "...l'infirmière, quand j'atteignis le seul ilot encore vivant a l'interieur de l'hopital Claude-Bernard qu'on venait d'évacuer et que je traversais désaffecté dans la brume comme un hôpital fantôme du bout du monde, me souvenant de ma visite de Dachau, le dernier îlot anime qui était celui du sida avec ses silhouettes blanches derrière les vitres dépolies…" (Guibert 49-50.)

In addition to the narrator's comparison of his visit to the hospital to his visit to the Dachau concentration camp, he also insists on the hospital's ghastliness when he refers to it as a "ghostly" place in the "middle of the world," a last "animated island" of AIDS with its "white silhouettes behind unpolished glass." The preceding and subsequent descriptions of the hospital

and of Paris, with its crowds, deficient public transportation and cold early January weather contribute to the narrator's crafting of a space that is at once unwelcoming and hard to navigate. Foucault's idea of spatial restriction of subjects like queer people comes to life during the AIDS crisis, when these groups met at locations specifically designed to study the development of AIDS; furthermore, Guibert exposes how queer AIDS patients conceive already existing spaces differently due to their health condition.

Guibert's text, however, ventures beyond a simple description of how society forces AIDS patients into locations specifically conceived to deal with them. It also exposes the manner in which queer people with AIDS resist some of the practices of these establishments that worsen their standard of living. Foucault, once again, provides by virtue of both his theory and biography as told by Guibert in the novel, an example of resistance to the medical gaze (Apter 86.) Apter points out that throughout Guibert's description of Muzil's (Muzil is the name Guibert gives to Foucault in the novel) stay in the hospital during the latest stage of his illness, he refused to engage with the medical establishment by ignoring his formal diagnosis of AIDS (86.) She also believes that Muzil's retilence to acknowledge the medical process is a way for him to rebel against the brutal practices of medical establishments, such as "the oral violation of the subject induced by medical probes and interventions" which Muzil describes as contributing to "the loss of identity in the medical maze" (86.) Caron points out that the denunciation of the abuses of the medical establishment towards AIDS patients is a feature of Guibert's AIDS literature, and that his depictions of such abuses illustrate "how the homosexual body represents a place where the heterosexual subject projects his morbid fantasies in a violent process of domination" (124.)

Through his honest, graphic depictions of invasive medical procedures, Guibert is exposing this process. One such scene is the narrator's description of a typical examination by his doctor:

> "...chaque fois qu'il m'examinait, procédait dans la meme ordre aux memes operations : apres les coutumières prise de tension et auscultation, il inspectait les voutes plantaires et les ecranchures de peau entre les doigts de pied, puis il écartait délicatement l'accès au canal si facilement irritable de l'urètre, alors je lui rappelai, après qu'il m'eut palpe l'aine, le ventre, les aisselles et la gorge sous les maxillaires, qu'il était inutile de me tendre le bâtonnet de bois clair dont ma langue refuse obstinément tout contact depuis que je suis petit.." (19.)

The narrator does not hesitate the describe the medical examination in detail, from the customary blood pressure check to the rather uncomfortable inspection of his feet, including the skin between the toes and the soles, as well as the interior of his urethra and the area surrounding his tongue, which causes him disgust when touched. In her analysis of Guibert's denunciation of the medical gaze in his AIDS literature, Rendell points out that his use of medical vocabulary serves to appropriate medical discourse (43.) Through his frank depictions of medical spaces and procedures, Guibert is exposing its readers to the range of sensations, from mild discomfort to sharp pain, that he experiences during his contact with the medical establishment.

Two more considerations about the novel's conception of space in relation to its queer characters have less to do with the medical establishment and more with attributing a different, non-heteronormative meaning to spaces. The first refers to Muzil's navigation of space before his diagnosis: Carlson insists that the fact that he felt more comfortable in the United States than in France to seek gay bathhouses and participate in other activities with other queer men evinces

the need of queer people to socialize in specific spaces, typically in metropolitan areas (22.) The fact that Muzil had to be conscious of both a place's level of acceptance towards sexual diversity and the possibility of being identified in public reveals the centrality of physical space in the lives of gay men even before the outbreak of the AIDS crisis (22.) In fact, Carlson proposes that Foucault once again inspired Guibert's text through his personal life and theory, as he considers Muzil's search for ideal spaces for socialization with other queer men an example of Foucault's very own notion of a heterotopia, which are spaces that break the traditional layout of space but are primarily accessible to specific communities (23.) Likewise, Guibert's protagonist's life between Paris and Rome, made possible through his occupations as a freelance journalist, novelist and photographer, points towards a different conception of space facilitated by his queerness (Carlson 24.) The protagonist is able to inhabit two spaces due to his flexible occupations and his lack of a nuclear family to care for. Furthermore, Carlson considers that the protagonist shows the queer aspects of the places he lives in or visits, such as the Vatican, which he exposes as home to a thriving yet hidden gay male community (24.) Considering the cruciality of space for both queer people and AIDS patients leads to the third category of analysis of this essay: social relationships. Like temporality and physical space, social relationships function differently for the protagonist and main characters of Guibert's novel due to their queerness and health conditions.

IV. Rethinking Social Relationships

Before citing specific sections that prove Guibert's representation of social relationships, and particularly friendships, deviate from the heteronormative model, it is important to understand why friendship was different for queer subjects even before the AIDS crisis. Foucault

declared in an interview that "[h]omosexuality is a historical opportunity to open up new relational and affective potentialities, not in virtue of qualities intrinsic to the homosexual, but because *the position of the homosexual 'off-center,'* somehow, together with the diagonal lines which the homosexual can draw through the social fabric, makes it possible to bring to light these potentialities" (cited in Halperin 67.) The potential for homosexual friendships that Foucault refers to become even stronger during the AIDS crisis when, according to Roach, new social bonds derived from a shared estrangement caused by AIDS developed (2.) Although Guibert's novel certainly acknowledges gay activism, it is through the description of his social relationships that readers can more easily discern the peculiarity of these relationships for gay men with AIDS.

Even though not all his social relationships follow the model of shared estrangement conceived by Roach, the ones that can be explained by it have been the object of detailed analyses. Guibert's friendship with Muzil is, of course, highly prominent as an example of a friendship between two gay men strengthened by their AIDS diagnosis. Gignoux remarks that the particularity of Guibert and Muzil's friendship lies in the fact that Muzil is older and wiser, and therefore a role model for Guibert; furthermore, Muzil experiences the physical, social and emotional consequences of AIDS right before Guibert (396-397.) Guibert and Muzil's close relationship, additionally, reflects Foucault's own ideas about gay relationships in his *History of Sexuality* series, where he proposes the mentoring element of the Greek model of gay friendship as an alternative in Western history to models of friendships and relationships derived from Christian and later capitalist models (Roach 48.) Another relationship of importance in the novel is that of Guibert and his partner Jules, who is also partner to a woman named Berthe and father

of her two children. The fact that Guibert, Jules and Berthe agree to this non-monogamous relationship is indicative of an openness to relationship models that challenge the nuclear family. It is notable, moreover, that the AIDS diagnosis does not provoke a rupture in their relationship but rather mutual solidarity. Guibert describes the link created by the diagnosis as follows:

> Le lendemain de ce soir de détresse où les larmes m'avaient refusé leur douceur, Jules me dit au téléphone qu'il avait bien réfléchi, et que faire le teste a Berthe serait un suicide, qu'il fallait pour tous les moyens, lui et moi, l'empêcher de faire ce test ; en évoquant le destin soudain affreusement soude de ses deux enfants, de Berthe, lui et moi, il nous surnomme le Club des 5. Le surlendemain j'étais passé diner chez eux, mal fichue Berthe était dans son lit avec un livre et un peu de fièvre, j'étais monté la voir, elle m'avait souri très doucement : chacun savait que l'autre savait mais nous n'en parlions pas. (154.)

In this scene, Jules confesses to Guibert that he is afraid of having infected Berthe, and that would rather tell her not to take an HIV test. Jules refers to the group composed by himself, Guibert, Berthe and their two children as "Club of the 5," indicating the solidarity created by their AIDS status. Moreover, the fact that Guibert says he went to dine at their home and observed an ill Berthe, who smiled at him and implicitly recognized her diagnosis indicates that there is no resentment on any side in regards to the transmission of the virus. Guibert, Jules and Berthe still remain friends and lovers in spite, or, indeed because of, their diagnosis. Ultimately, Guibert's particular relationships with Muzil and Jules prove that, as Roach says, "in the face of AIDS he forced to reconceptualize the friend and the self" (55.) As a gay subject with AIDS, "Guibert-the-protagonist becomes a philosopher of new relational and communal forms" (Roach

56) as he "grapples with the classical understanding of thought as friend and ultimately attempts to conceptualize a new friendship in the face of AIDS" (Roach 61.)

Lastly, although the novel's main focus is certainly not AIDS or gay rights activism, Guibert does concede in his narrative that the AIDS crisis could help mobilize those affected by it. Although the existence sex and gender minorities organizations whose functions included "assuring the survival and well-being of their members" certainly predates the AIDS crisis (McWhorter 89), scholars concede that the AIDS crisis encouraged new forms of solidarity in queer communities (Carlson 26.) Indeed, because the AIDS crisis threatened not only people's health but also the progress made in the acceptance of sex and gender minorities, it helped mobilize queer individuals who perhaps were not engaged in activism before (Sadownick 146.) In the novel, it is Muzil who points out the potential for AIDS to mobilize sex and gender minorities:

> Détrompe-toi, répondit-il, il n'y a au contraire autant du monde dans les saunas, et c'est devenu extraordinaire. Cette menace qui flotte a créé de nouvelles complicités, de nouvelles tendresses, de nouvelles solidarités, Avant on n'échangeait jamais une parole, maintenant on se parle. Chacun sait très précisément pourquoi il est la. (Guibert 30.)

Muzil's remark that the "threat that floats" has created "new complicities, new tenderness, new solidarity," and that it has motivated queer people to talk to each other demonstrates his awareness that the AIDS crisis has propelled activism and affinity among queer people. Furthermore, the novel briefly talks about the fate of Muzil's partner Stéphane after Muzil's death. Stéphane joins the local chapter of an AIDS non-profit organization whose function is to educate and guide patients. Although the protagonist himself does not mention engaging with

similar organizations, the act of writing of literature about AIDS could be seen as a contribution to the cause, as it helps raise awareness of the processes AIDS patients deal with. Guibert's acknowledgement within the novel of the writing process is a nod to the critical importance of creating reading materials about his experiences with AIDS.

V. Conclusions

Although the criticism expressed towards Guibert's AIDS literature, and specifically his novel *To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life*, brings attention to the need to portray AIDS in its broader sociopolitical context, the text is still highly valuable not only as a document that documents the experience of a gay man who dealt with AIDS in late 1980s France, but also as one that through its portrayal of alternative understandings of time, physical space, medical practices and social relationships demonstrates that even a seemingly non-politically minded subject like Guibert, with his highly introspective literary productions, participated in the critique of a society that allowed the AIDS crisis to develop and disproportionately affect sex and gender minorities. Guibert's novel does not explore all the dimensions of the AIDS crisis, and certainly does not manage to capture all the intersecting systems that allowed it to spread in France and elsewhere, but it still resists its advances while dealing with broader, universal themes. Ultimately, AIDS writing, literary or otherwise, is inherently political because it represents and suggests possibilities for marginalized communities. In this context, *To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life* played a crucial role in depicting the hardship of the AIDS crisis in Europe.

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