

'Your HIV--positive sperm, my trans--dyke uterus':

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**Your HIV-positive sperm, my trans-dyke uterus: anti/futurity and the politics of
bareback sex between Guillaume Dustan and Beatriz Preciado**

Abstract

Contemporary queer theorist Beatriz Preciado's hypothetical bareback encounter with her friend and former editor, the HIV-positive writer Guillaume Dustan, explores her own understanding of the origins of queer politics in the AIDS crisis. Dustan's 'insurrectional' writing, particularly his views on bareback sex, made him party to a bitter feud with anti-AIDS group Act Up Paris. I consider what is at stake in Preciado's eventual refusal of such an encounter with Dustan before his death, her understanding of Dustan's queer politics as a 'path of death', and finally the influence of these ideas on notions of futurity in Preciado's own thought.

Keywords

Trans theory/politics, queer theory/politics, bareback sex, Beatriz Preciado, Guillaume Dustan

Your HIV-positive sperm, my trans-dyke uterus: anti/futurity and the politics of bareback sex between Guillaume Dustan and Beatriz Preciado¹

This article considers how barebacking has been understood by queer theorists in France, how it has affected queer theory and how it might be understood in the context of queer activism around HIV during the AIDS crisis in France. The dramatic feud between author Guillaume Dustan and the Paris chapter of Act Up played a large part in shaping the political and theoretical arguments around bareback in France. The effect of this discourse on later queer writers in France will be examined. In particular, the article asks how Dustan's attitudes to his own HIV-positive status and the discourse around prevention have been understood by trans activist and queer theorist Beatriz Preciado, one of the few writers in France currently working on queer theory. Preciado recorded her response to Dustan's death in 2005 from a drug overdose in *Testo Junkie* (2008), in which she recalls their final encounters and the rift in their politics. Preciado understands Dustan's queer politics as originating in the midst of the AIDS crisis in France and as grounded in a time when queer entailed a proximity to death; she accordingly links Dustan's queer politics in some way to his serostatus. Examining attitudes toward bareback sex and HIV can shed light on the notion of queer and how it is theorised in France today; indeed the discourses around the two may feed off each other, in a symbiotic relationship which Preciado explores under the term 'autofeedback'. Finally, the article explores the impact of ideas around bareback and HIV on notions of futurity in Preciado's queer thought.

Guillaume Dustan, formerly William Baranès, took up writing after he learned of his HIV-positive status in 1989. After the publication of his first novel, *Dans ma*

chambre [*In My Bedroom*], in 1996, Baranès changed his name to Dustan and abandoned his legal career to focus on writing. In terms of genre, Dustan's writing could be broadly classed as *autofiction*: his are novels heavily, but often ambiguously, informed by autobiographical detail.² Dustan's works are often characterised by lengthy descriptions of sex and drug use, set to a soundtrack of the pop and techno music played at the gay clubs he frequented. Later works, such as *Nicolas Pages* (1999) [*Nicolas Pages*], for which Dustan won the Prix de Flore,³ occasionally concern themselves with politics and, to a certain extent, with theory. Dustan was also the editor of the series *Le Rayon Gay* [*Gay Sphere*], the first specifically LGBT collection to be published in France, by Éditions Balland.⁴ Beatriz Preciado has referred to Dustan as an 'idol, and the ultimate French representative of a form of sexual insurrection through writing' (Preciado, 2008: 11); indeed, Dustan's portrayal of extreme sexuality in his works places him in a long line of French insurrectional writers from the Marquis de Sade through to Rimbaud, Baudelaire and beyond, writers who have used depictions of sexuality in their works to resist established political or moral codes. Guillaume Dustan's publicly expressed views on bareback and the ensuing statements released by Act Up's Paris chapter (in particular by one of its founders, the journalist Didier Lestrade) made for a spectacularly bitter feud. Act Up (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) initially formed in 1987 as a direct action group in New York in response to the AIDS crisis.⁵ A Paris chapter of Act Up was set up two years later and adopted a similar model of using visually engaging actions or 'zaps' to bring media attention to HIV/AIDS,⁶ whereas other groups, such as AIDES, focused on providing support and raising funds for research.⁷ Numerous articles can still be found on the Act Up Paris website responding to Dustan's statements about HIV (its treatment and epidemiology), as well as about barebacking, *serosorting* and the use of condoms.⁸

Lestrade described his relationship with Dustan, if one can call it that, as ‘a fundamental hatred, one of the most powerful that I had the capacity to feel during my twelve years within Act Up’ (Lestrade, 2001).⁹ Their feud never eased, with Act Up even going so far as to publish an article entitled ‘Oublier Dustan’ (Act Up Paris, 2005) [‘Forgetting Dustan’] on his death in 2005.

Dustan expressed his views in writing, in his novels and in articles for the national press, in television appearances and also in person, at the ‘Assemblée Générale des Pédés’ [‘General Assembly of Fags’] called by Act Up Paris in November 2000, the minutes of which are available online (Act Up Paris, 2000). Dustan attended this meeting with Erik Rémès, another figure detested by Act Up Paris because of his writings on bareback, notably in the autofictional novels *Je bande donc je suis* (1999) [*I Get Hard Therefore I Am*] and *Serial Fucker: Journal d’un barebacker* (2003) [*Serial Fucker: Diary of a Barebacker*]. A ‘definition’ of bareback is included at the beginning of the minutes of this General Assembly, presumably agreed on by Act Up members present: ‘Bareback is an ideology of taking risks, the promotion of risky sex’ (Act Up Paris, 2000: 3). I believe this conception of barebacking gives valuable insight into the attitude of Act Up towards Dustan; bareback is not described as a practice, or behaviour, but as an ideology. What is more, it is not self-contained but constitutes an incitement to others: bareback is the ‘promotion’ of an ideology.

In an article for the national newspaper *Libération*, Dustan had supported serosorting as a method of risk reduction rather than solely focusing on the use of condoms as ‘the only realistic position in terms of prevention’ (Dustan, 2000). For this his views were deemed by Act Up to be ‘inept, reactionary, dangerous, criminal and discriminatory’ (Act Up Paris, 2005). Act Up was vehemently opposed to such strategies of risk reduction, supporting condom use and its promotion as the sole means of HIV

prevention. Dustan claimed that Act Up was guilty of oppressing the gay community by imposing its strict narrative of safe sex (that is, condom use) and attacked Lestrade for referring to those who were HIV-positive as ‘grenades ambulantes’ [‘walking grenades’] (Dustan, 2001: 137). Illustrating his point with the rather unsubtle ‘example’ of Jews who were supposedly complicit with the Nazis and enabled their policies during the holocaust, Dustan (who was Jewish) wrote: ‘In the camps, the Jews were the best *kapos*, the most relentless’ (Dustan, 2001: 137–138).¹⁰ Dustan also referred to Act Up as ‘Vichy’ (Dustan, 2001: 137), echoing the description of anti-HIV activists by some barebackers in the USA as ‘condom Nazis’ (Dean, 2009: 63). For their part, Act Up accused Dustan of being fundamentally destructive and of using the same arguments as the religious right in his opposition to the use of condoms; they accused him of claiming, at the General Assembly, that sex without condoms is more ‘natural’ (Act Up Paris, 2005). Dustan could certainly be described as a ‘provocateur’, as he was in an article written for Act Up in 2001 (Rouilly and De Luna: 2001), an irritating queer Socratic gadfly. No stranger to controversy, Dustan made few pretences of respectability; he appeared on French television to discuss his views dressed in a gold leather suit and blonde wig, clutching a golden skull (INA, 2001).

Dustan was accused of hiding behind his genre – autofiction – to absolve himself of responsibility for the transitive effects that his writing about bareback sex might have, writing which Act Up claimed would ‘incite’ others to fuck without condoms (Constantino and Héraud, 2001). Other authors of autofiction, such as Christine Angot, have shrugged off any questioning of controversial statements in their work by attributing them to the narrator (statements regarding incest and homophobia, in the case of Angot) and by asserting the difference between this narrator and themselves as authors.¹¹ While Erik Rémès responded through his blog to Act Up’s charge of irre-

sponsibility levelled against his own autofictional writing on bareback with a rather weak denial of the potential transitivity of writing – ‘As far as I know, literature has not yet killed anyone’ (Best and Crowley, 2007: 108) – Dustan’s stance, articulated in his article for *Libération* and repeated in television appearances, was simply that he had no responsibility to anyone other than himself: ‘we are responsible for ourselves, not for others’ (Dustan, 2000). This individualism was met by Act Up with assertions of the importance of community and solidarity: ‘The AIDS epidemic has shown us the necessity of collective responsibility and communitarian solidarity. For them (Dustan and Rémès) our community is secondary to their individual freedom’ (Act Up Paris, 2001). Dustan is understood by Act Up to be espousing a kind of neo-libertinage in which he puts himself before the community. Dustan’s alleged individualism, what was seen as his dismissal of community and solidarity, was even perceived as a kind of Anglo-American neo-liberalism (an accusation from which Dustan did little to defend himself, delighting in consumerism with references to American or British brands and song lyrics in his works). The discourse of Act Up is particularly intriguing when understood in the context of French political discourse around communitarianism, the Republican rejection of which had painted sexuality and thus HIV as a ‘private matter’; this antipathy towards identity politics had unquestionably delayed the socialist government in providing funding for research and targeted information campaigns directed specifically at men who sleep with men.¹²

In 2011, Act Up Paris pulled out of a conference on the nature of the theoretical discourse surrounding HIV activism in France, including discussions of bareback, on account of a text written by Beatriz Preciado in which she wrote about ‘the tensions between the imposition of condom use and bareback sex’ (Preciado, 2011), objecting to her use of the term ‘impose.’ Act Up criticised the terms in which Preciado

framed the feud between its members and Dustan, which she characterised as a conflict,

[...] between prophylaxis and seropride, between the criminalisation of contamination and a radical defence of ‘sexual freedom’, between responsibility and resistance. (Preciado, 2011)

She was also criticised for theorising about an illness, for abstracting something very real into what they saw as meaningless metaphor; the author of the Act Up article writes: ‘AIDS is not a metaphor for learning philosophy, to be used in place of a “concept”’ (Act Up Paris, 2011). While it is vital that the realities of HIV and barebacking are not ignored, surely this criticism cannot extend to any discussion of how the discourse of queer theory has been shaped by the discourse around barebacking and HIV, and vice versa. As I will show later, for Preciado the roots of queer activism lie in the response to the AIDS crisis, from the political anger as well as the personal grief that it caused. I want to consider how, through her written account of her relationship to Dustan and to his politics, Preciado sees HIV and bareback as affecting queer theory, what this has meant for queer and how that may now be changing.

Beatriz Preciado is a queer and trans theorist and author of *Manifeste contra-sexuel* (2000) [*Contra-sexual Manifesto*], which was edited by Guillaume Dustan and included in his Rayon Gay series. Preciado was born in Spain and studied with Jacques Derrida at the New School for Social Research in New York before moving to Paris, where she currently teaches Gender Studies and Political History of the Body at Paris 8–Saint Denis. Preciado writes in English, Spanish and French and translated the original Spanish text of *Testo Junkie* into French herself; the French text was published by Grasset in 2008. *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs and Biopolitics* gives an account of the relationship between Dustan and Preciado; indeed, the whole text is haunted by his recent death and dedicated to ‘William’ (Preciado, 2008: 7), who one must assume

to be Dustan referred to by his previous name. *Testo Junkie* is impossible to define neatly, comprised as it is of almost four hundred pages of philosophy and narrative. It recounts Preciado's experience of her body as she begins to take the androgen testosterone, administered in the form of a topical gel absorbed through her skin and into her bloodstream. Influenced by Michel Foucault's theory of biopower, Judith Butler's performativity and Donna Haraway's cyborg theory amongst others, *Testo Junkie* is a genealogy of what Preciado sees as the two 'pillars supporting contemporary biocapitalism' (Preciado, 2008: 48), the pharmaceutical and the pornographic industries. Theoretical discussions are linked to her own experiences through narrative sections and, in this way, the book is concerned with the effects of discourses and technologies on bodies, but also, reflexively, with the ways in which bodies affect theories and technologies in a continuous process, a symbiotic relationship which Preciado terms 'autofeed-back' ['autofeedback'] (Preciado, 2008: 33). Preciado develops this idea through her concept of 'autothéorie' ['autotheory'] (Preciado, 2008: 11), a process of utilising one's own body to explore and create theory, which she puts into practice through her ingestion of testosterone. Such considerations about the reflexivity between bodies and discourses are pertinent to the interactions between bareback sex and its discourses, particularly within queer theory and politics. I would argue that Preciado's concept of autofeedback informs her reading of queer's origins, of the concept and practice of bareback and of the way this has affected queer theory; in particular, how the development of antiretrovirals might affect a body of theory such as queer, as well as individual bodies.

Although Preciado never brings herself to tell Dustan that she has started to take testosterone – which is, in many ways, the central premise of the book – she claims that he was 'the only person who could read this book' (Preciado, 2008: 19).

Two factors, the reader is told, have influenced this account of her beginning to take testosterone: the death of Dustan and the start of her relationship with the writer and film producer Virginie Despentes, author of *Baise-moi* [*Fuck me*] (1993).

Throughout the book, Dustan is evoked and addressed in the *tu* form – ‘c’est toi’, ‘ton fantome’, ‘ton esprit’ [‘it’s you’, ‘your ghost’, ‘your spirit’] (Preciado, 2008: 15–17). In the opening chapter, entitled ‘Ta mort’ [‘Your death’], Preciado channels Dustan’s writing style and enacts a kind of auto-pornographic ritual dedicated to him and performed in his image, in drag, complete with his ‘moustache de pédé’ [‘gay guy’s moustache’] (Preciado, 2008: 18). When Preciado describes the action of her performance, or ritual, almost every sentence begins with the first-person pronoun *je*: ‘Je plie [...] Je me fais [...] J’ouvre [...] Je prends [...] Je me regarde’ [‘I fold [...] I make myself [...] I open [...] I take [...] I see myself’] (Preciado, 2008: 18), echoing Dustan’s own writing style in the insistent use of the first person pronoun and corresponding verb-forms, often in the present tense, in its simple sentence structure, in the lack or absence of any punctuation and in the lengthy descriptions of masturbation and dildos. The list of prostheses in Preciado’s opening chapter, complete with the exact dimensions of the ‘godes’ [‘dildos’] she is going to use (anally) appear in exactly the same format – ‘24 x 4,’ ‘25 x 6,’ ‘14 x 2’ (Preciado, 2008: 17) – as they do in Dustan’s first novel, *Dans ma chambre*, a text which she describes as physically present in her ritual and which is read aloud by her during the scene. In essence, Preciado tries to summon him, his writing and his spirit:

Reincarnate yourself in me, possess my tongue [...] inhabit me, live through me. Come. Come. Please don't leave. Come back to life. Come back to life. Hold on to my sex. Low, down, dirty. Stay with me. (Preciado, 2008: 20)¹³

These lines are not simply a supplication for Dustan's ghost to return, through this ritual involving his text and her body; they are undeniably sexual – her invitation to inhabit her, and in particular to 'come', is surely not singular in meaning.

Eventually, however, Preciado tells us that she cannot carry on Dustan's legacy, that it is impossible:

this book has no other reason to be, outside of the space of uncertainty which exists between [...] living-you and dead-you, between my desire to carry your line and the impossibility of reviving your sperm. (Preciado, 2008: 20)

The slippage contained in Preciado's reference to lineage is key here and accounts, in part, for the uncertainty she describes. In some ways she wants to continue Dustan's cultural, political and textual lineage, but she says that she cannot, making specific reference to his sperm, his serostatus and to biological lineage. I want to explore what Preciado means here and how this sheds light on her views on bareback in its relation to queer by considering an anecdote that Preciado recounts later on in *Testo Junkie*.

Midway through the text Preciado recounts her final interactions with Dustan before his death. He and Preciado imagine creating a baby from her ovum as a testosterone-administering trans dyke and his HIV-infected sperm. The process of IVF will be expensive, Dustan notes, particularly since they will have to find some way of filtering his sperm so that only the healthy cells remain.¹⁴ He decides they will apply for funding from an arts council – the Centre national du Livre [National Publishing Centre] – under the pretence of writing a 'political autofiction' (Preciado, 2008: 191) around their experience. It is Dustan who suggests they should filter his sperm, using only the healthy cells; yet, despite this, Preciado knows that Dustan cannot forgive her rejection of his 'sperme malade' ['diseased sperm']:

I know you hate me for considering the possibility of filtration, even if it was you who insisted that we did it that way. You hate me because I am incapable of wanting this unhealthy sperm, just as it is; of jerking you off right there and then so that I could put your contaminated sperm in my cunt; you hate me because, like you, I am scared of death. (Preciado, 2008: 191)

Preciado's words recall her statement from the opening chapter, cited earlier; the text reveals a tension between her desire to continue Dustan's lineage and the impossibility 'of reviving (his) sperm'. Here again she talks of impossibility; she is incapable of desiring his HIV-infected sperm.

This potential bareback encounter is certainly unusual; the imagined process of *in vitro* fertilisation is in a sense not an intimate exchange and, while reproductive, it is not exactly a sexual encounter, envisaged as it is taking place outside of their bodies by *in vitro* fertilisation, prior to transfer back into Preciado's body.¹⁵ Yet, as in the previous citation, Preciado does also imagine a more direct exchange between the two ('jerking you off right there and then'), and the prospect of sex between her and Dustan should not be considered implausible because of either's assumed sexual preferences – on the contrary, as I suggested earlier, there is an undeniable sexual tension between them throughout the text: Dustan tells Preciado he masturbated over her previous work, *Manifeste contra-sexuel* (Preciado, 2008: 367) and Preciado appears with him in a scene in a Keller backroom, in which he licks her nose and traces the outline of a penis on her chest (Preciado, 2008: 370). But what does Preciado's refusal of even an imagined (if unusual) bareback encounter signify? Why, when earlier Preciado pleaded for a reproductive bareback encounter with Dustan, repeatedly calling him to 'come', does she eventually refuse it? I want to consider these questions, which eventually bear upon what queer means for Preciado, how it relates to HIV/AIDS and what Dustan's attitude to bareback means for her.

After Dustan's fatal overdose, Preciado feels suicidal, homicidal and generally closer to death herself. She comes to understand better his attitudes towards death and the spread of HIV:

I wavered between suicide, becoming a serial killer, dedicating my life to the moral development of the human race, changing it, or founding a militant army of transfeminists whose mission would be to take out anyone who opposed them... Little by little, I learnt to appreciate your idea of seropositive contamination [...] the 'punk' destiny of our species. (Preciado, 2008: 196)

For Preciado, a queer politics or attitude which originated in the AIDS crisis in France bears the marks of a time when queer entailed a closeness to death. Indeed, the specificity of the French context should not be ignored: incidence of HIV in France was three times higher than the level in the UK, a country with a comparable population (Boulé, 2002: 11). These roots of queer now seem distant, however:

The nineties seem so far away. It was a different time. We were close to death, it had enchainned us with its viral lace [...] Queer politics as you [Dustan] understood it was nothing other than a preparation for death: the path of death (Preciado, 2008: 369)

The forms of queer politics which emerged in the nineties are immersed in death, inextricable from it and even a preparation for one's own death. Preciado goes as far as to say that it was Dustan's HIV-positive status, or his being situated in the midst of the crisis and surrounded by the death of others, which allowed him to write, 'allowed [him] to take the venom of writing' (Preciado, 2008: 370); indeed, Dustan only began to publish works after learning of his serostatus. Dustan comes to symbolise for Preciado the 'attitude' at the roots of queer. Preciado sees Dustan's queer politics as inextricable from his serostatus and from HIV more broadly. Tim Dean's discussion both of barebackers' use of metaphors of HIV transmission as filiation and of cultural transmission (the sustaining of a culture through the material embodiment of that cul-

ture) seems strikingly relevant here (Dean, 2009). Dustan's form of queer politics is symbolised by his HIV-positive sperm; Preciado's reluctance to reproduce with him in a biological sense is thus linked to her reluctance to reproduce his politics and, indeed, her references to lineage slip between the literary and biological resonances of the term. Preciado metaphorises her reluctance to take on Dustan's political views as reluctance to fuck with him, or to use his HIV-positive sperm to reproduce.

This conception of the founding moment of queer as immersed in the AIDS crisis (that is, the AIDS crisis in the West, among communities of gay men before the development of antiretrovirals, to qualify the term) almost begs the question of what queer can mean after it. Preciado argues that the introduction of antiretrovirals, the increase in the presence of HIV prevention and research campaigns, and the red ribbons that are used globally on World AIDS Day have allowed people to forget about the enveloping death which inaugurated queer politics. As a consequence, for Preciado, queer politics is dead: 'Queer politics has died along with those who initiated it, those who succumbed to the virus. Like you.' (Preciado, 2008: 369). Preciado's theory of autofeedback, the symbiotic relationship between theories and bodies, or between biocapitalism and politics, is put to use here. Her term 'pharmacopouvoir' ['pharmacopower'] (Preciado, 2008: 138), an extension of Foucault's 'biopouvoir' ['biopower'] (1998) intended to describe the regulatory effects of the pharmaceutical industry on bodies under capitalism, is especially relevant to a characterisation of the interaction between one particular development in HIV medication and those bodies who have access to it, and conversely how this relates back, in turn, to political or theoretical discourse. With the development of antiretrovirals, the landscape of queer has changed; queer as it was originally conceived is dead.

Preciado certainly feels an affinity for this initial moment in queer politics, as for those who are dead. There is a temptation to join them, or to embrace a politics surrounded by death:

You are all dead, now. Amelia, Hervé, Michel, Karen, Jackie, Teo and You. Am I better off in your world, rather than that of the living? My politics; aren't they yours [...]? (Preciado, 2008: 19)

These are all particularly French queer figures – some more obvious and others perhaps more ambiguous. Hervé Guibert and Michel Foucault both died of AIDS-related illnesses. ‘Jackie’ refers to Jacques Derrida, who died as a result of pancreatic cancer in 2004. ‘Karen’ is Karen Lancaume, the porn actress who starred in Desportes’ film adaptation of her novel *Baise-moi* and who killed herself some time after its release in 2000; that film symbolises, for Preciado, the birth of queer activism in Europe and an ‘intravenous terrorism of gender, class and race’ (Preciado, 2008: 78).

For Preciado, Dustan’s views on his serostatus and his refusal to take responsibility for others are decidedly antisocial and anti-future – Dustan becomes the figurehead of a queer politics that Preciado sees as a ‘path of death’. Perhaps ultimately Preciado’s understanding of Dustan is not so different from Lestrade’s, who wrote that, for Dustan, ‘destruction is glorious’ (Lestrade, 2001), even if Lestrade saw Dustan’s stance as contrary and insincere. While Preciado does not simply categorise Dustan’s views on bareback as ideology rather than as behaviour in the same way that Act Up did, she certainly understands them as entwined with ideology, inseparable from it. Ultimately, while attracted to the politics Dustan represents, Preciado eventually rejects them, mourning their loss as she mourns Dustan himself. In the final chapter recalling Dustan’s funeral, Preciado addresses him thus:

If you were still alive, you would surely hate us, me and V.D., with a hatred hot and silky like the skin of a dick that won't get hard, because you would know that me and her together are like the start of the revolution. That's why you would mourn for the heroism you carried in your testes and choose us to become sacred wolves, to carry your seropositive descendence. (Preciado, 2008: 378)¹⁶

Her refusal to accept Dustan's notion of what queer entails results in the rift between them: she cannot accept death, she cannot carry on his line in the sense that she cannot accept his ideas and, materially, she cannot take on his serostatus. To continue his political lineage would be to sacrifice herself, to accept death. Again recalling Tim Dean's writing on bareback as cultural transmission (2009), Preciado here feels she is being asked by Dustan to literally *embody* a culture through HIV transmission, an embodiment she sees as a sacrifice – as painful or even fatal – despite her somewhat contradictory acknowledgment of the successes of antiretroviral treatments, which of course now mean that contracting HIV need no longer be a death sentence. However, what Preciado chooses instead are notions of futurity and community contained within her reference to revolution. Her partnership with Despentès is textually reproductive, rather than biologically so. The two have collaborated on a number of texts together: Preciado translated Despentès' *King Kong Théorie* (2006) [*King Kong Theory*] into Spanish and their broader collaboration is evident even in *Testo Junkie* (Preciado, 2008: 378). Preciado's relationship with Despentès coincides with the death of Dustan: 'your funeral [Dustan's] is our marriage [that of Preciado and Despentès]' (Preciado, 2008: 378), she writes. Preciado's choice of futurity involves a break with Dustan and the politics he espouses, a politics she sees as somehow entrenched in his serostatus, or at least what his serostatus comes to symbolise for her.

Preciado approaches Dustan's understanding of his own HIV and the possibility of infecting others as inseparable from his understanding of queer as a kind of 'punk' politics (Preciado, 2008: 296-8). How far we have entered the realm of meta-

phor, how far Dustan, his serostatus and his views on bareback come to be symbolic and how far we are grounded in reality (as Preciado saw it) becomes unclear. Preciado's discussion of HIV and bareback wavers between the literal and the metaphorical, perhaps problematically so. How far has Dustan simply become a foil for Preciado to react against, to position a new politics against? Moreover, is Preciado's troping of HIV specific to Dustan's conception of it and what it meant to him, or does she generalise the psychologies of all those who found themselves in the midst of the AIDS crisis, surrounded by the deaths of others and the presence of the possibility of their own deaths? It is not clear whether Preciado's reluctance to faithfully reproduce the kind of 'punk' queer politics of nihilism, or hedonism, that Dustan represents for her – what she elsewhere refers to as 'la politique snuff' ['snuff politics'] (Preciado, 2008: 298) – actually relates to his HIV status and the potential danger of a bareback encounter. This tendency to metaphorise queer as a virus, and a virus as a political stance, leaves Preciado open to the accusations levelled against her previously by Act Up (2011) of philosophising and metaphorising a virus, to the extent that the reality of it is left behind. That said, Dustan himself was perfectly willing to talk about the ideologies associated with HIV and bareback, writing that: 'condoms [...] can protect one from much more than a virus' (Dustan, 2000). Here Dustan argued that condoms can protect not only from the HIV virus but from the very idea of sex and sexuality that HIV could represent (claims which, of course, further infuriated Act Up Paris). Yet the issue at stake remains whether or not queer was simply a product of its time: is queer a specific reaction to a traumatic event in the (recent) past, or is it more far-reaching and versatile – a mutable and context-specific standpoint of resistance to dogma, to the established or the mainstream? Was queer really so fleeting; is queer dead? Or is it, rather, more amorphous than the 'path of death' embodied by the figure of Dustan?

Attempts by other queer theorists to introduce the discipline into the French context have pointed to a shifting, flexible understanding of queer, asking not what it is but ‘what it could be in France...?’ (Bourcier, 1998: 56). As *Q comme Queer* [*Q like Queer*] (compiled by Marie-Hélène Bourcier in 1998) argues, queer must respond to context: queer anti-assimilationism and anti-universalism will mean very different things in France than they will in the US or the UK; if queer is concerned with challenging hegemonic or normative ideals, a ‘Queer made in France’ (Bourcier, 1998: 9) must acknowledge the issues of French Republican universalism, anti-Arab racism and a politically mainstream and successful far-right and address them (Bourcier, 1998: 94–96). As for Preciado, her attitude towards Dustan and her dilemma over whether or not to ‘reproduce’ his politics, echoes the larger tension in queer theory between futurity and antifuturity. Situating herself within this debate, Preciado is clear that she must choose collective politics invested in futurity over the antifuturist stance symbolised for her by Dustan, which she finds untenable. While she does not cite Lee Edelman’s startling intervention into queer theory from 2004, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* – perhaps the culmination of antifuturist tendencies in queer theory – nor his spat with Judith Butler over her reading of the myth of Antigone (Butler, 2000), the language and symbolism of Preciado’s final scene in *Testo Junkie* is highly evocative of this myth, with its opposing themes of marriage and burial. Preciado writes of burying, on the morning of his funeral, the recording she has made of her ritual in Dustan’s image in a match box with his name written repeatedly on it (Preciado, 2008: 378). Preciado is clear in her choice: a (textually) reproductive marriage with Despentès over Dustan’s burial – ‘la révolution en marche’. In this scene, Preciado again emphasises that Dustan’s ‘snuff politics’ are inseparable from his sexuality, referring to his coffin as ‘the ultimate sling, in which you’ll let yourself get

fucked in the ass for all eternity' (Preciado, 2008: 377). Yet she also implies that without Dustan, her union with Despentés symbolising 'the start of the revolution' could not take place: 'you [Dustan] and no one but you, could be the officiating spectre, confirming [...] an alliance between your death and our love' (Preciado, 2008: 378). Perhaps without Dustan, and without the politics he represents, Preciado's revolution could not be imagined in quite the same way.

In *Queer Utopia* (2009), written partly in response to Edelman, José Esteban Muñoz claimed that; 'queerness exists [...] as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future' (Muñoz, 2009: 1). Preciado indeed attempts to draw from the political energy resulting from the AIDS crisis, 'distilling' it to inform a new politics. Having argued that under biocapitalism *all* of our bodies are at stake, Preciado seeks to harness the urgency of anti-AIDS activism during the late eighties, a time when the vulnerability of bodies was all too evident. Preciado writes:

Philosophy that does not utilise its body [...] counts for nothing. Ideas are not enough. "Art is not enough". Style is not enough. Good intention is not enough. Sympathy is not enough. (Preciado, 2008: 307)

The slogan 'Art is not enough' was used as part of several varying poster designs created by Gran Fury for Act Up in the US from around 1988.¹⁷ Many posters noted the number of deaths from AIDS to date ('With 47,524 Dead Art Is Not Enough') and called for 'collective direct action' to challenge the policies (or lack thereof) of the state and drugs companies through physical action (Gran Fury, 1988). While this moment in queer is historically specific, Preciado identifies a queer energy and attempts to draw from it, pleading the case for a new politics of bodily experimentation and resignification of the kind she enacts throughout *Testo Junkie*.

Preciado's reading of Dustan's politics is heartfelt and laden with what comes across as real grief at his death, as well as for the politics he comes to represent for her, despite her eventual rejection of that politics. There seems to be an honesty to her dilemma over what queer means, what it has meant and what direction it could, or should, take. For Preciado there must be a break with tendencies of antifuturity present in queer theory, of which Dustan comes to be the ultimate symbolic representative.

¹ This title borrows its phrasing from Beatriz Preciado's *TestoJunkie* (2008); 'de ton sperme sidéen et de mes ovules de gouine trans' ['of your HIV-positive sperm and my trans-dyke ovules'] (Preciado, 2008: 191) and 'mon utérus testostéronée' ['my testo-uterus'] (Preciado, 2008: 192).

² *Autofiction* is a widely practised and popular mode in contemporary French literary writing. The term was originally coined by Serge Doubrovsky to describe his text *Fils* (1977) [*Son*].

³ The Prix de Flore is a literary prize founded in 1994 by the writer and literary critic Frédéric Beigbeder. Focusing on works by younger writers, the annual prize rewards its winners with a glass of Pouilly-Fumé at the Café de Flore in Paris every day for the following year.

⁴ Le Rayon published more than fifty books, including French translations of works ranging from Eve Ensler's *Vagina Monologues* (1996) [as *Les Monologues du vagin* (1999)] to Monique Wittig's influential essays *The Straight Mind* (1992) [as *La Pensée straight* (2001)]. Le Rayon ceased publishing in 2003.

⁵ There are distinct chapters of Act Up globally, sometimes with varying and conflicting political stances. All references simply to 'Act Up' in this paper are to Act Up Paris. For an overview of the movement's history in the US, see Jim Hubbard and Sarah Shulman's *United in Anger* (2012).

⁶ The language of Act Up ('zaps') has been re-used by French queer theorist Marie-Hélène Bourcier; 'Zap la psy, on a retrouvé la bite à Lacan' (2005).

⁷ AIDES was founded in 1984 by the sociologist Daniel Defert after the death of his partner Michel Foucault, inspired by groups such as the Terence Higgins Trust (THT) in the UK and Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) in the USA.

⁸ 'Serosorting', as defined by Tim Dean, 'describes the tendency to pursue unprotected sex only with those who share one's HIV status' (Dean, 2009: 12).

⁹ All translations into English in this article are my own, except Best and Crowley's translation of Erik Rémès.

¹⁰ *Kapo* refers to prisoners assigned by SS guards to undertake administrative work in camps, or to supervise other prisoners' forced labour.

¹¹ For an exploration of the uneasy relationship between author, narrator and protagonist in the work of Angot, see Rye, 2004.

¹² See Boulé (2000: 11) for an overview.

¹³ The original text by Preciado is written in a combination of French, English and Spanish: ‘Réincarne-toi en moi, possède ma langue [...] habite-moi, vis en moi. Viens. *Ven. Please don't leave. Vuelve a la vida. Reviens à la vie. Hold on to my sex. Low, down, dirty. Stay with me.*’ (Preciado, 2008: 20).

¹⁴ Dustan’s idea of ‘filtration’ may resemble the medical technique of ‘sperm washing’, a method that involves separating seminal fluid (the primary carrier of HIV) from the sperm, which can then be used for insemination.

¹⁵ It should be noted that the language used by some bareback communities makes an analogy between seroconversion and reproduction, with some referring to HIV transmission as ‘breeding’. As Tim Dean notes, for some barebackers, ‘seroconversion can feel like becoming pregnant’ (Dean, 2009: 88).

¹⁶ ‘V.D.’ refers here to Virginie Despentès. Both Despentès and Dustan are referred to by their initials frequently throughout the text.

¹⁷ The artist collective Gran Fury created many of Act Up New York’s poster campaigns, now housed at the New York Public Library’s Gran Fury Collection.

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