

The Biodrag of Genre in Paul B. Preciado's *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*

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ABSTRACT

Paul B. Preciado's *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (2013) is many things at once: a fictionalised account of its author-narrator's use of synthetic androgens, an alternative history of post-Fordism, and a manifesto for gender revolution. The text juxtaposes a number of disparate genres, including the fictionalized life narrative, the epistolary elegy, political theory, pornography, and the revolutionary manifesto. In this article I suggest that this aesthetic of juxtaposition figures genre as a form of drag, which I understand, in light of Elizabeth Freeman's work, as both a mode of gender performance and a way of articulating the persistence of the past in the present. In *Testo Junkie*, genre becomes a way of organising a central tension in the book between the hormone's history as an agent of oppression and the hormone's speculative future as an agent of liberation. The text's bifurcated form, I argue, ultimately works to compartmentalise difficult questions about the psychological legacies of racism and patriarchy, and to separate its manifesto for revolution from the histories that produce the revolutionary subject.

Keywords: hormones, queer, transgender, gender, genre

INTRODUCTION

We have the right to demand collective and "common" ownership of the biocodes of gender, sex, and race. We must wrest them from private hands, from technocrats and from the pharmacoporn complex. Such a process of resistance and redistribution could be called technosomatic communism. (Preciado, 2013: 352)

This statement, from Paul B. Preciado's book *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (2013), refigures the call to arms as a call to testosterone. The text sets a fictionalised first-person account of Preciado's self-styled experiments with the synthetic androgen Testogel against a bold theory of gender in the era of hormone pharmacology. First published in Spanish in 2008, *Testo Junkie* appeared in a French edition translated by Preciado that same year, and an English translation by Bruce Benderson in 2013. Just as Testogel has precipitated Preciado's gendered transformation, so the book has undergone its own metamorphosis across successive editions and printings. While early editions give the author's name as Beatriz Preciado, rendered in the text as "BP", *Testo Junkie* was recently republished with a new name on the cover: Paul B. Preciado. A note on the fourth printing reads, "Understand that Paul absorbs and assumes all that was once BP" (Preciado, 2013: 10). This note reflects not only the author's shifting gender identity, but his exploratory relationship with the first-person narrative mode. Indeed, the book's opening sentence—"This book is not a memoir" (Preciado, 2013: 11)—explicitly refuses the conventions not of gender but of genre.

Testo Junkie is many things at once: a fictionalised account of its author-narrator's use of synthetic androgens, an alternative history of post-Fordism, and a manifesto for gender revolution. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this final dimension of *Testo Junkie*—its manifesto for 'technosomatic communism'—has been the most controversial (Preciado, 2013: 352). The book's central thesis argues that the post-industrial economy is structured around the material production of sexual subjectivity by means of molecular and multimedia technologies—drugs and pornography, in other words. Rather than simply describing this 'pharmacopornographic regime', Preciado finds the seeds of resistance in its biopolitical mechanisms (Preciado, 2013: 35). Modifying Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to encompass the 'bioperformative' practices of hormonal supplementation, he writes that

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it is ‘only through the strategic reappropriation of these biotechnological apparatuses that it is possible to invent resistance, to risk revolution’ (Preciado, 2013: 344). Practices of biohacking—such as the use of synthetic testosterone by cis women—can, he suggests, construct new ways of embodying gender to displace heterosexual masculinity and femininity (Preciado, 2013: 352).

Testo Junkie’s speculative vision of ‘technosomatic communism’ has met with some compelling critiques on the grounds of its voluntarism, its blurring of the boundaries between resistance and complicity, and its location of political agency in the substance of testosterone rather than the social subject.¹ In this article, I contend that the political problems of the text need to be conceptualised in relation to its approach to genre. *Testo Junkie* juxtaposes—and I choose this verb carefully, rather than ‘combines’ or ‘weaves’ or ‘melds’, for reasons that will become clear—a number of disparate genres, including the fictionalised life narrative, the epistolary elegy, political theory, pornography, and the revolutionary manifesto. While most assessments of the book observe that it draws together the personal and the theoretical, the full scope of *Testo Junkie*’s approach to genre does not always register in critiques of its politics. *Testo Junkie* is, in the words of its author, a ‘somato-political fiction, a theory of the self, or self-theory’; he also describes it as a ‘body essay’ (Preciado, 2013: 11). As these tentative labels accumulate, so does a sense of the book’s restlessness. *Testo Junkie* is a text in flight from itself. To critique *Testo Junkie*’s manifesto pledges without considering how they are undone by the text’s elegy, for instance, is to miss something important about Preciado’s political aesthetics of juxtaposition.

In *Testo Junkie*, genre becomes a way of organising the relationship between past, present and future. Genre connects the testo junkie of the present not only with the liberated post-gender subjects of the text’s speculative future, but also with the deceased subjects of its historical past. These deceased subjects include the queer addressees of *Testo Junkie*’s elegiac mode, and the racialised subjects of the medical experiments that, as the text details, led to the development of the contraceptive pill. These subjects all require particular generic codes in order to be represented, and so the text shifts between the modes of autofiction, the grand theoretical narrative, the manifesto, the elegy, and pornography. The quality that Theodore Martin has termed ‘the historical drag of genre’ is relevant here (Martin, 2017: 2). Martin writes:

The accretive history of genre is a measure of both change and continuity, diachrony and synchrony, pastness and presentness. Genres explain how aesthetic and cultural categories become recognizable as well as reproducible in a given moment, and they demonstrate how the conventions and expectations that make up those categories are sedimented over time (Martin, 2017: 6).

Martin uses the term ‘drag’ to evoke ‘the accretion or sedimentation of formal change over time’, but the term also, of course, refers to the performance of gender (Martin, 2017: 7). Martin does not attend closely to the queer resonances of the term, though in a footnote he acknowledges his debt to Elizabeth Freeman’s notion of temporal drag as ‘a way of connecting queer performativity to disavowed political histories’ (Martin, 2017: 202; Freeman, 2010: 65). *Testo Junkie*, which makes both performativity and genre central to its representation of gender, can be illuminated by a more thorough investigation of the connections between Freeman’s ‘temporal drag’ and Martin’s ‘drag of genre’. Freeman mobilises the term ‘drag’ and its association with ‘retrogression, delay, and the pull of the past on the present’ in order to think through the relationship between queer politics and a lesbian feminism that it often figures as anachronistic. Temporal drag, Freeman notes, challenges the valorisation of the future that characterises Butler’s definition of performativity in *Gender Trouble* (1990). Noting that Butler figures time as ‘basically progressive, insofar as repetitions with a difference hold the most promises’, Freeman writes that ‘*Gender Trouble* disregards citations of pasts that actually signal the presence of life lived otherwise than in the present’ (Freeman, 2010: 62-63).² Freeman’s notion of ‘temporal drag’, when combined with Martin’s ideas about genre, clarify what is at stake in *Testo Junkie*’s own model of performativity.

One of *Testo Junkie*’s operative concepts is ‘biodrag’, defined as ‘the pharmacopornographic production of somatic fictions of femininity and masculinity’ (Preciado, 2013: 191). For Preciado, techniques of biodrag are not only pharmaceutical technologies such as the contraceptive pill, they are also textual technologies like pornography, which produce biochemical effects in the subject. These bioperformative techniques have been developed and deployed to enforce violent norms: the contraceptive pill, for instance, is said to function ‘to transform cis-females into a normalized heterosexual female body, with a depressive but stable temperament and a passive or frigid sexuality’ (Preciado, 2013: 218). Here, Preciado cites the established, if arguably underreported, evidence that the

¹ See for instance, Hester, H. (2015). Synthetic Genders and the Limits of Micropolitics. . . . *ment Journal*, 6. Available at: https://repository.uwl.ac.uk/id/eprint/2732/1/synthetic-genders-and-limits-micropolitics#footnoteref27_04lxgw7. (Accessed 5 May 2018); Rosenberg, J. (2014). The Molecularization of Sexuality. *Theory and Event*, 17(2). n.p.; Rivas, J. (2015). Intoxication and Toxicity in a ‘Pharmacopornographic Era’: Beatriz Preciado’s *Testo Junkie*, in Eugene Brennan and Russell Williams (eds.), *Literature and Intoxication: Writing, Politics and the Experience of Excess* (pp. 147-159). Basingstoke: Palgrave.

² Freeman does explore how Butler revises this approach in her more recent work ‘on what she calls “the psychic life of power”, where the subject inevitably “turns back” on itself and its pasts, and the psyche necessarily traffics in the deep time of the prior’ (Freeman, 2010: 64).

contraceptive pill raises levels of sex hormone binding globulin, which reduces bioavailable testosterone and thus raises the risk that users will experience a reduced sex drive, pain during sex, and lowered mood and energy levels (Panzer et al., 2006). Disrupting culturally dominant representations of the birth control pill as a feminist technology of sexual liberation, Preciado provocatively suggests that these symptoms are not merely unfortunate side-effects but primary functions of the pill's coercive biodrag, which defines and produces femininity as submissive and subservient. However, *Testo Junkie* also insists that biodrag can be redeployed subversively to reshape the meaning of gender, as with Butler's account of subversive performativity. If frigid, depressed femininity is a biofiction produced with the aid of synthetic hormones, then new ways of inhabiting gender must be available to feminised subjects.

Genre is not explicitly theorised as a mode of biodrag in *Testo Junkie*, but the text is deeply interested in how the codes of genre have shaped gender throughout history. Preciado uses genre to both address and displace the problem that history poses for feminist theories of performativity. Wearing genre as a mode of drag, Preciado self-consciously juxtaposes the genre codes of pornography, elegy, memoir, the manifesto, and the grand narrative, in order to expose the contingency of the truths these forms espouse. At the same time, I want to use Martin's emphasis on genre as a set of conventions that emphasise both change and continuity to open up a critique of *Testo Junkie*'s revolutionary rhetoric, which too easily severs the future from the past. In focusing on the politics of *Testo Junkie*'s juxtaposed genres, I draw out implicit connections between Preciado's book and Sandy Stone's landmark intervention on 'the transsexual as text' in *The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto* (2006), the first version of which Stone published in 1991. In this founding essay for transgender studies, Stone proposes 'constituting transsexuals not as a class or problematic "third gender," but rather as a *genre*—a set of embodied texts whose potential for *productive* disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desire has yet to be explored' (Stone, 2006: 231). Stone critiques the genres that have constrained trans lives: in particular, the linear conventions of the transition memoir and the prescriptivism of the medical textbook, both of which shape the narrative demanded by the gatekeepers of trans medical care. These genres pass as natural forms, and deny the codes through which they, and thus gender itself, come into being. By contrast, Stone draws on Donna Haraway (Haraway, 1990, 1984) and Butler's *Gender Trouble* to envision a new model of gender-as-genre that makes visible the social processes through which the subject is constructed. While Preciado does not cite Stone, *Testo Junkie* can be read as a response to her conflation of gender and genre, which proposes to 'fragment and reconstitute the elements of gender in new and unexpected geometries' (Stone, 2006: 231). Preciado's book is structured around a self-conscious inheritance of the genre codes that have shaped and limited trans lives. Yet he is ultimately less optimistic than Stone about the ease with which these genres can be destabilised: if hormones are malleable in *Testo Junkie*, textual forms are oddly resistant to change.

This discussion of genre and gender has significant implications for the medical humanities. Consider Stone's account of how the early 'gender dysphoria clinics' of the 1960s used Harry Benjamin's textbook *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (1966) to make treatment decisions:

It took a surprisingly long time—several years—for the researchers to realize that the reason the candidates' behavioral profiles matched Benjamin's so well was that the candidates, too, had read Benjamin's book, which was passed from hand to hand within the transsexual community, and they were only too happy to provide the behavior that led to acceptance for surgery. (Stone, 2006: 228)

The point of Stone's anecdote is not to judge the candidates against an ideal of authentic self-representation, but to illustrate the researchers' mistake in failing to understand that self-narration is likely to be structured by genre codes for all subjects, whatever their gender identity. This failure has meant that trans people seeking healthcare have faced demands for an impossibly innocent mode of self-narration: their stories have been expected to conform to rigid genre conventions naturally and instinctively, without their knowledge or intent.

Such demands can be contextualised with the help of Angela Woods' influential interventions on the privileged place of narrative in the medical humanities. Woods has critiqued the field's valorisation of the narrative self, which rests on an assumption that a person's narrative is 'coextensive with their subjective experience, their psychological health and indeed their very humanity' (Woods, 2014: 114). The clinical encounters Stone describes illustrate the problems with such assumptions: in these encounters, a specific narrative of gender identity is prescribed in advance by the clinical textbook, and then retroactively constructed as natural and authentic. Rather than taking up Woods' call for a new attention to formlessness, meaninglessness, and silence here (Woods, 2014: 125), I aim instead to demonstrate how a consideration of genre might add complexity to the investigation of narrative in the feminist medical humanities. The politics of genre, as they are played out in the clinic, touch on questions about the shifting social and historical conditions that set the terms for self-representation. In order to build this argument, I shall consider how three of the genres *Testo Junkie* deploys—the grand narrative, pornography, and the elegy—make visible this text's complex negotiation of the histories that produce its ideal revolutionary subject.

THE GRAND NARRATIVE

Testo Junkie opens with a scene of the author administering the synthetic androgen, Testogel, in an act of drag homage to a late friend, unnamed but inferred to be the author Guillaume Dustan.³ This autobiographical opening is followed by a densely theoretical second chapter, in which Preciado's evolving use of synthetic testosterone is contextualised by his expansive theory of what he terms the pharmacopornographic regime, which is at the centre of the book's alternative history of post-Fordism. With this history, the text draws on and departs from both post-Marxist and post-Foucauldian thought. Styling itself as an update of Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault, 1978, 1985, 1986), *Testo Junkie* introduces a new theoretical vocabulary in which biopolitics becomes pharmacopornographic politics, and power-over-life becomes 'power and control exerted over a technoliving and connected whole' (Preciado, 2013: 44). Charging autonomist Marxist thinkers like Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (Hardt and Negri, 2001, 2005, 2011) with 'stopping biopolitically at the belt' (Preciado, 2013: 37), Preciado displaces theories of immaterial labour with an insistence that 'the control, production and intensification of narcosexual affects [Preciado's term for the sexual affects engendered by drugs and pornography] have become the model of all other forms of production' in the post-Fordist era (Preciado, 2013: 40).

Focusing on the individual subject's augmentation by pharmaceutical technologies, Preciado analyses the 'performative feedback' between medical conditions and their treatments:

The success of contemporary technoscientific industry consists in transforming our depression into Prozac, our masculinity into testosterone, our erection into Viagra, our fertility/sterility into the Pill, our AIDS into tritherapy, without knowing which comes first: our depression or Prozac, Viagra or an erection, testosterone or masculinity, the Pill or maternity, tritherapy or AIDS. This performative feedback is one of the mechanisms of the pharmacopornographic regime (Preciado, 2013: 34-35).

Here, Preciado's analysis resonates with the work of the Foucauldian theorist Nikolas Rose. In a series of works published in the first decade of the twenty-first century, Rose identifies a profound shift in our ways of understanding emotion and behaviour: a 'recoding of everyday affects and conducts in terms of their neurochemistry' (Rose, 2003: 46). This shift, Rose argues, has produced a subject uniquely attuned to neoliberal discourses of flexibility and manipulability: the neurochemical self. For this neurochemical self, 'sadness' has been transformed into a 'condition called "depression" caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain and amenable to treatment by drugs that would "rebalance" these chemicals' (Rose, 2003: 46). For both Preciado and Rose, contemporary neurochemical states can only be conceptualised through the drugs that modify them.⁴ However, this surface resemblance masks some profound differences between the two thinkers. In line with his Foucauldian approach, Rose circumscribes his project as a descriptive one, noting that he does not aim to 'call for a new philosophy of life' but instead seeks to 'explore the philosophy of life that is embodied in the ways of thinking and acting espoused by the participants in this politics of life itself' (Rose, 2007: 49). By contrast, *Testo Junkie* carves out a rhetorical space not only for understanding pharmacopornographic power but for resisting it.

Preciado's commitment to resistance, however, is not as straightforward as it first appears. The contrast between the opening two chapters exemplifies *Testo Junkie*'s formal bifurcation: described by its narrator as a work of 'self-theory', the book is structured by a relatively disciplined alternation between chapters of fictionalised autobiography and chapters of political history and theory. The former deploy conventions from the genres of memoir, pornography, and elegy; the latter adopt the genre codes of the political grand narrative, supplemented with hand-drawn diagrams mapping out the text's key concepts and culminating in a manifesto for technosomatic communism. There are moments when this formal discipline slips, usually in the transition from one chapter to another. The opening passage of the theoretical second chapter, "The Pharmacopornographic Era", reads like a memoir: "I was born in 1970. The automobile industry, which had reached its peak, was beginning to decline" (Preciado, 2013: 23). But as the chapter moves on to outline its reconception of post-Fordist economics as the 'pharmacopornographic era', the first-person narrator fades into the background. The reader finds herself abruptly shifting from the elegiac, pornographic encounter of the opening chapter to the detached mode of history and theory.

In a special issue of the journal *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* on *Testo Junkie* and psychoanalysis, Preciado discusses the book as an intervention in the politics of narration itself:

I understand critical theory both as a "direct action," in the sense of a political collective form of intervention, and as a fictional performative subjective narrative. The book voluntarily embraces the

³ Dustan, the author of the novel *In My Room* (1996) among other works, published the French edition of Preciado's *Contra-Sexual Manifesto* (2000). He died of a drug overdose in 2005. As "William" (Dustan's birth name was William Baranès), he is one of *Testo Junkie*'s dedicatees.

⁴ Preciado does not cite Rose in *Testo Junkie*, despite the resonances between their analyses.

position of the left intellectual narrator (...) and uses the form of the grand narrative to tell the history of the somathèque from the point of view of the political minorities, to narrate this story as a Trojan poet (Preciado, 2016: 25).

Claiming this mode of ‘nonknowing as grand narrative’, Preciado indicates that *Testo Junkie*’s narrative voice is parodic rather than sincere. Suggesting that the text imitates the authoritative style of Left theory in order to subvert it, Preciado figures genre as a kind of drag—a mode of performativity that repurposes the past for the present and future. But, to borrow Martin’s formulation: in wearing genre as drag, *Testo Junkie* is troubled by the drag of genre. The codes of genre can be repurposed, but they carry with them the sedimented histories of their prior deployment. Each time *Testo Junkie* takes up the conventions of a genre—whether political theory, the elegy, the manifesto, pornography, or the memoir—it inscribes itself in the history of that genre, with one eye on the past. Stone, in her manifesto, figures the trans subject as a hybrid text and argues that the act of passing as cis ‘forecloses the possibility of a life grounded in the intertextual possibilities of the transsexual body’ (Stone, 2006: 231). For Preciado, however, the hybridity of genre works to divide the future from the past and the present. The drag of genre in *Testo Junkie* structures a tension in the book’s representation of hormones, which are framed as both tools of historical oppression and agents of future liberation. This duality is mapped onto the grand narrative chapters, which give an account of the violent social, material and cultural histories that underpin the hormone’s status as a biopolitical technology, then draw from this account, as if from a magician’s hat, a free subject whose capacitation by synthetic hormones becomes a revolutionary mode of gender subversion. By compartmentalising difficult questions about the psychological legacies of racism and patriarchy within its autofictional chapters, *Testo Junkie* can represent the liberated future as a technological inevitability, embedded within the pharmacopornographic regime’s mechanisms of control.

In one of the ‘grand narrative’ chapters, ‘Pharmacopower’, Preciado carefully traces the colonial historical process by which hormonal research produced biofictions of racialised masculinity and femininity. He shows how clinical trials of the birth control pill, imposed on the women of Puerto Rico in the 1950s, laid the foundations for the global institution of ingestible hormonal birth control as a ‘chemical panopticon’ (Preciado, 2013: 205). The contraceptive pill, which has not only been shown to risk dulling users’ libidos but is also known to carry a risk of blood clots and cancer, is presented here as an agent of biopower operative at the molecular level. Nevertheless, Preciado maintains that ‘the fact that the Pill must be managed at home, by the individual user in an autonomous way, also introduces the possibility of political agency’ (Preciado, 2013: 208). The precise form this agency takes is left unarticulated until the end of the ‘Pharmacopower’ chapter, which closes with a provocative question—“What would happen if a large proportion of cis-females began collectively self-administering enough doses of testosterone to be socially identified as males?” (Preciado, 2013: 234). This question figures androgens as a source of value that can be redistributed from cis men to everyone else. It is testosterone, rather than estrogen, that must be redistributed because it is testosterone that invests the subject with social power and agency. In an earlier autofictional chapter, ‘Becoming T’, Preciado maintains that ‘testosterone isn’t masculinity’ (Preciado, 2013: 141), but in the theoretical ‘Pharmacopower’ chapter he gives us the history we need to understand that the value of testosterone is indeed derived from its historical role in the production of masculinity. It is difficult to understand why this value would necessarily be maintained if masculinity were dissolved through the revolutionary mass redistribution of androgens. Moreover, it is unclear why synthetic estrogens cannot be reclaimed in a similar way. Agency, in this formulation, is not only possessed by the individual: it seems to inhere in the hormone itself—and not just in any hormone, but in testosterone specifically. Despite *Testo Junkie*’s interest in history, the text adopts an oddly ahistorical model of the hormone here. Insisting on the inherently capacitating quality of testosterone regardless of its social function, Preciado abruptly wrenches the hormone from the very history of gendered and racialised violence that *Testo Junkie* elsewhere confronts. (Preciado, 2013: 164-165).

Testo Junkie’s construction of the future is illuminated by Jasbir Puar’s discussion of what she terms ‘piecing’, a mode of white trans normativity that does not strive to pass as cis, but is instead embodied through the partitioning of the body into flexible, mobile, manipulable parts (Puar, 2017: 45). This neoliberal construction of transnormative futurity, writes Puar, has emerged in stark contrast to the experiences of trans women of colour, whose ‘bodies can be read as sites of intensive struggle (medical, educational, employment, legal, social) over who indeed does get to embody—and experience—futurity and who as a result will be cast off as the collateral damages of such strivings to capture the essence of the future’ (Puar, 2017: 48). Puar finds Preciado’s conception of hormonal revolution to be ‘part of the transnormative body that pieces’, which drives the ‘reterritorialization of whiteness’ (Puar, 2017: 58). In light of Puar’s analysis, *Testo Junkie*’s bifurcated form can be understood as a way of dividing the white subject of transnormative futurity from the racialised subjects whose presence is conceived as a drag on the revolution. Whereas Stone opposed the gender-conservatism of passing to a subversive embrace of embodied intertextuality, Puar troubles this dichotomy by drawing attention to trans subjects of colour ‘that struggle to piece (in order to perhaps pass)’. Puar does not cite Stone’s manifesto, but her analysis points to something missing from it: the fact that passing, particularly for trans subjects marginalised by race and class as well as gender, might well

be a matter of economic and psychological survival. In addition, Puar's concept of 'piecing' gives theoretical context to *Testo Junkie's* abrupt appeal to voluntarism, which detaches the patriarchal and colonial histories of synthetic hormones from the speculative future by means of individual agency alone.

At rare but potent moments Preciado alludes to the way these (continuing) histories present a problem of complicity. Writing of the glandular expropriation through which experimental hormone laboratories collected the testicles of executed prisoners, as well as animals, Preciado writes:

Every time I give myself a dose of testosterone, I agree to this pact. I kill the blue whale; I cut the throat of the bull at the slaughterhouse; I take the testicles of the prisoner condemned to death. I become the blue whale, the bull, the prisoner. I draft a contract whereby my desire is fed by—and retroactively feeds—global channels that transform living cells into capital. (Preciado, 2013: 163)

In describing this subject who is inescapably embedded within the violence of global capitalism, Preciado recalls Michelle O'Brien's path-breaking essay, *Tracing this Body: Transsexuality, Pharmaceuticals and Capitalism* (2013).⁵ Here, O'Brien draws connections between privatised healthcare, the war on drugs, the pharmaceutical industry, and the daily lives of trans people, drug users, and people with HIV. She writes:

When I give myself an injection of Delestrogen, I am locating myself and located within global flows of power. I am connected to complex political, economic and social histories of how these drugs were manufactured and by whom. I am bound within the international trade systems that allow these corporations to function, that bring the hormones to my door in a brown envelope. I am facing the systems of violence that render my body invisible, that make it impossible for many to get drugs at all. By taking hormones, I am doing what we all do in various ways: I am participating within the system of transnational capital. These systems are racist, classist, sexist, homophobic and transphobic to their core. They are systematically structured on a hatred of the bodies of trans people, poor people, people living with HIV, and drug users. And yet, all of us are deeply, inexorably dependent on these very structures. Quite literally, we need them to keep us alive. (O'Brien, 2013: 63).

O'Brien, like Preciado, is interested in the way trans subjects, like all subjects, are caught up in a dialectic of resistance and complicity. Rejecting the 'politics of purity and non-participation' displayed by anti-consumerist movements, O'Brien instead embraces the cyborg whose 1985 conceptualisation by Donna Haraway forged new paths for feminism with its destabilisation of the nature-culture dichotomy (Haraway, 1991). The utopian promise of cyborgs, for Haraway, lies in their ability to be 'exceedingly unfaithful to their origins' in militarism and capitalism (Haraway, 1991: 151). For O'Brien, the cyborg is an 'effective, empowered, conscious' being whose knowledge of her embeddedness in the flows of global capital is precisely what gives her the strength to resist (O'Brien, 2013: 64).

Yet O'Brien's knowing cyborg subject differs starkly from Preciado's embrace of 'nonknowing as grand narrative' (Preciado, 2016: 25). The relationship between knowing and nonknowing in *Testo Junkie* has something to do with the text's complex approach to psychoanalysis. Preciado explicates his mode of 'nonknowing as grand narrative' in response to Kirsten Lentz, who in the same special issue of *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* argues that the text's authoritative voice, which brooks no uncertainty, presents 'a subject without a psyche' (Lentz, 2016: 7). Preciado's response outlines his 15 years of psychoanalytic treatment, but also his critique of the 'normative gender framework of psychoanalytic theory' (Preciado, 2016: 24). He argues that the internalised psyche of Freudian psychoanalysis must be replaced with the notion of 'an "externalized" psyche', mediated by technology (Preciado, 2016: 24). In place of the Freudian unconscious, Preciado therefore proposes the 'soma-thèque'—a 'living archive of political fictions'—as the new object of clinical psychoanalysis (Preciado, 2016: 24). Preciado's post-psychoanalytic psyche is simultaneously more and less accessible than the Freudian unconscious: more, because it is 'external' to the subject' and thus presumably does not require the excavatory work of analysis; less, because it is 'larger than the body and the psyche', and the techniques required to reach it have not yet been developed. Positioned on the threshold of this new psychoanalysis, *Testo Junkie* shuttles between the knowing mode of the intellectual who no longer needs to grapple with the opaque unconscious, and the unknowing mode of the subject who cannot grasp the connection between his psyche and the somatopolitical apparatus that produces it. This 'soma-topolitical apparatus' is another term for what O'Brien discusses as the 'global flows of power' in which we are embedded (O'Brien, 2013: 63). Unlike O'Brien's Harawayan cyborg, though, Preciado's subject is not especially effective, empowered or conscious of the mechanisms through which he is produced. *Testo Junkie* does not dispense with the psyche; instead, it brackets the psyche within the autobiographical chapters of the text, and isolates it from the grand narrative. In this way, the text makes the problem of complicity a problem of genre. The political

⁵ First given as a speech, then published as a zine, in 2003, O'Brien's essay was republished a decade later in the *Transgender Studies Reader 2* (O'Brien, 2013: 56).

implications of this dichotomy between autobiography and theory become clear when *Testo Junkie* adopts the codes of pornography, the genre to which I now turn.

PORNOGRAPHY

This problem of complicity takes on an intensified charge during the pornographic autofictional sections of the book, where racism and misogyny surface on the level of individual sexuality. In one of the early chapters, the narrator adopts a self-consciously masculinist persona as he recounts his teenage desire to fuck ‘the alpha bitches, the supersluts’ (Preciado, 2013: 90). Meeting these women as an adult returning to his hometown, he muses that they are ‘still my little girls, my bitches’ (Preciado, 2013: 94). This misogynist persona wants his desire to be validated as a cis man’s would. The narrator tells his mother: ‘I’m a boy, get it?—and I lift my shirt, show her my nipples that dot a still flat chest—and I deserve the same respect my father gets’ (Preciado, 2013: 93). Later in the book, in another autofictional chapter, he describes purchasing a dildo, ‘8 ½ inches and very kitsch, with visible veins, the same color as chocolate with a milk chocolate head’ after learning that his lover, VD—a fictionalised version of the author Virginie Despentes—had fantasised about Jimi Hendrix (Preciado, 2013: 328). In the subsequent sex scene, soundtracked by ‘Foxy Lady’, the narrator is prostheticised not only by ‘Jimi’ but by a fantasy of black male sexual prowess: “Hey Jimi, can I borrow your cock to plow my blond’s ass?” (Preciado, 2013: 328).

These sections deploy the genre codes of pornography, shaped as they are by racism and misogyny. In the theoretical chapter “Pornopower”, Preciado discusses pornography as a biopolitical apparatus that, like the birth control pill, has the capacity ‘to become activated in the body’; also like the pill, it drags with it racist and sexist histories, and these histories structure its eroticisation of power, violence and taboo (Preciado, 2013: 265). In this chapter, the text argues that pornography has the capacity to become a ‘field of political intervention’ through an ‘epistemological inversion’ that remakes the passive objects of the pornographic gaze as subjects (Preciado, 2013: 273). However, this epistemological inversion is complicated by *Testo Junkie*’s own pornographic sections, which grant subjectivity to Preciado and VD while sustaining the racist and sexist tropes of the genre.

The sexual fantasies depicted in these sections cannot be detached from histories of colonial violence, as bell hooks has explored in her work on race, gender and sexuality. In *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (2004), hooks writes:

Whites seek the black body to confirm that it is the exotic supersexed flesh of their fantasies. Within this economy of desire, which is anything but equal, the “hypermasculine black male sexuality” is feminized and tamed by a process of commodification that denies its agency and makes it serve the desires of others, especially white sexual lust (hooks, 2004: 79).

For hooks, the correct political response to this racist economy of desire is to ‘envision a liberatory sexuality that refuses to ground sexual acts in narratives of domination and submission, and lay claim to uninhibited erotic agency that prioritizes connection and mutuality’ (hooks, 2004: 83). Yet, as recent articles by Andrea Long Chu and Amia Srinivasan have observed, the task of reshaping desire has never been so straightforward. Chu, in her essay *On Liking Women*, notes that “Desire is, by nature, childlike and chary of government. The day we begin to qualify it by the righteousness of its political content is the day we begin to prescribe some desires and prohibit others” (Chu, 2018: 59). But, Srinivasan counters in her essay on the notion of a right to sex, certain strands of sex-positive feminism risk ‘covering not only for misogyny, but for racism, ableism, transphobia, and every other oppressive system that makes its way into the bedroom through the seemingly innocuous mechanism of “personal preference”.’ (Srinivasan, 2018: n.p.). The problem of how to reshape desire, without repressing it or reverting to a liberal division between public and private, remains unsolved at the end of Srinivasan’s article.

These feminist debates about desire are also a context for *Testo Junkie*, which traverses similar issues in its negotiation of sexual politics. In an autofictional chapter titled “Testo-Mania”, the narrator recalls Dustan’s response to his proposal to write a book about ‘the political sex movement in France’ of the 1970s:

You say you thought I wasn’t like the other chicks, and that for me it was all about fucking, but now you realize that I’m like the other lesbians, ready to become the political nurse for anyone I meet. I answer, I’m not a lesbian, I’m trans, a boy, that the fact I don’t have a shitty biocock like yours doesn’t mean that I’m not a guy. I tell you, Stop treating me like cow shit just because you take me for a girl. (Preciado, 2013: 244)

Rather than defending the sexual politics of his proposed book, Preciado is hurt by Dustan’s misreading of his gender and compelled to assert his entitlement to masculine privileges. This passage follows one that describes Dustan and Preciado’s erstwhile plan to procreate: they speculate about funding the procedure of ‘filtering the HIV out of your sperm’ by writing a memoir about the process, but Preciado is troubled by the idea that Dustan

hates him 'because I'm incapable of wanting that sick sperm as it is' (Preciado, 2013: 240). As Elliot Evans has noted, these conversations between Dustan and Preciado reflect *Testo Junkie's* queer political tension between nihilism and a political commitment to the future, which harks back to the arguments during the AIDS crisis between Dustan, a controversial advocate for barebacking, and the activist group ACT UP, prominent critics of this stance (Evans, 2015: 128-131). However, the antagonism between Dustan and ACT UP goes unmentioned in *Testo Junkie*, reflecting the text's general reluctance to directly articulate the question that runs beneath its surface—the question of whether, and how, sexual desire should be a political project. *Testo Junkie* never addresses the reconfiguration of desire as an element of its revolution: under technosomatic communism, sexual affects are redistributed, not remade. It remains unclear how the dynamics of pharmacopornographic sexual desire could ever break with the violence enacted on the blue whale, the bull, and the prisoner, or what new ways of inhabiting gender might emerge in a world where those taken for girls are no longer treated like 'cow shit'.

Testo Junkie's failure to theorise the vivid points at which structural violence meets desire is part of its literary technique. The book's formal split between omniscient theory and autobiographical practice makes certain dimensions of experience simultaneously visible and invisible, witnessed but untheorisable. Even as the colonial and patriarchal context of industrial hormone production resurfaces as pornography, it remains impervious to Preciado's theoretical register. In this way, *Testo Junkie's* form issues a challenge to its theory: by insulating the experiential chapters from his 'grand narrative', Preciado signals the limits and contradictions not only of his proposed bioperformative revolution, but of the genres he has inherited and all they have dragged with them.

It is significant that the drag of genre does not only constrain the text: it is also shown to limit the available scripts through which trans people gain the social recognition and material support necessary for survival. Preciado acknowledges just two socially legible categories within which to make sense of his need for testosterone: the gender dysphoric and the drug addict. Embracing the role of the 'testo junkie', the narrator is clear that he does so under the constrained social conditions in which the only other option is a medical diagnosis of dysphoria: "This is how things appear, and it's going to be necessary to face them: if I don't accept defining myself as a transsexual, as someone with 'gender dysphoria', I must admit that I'm addicted to testosterone" (Preciado, 2013: 256). If one wishes to reject the state administered medicalisation of transgender subjectivity, this book argues, one has no other option but to inhabit the status of the addict. According to Preciado's formulation, understanding the genres through which gender is constituted does not open up possibilities for liberation, as Stone would have it, but closes them down. Confronting the coercion of medical gatekeeping, the text begins to depart from the privileging of the future that, in Freeman's assessment, limits Butler's early model of performativity (Freeman, 2010: 63). This section seems to represent a startling departure from Preciado's stated commitment to a post-Butler (bio)performative politics, in which identity categories can be subverted and proliferated through repetition. However, if the repetition that structures genre has only solidified the binary options of the gender dysphoric and the testo junkie, it is also the mechanism that allows Preciado to detach the political vision of the book's grand narrative chapters from the subjectivities that inhabit its autofictional chapters.

The status of the addict structures the narrator's relationship with his lover, VD, as well as his use of testosterone. Both forms of desire are experienced as addiction, which is cast as a 'desire for an object that does not desire', necessarily unrequited and insatiable (Preciado, 2013: 247). One passage conflates the narrator's experiences with VD and Testogel:

Right where satisfaction is supposed to take place, frustration emerges. When I'm kissing her, I think I want to kiss her; when I'm talking with her, I think I have an urgent need to talk with her. When it spills out across my skin, I think I want it to spill out across my skin, and when my body absorbs it, I think I want to absorb it, more and more (Preciado, 2013: 251-252).

Reading this passage, it is impossible to determine whether testosterone produces the desire for VD or VD produces the desire for testosterone. Both trajectories are intertwined in what the book terms a 'circle of mutual production' (Preciado, 2013: 252). This 'circle of mutual production' structures the relationship between the pharmacopornographic system and the psyche: each produces the other. Earlier in the text, Preciado claims that the desiring subject is produced by the 'technical, pharmaceutical, and mediatic supports' of the pharmacopornographic regime, but here it becomes clear that the subject, in turn, produces the pharmacopornographic system. (Preciado, 2013: 53). This feedback model of psychosocial production does not address the historically contingent production of the resisting subject; indeed, it is difficult to see how the subject embedded in this feedback loop could break out.

In *Testo Junkie*, pornography exemplifies the way texts function not just as representations but as technologies that make people feel things. In the 'Pornpower' chapter, Preciado cites Linda Williams's concept of the 'embodied image', which produces corporeal effects in the body of the spectator (Preciado, 2013: 265). Williams's ideas influence Preciado's claim that pornography is the 'paradigm of all cultural industries' because of its inherent ability to 'affect the techno-organic centers of the production of subjectivity' (Preciado, 2013: 271). Texts are thus part

of the somatopolitical apparatus in which subjectivity is constituted under the pharmacopornographic regime. *Testo Junkie* performs its own status as a complicit mechanism of control by emphasising the constraints of the genre codes it deploys. Thus its manifesto sections leave no room for a consideration of the text's engagement with racist and sexist dynamics of desire, which are only expressible within the codes of pornography. Of course, if these problems fail to make their way into *Testo Junkie's* manifesto that is because the colonial histories they register cannot be simply modified by neurochemical manipulation. This problem resurfaces in *Testo Junkie's* deployment of the final genre I will consider, the elegy.

ELEGY

The political complexities of sexual desire persist as a problem in *Testo Junkie's* mourning passages, where the 'I' of autofiction meets the epistolary 'you' of the elegy. The text's 'you' is introduced in its opening chapter, which addresses not only Dustan, but a historical milieu of deceased queer figures:

From this moment on, all of you are dead. Amelia, Hervé, Michel, Karen, Jackie, Teo, and You. Do I belong more to your world than I do to the world of the living? Isn't my politics yours; my house, my body, yours? Reincarnate yourselves in me, take over my body like extraterrestrials took over Americans and changed them into living sheaths. Reincarnate yourself in me; possess my tongue, arms, sex organs, dildos, blood, molecules; possess my girlfriend, dog; inhabit me, live in me. Come. *Ven*. Please don't leave, *Vuelve a la vida*. Come back to life. Hold on to my sex. Low, down, dirty. Stay with me (Preciado, 2013: 20).

The names Preciado lists in this passage—which include Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Hervé Guibert and Karen Lancaume—evoke a particular moment of French queer art and theory that is inseparable from the AIDS crisis (Evans, 2015: 136). According to Evans, while Preciado here figures himself as a vessel for the reproduction of Dustan's nihilistic politics, he ultimately embraces a politics of 'futurity and community' (Evans, 2015: 136). While this is correct enough as an assessment of *Testo Junkie's* manifesto proposals, it seems to flatten out the text's contradictions and their entanglement with genre. Deploying tropes of invasion, copulation, possession and brainwashing, this passage conflates death and procreation with a cold war metaphor drawn from *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the 1956 film that allegorises McCarthyism as a process of alien colonisation and auto-reproduction. Just as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* collapses metaphors of death and life—the aliens both kill and reproduce the humans they ensnare—*Testo Junkie* engages in a speculative fantasy of reincarnation. This reference to an iconic science-fiction film connects the transmission of genre cues to the persistence of politics: both are received passively by a subject whose politics are given to him by history.

In addressing itself to the deceased, *Testo Junkie's* 'you' deploys apostrophe, the figurative strategy powerfully characterised by Barbara Johnson as 'a form of ventriloquism through which the speaker throws voice, life, and human form into the addressee, turning its silence into mute responsiveness' (Johnson, 1987: 185). In her discussion of apostrophe in abortion poetry, Johnson notes that, as a rhetorical mode that animates what it addresses, apostrophe foregrounds questions about the 'connection between figurative language and questions of life and death, of who will wield and who will receive violence in a given human society' (Johnson, 1987: 184). In light of Johnson's reading, *Testo Junkie's* 'you' can be understood as a figurative reanimation of Dustan, which places the narrator in a simultaneously supplicatory and coercive position. This reanimating 'you' registers the simultaneous possibility and impossibility of possessing the other, which is another way of saying that it registers the problem of violence in desire.

Testo Junkie's use of apostrophe brings a new dimension to Preciado's notion of the text that acts on the body. As we have seen, for Preciado the text, and especially the pornographic text, is like the hormone in its ability to affect sensation and thereby produce the subject. The apostrophe of *Testo Junkie's* elegiac mode introduces a different mode of textual action—not literal, but figural. The apostrophic address cannot literally bring Dustan back to life (in the way pornography can literally arouse the spectator); it can, however, figure the persistence of the past in the present and allude to the structural conditions by which power is distributed. *Testo Junkie's* apostrophe points to the fact the material life of the text does not only reside in its ability to produce sensations in the individual subject; it also resides in the social function of language as one of the techniques through which resources are distributed or denied and lives are sustained or discarded.

The question the narrator asks Dustan—'isn't my politics yours?'—remains unanswered, tangled up as it is in the apostrophe's ambivalent combination of coercion and supplication. This ambivalent balance of power and powerlessness in apostrophe expresses the fact that history is not just a matter of transmission and inheritance, but of human intervention and activity. The apostrophe thus strains against *Testo Junkie's* ideology of malleability, in which technology inevitably and automatically prises subjects from the historical conditions that have

constrained them. While the narrator's apostrophic address to Dustan implicitly undermines the automatism of pharmacopornographic action, *Testo Junkie's* explicit manifesto for liberation remains wedded to it. The text's manifesto proposals remain untouched by the legacies of the histories it encodes in pornography and elegy. The text's approach to genre thus emerges as surprisingly depoliticising, positioning historical knowledge as that which must be set aside in order for the future of technological liberation to begin.

There are different ways of activating the past to change the present and future. Jordy Rosenberg gives one such example in his discussion of Preciado's reductive politics of molecular agency. He writes:

(...) there are lots of things molecules can do – not in 'themselves' but when collectively deployed, as in the '92 Act Up Ashes Action, that mass political funeral in which the ashes of HIV-positive loved ones were scattered on the White House lawn, a tidal flood of grit jamming the machine. But a molecule on its own? How do you differentiate a molecule that resists from a molecule that complies? (Rosenberg, 2016: n.p.)

The '92 Act Up Ashes Action might be considered a mode of apostrophe that animates the dead for a politics of the collective. By contrast, *Testo Junkie* does not trace the implications of its elegiac apostrophe into its manifesto, and ultimately neglects to differentiate between the activist deployment of molecules and the automatic agency of the molecular. This neglect is aided and abetted by the text's particular approach to genre, which treats it as a medium of complicity—an unbreakable constraint. There are, of course, alternative approaches to genre, which emphasize that—as with Butler's performative theory of gender—its dependence on repetition is precisely what produces the conditions for its transformation. As Williams puts it, "Genres thrive, after all, on the persistence of the problems they address; but genres thrive also in their ability to recast the nature of these problems". (Williams, 1991: 12) Such a recasting does not take place in *Testo Junkie*. Questions of life and death, of structural violence and the way they inflect interpersonal relationships, are kept at a distance from Preciado's vision of revolution.

In light of Rosenberg's intervention, *Testo Junkie's* manifesto can be compared with the *Trans Health Manifesto* published in 2017 by Edinburgh Action for Trans Health. This manifesto embeds a call for the freedom and resources to self-experiment within a broader set of demands including 'the power to hold abusers of medical & administrative power accountable for historical & present injustices', 'material reparations for historical abuses against trans people, and for all people hurt by eugenicist medical practices and policies', and the abolition of prisons and borders (Edinburgh Action for Trans Health, 2017: n.p.). If *Testo Junkie's* manifesto makes hormonal self-experimentation the origin and end point of a revolution that has left its history behind, the *Trans Health Manifesto* situates such experimentation within a materialist programme of social transformation that looks to the past and the future at once. Calling for the abolition of the gender identity clinic, the *Trans Health Manifesto* reminds us that genre codes are political not only because they make the subject feel a certain way, activating this or that biochemical reaction, but because of how they are wielded by the institutions that have the power to refuse or bestow a mode of healthcare that is intimately bound up with psychosocial survival and bodily autonomy. It is clear that if genre is a form of biodrag, it acts on the body in ways that exceed biochemical manipulation. Neither freely chosen nor rigidly fixed, the codes of genre develop through a historically contingent dialectic of identification and disidentification, carrying the past without being condemned to repeat it. In a social context that continues to insist on biology as the determined and determining ground on which culture is superimposed, there is something powerful in *Testo Junkie's* implicit acknowledgment of the drag of genre, and of the possibility that cultural forms might be *less* readily malleable than the individual body. Still, in the seams that join *Testo Junkie's* fragments, I find a call to remake genre, and to produce forms of writing that might forge a connection between the 'you' that animates the dead and the 'us' that erupts from within the collective.

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