



## BOOK REVIEWS

### *Testo junkie: sex, drugs, and biopolitics in the pharmacopornographic era*

Beatriz Preciado, translated by Bruce Benderson. New York: The Feminist Press, 2013.

by Karmele Mendoza Pérez

*Testo Junkie* is a rigorous examination of the 21st century body, as measured, dissected and controlled by the pharmaceutical and pornography industries in their business of creating desire. Named by the author a 'pharmacopornographic regimen', this tandem of industries amounts to "a biomolecular (pharmaco) and semiotic-technical (pornographic) government of sexual subjectivity". In this theoretical and political analysis of the 'pharmacopornographic era', the author establishes how, through these industries, the prevailing order controls our bodies and, in consequence, our sexuality, gender and sex.

Preciado's creative narrative introduces us to a different kind of book: part memoir (what Preciado classifies as 'autotheory'), part queer theory. Although these themes are interspersed throughout the book's thirteen chapters, an internal consistency is maintained, both aspects being necessary to understand the socio-political criticism that s/he establishes.

Preciado documents her/his taking of testosterone in gel form over the course of a year. This is not merely an experiment to measure the impact of testosterone on the body and subjectivity, it is a political experiment, a provocation, an act of resistance or, as Preciado explains it, an "auto-experimental form of do-it-yourself bioterrorism of gender": "I'm not taking testosterone to change myself into a man or as a physical strategy of transsexualism; I take it to foil what society wanted to make of me, so that I can write, fuck, feel a form of pleasure that is postpornographic, add a molecular prostheses to my low-tech transgender identity composed of dildos, texts, and moving images."

This "experiment" or "case study" is used by the author to deconstruct gender as a biotech-industrial artefact: in the "pharmacopornographic era" testosterone is just another molecule to control gendered subjectivity. Moreover, through off-label use of testosterone, Preciado escapes from the pharmacopornographic regimen's "global circuit of excitation-frustration-excitation". For the author these kinds of practices open doors to other ways of functionality and to cognitive experiences far removed from the able-bodied masculine heterosexual. In other words, the author proffers a highly utopian way of rethinking new technologies of government and the body, one which eludes mainstream cultural theory.

Two major characters running through the narrative are the ghost of the French writer and journalist, Guillaume Dustan and Preciado's lover, Virgine Despentes, who together embody the greatest personal tension of the book: the (de)construction of the

author's subjectivity and identity. In some chapters of autotheory Preciado asks the ghost of Dunstan "what kind of feminist is s/he today"; in others s/he finds the answer in sex with Despentes, her/his radical muse. "As we screw, I feel as if my entire political history, all my years of feminism, are moving directly toward the center of her body and flowing into it, as if her skin provided their only real niche. She is covered with my feminism as if with a diaphanous ejaculation, a sea of political sparkles." In this way, sex and theory blend naturally in the text of *Testo Junkie*.

These narratives are intertwined with more theoretical chapters, in which Preciado explains two of his/her main concepts: "pharmacopornographic regime" and "potential guadendi". Preciado updates Foucauldian biopolitics via a Deleuzian understanding of the molecular; the work of Judith Butler; and Marxism; and the theorists of post-Fordist capitalism. The "Pharmacopornographic regime" is a contemporary biopolitical landscape where "subjectivities are defined by the substance (or substances) that supply their metabolism, by the cybernetic prostheses and various types of pharmacopornographic desires that feed the subject's actions and through which they turn into agents."

But to fully understand this regime – which can also be described as a "war-porn-drug-prison complex" – we need another concept: "potencia guadendi" or orgasmic power, "the (real or virtual) strength of a body's (total) excitation". This orgasmic strength is the most abstract and, at the same time, the most material labour force in the "Pharmacopornographic regime"; although it cannot be possessed or conserved, it can be transformed by desire and subjectivity into capital: pleasure capital.

This book makes two major contributions to the field. Firstly, there is a deconstruction of the gender subjectivity created by the use of particular drugs that interact with other cultural devices. Drug and "prosthesis" designed to regulate gender category representations (the pill, Viagra, silicone breasts and lips, hair implants to limit alopecia, penis enlargements, etc.) are therefore political instruments for the management of gender and sexual subjectivity. But as with all political instruments – and as the author demonstrates with unregulated use of testosterone – these can be put to a different use. The second major contribution is his/her revolutionary way of thinking about bodies. Preciado understands the body as uncategorised, a polisexual orgasmic force. S/he takes a queer anarchist approach to the power of bodies dissenting from the norm, believing that an alliance of minority bodies could instigate sexual liberation from biopolitical control: sexuality as a critical force. In



this way, feminism would be promoted by “proletarian” whores, transsexuals and transvestites; by black, indigenous, disabled and poor bodies; and pornography and prostitution as biopolitical weapons could dismantle the watertight compartmentalism of gender and sexuality.

In short, this is a provocative essay on the body, gender and sexuality in contemporary society, which questions apparently unquestionable concepts in such a way that could have innovative social and political consequences.