

# Qualitative Agency Meets the History of Hormones: Auto-Experiments and Sexcapades

Preciado, Beatriz *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*. New York: Feminist Press at CUNY 2013 (432 pages)

**PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL** history of the body, gender theory, and history of performance at the University of Paris VIII, Beatriz Preciado, is a leading thinker in gender and sexuality studies. Their insightful new work, *Testo Junkie*, contains many tasty morsels of different styles and textures, mixed and transposed on each other, which may please or disturb the palate depending on the taste of the reader. In this manner, Preciado strives to excite us all, regardless of (academic) taste, on several levels simultaneously. Touching our wounds with memories of their recently dead friend-love, intricately describing the unfolding of a sex affair, detailing the auto-experiment of testosterone "addiction," deconstructing post-Marxist labor theory, fondling Deleuze, and conceptually mapping the overlaps between porn, pharmacology, biopolitics, economics, sex, and gender: this book is a sampler of excitement.

Ironically or not, one of the first ideas that Beatriz Preciado tempts us with in *Testo Junkie* is that we have entered a new era in which labor and the body are subject to "new" regiments for which "excitement" is one of the primary goals of production and biopolitics. Throughout the book we are confronted with various components of this era, which according to Preciado can be characterized as a "postindustrial, global, and mediatic regime that, from here on, I [Preciado] will call *pharmacopor-*

*nographic*. The term refers to the process of a biomolecular (pharmaco) and semio-technical (porno-graphic) government of sexual subjectivity [...] the mechanisms of the pharmacopornographic regime are materialized in the fields of psychology, sexology, and endocrinology” (Preciado 2013, 33–4). In *Testo Junkie*, Preciado helps us digest this government of subjectivity and bodies from a myriad of approaches, returning the concept of government to an analysis of post-fordist “non-productive” labor (such as that which we find in many extensions of the sex industry; sexualized labor), as well as addressing the pharmakon government of gendered performances including those related to sexuality.

The socio-economic analysis in *Testo Junkie*, as well as the increased attention to sexuality adds an important new layer to the field of hormone studies. What starts as an analysis of the enormous economic impact of pornographic production as an “un-official” source of cultural production, leads to a discussion about the sex industry with its “penetrable” bodies that are expected to produce sexuality for consumption (sexual, ethnic, and economic subordinates – a new look at the sexual division of labor). In the end, this tour enables Preciado to provide a satisfying critique of the less satisfying concept of the “feminization” of labor (often used to discuss casual labor). In the pharmacopornographic era, Preciado claims, gender is inextricably linked to the consumer market of the “*potentia gaudendi*, or ‘orgasmic force’, the (real or virtual) strength of a body’s (total) excitation [...] that is equivalent to the force of work in the domain of classical economics” (41). Thus, Preciado posits the semio-pornographic industry and the pharmaceutical industry in a similar place as socio-economic forces: while the later obviously requires greater initial investment of capital, both have low production costs, high profit margins, and contribute greatly to many countries’ gross domestic product (GDP).

Preciado’s auto-experimentation with Testogel is framed by a historical breakdown of certain aspects of the pharmakon government of the body. This includes the blaring gendered premise that arises in all social studies of hormones, in which these are intrinsically linked to gender – almost all hormone therapies correspond to the gender *identity* of the

"patient," not to so-called biological sex. In *Testo Junkie*, binary biological sex is unraveled as a biopolitical project that ambiguously uses the plasticity of the gendered body to reinforce the dichotomous project of masculinity and femininity, as well as the fixed idea of the male and the female body. Chemical agents such as Testogel, the Pill (and its initial testing in Puerto Rico), the vasodilator molecule (Viagra, etc.), Intrinsa (testosterone for cisgender female sexual dysfunction), HRT in general, as well as morphine, cocaine, MDMA and psychoactive substances receive a historical and performative shakedown. Whereas a historian might wish for more detail, it is extremely interesting to have the stories of these different chemicals agents laid side by side.

Furthermore, the auto-experiments Preciado engages in with Testogel derail the "psycho-political neoliberal modeling of subjectivity that potentiates the production of subjects" (117) regarding the connection between gender and mental health. Subjectivities lies not just in relation to gender categories but state regulated categories of wellness and pathology, Preciado claims, in a discussion in which illegal (not prescribed by a doctor) hormone use is paralleled to other illegal drug use. Cisgender women do not have legally sanctioned access to so-called "male" hormones, wherefore the one who takes "cross-gendered" hormones will be defined either as a junkie or someone with "gender dysphoria." As Preciado puts it: "[E]ither I declare myself to be a transsexual, or I declare myself to be drugged and psychotic [...] without identifying politically and socially as a man, I become inevitably, nuts. I won't be able to go directly to the pharmacy to get my doses of Testogel." (256-8).

Preciado's "hits" of Testogel are often described within the budding sex story, and one might desire more description of the specific sensation of the Testogel which, in the way it is framed, seems almost inseparable from the sensation of sex. In line with their breakdown of subjectivities, the Testogel seems to imply little for Preciado's already genderqueer *identity*, and is instead inserted into a narration of perceptions (described parallel to other psychoactive drugs) of the body, energy, relations, and libido in which gender is one of many fields of perception.

To sum up, in *Testo Junkie* Preciado takes us for a beautiful stimulat-

ing ride through a sexcapade in which the hormonal auto-experiment is ever-present. The arrival and departure stations that bookend this narrative, death, are not explicitly inserted in the analysis of the pharmacopornographic regime, but serve as a portrait of the complexity of stimulation. Along this ride we are invited to contemplate the somatechnic governance of the many facets of sexuality (reproduction, penetrator/penetrated scripts, elicit/licit excitement, etc.), gender (scripts, bodily components, medicalization of, etc.) and their socio-economic production. The shifts between the literary styles and levels are very satisfying, producing the qualitative agency that theory often lacks. Indeed, Preciado gives us plenty of theory, agency and stories for our meal, and as the Italian saying goes *l'appetito vien mangiando*, you begin to realize how hungry you were as you eat.

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