

Beatriz Preciado

Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics

e-flux journal #44 — april 2013 Beatriz Preciado
Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics

01/03

I live in a world where many things I thought impossible are possible.

– Guillaume Dustan, *Dans ma chambre* (1996)

The day of your death I put a 50-mg dose of Testogel on my skin, so that I can begin to write this book. The carbon chains, O-H₃, C-H₃, C-OH, gradually penetrate my epidermis and travel through the deep layers of my skin until they reach the blood vessels, nerve endings, glands. I'm not taking testosterone to change myself into a man, nor 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 post-pornographic, add a molecular prostheses to my *low-tech* transgendered identity composed of dildos, texts, and moving images; I do it to avenge your death.

I spread the gel over my shoulders. First instant: the feeling of a light slap on the skin. The feeling changes into one of coldness before it disappears. Then nothing for a day or two. Nothing. Waiting. Then an extraordinary lucidity settles in gradually, accompanied by an explosion of the desire to fuck, walk, go out everywhere in the city. This is the climax in which the spiritual force of the testosterone mixing with my blood takes the fore. Absolutely all the unpleasant sensations disappear. Unlike speed, the movement going on inside has nothing to do with agitation, noise. It's simply the feeling of being in perfect harmony with the rhythm of the city. Unlike coke, there is no distortion in the perception of self, no logorrhea nor any feeling of superiority. Nothing but the feeling of strength reflecting the increased capacity of my muscles, my brain. My body is present to itself. Unlike speed and coke, there is no immediate come down. A few days go by, and the movement inside calms, but the feeling of strength, like a pyramid revealed by a sandstorm, remains.

How can I explain what is happening to me? What can I do about my desire for transformation? What can I do about all the years I defined myself as a feminist? What kind of feminist am I today? A feminist hooked on testosterone, or a transgendered body hooked on feminism? I have no other alternative but to revise my classics, to subject those theories to the shock that was provoked in me by the practice of taking testosterone. To accept the fact that the change happening in me is the metamorphosis of an era.

The changes within neoliberalism that we are witnessing are characterized not only by the

transformation of “gender,” “sex,” “sexuality,” “sexual identity,” and “pleasure” into objects of the political management of living, but also by the fact that this management itself is carried out through the new dynamics of advanced techno-capitalism, global media, and biotechnologies. We are being confronted with a new type of hot, psychotropic punk capitalism. These recent transformations are imposing an ensemble of new micro-prosthetic mechanisms of control of subjectivity by means of biomolecular and multimedia technical protocols. Our world economy is dependent upon the production and circulation of hundreds of tons of synthetic steroids, on the global diffusion of a flood of pornographic images, on the elaboration and distribution of new varieties of synthetic legal and illegal psychotropic drugs (e.g., enaltestovis, Special K., Viagra, speed, crystal, Prozac, ecstasy, poppers, heroin, Prilosec), on the flood of signs and circuits of the digital transmission of information, on the extension of a form of diffuse urban architecture to the entire planet in which megacities of misery are knotted into high concentrations of sex-capital.

In order to distinguish this new capitalism from the nineteenth century disciplinary regime, I shall call “pharmacopornographic capitalism” this new regime of the production of sex and sexual subjectivity.

After World War II, the somatopolitical context of the production of subjectivity seems dominated by a series of new technologies of the body (which include biotechnology, surgery, endocrinology, and so forth) and representation (photography, cinema, television, cybernetics, videogames, and so forth) that infiltrate and penetrate daily life like never before. These are biomolecular, digital, and broadband data transmission technologies. The invention of the notion of gender in the 1950s as a clinical technique of sexual reassignment, and the commercialization of the Pill as a contraceptive technique, characterized the shift from discipline to pharmacopornographic control. This is the age of soft, feather-weight, viscous, gelatinous technologies that can be injected, inhaled – “incorporated.” The testosterone that I use belongs to these new gelatinous biopolitical technologies.

When I take a dose of testosterone in gel form or inject it in liquid form, what I’m actually giving myself is a chain of political signifiers that have been materialized in order to acquire the form of a molecule that can be absorbed by my body. I’m not only taking the hormone, the molecule, but also the concept of a hormone, a series of signs, texts, and discourses, the process through which the hormone came to be

synthesized, the technical sequences that produce it in the laboratory. I inject a crystalline, oil-soluble steroid carbon chain of molecules, and with it a fragment of the history of modernity. I administer to myself a series of economic transactions, a collection of pharmaceutical decisions, clinical tests, focus groups, and business management techniques. I connect to a baroque network of exchange and to economic and political flow-chains for the patenting of the living. I am linked by T to electricity, to genetic research projects, to mega-urbanization, to the destruction of forests and the biosphere, to pharmaceutical exploitation of living species, to Dolly the cloned sheep, to the advance of the Ebola virus, to HIV mutation, to antipersonnel mines and the broadband transmission of information. In this way, I become one of the somatic connectives that make possible the circulation of power, desire, release, submission, capital, rubbish, and rebellion.

As a body – and this is the only important thing about being a subject-body, a techno-living system – I’m the platform that makes possible the materialization of political imagination. I am my own guinea pig for an experiment on the effects of intentionally increasing the level of testosterone in the body of a bio-female. Instantly, the testosterone turns me into something radically different than a cis-female. Even when the changes generated by this molecule are socially imperceptible. The lab rat is becoming human. The human being is becoming a rodent. And, as for me: neither testogirl nor techno-boy. I am just a port of insertion for $C_{19}H_{28}O_2$. I’m both the terminal of one of the apparatuses of neoliberal governmentality and the vanishing point through which escapes the will to control of the system. I’m the molecule and the State, and I’m the laboratory rat and the scientific subject that conducts the research; I’m the residue of a biochemical process. I am the future common artificial ancestor for the elaboration of new species in the perpetually random process of mutation and genetic drift. I am T.

I do not want the female gender that has been assigned to me at birth. Neither do I want the male gender that transsexual medicine can furnish and that the State will award me if I behave in the right way. I don’t want any of it. I am a copyleft biopolitical agent that considers sex hormones free and open biocodes, whose use shouldn’t be regulated by the State commandeered by pharmaceutical companies.

The consumption of testosterone, like that of estrogen and progesterone in the case of the Pill, does not depend upon any ideal constructions of gender that would come to

influence the way we act and think. We are confronted directly by the production of the *materiality* of gender. Everything is a matter of doses, of melting and crystallization points, of the rotary power of the molecule, of regularity, of milligrams, of the form and mode of administration, of habit, of *praxis*. What is happening to me could be described in terms of a “molecular revolution.” In detailing this concept in order to refer to the revolt of May ’68, Félix Guattari certainly was not thinking of cis-females who self-administer testosterone. On the other hand, he was attentive to structural modifications generated by micropolitical changes such as the consumption of drugs, changes in perception, in sexual conducts, in the invention of new languages. It is a question of becomings, of multiplicities. In such a context, “molecular revolution” could point to a kind of political homeopathy of gender. It’s not a matter of going from woman to man, from man to woman, but of contaminating the molecular bases of the production of sexual difference, with the understanding that these two states of being, male and female, only exist as “biopolitical fictions,” as somatic effects of the technical process of normalization. It’s a matter of intervening intentionally in this process of production in order to end up with viable forms of incorporated gender, to produce a new sexual and affective platform that is neither male nor female in the pharmacopornographic sense of these terms, which would make possible the transformation of the species. T is only a threshold, a molecular door, a becoming between multiplicities.

×

An excerpt from Beatriz Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, translated from the French by Bruce Benderson and forthcoming from Feminist Press in September 2013.

03/03

e-flux journal #44 — april 2013 Beatriz Preciado
Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics

Beatriz Preciado is a professor of Political History of the Body, Gender Theory, and History of Performance at Paris VIII. She is also the author of *Manifiesto contrasexual*, which has become a queer theory classic, and *Pornotopía: Architecture and Sexuality in Playboy During the Cold War*, which has been named a finalist for the Anagrama Essay Prize. She received her PhD in the Theory of Architecture at Princeton and her masters in contemporary philosophy and gender theory at the New School for Social Research in New York.