

How Should Men Be Made? Preciado in the Gender Laboratory

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Abstract

Paul B. Preciado's theory of the pharmacopornographic regime provides a radical theoretical analysis of the relationship between gender, technology and capitalism. Firstly, I explicate Preciado's key concepts and argue that their overarching theoretical project illuminates neoliberal capitalism's capture and commodification of sexual energies and desire. I contend that contemporary toxic heteronormativity in extreme online communities may be explained as reactionary internalisation/resistance to this process. I conclude by suggesting Preciado's theoretical insights gesture toward a progressive and emancipatory pathway for rethinking masculinity.

Keywords: Gender, technology, feminism, testo-junkie, transgender, Preciado, incel, biopolitics, capitalism

Introduction

“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 transgender body hooked on feminism?”¹

“It is philosophically relevant today to undertake a somatopolitical analysis of world-economy.”²

That which is deemed natural, especially when placed in opposition to technology, is determined within a gendered context. Bacon’s *Novum Organum* refers to the technical arts as a means of helping science command Nature, forcing “her” into the role of humanity’s servant by surrendering her secrets.³ Technology, in the masculine register, has “the power to conquer and subdue her, to shake her to her foundations.”⁴ In contemporary science-fiction, nature is often rendered as a gendered, passive system of species and habitats that humans have the unique responsibility to save.⁵ The masculine controls, dominates, and investigates whilst the feminine is framed as passive, subservient; perhaps elusive. For Preciado, these are not only harmful stereotypes endemic to patriarchal thinking—the binary serves to mask the fact that gender is not an inherent or natural category but rather constructed and regulated through technological, medical, and pharmaceutical interventions.

Paul B. Preciado’s⁶ work seeks to undermine discourses that naturalise the gender binary and explore the artificiality of gender through the imposition of political and cultural practices that contribute to its technological construction. Preciado’s work extends the tradition of feminist posthumanism and poststructuralist gender theory by way of engaging with the relationship between gender and technology in the context of

1 Paul B. Preciado, *Testo-Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, trans. Bruce Benderson (New York: Feminist Press, 2013), 21–22.

2 Preciado, 25.

3 See Francis Bacon, *The New Organon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

4 Bacon, quoted in Carolyn Merchant, “Secrets of Nature: The Bacon Debates Revisited,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 69, no. 1 (2008): 162.

5 Julia B. Gibson, Kyle Powys Whyte, “Science Fiction Futures and (Re)Visions of the Anthropocene,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Technology*, ed. Shannon Vallor (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2022), 479.

6 Preciado previously identified as a lesbian woman, later going by non-binary pronouns, and in 2015, Preciado changed his name from Beatriz to Paul Beatriz and now identifies as a transgender man.

desire-production in late capitalism.⁷

I shall provide an overview of Preciado's key concepts—*potentia gaudendi*, the pharmacopornographic regime and technogender—consider the political implications of Preciado's somatopolitical analysis of world-economy and suggest that radical experimental approaches to trans-masculinity offer valuable insights into the interrogation and renegotiation of heteronormative masculinity among cisgender male feminist allies. In other words, *trans-men can show cis-men how men ought to be made*.

1. *Potentia Gaudendi* – The Politics of Orgasmic Force

Preciado's *Testo-Junkie* is part-philosophical monograph, part-memoir—brilliantly weaving erotic and existential personal anecdotes with rigorous historical case studies and conceptual engineering. Preciado wrote *Testo-Junkie* more than a decade ago, and yet given its prescience, it feels as though it could've been written next week. The central thesis in Preciado's work is that the contemporary transformation of neoliberal capitalism is increasingly ambivalent about the reproduction of binary gender hierarchies and gendered institutions because capital increasingly reduces the individual to a flattened embodiment valued for its capacity for *potentia gaudendi*, a semi-involuntary prompting of desires inherent to the body during moments of external stimulation. Preciado defines it simply as “‘orgasmic force’, the (real or virtual) strength of a body's (total) excitation.”⁸

Preciado describes the new capitalism as “hot, psychotropic, punk,” as “imposing an ensemble of new microprosthetic mechanisms of control of subjectivity by means of biomolecular and multimedia technical protocols.”⁹ The world economy is framed as a circulatory system exchanging organs, fluids, steroids, cells, psychotropic drugs, and pornographic images across distributive networks, including both synthetic and pharmaceutical products being shipped across the seas and arriving on palates in port cities and instantaneously transmitted digital information. They are the extension of a perverse and diffuse planetary architecture “in which megacities of misery are knotted into high concentrations of sex-capital.”¹⁰ Preciado invokes the language of an imbricated and accelerating viscera to provide “snapshots of a postindustrial, global, and mediatic regime”

7 See Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

8 Preciado, *Testo-Junkie*, 41.

9 Preciado, *Testo-Junkie*, 33.

10 Preciado, 33.

they term “pharmacopornographic.”¹¹ Our contemporary capitalism is differentiated from prior iterations due to the technical capacity of processes of “biomolecular (pharmaco) and semio-technical (pornographic) government of sexual subjectivity—of which ‘The Pill’ and Playboy are two paradigmatic offspring.”¹²

The novelty of contemporary technoscience is found in its capacity no longer to govern or discipline gender conformity so much as being capable of producing gender—the previously performed social fictions of gender may now be integrated directly into the body as “tangible realities.”¹³ Technoscience is no longer interested in “discovering the hidden truth in nature; it is about the necessity to specify the cultural, political, and technological processes through which the body as artifact acquires natural status.”¹⁴ It matters less what is natural to a female body, for example, but what can be done to a body to affirm our social understanding of what best assigns it as female. If gendered traits can be synthetically manufactured, then the sociological overlap of sex and gender in the public imagination becomes less important as the body becomes the site of gender production itself:

There is nothing to discover in sex or in sexual identity; there is no *inside*. The truth about sex is not a disclosure; it is *sexdesign*. Pharmacopornographic biocapitalism does not produce *things*...the pharmacopornographic business is *the invention of a subject* and then its global reproduction.¹⁵

Preciado invites us to consider the sex industry under these conditions, now reinterpreted as the ideal profit model for modern capitalism alongside financial speculation—“minimum investment, direct sales of the product in real time in a unique fashion, the production of instant satisfaction for the consumer. Every Internet portal is modelled on and organised according to this masturbatory logic of pornographic consumption.”¹⁶ The consumer wants to scratch an itch, they go to a website, they are presented with a variety of objects, often tailored by algorithms to meet targeted desires as efficiently and as quickly as possible; the product is purchased, the videos watched, the images enjoyed, and then the moment is gone, its duration and specifics logged for future algorithmic iterations—in the context of Amazon or eBay, further enjoyment when the product purchased arrives—

11 Preciado, 33.

12 Preciado, 33–34.

13 Preciado, 34.

14 Preciado, *Testo-Junkie*, 35.

15 Preciado, 36, author’s emphasis.

16 Preciado, 38–39.

and in the context of social media, the scrolling may continue and extend that session of attention. Orgasmic force—*potentia gaudendi*—is not always sexual but extended to also refer to underlying forces of entertainment, amusement, and titillation that command our attention.

Potentia gaudendi is malleable and impermanent *but is also impossible to possess or retain*; it cannot be reified or transformed into private property—I cannot possess your orgasmic energy, nor can I retain my own outside of my immediate experience of it at certain moments in certain circumstances—it “exists exclusively as an event, a relation, a practice, or an evolutionary process.”¹⁷ Preciado describes this energy as “inextricably carnal and digital, viscous yet representational by numerical values, a phantasmatic or molecular wonder that can be transformed into capital.”¹⁸ The technobodies that generate *potentia gaudendi* do not necessarily need to be living bodies—if they have already produced “content”—erotic or otherwise—their work may continue to exist; to be shared, liked, commented on, circulated, and by someone somewhere, profited from.¹⁹ It is a desire that cannot be fully enclosed and ultimately sated and so is eagerly sought within the capitalist system of infinite growth.

Preciado argues the market is no longer best understood as an outside power that

17 Preciado, *Testo-Junkie*, 43.

18 Preciado, 43.

19 Following Preciado’s style of splicing theory with anecdotal erotic memoir, I recall a memorable exchange as a student that provides an example of this strange phenomena: falling into inebriated conversation with a group of strangers as is customary in the smoking area of a nightclub, the conversation turned to the shared student pastime of consuming Internet pornography, and they spoke about their favourite porn actresses. Various names were bandied about—always ridiculous, glamorous, sometimes humorous monikers that one would never find on a passport—until one in their group brought up an actress and was swiftly rebuffed. After a quick back and forth and a google search, it was revealed that she had died the previous year—this led to a lengthy, disjointed but fascinating group discussion about the ethics of “appreciating” the work of a deceased performer. The immediate comparison was made with non-pornographic materials—we listen to songs recorded by deceased musicians, we enjoy the movies of deceased film stars, we read books written by deceased writers—why not enjoy pornographic materials with similar gusto? However, once the initial clamour for any excuse dissipated, the original objector argued that there is something about the logic of masturbation, and something about treating the dead with respect, that makes the act of pleasuring oneself to a dead porn actress inherently profane. The discussion then turned as to whether such a view assumes that porn actresses do not want their material to be used for that express purpose at all, or if the whole process is necessarily imbricated with exploitation. As a young student Marxist, I remember being preoccupied with questions of material production and ownership—who owns these videos? Is there an estate that secures profits? What if they acquire posthumous success—will there ever be a pornographic equivalent of Kafka, somebody who produces pornographic materials and leaves them to a friend like Max Brod, publishing them on their behalf? The emergent pharmacopornographic regime *does not care*—if the video exists, and it elicits desire, excitement and ecstasy, then it has value, and that value will be extracted and translated into profit. The desirous images become content; bodies fixed in time.

expropriates, represses, or controls our sexual instincts, rather the body is not aware of its *potentia gaudendi* until it is “put to work”²⁰—femininity refers less to a set of natural characteristics and more to the quality of an orgasmic force that can be converted into an object of economic exchange. Capitalism, understood through its control of *potentia gaudendi*, “defines the difference between genders, the female/male dichotomy” and “the technobiopolitical difference between heterosexuality and homosexuality.”²¹ If sex sells, masculinity tends to buy—and femininity tends to be the product. The pornographic image has its definition extended to refer to its capacity to stimulate—independently of the will of any spectator-consumer—biochemical and muscular mechanisms that regulate and constitute pleasure.²² In this context, toxic masculinity—here referring to the set of behaviours and beliefs that promote the dominance and devaluation of women, and the valorisation of aggression and avoidance of vulnerability through the suppression of emotions in men²³—are reproduced and sustained through the libidinal deferrals made possible through pharmacopornographic subjectivity. The traditional patriarchal masculinity of old may have receded and been replaced with a more consumerist libertine model in the pharmapornographic regime, but the underlying asymmetry of gendered social relations remains hardcoded into contemporary modes of production and consumption.

The pleasure of the pornographic consumer is a contradiction of an excited body involuntarily stimulated and yet deferred from gratification—the consumer objectifies the porn actors to associate their own *potentia gaudendi* with the performers, and yet the consumer’s body is “reduced to an involuntary receiver of ejaculatory stimuli, thereby putting him in a position deprived of any power to make sexual decisions.”²⁴ Sexuality is performed; it is performative; it is the public staging of a conventionally private performance commodified and uploaded to a global network that profits from reproducing its global circuit of “excitation-frustration-excitation.”²⁵ Sexuality is historically private, only rarely presented as performance by the sex industry, but removing sexuality from our conventional frameworks of paid work does not free sexuality from contemporary biopolitical control—we may have sex behind closed doors, but what sexuality is and how our bodies stimulate, excite, frustrate, satisfy—that is still under the purview of a pharmacopornographic regime that influences our own performance of ourselves.

If pornography may be understood as the transformation of sexuality into virtual, digital

20 Preciado, *Testo-Junkie*, 46.

21 Preciado, 47.

22 Preciado, 265.

23 See Terry A. Kupers, “Toxic Masculinity as a Barrier to Mental Health Treatment in Prison,” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 61, no. 6 (2005).

24 Preciado, *Testo-Junkie*, 270.

25 Preciado, 271.

spectacle as information,²⁶ a conceptual continuity may be found between pornography in its conventional form, and the way that other contemporary spectacles of information are articulated on digital networks. A representation becomes pornographic when it discloses in public what is customarily supposed to remain private, and therefore, in the contemporary age of digital disclosure, the absolute spreading of private information across social media that represent both our personal and professional lives (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn—and now arguably, OnlyFans insofar as it can also operate like Patreon), I here argue we may see a parallel between the disclosure of the sex worker and the disclosure of the worker laid bare by the imposition to present themselves as an object for digital consumption.²⁷ In other words, the increasing normalisation of sex work—which I must impress to be a welcome change from cultural attitudes that scorn, shame, and endanger sex workers—comes from the increasing normalisation and standardisation of their own work as *content creators*, where the content provided aligns with the earlier notion of orgasmic force. What consumer better aligns with the circuit of excitation-frustration-excitation than the permanently scrolling social media user, Amazon shopaholic, or YouTube addict? Furthermore, the increasing overlapping and integration of our public selves (the selves that go to work, pursue career opportunities, network with colleagues) and our private selves (the selves that take selfies and upload them for our followers, the selves that joke and gossip in group chats, the selves that share our personal and political beliefs) through social media imposes a thinner and thinner gauze between how we want to be perceived at work and how we act at leisure. Through our collective translation into content creators on digital networks, the form becomes ubiquitous on platforms, and in doing so, flattens out the details of the content into “*Content*” as such.

2. Gender as Political Construction

Gender enters the discussion as a somatopolitical fiction, as a means of producing subjects of desire and representation, but as Preciado argues, since the post-war period of the twentieth century, binary epistemologies of gender are becoming increasingly redundant. When Preciado talks about the production of gender, we may lean towards thinking about queer, transgender examples, but the pharmacopornographic regime is involved in the production of all genders—

“heterosexuality must be understood as a politically assisted procreation technology.”²⁸ Heteronormativity is a technologically assisted and politically endorsed reproduction of

26 Preciado, 266.

27 Preciado, 266.

28 Preciado, *Testo-Junkie*, 47.

the conditions of production, a means of preserving the status quo through the creation of future generations that will reproduce certain norms, and “the gradual transformation of sexual cooperation into a principal productive force cannot be accomplished without the technical control of reproduction.”²⁹ Being heterosexual, to be heteronormative, to have a “straight mind” or “straight way of thinking” is understood not as a sexual preference and its associated sexual practices, but as a ‘political regime’ that ‘guarantees the structural relationship between the production of sexual identity and the production of certain body parts (to the detriment of others) as reproductive organs.’³⁰ “Straight” couples must reproduce a certain way of life to reproduce certain conditions of production, and as long as those conditions of production are reproduced, it becomes increasingly irrelevant at a structural level if heteronormativity *qua* political regime is reproduced by homosexual couples (insofar as their desires align with certain values and norms of civic life, raising a family, securing a mortgage, defending the existing modes of production, circulation and consumption, disavowing alternatives modes of living, etc.).

In the post-disciplinary society, the reproduction of subjects is shifting in terms of institutional practices, but the production of bodies and their classification has been the purview of the western world since the eighteenth century—“sex, its truth, its visibility, and its forms of externalisation; sexuality and the normal and pathological forms of pleasure; and race, in its purity or degeneracy, are three powerful somatic fictions...eventually defining the scope of all contemporary theoretical, scientific, and political activity.”³¹ In disciplinary societies, technologies of subjectivisation controlled the body externally. The best example are sartorial interventions through history. Arsenic pads, once used to pale the complexion (they worked by killing the red blood cells under the skin); lead powder, once used to create the signature white face lauded in the Baroque period; extremely wide and long flammable crinoline skirts during the Victorian period, often worn with corsets underneath, which have been shown to deform the bowels, causing painful blockages, deform the lungs, opening them up to infections, and even cause death.

In the pharmacopornographic society, considered by Preciado to be post-disciplinary, the technologies become part of the body—“they dissolve into it; become somatechnics” and “technopolitics take on the form of the body and is incorporated.”³² Perhaps the most famous contemporary example would be the misuse of semaglutide (often known by its brand name Ozempic), an antidiabetic medication designed to supplement diet and exercise to control glycaemic levels in type 2 diabetes patients, instead used by celebrities to make rapid weight-loss transformations (and even contributing to a shortage for those

29 Preciado, 51.

30 Preciado, *Testo-Junkie*, 71.

31 Preciado, 69.

32 Preciado, *Testo-Junkie*, 78.

requiring it as a medical necessity).

For Preciado, “gender is a biotech industrial artifact.”³³ The biopolitical ideas of masculinity and femininity are transcendental essences from which contemporary gender aesthetics, normative codes of visual recognition (facial hair, timbre of voice, clothing choices, etc.) and psychological convictions create the conditions from which the subject proclaims itself a male or a female, cis- or transgender, heterosexual or queer.³⁴ Gender dysphoria may be reinterpreted and re-examined as the subject’s dislocation within an inherited pharmacopornographic biocapitalist regime that historically reinforced a gender binary but may increasingly accommodate diversions from heteronormativity so long as these differentiations reproduce the existing regime as much as the “nuclear family” served post-war capitalism. In this context, there remain immanent possibilities for creative reinvention to existing norms, but to have counter-hegemonic micropolitical effects, they must intentionally resist the forms of gender flexibility afforded to subjects within the pharmacopornographic regime of contemporary neoliberal capitalism.

The contemporary pharmacopornographic sex-gender regime is described as an “unexpected alliance between the nineteenth-century naturalist metaphysics of sexual dimorphism, focused on heterosexual reproduction, and the rise of a hyperconstructivist medical and biotech industry in which gender roles and identities can be artificially designed.”³⁵ The clinical notion of gender, once used as an instrument of rationalisation as an organising principle became necessary for the appearance and development of techniques that normalised and transformed living bodies, a process that includes historical methods such as “photographing ‘deviants’, cellular diagnosis, hormonal analysis and therapy, chromosomal readings, and transsexual and intersexual surgery.”³⁶ The process of normalisation that under disciplinary societies would involve techniques of assignment, accomplished by discursive or photographic representation, “is now inscribed within the very structure of the living being by surgical, endocrinological, and even genetic techniques,”³⁷ the body becomes understood as a techno-organic interface territorialised and determined by varying technological approaches,³⁸ which leads to various contradictions between our contemporary context and its historical inheritance. For example, our noses are considered part of our bodies to which we have absolute self-ownership—an extension of the notion that we own our own bodies as private property—but genitals “are still imprisoned in a premodern, sovereign, and nearly theocratic power

33 Preciado, 101.

34 Preciado, 102.

35 Preciado, *Testo-Junkie*, 103.

36 Preciado, 111.

37 Preciado, 112.

38 Preciado, 114.

regime that considers them to be the property of the state and dependent on unchanging transcendental law.”³⁹ Preciado has declared elsewhere that “enclosed in the neoliberal individualist fiction, we live with the naïve belief that our bodies belong to us.”⁴⁰

Returning to gender, my certainty of being a heterosexual cisgender male is not a natural alignment of my being at the ontological level, nor is it a natural cohesion of sexed body and mind, but rather “a somato-political biofiction produced by a collection of body techniques, pharmacologic and audiovisual techniques that determine and define the scope of our somatic potentialities and function like prostheses of subjectification.”⁴¹ Gender operates through affects, desires, actions, beliefs, and identities, and associated social responses to these stimuli. I am relatively tall; I am hairy and can grow a beard reasonably quickly; I have broad shoulders—these are all individual traits rendered as culturally masculine that intersect on my body as a surface for gender recognition from the other. Would I feel so comfortable in my skin, in my gender, if I were smaller; pigeon-chested; smoother? How quickly could something that feels as secure and fixed as my masculinity become radically contingent with a different somatic configuration, even with an aleatory selection from my own genetic inheritance? Preciado understands gender as a “psycho-political neoliberal modelling of subjectivity” that produces subjects that think of their gender as an extension of our own personal sense of self and behave like individual bodies, considering themselves “private organic spaces and biological properties with fixed identities of gender and sexuality.”⁴² The pharmacopornographic regime constructs gender to exist “before a public audience, as a somato-discursive construction of a collective nature, facing a scientific community or a network.”⁴³ This may partially explain the restrictive and intrusive policy convictions of transphobic lobbyists as the difference between ‘cis-’ and ‘trans’ is determined by resistance to the norms of these technical processes that produce the known somatic fictions of the masculine and the feminine body.⁴⁴ Instead, there exists *technogenders*, assemblages of “photographic, biotechnological, surgical, pharmacological, cinematographic, or cybernetic techniques come to construct the materiality of the sexes performatively.”⁴⁵

Another theoretical virtue (or perhaps implication for those resistant to methodological reconfiguration) of reorienting gender as political fiction produced at the level of the body is to take the question of gender identity out of the head; Preciado has been a notorious and

39 Preciado, 116.

40 Paul B. Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus*, trans. Charlotte Mandel (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2019), 74.

41 Preciado, *Testo-Junkie*, 117.

42 Preciado, 117.

43 Preciado, 118.

44 Preciado, 127–128.

45 Preciado, *Testo-Junkie*, 128.

controversial critic of the French psychoanalytic community, especially those influenced by Freudian and Lacanian methodologies to disregard the possibility of sex-identification outside of binaries: “I ardently appeal for a mutation in psychoanalysis, for the emergence of a mutant psychoanalysis, one equal to the paradigm shift we are experiencing.”⁴⁶

But where there are transformations of capitalist domination through subjectivity, there is always scope for resistance—political agency does not depend on rejecting technogender and trying to reimagine those original gender binaries through previous iterations of artificial construction rendered as natural (as may be a plausible interpretation of trans-exclusionary radical feminist approaches to hetero-masculine domination), but rather on reappropriation of those techniques of subjectivity production. As living bodies, as subjects constructed under these conditions—we are “the platform that makes possible the materialisation of political imagination.”⁴⁷ There is a recognisable Nietzschean voice—via Foucault—that Preciado adopts when considering the self-mastery of one’s gender expression as a point of micropolitical resistance: “biopower doesn’t infiltrate from the outside. It already dwells inside.”⁴⁸

The conventional critique of representation may be applied here. Testosterone is represented as typically masculine, something that masculine bodies produce more of and feminine bodies less, and yet ‘nothing allows us to conclude that the effects of testosterone are masculine’.⁴⁹ Testosterone is an androgen commonly associated with the male sex, but also exists in the bodies of females, albeit at lower levels, functioning in libido and sexual arousal. Androgens themselves are the precursors to oestrogens, which circulate at lower levels in both male and female bodies. In a world where hormonal therapy is possible, Preciado suggests the approach itself is analogous to “another form of mass communication—an attempt to conceptualise the body as a system of biocommunication.”⁵⁰ Hormones are described as carriers of messages and the body becomes the material effect of these transmissions, and then reframed in scientific discourse as chemical agents that act on behalf of masculinity and femininity, which can be deliberately inserted to the body to induce different gendering effects. Theorists of gender and technology, therefore, must look beyond how a discourse or technical innovation is represented, and instead at what could be done if applied without existing limitations, in this case, the inherited binary categorisations of prior iterations of biocapitalism that remain within the pharmacopornographic regime.

46 Paul B. Preciado, *Can The Monster Speak?*, trans. Frank Wynne (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2020), 77.

47 Preciado, *Testo-Junkie*, 139.

48 Preciado, 208.

49 Preciado, *Testo-Junkie*, 141.

50 Preciado, 160.

The transition from a disciplinary to a pharmacopornographic regime is exemplified with 'The Pill'. A synthetic oral progesterone taken regularly to a strict timetable, clinical trials were performed in Puerto Rico, the first to be "externalised and outside medical and pharmacological institutions and to take place in the domestic environment,"⁵¹ contributing to a new "pharmacodomestic technique for (re)producing race, a form of neocolonial biotechnologies eugenics for controlling the reproduction of the species,"⁵² The birth-control technique is camouflaged as a feminine everyday use product, resembling a makeup compact in size and shape, a way of making public what once would have been considered private. Preciado contends that these forms of medical intervention "produce the subject they claim to shelter"⁵³—the woman who must discreetly ensure their newfound sexual liberation does not leave them at risk of pregnancy produces through the product the representation of both the woman who may be privately sexually liberal, and the woman who is publicly ashamed of their disclosing their liberation, hence the product's camouflaged packaging. Power is not impacting the body from outside, rather, "the body swallows power. It is a form of control that is both democratic and private, edible, drinkable, inhalable, and easy to administer, whose spread throughout the social body has never been so rapid or so undetectable."⁵⁴

3. Political Interventions

Preciado contends that the gains made for women during the initial stages of the pharmacopornographic regime—technology such as the Pill being the paradigmatic example—shifted the political approach of (white, liberal) feminism. If the state would no longer control the narrative of what constitutes a "good woman," liberal feminism appeared indifferent to those representations and expectations being determined in a more diffuse form across the market through commodities. For example, Preciado suggests an alternative history where feminists argue that masculinity should *also* undergo state regulation—castration for sex offenders, making the use of condoms legally required for casual sexual encounters, research directed into techniques for sealing of the seminal channel, "mass administration of Androcur (to lower the production of testosterone in cis-males), and so on."⁵⁵ That is not to say that this would be an emancipatory political project, but rather reveals that contingencies of politicising gender, the alternative

51 Preciado, 188.

52 Preciado *Testo-Junkie*, 189–190.

53 Preciado, 205.

54 Preciado, 207.

55 Preciado, 232.

demands, that could have been made along the way.

In the neoliberal biocapitalism inherent to the pharmacopornographic regime, Preciado argues it is necessary to oppose our existing gender regime “with a molecular and postpornographic transfeminism...to trigger a new counter-pharmacopornographic revolution.”⁵⁶ Contemporary feminism must resist the spectacularizing of femininity by the pharmacopornographic regime that wants to value bodies by their erotic output (orgasmic force) and the determination of what constitutes femininity by external political, medical and technological discourses, and instead embrace a form of personalised and counter-hegemonic rejection of patriarchal norms, through the production of new forms of gender identification and expression:

If I don't accept defining myself as a transsexual, as someone with “gender dysphoria,” I must admit that I'm addicted to testosterone. As soon as a body abandons the practices that society deems masculine or feminine, it drifts gradually towards pathology. My biopolitical options are as follows: either I declare myself to be a transsexual, or I declared myself to be drugged and psychotic.⁵⁷

Preciado argues that the ultimate problem of resistance to the existing technological regime of gender is breaching mainstream social thought with the idea that the genders, as well as the notions of heterosexuality and homosexuality, are politically constructed.⁵⁸ With such a reorientation operationalised, theorists of gender and technology are then able to ask questions about when, how, and which bodies have been pharmacologically managed, what the underlying political fictions of masculinity and femininity contribute to the contemporary management of gender, what type of subjectivity the existing pharmacopornographic regime wishes to reproduce, and of course, what type of subjectivity do we wish to create for ourselves and each other as part of a broader counter-hegemonic politics?⁵⁹

Preciado refers to the global corporation that “produces nothing,” a symptom of cognitive, informational, communicative capitalism in the global North. The corporation that produces nothing is arguably best understood through the platform model, increasingly adopted by corporations in the last decade, and symptomatic of the pharmacopornographic regime—social media platforms produce something approaching nothing, a blank canvas to be shared by users, and operationalised to encourage the production of content that may

56 Preciado, *Testo-Junkie*, 231.

57 Preciado, 256.

58 Preciado, 227.

59 Preciado, *Testo-Junkie*, 228.

be turned into data, reorganised, reinterpreted, reconstituted, and converted into profit.⁶⁰ Corporations in the post-Fordist mode of production wish to control the reproduction of bodies (in the sense of being somatic fictions) and their associated pleasures (recalling the excitation-frustration-excitation circuit) through copyright (and I would add intellectual property more expansively). We live, we make, we share, we exchange, we talk, we write, we want, we desire—we become abstract profit⁶¹—post-Fordist society is defined by “the sale of the force of communication and excitation produced by a living body—the sale of that body’s *potentia gaudendi*.”⁶²

For theoretical context, Preciado resists those referring to the feminization of work as “insufficient but also biased”—it is the racialised and transgender body that is most exploited by the transition to a global pharmacopornographic political regime.⁶³ The bodies of value for capital are those bodies endowed with the capacity to produce frustrating satisfaction—political subjects must be able to experience pleasure and produce it for others⁶⁴—bodies that fit the archetypal characteristics that engender sexual excitation may survive in the network longer than those disregarded by patriarchal biocapitalism. The overweight cisgender male struggling with loneliness; the middle-aged menopausal cisgender woman struggling to be taken seriously in the workplace and struggling to think of herself as a sexual being in her private life; the younger transgender woman struggling to pass in public and regularly encountering misgendering that shatters her confidence and the stability of her self-identity; the racialised cisgender people grappling with the imposition of white patriarchal beauty standards—all may be connected politically by their shared subject-position as those pushed out by the pharmacopornographic regime: “the new pharmacopornographic proletariat is not simply an economic subject engaged in producing sexual and toxicological surplus value; *it is also a new form of political subject*.”⁶⁵

Gender is no longer determined by social norms alone—pharmaceutical laboratories that produce new medico-technical interventions into the body, corporate and state medical and legal institutions that control and regulate the use of gender and sex biocodes such as progesterone, oestrogen and testosterone alongside our own individual and collective performances of dissident performance and aesthetics all contribute to modern gender representation. Preciado’s political project is clear:

60 See Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017); Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (London: Profile Books, 2018).

61 Preciado, *Testo-Junkie*, 278.

62 Preciado, 285.

63 Preciado, 287.

64 Preciado, *Testo-Junkie*, 304.

65 Preciado, 304, my emphasis.

we must reclaim the right to participate in the construction of biopolitical fictions. We have the right to demand collective and “common” ownership of the biocodes of gender, sex, and race... a process of resistance and redistribution could be called technosomatic communism.⁶⁶

Here Preciado’s call mirrors the poststructuralist account of freedom for the subject: “(1) *x*, a socially-constructed subject, is free (2) from *y*, the present social context that constitutes her subjectivity, (3) in and through *z*-ing, resisting the present context/subjectivity, constructing new contexts/subjectivities.”⁶⁷ Despite the conceptual stretch of framing such resistance as a form of communism, Preciado also sees the political possibilities that may emerge at the individual level, advocating a “micropolitics of disidentification, a kind of experimentation that doesn’t have faith in representation as an exteriority that will bring truth or happiness.”⁶⁸ In the next section, I argue that the harmful effects of the absence of such an emancipatory politics may be found in extremist heteronormative online communities such as incels and “NoFap.”

4. Masculinity Failing Men

Despite encouraging signs of the pharmacopornographic regime indirectly facilitating emancipatory communities of resistance and solidarity, there are aberrations symptomatic of any cultural transformation that resist the potential of change even to their own disadvantage.

Incels (involuntary celibates) exist in online communities, groups of predominantly young men who reject their own somatic presentation as inferior to the “Chads” (think stereotypical masculine alpha males) who are able to seduce women. The failures of the incel are internalised, often through racialised self-hatred and dominant toxic heteronormativity—but also externalised—with liberal sex-positive feminist attitudes and the growing economic influence of women in work and the marketplace often considered unjust deviations from historical custom.⁶⁹ Incels are racist, prone to extreme language

66 Preciado, 352.

67 John Filling, “Liberty” in *Encyclopedia of Political Thought*, ed. Michael Gibbons, Diana Coole, Lisa Ellis, and Kennan Ferguson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 15.

68 Preciado, *Testo-Junkie*, 398.

69 Lauren Menzie, “Stacys, Beckys, and Chads: The Construction of Femininity and Hegemonic Masculinity within Incel Rhetoric,” *Psychology & Sexuality* 13, no. 1 (2020): 69.

that advocates violence,⁷⁰ and they lean politically—if at all—fascist.⁷¹

Studies of incel sub-forums on Reddit reveal through keyword analysis that references to gendered social actors are commonplace across the community. Considered preoccupied with physical attractiveness, incels group different types of men into a hierarchy in which conventionally attractive men are highest status, yet studies note that female social agents are not placed in a similar hierarchy.⁷² Incels perform a hybrid, contradictory discourse of masculinity in which they claim lower status than women while also calling other men weak and powerless using comparisons to women, which spirals into violent hatred of both women and themselves.⁷³ The cultural transformation from fixed heteronormative ideas of gender, themselves disadvantageous social impositions for incels anyway, creates a crisis of meaning instead of a space for opportunity due to resistance to the progressive political and social implications of such a transformation—it *becomes more important to be “weak” men by their admission in a society where they may still control women than to be freed along with women*. In this sense, there is continuity with historical forms of antifeminism.⁷⁴ The most extreme and violent incels, including those who have committed acts of domestic terrorism, consider themselves part of a political movement.⁷⁵ Through Preciado’s theoretical framework, we may interpret incels as toxic heteronormativity’s violent reaction to the increasing normalisation of liberal attitudes within the neoliberal capitalist states of the global North, a nostalgic internationalisation of eroding patriarchal norms.

Consider a different form of online community, understood as an anthropotechnical enterprise with its own novel, if ultimately misguided, interpretation of resistance to the pharmacopornographic regime. Micro-communities of heteronormative males are interpreting their own difficulties within contemporary cognitive capitalism through the prism of withholding sexual gratification. Given contemporary capitalism’s injunction to enjoy, young, isolated males find themselves as online inheritors of religious and pseudoscientific advocacy of sexual self-regulation, and as such find communities of

70 Alessia Tranchese and Lisa Sugiura, “‘I Don’t Hate All Women, Just Those Stuck-Up Bitches’: How Incels and Mainstream Pornography Speak the Same Extreme Language of Misogyny,” *Violence Against Women* 27, no. 15 (2021): 2719.

71 Casey Ryan Kelly, and Chase Aunspach, “Incels, Compulsory Sexuality, and Fascist Masculinity,” *Feminist Formations* 32, no. 3 (2020): 6.

72 Frazer Heritage, and Veronika Koller, “Incels, In-groups, and Ideologies,” *Journal of Language and Sexuality* 9, no. 2 (2022): 152.

73 Alyssa M. Glace, Tessa L. Dover, and Judith G. Zatzkin, “Taking the Black Pill: An Empirical Analysis of the ‘Incel,’” *Psychology of Men & Masculinities* 22, no. 2 (2021): 288.

74 Debbie Ging, “Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere,” *Men and Masculinities* 22, no. 4 (2019): 639.

75 Catharina O’Donnell and Eran Shor, “‘This is a Political Movement, Friend’: Why ‘Incels’ Support Violence,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 73, no. 2 (2022): 347.

resistance in conservative circles.

The “NoFap” community is an anti-masturbation group set up on Reddit that now operates its own independent website and forums.⁷⁶ Members perceive masturbation as unhealthy and pathologise their own pornographic media consumption, internalise their own previous addictive behaviours as defects of character, and frame their self-imposed discipline as individual mastery and collective rejection of the hypersexuality of contemporary capitalism. Clearly this is not a coherent politics of resistance; it is a reaction to the pharmacopornographic regime emerging from a context of gendered expectations and desire production as a form of social discipline. These community norms resemble accounts of positive freedom as self-mastery: “(1) x, the ‘real’ self (individual or, more commonly, collective), is free (2) from y, desires, (3) to z, do whatever is rational,”⁷⁷ where the *first-order* desire to consume internet pornography is eschewed in order to maintain the *second-order* desire to achieve certain personal targets and goals.⁷⁸ Masculinity is the underlying cultural machine that renders an implicit endorsement of pseudoscience and an accompanying pop-cultural understanding of stoicism as a viable technique for self-mastery. Its reactionary critique of liberal capitalism is framed in moral and spiritual terms, suggesting that pornography and masturbation weaken men, sap their willpower, and reduce their potential for self-mastery and “higher” pursuits. While this can be framed as an effort to reclaim desire from the grasp of capitalist exploitation, the political reactionary nature of “NoFap” lies in its attempt to reassert a rigid, self-controlled, misogynistic form of masculinity.

In both cases, rather than finding new, emancipatory modes of desire or relationships, these groups retreat into older structures of gender and sexuality, seeking a kind of purity or authenticity in reaction to what they see as the excessive liberalization and commodification of human life. Thus, while their critiques of capitalism’s reduction of desire to the sexual and transactional resonates with our socio-technical conditions, their solutions intend to reclaim lost hierarchies rather than revolutionary engagements with the possibilities for new, egalitarian forms of desire or relationships. The existence of these toxic patriarchal subcultures lends credibility to Preciado’s analysis of the relationship between gender, capitalism and desire, but also underscores the necessity of cultivating anti-patriarchal responses to avoid anti-feminist cultural regression.

Returning to Preciado’s journey through gender piracy to trans-masculine affirmation, I

76 Felix Zimmer and Roland Imhoff, “Abstinence from Masturbation and Hypersexuality,” *Sexual Behavior* 49, no. 4 (2020): 1334.

77 Filling, “Liberty,” 5.

78 Charles Taylor, “What’s Wrong with Negative Liberty,” in *The Idea of Freedom: Essays in Honour of Isaiah Berlin*, ed Alan Ryan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 177.

contend that trans-masculinity may offer radical and fruitful approaches to the collective socio-political project of *redesigning men*, of rethinking the role of masculinity in a free and equal society. Preciado's theoretical writings are an exercise in autobiographic exhibitionism and reinvention, of over-extending oneself publicly to demonstrate a willingness to be vulnerable with the other, and yet in doing so, to place the other in a voyeuristic register, to challenge their comfort in having access to so much of the author. If earlier forms of patriarchal masculinity found their expression in 'strong, silent types'—suppressed emotions and an unwillingness to appear vulnerable—and newer forms of masculinity are expressed with risk-taking consumerist play aligned with the producer/consumer neoliberal subjectivity, a radical masculinity that develops from these existing limitations within and beyond the pharmacopornographic regime must accommodate ironic awareness of existing privileges coupled with a willingness to follow hetero-divergent and queer-centric practices as sources of creative inspiration—to see solidaristic connections between the art of drag and affirming procedures such as hairline transplantation, teeth whitening, and steroid use for muscular development by cisgender men.⁷⁹ Extreme forms of heteronormativity perceive femininity as an external threat to masculinity—to be dominated and contained, desired and possessed—rather than a necessary supplement to the cultural limitations of masculinity reproduced as a means of reproducing the existing conditions of social reproduction. Trans-masculinity, as a self-authored embodied intervention, compels heterosexual cisgender allies to rethink the contingencies of their own gender expression, the extent to which their own social subjectivity is limited, compelled or determined by an unexplored conception of masculinity, and invites a pathway towards an exclusive and emancipatory reimagining of gendered norms as intentional, guided by performative principles rather than existing prejudices.

Conclusion

*"My trans body is a rented apartment, a nameless space—I am still waiting for the right to be named by the State, I wait, and I fear the violence of being named."*⁸⁰

*"Happiness resides in the conviction that to be alive is to bear witness to an era, and thus to feel responsible, vitally and passionately responsible, for the collective fate of the planet."*⁸¹

79 It is worth recalling that 'Testogel'—Preciado's fugitively applied supplement—was originally marketed to support men with hormone deficiencies.

80 Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus*, 196.

81 Preciado, 201.

Trans rights are human rights, and both are under threat. Preciado's project is a theoretical intervention into existing feminist, anticapitalistic, poststructuralist, and sociotechnical discourses that brings the periphery into the centre of critical thought—we should not read in Preciado the cultural transformation of gender as an example of a progressive capitalism that ought to be left to counter traditional gender norms unabated by political interference, but rather read the pharmacopornographic regime as the untethering of certain forms of biopolitical control from economic control, an iteration of neoliberal late capitalism that objectifies and stifles as much as it contains the immanent possibility of liberation. Furthermore, the context in which trans lives are becoming more visible is also the context of violent political reaction.⁸² Any analysis of the relationship between politics and technology is incomplete without gender, and any gender analysis is incomplete without an acknowledgement of those that exist outside the gender binary. A radical politics of technology must accommodate “new affordances of perception and action unblinkered by naturalised identities.”⁸³ Returning to the ideological and cultural distinction between nature and technology, “if nature is unjust, change nature!”⁸⁴ Preciado's theoretical contribution demonstrates the contemporaneous methods by which late capitalism may intercept, distort, and commodify interventions into gender and technology that must instead be cultivated and redistributed as supplements to a personal and collective politics of resistance. Insofar as patriarchal heteronormativity is socially reproduced, we must reject toxic approaches (for instance, incelism and communities of pathological self-discipline) that reify and reproduce existing problematic limitations on the performance of manhood and manliness through their attempted rejection of the pharmacopornographic regime, and instead enter the gender laboratory and find instances of strangeness, of experimentation; of collective reformulation—to overcome the technology of patriarchy, *we must redesign masculinity together*.

82 Tecelli Domínguez-Martínez, Rebeca Robles García, Ana Fresán, Jeremy Cruz, Hamid Vega & Geoffrey M. Reed, “Risk Factors for Violence in Transgender People: A Retrospective Study of Experiences during Adolescence,” *Psychology & Sexuality* 14, no. 4 (2023): 659.

83 Laboria Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto: A Politics for Alienation* (New York: Verso 2018), 93.

84 Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto*, 93.

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