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Spaces for Becomings? Heterotopic Fictions in Preciado's *Testo yonqui*

Caroline King

Abstract

This article examines the possibilities and limits of Paul Preciado's (2008) book *Testo yonqui* (*Testo Junkie*) to inspire gender becomings. A genre-fluid "body-essay," Preciado's text follows his self-administration of testosterone in what he terms the pharmacopornographic era, a modern iteration of Foucault's biocapitalism. After designating Preciado's self-generated transformations as *becomings*, I explore how the book's heterotopic spaces—including its genre—facilitate Preciado's quest for a gender identity that cannot be labeled. A Foucauldian term, "heterotopia" has not yet been applied to *Testo yonqui* or other transgender texts, and it provides a productive template for the complex interplay of individuals and society. While I critique the vulnerability of heterotopias, and, by proxy, of *Testo yonqui*, to harmful power dynamics, I ultimately uphold *Testo yonqui's* ability to destabilize rigid narratives of identity.

Keywords: transgender, gender identity, testosterone, heterotopias, Foucault, Preciado, self, becoming, genre

This revolution is going to be about love, about changing desires. . . . *Pase una cuestión de cambiar de deseos, de transformar los deseos. C'est la révolution de l'amour.*

– Paul Preciado, *Ouverture of Something That Never Ended* (Van Sant and Michele 2020)

Introduction

Referring to dissolving gender boundaries, the epigraph above is spoken in a short film produced by Gucci. While lounging in her Roman home wearing modern lace pajamas, transgender actor Silvia Calderoni turns on the television to see Paul Preciado, an internationally recognized philosopher from Spain. As Preciado talks about superseding sexual binaries through individual transformation and experi-

mentation, he suddenly turns to address Silvia through the screen¹: “But you know what I’m talking about, Silvia,” he says, studying her earnest face. “This revolution is going to be about love” (Van Sant and Michele 2020).

For many, it will seem out of place for a philosopher to appear in a fashion film.² But the revolution Preciado, the character, theorizes is also recounted in Preciado the author’s book *Testo yonqui* (*Testo Junkie*). Like many manifestos, this text begins with a rejection: “*Este libro no es una autoficción*” (Preciado 2008, 15; This book is not an autofiction).³ Because the book recounts Preciado’s self-administration of testosterone, *Testo yonqui* could quickly be classified as autofiction. Instead, from this apophatic first sentence *Testo yonqui* hedges its reader’s genre expectations then specifies what the book *is*: a fiction, a body-essay, and an autotheory. Kaleidoscopic across each page, these genres blend, blur, and interrupt one another like the ideals Preciado’s gender revolution upholds. As the first passage establishes the book’s hybrid textuality, it also anticipates *Testo yonqui*’s topos of space in which Preciado’s narrator Beatriz (called B. P. throughout the text) takes testosterone. Recent work by cultural geographers suggests that “space is a condensation of the acts that comprise it” (Larisch 2015, 503), and in the introductory passage, Preciado’s act is a performance of both genres and genders.

After denoting the many genres the text will perform, B. P. lays out the book’s fictional plot and tells us that during the time period covered, “*sucedan dos mutaciones externas en el contexto próximo del cuerpo experimental*” (Preciado 2008, 15; two external mutations in the proximal context of the experimental body occur). First, there is the death of G. D., Preciado’s real-life friend and leading queer activist Guillaume Dustan. Then, almost simultaneously, there is “the tropism” of B. P. toward V. D., Preciado’s real-life lover and feminist filmmaker Virginie Despentes. Facilitated by testosterone, this second turn denotes the start of B. P.’s transformation into a

¹ Throughout the paper, I will be using he/his pronouns when referring to both Preciado and *Testo yonqui*’s narrator, B. P. (Beatriz Preciado). These are Preciado’s preferred pronouns at the time of this paper’s publication.

² “It is a little bit me, in the sense that he takes my words and my ideas, but it is also not exactly me, because philosophers rarely speak on TV and even more rarely have the chance of talking directly to those who are watching TV at home,” Preciado (2020b) says in an interview—a statement reminiscent of Jacques Derrida in the documentary *Derrida* (2002) in which he deconstructs a film’s ability to portray him accurately.

³ Though Bruce Benderson produced an English translation of *Testo yonqui* (*Testo Junkie* [Preciado 2013]), his translation takes many liberties. Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent translations of the Spanish original will be my own.

man that loves a woman, a change that he chooses. Then the narrator turns yet again: this time, from the mode of memoir to that of theory.

In this article, I will explore how, within its oscillating genres, *Testo yonqui's* literary space allows or inhibits *becomings*, my term for self-generated transformations. Even when those changes are prompted by death, inherent in *Testo yonqui's* *becomings* is a vitality emphasized—and dashed—by the text's heterotopias: worlds within worlds that both mirror and upset the "real" world outside, as theorized in Foucault's essay "Of Other Spaces." In section 1, I establish how heterotopias are a productive lens through which to view transgender theory. Section 2 narrows in on how both genre and gender, with their capricious identities, function as heterotopias throughout *Testo yonqui*. The question, line by line, then becomes, who holds the agency to write these identities? Section 3 considers the text's limits to inspire *becomings*, including Preciado's own misuse of decolonizing language. But ultimately, as I discuss in section 4, Preciado also gives readers tools to recognize oppressive structures then choose to resist.

Foucault provides six principles and their examples through which to define heterotopias, and I will use several of those principles as benchmarks throughout this article. Some examples he gives, like mirrors and cinemas, are heterotopias due to the gap between real-time viewers and the images who exist in a different space. Other heterotopic orders, like colonies, have darker meanings: utopias created at the expense of another, for whom it is a dystopia. This is the same relationship Preciado seeks to subvert as he reappropriates the bioapparatuses of colonizing structures for a gender revolution. Heterotopias therefore house an indeterminacy between being and nonbeing as well as a temporal uncertainty. This definition resonates with the interplay of genres in Preciado's text, which, unlike works from many other literatures from Latin American to Arabic that also question societal structures, has not yet been categorized as heterotopic.⁴ As Foucault (1987, 27) writes, in a society without heterotopias "dreams dry up." Through considering *Testo yonqui* as a heterotopic piece of literature, this article will illustrate the multivariate possibilities Preciado creates for *becomings* as well as point out where those possibilities fall short.

Though Preciado never uses the term "becomings," the idea of transformation and metamorphosis is integral to his work. There are two categories in which he uses the verb *to become* (*volver* and *convertirse* in the original Spanish): the personal and the political. "*Pero cómo el sexo y la sexualidad, se preguntarán, llegan a convertirse en el centro de la actividad política y económica?*" Preciado asks (2008, 26; But how did sex and sexuality, they will wonder, become the center of political and economic

⁴ See Lindsey Moore's (2008) *Arab, Muslim, Woman: Voice and Vision in Postcolonial Literature and Film*; see also Sharon Larisch's (2015) "Mario Bellatin's *Salón De Belleza* and the Production of Space."

activity?). He answers this question by terming today's world a "pharmacopornographic era." A version of Foucault's biocapitalism, the pharmacopornographic entails the invention of a gendered, sexual subject and its reproduction through drugs, surgeries, and desires shaped by porn. Quoting Foucault's *The Abnormal*, Preciado writes that each body becomes an "individual to correct" (62; *individuo que es necesario corregir*; quoting Foucault 1999, 53). Enabled by the technoscientific industry, men take Viagra and women take the Pill—the most used pharmaceutical in human history (Tone 2001)—to achieve increasingly heterosexual attributes; both sexes undergo surgeries to enhance their bodies toward ideals promoted by porn. These phenomena are then exploited both economically and politically as companies exacerbate gender archetypes through marketing while governments place limits on how far these supplements can go.⁵

The political turns personal in *Testo yonqui* when, to demonstrate how the pharmacopornographic era makes gender eternally malleable, the narrator destabilizes his physical self through testosterone. Margaret Frohlich (2010, 134) describes *Testo yonqui*'s approach to gender as "sex design" rather than an unveiling, and indeed, Preciado demonstrates agency over his visual identity while evading the often-oppressive analyses implemented by medical professionals to determine whether a female's request for testosterone is legitimate. Anticipating judgement for his choice "*volverme un hombre*" (2008, 48; to become a man), Preciado acknowledges the bad press his decision might accrue: at a time when law and medicine are beginning to legitimize transsexuality, he describes testosterone as an experiment rather than a gateway to his truest gender identity. He writes that he is not taking testosterone to change into a man or to transsexualize his body, but "*para traicionar*" (to betray) what society wants to make of him (2008, 20).

Though there are potentially negative political implications to this approach, Preciado's project also represents his power—and the reader's by proxy—to use what he wants from the pharmacopornographic era without conforming entirely to its rules. Accordingly, scholars such as José Esteban Muñoz (1999, 12) and Frohlich (2010, 125) have labeled the narrator's acts within *Testo yonqui* as disidentificatory. *Disidentification* is a term that has been adopted by theorists from various fields to denote a mindset that allows one to take pieces (ideologies, dress, affinities, etc.) from the dominant culture that serve their ideal identity, and then abandon or repurpose the rest. For example, one might embrace points from a historically patriarchal theory that resonate with their own experiences while reconceptualizing oppressive frameworks to better support their beliefs. Notably, Muñoz (1999, 4) uses

⁵ Preciado also refers to this as a performative feedback loop, stating that concepts such as femininity and masculinity, transsexuality, consciousness, and the libido have been turned into tangible entities to be commercialized (see Preciado 2008, 32–33).

the term disidentification in the context of racial and queer oppression to describe moments of “powerful and seductive . . . self-creation,” a definition that informs my use of becomings as well.

Nonetheless, this article considers Preciado's act distinct from traditional understandings of disidentification. Though Preciado has used the term “biodrag” as an operative concept in his work, the modifier “bio” implies a transformation that is not so finite. A molecular change through testosterone functions distinctly from a costume or a gesture: it cannot be taken off at the end of the night, as Muñoz writes of the vogue dancers' drag in New York City.⁶ Becomings, on the other hand, constitute forward motion that is more corporeal than ephemeral—the changes Preciado undergoes are concrete: changes in his physical constitution. When he takes the last dose of testosterone, Preciado's narrator writes, “*las cosas avanzan*” (2008, 306; things are advancing). There is also a multiplicity to this forward motion: just as a river is never the same river twice as it flows, Preciado's gender and the identity it denotes transform constantly as the hormones move through his body. Because these changes are so perpetual that it is difficult to pin them down to define them, I speak of becomings as a plural noun, nodding also to the multiplicity inherent in heterotopias.

1. Heterotopias: A Framework for Transgender Writing

Throughout queer and transgender writings, the medium has been part of the exposition. But for transgender writing, the answer to what that medium is has not been clear. In her article “Trapped in the Wrong Theory: Rethinking Trans Oppression and Resistance,” Talia Mae Bettcher (2014) speaks to the various models of transgender narratives, from the “wrong-body” model to the “beyond-the-binary” model. Unsatisfied with these constructs, Bettcher (2014, 389) describes her search for her own model and those of her community: “Our self-identifications are generally complex and hard to pin down. Indeed, the very meanings of gender terms are not stable. They're both variable and contested.”

Bettcher's description resonates with Walter Mead's (1995, 13) definition of heterotopias: “a collection whose members have few or no intelligible connections with one another.” The word “collection” is important here: despite the inconsistencies, differences are brought together to form something new. Through his hybrid, indefinable genres, Preciado creates his own collection of memoir, philosophy, manifesto, and elegy, to name a few. In *Testo Yonqui's* introduction, Preciado writes of its form, “*Si el lector encuentra dispuestos aquí, sin solución de*

⁶ “The performances come to an end. Club kids stumble into taxis in broad daylight Is this the performance's end? That moment when the venue closes?” (Muñoz 2009, 80).

continuidad, reflexiones filosóficas, narraciones de sesiones de administración de hormonas y relatos detallados de prácticas sexuales, es simplemente porque este es el modo en el que se construye y se deconstruye la subjetividad" (2008, 16; if the reader finds laid out here, without a continuous solution, philosophical reflections, accounts of hormone administration, and detailed records of sexual practices, it is simply because this is the mode on which subjectivity is constructed and deconstructed). I see this disclaimer as a link between *Testo yonqui's* elusive genres and the inconstancy of self-determination, or what Butler (2004) might call being "undone" as one seeks autonomy from institutions outside oneself.

As I will explore further below, heterotopias are also based on shifting relations: recall the colony that is utopian from one perspective, dystopian from another. While Preciado's narrator B. P. explores his identity between an act of independence—self-administering testosterone—and the institutions that created T-gel to reinforce gender binaries, he is searching through this neither/nor space, using and being used by the master's tools. Heterotopias are not only variable but are spaces of difference and liminality, making them an effective way to describe this search both in *Testo yonqui* and perhaps transgender writing more broadly.

II. Heterotopia as Genre as Gender

The two categories of becomings (personal and political) occur within two layers of heterotopias. The first is the text's genres—the world of the text—and the second is the specific spaces narrated within those genres, which I will analyze in the following section. Here, space is defined as the dimensions inside which a thing exists. How might we then understand genre as a heterotopic space? Through its constant becomings and unravelings, *Testo yonqui's* genre, which performs like its gender, functions as a heterotopia. Presenting as a hybrid of genres from memoir to fiction to theory, Preciado's book eludes traditional narrative structures and facilitates kaleidoscopic interpretations of the text: it is both a historical account and a personal story. Certainly, genre is not typically considered a space. But if a text is approached as its own world, then the genres are like the rooms whose rules ideas pass through. That those "rooms" are named and hierarchized speaks to the history of heterotopias: once Galileo unlocked an infinite world beyond our world, Foucault (1986, 23) writes, humans became fixed on trying to classify their spaces.⁷ But, as I will demonstrate in the case of *Testo yonqui's* genres, under scrutiny these classifications dissolve to reveal space as "no longer anything but a point in its movement" (Foucault 1986, 21);

⁷ Though Galileo did not discover on his own that the earth revolved around the sun, he is used by Foucault as a metaphor for the post-Medieval understandings of Earth in relation to the universe.

though relations between spaces and their inhabitants briefly exist, these relations shift too fast to merit binaries.

From the introductory paragraph, we see Preciado playing with the notion of genre as gender—*género como género* in Spanish, its original language in which these words are homonyms. They are also derived from the same Latin root, *genus*, meaning “birth, family, nation,” with earlier meanings, including “kind, sort, species,” linking *Testo yonqui's* genre to its gender through syllogistic logic. “*Es un ensayo corporal*” (2008, 15; It is a body essay), he writes. First, by linking the somatic to the linguistic, Preciado is saying that the book—his words—performs like his body.

It then follows that, by performing like the body, the essay performs like gender. As Sophie A. Jones (2018, 2) notes in “The Biodrag of Genre in Paul B. Preciado’s *Testo Junkie*”: “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.” Jones’s term “genre codes” also relates to the rules assigned to space: Is a home still just a home if it stands above a grave? Is a story just a story when based in theory? Because *Testo yonqui* explores whether the visual connotes essential identity, it seeks to debunk the idea that “gender” is defined by normative bodies that can be neatly categorized. As we “watch” B. P.’s body transform throughout the text, does B. P. become a different narrator? Can we trust this self-portrayal since Preciado himself holds the pen? But given most readers’ dispositions to identify things as one form or another, even as Preciado flirts with and evades his female identity through testosterone, the genders, the genres, and the spaces they embody are resistant to change. These shifting, indefinable genres are therefore constructed to be destabilized in the same way that Preciado’s body, and thereby his gender, is rearranged.

Another notable commonality between gender and genre, especially as we speak of performances, is their reliance on linguistic shells. For example, in the first passage when Preciado recounts G. D.’s death, he could have packaged the facts in a detached, objective manner like a history instead of as a mythic domino effect. But after G. D.’s death, Preciado writes that “*casi simultáneamente, el tropismo del cuerpo de B. P. hacia el cuerpo de V. D.*” (2008, 15; almost simultaneously, there is the tropism of B. P.’s body in the direction of V. D.’s body). Here, Preciado frames the emotions surrounding G. D.’s death as catalysts toward taking testosterone, an act that augmented his affair with V. D. But this is only a fictional portrayal of separate core facts: G. D. died, B. P. took testosterone, B. P. was sleeping with V. D. Certainly, the content changes slightly based on genre, just as the presentation of a word, a gesture, an embrace changes slightly based on an individual’s assumed gender. But the greatest change is in how the reader understands the “facts” based on their labels.

Just as the monikers “man” or “woman” often come with certain assumptions, so too do Preciado’s genre categories.

As the genres and their aspects shift, we see constant motion that eludes binary definitions. “*No hay conclusión definitiva acerca de la verdad de mi sexo*” (16, There is not a definitive conclusion around the truth of my sex), the narrator writes in the first passage. With no fixed teleology, both genre and gender in *Testo yonqui* present as a progression throughout their respective spaces. In a similar vein, Kevin Hetherington’s *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopias and Social Ordering* links Foucault’s spaces with the performance inherent in becomings, affirming that heterotopias “reveal the process of social ordering to be just that, a process rather than a thing” (Hetherington 1997, xi). For Hetherington, heterotopias are thus defined by the *performance* of alternate spatial orderings. Capable of escaping hegemonic binaries such as life/death, truth/fiction, and pure/perverse, heterotopias reveal the space-time discontinuity to allow for ambivalent, dualistic realities. As Preciado breaks down these binaries within genre’s space, thwarting “any definitive conclusion about the truth of my sex, or predictions about the world to come” (2008, 16; *no hay conclusión definitiva acerca de la verdad de mi sexo, ni profecía sobre el mundo a venir*), he affirms the potential of art and theory to function as visual laboratories that counter this constructed reality: in the cracks where oppressive creeds once were, he shows us heterotopic spaces for becoming.

But if these spaces are discontinuous, how does Preciado relate them to the time—and, by proxy, the history—that moves through them? In line with Foucault’s (1986, 26) statement that “heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time” that are then disrupted, Jones (2018, 1) states that the genres in *Testo yonqui* articulate the persistence of past into present by portraying hormones as a tool for both historical oppression and future liberation. However, rather than dealing with the tension inherent in this dichotomy by integrating dark histories into the narrator’s determined voice, Preciado tends to alternate the genres and their associated themes: B. P.’s fictions focus on the personal, and the histories examine societal motifs. But once in a while, this compartmentalization “slips,” and the narrator’s voice appears, frightened, within a history, then disappears again when it has had enough. When recounting the history of cars, for example, Preciado begins by linking their decline to his birth year. By the end of this section, however, the “I” voice has disappeared once more behind third-person theorizations.

This unsteady interplay between history and fiction does link *Testo yonqui* to many autofictions,⁸ but Preciado denies this categorization from the first line. Popularized in France, autofiction was a genre that became associated with the

⁸ Notable examples of autofictions are Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts*, Roland Barthes’s *A Lover’s Discourse*, and Marguerite Duras’s *The Lover*.

feminist movement, which gendered it a female genre. Its tenets include (1) that it is not a memoir or an autobiography because those genres are reserved for “important people,” and (2) that what is fictional is anchored in reality (Lévesque-Jalbert 2020). The second tenet acknowledges a fault in traditional narratives about the self (for example, memoirs and autobiographies) which present as nonfiction accounts despite the fabrications used to smooth the narrative into something more marketable. Autofiction, on the other hand, is aware of an individual's limits to recreate the self and is thereby candid about its inventions, misrememberings, and biases used to present a curated version. Nonetheless, any fictions must still be based on real happenings, which limits the author's ability to dream realities anew.

Preciado consistently denies *Testo yonqui's* capacity to unlock truth, especially truths of the self, thereby rejecting autofiction's premise to remain anchored in reality. He also separates the book from his personal emotions: “*No me interesan aquí mis sentimientos, en tanto que míos, perteneciéndome a mí y a nadie más que a mí*” (2008, 15; I'm not interested here in my emotions inasmuch as their being mine, pertaining to me and to no one else but to me). This assertion is significant because most memoirs focus on emotional arcs and development: they're personal narratives. Instead, Preciado claims that his book favors a representation of larger forces—historical, molecular, political, technological—that have shaped conceptions of gender.

Following these rejections, Preciado accedes that the book is a fiction; in line with the transformative power of becomings, I see fiction as connected to revolutions. Both involve a voice that envisions new realities, a notion that Preciado corroborates in an interview with Gucci following the release of *Ouverture of Something That Never Ended*. Speaking about revolutions against taxonomies of oppression, Preciado (2020b) says, “This is why fiction is so interesting. In order to change, the first thing that must be mobilized is the imagination—we need to be able to imagine that it is possible to change the way we live, we feel, we fall in love, the way we understand kinship or society.” One of *Testo yonqui's* fictional passages, for example, recounts the first time B. P. saw V. D. while handing out pamphlets for a pansexual revolution. Though it would be five years before they'd meet again, a different kind of revolution was set in motion during B. P.'s political demonstration—“*el tropismo del cuerpo de B. P. hacia el cuerpo de V. D.*” (15). Here, Preciado demonstrates a shift in the way people can love: two women fall in love as one becomes a man, a testament also to core identities untouched by gender categories.

But how is this love story different from any real-life account? Why call passages of *Testo yonqui* a fiction when B.P. represents Preciado himself? Though *Testo yonqui* cannot be considered a fiction in the strictest literary sense, this genre speaks to the subjectivity in the narrator's voice. Through all the well-cited theory and logical scaffolding, B. P.'s voice represents the strongest instances of becomings in the

text—the fiction appears in assertions that cannot be proven but rather only felt. Extrapolating from his love for V. D., Preciado writes,

El amor es un tipo de mapa de conexiones neurológicas que durante un tiempo regula nuestra producción de afectos. . . . Hoy estar enamorado es forzosamente comunicar con la totalidad del planeta. Sentir el planeta. (2008, 288; Love is a type of map of neurological connections that for a time regulate our production of affects. . . . Being in love today is inevitably communicating with the entire planet. Feeling the planet.)

Apart from adding poetry, these statements also reflect B. P.'s character development throughout the book. In the beginning, we're introduced to a Beatriz who lived through Francoist Spain with her head hung low, who explored her lesbian identity in secret and was unsure of how to approach V. D. But by the end, B. P. allows her feelings to embody her—to be another “prosthetic system” to her identity just as testosterone has been (Preciado 2008, 288; *sistema protésico*). Through literary voice, dress, chemicals, and choice, Preciado demonstrates a degree of volition in how he sees himself within his world. What I call a becoming, Frohlich calls an enchantment, continuing that “B. P.'s description of her identity in this scene fits with Muñoz's description of an alternative type of subject who neither identifies with nor strictly rejects dominant culture: ‘The “disidentificatory subject” . . . tactically and simultaneously works on, with, and against a cultural form’” (Frohlich 2010, 125; quoting Muñoz 1999, 12). Once again, we understand becomings, disidentification's kin, as moments of “powerful and seductive . . . self-creation” (Muñoz 1999, 4) made capable within *Testo yonqui's* fictional riffs.

The capacity for change through narrating our own stories is also elucidated in philosopher Federico Campagna's concept of “magic”: the path of embracing a particular, alternative reality system. By “reality system,” Campagna is referring to an individual's circumstances—social class, hegemony, hierarchy—and their respective rules for propriety and mobility that most people accept without analysis. Through questioning these realities, Campagna advocates a therapeutic mindset he calls magic thinking. In his book *Technic and Magic*, he asks how we can use the truth that “truths” shift over time to shape our own experiences:

Since God's death, we have been left alone to decide the axiomatics of our understanding of the world. We have to set the ground over which we can place our meaningful construction of a world that we can inhabit. These axiomatics, I call “reality-settings”: the historically specific decision (witting or unwitting) over what criteria we use to

understand the baffling experience of existing somewhere, somewhen.

. . . What are the implicit metaphysical assumptions that define the architecture of our reality, and that structure our contemporary existential experience? What defines at the core the peculiarity of our present time, as opposed, for example, to previous times populated by ghosts and gods? (Campagna 2018, introduction)

By unpacking the metaphysical assumptions (axiomatics) of our time and recognizing that any “truths” might be arbitrary favorites of the latest hegemony, Campagna champions our magic power to “modify our own reality-settings beyond the diktats of our social context, even when history tells us that we are powerless and stuck” (2018, introduction). For example, Foucault’s description of cemeteries involves magical thinking. When recounting their history, he notes that before cemeteries were on the outskirts, it was a “time of real belief in the resurrection of bodies and the immortality of the soul” (Foucault 1986, 25). Therefore, set in the reality principles of an earlier time, death was considered more connected to life, so cemeteries were placed at the heart of cities. Though concrete change like the cemetery’s placement is important, Campagna describes changing reality-settings as a “pre-political process that is crucial to any radical rethinking of our political and social life” (2018, introduction). While becomings can involve physical changes that Campagna’s magic does not, *Testo yonqui* similarly champions those pre-political motions that literature can set forth in readers’ minds.

Campagna also links magic’s reality-system to heterotopias, stating that this reality-system is not a utopia but rather “a force that lives in *Nâ-Kojâ-Abâd*, ‘the land of non-where,’” (2018, introduction). Later, discussing French philosopher Gilbert Simondon, Campagna (2018, 28) also describes what happens to those spaces where technology and culture meet: “a blurring of all formal lines towards a field of open-ended ‘becoming.’” In the Simondon example, “becoming” refers to the fusion of techno and human, not unlike Preciado’s description of his own body transforming through TestoGel. This act—foiling binaries by blurring the lines—is also seen in heterotopias, which elude definitions. As María Patricia Ortiz (2017, 196) notes, “*Si la estructura de los espacios hegemónicos produce marcas definitivas en la identidad individual, es posible también que las heterotopías articulen de una manera alterna la subjetividad del individuo*” (If the structure of the hegemonic spaces produces definitive marks on individual identity, it is also possible that heterotopias articulate an alternative way of the individual’s subjectivity). Set in a space that itself constitutes an amorphous reality, Preciado’s characters also have more latitude to explore the nuances of their identities. Of his text’s fluid nature, Preciado writes that it is simply the mode in which subjectivity is constructed and deconstructed; internal realities are

manufactured to be broken down by the fact they were created rather than born unalloyed.

In the first episode of the Gucci short film series, “At Home,” codirectors Gus Van Sant and Alessandro Michele (2020) exemplify this reality construction through Silvia’s morning routine: each wardrobe change and whim asks, *Who will I be today?* Without influence from the outside world, her home facilitates an intimacy with herself as well as an agency for self-creation. As she stretches in front of the TV, she settles into her body; she finds inspiration for the day in her own being. Commenting on Silvia’s activities, Preciado (2020b) notes how the dress she picks is anachronistic, “from another historical period, or even from a fairy-tale,” allowing the film to traverse time bounds, which is another Foucauldian tenet of heterotopias. Then, when she lets a flowery kimono fly away into the wind, Preciado likens it to relinquishing a female signifier of fashion (2020b). As in *Testo yonqui*, Silvia’s story is interrupted by flashes of oppressive hierarchies—while Preciado is recounting the hegemonic history surrounding sex, she takes notes and considers. But ultimately, she chooses to discard those uninspiring realities and in the following episode, “At the Cafe,” she leaves her home to explore a neighborhood with characters just as quirky, surreal, and comfortable in their nonbinary identities as she is. There is a stepping out reminiscent of Dorothy into Oz: Silvia’s private dreams become her public realities as well.

But imagine that sometimes the Oz she steps into is harsh, is not her own like much of the world Preciado’s pharmacopornographic theory describes. I’ll now explore this anxiety inherent to heterotopias and *Testo yonqui*’s literary space.

III. Limits of Heterotopias

In heterotopias, cultural sites are “simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (Foucault 1986, 24). Thus, with every triumph comes pushback. These limits of heterotopias are also limits to *Testo yonqui*’s possibilities for becomings.

Because heterotopias are often residual spaces from failed utopias, their identities can be inherently less-than. Foucault’s sixth principle of heterotopias states that “they have a function in relation to all the space that remains (1986, 27). This entails that not only can heterotopias exist because of their relative spaces, but—when the other culture is dominant—they can be subjected to them as well. Bettcher speaks of the transgender experience in terms of María Lugones’s “multiple worlds of sense,” a concept not unlike heterotopias. “I think that there are many worlds, not autonomous, but intertwined semantically and materially, with a logic that is sufficiently self-coherent and sufficiently in contradiction with others to constitute an alternative construction of the social,” Lugones (2003, 20) writes. For transgender individuals, these worlds are more than semantics. For example, Bettcher (2014, 389) describes a scenario in which a woman in a trans subculture is loved as a woman;

however, if she were incarcerated by the dominant society, she would be jailed as a man.

To illustrate his sixth principle of heterotopias, Foucault describes colonies and their multivalent power imbalances. Here, he speaks of colonies in their true and literal sense: the subjugation and exploitation of societies, lands, and peoples. Many colonies were meticulously laid out, their schedules regulated by the church bell. But it goes without saying that these spaces were not halcyon: instead, they were sites of subjugation and inhumanity. Preciado also refers to colonies in his discussions of inequity, but he uses them as a metaphor. For example, in *Yo soy el monstruo que os habla: Informe para una academia de psicoanalistas*, which Preciado (2020a) presented, in part, as a speech to l'École de la Cause Freudienne in Paris, he describes the trans body as a “colony”—for science, for culture, for Lustmord. He notes how opposing camps of psychoanalysts and doctors fight over his body's legitimacy. Like America once was to Spain, the trans body has become a place of culture and riches irreducible to the imperial mind, he explains (Preciado 2020a, 46). At a metaphorical level, this description tracks with Foucault's theory of colonies as a type of heterotopia: they have a function to compensate for lacks in real spaces; to be perfect “other” spaces (1986, 27). Comparing the trans body to colonies is to suggest limits to an individual's agency over their own becomings and define them in relation to a heteronormative way of being.

While Preciado's application of the word “colonies” allows convenient analyses via heterotopic lenses, its metaphorical use raises an important question about his position relative to his theories: can Preciado himself be considered among the “colonized”? Early in *Testo yonqui*, he chronicles the testing grounds of biomedical research for what are now common gender-affirming treatments. Many seminal hormone experiments were carried out in colonial or psychiatric settings. The Pill, for example, was tested on the island of Puerto Rico (2008, 124). Though Preciado's contempt for this history is clear, to use language of decolonization for his own body is inaccurate. For starters, Preciado's self-administration of testosterone is a choice, and to be colonized is not to be complicit in one's own subjugation. Analogizing himself to executed animals whose testicles are collected by hormone laboratories, he writes,

Cada vez que me administro una dosis de testosterona acepto ese pacto. Soy la ballena azul y sus enormes ovarios. Me vuelvo el toro degollado del matadero, el condenado a muerte y sus testículos recuperados para la ciencia. Establezco un contrato en el que todo mi deseo se alimenta—y alimenta retroactivamente—las cadenas globales que transforman células vivas en capital. (123; Every time I give myself a dose of testosterone, I accept this pact. I am the blue

whale and its enormous ovaries. I become the slaughtered bull, condemned to death whose testicles are recovered for science. I form a contract whereby my desire is fed by—and retroactively feeds—global channels that transform living cells into capital.)

Here, a system he resents—one that uses him—is the means to his desires. There is power, he proposes, in this strategic reappropriation of biotechnological apparatuses: it's a means to resist and displace heterosexual masculinity and femininity.

While Preciado's argument converses with tensions theorized between medical practitioners and transgender identity, it is not a question of colonization. As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang describe in "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," superficially adopting decolonizing discourse for conversations around human rights skirts the "more uncomfortable task of relinquishing stolen land" (2012, 19). "Decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life," they write. "It is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools" (1). Thus, Preciado's endeavor is not a decolonizing one: though the formulation of biomedical means for gender-affirmation is linked to colonial histories, as a white European, Preciado's voluntary administration of testosterone is removed from this lineage.

By establishing parameters for in-groups versus out-groups, Foucault's fifth principle of heterotopias provides further frameworks by which to analyze Preciado's position. Heterotopias, Foucault writes,

presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place. Either the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else the individual must submit to rites and purifications. To get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures. Moreover, there are even heterotopias that are entirely consecrated to these activities of purification. (Foucault 1986, 26)

So, who is in charge of the opening and closing? Who sets the rules, and do these rules give transgender individuals the agency to choose who they are within that space, in this case the geography of gender?

Returning to Preciado's description of the pharmacopornographic era, the gendered, sexual subject is reproduced through drugs, surgeries, and porn. While none of those arenas permit total individual agency, even Preciado's co-option of the mechanisms through self-administration perpetuates an in-group and an out-group. Despite his implication that, through his dependence on testosterone, he is among

the colonized, as a prominent philosopher living in France Preciado would not be subject to the same repercussions as someone in different circumstances. Instead, he has a “certain permission” that would not be universally granted. Ultimately, though it does highlight the permeability of the heterotopic spaces throughout *Testo yonqui*, his metaphorical use of decolonization instead emphasizes his privilege.

Closer to the French psychoanalytic tradition with which Preciado often interacts, he also explores political subjection through a Lacanian lens. The pharmacopornographic era, he writes, functions contrary to the traditional ideals of Lacan's mirror stage: in the former, the subject does not even recognize itself in its representation (2008, 284). In traditional psychoanalytic theory, the mirror stage is the moment when, as infants, we recognize ourselves in the mirror's image and “enjoy a coherence which the subject itself lacks—it is an *ideal* image” (Silverman 1994, 157). Foucault also describes mirrors as heterotopias in “Of Other Spaces,” writing, “From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there” (1986, 24). This sense of lack can be seen through continued analysis of the relationship between the mirror stage and pornography. In chapters separate from his beautiful descriptions of love and magic, Preciado theorizes how the public pornographic sphere curbs the freedoms V. D. and B. P. experience in their private, fictional space. Even in the pre-internet era, Lacan considered his mirror stage unending. Now, the cycle of desire and lack that our ideal images [*imagos*] create has become not only inescapable but commodified. Kaja Silverman (194, 160) points out the cultural mediation of this ideal, stating, “‘Ideal’ is a term which has meaning only within a system of values.”

In the pharmacopornographic era, Preciado explains a similar cycle of desire and lack that occurs through the idealization of hypergendered actors. Anticipating consumers' sense of inadequacy, pharmaceutical companies promise to allay these physical lacks through hormones and prosthetics. But as more people, especially in the media, embody masculine and feminine ideals, the standard becomes even harder to achieve. This ideal is explained in Lacan's mirror stage, which entails that one sees an ideal version of oneself on the screen and, though that person exists, only their imago is knowable to the othered viewer. The imago itself is a breed of myth, thus the viewing space of a pornography film becomes heterotopic through tensions between the mythic and the real.

From a literary standpoint, there is also an uneasiness in the shifting nature of *Testo yonqui's* genres, an uneasiness inherent in heterotopias. When we reach a hopeful moment in a memoir section, it risks being undercut by the overarching theory. Thus, the becomings facilitated through *Testo yonqui's* fictions are at times tainted by the ontological distance Preciado creates between his self as the philosopher and the story he tells. Instead of calling his personal accounts memoirs, he calls them “autotheories,” or theories of the self. Émile Jalbert-Lévesque notes that

rather than addressing the tension between fiction and nonfiction, *Testo yonqui* frames autotheory at the “extreme limit of that very opposition where theory emerges from a self-fictionalization” (2020, 81). By externalizing his psyche, as Preciado’s puts it, he is able to view his character B. P. through a theoretical lens that would not be possible from a subjective close-up—analyzing his mind from his own mind might seem less convincing. Preciado writes: “*Se registran aquí tanto las micromutaciones fisiológicas y políticas provocadas por la testosterona en el cuerpo de B. P., como las modificaciones teóricas y físicas suscitadas en ese cuerpo por la pérdida, el deseo, la exaltación, el fracaso o la renuncia*” (2008, 15; Recorded here are both the physiological and political micromutations provoked in B. P.’s body by testosterone, as well as the theoretical and physical changes incited in that body by loss, desire, elation, failure, or renouncement). “*Recorded here*”: through clinical language, Preciado depersonalizes his experience, an effect also achieved through the initialing of his story’s characters. Using these fictions as case studies—as if viewing life on a petri dish—limits some of the fiction’s expansive power to inspire becomings in readers. I see this as connected to Campagna’s (2018, chap. 1) view of overtheorizing: “Like a novel reduced to pure grammar, the present age has shunned the question of meaning as a sign of superstition and nostalgia, while relegating reality to the status of an obsolete concept which is to be overcome if we wish to fully unleash our productive potential.”

Testo yonqui’s ending, while striking a note of triumph, is also tinged by delimiting theory. In the final chapter, “Eternal Life” (*La vida eterna*) Preciado stands with V. D. at G. D.’s grave and addresses him from the collective view of all the activists he honors in this text:

Mientras nos alejamos dejando atrás tu cuerpo, que ya ha empezado a fermentar entre las flores de Montparnasse, te prometo que vendremos a tocarnos las tetas encima de tu tumba, que vendremos a dejar sobre la losa las huellas de nuestros fluidos corporales, como dos lobos dormiremos sobre tu tumba, calentaremos tus huesos, como dos vampiros vendremos a saciar tu sed de sexo, de sangre y de testosterona. (2008, 310; As we walk away from your body, which has already begun to ferment among the flowers of Montparnasse, I promise you that we will come to rub our bodies against your grave, that we will come to leave the traces of our bodily fluids on the slab; like a pack of mutating wolves, we will sleep on your earth, warm your bones; and like vampires, we will come to quench your thirst for sex, blood, and testosterone.)

Here, I note Muñoz's idea of the performative "trace" as well as Preciado's revolution compelled by death.⁹ Though the book ends with hopeful promises to ghosts, thereby integrating the past with the future, this fictional gesture is at odds with the time-bound history before it. The apostrophic device itself reveals this tension: "Isn't my politics yours?" (Preciado 2013, 20), the narrator asks G. D.¹⁰ This question will never be answered, and it reflects the apostrophe's uneasy combination of coercion and supplication. As Jones (2018, 9) notes, 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. Apostrophe thus strains against *Testo yonqui's* becomings by suggesting futility in its fictional addresses. Though Preciado's text, especially when considered a manifesto, acknowledges the human power to alter history, it ultimately shies from claiming complete agency. But this realism can cut the book's ability to inspire: as Campagna writes, embracing rather than theorizing uncertainty "might be much more refreshing than rearranging the coloured squares on the mosaic of contemporary theory, which too often results in rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic of cynical reason" (2018, preface).

Preciado's philosophical aims stated outside *Testo yonqui* can perhaps provide more insight into these cynical observations. Maintaining a skeptic air, Preciado (2016, 25) writes, "The book . . . 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." The qualified narration—"as a Trojan poet"—suggests hyperbole that frames the "I" and its triumphs by the grave with a note of parody. Speaking of manifestos in general, Marshall Berman (1983, 102) notes that they are "remarkable for [their] imaginative power." However, rather than allowing *Testo yonqui's* imaginative potential to ring unchecked, Preciado's qualification questions his belief, and thereby the reader's, in this power. Though this passage's heroic hope is certainly admirable, its parodic tone echoes Jones's (2018, 2) assertion that "*Testo Junkie* is a text in flight from itself."

Despite these limitations, I've so far held off from the second and perhaps most defining principle of heterotopias for this article: "that a society, as its history unfolds, can make an existing heterotopia function in a very different fashion; for each heterotopia has a precise and determined function within a society and the same heterotopia can, according to the synchrony of the culture in which it occurs, have

⁹ See Muñoz's (2009) "Gesture, Ephemera, and Queer Feeling: Approaching Kevin Aviance."

¹⁰ This is Benderson's translation of Preciado's (2008; 23) "*Acaso mi política no es la vuestra?*"

one function or another” (Foucault 1986, 25). In *Testo yonqui*’s case, this other culture is the imagined world: fiction.

IV. Heterotopic Settings for Becomings

The example Foucault gives of his second principle is a cemetery, and fittingly, this is where *Testo yonqui*’s first fictional passage begins. As spaces of both disappearance and quasi-eternity, cemeteries encapsulate difference. According to Foucault (1986, 25), burial grounds were once the centers of communities until relegated to the suburbs when death became an illness rather than a rite of immortality. Today, this deportation of the dead might make us think of AIDS victims buried on Hart Island on the outskirts of mainland New York City.

Preciado brings death to *Testo yonqui*’s forefront—*For our dead ones*, its dedication reads, almost like a headstone to begin the book. The first passage of *Testo yonqui* is a metaphorical cemetery cataloging two moribund transformations: “*la muerte de G. D. . . . y, casi simultáneamente, el tropismo del cuerpo de B. P. hacia el cuerpo de V. D., ocasión irrenunciable de perfección y de ruina*” (2008, 12; there is the death of G. D. . . . and, almost simultaneously, there is the tropism of B. P.’s body in the direction of V. D.’s body, an opportunity for perfection—and for ruin). “Perfection” recalls Foucault’s definition of utopias as a contrast to heterotopias. The former are places so ideal that they are nonplaces, thereby situating V. D. in a nonexistent realm. “Ruin” also foreshadows the end of the book when, realizing V. D. is his future widow, Preciado presages his own death.

Here, we see two cases of physical life to physical death: where is the “freedom process” of becoming? In line with Campagna’s proposition to “modify our own reality-settings,” *Testo yonqui* calls out delimiting histories and then moves beyond them. At the end of his book, written to mourn G. D., though Preciado tells us that words could not bring his friend back, he still rejects the full stop that death might imply. Far from an ending, G. D.’s burial is declared the marriage site for V. D. and B. P, a site where G. D.’s spirit can oversee it: “*Tú, nadie más que tú, podía ser el oficiante-espectro que sellara bajo la tierra alianza entre tu muerte y nuestro amor*” (2018, 310; You, and no one else, will be the officiating ghost who will seal the alliance between your death and our love under the earth”). Here, in the cemetery’s heterotopia, Preciado collapses borders of both earthly life and gender proprieties. Standing above a man who has died, B. P. begins a new life by marrying a woman as he sets out to become a man.

Though Foucault does not identify weddings as heterotopias, Preciado’s metaphorical marriage to V. D. functions as such, especially given its untraditional gendering. The wedding is the counterpart to the brothel, which, as I will explain later in this section, Foucault identifies as a heterotopia of deviation. Marriage, on the other hand, represents a space neatly enclosed in norms and proprieties: it is a utopia,

which Foucault defines as an “unreal” place because it represents society in a perfected form. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh,” says Genesis 2:24. In this union, we see forebears of Carl Jung’s syzygy, an archetypal pairing of contrasexual opposites—male and female—to create the perfected psyche. But a real marriage eludes this perfection since, even when compatible, each partner can only approach the relationship as an individual; its idealized construct is therefore a nonplace. By breaking down the biblical norms, B. P.’s untraditional marriage to V. D. can instead be considered a heterotopia.¹¹ Not only does the wedding occur in a cemetery, but it is a marriage that is neither heterosexual nor homosexual and, as *Testo yonqui*’s first passage tells us, this neither/nor will never crystallize.

The positionality of the cemetery in the outskirts, particularly cemeteries such as Hart Island, aligns with Foucault’s description of “heterotopias of deviation: those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed” (1986, 25). Heterotopias of deviation imply that in today’s society, acceptance is contingent on normality, thus the easiest solution toward a more orderly society is to extradite whoever compromises the leading vision. While G. D.’s burial happens in Montparnasse, an artistic hub in Paris, B. P. describes an eerie sense of real and supernatural worlds colliding.

La gente avanza sola, o de dos en dos hasta el montículo de tierra que han sacado para poder meterte a ti. Ahora eres tú el que ha tomado el lugar que antes ocupaba esa tierra y esa tierra, fuera, está donde tú estabas antes, aquí entre nosotros, los vivos. (2008, 309; People come forward alone, or two by two toward the mound of earth that they have removed to put you in. Now you’re the one who will take the place of that earth, the place that this land used to occupy and that land, outside, is where you were before, here among us, the living.)

As he speaks to G. D. enclosed in his casket beneath the earth, B. P. considers how his friend will become free as he had never been before.

A contrast to the sacred rites of marriage and burial, the pornographic sphere in *Testo yonqui* is another heterotopia of deviation that can harbor freedoms, at least in spaces not yet overtaken by the pharmacopornographic economy. Using Foucault’s paradigm of the brothel to exemplify his idea that heterotopias “create a space of illusion that exposes every real space . . . as still more illusory” (1986, 27),

¹¹ Because Preciado cites his upbringing in Catholic, Francoist Spain as a catalyst for his gender rebellion, I feel that Christian references are relevant to this article’s analysis of marriage.

pornography also reveals how even the most accepted constructs such as marriage can be dethroned. In both the brothel and the pornographic sphere, sex is explored in a space separate from the “real” world of nuclear families. Thus, though both may provide visitors the illusion that their actions are safe from the judgement of traditional sexual morals, they also question the power and legitimacy of those morals—are marriage and its consummation truly sacred?

Rather than discussing its sacrilegious implications, Preciado describes how, in its private form, pornography is a vehicle for B. P.’s intimacy with V. D. While taking pictures of V. D. in bed, B. P. says that each photograph brings with it the possibility of magic. “*El amor es magia*” (2018, 300; Love is magic), he says in the following line. His conflation of sexual photography with love illustrates a version of pornography before it is publicly commodified. Inherent in these photographs is a heterotopic oscillation between the real and unreal, especially as the pictures represent a modern version of Lacan’s mirror stage—discovering one’s absence in one’s image. Thus, though B. P. takes more and more photos of V. D. in an effort to capture her essence eternally (like a tattoo on the memory, he says), there will always remain a distance between her being and her image. Despite its metaphysical impossibility, his persistence to express his love for V. D. demonstrates B. P.’s agency to create both art and memories that further his desires, the birthplace of his self’s becomings.

Certainly, the love that pornography represents in this scene could be easily adulterated by pharmacopornographic regimes described elsewhere in *Testo yonqui*. Though meant only for B. P., the pictures of V. D. might fall into ill-meaning hands—a common narrative for nude photos today. Accordingly, in his chapter “*Historia de la technosexualidad*” (History of Technosexuality) Preciado (2018, 57–67) describes how bodies are stripped of all legal and political status through online pornography. But this exploitative reality is precisely why Preciado provides the alternative scene of B. P. and V. D.: even in spaces with great potential to coerce and harm (in this case, pornography), people can simultaneously create means for self-expression and love.

These are the “both/and” moments that *Testo yonqui* masterfully shapes: fiction, pornography, funerals, and bodies can hold vulnerability and magic all in one breath. Because these dualities are especially heightened in transgender literature, Foucault’s heterotopias provide apt templates for analyses even outside *Testo yonqui*—as well as the inspiration to resist oppressive structures.

In Van Sant and Michele’s (2020) first short film, after Silvia turns off Preciado’s television show, she rummages through her wardrobe until she finds a pink chiffon dress laced with beads. She putters around the house in pink, she puts on some pants then, standing out on a balcony, lets the silk kimono blow away through the wind. As she gets ready for the day in starts, stops, and volte-faces, she is choosing which gradient of herself to become. Perhaps these movements are circular or ambling, but they are moving always ahead in the reality she’s creating. Without the

agency for forward motion, “*dreams dry up*,” as Foucault writes (1986, 27), but through the heterotopic fictions seen in *Testo yonqui*, we might create definitions of identity that suit us best.

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