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Spaces for Becomings?

Heterotopic Fictions in Preciado's *Testo yonqui*

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”¹

I. 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 speaks about superseding sexual binaries through individual transformation and experimentation, he suddenly turns to address Silvia through the screen: “But you know what I’m talking about, Silvia...” he says, studying her earnest face. “This revolution is going to be about love...”

While fashion films are an untraditional venue for a philosopher,² the revolution his character theorizes—“an incarnation, a practice of life, an aesthetic of the body outside the binary of man and woman”³—is also recounted in Preciado’s book *Testo yonqui* (2008) (*Testo Junkie*). Like many manifestos, this text begins with a rejection: “*Esta libro no es una*

¹ *Ouverture of Something That Never Ended*, episode 1, “At Home,” directed by Gus Van Sant, published November 16, 2020, by Gucci, <https://www.guccifest.com/#/en/>.

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 says in an interview (see footnote 3), a statement reminiscent of Jacques Derrida in the documentary *Derrida* (2002) in which he deconstructs a film’s ability to portray him accurately.

³ Paul Preciado, interviewed by GucciFest, “Talking Revolution with Paul B. Preciado,” *GucciFest*, 2020, <https://www.guccifest.com/#/en/story-behind-the-story>.

autoficción”⁴ (“This book is not an auto-fiction”).⁵ 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 continues by specifying what the book *is*: a fiction, a body-essay, and an auto-theory. 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 Beatriz Preciado becomes Paul. Recent work by cultural geographers suggests that “space is a condensation of the acts that comprise it”⁶ and in the introductory passage, Preciado’s act is a performance of both genres and genders.

After denoting the many genres his text will perform, Preciado’s narrator 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*”⁷ (“two external mutations in the proximal context of the experimental body occur”). First, there is the death of G.D., Preciado’s friend and leading queer activist Guillaume Dustan. Then, almost simultaneously, there is “the tropism” of Preciado (B.P.) towards V.D., his lover and feminist filmmaker Virginie Despentes. Facilitated by testosterone, this second turn denotes the start of B.P.’s transformation into a man that loves a woman, a change that he chooses.

⁴ Beatriz Preciado, *Testo yonqui*, Espasa, 2008, 15.

⁵ Though Bruce Benderson produced an English translation of *Testo yonqui* (*Testo Junkie*, 2013), his translation takes many liberties, all subsequent translations of the Spanish original will be my own.

⁶ Sharon Larisch, "Mario Bellatin's Salón De Belleza and the Production of Space," *Revista De Estudios Hispánicos* 49, no. 3 (10, 2015): 503.

⁷ Preciado, *Testo yonqui*, 15.

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 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." For example, cemeteries are heterotopias because they are spaces where bodies, familiar yet empty and strange, meet an otherworldly realm which is poorly understood if believed in. Cinemas are another heterotopia due to the gap between real-time viewers and the actors on the screen who also have existed, but in a different space. 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.⁸ As Foucault writes, in a society without heterotopias "dreams dry up."⁹ 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.

There are two categories in which Preciado 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?*"¹⁰ Preciado asks ("But how did sex and sexuality, they will wonder, become the

⁸ See Lindsey Moore, *Arab, Muslim, Woman: Voice and Vision in Postcolonial Literature and Film*, London: Routledge, 2008; see also Sharon Larisch, "Mario Bellatin's *Salón De Belleza* and the Production of Space," *Revista De Estudios Hispánicos* 49, no. 3 (10, 2015): 503-524.

⁹ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," 30.

¹⁰ Preciado, *Testo yonqui*, 26.

center of political and economic 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 History of Sexuality*, which *Testo yonqui* cites as a forebear to its theory, Preciado writes that each body becomes an “individual to correct.”¹¹ Enabled by the technoscientific industry, men take Viagra and women take the Pill—the most used pharmaceutical in human history¹²—to achieve increasingly heterosexual attributes; both sexes undergo surgeries to enhance their bodies towards 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.¹³

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 describes *Testo yonqui*’s approach to gender as “sex design” rather than an unveiling,¹⁴ 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*” (“to become a man”), Preciado acknowledges

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹² Andrea Tone, *Devices and Desires. A History of Contraceptives in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 203–31.

¹³ 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 (cf. *Testo yonqui*, 32-33).

¹⁴ Margaret Frohlich, "Lesbian Desire and (Dis)identification in Beatriz Preciado's "Testo Yonqui", " *Letras Femeninas* 36, no. 1 (2010): 134. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23022339>.

the bad press his decision might accrue: at a time when law and medicine are beginning to legitimize transsexuality, he regards 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.¹⁵

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 Frohlich have identified the narrator’s acts within *Testo yonqui* as disidentifactory.¹⁶

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...) 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 re-conceptualizing oppressive frameworks to better support their beliefs. Notably, José Esteban Muñoz uses the term disidentification in the context of racial and queer oppression to describe moments of “powerful and seductive self-creation,”¹⁷ a definition that frames 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

¹⁵ Preciado, *Testo yonqui*, 20.

¹⁶ Frohlich, "Lesbian Desire and (Dis)identification in Beatriz Preciado's "Testo Yonqui"," 125.

¹⁷ José Esteban Muñoz, 1999, *Disidentifications: queers of color and the performance of politics*, 4.

end of the night, as Muñoz writes of the vogue dancers' drag in New York City.¹⁸ Becomings, on the other hand, constitute forward motion that is more corporeal than ephemeral—the changes Preciado undergoes cannot be reversed. When he takes the last dose of testosterone, Preciado's narrator writes "*las cosas avanzan*"¹⁹ ("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.

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,

¹⁸"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?" José Esteban Muñoz, "Gesture, Ephemera, and Queer Feeling: Approaching Kevin Aviance," In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, (NYU Press, 2009), 81.

¹⁹ Preciado, *Testo yonqui*, 306.

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 writes, humans became fixed on trying to classify their spaces.²⁰ 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”,²¹ 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*”²² (“It is a body essay”), he writes. If the genre is the body, the body is the gender, then the genre is the gender. 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 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

²⁰ 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.

²¹ Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” 21.

²² Preciado, *Testo yonqui*, 15.

truths these forms espouse.”²³ The 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, do we see him as 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.*”²⁴ (“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 towards taking testosterone, an act which 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

²³ Sophie A Jones, “The Biodrag of Genre in Paul B. Preciado’s *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*,” *Feminist Encounters*, vol. 2, no. 2, 27 Sept. 2018, 2.

²⁴ Preciado, *Testo yonqui*, 15.

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*,"²⁵ the narrator writes in the first passage ("There is not a definitive conclusion around the truth of my sex.") 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."²⁶ 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,"²⁷ 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 statement that

²⁵ Preciado, *Testo yonqui*, 15; my translation.

²⁶ Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering*, London: Routledge, 1997, xi.

²⁷ Preciado, *Testo yonqui*, 16.

“heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time”²⁸ that are then disrupted, Jones 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.²⁹ 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: the 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,³⁰ but Preciado denies this categorization from the first line. Popularized in France, autofiction was a genre that became associated with the 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.³¹ The second tenet acknowledges a fault in traditional narratives about the self (for example, memoirs and autobiographies) which present as non-fiction accounts despite the fabrications used to smooth the narrative into something more marketable. Autofiction, on the other hand, is

²⁸ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," 27.

²⁹ Jones, “The Biodrag of Genre in Paul B. Preciado’s *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*,” 1.

³⁰ Notable examples of autofictions are Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts*, Roland Barthes’s *A Lover’s Discourse*, and Marguerite Duras’s *The Lover*.

³¹ Émile Lévesque-Jalbert, “‘This is not an autofiction’: Autoteoría, French Feminism, and Living in Theory,” *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 76, no. 1 (2020): 65-84. [doi:10.1353/arq.2020.0002](https://doi.org/10.1353/arq.2020.0002).

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, perteneciéndose a mí y a nadie más que a mí*"³² ("I'm not interested here in my emotions insomuch 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 and, 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 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."³³ 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

³² Preciado, *Testo yonqui*, 15.

³³ Preciado, interviewed by GucciFest, "Talking Revolution with Paul B. Preciado," *GucciFest*, 2020, <https://www.guccifest.com/#/en/story-behind-the-story>.

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..." 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.*³⁴

(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 walked down the Franconian streets 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"³⁵ to her identity just as testosterone has been. Through literary voice, dress,

³⁴ Preciado, *Testo yonqui*, 288.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 400.

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 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.”³⁶ **Once again, we understand becomings, disidentification’s kin,** as moments of “powerful and seductive self-creation”³⁷ 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

³⁶ Frohlich, "Lesbian Desire and (Dis)identification in Beatriz Preciado's 'Testo Yonqui'," 125.

³⁷ Muñoz, 1999, *Disidentifications: queers of color and the performance of politics*, 4.

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?³⁸

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.”³⁹ 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.”⁴⁰ Therefore, set in the reality principles of an earlier time, death was considered more connected to life so cemeteries were constructed 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.”⁴¹ 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’, which [French philosopher Gilbert] Simondon’s perspective suggests is a blurring of all formal

³⁸ Federico Campagna, *Technic and Magic*. Bloomsbury Publishing. Kindle Edition.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," 26.

⁴¹ Campagna, *Technic and Magic*. Bloomsbury Publishing. Kindle Edition.

lines towards a field of open-ended 'becoming', thus resembling a truly Faustian impetus unleashed at a metaphysical level."⁴² 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 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*"⁴³ ("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 which 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 film series, "At Home," director Gus Van Sant exemplifies 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 notes how the dress she picks is anachronic, "from another historical period, or even from a fairy-tale," allowing the film to traverse time bounds which is another

⁴² Campagna, *Technic and Magic*. Bloomsbury Publishing. Kindle Edition.

⁴³ María Patricia Ortiz, "El concepto de heterotopías de Michel Foucault en dos novelas de Mario Bellatin: *Salón de belleza y Damas chinas*," *Hispania* 100, no. 2 (2017), 196.

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.⁴⁴ 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 non-binary identities as she is?. There is a stepping out reminiscent of Dorothy into Oz: Silvia's private dreams become her public realities as well.

III. Heterotopic Settings for Becomings

Having identified *Testo yonqui*'s genre as its literary world where becomings occur, I will now zoom in to the fictional heterotopias within those worlds. B.P.'s motivation to find hope between truth and fiction was fueled by times this cracked space hurt; accordingly, *Testo yonqui*'s first fictional passage begins at the cemetery. When seen as heterotopias, cemeteries are spaces of both transformation and liminality: according to Foucault, 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 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

⁴⁴ Preciado, interviewed by GucciFest, “Talking Revolution with Paul B. Preciado,” *GucciFest*, 2020, <https://www.guccifest.com/#/en/story-behind-the-story>.

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*”⁴⁵ (“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 non-places, 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 qu sellara bajo la tierra alianza entre tu muerto y nuestro amor*”⁴⁶ (“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, she/he begins a new life by marrying a woman as she/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

⁴⁵ Preciado, *Testo yonqui*, 12.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 331.

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 1:27-8. 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 non-place. By breaking down the biblical norms, B.P.’s untraditional marriage to V.D. can instead be considered a heterotopia.⁴⁷ 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.”⁴⁸ Heterotopias of deviation imply that in today’s society, acceptance is contingent on normality, thus the easiest solution towards 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 genre avanza sola, o de dos en dos hasta el montículo de tierra que han sacado para poder meterte a ti. Ahora eres tú el*

⁴⁷ Because Preciado cites his upbringing in Catholic, Franconian Spain as a catalyst for his gender rebellion, Christian references are relevant to this article’s analysis of marriage. [so that’s how the Genesis quote gets there? I think you need to signal your own agency in making that connection]

⁴⁸ Ibid, 26.

*que ha tomado el lugar que antes ocupaba esa tierra y esa tierra, fuera, está donde tú estabas antes, aquí entre nosotros, los vivos*⁴⁹ (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 in spaces not yet overtaken by the heterosexual 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," pornography also reveals how even the most accepted constructs such as marriage can be deflated. 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*," he says in the following line ("Love is magic").⁵⁰ 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

⁴⁹ Preciado, *Testo yonqui*, 309.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 300.

represent a modern version of Lacan's mirror stage: the moment when, as infants, we recognize ourselves in the mirror's image and "enjoy a coherence that the subject itself lacks—it is in ideal image."⁵¹ Foucault also describes mirrors as heterotopias in "Of Other Spaces," writing that "From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there."⁵² 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.⁵³ Despite its metaphysical impossibility, his persistence to **express V.D.** demonstrates B.P.'s agency to create both art and memories that further both his love's[?] and his self's becomings.

IV. Theory as a Limiting Space

But these bedsheet joys and their subsequent becomings are not *Testo yonqui's* only conclusion: though *Testo yonqui's* fictions function as heterotopias, there are limits to the heterotopic possibilities in the book as a whole. An example of these limits 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. These limits begin with a lack: even in the pre-internet era, Lacan considered his mirror stage unending but now, the cycle of desire and lack which our ideal images [*imagos*] creates has become not only inescapable but commodified. Kaja Silverman points out the cultural mediation of this ideal,

⁵¹ Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 157.

⁵² Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," 25.

stating that: “‘Ideal’ is a term which has meaning only within a system of values.”⁵⁴ In the pharmacopornographic era, Preciado explains a similar cycle of desire and lack that occurs through the idealization of hyper-gendered actors which, anticipating the consumers’ sense of inadequacy, pharmaceutical companies promise to allay. Foucault’s analysis of a mirror as heterotopic can be extended to the analogy of mirror as medium: “[the mirror] makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there,”⁵⁵ he writes in “Of Other Spaces.” Likewise, one sees an ideal version of oneself on the screen and though that person exists, only their imago is knowable to the othered viewer. Thus, the viewing space of a pornography film becomes heterotopic through tensions between the mythic and the real.

Though this version of a mirror is a heterotopic space, it is fixed in theory that will not facilitate becomings. Of political subjectivity, Preciado writes that contrary to the traditional ideals of the Lacanian mirror stage, the subject does not even recognize itself in its representation.⁵⁶ In his speech *Yo soy el monstruo que os habla: Informe para una academia de psicoanalistas* which Preciado presented to l’École de la Cause Freudienne in Paris, Preciado describes the trans body as a “colony”—for science, for culture, for **murder lusts**.⁵⁷ 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. While Foucault considers colonies another type of heterotopia in that they have a

⁵⁴ Ibid., 160.

⁵⁵ Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” 25.

⁵⁶ Preciado, *Testo yonqui*, 384.

⁵⁷ Paul B. Preciado, *Yo Soy El Monstruo Que Os Habla* (Madrid: Nuevos cuadernos Anagrama, 2020).

function to compensate for lacks in real spaces; to be perfect “other” spaces,⁵⁸ this understanding of the trans body as a colony limits the individual’s agency to become expressions of their choosing. It not only defines them in relation to a heteronormative way of being, but it also allows the latter standard to control their self-definition.

Because its theory binds with time, certain passages of *Testo yonqui* also fail to meet heterotopia’s temporal stipulations. One tenet of Foucault’s heterotopias is that they work best when people “arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time. This situation shows us that the cemetery is indeed a highly heterotopic place since, for the individual, the cemetery begins with this strange heterochrony, the loss of life, and with this quasi-eternity in which her permanent lot is dissolution and disappearance.”⁵⁹ As an example, museums and libraries act as an accumulation of time through their artifacts. However, Preciado’s book is not heterochronous. Instead, its theory outlines the history toward and arrival at the pharmacopornographic era. Describing the body’s technomanagement, he writes that there is nothing to discover in nature, but rather there is a necessity to specify the cultural, political, and technological processes through which the body as artifact acquires natural status.⁶⁰ Within this strictly defined timeline, heterotopias and thereby the becomings they facilitate are stunted. In this way, Preciado’s pharmacopornographic model fits into Campagna’s definition of the “Technic,” that which seeks to contain reality within fixed constructions of language and theory. Of the Technic’s relationship to time, Campagna writes, it is “the spirit of absolute instrumentality, according to which everything is merely a means to an end.”⁶¹

⁵⁸ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," 29.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁶⁰ Preciado, *Testo yonqui*, 33.

⁶¹ Campagna, *Technic and Magic*. Bloomsbury Publishing. Kindle Edition.

Even the becomings facilitated through *Testo yonqui*'s fictions are compromised 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 non-fiction, *Testo yonqui* frames autotheory at the "extreme limit of that very opposition where theory emerges from a self-fictionalization."⁶² By externalizing his psyche, to use Preciado's own words, 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*"⁶³ (Recorded here are both the physiological and political micromutations provoked in BP'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 arranging a life on a petri dish—limits some of the fiction's expansive power to inspire becomings in readers. **Similarly,** Campagna writes 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

⁶² Lévesque-Jalbert, "'This is not an autofiction': Autoteoría, French Feminism, and Living in Theory," 82.

⁶³ Preciado, *Testo yonqui*, 15.

to the status of an obsolete concept which is to be overcome if we wish to fully unleash our productive potential.”⁶⁴

At first, *Testo yonqui*'s ending might seem like a note of triumph against delimiting theory. In the final chapter, “Eternal Life,” Preciado stands at G.D.'s grave and addresses 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.*⁶⁵

(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.⁶⁶ Though the book ends with hopeful promises to ghosts, thereby integrating the past with the future, this fictional gesture does not undo the time-bound history before it. The

⁶⁴ Campagna, *Technic and Magic*. Bloomsbury Publishing. Kindle Edition.

⁶⁵ Preciado, *Testo yonqui*, 311.

⁶⁶ See José Esteban Muñoz, “Gesture, Ephemera, and Queer Feeling: Approaching Kevin Aviance,” In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*.

apostrophic device itself reveals this tension: “isn’t my politics yours?” the narrator asks G.D. This question will never be answered, and it reflects the apostrophe’s uneasy combination of coercion and supplication. As Jones 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.⁶⁷ Though Preciado’s text, especially when considered a manifesto, acknowledges the human power to alter history [right; this is in part due to the animation], it ultimately shies from claiming complete agency [also right]. 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.”⁶⁸

Preciado’s philosophical aims stated outside *Testo yonqui* can perhaps provide more insight into these cynical conclusions. Maintaining a skeptic air, Preciado 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.”⁶⁹ 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 notes that they are “remarkable for [their] imaginative power.”⁷⁰ However, rather than allowing *Testo yonqui*’s imaginative

⁶⁷ Jones, “The Biodrag of Genre in Paul B. Preciado’s *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*,” 9.

⁶⁸ Campagna, *Technic and Magic*. Bloomsbury Publishing. Kindle Edition.

⁶⁹ Paul B. Preciado, “Testo Junkie: Notes for a Psychoanalytic Forum,” *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 17(1), 2016, 25.

⁷⁰ Alex Danchev, *100 Artists’ Manifestos*, London: Penguin, 2011.

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 assertion that "*Testo Junkie* is a text in flight from itself."⁷¹

While I am not disregarding Preciado's text as a tool to understanding the culture people might seek to push against, only its fictional moments beget a sense of strangeness—magic, as Campagna might say—that fertilizes a greater sense of becomings. 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. Without the agency for forward motion, "*dreams dry up*," as Foucault writes, but through the heterotopic fictions seen in *Testo yonqui*, we might cultivate the power to choose which definitions suit us best.

⁷¹ Jones, "The Biodrag of Genre in Paul B. Preciado's *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*," 2.

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