

Paul B. Preciado and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference

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*Thesis*  
*Submitted to Flinders University*  
*for the degree of*

Master of Arts (Research)  
College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences  
23 Aug 2024

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## *Abstract*

This thesis seeks to examine the work of Spanish philosopher Paul B. Preciado in relation to Continental philosophies of sexual difference. Philosophies of sexual difference and philosophies of gender have been the two main forms of analysis of sexual and gendered subjectivities within society and philosophy. While ‘gender’ is at present the most commonly utilised concept to analyse the way in which people are subjectified in regards to terms such as ‘man’, ‘woman’, ‘male’, and ‘female’, the philosophies of sexual difference still hold important insights for us today, no matter what terms we choose to deploy. Speaking of sexual difference in relation to Preciado’s work, we can see ourselves in what at first seems to be a double bind. On the one hand, there is a plethora of work on sexual difference which refuses to restrict sexual difference to a binary and/or essential difference, but rather, understands sexual difference as multiple. A sexual difference which possibly could speak to the multiplicity of determinate being (past, present, and future) which does not do a violence to the being of subjects. On the other hand, Preciado speaks quite adamantly about their opposition to ‘sexual difference’. In an interview for Purple Magazine, Preciado states ‘[f]or me, any form of feminism today that does not seek to abolish sexual difference implies a refounding of identitarian power’. Preciado follows on in a way which I think highlights a certain rigidity of concepts in his writing. Preciado tends to associate sexual difference feminism with a political project which refuses the undoing of the restriction of subjectivity to ‘male and female’, ‘masculine and feminine’. This is the same with the concept of ‘sexuality’ as well. In the aforementioned interview, we find him saying that one way in which we can avoid our sexual subjectivities returning to ‘the intimate, domestic, conjugal, familial, national space, in which we are ever more tightly enclosed’ is to ‘desexualise sexuality’. In reality, this ‘desexualisation’ is rather the disidentification of practices, relationships, and ways of being from the normative logic of identity which sexuality functions under in the present. For Preciado, we must remove ‘sexuality from the language to which it has been subjected from the late 18th century up to now’ and ‘transform it and make it into something else’ which refuses the violence of the past. This is what Preciado means by the desexualisation of sexuality. In one way, this is a desexualisation—one’s subjectivity becomes outside of sexuality as it is currently conceptualised, but in another way, it can be seen as a reconceptualisation of ‘sexuality’ into a new conceptual grammar which refuses the identitarian logic that sexuality has been aligned with. This is why I am sceptical to do away with the philosophy of sexual difference outright. Perhaps, through closely reading Preciado alongside philosophers of sexual difference, we may be able to find the possibility of a fruitful dialogue between their works on what the future of subjectivity could be.

In the first chapter, I will outline the contours of Preciado’s theories of counter-sexuality and uranism. These theories offer an outline of the form of subjectivity which Preciado’s political and philosophical project seeks to bring about. In doing this, I will outline, also, Preciado’s understanding of

subjectivity as it exists for us now in the form of (capitalist-patriarchal) pharmacopornographic subjectivity. This chapter, in highlighting the stakes of Preciado's theories of counter-sexuality and uranism, will articulate Preciado's critique of the 'regime of sex, gender and sexual difference' and his alternative form of subjectivity. In this chapter, I also present two contemporary readings of psychoanalysis and sexuate difference. These readings, by Jamieson Webster, and Oli Stephano, respectively relate psychoanalysis to Preciado's work, and sexuate difference to Preciado's sources—particularly Judith Butler.

The second chapter presents a reading of Irigaray's figure of the lips, and Preciado's figure of the anus. While Irigaray is a defender of sexual difference, and Preciado a critic, the world in which both writers seek to bring about (through the realisation, and transcendence of sexual difference, respectively) appear very similar through their fidelity to the flourishing of sexual subjectivity. This chapter presents a comparative reading of Irigaray's work on feminine morphologies—in particular the 'two lips'—and Preciado's writing on the anus in 'Anal Terror'. My reading proposes that both Irigaray and Preciado, through the notions of the 'lips' and 'anus' respectively attempt to produce a vision of the multiplicity of sexuate subjectivity. While Irigaray's 'lips' are multiple, they—and their name—disseminate meaning beyond Irigaray's work, meaning there is a need to move beyond the lips. Preciado's figure of the anus, through his reading of Hocquenghem, allows us to move beyond certain disseminated meanings of Irigaray's lips, which, on my reading, can lead to a trapping of one's account in a cissexual form. The anus, on my reading, is presented by Preciado as an expansive figure which seeks the production of a multitude of difference and mutation which has no bounds.

The third and final chapter gives a grounding to Preciado's philosophy through a reading of Xenofeminism and the work of Ray Brassier. It also responds to contemporary literature on sexual difference through a critique of a recent paper by M.D. Murtagh titled 'An Onto-Ethics of Transsexual Difference'. In particular, I argue that Murtagh, and his defense of Grosz, stifle our ability to think the future of difference through ontologizing current environmental limits. Given Preciado's indebtedness to the work of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, the possibility of bodily change, on my reading, tends to be taken for granted, and is not necessarily accounted for. On my reading, while Preciado fails to account for the conditions of bodily change, Xenofeminism and its notion of alienation can help us begin to provide an account of the conditions of bodily change which aligns with the political and philosophical positions advanced in Preciado's project. I further supplement the Xenofeminist account of bodily change with an elaboration of Ray Brassier's account of the human. This account of the human argues that the event of self-consciousness brings about a *sui generis* mutability within the human, allowing us to undo our own bodily limits through the aid of technics. Reading Xenofeminism and Ray Brassier in this way, in my view, allows us to sketch a philosophical grounding for Preciado's political and philosophical project—the creation of a

'somatic communism' which democratises power to our bodies, and allows for the flourishing of bodily experimentation and mutation.

## *Declaration*

I certify that this thesis:

1. does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university
2. and the research within will not be submitted for any other future degree or diploma without the permission of Flinders University; and
3. to the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed Alice Nilsson  
Date 26/05/2024

## *Acknowledgements*

This thesis would not exist in its current form without the help and support from my supervisors Dr. Laura Roberts, and Dr. Catherine Kevin. I thank them for their support in this project on a much often invoked, but narrowly read writer. I also thank them for their attention to detail—especially when reading my work, which I believe can be sometimes both abstract and dense, even when dealing with the most concrete issues.

I would like to thank the participants of Luce Irigaray’s seminars, where an earlier version of the second chapter was presented. In particular, I would like to thank Paula Gruman Martins—a welcome ally and defender of the promethean who understood the necessity of my deliberate (and not necessarily welcome) philosophical provocations. We both understood the necessity of each other’s work, and did not back down when we felt our positions were simply being waved away.

Thank you also to Jolene for not only being a great philosophical interlocuter, but also for giving me the opportunities to talk about weird French guys (Preciado, Hocquenghem, Scherer, Dustan etc.) on their podcast *When a Guy Has a Really Fucked Gender*. Juliana Gleeson for comments, questions, and discussions not only on earlier versions of the work in this thesis, but also adjacent work which has come out of it—there’s only so many Ray Brassier fans in this world. I also thank Abs, Alex, Charlie, Antigone, my mum, and my dad for all the love, support, food, and discussion throughout the writing of this this thesis.

I received financial support throughout my candidature through the Australian Government Research Training Program (AGRTP) stipend, as well as travel support through the CHASS HDR Project Funding Awards.

## *Introduction*

‘A philosophy become multiple means that philosophy is no longer simply philosophy; logic is no longer merely logic, many is no longer just many—rather, philosophy becomes an improvisation on the multiplicity that lies at the core of the metaphysical interpretation of the (ontological) difference and on the conceptual identity of multiplicity and on that which is multiple’<sup>1</sup>

This thesis seeks to examine the work of Spanish philosopher Paul B. Preciado in relation to Continental philosophies of sexual difference. Philosophies of sexual difference and philosophies of gender have been the two main forms of analysis of sexual and gendered subjectivities within society and philosophy. While ‘gender’ is at present the most commonly utilised concept to analyse the way in which people are subjectified in regards to terms such as ‘man’, ‘woman’, ‘male’, and ‘female’, the philosophies of sexual difference still hold important insights for us today, no matter what terms we choose to deploy.

Paul B. Preciado is a contemporary Paris-based Spanish philosopher and artist working on gender, sexuality, and the histories of bodies. They were a student of Derrida at the New School, and wrote their dissertation titled ‘Gender, Sexuality, and the Biopolitics of Architecture: From the Secret Museum to Playboy’ at Princeton. He has also taken positions at Université Paris VIII, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona, and curated documenta 14. Preciado is most well known for their ‘auto-theoretical’ text *Testo-Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* which sought to document Paul’s own experimentation with the self-administration of exogenous testosterone, as well as provide a theoretical framework which informed this ‘experiment’. While most of the work and reception of Preciado’s work has been in regard to *Testo-Junkie* and its concept of pharmacopornographic subjectivity, their earlier book *Countersexual Manifesto*, as well as their aforementioned PhD—the second half of which was published as *Pornotopia: An Essay on Playboy’s Architecture and Biopolitics*—theorise and critique the ‘regime of sex, gender, and sexual difference’.

Part of Preciado’s project can be summarised as an attempt to critique current (and historical) regimes of sex, gender, and sexual difference. One route of this is through a reconceptualisation and rewriting of the history of sexuality and gender. Preciado’s project is influenced by and departs from Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*. While Foucault is a key theoretical touchstone in Preciado’s project, their reading of the history of sexuality and gender departs from Foucault’s analysis due to the lack of analysis of the relation between sexuality, gender, and race in the volumes of *The History of Sexuality*. In this sense,

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<sup>1</sup> Haas, *Hegel and the Problem of Multiplicity*, xxxii.



Preciado's project merges together and expands the original 6 volume work that Foucault had planned to produce.<sup>2</sup> Preciado's project, as well, whether consciously or unconsciously, adheres to the 'problem of philosophy' that Deleuze and Guattari read in Foucault's reading of Kant. Deleuze and Guattari write that

'when Foucault admires Kant for posing the problem of philosophy in relation not to the eternal but to the Now, he means that the object of philosophy is not to contemplate the eternal or to reflect History but to diagnose our actual becomings: a becoming-revolutionary that, according to Kant himself, is not the same thing as the past, present, or future revolutions'.<sup>3</sup>

Preciado's work, from *Countersexual Manifesto* to *Can the Monster Speak?*, engages in diagnosing the 'actual becomings' of subjects through historical and philosophical analysis. In this thesis, I wish to highlight how Preciado diagnoses and points towards more liberatory becomings or subjectivities, specifically in relation to sexual difference and theorists of sexual difference.

Speaking of sexual difference in relation to Preciado's work, we can see ourselves in what at first seems to be a double bind. On the one hand, there is a plethora of work on sexual difference which refuses to restrict sexual difference to a binary and/or essential difference, but rather, understands sexual difference as multiple.<sup>4</sup> A sexual difference which possibly could speak to the multiplicity of determinate being (past, present, and future) which does not do a violence to the being of subjects. On the other hand, Preciado speaks quite adamantly about their opposition to 'sexual difference'. In an interview for *Purple Magazine*, Preciado states '[f]or me, any form of feminism today that does not seek to abolish sexual difference implies a refounding of identitarian power'.<sup>5</sup> Preciado follows on in a way which I think highlights a certain rigidity of concepts in his writing. Preciado tends to associate sexual difference feminism with a political project which refuses the undoing of the restriction of subjectivity to 'male and female', 'masculine and feminine'.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Davidson, "Ethics as Ascetics: Foucault, the History of Ethics, and Ancient Thought," 125.; Arnold Davidson notes that the back cover of the original French edition of *The History of Sexuality*'s first volume 'announced the titles of the five forthcoming volumes that would complete Foucault's project' with volumes 3-6 dealing with children's sexuality, sexuality and the female body, the figure of the pervert, and the relation between population, race, and sexuality, respectively. This project never came to fruition with volumes 2-4 dealing with sexuality in Greek, Roman, and pre- and early Christian thought.

<sup>3</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 112–13.

<sup>4</sup> In particular Stephano, "Irreducibility and (Trans) Sexual Difference"; Stephano, "Sexual Difference as Qualitative Becoming: Irigaray Beyond Cisexism?"; Gill-Peterson, "The Miseducation of a French Feminist"; Magallanes, *Psychoanalysis, the Body, and the Oedipal Plot*; Colman, "Tarrying with Sexual Difference: Toward a Morphological Ontology of Trans Subjectivity"; Poe, "Can Luce Irigaray's Notion of Sexual Difference Be Applied to Transsexual and Transgender Narratives?"; Murtagh, "An Ontoethics of Transsexual Difference."

<sup>5</sup> Preciado, Paul B. Preciado.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

This is the same with the concept of ‘sexuality’ as well. In the aforementioned interview, we find him saying that one way in which we can avoid our sexual subjectivities returning to ‘the intimate, domestic, conjugal, familial, national space, in which we are ever more tightly enclosed’ is to ‘desexualise sexuality’. In reality, this ‘desexualisation’ is rather the disidentification of practices, relationships, and ways of being from the normative logic of identity which sexuality functions under in the present.<sup>7</sup> For Preciado, we must remove ‘sexuality from the language to which it has been subjected from the late 18th century up to now’ and ‘transform it and make it into something else’ which refuses the violence of the past.<sup>8</sup> This is what Preciado *means* by the desexualisation of sexuality.

In one way, this *is* a desexualisation—one’s subjectivity becomes outside of sexuality as it is currently conceptualised, but in another way, it can be seen as a reconceptualisation of ‘sexuality’ into a new conceptual grammar which refuses the identitarian logic that sexuality has been aligned with. This is why I am skeptical about doing away with the philosophy of sexual difference outright. Perhaps, through closely reading Preciado alongside philosophers of sexual difference, we may be able to find the possibility of a fruitful dialogue between their works on what the future of subjectivity could be.

As I will outline below, the vast majority of secondary scholarship on Preciado’s work tends to deal with his concept of pharmacopornographic subjectivity—the present form of human subjectivity that is created through the biopolitical convergence of the pharmacological—through inventions such as birth control, and exogenous hormones—and the pornographic—through the cultural sphere. While the concept of pharmacopornographic subjectivity is important to understand Preciado’s analysis of the present state of gender and subjectification, most of the secondary scholarship has not related his writing to the philosophies of sexual difference. A fair bit of the secondary literature also neglects Preciado’s earlier work *Counter-Sexual Manifesto*, and his 2009 afterword to Guy Hocquenghem’s *Homosexual Desire*, titled ‘Anal Terror’. These writings move Preciado’s analysis beyond one of the present and provide a framework for what sexual subjectivity could become. As of this, this thesis seeks to provide a dialogue between the work of Preciado and the philosophies of sexual difference.

### *Secondary literature on Sexual Difference:*

If there was one problematic or concept which (particularly French) twentieth century Continental philosophy and its reception is enamoured with, *différance* would be an important contender. While taking different forms—such as difference-in-itself, *différance*, non-identity, and sexual difference—twentieth century Continental philosophy grappled with the historic erasure of difference by totalising conceptions of

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

identity. Elizabeth Grosz locates the way in which twentieth century French philosophy defended the notion of difference as being derived from, in particular, the criticism of the concept of identity presented by the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault.<sup>9</sup>

For Grosz, Nietzsche provides an alternative ‘logic’ in contradistinction to an Aristotelian logic of identity (A=A). This alternative logic is a “‘logic” of difference or becoming’.<sup>10</sup> This logic of difference is one that refuses the restriction of the possible future(s) of both subjects and objects that arises through understandings which place the self-identical as the ground of being. In positing identity as the ontological ground of existence, for Nietzsche and the French Philosophers of difference, we then end up positing the annulment of difference *itself*.<sup>11</sup> This general sentiment is highlighted in Deleuze’s statement that ‘[t]he attempt to deny differences is a part of the more general enterprise of denying life, depreciating existence and promising it a death [...] where the universe sinks into the undifferentiated’.<sup>12</sup>

Freud’s influence on the philosophers of difference comes from his theory of the unconscious. On Grosz’s reading, the Freudian unconscious undermines the proposed self-identical nature of the Cartesian *cogito*. The unconscious and its impulses cut through the conscious thinking subject, undermining the possibility of a knowing subject in complete control of itself.<sup>13</sup> Freud also was the first to *think* the problem of sexual difference, understood by Grosz as the ‘question of the (social) meaning of sexual specificity’.<sup>14</sup>

Derrida directs the critique of identity towards knowledge itself, understanding knowledge and language to function in a dispersed and differentiated manner. Derrida understands our wealth of knowledge in the present to be structured through binary oppositions. Binary oppositions such as difference/identity, non-being/being, and bad/good operate in a way wherein the privileged position must disavow its dependence on its opposite in order to retain its self-sustaining identity.<sup>15</sup> For Derrida, Western metaphysics has sought to retain and uphold these oppositions by assuming that ‘being, language, [and] knowledge are self-evident, neutral, and transparent terms’—rather, these terms are constituted by dispersed networks of meanings instead of being self-identical.<sup>16</sup> Deconstruction is a process which criticises and undermines discourses of identity by following the traces and remainders of difference which our knowledge, metaphysics, and texts hold within them.<sup>17</sup> This holding of an idea or text’s opposition within said idea or text is named by Derrida as *different in itself*, and is a logical condition for terms/ideas/texts.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, ix.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 45.

<sup>13</sup> Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, ix.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., x.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 26.

Grosz also notes Derrida's writing on sexual difference wherein 'he raises the crucial question of whether sexual difference precedes or follows ontological difference', and what this *means* for the structure of theories of sexual difference.<sup>19</sup>

Foucault's analysis of the body opposes a 'brute' biological understanding, arguing rather that the body is a site of historical and cultural construction. This is not to say that the body is *completely* constructed by history and culture, but rather that historical and cultural circumstances mould the body through 'systems of training, discipline, and construction'.<sup>20</sup> Grosz states that for the Foucauldian understanding of the body '[w]hatever (historical) identity the body has, this is the result of a play of forces unifying and codifying the different organs, processes and functions which comprise it'.<sup>21</sup> The power produced by history and culture is, while pervasive, unable to completely subdue bodies, meaning in cases, subjects are able to revolt against the forms of subjectification of their bodies.

Another influence was crucial for the development of philosophy of difference in France is Jean Hyppolite's interpretation of Georg W. F. Hegel's philosophy. Grosz does mention Hyppolite in the context of the development of French Feminist philosophies of difference, but positions him more as a translator of Hegel. Kojève's interpretation of Hegel's master-slave dialectic is given pride of place, whereas Hyppolite's books on Hegel are not mentioned at all. While Hegel was taken, by many, as a thinker who dissolved the problem of difference into identity or sameness, Hyppolite stressed that the concepts deployed in Hegel's work are shown to logically become their opposites. The concepts present in Hegel's writing refuse an identity closed off from the constitutive effects of its others. Hyppolite stressed that in Hegel this contradiction or 'opposition is inevitable not because there is only a multiplicity of things [...] but because each is in relation with the others, or rather with all others'.<sup>22</sup> The (necessary) relation of a thing to its others means that to highlight a thing's basic qualities requires an 'internal reference' within the concept to the thing's other in order to deduce what the aforementioned 'thing' is as opposed to what another 'thing is'—'left' must internally differentiate itself through reference to 'right', 'dispossession' requires an internal reference to differentiate itself from 'possession'.<sup>23</sup> While this reading of difference was opposed by later (post 1968) thinkers such as Derrida and Deleuze, Hyppolite's reading was important for the formation of philosophies of difference as, according to Derrida, 'Hegel's critique of the concept of pure difference is for us here, doubtless, the most uncircumventable theme. Hegel thought absolute difference, and showed that it can only be pure by being impure'.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., x.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence*, x.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., xi.

Nietzsche, Freud, Derrida, Foucault, and Hyppolite are only a few names within a milieu of thinkers that influenced the philosophies of difference which emerged in twentieth century French Philosophy. While this is the case, these thinkers are touchstones which highlight certain aspects of French philosophies of difference, particularly through the critique of self-sustaining identity—the self-identical and its logics. Logics of identity, on Grosz’s reading, have become troubled as it has become increasingly apparent in philosophy over the past two centuries that identity is not something which is self-identical—that is self-sufficient for the continuation of its own identity. For Grosz, this is most apparent in Sigmund Freud’s theory of the unconscious, Jacques Derrida’s theory of *différance*, and Michel Foucault’s genealogical analysis of the body.<sup>25</sup> In all three of these writers, there is an undermining of the self-identical nature of the psyche, meaning, and the body, respectively.<sup>26</sup> A logic of difference is one in which there is a realisation that identity is constituted by difference, and difference is constituted by identity—a “logic” of difference explains not only how we are able, for the purposes of analysis and reflection, to delimit linguistic identities or entities, but also how language itself undermines and problematises the very identities it establishes’.<sup>27</sup> Difference, on Grosz’s reading, is understood in the French context, following on from Nietzsche, as the philosophical refusal of identity as the ground of existence. The articulations of difference through the critique of identity—the philosophies of difference—are ultimately what sets the stage for the reception and articulation of philosophies of sexual difference in Continental philosophy.

While many philosophers have a ‘theory’ or ‘concept’ of sexual difference, in the English-speaking world the philosophy of sexual difference is most commonly associated with thinkers who (outside of France) were grouped under the label ‘French Feminism’. French Feminism denotes thinkers such as Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray who had ‘deeply engaged with poststructuralist thought, most notably Derridean deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis, and [were] primarily concerned with sexual difference, language, and the unconscious’.<sup>28</sup>

In this context (French Feminism), the term ‘sexual difference’ arises from a psychoanalytic understanding of the term. While this term means different things for each of these writers, their understanding shares a common root or point of departure. This point of departure—psychoanalysis—allows us to see a split in terms which writers use to analyse what at times can be revealed to be very similar

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<sup>25</sup> Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, viii–x.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, ix–x.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>28</sup> Costello, “Inventing ‘French Feminism’: A Critical History,” 5.; It should be noted that ‘French Feminism’ is a term which arose in the English speaking scholarship on these writers when they were beginning to be translated. In France, these thinkers were understood as a rejection of feminism (understood as the feminist theory which arose out of the women’s liberation movement in France). The term ‘French Feminism’ also flattens the differences between Cixous, Kristeva, and Irigaray, with Grosz noting that the similarities between these thinkers being ‘largely superficial’.

phenomena. Judith Butler—who, like Preciado, more often than not speaks of gender rather than sexual difference—has stated that

‘most of the people who work in a “sexual difference” framework actually believe . . . there is something persistent about sexual difference understood in terms of masculine and feminine. At the same time, they tend to engage psychoanalysis or some theory of the symbolic. . . .’<sup>29</sup>

The notion of persistence which Butler utilises here singles out theories of sexual difference—such as the Lacanian account or essentialist readings of Irigaray—which, on their reading, insist that sexual subjectivity presents itself in a- and trans-historic forms which refuse change (and are in this case limited to masculine and feminine). While it is the case that *some* theorists who utilise the term ‘sexual difference’ have an account which fundamentally limits the possibilities of sexual subjectivity, this is not the case for all theorists of sexual difference. Philosophers such as some readers of Luce Irigaray’s work, including Oli Stephano, and Jamieson Webster, speak of sexual difference, but in a fashion which does not limit sexuate subjectivity to the ‘two’.<sup>30</sup> This is because, as Anne Emmanuelle Berger has noted, theoretically the term sexual difference has grown multiple.

In analysing how sexual difference has transformed through translation—the import of sexual difference theory to the United States—Berger highlights in *The Queer Turn in Feminism* five differing theories in the work of Sigmund Freud, Helen Cixious, Jacques Derrida, Gayle Rubin, and Judith Butler. Berger ultimately sketches out a narrative of the transformation of sexual difference in the French context, and then again across the Atlantic, in the United States. While there may be issues with this narrative and its exclusions—in particular Lacan and Irigaray—it highlights the plurality of the term ‘sexual difference’, as well as ‘slippages’ in regard to any theoretical distinction between gender and sexual difference. This narrative, also, is not one of direct transformation and influence, but rather seeks to highlight the ways in which the term has been used in feminist philosophy and its influences, with Berger stating that sexual difference ‘does not bequeath to us a doctrine or an ideology but an injunction to keep open, and continue to interpret actively, the meaning or rather the meaning(s) of its legacy’.<sup>31</sup> While Berger’s narrative provides

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<sup>29</sup> Berger, *The Queer Turn in Feminism*, 108.

<sup>30</sup> I have chosen to use the term ‘sexuate subjectivity’ throughout this thesis as I believe that in using this term I am able to avoid a misconception from readers as to what this aspect/form of subjectivity *delimits* and is *delimited by*. In particular, I believe that the term ‘sexuate’ is able to avoid conflation with an analysis of the ‘simply biological’—that is, ‘sex’ as is commonly used—and sexual practice. The term sexuate, for me, encompasses a much wider range of the subjectivity of subjects, which may be lost or rather become cumbersome if the phrase ‘sexual subjectivity’ were to be used. Also see n. 41 below for a relevant discussion of the term ‘sexuate’ in Irigaray scholarship.

<sup>31</sup> Berger, *The Queer Turn in Feminism*, 125.

a background, I would like to propose a more relevant path for the purpose of this thesis which is as follows: Freud, Lacan, Irigaray, Rubin, Butler, and, lastly, Preciado.

Berger positions Freud as the beginning of this narrative due to his break with biological understandings of sexual difference. Freud understands sexual difference as being, instead of anatomical differentiation, a differentiation between positions of the unconscious in regards to the social and the erotic. As noted above, the theory of the unconscious undermines the self-identity of the subject.<sup>32</sup> This undermining of the subject's self-identical nature is also shown in regard to sexual difference itself through Freud's assertion that the co-existence of masculine and feminine traits in people highlights the manifestation of a 'bisexuality' in the subject. This bisexuality for Freud is prior to differentiation of subjects in sexual development, thus undermining—in Freud's view—the grounding of sexual difference as an inherent given of the subject, but rather as a product of becoming.<sup>33</sup>

Here it would be important to note, Jacques Lacan's innovation upon the Freudian theory of sexual difference, as well as Irigaray's theory of sexual difference—both of which are not noted in Berger's narrative of translation, but are analysed elsewhere in their book. While I will analyse these figures later in this thesis, it is important to introduce them to highlight the movement and development of the term 'sexual difference' within Continental philosophy. Berger notes an interesting convergence between early Lacan's theory of sexual difference which is based on identification (unconscious) with ideal type of one's (assigned) sex and Butler's theory of gender performativity. This is as in the early Lacan, sexual differentiation operates as a normative societal regulatory model, and that Lacan understands femininity as the rejection of what is posited as woman's 'essential attributes' in favour of 'masquerade'.<sup>34</sup> Stephen Heath's statement that '[t]he masquerade says that the woman exists at the same time that, as masquerade, it says she does not' highlights the constructed and repeated nature of sexual differentiation in the early Lacan, which Berger highlights as similar to Butler's theory of gender constitution.<sup>35</sup> It should be noted that Berger's analysis of Lacan in *The Queer Turn*, focuses solely on the first phase of Lacan's theory of sexual difference (femininity as masquerade), and excludes the late Lacan's break from his earlier theory through the formulas of sexuation—which most contemporary Lacanians base their theories of sexual difference on.

Sexual difference takes on a new form in the work of Luce Irigaray. In an interview, Irigaray divided her work into three different phases and highlighted *how* she has written about sexual difference. While Irigaray characterizes these phases chronologically, Rebecca Hill has noted that these phases can be understood as the structural parts which allow for a theory of non-hierarchical sexual difference.<sup>36</sup> The first

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 113–14.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 64–65.

<sup>35</sup> Heath, "Joan Riviere and the Masquerade," 54.

<sup>36</sup> Hill, "The Multiple Readings of Irigaray's Concept of Sexual Difference," 391.

phase finds Irigaray highlighting that sexual difference as it currently exists is rather a form of sexual *indifference*. On Irigaray's reading, there is currently only 'a single subject', the 'traditionally [...] masculine' subject which has meant the world has been interpreted and constructed according to this patriarchal masculine subject.<sup>37</sup> While this patriarchal subjectivity has a theory of femininity, of woman, of sexual difference this understanding operates through the 'masculine imaginary' and refuses any autonomy to those other than the 'male sex' in regards to the formation of subjectivity.<sup>38</sup> For Irigaray, the masculine imaginary refuses to allow the existence of non-hierarchical sexual difference and 'woman-as-subject', women are relegated to the status of 'defective men'.<sup>39</sup>

In the second phase of her work, Irigaray sought to figure out the conditions which would allow for feminine subjectivity and non-hierarchical subjectivity to exist. For sexual difference to exist, it must be possible for women to 'join together [...] in order to discover a form of "social existence" other than the one that has always been imposed upon them'.<sup>40</sup> If sexual difference is to exist, it depends upon the social and political ability for subjects—both individually and collectively—to autonomously construct imaginaries and subjectivities 'appropriate to their situations and lives'.<sup>41</sup>

The third phase of Irigaray's work seeks to define ethically and philosophically the relation between autonomous sexuate subjectivities.<sup>42</sup> Irigaray is seeking to answer 'how to define ... an ethic, a relationship between two different subjects'.<sup>43</sup> Penelope Deutscher has noted that this phase of Irigaray's work can be

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<sup>37</sup> Hirsh, Olson, and Irigaray, "Je—Luce Irigaray," 96–97.

<sup>38</sup> Roberts, *Irigaray and Politics*, 13.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Irigaray, *This Sex which is Not One* cited in *ibid.*, 46.

<sup>41</sup> Roberts, *Irigaray and Politics*, 46.

<sup>42</sup> See Jones, *Irigaray*. The term *sexuate* (and *sexuate difference*) is used—at times—in Irigaray scholarship instead of the term 'sexual difference'. The term *sexuate* is due to the issues with the term 'sex' and 'sexual' in the Anglo-American feminist debates around sex and gender. Rachel Jones has noted that the term 'sexuate' cannot be neatly mapped onto the sex/gender distinction which is taken as gospel by many. On Jones' reading, Irigaray's use of the term 'sexuate' refers not to 'a mode of being determined by biological sex nor to a cultural overlay of gendered meanings inscribed on a "tabula rasa" of passively receptive matter'. The term *sexuate*, rather, encompasses the multitude of ways in which one becomes an *embodied sexuate subject* through—but I should add, not limited to—'bodily, social, linguistic, aesthetic, erotic, and political forms'. In using the term *sexuate*, Jones and Irigaray highlight that the *sexuate* aspect of one's subjectivity cannot be relegated to being 'caused' simply by one pole or the other, but is rather constituted by their interplay: as of this, such distinctions such as sex/gender, and nature/culture work upon and constitute each other's determinate being.

It is also important to highlight that Jones also problematizes the mapping of Irigaray's use of the French '*masculin*' and '*féminin*' onto their seeming English counterparts *masculine* and *feminine*. If one is to map the English *masculine* and *feminine* onto the aforementioned French terms, we end up projecting the sex/gender distinction—again—onto terms which operate differently than in English. Jones notes that the terms one might, at first glance, ascribe as denoting a subject's 'biological sex'—'*mâle*' and '*femelle*'—are much more narrow, being used to describe the sex of animals, and would be considered quite degrading to use in reference to a person. The use of '*masculin*' and '*féminin*', then should not be taken as *masculine* and *feminine* would be understood in English—as denoting a cultural inscription of norms—but rather as embodied ways of being which cannot be restricted to an understanding which is formed as the result of an Anglo-centric monolingualism.

<sup>43</sup> Deutscher, "Irigaray Anxiety: Luce Irigaray and Her Ethics for Improper Selves," 7.



seen particularly in *I Love to You* wherein Irigaray ‘proposes programmes for reshaping intersubjective relations between women, and between women and men’ which does not impede on the autonomy of differing sexual subjectivities.<sup>44</sup> These three phases form together, in Irigaray’s work, as the conditions for a theory of sexual difference which allows ‘for different bodies [and subjectivities to] be and their fortune multiply’.<sup>45</sup>

In the United States, the term sexual difference has been used in different ways which can be seen through the difference of its use in the work of Gayle Rubin and Judith Butler. In Rubin’s work, the term sexual difference does not hold the connotations that are present in the French work on the topic. In the French context, sexual difference, while being spoken of differently by different writers tends to align more with what we could call a ‘sexed’ or ‘gendered’ subjectivity.<sup>46</sup> In Rubin’s work on the other hand, the term sexual difference denotes that which can be encompassed by the terms ‘perversion, sexual deviance, sexual variance or sexual diversity’.<sup>47</sup> The term sexual difference, for Rubin, is used to highlight and criticise the way in which American feminism became extremely reactionary in regards to certain sexual practices throughout the Feminist sex wars. Rubin notes that ‘[t]ranssexuality, male homosexuality, promiscuity, public sex, transvestism, fetishism, and sadomasochism were all vilified within a feminist rhetoric [... and] were suddenly the ultimate expressions of patriarchal domination’.<sup>48</sup> Sexual difference, for Rubin, encompasses a variety of minority sexual practices which should be defended from persecution. Rubin’s analysis of sexual difference and its repression has, like Berger notes with Butler’s work, an affinity with Lacan through understanding psychoanalysis as ‘the study of the traces left in the psyches of individuals as a result of their inscription into systems of kinship’.<sup>49</sup> Rubin’s defense of psychoanalysis through Lacan in ‘The Traffic in Women’ provides context for their movement towards the adoption of Foucault’s reading of sex and sexuality in ‘Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality’. This is because the Foucauldian reading of subjectification presents a radicalisation of the theories of inscription to sexual, cultural, and gender norms in kinship structures as analysed by Lacan and Claude Lévi-Strauss.

While Gayle Rubin uses the term sexual difference in a different way to writers such as Lacan and Irigaray, Rubin’s work is important for the development of Judith Butler’s work—particularly in regard to the movement from the concept of sexual difference to gender. In ‘Against Proper Objects’, Butler analyses

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, 18.

<sup>46</sup> This categorisation is no doubt significantly flawed as in sexual difference theory sexual difference is not reducible to sex assignment or to a cultural notion of gender. While this is the case, it seems to be the closest comparison (other than the term sexual difference itself) and also that now the term gender seems to encompass a larger space than the cultural.

<sup>47</sup> Rubin, *Deviations*, 289.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 289–90.

<sup>49</sup> Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” 188.

the distinction between sex and gender as they were taken up in sexuality studies, and feminist theory respectively. On Butler's reading, feminist scholarship and sexuality studies had separated these categories into neat boxes, failing to understand the ways in which sexuality and gender are intertwined. In defining the 'proper objects' of sexuality studies, and feminism, respectively, as 'sex'—what a subject *does*—and gender—in this case, the reduction of gender to *biological sex*—these two fields of analysis closed themselves off. In 'Against Proper Objects', we find Butler aligning themselves somewhat with the concept of sexual difference, particularly with theorists such as Grosz and Rosi Braidotti. This is because Butler finds in sexual difference theory the possibility to 'rethink corporeality in semiotic and symbolic terms that articulate sexual difference in ways that defy biologism and culturalism at once'.<sup>50</sup> In 'Sexual Traffic', Rubin says to Butler that the way Butler uses the term sexual difference in 'Against Proper Objects' is similar to how the term 'gender' was being used. Butler continues and asks '[y]ou mean I am using "sexual difference" in the way you [Rubin] were using "gender" in "Traffic in Women"?' to which Rubin responds that they 'do not know' and asks Butler to clarify what they understand sexual difference to be. Butler essentially avoids the question, or rather, answers it in a way that makes it clear that while sexual difference theory and Lacanian thought are crucial and influential to their writing, that Butler prefers to use the concept of 'gender'.<sup>51</sup> Butler notes that Rubin's more expansive use of the term 'gender'—as the 'socially imposed division of the sexes' through the sex-gender-sexuality system—was instrumental in their adoption of the term 'gender' as opposed to sexual difference in *Gender Trouble*.<sup>52</sup>

Butler's theory of gender is most succinctly put in the paper 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory'. In the concluding paragraph, Butler states

'Regardless of the pervasive character of patriarchy and the prevalence of sexual difference as an operative cultural distinction, there is nothing about a binary gender system that is given. As a corporeal field of cultural play, gender is a basically innovative affair, although

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<sup>50</sup> Butler, "Against Proper Objects," 16.; It is important to note that in 'Against Proper Objects', Butler is writing about how these terms are used, rather than how they *can* be used. In a footnote, Butler states that they themselves 'have imported a Lacanian scheme into gender theory' through 'insisting on the incommensurability between gender norms and any lived effort to approximate its terms'; by highlighting the impossibility for concepts to transparently and unambiguously capture the 'real'—to use the Lacanian term.

<sup>51</sup> Rubin, *Deviations*, 280–81. Interestingly, the article 'Against Proper Objects' was published four years after *Gender Trouble*—1994 and 1990, respectively.

<sup>52</sup> Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," 179.; *Ibid.*; In a more recent lecture, Butler has provided an account of the movement from 'sex' to 'gender' in the Anglo context. Butler's account begins with John Money's adoption of the linguistic term 'gender' to distinguish from sex in order to impose a normative prohibition and boundary around intersex individuals. Gender functioned in order for Money to impose a gender upon children who's sex did not fit 'male' or 'female'. This term was then adopted first by Feminist anthropologists such as Sherrie Ortner and Marilyn Strathern, and by Feminist theorists such as Teresa de Lauretis and Gayle Rubin.

it is quite clear that there are strict punishments for contesting the script by performing out of turn or through unwarranted improvisations'.<sup>53</sup>

Gender, for Butler, is constituted through 'a *stylized repetition of acts* [...] the stylization of the body' in a way which abides—or in some cases rejects—the normative statuses of gender at a given time.<sup>54</sup> These acts which bring gender into existence are, for the most part, not the conscious decisions of subjects. Butler writes that these acts are 'clearly not one's act alone' and while these acts are and can be widely individualised they are 'clearly not a fully individual matter'.<sup>55</sup> These acts are produced and constrained by the cultural, technological, and ideological situation of the time and place which the subject finds themselves within. Because of this, Butler takes gender to *not* be a stable identity over time, or able to be reduced to biology or culture. Rather, like how Maurice Merleau-Ponty views the body, gender is 'not only [...] a] historical idea but a set of possibilities to be continually realized' through the convergence of aforementioned stylised acts and one's embodied condition.<sup>56</sup> While the embodiment of a subject influences the acts in which said subject chooses or does not choose to enact, to be 'female' or 'male', for Butler, is 'a facticity which has no meaning' when one reads Simone de Beauvoir. This is as 'woman'—or 'man'—is something which one becomes through societal compulsion, not through a supposed brute given of 'nature'.<sup>57</sup> While there is social compulsion for those who are assigned female or male at birth to engage in certain performative acts, for the most part the sex of a subject is *assumed* by the acts which one enacts rather than an intimate knowledge of one's 'sex'. As of this, the gender which one goes through the world *as* does not necessarily correspond with one's sex in the way a 'biological' understanding of gender would assign gender. In fact, for Butler, sex is just as constructed as gender. Sex is, like gender, a 'regulatory ideal' within which the 'material body' is understood.<sup>58</sup> Sex, for Butler, should not be understood as 'a simple fact or static condition of a body, but [rather] a process whereby regulatory norms materialize "sex" and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms'.<sup>59</sup> As of this, "sex" is always already gendered', and our becoming arises "from a place which cannot be found and which, strictly speaking, cannot be said to exist' as a brute natural given.<sup>60</sup>

Paul Preciado's work presents us with a new development in the understanding of gender through the concept of the 'pharmacopornographic'. This concept, which Preciado first introduces in *Testo Junkie*,

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<sup>53</sup> Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 531.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 519.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 525.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 521.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 522.

<sup>58</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 1.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 1–2.

<sup>60</sup> Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*," 39.

arises out of a constellation of influences such as Butler, Foucault, Teresa de Lauretis, and Donna Haraway. Using Butler's theory of performativity, Foucault's theory of biopolitics, and de Lauretis and Haraway's analyses of the convergences of technology and gender, Preciado argues that through the 'combined effects of the pharmaceutical and pornographic industries' upon bodies a new form of subjectivity has been produced, as well as a new era of 'biocapitalism'—the 'pharmacopornographic era'.<sup>61</sup> The term pharmacopornographic highlights the two processes which have become crucial in the post-war construction of sexuate subjectivity—the 'bio-molecular (pharmaco) and [the] semio-technical (pornographic)'.<sup>62</sup> Preciado argues that in the pharamacopornographic era in addition to the general change in subjectification through increased utilisation of pharmacological products, the increased prevalence and usage of pornography, contraceptives (both pharmacological and not), and medications such as exogenous hormones and Viagra have revealed the denaturalisation of both sexuality and gender.<sup>63</sup> Historically, the normative attack on homosexuality, gender non-conformity, and transgender people has operated through a discourse of naturalization. The deviation from heterosexuality and 'traditional' gender roles was projected as 'unnatural', and therefore to be punished and discouraged. It was 'understood' that the natural thing was for males and females to couple together, and this coupling was aligned with sexual reproduction—sexuality implied the reproduction of the (heterosexual) family. For Preciado, there has been a historic removal of sexuality from sexual reproduction; beginning with the invention of the condom, and culminating in the mass distribution of the birth control pill.<sup>64</sup> If heterosexual sexual activity no longer (necessarily) holds the risk of pregnancy, the 'reproductive alibi' for heterosexuality and cisnormative gender structures crumbles.<sup>65</sup>

While Preciado uses the term 'gender', it is not used in a positive sense. Rather, for Preciado, we live under a 'regime of sex, gender and sexual difference'.<sup>66</sup> Within the regime of sex, gender, and sexual difference, the politics of sexuate and gendered subjectivities has become wrapped up within the politics of identity. The politics of identity, on Preciado's reading, can only really lead us into a dead end—'we become *more* homosexual, *more* lesbian' in an 'innate' sense.<sup>67</sup> Identities are taken as opaque and unambiguous, we *certainly* know who we are, how could we not? One example Preciado gives is the continued proliferation and addition of more identities, which he understands as essentially aligning itself

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<sup>61</sup> Evans, "'Wittig and Davis, Woolf and Solanas (...) Simmer within Me,'" 286.

<sup>62</sup> Preciado, "The Pharmaco-Pornographic Regime: Sex, Gender, and Subjectivity in the Age of Punk Capitalism," 269.

<sup>63</sup> Evans, "'Wittig and Davis, Woolf and Solanas (...) Simmer within Me,'" 286–87.

<sup>64</sup> Preciado, *Pornotopia*, 10.

<sup>65</sup> *Paul B. Preciado with Jack Halberstam*.

<sup>66</sup> Preciado, *Can The Monster Speak?: A Report to an Academy of Psychoanalysts*, 1.

<sup>67</sup> *Paul B. Preciado with Jack Halberstam*.

with a Neoliberal political outlook.<sup>68</sup> Preciado has stated that he finds it increasingly hard for himself to articulate a radical political understanding of sexuate subjectivity within the language we have in the present. The terms sex, gender, sexual difference, lesbian, queer, trans all seem to operate around the logic and politics of identity. Instead, Preciado is more interested in theorising what he terms ‘somato-political revolution’ and the terms which will be appropriate for articulating such a politics.<sup>69</sup> It is a politics which begins from the simple fact that we ‘are [...] living bod[ies]’ and seeks to liberate what a body can do.<sup>70</sup> This politics, Preciado states, ‘would be instead of fighting for identity, starting to build, and to think, and to invent practices of critical disidentification’ with the terms of identity until a new conceptual grammar is found for them—if that is possible.<sup>71</sup> Preciado finds in the radical queer culture of the twentieth century a desire for the experimental reinvention of the body which deconstructs and disidentifies with the taxonomies of the current regime of identity to provide ‘other ways of living’.<sup>72</sup>

Sexual difference. Gender. How should one differentiate these terms? Should one differentiate these terms? Are these terms even still adequate? Must we find new concepts? If we decide to draw a line in the sand on the basis of one’s relation to psychoanalysis, we will run into issues with theorists like Irigaray, Butler, and Preciado who—I would argue—are not opposed to psychoanalysis *an sich* but rather the way it has been taken up. If we were to attempt to bracket philosophers on the basis of the terms they use, we will also run into problems. Even among those who work specifically on *sexual difference* (in contrast to *gender*) we find disagreements as to the multiplicity or non-multiplicity of sexual difference, both in the present or in the future, as well as to how sexual difference is to be conceived. Fernanda Magallanes, for example, uses the terms sexual difference *and* gender interchangeably, stating that one could ‘say that the categories of men and women [the categories of sexual difference] are a historical construct that has enabled only two forms of becoming a sexed body in the domain of intelligibility’.<sup>73</sup> Magallanes’ use of the terms sexual difference and gender interchangeably reveals something about theorists of sexual difference and gender, as well as these terms—a fair bit of the time, we can find these different theorists are ultimately speaking about the same things and, at times, in similar ways. This is what I aim to explore through this thesis.

### *Secondary Scholarship on Preciado:*

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Magallanes, *Psychoanalysis, the Body, and the Oedipal Plot*, 70.

The majority of the scholarship on Preciado's work has focused on his concept of pharmacopornographic subjectivity, most notably found in *Testo-Junkie*, and *Pornotopia* (both in published and thesis form). While this is useful, it tends to end up as an elaboration of a generalized Foucauldian argument which derives itself from Preciado, in order to analyse certain phenomenon. In particular, Helen Hester, McKenzie Wark, and Joshua Rivas' work on Preciado tends to be limited to this area—Hester's work applies Preciado's work to the Deleuzian concept of 'micropolitics', Rivas' examines *Testo Junkie* in the context of intoxication, and Wark really just explains *Testo Junkie* to a non-academic audience. Given that the amount of work produced by Hester, Wark, and Rivas on Preciado is so small, it has a limited use for this thesis in contrast to Ropek-Hewson and Elliott Evans' work on the subject which is much larger.

Sofia Ropek-Hewson's 2018 doctoral thesis 'Pharmacopornographic Subjectivity in the Work of Paul B. Preciado' still happens to be the only secondary work at such a length on Preciado's writing. Ropek-Hewson explicates Preciado's theory of pharmacopornographic subjectivity through four avatars which can be found throughout Preciado's work: the Voyeur, the Sex-Worker, the Biodrag King, and the Junkie.<sup>74</sup> Ropek-Hewson's dissertation refers little to Preciado's *Counter-Sexual Manifesto* in comparison to *Pornotopia* and *Testo-Junkie*. While Ropek-Hewson is correct that the book deals little with the concept of the pharmacopornographic (as Ropek-Hewson notes, this term first arises in *Pornotopia*), in regards to the concept of subjectivity as it is articulated in Preciado's work, *Counter-Sexual Manifesto* is extremely important—not only in regard to *current* subjectivity through the thesis that 'sexuality is prosthetic'—which is further elaborated on in *Testo-Junkie*—but also in regard to subjectivities which are not-yet in the present—the future which subjectivities *could* be.<sup>75</sup> To an extent I agree with Ropek-Hewson's assertion that the analysis of pharmacopornographic subjectivity which is present in *Testo-Junkie* is more developed than is present in *Counter-Sexual Manifesto*, in focusing on these texts, what is produced in regards to a reading of Preciado's is an elaboration of subjectivity as it exists for us at this specific conjuncture. Ropek-Hewson's work, while analysing Preciado's theory of subject formation through pharmacology and pornography reflects little on sexual difference and its theorists. While theorists such as Lacan, Irigaray, Derrida, and Grosz are mentioned, there is little engagement with these thinkers and how Preciado's work relates to (their) philosophies of sexual difference.

While Ropek-Hewson's work is the biggest work on Preciado, Elliott Evans has produced a small body of writing focusing particularly on the body, bareback sex, and the feminist archive as it appears in Preciado's work. The work Evans has produced deals with some of Preciado's work which was absent in Ropek-Hewson's writing. Evans' does not leave works such as *Counter-Sexual Manifesto*, and 'Anal Terror' to one side, but rather integrates them into a reading of Preciado's work, and situates Preciado's writing in the

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<sup>74</sup> Ropek Hewson, "Pharmacopornographic Subjectivity in the Work of Paul B. Preciado," 14.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

French Queer context that it arose out of.<sup>76</sup> Evans devotes a chapter of their book *The Body in French Queer Thought from Wittig to Preciado: Queer Permeability* to Preciado's work. Evans situates Preciado's work within what Evans terms 'queer permeability'. Queer permeability is, for Evans, an attempt to provide an understanding of the body which accounts for the 'indeterminacy and slippage between what we consider 'natural' and 'cultural' phenomena', wherein the material body and language/culture etc. exist in a symbiotic relationship.<sup>77</sup> Evans reads in the work of Preciado (as well as Wittig and the French artist ORLAN) an overcoming of 'linguistic monism' which has been found particularly in some readings of Post-Structuralism and Queer Theory. In the chapter on Preciado, not only is Preciado's understanding of the body and subjectivity in the present analysed, but through reading *Counter-Sexual Manifesto*, Evans—at times—points out how the process of the subject resignifying the body (what the body *is*, what it *does* etc.) points out of the body, gender, and sexual practices as conceived by static naturalised metaphysics towards the future multiplicity of the body in all its capacities.

Evans' article 'Your HIV-positive sperm, my trans-dyke uterus: Anti/futurity and the politics of bareback sex between Guillaume Dustan and [Paul] Preciado' analyses the relation between seropositive, seronegative subjectivities and the ethics of reproduction. In particular, Evans relates this dialogue between Preciado and Guillaume Dustan to the debate on reproductive futurism in texts such as Lee Edelman's *No Future*. The exchange between Dustan and Preciado is read by Evans' as a grappling between the tension between Dustan's queer politics as a 'path of death' which adopts a neo-libertine refusal of responsibility for others and the political orientation towards futurity and mourning (of Dustan) which Preciado adopts. Evans' other paper "'Wittig and Davis, Woolf and Solanas (...) simmer within me": Reading Feminist Archives in the Queer Writing of Paul B. Preciado' tracks the influence of the Feminist theoretical archive and its trajectories as it arises in Preciado's writing. While Evans does not analyse the relation between Preciado's work and philosophers of sexual difference, they highlight Preciado's indebtedness to one form of the feminist canon, and also the French Queer philosophical context through figures such as Guy Hocquenghem.

Ropek-Hewson makes note of a blog by Anne Pasek entitled 'Identity Politics and French Feminism Today' which reads Preciado's work in relation to masculinity, construing Preciado as embodying and being drawn towards the 'structures of violence' which are reproduced by the 'position and privileges of hegemonic masculinity on a visual and hormonal level'.<sup>78</sup> Pasek also attempts to characterise Preciado's

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<sup>76</sup> While *Counter-Sexual Manifesto* is pushed to one side by Ropek-Hewson, 'Anal Terror' (which had been translated and published in English in 2015, while Ropek-Hewson was writing their dissertation) is completely absent from their work. Also, while Evans cites and quotes 'Anal Terror', his use of the piece is limited to relating Preciado's writing French Queer activism.

<sup>77</sup> Evans, *The Body in French Queer Thought from Wittig to Preciado*, 19.

<sup>78</sup> Ropek Hewson, "Pharmacopornographic Subjectivity in the Work of Paul B. Preciado," 7.

theoretical reading of testosterone and its consumption as a ‘flight from “woman” [which] flirts with a subtle misogyny’ wherein testosterone is lauded as a molecule because of its supposed ability to ‘strengthen orgasm’ and increase aggression.<sup>79</sup> Pasek also reads Preciado’s writing on testosterone as posing the possibility of the equalisation of bodies and destruction of gendered (or also, sexual) difference ‘through the conversion of (all?) cis-women into technomales’.<sup>80</sup> Ropek-Hewson, contra Pasek, situates Preciado’s text alongside Jack Halberstam’s book *Female Masculinity* which highlights the difference between hegemonic masculinities and non-hegemonic masculinities.<sup>81</sup>

Alongside this, Pasek’s reading of Preciado seems to willingly misread *Testo-Junkie*. The references to the strengthening of orgasms and increase of aggression through the administration of testosterone are not framed in a moral sense: Preciado writes that the testosterone was proposed to be used and is used as a biopolitical tool to regulate the level of sexual desire in persons who are deemed to ‘suffer’ from a ‘lack of sexual desire’, clinically known as Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder, and that the FDA pushed back on its use in women due to conservative committee members who no doubt held to ‘a naturalistic metaphysics of sexual difference’.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, testosterone has been shown to increase aggression but only with the caveat that aggression increases in cultures which valorise and accept aggression.<sup>83</sup> In regards to the ‘conversion of [...] cis-women into technomales’, this is presented as a hypothetical to meditate on how subjectivity and sexuality can operate and be understood. On the next page, Preciado says that cisgender men simply resemble androgenised women and that ‘[c]is-females are just surgically and endocrinologically modified “men”’.<sup>84</sup> These seem to be deliberately provocative statements which Preciado uses to denaturalize sex, gender, and sexuality. It is not that cisgender men simply resemble androgenised women and cisgender women resemble feminized men in a sense that aligns with a static metaphysics of sexual difference. Rather, Preciado is arguing that the body endocrinologically operates as a blank slate wherein characteristics associated with ‘maleness’ and ‘femaleness’ are produced by the relative levels of hormones present in the body—gender, sex, and sexuality operate as prosthetic technologies of the body, created through the convergence of different technologies of the self. Pasek nearly reaches this point, stating that Preciado’s vision of “technosomatic communism” [...], therefore, would constitute nothing less than the destruction of the present system of identity as a whole. [...] Its achievement, however, requires a collective rather than

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<sup>79</sup> Pasek, “Identity Politics and French Feminism Today.”

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> This is not so say that those who are not cisgender men cannot be assimilated or assimilate themselves into hegemonic masculinities, just that the adoption of masculinity itself does not necessarily include the violence of hegemonic masculinity.

<sup>82</sup> Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 221–27.

<sup>83</sup> See Sapolsky, “Testosterone Rules.”

<sup>84</sup> Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 234–35.



individual experiment and will surely devalue testosterone's relational powers in turn'.<sup>85</sup> This realisation on Pasek's part is presented as a critique of Preciado, rather than the realisation that this is explicitly present in Preciado's work through the notions of countersexuality, uranism, and somatico-political revolution.

Fernanda Magallanes' book *Psychoanalysis, the Body, and the Oedipal Plot* utilises Preciado's understanding of the body as a 'somatic-psychic unity' of 'images, narratives, and daily cultural practices' to present psychoanalytic understanding of the body which does not limit itself to the historical binary account of sexual difference and to the dependence on an ahistorical and static understanding of the Oedipus complex. Magallanes historicises the psychoanalytic work of both Freud and Lacan in order to account for sexual differentiation outside of the Oedipal Scene and Plot which doesn't render such differentiation as aberrant or abject. The psychoanalysis that follows from Magallanes book is one which recognizes that the 'senses are indistinguishable from the symbolic order that administers the body and therefore perception carries with it a certain [historical] ideology'.<sup>86</sup> On Magallanes' reading, sexual difference is not restricted to a supposed empirical or essential nature, as it is in some psychoanalytic readings, but can and should be expanded not only through consciously 'dismantling the [current] psychoanalytic form of understanding sexual difference', but through and orientation towards the ways in which the unconscious expands psycho-sexual development beyond the Oedipal frame.<sup>87</sup> Preciado's presence in Magallanes' book is not so much to analyse Preciado's relation to psychoanalytic or philosophical concepts of sexual difference, but rather deploys Preciado in order to create what Preciado would name a 'mutant psychoanalysis'.

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How are we to respond to the 'problem' of sexual difference? This problem which has been called 'one of the important questions of our age, if not in fact the burning issue' by Irigaray.<sup>88</sup> Is sexual difference still a problem for us? Or is there another way that sexual difference may be read? Rather, has the problem of sexual difference become like that fateful 'melancholic paradox that would preoccupy Sade, Nietzsche, and eventually Klossowski and Blanchot'?<sup>89</sup> —the death of God, the death of sexual difference.

While this death can be read in a metaphysical fashion, as Heidegger argued, Nietzsche's parable highlights a break between forms of thinking. Walter Kaufmann has stated that what is occurring 'is not [an] opposing [of] claim to claim', as Nietzsche's statement is usually read. The death of God is not one

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<sup>85</sup> Pasek, "Identity Politics and French Feminism Today."

<sup>86</sup> Magallanes, *Psychoanalysis, the Body, and the Oedipal Plot*, 76.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Irigaray, "Sexual Difference," 118.

<sup>89</sup> Comay, *Mourning Sickness*, 78.

saying to a believer that they have been deceived, rather, ‘it is a declaration of what he takes to be a historical cultural fact [...] an attempt at a diagnosis of contemporary civilization, not a metaphysical speculation’.<sup>90</sup> On this reading, the death of god ‘is about the drying up of a horizon of meaning, and of a whole form of human life’.<sup>91</sup> But the destruction of this way of life and of meaning is not the destruction of life and meaning *an sich*. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche poetically writes that the death of God leaves us open to the proliferation of life and the multiple, stating

‘Indeed, at hearing the news that “the old god is dead”, we philosophers and “free spirits” feel illuminated by a new dawn; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, forebodings, expectation — finally the horizon seems clear again, even if not bright; finally our ships may set out again, set out to face any danger; every daring of the lover of knowledge is allowed again; the sea, *our* sea, lies open; maybe there has never been such an “open sea”’<sup>92</sup>

Perhaps, one might like to say, Irigaray was like Nietzsche’s Madman in *The Gay Science*, she had ‘come too early’, her ‘time [was] not yet’.<sup>93</sup> While being held as the ‘leading figure in ‘difference feminism’,<sup>94</sup> her account breaks with the conception of sexual difference, not only of the time of her most famous writings, but of the conception(s) of sexual difference in the present. Irigaray says that she ‘never meant that there can only be two sexes’ but rather that ‘there may be “at least two” sexes’ with only one sex existing in the present.<sup>95</sup> Sexual difference is not restricted to the one or to the two, but presents a horizon of multiple being which has the possibility to be instantiated. Was Irigaray working through sexual difference’s death without the vocabulary necessary to enunciate such a revolutionary claim? A form, a grammar of sexual difference which remains within the logic of identity?

While from the 1970s to the 1990s, it may have just been difference feminists who were (unconsciously) enacting sexual difference’s death, but today, Preciado states ‘that we are living through a paradigm shift: sexual difference does not exist, it is a construct’.<sup>96</sup> Preciado orients sexual difference in a similar way to gender—a symbolic concept which orients itself around the delimitation and categorisation of bodies and in the present, produces a normative prohibition on certain forms of sexuation and being. In this sense, we find Preciado in a similar position as Irigaray—positing that the current symbolic order

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<sup>90</sup> Kaufmann, “The Death of God and the Revaluation,” 12–13.

<sup>91</sup> *The Death of God*.

<sup>92</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 199.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>94</sup> Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 99.

<sup>95</sup> Gill-Peterson, “The Miseducation of a French Feminist,” 3.

<sup>96</sup> Preciado and Dangerfield, “A Discussion on Deconstruction.”

fundamentally limits the ways in which subjects can and come to be. Contemporary civilization is thus diagnosed as one which restricts the free development of subjectivity. While Preciado believes this aforementioned paradigm shift began in the 1950s, it has come to a head in the present. The present in which we find ourselves forces us to think about sexual difference in the way Rebecca Comay characterised the predicament that those who attempted to think through the death of god found themselves in:

‘How to kill a God who is, effectively, already long dead, who never actually did exist as such: how to mourn what is forever too late to mourn—what never was for the having?’<sup>97</sup>

How to kill a form, a grammar of sexual difference which is, effectively, already long dead, which never actually did exist as such: how to mourn what is forever late to mourn—what never was for the having?<sup>98</sup>

Throughout this thesis, I highlight—through reading Preciado alongside scholarship on sexuate difference—not only that Preciado’s work can be understood in a wider philosophical and conceptual context, but that Preciado’s work can allow those who are interested in the philosophical discourse of sexual difference to theorise in such a way which does justice to the multiplicity of sexuation without falling into—whether explicitly or subconsciously—arguments which still hold transphobic assumptions and outcomes. In reading Preciado with the corpus of feminist work on sexual difference, we will be able to separate its liberatory kernel from its cissexist shell.

#### *Chapter Outline:*

In the first chapter, I will outline the contours of Preciado’s theories of counter-sexuality and uranism. These theories offer an outline of the form of subjectivity which Preciado’s political and philosophical project seeks to bring about. In doing this, I will outline, also, Preciado’s understanding of subjectivity as it exists for us now in the form of (capitalist-patriarchal) pharmacopornographic subjectivity. This chapter, in highlighting the stakes of Preciado’s theories of counter-sexuality and uranism, will articulate Preciado’s critique of the ‘regime of sex, gender and sexual difference’ and his alternative form of subjectivity. In this chapter, I also present two contemporary readings of psychoanalysis and sexuate

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<sup>97</sup> Comay, *Mourning Sickness*, 78.

<sup>98</sup> I have deliberately inserted ‘a (form, a grammar of)’ in order to sustain an openness in regard to concepts. While Preciado indeed *does* engage in a critique of the ‘regime of sex, gender, and sexual difference’, when we relate Preciado to other philosophers of sexual difference, we find similarities between Preciado’s proposed theory of (future) subjectivity and what other thinkers name sexual difference. This will indeed be something which will be interrogated later in the thesis.

difference. These readings, by Jamieson Webster, and Oli Stephano, respectively relate psychoanalysis to Preciado's work, and sexual difference to Preciado's sources—particularly Judith Butler.

The second chapter presents a reading of Irigaray's figure of the lips, and Preciado's figure of the anus. While Irigaray is a defender of sexual difference, and Preciado a critic, the world in which both writers seek to bring about (through the realisation, and transcendence of sexual difference, respectively) appear very similar through their fidelity to the flourishing of sexual subjectivity. This chapter presents a comparative reading of Irigaray's work on feminine morphologies—in particular the 'two lips'—and Preciado's writing on the anus in 'Anal Terror'. My reading proposes that both Irigaray and Preciado, through the notions of the 'lips' and 'anus' respectively attempt to produce a vision of the multiplicity of sexual subjectivity. While Irigaray's 'lips' are multiple, they—and their name—disseminate meaning beyond Irigaray's work, meaning there is a need to move beyond the lips. Preciado's figure of the anus, through his reading of Hocquenghem, allows us to move beyond certain disseminated meanings of Irigaray's lips, which, on my reading, can lead to a trapping of one's account in a cissexual form. The anus, on my reading, is presented by Preciado as an expansive figure which seeks the production of a multitude of difference and mutation which has no bounds.

The third and final chapter gives a grounding to Preciado's philosophy through a reading of Xenofeminism and the work of Ray Brassier. It also responds to contemporary literature on sexual difference through a critique of a recent paper by M.D. Murtagh titled 'An Onto-Ethics of Transsexual Difference'. In particular, I argue that Murtagh, and his defense of Grosz, stifle our ability to think the future of difference through ontologizing current environmental limits. Given Preciado's indebtedness to the work of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, the possibility of bodily change, on my reading, tends to be taken for granted, and is not necessarily accounted for. On my reading, while Preciado fails to account for the conditions of bodily change, Xenofeminism and its notion of alienation can help us begin to provide an account of the conditions of bodily change which aligns with the political and philosophical positions advanced in Preciado's project. I further supplement the Xenofeminist account of bodily change with an elaboration of Ray Brassier's account of the human. This account of the human argues that the event of self-consciousness brings about a *sui generis* mutability within the human, allowing us to undo our own bodily limits through the aid of technics. Reading Xenofeminism and Ray Brassier in this way, in my view, allows us to sketch a philosophical grounding for Preciado's political and philosophical project—the creation of a 'somatic communism' which democratises power to our bodies, and allows for the flourishing of bodily experimentation and mutation.

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I would like to make clear that the aim of this thesis is not to produce a ‘canonical’ or systematic elaboration of Preciado’s analysis of sexual difference and their proposed new form(s) of subjectivity. As I have noted before, Preciado’s work seems to evade origin in a general sense—but also *does* delimit *some* origin through influence. He is neither Foucauldian, Butlerian, or Irigarian. He is all and none of them at the same time. In light of this, I am seeking to provide dialogue between Preciado and canonical figures in Continental philosophy in order to open new pathways which scholars interested in Preciado’s work may be able to build upon in future.

## Chapter I: Preciado's theory of Countersexuality and Uranism

'The refusal to become or to remain a 'gendered' man or a woman, then, is an eminently political insistence on emerging from the nightmare of the all-too-real, imaginary narrative of sex and race'

— Donna Haraway<sup>99</sup>

Preciado ends his introduction to *An Apartment on Uranus*, with a reflection upon the (then) past five years of his 'crossing', and wonders of the future. He writes,

'Uranus approached the Earth in 2013, when I began these columns and when I ventured onto the paths of the crossing. I like to think that the frozen giant will return in 2096, in seventy-eight years, after a complete revolution around the sun. Then, with all certainty, my body (intersex, transsexual, masculine, feminine, monstrous, glorious) will no longer exist as conscious flesh on the planet. I wonder if, between now and then, we will manage to overcome racial epistemology and sexual difference and to invent a new cognitive framework allowing the existence of life's diversity. Or if, on the contrary, the colonial techno-patriarchy will have destroyed the last vestiges of life on Earth. I will never know. But I hope that the cursed, innocent children will still be here to welcome Uranus again'.<sup>100</sup>

This final paragraph highlights something I believe has not (at length) been explicitly reflected upon—if not, at times, lost—in secondary scholarship on Preciado's work: Preciado's theorisation of subjectivity and its sexuete aspects is not restricted to a historical analysis of subjectification (both past and present), but looks forward towards *what may be*. This orientation towards the future and reflection upon the ethics of subjectification is made most explicit in Preciado's first book *Countersexual Manifesto*.

As I have noted in the introduction to this thesis, most work on Preciado—with the exception of Elliot Evans' writing—has been focused on Preciado's concept of pharmacopornographic subjectivity. While this is not a fault of writers who have worked on Preciado—the secondary literature is inchoate, after all—it means there is a large part of Preciado's work and conceptual apparatus which, in my view, is under appreciated.

In this chapter, I would like to present a reading of Preciado's theorisation of countersexuality—in *Countersexual Manifesto*—and what I call uranism—in the introduction to *An Apartment on Uranus*. On my reading, these two terms are synonyms for a theory of future sexuete subjectivity which I believe is present

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<sup>99</sup> Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 148.

<sup>100</sup> Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus*, 42.

throughout Preciado's work. I choose these texts—*Countersexual Manifesto* and the Introduction to *An Apartment on Uranus*—as they both contain an explicit engagement with the future and with world-building that I believe allows us to criticise the present, and build the groundwork for future forms of subjectivity. In particular, I believe Preciado's analysis of sexuality, and sexuate subjectivity as being *prosthetic* provides us with a novel concept which we may use to think through sexual difference.

My aim in this chapter is to outline how Preciado develops an understanding of sexuate subjectivity, with particular focus on his *Countersexual Manifesto*, and his introduction to *An Apartment on Uranus*. This understanding of sexuate subjectivity will form the backdrop for the encounters with Irigaray, and Grosz in the next two chapters. While this reading will inform later chapters, I do not want to limit them to a reading, importing, or assimilating thinkers into countersexuality or uranism. Rather, I aim to analyse aspects of certain philosophers' thought in light of Preciado's work.

'Countersexuality' and 'uranism' are two terms which, in Preciado's writing, operate to distinguish a political position in the present, and, on my reading, an understanding of the future of sexuate subjectivity. These two terms are not opposed to each other, nor would I say uranism is a development of the concept wherein countersexuality is dropped. Rather, I believe that countersexuality is uranism, and uranism is countersexuality. The two concepts, I would argue, are synonymous, and their different names arise out of the writers which Preciado was engaging with at the time of writing—Michel Foucault, in regards to countersexuality, and Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, in regards to uranism. While I believe that the core of what Preciado calls countersexuality is not abandoned in the writing on uranism, I believe uranism is in a sense, more politically and philosophically mature.

### *Countersexuality*

In the Introduction to the English edition of *Countersexual Manifesto*, Preciado writes of the possible resistance to the Pharmacopornographic Regime in a way which could have been ripped from a David Cronenberg film: "Instead, we need to open a revolutionary terrain for the invention of new organs and desires, for which no pleasure has yet been defined".<sup>101</sup> Preciado, further, goes on to state

'The invention of new bodies will be possible only through the assemblage and hybridization of experiences from the border of what are traditionally understood as proper identities: organs, functions, and bodies are reshaped at the threshold of homosexuality and heterosexuality, trans and bio, disabled and abled, animal and human, white and nonwhite.

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<sup>101</sup> Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 14.

These identities (which never existed and were only ever fixed points in the power-knowledge regime of the patriarchal-colonial) are now obsolete'.<sup>102</sup>

At the time of its original publication (2000), and even in the present such an idea of the body and its plasticity goes against what most would take to be common sense. The commonsense of our current discourse. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault notes that while discourse subjectivates and limits how subjects can be, it also includes 'a starting point for an opposing strategy'—the seed of its own undoing.<sup>103</sup> Taking inspiration from Foucault, Preciado writes that countersexuality is 'situated outside the polarities of man/woman, masculine/feminine, heterosexuality/homosexuality, trans/cis', and understands the categories and practices of the sex/gender system to be 'nothing more than machines, products, instruments, apparatuses[... and] prostheses'.<sup>104</sup> Countersexuality is, on my reading, the practice of embodying and creating sexuate subjectivities which operate outside the confines of the sex/gender system as it currently operates. This is what I believe Preciado means when, in *Testo-Junkie*, he writes: '[w]e must reclaim the right to participate in the *construction* of biopolitical fictions[... ] to demand the collective and "common" ownership of the biocodes of gender, sex, and race'.<sup>105</sup> Putting into practice Foucault's writing on power/knowledge, Preciado is producing a counter-discourse of the gender, sex, sexuality, and the body.

For Preciado, countersexuality is both 'postnaturalist and postconstructivist'.<sup>106</sup> He writes that '[c]ountersexuality is not the creation of a new nature but rather the end of nature as an order that legitimizes the subjection of some bodies to others'.<sup>107</sup> This statement by Preciado, in refusing to understand countersexuality as a refashioning of nature—in any form—depends upon the assumption that nature is an ideological tool which cannot be changed in its discursive substance. Nature as a discourse, *must* be done away with as, for Preciado at this point, nature is a discourse of exclusion—of restrictive normative specification.<sup>108</sup> While Preciado's understanding of nature may have changed, it is interesting as this understanding of nature as a discourse of exclusion is *ironically* in opposition to the post-humanist animist metaphysics which Preciado has agreed with at other points.

In response to a paper by Ray Brassier, Preciado states that he would 'challenge [the] division between the human and the animal which is grounded in [the] Enlightenment' as it is a 'humanist'

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>103</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, 101.

<sup>104</sup> Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 21.

<sup>105</sup> Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 352.

<sup>106</sup> Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 9.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 20–21.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.



distinction which we should overcome.<sup>109</sup> Here Preciado is arguing that the distinction between ways of living *implies* the creation of a normative hierarchy. It is the same post-humanist position which Rosi Braidotti explicates when she writes that ‘[a]ppeals to the ‘human’ are always discriminatory: they create structural distinctions and inequalities among different categories of humans, let alone between humans and non-humans’.<sup>110</sup> This variety of post-humanist metaphysics has been described by Brassier as follows:

‘Emancipation is no longer of the human; it is from the human as exclusionary category. What is humanism deemed guilty of excluding? Alterity: racial, sexual, biological, etc. But racism, sexism, and species-ism remain partial indexes of a more fundamental xenophobia, whose foundation is ontological. It begins with the demarcation of the animate from the inanimate and of the minded from the mindless. [...] The metaphysical subversion of humanism consists in undermining any attempt to specify the difference between humans and other animals, whether in terms of the capacity for language (the human is the talking animal), for reason (the human is the rational animal), or for politics (the human is the political animal). That language is a species of signalling, reasoning a species of reckoning, and politics a species of cooperation, reintegrates the differences that were taken to be constitutive of the human back into the continuum of biological capacities’.<sup>111</sup>

On my reading, throughout his work Preciado vacillates between a position similar to Braidotti’s (a posthuman naturalism), and an acceptance of the social nature of sexuate subjectivity, and the way we understand the world. Right after Preciado refuses the category of nature from his imagined future ‘countersexual’ society, due to it being fundamentally hierarchical, he writes that within a countersexual society everyone would ‘recognize in themselves the possibility of gaining access to every signifying practice as well as every position of enunciation’—which would imply the possibility of an enunciation of nature in the sense of its usual understanding, as well as, on the other hand, nature’s refusal.<sup>112</sup> Further, in a text for the French newspaper *Liberation*, Preciado argues that ‘feminism is not a humanism. Feminism is an animalism’. This animalism is also ‘not a naturalism’ but a ‘counter-technology’.<sup>113</sup> Animalism seems, in my view, to do exactly the same work as Braidotti’s post-humanism, but refuses to see that it itself is a naturalism. Preciado is correct that the naturalising impulse that has emboldened ‘born this way’ rhetoric—that sexuality, gender etc. are in-born characteristics of a subject— should be opposed, but the way Preciado

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<sup>109</sup> *The Parliament of Bodies: Communism Will Be the Collective Management of Alienation*.

<sup>110</sup> Braidotti, “A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities,” 35.

<sup>111</sup> Brassier, “The Human,” 2–3.

<sup>112</sup> Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 20.

<sup>113</sup> Brassier, “The Human,” 2–3.

speaks of nature highlights an issue for his theory. Concepts at times are treated by Preciado as fixed to their historical meaning. As contemporary and historical discourses, sex, sexual difference, and gender are oppressive and, seemingly, *cannot* be changed, and thus must be done away with. On my reading, sexual difference—or sexuate subjectivity—do not have to necessitate an oppressive discourse as they have historically. The issues which arise within the discourse(s) of sexual difference and sexuate subjectivity are due to the metaphysical and social structure of the arguments which have been deployed. As I will highlight below, the discourse(s) of sexual difference and sexuate subjectivity do not necessarily depend upon an oppressive social and metaphysical logic, and there are writers who have theorised sexual difference and sexuate subjectivity—taking influence from and moving beyond Irigaray—in a way which is not cissexist and transphobic.

For all the historical work Preciado has done on the development and historical deployment of these categories, *at times*, the way he writes seems to forget that these categories which give us a certain form of social existence are constructed by ourselves collectively, and can be refashioned to our own ends in ways which do not reproduce the subjugation of subjects. On my reading, this is prevalent in the *Countersexual Manifesto* wherein Preciado sets up camp to defend one side of a conceptual pole—in the case of *Countersexual Manifesto*, the prosthetic and technological—against its opposite, while still attempting to lay claim to what most would say the term ‘nature’ and/or matter/materiality lays claim to—in particular the ‘materiality’ of the body. One of the ways Preciado attempts this is through a critique of what he calls ‘constructivist feminism’, which, on Preciado’s reading, understands bodies as ‘formless material to which gender would give cultural form and meaning according to the cultural or historical matrix’.<sup>114</sup> That is, those who adhere to a linguistic monist view of the body, fail to do justice to the materiality of bodies. One could respond that materiality does not necessitate that the body is ‘natural’, *though*, we find right after Preciado’s critique of constructivist feminism he states

‘It is entirely constructed, and, at the same time, it is purely organic. It springs from the Western metaphysical dichotomies between body and soul, form and matter, nature and culture, while simultaneously tearing them apart. Gender resembles the dildo. Both surpass imitation. Their carnal plasticity destabilizes the distinction between the imitated and the imitator, between the truth and the representation of the truth, between the reference and the referent, between nature and artifice, between sexual organs and sexual practices’.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 27.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

Here, on my reading, Preciado could have moved forward with deconstruction. Preciado, throughout the text from this point on, explicates the relationality between technics and nature, but still it appears that the text stalls at the reversal of poles—technics being the dominant term for gender and sexuality rather than nature. It could be argued that, in a sense, Preciado, in reversing the dominant structure of gender being *natural*, has reinstated the position of nature being a passive substance which the dildo (technics) works upon and changes, rather than technics and nature both having roles in their constitution. The ‘tearing apart’ of Western metaphysical dichotomies which deconstruction seeks to enact, reveals that these poles do not function purely, but each is contaminated with its opposite. Technology is contaminated with nature, and nature is contaminated by technology. On my reading, the way Preciado uses ‘technology’, ‘prosthetic’, and related terms highlights the pervasive nature of what Catherine Malabou has called ‘plasticity’, which allows us to recognise ‘how structures and forms of life previously considered rigid are in fact “plastic” and in constant mutation and transformation’.<sup>116</sup> This plasticity, on my reading, is revealed in the figure of the dildo in *Countersexual Manifesto*.

While Preciado accepts and argues for understanding sexuate subjectivity as dependent upon multiple terms of address in a relational manner, I still believe that ‘nature’ and the ‘organic’ are relegated to the role of secondary terms in *Countersexual Manifesto*. While this is the case, *Countersexual Manifesto* holds and presents an important understanding of the relation between technics and nature which I believe comes into its own in later texts as technics no longer textually dominates Preciado’s analysis. This is not to say that technics becomes less important for Preciado later on, but that there is a more useful balance between terms than in *Countersexual*, which at times adheres to the cultural techno-fetishism of the 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>117</sup>

If countersexuality is, for Preciado, postnaturalist as it refuses to understand countersexuality as ‘natural’ but rather technological or prosthetic how are we to characterise countersexuality’s ‘postconstructivism’? Preciado understands countersexuality as being influenced by theories which take gender to be socially or psychologically constructed while it moves beyond theories of construction by situating them within the larger system of biopolitical technologies and *dispotifs*. Here he notes that it is important to understand this movement is not a rejection of theories of the social and psychological of gender. In situating the construction of gender within an analysis of biopolitical technologies, Preciado is pushing against certain misreadings of Queer theory which turn ‘the body into a formless material to which

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<sup>116</sup> Dalton and Malabou, “What Should We Do with Plasticity?,” 1.

<sup>117</sup> Bogna Konior has noted a similar technofetishism in Laboria Cuboniks’ ‘Xenofeminist Manifesto’, writing that ‘[i]n xenofeminism, alienation means siding with the artificial, “unnatural”, and unfamiliar’—that is, the technological. See Konior, “Automate the Womb: Ecologies and Technologies of Reproduction. Helen Hester, Xenofeminism (Polity, 2018).”

gender would give cultural form and meaning according to the cultural or historical matrix'.<sup>118</sup> Key to this movement towards Preciado's *technological* reading of gender is the figure of the dildo.

The dildo is one of the main figures in *Countersexual Manifesto*, with the notions such as dildonics and dildo ontology being key as well. For Preciado, the role of the dildo is the instantiation of 'the postgender and post-sexually identified subject'.<sup>119</sup> The dildo and its concepts operate almost like third terms which attempt to encompass the opposing dichotomies found in the text—such as sex/gender, nature/culture, technic/organic—as well as a tool which undermines 'naturalist' and 'essentialist' philosophies. It operates as Donna Haraway's cyborg does, undoing the rigidity and purity of the poles of dominant thought.<sup>120</sup>

Preciado's choice to utilise the dildo as a tool to theorise sexuate subjectivity appears strange at first. It seems like a somewhat innocuous object to the seeming stability and inherent nature of the body's attributes. Even before Preciado's theorisation of the dildo, we can see how the dildo is understood as prosthetic. Prosthetic should not be understood in the sense the medical field understands that term—that is, denoting a replacement for a lost organic object in order to restore normal function. Rather, prosthetic should be understood as that which modulates and modifies one's subjectivity through its adoption. As of this, the prosthetic nature of the dildo converges on the larger notion of technological apparatuses or *dispositifs* which Preciado adopts from Foucault. This convergence, on my reading, widens how the dildo can be understood by Preciado. The dildo is not limited to the dildo *as object*, but rather as a conceptual object which *many objects may be*. That is to say, the dildo is not limited to *the dildo*, but rather, anything can be a dildo. Preciado highlights this, in the 2018 introduction to *Countersexual*, writing that

'[t]he lesson we learn from the survival of Sade's most challenging text is not only that hollow dildos can be useful pens for hiding secrets or that any dildo can eventually contain a book but also that a book can operate like a dildo by becoming a technique for fabricating sexuality. Like a dildo, a book is a sexual body's assisted cultural technology of modification.

In this sense, this book, too, is a dildo. A dildo-book and a book about dildos that aims to modify the subject who might use it'.<sup>121</sup>

The dildo operates then, as a concept, or an abstract object, which highlights the ways in which objects operate as technologies of the self. Further, given the wide net which the dildo casts, it also includes organic

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<sup>118</sup> Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 27.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>120</sup> Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway*, 9; Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 9.

<sup>121</sup> Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 2.

objects, or non-organic objects which transform the organic through its own processes (e.g. drugs, exogenous hormones). It is in these ways that countersexuality can be understood as ‘postconstructivist’.

Given that the dildo is conceptually linked to the notion of technological apparatuses, it operates as a representation the concept of plasticity—the dildo operates as a tool of plasticity through its ability to transform subjectivity. He had to ‘write the discourse of the dildo[, that is, the plasticity which the dildo enacts,] in tiny script and hide it secretly within the [avatar] of the dildo itself’.<sup>122</sup> This means, when Preciado writes that ‘this book, too, is a dildo’, or, ‘[g]ender resembles the dildo’ he means the book or gender operates as a technological apparatus which, depending on the subject and how they use it, can utilise the plasticity of the body and subjectivity to enact a transformation. Preciado summarises this well when he writes that the ‘carnal plasticity [of these *dispositifs*] destabilizes the distinction between the imitated and the imitator, between the truth and the representation of the truth, between the reference and the referent, between nature and artifice, between sexual organs and sexual practices’.<sup>123</sup>

Readers of Preciado such as Ropek-Hewson have noted this link between the writing of Malabou and Preciado. In particular, Ropek-Hewson links Preciado’s theorisation of sexuate subjectivity to Malabou’s distinction between plasticity and flexibility. In an interview with Purple Magazine, Malabou states that plasticity and flexibility

‘are synonymous up to a certain extent. They’re synonymous if we define plasticity only as a capacity for transformation. In plasticity, however, there’s something more than just change, which is resistance to deformation. The physics of materials makes a clear distinction between flexibility and plasticity. A flexible material can be bent in all directions. A plastic material, once deformed, cannot go back to its initial form. It means that in plasticity you have the idea of a resistance, which is not contained in fluidity’.<sup>124</sup>

Plasticity, on Malabou’s account, allows for a resistance which is more radical and destructive than is present in the notion of flexibility. Ropek-Hewson notes that flexibility is compatible with the domination of the body by capitalism, writing that ‘flexible bodies map onto capitalist mechanisms of control; plastic bodies are capable of creativity’.<sup>125</sup> Flexibility, conceptually, implies an inherent base form which the body *can* and *will* return to, whereas plasticity means that even if one returns to what seems a familiar ‘form’, it still holds the mark’s process of change and deformation and is, thus, different.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>124</sup> Grau, Zahm, and Malabou, “Philosophy with Catherine Malabou.”

<sup>125</sup> Ropek Hewson, “Pharmacopornographic Subjectivity in the Work of Paul B. Preciado,” 24.

Ropek-Hewson reads in Preciado's work a notion of 'body plasticity' which views 'the body as Malabou views the brain: as "un facteur de désobéissance à toute forme constituée" [a factor of disobedience to any constitutive form]'.<sup>126</sup> Ropek-Hewson links this notion of body plasticity with Preciado's administration of testosterone as presented in *Testo-Junkie*, where Preciado 'improvis[es] his identity' through 'taking Testogel like an illegal drug, creatively and without concern for its regulation'.<sup>127</sup> Preciado's figure of the dildo, as well, highlights this notion of body plasticity in a more general sense. I read the dildo as functioning this way as Preciado notes that there is a 'nonidentitary grammar' which the 'dildo introduces within bodies and sexualities'. The dildo operates as a term which challenges an essentialist ontology of sexuate difference. Because, for Preciado, practically anything can be a dildo, this means that anything is able to function as a tool which modulates one's sexuate subjectivity through plasticity.

Given the role of the plastic nature of subjectivity within Preciado's work, on my reading, the issue that arises when relating Preciado's work to philosophies of sexual difference is not difference itself, but rather understandings of sexuate difference which '[equate] difference with sexuation, making it the whole of difference, and not simply one mode of variety among human bodies'.<sup>128</sup> Preciado, while not using the term 'sexuate', on my reading, allows for the sexuate within his philosophy while refusing to make it the whole of difference as Irigaray and some of her readers do.

### *Uranism*

In his introduction to *An Apartment on Uranus*, Preciado recounts the dream which included the book's namesake. In this dream, Preciado is speaking to his friend about what he names his 'problem of geographic dislocation'.<sup>129</sup> In this dream, the many places Preciado has lived during his 'nomadic' life have been replaced with planets. Preciado finds it 'hard for [him] to decide on a place to live in the world' and in an attempt to overcome the problems that may come with the aforementioned decision, had decided to rent an apartment on each of the planets in the solar system—an unsustainable wish even in his dream.<sup>130</sup> Preciado's friend, Dominique González-Foerster, says to him

'If I were you, I'd have an apartment on Mars and I'd keep a *pied-à-terre* on Saturn, [...] but I'd get rid of the Uranus apartment. It's much too far away'.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 24–25.

<sup>128</sup> Parker, "Precarity and Elemental Difference," 333.

<sup>129</sup> Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus*, 22.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

This dream forms a springboard which allows Preciado to think of sexuate subjectivity in relation to Uranus moving from the ancient Greek myth, through the work of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, and into the present. The story of the birth of the elder Aphrodite Urania—and not of the birth of her father, Uranus—is the root of the term Uranian, as used by both Preciado and Ulrichs (who I will discuss below).

Preciado begins his traversal of Uranus with the planet itself. A planet around 2.9 billion kilometers from the sun ‘[m]ade up of ice, methane and ammonia’, and ‘the coldest planet in the solar system’.<sup>132</sup> *Une terre inhospitalière*. This dream which Preciado recounts cannot—at least in the present—be a reality for him. But still, Uranus and its apartment keep reappearing to Preciado in a way he cannot escape. He writes that

‘dream [sic] functions like a virus. From that night forward, while I’m awake, the sensation of having an apartment on Uranus increases, and I am more and more convinced that the place I should live is over there’.<sup>133</sup>

Dreams, for Preciado, are ‘an integral part of life’, noting—similarly to Freud—that ‘life begins and ends in the unconscious’.<sup>134</sup> Writing on dreams, Jamieson Webster has noted that from a psychoanalytic point of view we come to understand that ‘[d]reams help us confront what is impossible to think, what is unspeakable and as of yet un-symbolized’.<sup>135</sup> The lack of reference to Freud in the introduction to *An Apartment* is interesting as Preciado unconsciously produces a dream analysis, realising that his planetary apartments are rather a displacement of the dream’s latent content.<sup>136</sup> These apartments rather are representations of different forms of sexuate subjectivity which have not yet—or cannot yet—be properly represented in the symbolic order.

Preciado’s analysis then mentions the role of Uranus in Ancient Greek mythology. In his *Theogony*, Hesiod, after recounting Kronos’ castration of his father, Uranus, writes

The genitalia themselves, freshly cut with flint, were thrown  
Clear of the mainland into the restless, white-capped sea,  
Where they floated a long time, a white foam from the god-flesh  
Collected around them, and in that foam a maiden developed  
And grew [...]

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<sup>132</sup> Ingersoll, “Uranus”; Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus*, 23.

<sup>133</sup> Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus*, 23.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>135</sup> Webster, “Disorganisation & Sex.”

<sup>136</sup> Preciado’s relation to psychoanalysis is complicated moving from

There she came ashore, an awesome, beautiful divinity [...]  
Aphrodite<sup>137</sup>

Preciado writes of this Greek myth that it ‘could imply that love comes from the disjunction of the body’s genital organs, from the displacement and externalization of genital force’.<sup>138</sup> This tale of the birth of Aphrodite acts, in Preciado’s text, as a bridge to speak of Ulrichs, who utilises this myth to theorise sexual subjectivity as well.

Writing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Ulrichs adopted the term Uranian, with explicit reference to Plato’s *Symposium*, as a way to assert his own love and desire for men. Pausanias, in the *Symposium*, states that the birth of the two goddesses named Aphrodite, posits the existence of two kinds of love. The elder Aphrodite ‘is the daughter of Uranus and had no mother’, the younger Aphrodite, on the other hand, ‘is the child of [the gods] Zeus and Dione’.<sup>139</sup> While named the ‘Heavenly’ and ‘Common’ Aphrodites, their other names, Aphrodite Urania and Aphrodite Dione provided the namesakes Ulrichs adopted for the distinction between what would be later called homosexuality and heterosexuality.

The work of Ulrichs appears a strange reference for Preciado to make. The explanation for and moral defense of the Uranian in Ulrich’s writing engages in a naturalist pre-Critical metaphysics which, for Preciado, is no doubt suspect. The Uranian and the Dionäer, are not simply seen as two ‘orientations’ or ‘sexualities’ by Ulrichs. The Uranian make up a ‘third sex’—different from the two—male and female—which compose the Dionäer.<sup>140</sup> Albeit, while Ulrich’s theory is not framed negatively, it mirrors the theory of sexual inversion, with Ulrichs claiming that male homosexual desire is a womanly form of desire stating ‘[w]e are women in spirit [...] sexually, namely in the direction of our sexual love’.<sup>141</sup> The feminine and masculine ‘souls’ can only desire its other of the two—as of this, the desire for one’s own ‘sex’ is the result of the misplacement of one’s soul with one’s body.<sup>142</sup> Ulrichs holds the assumption that it is of natural law for men and women to couple, as of this, in order to account for his own and other’s existence, he posits that biological and psychical development are split; if they were not, Ulrichs would not be able to account for the Uranian’s existence as—due to his pre-held assumptions—their physical embodiment would necessitate desire for the other ‘sex’.<sup>143</sup> On Ulrichs’ account, the existence of the Uranian is not *against* nature,

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<sup>137</sup> Hesiod, *Works and Days and Theogony*, 66.

<sup>138</sup> Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus*, 24.

<sup>139</sup> Plato, *The Symposium*, 11–12.

<sup>140</sup> Kennedy, *Karl Heinrich Ulrichs: Pioneer of the Modern Gay Movement*, 63.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 63–64.

<sup>142</sup> My use of ‘soul’ here should not necessarily be read in a metaphysical fashion, rather, I am pointing out that Ulrich’s account an account of the psyche wherein one *is inherently* masculine or feminine in regards to the orientation of their desire.

<sup>143</sup> Kennedy, “Karl Heinrich Ulrichs: First Theorist of Homosexuality,” 29.



but is itself *natural* and ‘God-given’.<sup>144</sup> Due to the God-given naturalness of the Uranier’s desire, Ulrichs states that they have ‘the right to satisfy it’.<sup>145</sup> On Ulrichs’ reading, it is precisely *this* naturalness of Uranic desire which provides the basis for its ethical approval.

As I noted above, the reference to Ulrichs is rather out of the ordinary. The theoretical sources which Preciado pulls from—most importantly French Post-structuralism, and Queer Theory—have repeatedly pushed against the grounding of sexuality in nature that is present in Ulrichs’ work—it is in these domains, something of a dead dog.

Preciado writes of Ulrichs’ theory that it reproduces the ‘binary epistemology of sexual difference’ because he (Ulrichs) enacts a cutting in half of subjectivity through the separation of body and soul.<sup>146</sup> Preciado reads Ulrichs’ theory to be limited to the two—there can be no more. While this is the case, Preciado still uses the term Uranism to describe himself in the introduction. The reference to Ulrichs, then, seems not as an adoption of his theory of sexualisation, but rather his role as a homosexual political activist.

Preciado recalls one of Ulrichs’ diary entries wherein he notes his anxiety having to speak *as a Uranian* in front of a gathering of ‘500 jurists, members of the German Parliament, and a Bavarian prince’ after he was condemned to prison and his books banned. Ulrichs recalls the words of the Swiss writer Heinrich Hössli who had openly defended homosexuality in his writings. For Hössli, it was imperative to defend homosexual people from persecution, putting it as follows:

‘to write this book and expose myself to persecution, or not to write it and be full of guilt until the day I am buried. Of course I have encountered the temptation to stop writing... But before my eyes appeared the images of the persecuted and the prospect of such wretched children who have not yet been born, and I thought of the unhappy mothers at their cradles, rocking their cursed yet innocent children! And then I saw our judges with their eyes blindfolded. Finally, I imagined my gravedigger slipping the cover of my coffin over my cold face. Then, before I submitted, the imperious desire to stand up and defend the oppressed truth possessed me...’<sup>147</sup>

For both Hössli and Ulrichs, picturing the continual persecution of future generations for their desire and love fuelled their desire to speak. They knew that they had a political task to undertake, if not for those living at their time then for those who would come. The response to Ulrichs’ aforementioned speech at Munich’s

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<sup>144</sup> Kennedy, *Karl Heinrich Ulrichs: Pioneer of the Modern Gay Movement*, 64.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus*, 24.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 25–26.

Odeon Hall mirrors the response to Preciado's address to the *École de la cause freudienne*; anger, *furor*, but also from some, agreement.<sup>148</sup> Preciado asks, 'what does it mean to speak for those who have been refused access to reason and knowledge'? He then responds in a way which elucidates the reason for his reference to Ulrichs:

'To speak is to invent the language of the crossing, to project one's voice into an interstellar expedition: to translate our difference into the language of the norm; while we continue, in secret, to practice a strange lingo that the law does not understand'.<sup>149</sup>

Preciado notes that Ulrichs refused to translate his *sexuate* subjectivity into the contemporary terms of his time. Ulrichs did not walk into the Odeon Theatre and state 'I am not a sodomite' or even 'I am a sodomite'. While Ulrichs' speech, no doubt, would have been read by some at the time as the confessions of a sodomite, Ulrichs sought to construct his subjectivity with *new* concepts that he believed did justice to his existence. In Preciado's words, Ulrichs 'invented a new language and a new scene of enunciation'.<sup>150</sup> It is this act of invention which, on my reading, motivates Preciado's use of Ulrichs.

Alongside Ulrichs' new scene of enunciation, Preciado notes that Ulrichs' concepts have evaded integration into the biopolitical apparatuses. Homosexuality, transsexuality, and intersexuality became conceptual apparatuses wherein subjects could be subjectivated as criminal, deviant, and sick. Butler notes that, following Hegel, recognition is not a unilateral occurrence. They write that

'[i]n the moment that I give [recognition], I am potentially given it, and the form by which I offer it is one that is potentially given to me. In this sense, one might say, I can never offer it, in the Hegelian sense, as a pure offering, since I am receiving it, at least potentially and structurally, in the moment, in the act, of giving'.<sup>151</sup>

The scene of address, in which I recognise a subject, and they may, in turn, recognise me highlights the ecstatic nature of subjectivity, and that our subjectivity is dependent upon that which is outside of the self. Butler writes that

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<sup>148</sup> Marraccini, "Old Cages, New Bodies, New Scrutiny"; Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus*, 26.

<sup>149</sup> Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus*, 26.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>151</sup> Butler, "Giving an Account of Oneself," 22.

‘the only way to know myself is precisely through a mediation that takes place outside of me, exterior to me, in a convention or a norm that I did not make, in which I cannot discern myself as an author or an agent of its making. In this sense, then, the subject of recognition is one for whom a vacillation between loss and ecstasy is inevitable. The possibility of the "I," of speaking and knowing the "I," resides in a perspective that dislocates the first-person perspective whose very condition it supplies’.<sup>152</sup>

Butler and Preciado, following Foucault, understand that the becoming of a subject is delineated by ‘the contemporary order of being’.<sup>153</sup> The possibility for one to address another or to enunciate their being is dependent upon the borders of the knowledge, concepts, and language in which the subject, and the other which addresses or recognises the subject holds. The creation of a new scene of enunciation is important for Preciado as it entails the creation of new future scenes of address. It allows for new forms of recognition—and in turn, misrecognition—to ensue. This is why Preciado asks the reader ‘How can you, how can we, organize an entire system of visibility, representation, right of self-determination and political recognition if we follow such categories? [...] Does the very meaning of your human identity depend on them?’<sup>154</sup> The role of this question is to probe the reader into interrogating the ways in which the categories which constitute human identity impersonally rule the way in which our subjectivity is constituted, and in turn how we habitually self-apply these categories upon ourselves and others in a seeming attempt of self-determination. Preciado is not saying that we must remove the use of categories tout-court in future, or remove all of our current categories—rather, it is a call to interrogate and evaluate the categories we utilise, especially when applied to ourselves in the manner of self-fashioning.

It is possible that one might read Preciado as attempting to undertake some sort of sexual-phenomenological reduction—his emphasis on beginning politics from the recognition that we are all ‘living bodies’ could attest to such a reading. Instead, I think it is important to recognise the importance of mediation which runs from Hegel through Preciado’s influences such as Foucault, Butler, and Derrida. This is one difference between Preciado in *Countersexual Manifesto*, and in *An Apartment on Uranus*. While *Countersexual Manifesto* focuses itself on particularisation—wherein the subject’s enunciation makes a claim on *their own body to the exclusion of all others*—*An Apartment*, on my reading, allows for us to understand sexuate subjectivity—as well as subjectivity in general—as something we are collectively ‘compelled to produce and reproduce’—due to the need to enunciate one’s existence—while still being open to the non-identical, or the as of yet

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>154</sup> Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus*, 28.

not-symbolised.<sup>155</sup> Foucault, in particular, allows for us to agree with Preciado's statement without attempting to arrive at a space removed from mediation. Foucault, in an essay titled 'Utopian Body', writes

'[m]y body, in fact, is always elsewhere. It is tied to all the elsewhere of the world. And to tell the truth, it is *elsewhere* than in the world, because it is around it that things are arranged. It is in relation to *it*—and in relation to it as if in relation to a sovereign—that there is a below, an above, a right, a left, a forward and a backward, a near and a far. The body is the zero point of the world. There, where paths and spaces come to meet, the body is nowhere. It is at the heart of the world, this small utopian kernel from which I dream, I speak, I proceed, I imagine, I perceive things in their place, and I negate them also by the indefinite power of the utopias I imagine. My body is like the City of the Sun. It has no real place, but it is from it that all possible places, real or utopian, emerge and radiate'.<sup>156</sup>

When Preciado asks if the very meaning of one's human identity depends upon the aforementioned categories, the answer—following Butler, Hegel, and Foucault—is both *yes* and *no*. Without the scene of address, without language, without concepts, without the other, the subject would experience its own death. We are dependent upon the recognition and enunciation of ourselves through language. *But* the categories *could be otherwise*. This is why Ulrichs becomes so important in this piece of Preciado's writing. Ulrichs, through the enunciation 'Ich bin Urning', reverses the scene of address by refusing the interpellation of himself as a sodomite or homosexual.

While, as I noted before, the process of recognition is not unilateral, and depends upon the acceptance of one's enunciation by the other, the possibility of this enunciation *implies* the possibility of its recognition—and in turn, the continuation of the scene of address, and future scenes of address on the grounds which the subject and the other have enunciated themselves to one another.

This is the function of Preciado's dream, albeit through displacement, if we are to follow Freud. In dreaming of his dwellings throughout the galaxy, Preciado reads different forms of subjectivity. His longing for the Uranus apartment—no matter how far away—indicates a striving for a political arrangement which will allow sexuate subjectivities to flourish. When Preciado writes 'I understand that my trans condition is a new form of Uranism', he does not mean it is his essence, a part of his soul, or inherent to him, he is rather saying that he is able to construct his subjectivity in such a way which refuses the 'binary political and

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<sup>155</sup> Brassier, "Reflection: The Compulsion of the Human," 321.; I think Preciado still does, at times, fall into the language of what Ray Brassier has called the 'contemporary "critical" humanities' as mentioned above.

<sup>156</sup> Foucault, "Utopian Body," 233.

epistemological' system of sex and gender.<sup>157</sup> As I noted before, Preciado understands that his—and everyone else's—subjectivity is delineated by the 'contemporary regime of being'. He highlights that his attempt to construct his subjectivity has been delimited in order to be enunciated as well. The term 'contemporary regime of Being' can also be understood as synonymous with the term 'regime of sex, gender, and sexual difference' in *Can the Monster Speak?*. They denote the regimes of power which, in contemporary society, regulate the becoming and multiplicity of being in accordance with patriarchal-colonial-cissexist norms. He writes that he 'wasn't asking medical institutions for testosterone' in order to 'cure "gender dysphoria"', he rather wanted to 'become unrecognizable' within our current categories. But Preciado was given no way out, he had 'agreed to identify myself as a transsexual, as a "mentally ill person," so that the medico-legal system would acknowledge me as a living human body'.<sup>158</sup>

While Preciado acknowledges the recuperation of his subjectivity by the state's biopolitical apparatuses, he also notes that while his 'existence as a trans man constitutes [...] the acme of the sexual *ancien régime*', it also constitutes the 'beginning of its collapse' and a signal of the possibilities to come—of the 'multiplicity of life and the desire to change the names of all things'.<sup>159</sup> Preciado knows that they no longer need to take the paths that Ulrichs, and many before Preciado, had taken. There is no need for Preciado to necessarily declare himself in the terms that the biopolitical psychiatric apparatuses have given him. Speaking in a counter-sexual discourse, Preciado addressing the reader, writes

'I no longer need, like Ulrichs, to assert that I am a masculine soul enclosed in a woman's body. I have no soul and no body. I have an apartment on Uranus, which certainly places me far from most Earthlings, but not so far that you can't come to see me. Even if only in dream...'<sup>160</sup>

The politics of sexuete subjectivity, for Preciado, means we should *in actuality* all be afforded an apartment on Uranus(... or Mars... or Venus... or Jupiter...), *not* just in our dreams.

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Now, it may be asked how Preciado's work links up with sexual difference—and in turn, psychoanalysis. In fact, at times in his work Preciado is, quite critical of 'the claims of colonial,

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<sup>157</sup> Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus*, 29.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 29–31.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

heteropatriarchal psychiatry and psychoanalysis’, and ‘the regime of sex, gender, and sexual difference’.<sup>161</sup> There are two writers who have dealt with psychoanalysis, and sexual difference in a way in which I believe allow for these concepts to align with Preciado’s refusal for the delimiting of subjectivity and its sexual aspects, which society and the medical and psychiatric institutions have engaged in over the centuries. These writers whose accounts I will detail below are Jamieson Webster, and Oli Stephano.

In a recent paper titled ‘Somato-militancy: A New Vision for Psychoanalysis in the Work of Paul B. Preciado’, Jamieson Webster relates Freud and Preciado through linking their notions of the symptom and Uranus, respectively, to ‘the imperative never to travel backwards, only forwards’.<sup>162</sup> Webster links Freud’s notion of the symptom with Preciado’s Uranus through the concept of ‘conversion’—taking its name from Conversion Disorder. Conversion disorder, for Webster, ‘names the enigmatic transformation of psychic energy into bodily manifestations’.<sup>163</sup> The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5<sup>th</sup> Edition characterises conversion disorder stating ‘the essential feature is neurological symptoms that are found, after appropriate neurological assessment, to be incompatible with neurological pathophysiology’.<sup>164</sup> Conversion disorder, then, is, as stated above, the manifestation of somatic symptoms, by the psyche, without the proper neurological basis for said somatic symptoms. Webster writes

‘I like the two words together, “conversion” and “disorder,” implying that conversion in itself is neither a simple disorder nor a simple hysteria. A sense lingers that there is a hidden order in conversion beyond or behind all its disarray. Conversion keeps its potential power in reserve, a power alive and unpacifiable, a power that twists and turns and wreaks havoc’.<sup>165</sup>

For Webster, we can cleave disorder from conversion, and thus able to speak of the body’s manifestations, its change, and to follow the body, follow its drive without reducing conversion to a distressed subject or analysand. In understanding conversion in such a way, we can begin to articulate the body in its immense complexity and openness.

The aforementioned imperative to ‘never travel backwards’ is, for Webster, ‘the agenda of the ‘symptom’ that Freud says is looking for its “own” end, its own telos’.<sup>166</sup> The symptom searching for ‘its “own” end, its own telos’ can be read as a form of conversion to which Webster writes

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<sup>161</sup> Preciado, *Can The Monster Speak?: A Report to an Academy of Psychoanalysts*, 33,45.

<sup>162</sup> Webster, “Somato-Militancy,” 137.

<sup>163</sup> Webster, *Conversion Disorder*, back cover.

<sup>164</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 310.

<sup>165</sup> Webster, *Conversion Disorder*, 15.

<sup>166</sup> Webster, “Somato-Militancy,” 137.

‘We need to push this conversion as far as it will go, forwards, into unknown gains and surpluses, to harness the power of this parasitic, irresolvable innervation. Psychoanalysis is not deconversion, but the most radical conversion, which is another name for mutation. Psychoanalysis is a somato-militant vision which can be seen in Freud sticking to the strange language of the body and refusing to translate it out into more acceptable terminology and psychological categories: oral and anal phases, the phallus, genital and pre-genital sexuality, polymorphous perversion, castration anxiety, the repudiation of femininity, the pleasure principle, the death drive. This militancy and somato-terminological invention reverberate in the space between Freud and Preciado’.<sup>167</sup>

This push forward towards the mutation of the body and of the subject, Webster finds exemplified in Preciado’s notion of an ‘apartment on Uranus’. As noted above, Preciado had had a dream wherein he had ‘rented an apartment on each planet, but [...] didn’t spend more than a month on any one of them, and that this situation was economically and physically unsustainable’.<sup>168</sup> In this dream, his friend Domonique says to him that he should get rid of the ‘Uranus apartment’ as it is ‘much too far away’.<sup>169</sup> This attempt to travel to and inhabit the furthest planet links to the imperative to push and travel to the furthest limits that one can. Webster writes

‘This crisis of trying to go as far as possible is not merely a pathological perturbation; it is real, or rather, it is what is most real in our subjectivities. This need is a crisis that is here to stay until the paradigm shift is complete. A prophetic parasite’.<sup>170</sup>

Webster notes that Preciado tells us that this urge acted like a virus, a symbol of the ‘wish for a deterritorialised life’ which made him look like a madman.<sup>171</sup> The want to push oneself to the limit depends upon an empowerment of the subject—and in the analytic context, of the analysand. Sovereignty and power must be ‘redistributed to individuals’, and they must be allowed to engage in self-experimentation, like Preciado undertook in *Testo-Junkie*.<sup>172</sup> This notion of self-experimentation has a long history, especially within the intersections of the Queer and Performance art scenes. An example that Preciado notes in

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus*, 22.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Webster, “Somato-Militancy,” 138.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 136.

*Countersexual Manifesto* is that of Ron Athey's performance 'Solar Anus'. In 'Solar Anus', Athey—an 'extreme performance artist'—utilises hooks, sewing, and prostheses to change his body and how it 'functions'—in the broad sense of the term. In Cyril Kuhn's documentation of Athey's work we see Athey utilise a set of high heels with dildos attached as prosthetics which he uses to fuck his solar anus—a merging of Pierre Molinier's *Éperon d'amour* and George Bataille's *The Solar Anus*. Further on in the documentation of Athey's performance—in the behind the scenes footage of the post-performance photoshoot—we see that Athey's scrotal skin appears to have been sewn together around his penis—producing a mound which obscures his genitals.<sup>173</sup> For Preciado, Athey's performance is a countersexual reversal practice—that is, a practice which reverses the heterocentric regime of sex, gender, sexuality, and sexual difference into a countersexual practice. Utilising his generalised notion of the dildo, we can understand Athey's 'Solar Anus'—as well as his complete body of work—as an example of what Preciado calls 'dildotectonics'. Preciado writes that dildotectonics

'localizes the deformations that the dildo inflicts upon the sex/gender system. Making dildotectonics a branch of first importance within countersexuality assumes consideration of the body as a surface and territory, a site of the dildo's displacement and emplacement. Owing to medical and psychological definitions that naturalize the body and sex (according to which the dildo would be a simple "fetish"), this undertaking can often be quite difficult. From the heterocentric point of view, the term dildotectonics could designate any description of the deformations and abnormalities detectable in one or several bodies fucking with, or using, dildos'.<sup>174</sup>

The work of Ron Athey and other 'extreme' performance artists who utilise the body through modification, along with 'extreme' forms of body modification, are simply one form of redistributing or, to put it aptly, of communising the body and what it can do. It is a deliberate experimentation with and pushing forward of those oft repeated words of Spinoza: 'We do not even know what a body is capable of...' and 'We do not even know of what affections we are capable, nor the extent of our power'.<sup>175</sup> Preciado's work—and what links him to thinkers such as Spinoza, Deleuze, Xenofeminists, and many more—is this reckoning with this question by experimenting what we can do with our bodies, and pushing this experimentation as far as possible.

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<sup>173</sup> Athey and Kuhn, *Solar Anus*.

<sup>174</sup> Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 41.

<sup>175</sup> Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 226.





Figure 2. Ron Athey, *Solar Anus*, 1999. Videographer: Cyril Kuhn



Figure 1 Ron Athey, *Solar Anus*, 1999. Videographer: Cyril Kuhn

As Preciado seeks to redistribute power and sovereignty back towards the masses, psychoanalysis, and the theories of sexual difference which arise from his work must move away from notions such as the ‘cure’ which seek to mould conversion and its products into repressive pre-established norms.<sup>176</sup> Uranus as ‘the place of the sexual object’ as well as conversion can be read as operating akin to the Freudian death-drive in its aim to ‘undo connections’ and civilisation’s discontents—Uranus simply operates as this undoing at an extreme.<sup>177</sup> Webster says that in order to stop the curbing of ‘potential transformation’ and mutation ‘the sexual object has to break in at the level of the body at any cost, beyond any ego or representational system or psychical grouping that is part and parcel of the discontents generated by civilization’.<sup>178</sup> The sexual object, like conversion, must break from and through the colonization of the psyche by civilisation’s normative strictures through processes such as sublimation and repression. For Webster, Uranus—and I would argue countersexuality—represent the transformation and mutation of desire which can be enacted in the harnessing of the sexual object and the process of conversion. These two notions highlight, on my reading, the revolutionary potential which Webster sees in psychoanalysis for the political transformation of desire as found in Preciado’s work. If there is a possibility for the transformation of desire in the work of psychoanalysis, then is that possibility present for its concept of sexual difference?

Oli Stephano’s work can function as an entry point for thinking sexual difference in a way which allows for the transformation of desire and the desire of transformation for bodies. His work, in particular, deals with an understanding of sexual difference which is able to account for transgender sexual difference without reducing the claims of trans people to a category mistake—as writers such as Elizabeth Grosz do.

Stephano grounds his account of transsexual difference in a reading of Judith Butler’s analysis of sex. Stephano reads Butler’s account as one which can act as an ameliorative to the issues that arise in Grosz’s account in regards to transsexual difference. He employs Butler’s ‘refutation of “sex” as an irreducible given’, Stephano writes, ‘not in order to dislodge Grosz’s claim as to the ontological force of sexual difference but to unsettle the ways in which its correlative claim to irreducibility circumscribes a very narrow range of possible sexual embodiment’.<sup>179</sup> As of this, Stephano’s account seeks to produce an account of sexual difference which understands sexual difference as *not only* an ontological force, but also as

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<sup>176</sup> Webster, “Somato-Militancy,” 133.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 139; Freud, “On Love and the Death Drive,” 9.; The term discontent can be seen in two senses. The discontents of civilisation can be read from the position of the subject or of the civilising drive. In the first sense, discontents arise from the repression and sublimation needed for civilisation to arise and function. Civilisation’s functioning requires certain sexual objects and desires to be undone. From this point of view, Uranus is the place in which the subject must be allowed to go, it is the freeing of desire from civilisation. The second position—that of civilisation—understands these ‘discontents’ as the objects and desires *themselves* which require sublimation and curbing. The discontents *of* civilisation, in turn, are revolutionary objects which point towards the forms of mutation which Webster and Preciado believe we should harness and produce.

<sup>178</sup> Webster, “Somato-Militancy,” 139.

<sup>179</sup> Stephano, “Irreducibility and (Trans) Sexual Difference,” 149.

‘fundamentally bound up in schemas of intelligibility’—as the notion of matter is in Butler’s *Bodies that Matter*.<sup>180</sup> Stephano’s account takes up, in particular, Butler’s reading of the notions of *hyle* (matter) and *schema* in Aristotle’s *De Anima*. In *De Anima*, Aristotle argues that there is an ‘indissolubility’ between *hyle* and *schema*.<sup>181</sup> The example specifically used by Aristotle—and analysed by Butler—is that of wax and ‘the shape given to it by the stamp’—which correlate to the terms *hyle* and *schema*, respectively.<sup>182</sup> This phrase which Aristotle writes, for Butler, means that we cannot split matter from that which gives it its form. As of this, Butler writes:

‘If matter never appears without its *schema*, that means that it only appears under a certain grammatical form and that the principle of its recognizability, its characteristic gesture or usual dress, is indissoluble from what constitutes its matter’.<sup>183</sup>

On Butler’s reading, the indissolubility that Aristotle posits between *hyle* and *schema* means there is ‘no clear phenomenal distinction between materiality and intelligibility’.<sup>184</sup> Following Foucault’s analysis of power, Butler argues that sex operates as a *schema* which enforces a regulative ideal of *what sex is*.<sup>185</sup> As matter—and in turn all the ‘characteristics’ or ‘forms’ of matter—require, on Butler’s reading, principles of recognisability—that is, the ways in which we can cognise, understand, and enact in a *performative* sense—sex does not operate, for Butler, as an attribute prior to subjectivation, but rather as a regulatory norm which arises through the materialisation of matter.<sup>186</sup>

It should be noted that there are immediately some issues which arise when reading Butler’s work in relation to sexuate difference. For Stephano, following Grosz, sexuate difference is an ontological force of differentiation. Butler attempts to evade such forms of thought as, on their reading, sexuate difference is ‘taken as a claim to a dogmatic, presupposed difference’.<sup>187</sup> On Stephano’s reading there is a dissonance between Grosz’s claim that ‘sexual difference has “potentially infinite” [...] forms of expression’, and is a ‘difference that is always in the process of differentiating itself’ with her claims that

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 8.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 31–36.

<sup>187</sup> Karlson-Carp and Hondroudakis, “The Scale(s) of Sexuate Difference: Towards a Multi-Scalar (Techno)Feminism.”

‘The one sex, whether male or female or some other term, can only experience, live, according to (and hopefully in excess of) the cultural significations of the sexually specific body’.<sup>188</sup>

Stephano writes that in Grosz’s work ‘[t]ranssexuality is invoked to illustrate the impossibility of becoming other than one’s assigned sex’.<sup>189</sup> The claims Grosz makes in regard to transgender individuals, for Stephano, ultimately makes sexuate difference stuck within a male/female dichotomy, whereas Stephano aims to understand the sexuate difference of transgender individuals as not reducible to this supposedly ‘irreducible’ framing. In other words, Stephano’s aim is to understand sexuate difference in such a way that the ‘sexuate specificity’ of one’s bodily comportment does not categorically *bar* one from ‘being’ or ‘becoming’ another sex. It is quite clear that there is at least some form of dissonance between these two claims by Grosz, and this is why, on Stephano’s reading, there is a link between the notion of ‘transsexuality’ in Grosz’s work, and ‘sex’/‘gender’ in Butler’s. Stephano produces a distinction between sexuate difference—understood as a process of differentiation—and ‘sex’ or ‘transsexuality’ in the writings of Butler and Grosz, respectively.

While Stephano presents a critique of the notion of irreducibility in relation to sexual difference, in more recent work Stephano unconsciously complicates this previous position. In ‘Sexual Difference as Qualitative Becoming’, Stephano presents an account of sexuate difference influenced by the work of Henri Bergson. In this paper, Stephano argues that Irigaray’s philosophy cannot be limited to an ontology of the two, and, rather, is one which points towards an understanding of sexual difference as ‘a qualitative multiplicity, generating a variety of sexuate differences that do not reduce to only two kinds’.<sup>190</sup>

I find the use of Bergson troubling and believe that it is incompatible with the account presented in ‘Irreducibility and (Trans) Sexual Difference’. On Stephano’s account, if one were to understand sexual difference as a quantitative multiplicity, one would fall into an ontology of the one. For Bergson, quantitative multiplicities do not produce differences in kind, but only in degree or magnitude. Differences in degree do not make a significant change to the object wherein its kind is changed. Stephano reads sexual difference as a qualitative multiplicity. Qualitative multiplicity is read by Stephano as ‘composed of internally-different terms that cannot be parsed and compared to one another according to a common measure’, and if one were to attempt to measure such multiplicity by a common measure it would mean the induction of ‘change in the multiplicity itself’.<sup>191</sup> Knowledge, intuition, and concept for Bergson tend to distort qualitative

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<sup>188</sup> Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 207.

<sup>189</sup> Stephano, “Irreducibility and (Trans) Sexual Difference,” 142.

<sup>190</sup> Stephano, “Sexual Difference as Qualitative Becoming: Irigaray Beyond Cissexism?,” 212.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

multiplicity—flattening it, distorting it through inducing transformations within it. Sexual difference is a form of qualitative multiplicity as sexuation is the internal differentiation between subjects. Bergson—and I assume Stephano—have the project of attempting to create a grammar which can do justice to sensation without assimilating it to the conceptual process of the understanding. In using the concept of qualitative multiplicity, as taken from Bergson, we find a theory of sexual difference which itself takes an issue with the act of thinking. Thinking and experience are understood as indubitably different to the point that ‘the intelligible is the disintegration of the sensible’.<sup>192</sup> Metaphysics for Bergson is a science which opposes itself to ‘the generalities of representation’ in order to get at what experience is. Experience for Bergson needs new forms of conceptualisation which thinking (or representation) does not have. This is aptly put by Ray Brassier who writes:

‘The credibility of Bergsonian metaphysics depends on establishing the claim that the absolute is concretely given in experience, rather than attained via intellectual abstraction, and that conceptual generality is not our means of access to being, understood as what truly is, but precisely what prevents us from attaining it. Metaphysics as science of the absolute, which is to say, knowledge of being qua being, is possible on the condition that we learn how to prise the absolute reality of experience free from the distorting emendations of the intellect’.<sup>193</sup>

Brassier categorises Bergsonian metaphysics as depending upon a clawing of experience from conceptuality which we find highlighted in *Time and Free Will* wherein Bergson states:

‘In a word, it seems, on the one hand, that two difference sensations cannot be said to be equal unless some identical residuum remains after the elimination of their qualitative difference; but, on the other hand, this qualitative difference being all that we perceive, it does not appear what could remain once it was eliminated’.<sup>194</sup>

If knowledge, intuition, and concepts destroy and flatten qualitative multiplicity, there is the issue that the distinction between qualitative and quantitative multiplicity *is itself*, an act of intellection—an intellectual act. Given that, for Bergson, there must be a distinction between differences in sensation—taken as experiential, and differences in their representation—taken as conceptual, Brassier notes that if one wishes to make such a distinction in the way Bergson does, it will depend on the dissociation of ‘our ability to

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<sup>192</sup> Brassier, “Lived Experience and the Myth of the Given: Bergson and Sellars,” 2.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>194</sup> Bergson 1960, 63-64, cited in *ibid.*, 5.

discriminate qualitative differences from our ability to perceive qualities as properties of things'.<sup>195</sup> In doing so, Bergson must oppose understanding the movement from the discrimination of 'sensory inputs' to 'the capacity to perceive something as something' (thoughts of the form  $x$  is  $\emptyset$ )—the movement from sentience to sapience—as an event in cognitive evolution which indubitably changes how experience operates.

If we are to follow Stephano and understand sexual difference as a qualitative multiplicity in the Bergsonian sense we run into the problem of the possibility to conceptualise sexual difference. The inability to be compared without change in the multiplicity itself that is bound with the Bergsonian understanding of qualitative multiplicity depends upon this problematic distinction between experience and thinking which is pervasive in Bergson's thought. In understanding sexual difference as a qualitative multiplicity, Stephano has made a step backwards from his original thesis in 'Irreducibility' wherein this difference is understood with a specific reference to conceptuality to an understanding sexual difference as something which cannot be conceptualised without doing violence to its being. In understanding sexual difference as qualitative multiplicity, the conceptual becomes rendered problematic to the being of sexual difference. Instead of being that which we come to know, understand, and change ourselves as sexuated subjects, conceptuality is rendered as that which disintegrates sexual differences being.

While Stephano does not present in 'Irreducibility' an account of how Butler's reading of Aristotle/Foucault, and their theory of performativity, can be read in conjunction with theories of sexuate difference, he does point towards the possibility of sexuate difference being understood as multiple, and not reduced to 'the two'. In turn, we can see that the way in which the terms 'sex' and 'transsexuality' are explicated in Stephano's paper operate in a similar way to Preciado's term 'regime of gender, sex, and sexual difference'. Because Stephano understands sexuate difference as *not* as regulative ideal, and multiple, I believe that there is room to read Preciado's work alongside the concept of sexuate difference, in order to update and liberate it from some of its unsavoury readings.

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 10.

## *Chapter II: Irigaray's Lips, Preciado's Anus*

What follows in this chapter is a reading of Irigaray's figure of the lips, and Paul Preciado's figure of the anus. To play with Irigaray's lips and Preciado's arse to some may seem counterintuitive. Irigaray is firm on her critique of 'the primacy of anal eroticism over genital sexuality'.<sup>196</sup> On Irigaray's reading, as the anal stage is prior to the genital stages of sexual development, an anal eroticism—or rather, a primacy of the anal—is understood as a neutering of, or an attempt to return to a state which is prior to sexual differentiation. The figure of the anus is, for Irigaray, a symptom of the ideology of sameness that patriarchal society enstates.

Rather, on my reading, in his afterword to Guy Hocquenghem's *Homosexual Desire*, titled 'Anal Terror', Preciado returns to the site of the anus—like Irigaray returns to the two lips—as a way to theorise the multiplicity of sexual subjectivity. Preciado's return to the anal site cannot be subject to the Irigarayan charge of neutralisation of sexual difference or the return to a pre-genital sexuality, as Preciado's conceptualisation of the anus operates as a criticism of binary cissexual difference, in the way Irigaray's conceptualisation of the lips operates as a criticism of the one of sexual difference. While the figurations of the body in Irigaray cannot be reduced to an essentialism, when reading alongside Preciado, we can see that when one reads *entre* (between) and *entrer* (enters) Irigaray's lips and Preciado's anus, while adopting different figures, both writers use said figures in an attempt to theorise the multiplicity and plurality of sexual being. Inspired by Preciado's reading of Hocquenghem in 'Anal Terror', I will highlight that to try and apply an Irigarayan critique of 'anal eroticism' to Preciado's theory involves the presupposition that the anus and anal eroticism retain the same sexual economy throughout development, and that the anus and forms of anal eroticism post-anal stage necessarily hold the same economy as the anal stage—that is, an economy which is necessarily sexually indifferent, and refuses sexual difference.

### *Irigaray's Lips*

Irigaray's attempts to refigure woman as subject—of which the image of the two lips is just one example—are some of the most controversial and criticised parts of her work. This is not only because of the poetic translation of Irigaray's 'When our Lips Speak Together' eludes a straightforward extraction of 'Irigaray's positions', but also because the transformation of how Irigaray uses the term 'sexual difference' in her own work develops and changes over her oeuvre. Margaret Whitford has written that

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<sup>196</sup> Roberts, *Irigaray and Politics*, 30.

‘[i]t’s possible that some of the range of views ascribed to her [Irigaray] are largely preoccupations of the ascribers; the opacity of her text elicits a considerable degree of projection and imaginary identification, or aggressive rejection’.<sup>197</sup>

In the English-speaking Feminist context—while both Margaret Whitford and Carolyn Burke note the difficulty of parsing Irigaray’s writing *in French* as well—the problem of monolingualism has led to certain problems in Irigaray’s reception in the (only) English speaking world. Of note are the limited topics of discussion which arose within English-speaking Feminist circles who were reading and engaging with the ‘French Feminists’.<sup>198</sup> Burke notes that

‘the history of her work’s reception tended to limit discussion to what was seen as its *matter*—the lips as rhetorical figure, mimicry and masquerade as theories, “speaking (as) woman” as concept. As a result of such readings discussions of her work became mired in the antiessentialism debates of the eighties, while her subtly performative strategies were reified rather than experienced as phases of a work on and in language—whose aim was to transform our modes of understanding’.<sup>199</sup>

Even beyond the limitation of early readings due to lack of translation, readers of Irigaray have found many different voices within her work. Perhaps this is one of the most liberating aspects of Irigaray’s writing—what if one is to utilise these voices with Irigaray, against Irigaray, with ourselves, and against ourselves. Indeed, this is what Margaret Whitford seems to be getting at in ‘Reading Irigaray in the Nineties’ when she writes,

‘I still think that “engaging with Irigaray” is one of the most productive ways to move beyond Irigaray, both to avoid being enclosed in the limitations of a single vision, and also to avoid the Scylla of idealisation or the Charybdis of denigration. [...] It [Jane Gallop’s introduction to *Reading Lacan*] gave me the idea that one could map the two processes that Gallop identifies (interpretation as mastery, interpretation as transference) onto Irigaray’s

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<sup>197</sup> Whitford, *Luce Irigaray*, 11.

<sup>198</sup> With more translations of Irigaray’s work, as well as time, the scope of discussions surrounding Irigaray’s work has expanded, but these previous debates still stick with us, and pose issues for new readers of Irigaray.

<sup>199</sup> Burke, “Translation Modified: Irigaray in English,” 250.



different “voices” [...] The main point here is that the reader’s openness “will participate in determining Irigaray’s impact, indeed, her identity”, as Elizabeth Hirsh puts it’.<sup>200</sup>

While I would argue that Irigaray’s work, and the notion of the lips to present an understanding of sexual difference which can be read as multiple—as ‘at least two’—Preciado updates the figure of the lips through reading Guy Hocquenghem’s *Homosexual Desire*.

In ‘This Sex Which is Not One’, Irigaray writes that

‘Female sexuality has always been conceptualised on the basis of masculine parameters [...] woman’s erogenous zones never amount to anything but a clitoris-sex that is not comparable to the noble phallic organ [...] a non-sex, or a masculine organ turned back upon itself, self-embracing’.<sup>201</sup>

For Irigaray, society, thus far, has refused the position of women’s subjectivity. As I note in the introduction, one of the ways in which the term sexual difference is utilised in Irigaray’s work is as ‘a diagnosis of the way in which a single subject, historically the masculine, has constructed and interpreted the world exclusively according to his interests and perspectives’.<sup>202</sup> For Irigaray, woman’s status as a non-sex within society requires a response which is able to elaborate and construct the conditions for woman to have the status of a subjectivity or sex which is not reducible to ‘man’: ‘the existence of a specifically feminine subject’.<sup>203</sup> The figure of the lips in Irigaray’s work functions as a way to elaborate ‘a specifically feminine subject’, sexuality and a sex which is not conceptualised through or reduced to masculine constructions.

The lips operate as a figure which instantiates sexual difference—that is, they are opposed to the anal, masculine imaginary (which will be discussed below) which constructs the world as one of sexual indifference. The lips, though, are a strange figure. They are spoken of, described, but also ‘have nothing to show for itself [...] as they lack] a form of its own’.<sup>204</sup> While in some sense, we can read this as meaning the masculine imaginary that has refused the lips a form of their own—as has been the case with women—but Irigaray takes this further. She notes that ‘if woman takes pleasure’ in the ‘incompleteness of form’ of

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<sup>200</sup> Whitford, “Reading Irigaray in the Nineties,” 24.; Perhaps it is too late to reveal this, I hope, rather, that the reader has already noticed, these reading processes are already present, and motivate this work.

<sup>201</sup> Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 23.

<sup>202</sup> Hill, “The Multiple Readings of Irigaray’s Concept of Sexual Difference,” 390.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 26.

the lips then the pleasure which is derived from the lips will necessarily be ‘denied by a civilisation that privileges phallomorphism’.<sup>205</sup> Irigaray describes the lips further, writing

‘So woman does not have a sex organ? She has at least two of them, but they are not identifiable as ones. Indeed, she has many more. Her sexuality, always at least double, goes even further: it is plural’.<sup>206</sup>

Sentences like this highlight that for Irigaray, the lips operate as a notion of plurality within woman, but also within sexual difference. The lips, with their plurality and unidentifiability run against the one of the masculine—of the phallus—and of rigid and static forms of identity which the masculine imaginary operates through. Irigaray highlights this, writing

‘The *one* of form, of the individual, of the (male) sexual organ, of the proper name, of the proper meaning ... supplants, while separating and dividing, that contact of *at least two* (lips) which keeps woman in touch with herself, but without any possibility of distinguishing what is touching from what is touched’.<sup>207</sup>

This refusal of the ‘one’ which woman and her sexual organs take up in *This Sex Which is Not One* highlights that the lips and the theory of sexual difference that Irigaray’s writing advances is not necessarily a binary form of sexual difference which excludes bodies which are ‘outside’ the colonial-cis-hetero-patriarchal regime of the present. In fact, it can be seen as the case that the binary oppositions created by societies structured by sexual indifference operate to nullify attempts to bring sexual difference into being. Irigaray writes that

‘[m]ore generally, it is through a logic of pairs of opposites that masculine subjectivity seemingly separated off from its natural and affective origin, but such couplings became substitutes for difference between subjects belonging to the two sexes and, firstly, between the mother and the male child’.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>208</sup> Irigaray and Green, *Luce Irigaray*, 224.

But this separation, we can argue, is only a semblance. Separation within sexually indifferent societies is only semblance because patriarchal Man's drive towards mastery refuses the other's differentiation, and also forgets his connection to that which he seeks to master—most notably, the one who birthed him. The sexually indifferent (and in turn colonial-cis-hetero-patriarchal) form of mastery can only operate through the subordination of that which he seeks to throw off from himself, thus creating the oft repeated couplings (male/female, culture/nature, activity/passivity, reason/emotion etc.) which map onto the masculine labelling of women and themselves. Speaking of this drive for a mastery which subordinates, Irigaray, speaking to Friedrich Nietzsche writes '[t]o share the life of the other without stealing the other's goods is a threshold you refuse to cross. A circle you will not break'.<sup>209</sup> Further she writes: 'Overcome, overpower, overman, isn't this flying over life? Life is what matters to me, not the beyond that snatches food from the man still struggling to live'.<sup>210</sup> Asking of Nietzsche to throw off this drive, we find that it is possible to 'pitch yourself to a higher creation not by devouring the other so it is reduced to your own substance, but rather by letting different bodies be and their fortune multiply'.<sup>211</sup> The lips—and moreover, sexual difference—are not one, the naming of sexual difference as 'at least two' points towards the possibility of this difference being *more than two*. We find an affirmation of this in Jules Gill-Peterson's account of a discussion she had with Irigaray at her seminars in 2013. Gill-Peterson writes:

'S and I asked her [Irigaray] one day during a break in the seminar about trans people. She walked with us slowly in the courtyard of the old university building, sipping her coffee, and shared that she had seen a number of trans women in her psychoanalysis practice over the years. And that she regretted how psychoanalysis was often used to disallow trans identity through analytic sleights of hand and the disavowal of the power wielded by the analyst. This failure in the analyst's duty to the other, she told us, was yet another masculinist negation of difference. She felt her trans analysands should be encouraged to become as they would come to know themselves to be. Transness was in no way incongruent with a project of sexual difference. Quite the contrary.

"I never meant that there can only be two sexes," she offered, turning to look at us with what I had to interpret as feeling. "I would be unhappy if those who have read my work

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<sup>209</sup> Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, 15.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

use it for such ends. We can say that there may be ‘at least two’ sexes. My point is that we have only a single sex at this time”<sup>212</sup>

While this is the case, like the ‘theories of the subject’ which are produced under the masculine imaginary, we can see that the notion of the lips—especially when the lips are understood as *the figure* of feminine sexuality and subjectivity—can be understood, not necessarily as they operate in Irigaray’s work, but rather as they operate more widely—particularly in *some* readings of Irigaray—as belonging to what we could call a cissexual imaginary.<sup>213</sup> We can understand the cissexual imaginary to be similar to what Irigaray scholars refer to as the masculine imaginary, but rather points towards the position that current society’s imaginary depends on a structural cissexism. The term ‘cissexism’ tends to be used to denote ‘discrimination against individuals who identify with and/or present as a different sex and gender than assigned at birth and privilege conveyed on individuals who identify with and/or present as the same sex and gender as assigned at birth’.<sup>214</sup> In turn, we can understand that, like the masculine imaginary refuses feminine subjectivity, the cissexual imaginary refuses subjectivity which is not cisgender. On my reading, I believe that the notion of the anus, which Preciado adopts from the work of Guy Hocquenghem, can be useful as a figure of sexuate difference which moves outside of the cissexual imaginary which society has constructed.

### *Preciado’s Anus*

‘Anal Terror’ is Preciado’s reflection upon Guy Hocquenghem’s text *Homosexual Desire*. In *Homosexual Desire*, Hocquenghem—like Preciado decades later—stages a critique of Capitalism and the French Psychoanalytic-theoretical establishment’s understanding of homosexuality. ‘Anal Terror’ begins with ‘the story of the anus’. Following Hocquenghem, Preciado rearticulates this ‘myth’ which explains how society split humans into two—the ‘hetero-human’ and the ‘homo-human’.<sup>215</sup>

Preciado writes ‘we aren’t born men or women; we aren’t even born boys or girls. When we’re born we are a patchwork of liquids, solids, and gels covered by a strange organ whose extension and weight is greater than any other: the skin’.<sup>216</sup> We begin, then, not with categories of identity or even of ‘the subject’, but rather of an ‘appearance of isolated unity’ with an ‘indefinite capacity to enjoy everything (earth, stones,

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<sup>212</sup> Gill-Peterson, “The Miseducation of a French Feminist.”

<sup>213</sup> I specify that the lips may not necessarily be cissexual in Irigaray’s work to highlight the divergent readings of Irigaray’s work. My interest is not about ‘getting Irigaray right’, but rather to take from her writing what I find useful in building parts of a wider political and philosophic project.

<sup>214</sup> Hibbs, “Cissexism,” 235.

<sup>215</sup> Preciado, “Anal Terror,” 123.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*

water, animals, other dermal tubes)'.<sup>217</sup> Prior to this splitting, subjects—though it is unaware if they have been 'subjectivated yet'—hold the possibility for an indefinite amount of pleasure. These polymorphous pleasures are deemed 'perverse' by normative psychoanalytic accounts which construct a teleological track of sexual development from the oral to the genital stages. This splitting, Preciado writes, was produced by 'the fear that the whole skin could be a genderless sexual organ' which

'brought them to redraw the body, designing outsides and insides, marking zones of privilege and abject zones. It was necessary to close up the anus to sublimate pansexual desire, transforming it into the social bond, just as it was necessary to enclose the commons to mark out private property. To close up the anus so that the sexual energy that could flow through it would become honorable and healthy male camaraderie, linguistic exchange, communication, media, advertising, and capital'.<sup>218</sup>

Hocquenghem utilises Freud's term 'persecutory paranoia' to address this thesis. He writes that 'society suffers from an interpretative delusion which leads it to discover all around it signs of a homosexual conspiracy that prevents it from functioning properly'.<sup>219</sup> This paranoid conspiracy is not limited to the homosexual though, it can be expanded to all those that are seen as undesirable.<sup>220</sup> Not only is the functioning of society at issue in this paranoia, but the functioning of what the paranoiac understands as 'normal'—that is heterosexual—desire. Persecutory paranoia around homosexuality, on Hocquenghem's reading operates not only through the paranoia of being a possible object of desire, but also paranoia around the homosexual aspect of one's own libido. On the Freudian account, these two aspects of the paranoiac are interrelated. Freud argues that need for the repression of the 'homosexual component' of the libido makes it, Hocquenghem writes, that '[s]ocial man's fear of his own homosexuality induces in him a paranoiac fear of seeing it appear around him'.<sup>221</sup> The key discovery Freud makes through his analysis of the Judge Schreber, on Hocquenghem's reading, society's paranoia around the homosexual's fettering of smooth function means that someone in such a high position as Judge Schreber 'can, but must not, be homosexual'.<sup>222</sup> Hocquenghem quotes sociologist André Morali-Daninos who summarises society's paranoia quite aptly:

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 55.

<sup>220</sup> In recent scholarship, Jules Gill-Peterson has noted that the conspiracy surrounding the 'queer child' historically took on a eugenic and racial role as well. See, Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child*.

<sup>221</sup> Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 56.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 57.

‘Were homosexuality to receive, even in theory, a show of approval, were it allowed to break away even partially from the framework of pathology, we would soon arrive at the abolition of the heterosexual couple and of the family, which are the foundations of the Western society in which we live’.<sup>223</sup>

This paranoia of the homosexual that proliferated throughout society through the discourse of psychiatry is, on Hocquenghem’s reading, counter to the reading of homosexuality expounded by Freud. Instead of, on Freud’s reading, paranoia arising through a misrecognition of desire due to the persecution of the homosexual subject (‘I don’t desire that man—he hates and persecutes me’), we find the discourse of psychiatry arguing paranoia as the cause of homosexual desire. Hocquenghem cites W. H. Gillespie who, speaking in Stockholm, argued that ‘the persecutory anxiety [is stressed] in the aetiology of male homosexuality: the patient externalises his internal persecutors and projects his anxiety onto them in the role of a sexual partner’.<sup>224</sup> This paranoia surrounding the homosexual in society also occurs in relation to transness—particularly when society speaks of the child. Preciado talks of his childhood and the societal remnants from Franco’s Fascist regime that continued to exist in Spanish society during the time Preciado was growing up. He writes of the strict societal gender standards within Spanish society at the time, writing:

‘What was expected of me was the execution of the silent conscientious and reproductive work appropriate to my assigned gender and sexuality. [...] What was it in my child’s body that predetermined my whole life?’<sup>225</sup>

Societies with such a dominant view of gender depend upon this paranoia surrounding homosexuality and transness as without it, there would be no unconscious ideological ability to protect its value in cis-heterosexuality. It also must apply this paranoia ideologically upon both adults and children for differing reasons, but they converge upon societies need to position children as property and extensions of parents’ ego-ideals. Our current society must socially apply the prohibition upon homosexuality and all forms of gender deviance—including transness, butchness etc.—upon adults as the adult operates as a societal model of the future; if children see people outside of the cisgender, heterosexual ‘norm’ flourishing or even simply just existing, it opens possibilities which a gender-fascist society must beat out of a child whether unconsciously or, if ideological interpolation doesn’t work, by the threat of violence. The conditioning of children out of homosexuality and gender deviance follows the same ethical lines as the paranoid ideological

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>225</sup> Preciado, *Can The Monster Speak?: A Report to an Academy of Psychoanalysts*, 22.

framing of queer adults but comes with added seeming social ‘rights’ parents. Children are treated in our society, for the most part, as chattels or the property of parents rather than growing human beings. The ways in which children are treated in regard to their gender and sexuality that Preciado and others have noted operates as a particularly authoritarian and patriarchal form of primary narcissism. This primary narcissism is a representation of the parents’ desire of what their child should be.<sup>226</sup> Even when parents project the belief that one can be gender non-conforming but one should not transition, they are reproducing the belief that there is something within their ‘child’s body that [predetermines their] whole life’ and projecting their desire for their child to conform to said belief.<sup>227</sup> In the context of the French Right-wing’s defense that every child should have a ‘mother and a father’—that is, a heterosexual family—Preciado writes

‘They [the Right] are marching to maintain the right to discriminate, punish and correct any form of dissidence or deviation, but also to remind the parents of gender non-conforming and non-heterosexual children that their duty is to be ashamed of them, to refuse them, to correct them. We defend the right of children not to be brought up solely as a labor and reproductive force. We defend the right of children not to be regarded as future sperm-producers or future uteruses. We defend the right of children to be political subjectivities irreducible to an identity of gender, sex or race’.<sup>228</sup>

Society at large desires that ‘the anus [is] understood only as an excretory orifice [and] not an organ’, it desires to create ‘kids-with-castrated anuses’ rather than bodies of pleasure. Bodies which deny what is taken as common-sense ‘anatomical evidence’ and which ‘make of mutation an aesthetics of life’.<sup>229</sup> In order to live a non-castrated life, the child—and also the adult—must kill their parents and, further, society’s representation of them, and in turn refuse to reproduce primary narcissism any further by being open to the mutation of ‘non-castrated-bodies’.<sup>230</sup>

Returning to Hocquenghem, attempts to theorise the existence and aetiology of homosexuality are—in Hocquenghem’s view—attempts to distract from society’s persecutory paranoia around homosexuality. He writes

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<sup>226</sup> Leclaire, *A Child Is Being Killed*, 9.

<sup>227</sup> Preciado, *Can The Monster Speak?: A Report to an Academy of Psychoanalysts*, 22–26.

<sup>228</sup> Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus*, 49.

<sup>229</sup> Preciado, “Anal Terror,” 125.

<sup>230</sup> Leclaire, *A Child Is Being Killed*, 9–10; Preciado, “Anal Terror,” 125–26.

‘[t]he homosexuality which it represses and sublimates keeps springing from every pore of the social body. It delves all the more violently into the private lives of individuals, although it knows that what goes on there exposes society itself [...] It builds more and more repressive barriers, but this proves to be so ineffectual that it feels inextricably bound to the desire which it persecutes’.<sup>231</sup>

The refusal of homosexuality to go away—but to continually spring from every pore—highlights not only the presence of *homosexual desire* ‘in every social institution’ but the presence of *desire tout court*.<sup>232</sup> As of this, Hocquenghem believes that the concept of the unconscious is crucial to the understanding of the paranoiac structure of desire of the heterosexual capitalist social order. For Hocquenghem, there is no better place to begin, but the Oedipus complex—‘[t]he first appearance of the libido is accompanied by the most amazing system of guilt-inducement ever created’.<sup>233</sup> On Hocquenghem’s reading the Oedipal plot is crucial in the domestication of desire as it ‘represents the internalisation of the family institution’.<sup>234</sup> As of this, in response to the undermining of the institution of the family not only by capitalism, but by the ‘threat’ of homosexuality as well, homosexuality had to be Oedipalised.<sup>235</sup>

Preciado notes that in questioning the aetiological impulse it is revealed that the mode of existence of categories such as homosexuality, transsexuality, and intersexuality undoes ‘the certainty of [their] existence’.<sup>236</sup> These categories are ultimately biopolitical, with Preciado writing ‘they are historical constructs, somatic fictions, political inventions that take the shape of bodies and the consistency of life’.<sup>237</sup> As of this, for Preciado, ‘etiological questions [...] are replaced with a political interrogation’.<sup>238</sup> Questions such as ‘what is homosexual desire’ miss the point, we must rather interrogate and investigate the domestication of bodies and desire which instate social conditions in order to ‘guarantee that heterosexuality [...] will continue to appear as the only natural sexuality’.<sup>239</sup> The response to the ‘question’ of homosexual desire, Preciado states ‘[t]he problem is not anal sex, but the civilisation of the anally-castrated-man’.<sup>240</sup>

Hocquenghem asks the reader how psychoanalysis went from the non-moral Freud’s revolutionary discoveries of things such as the libido, polymorphous perversity, and bisexuality to a homophobic and moralising theory of sexuality. Freud’s theorisation of desire understands that desire is a thing which ‘ignores

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<sup>231</sup> Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 61.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>236</sup> Preciado, “Anal Terror,” 152.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*



scientific divisions'.<sup>241</sup> In his *Three Essays on Sexuality*, Freud does not adopt the common view of heterosexuality's self-evidence, with homosexuality being the thing which needs elucidating. He writes that '[a]ll human beings are capable of making a homosexual object-choice', adding that all humans 'have in fact made one in their unconscious'.<sup>242</sup> The psychoanalytic viewpoint, for Freud, understands that which falls under the umbrella of 'sexual orientation' to be 'the precarious outcome of a desire which knows no name'.<sup>243</sup> In fact, the Freudian view that the object of psychoanalysis—which much of the history of psychoanalysis has missed in attempting to find a fixed ontological aetiology of sexuality—is how we find society refracted through the psyche. This has parallels with—on my reading—Preciado's account of the emergence of sexuality and gender, and, in particular, the possibilities of change embodied in the figure of the anus.<sup>244</sup> The Oedipalisation of homosexuality, then, is for Freud, as it is for Hocquenghem and Preciado, a product of society, rather than a static, given process.

The history of psychoanalysis, then, is the history of the misappropriation of Freud's work. In the work of W. H. Gillespie, Hocquenghem identifies the reduction of Freud's work to a deterministic biological model—effectively removing the psychic from psychoanalysis. Gillespie reads Freud's theory of bisexuality as being grounded in the biological and the anatomic. Gillespie reads Freud in such a way as to try and disprove Freud's theory through—at the time—recent work on chromosomal theory. If bisexuality is biological, for Gillespie it is pretty easily disproven as sexual difference is pretty quickly and distinctly delineated if we take sexual difference to be chromosomal. Hocquenghem writes that the 'chromosome theory appears to be less a biological "discovery" than an ideological regression: the homosexual becomes an accident of nature, an imbalance in the twenty-third pair of chromosomes. A similar natural "flaw" is used to account for the criminal personality (again, the inevitable association of the criminal with the homosexual)'.<sup>245</sup> This 'ability' to account for the homosexual and criminal personality in turn leads to the theorisation of homosexuality as not a simple difference in object-choice, but as the hatred of women—who are in turn, designated by society as the only 'social sexual object'. Hocquenghem finds in the work of Wilhelm Stekel the position that homosexual desire is essentially a form of violent patriarchal sadism. Stekel argues that homosexual men repress their bisexuality due to their hatred of women. He writes 'the homosexual only repressed his heterosexual component because he harbours an attitude of sadism (with hatred) towards womanhood'.<sup>246</sup> Homosexuality, for Stekel, is a form of neurosis constituted by lack and fear—the preconditions for the Oedipal plot.<sup>247</sup> This hatred, paired with fear that certain psychoanalysts

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<sup>241</sup> Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 75.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>244</sup> Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality*, 23.

<sup>245</sup> Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 76.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*

associate with homosexual desire link to the oedipalisation of homosexuality. Hocquenghem finds that for these psychoanalysts ‘[w]hat matters is fear’ which is then connected ‘with castration and with the phallus, in its role as the dispenser of meaning between the sexes’.<sup>248</sup> This, in turn, was important as there was a political necessity for homosexuality to be oedipalized as oedipalisation is the ‘only effective means of controlling the libido’.<sup>249</sup>

The Oedipalisation of homosexual desire in Freud’s writings was couched in his criticism of Hirschfield’s theory of the ‘third sex’. Hirschfield’s defence of homosexuality was of issue to Freud as Hirschfield’s theory operated in such a way that meant homosexuality was defended on the condition that it was characteristic of a ‘third sex’. As homosexuality was understood as a ‘drittes Geschlecht’ its support was formed due to its supposed biological basis. For both Freud and Hocquenghem, the support of homosexuality on the basis of its biological aetiology was of issue. Freud, contra Hirschfield, rooted his defense of homosexual desire in its universality, as an expression—or ‘translation’ in Hocquenghem’s terms—of the ‘polymorphous perversity’ exhibited by children prior to the sublimation of desire as they go through the stages of sexual development. While the theoretical universalisation of homosexual desire operated as a non-biologicistic alternative to the theories of sexologists and psychiatrists such as Hirschfield and Kraft-Ebbing it also lead to the universalisation of the Oedipus complex.<sup>250</sup> The oedipalisation of homosexual desire on Freud’s reading operates in a narcissistic fashion—inheriting some of the characteristics of the ‘basic narcissism of woman’.<sup>251</sup> Male homosexual desire is understood as narcissistic as the subject does not take the mother as the object of desire, but rather themselves due to their attraction to men. The desire of other men is understood as the libido taking itself as its object.<sup>252</sup> Freud further notes in *On Narcissism* that ‘[t]he want of satisfaction which arises from the non-fulfilment of this [ego] ideal liberates homosexual libido, and this is transformed into a sense of guilt (social anxiety)’—which we may read as related to the previously mentioned paranoia.<sup>253</sup> This connection which certain psychoanalysts ‘found’ between narcissism, homosexuality, social anxiety, and paranoia is, on Hocquenghem’s reading a construction to fit male homosexual desire into the Oedipal plot, writing:

‘What is described is at the same time constructed: we only find in the Oedipalised homosexual libido what we have put there in the first place. In this sense, the analysis of

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 78–79.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 81.

homosexuality is at the same time the construction of the whole family romance, where it will have to go on living whether it likes it or not'.<sup>254</sup>

These connections, then, for Hocquenghem are rooted not in homosexual desire, but in the persecutory paranoia and narcissism of 'the agent operating the distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality'.<sup>255</sup>

Following on from his analysis of the oedipalisation of homosexual desire, Hocquenghem explores the positioning of the anus in society. This exploration of the anus is of utmost importance for Preciado's reading of Hocquenghem in 'Anal Terror'. The anus strikes terror not simply due to society's persecutory paranoia, but because the anus undermines the primacy of the phallic signifier. On Hocquenghem's reading, heteronormative capitalism finds it necessary to sublimate any forms of anal eroticism or homosexual desire. This is because, in a 'phallographic society', the entire libidinal economy is focused upon the phallus and its ejaculation. Hocquenghem notes himself that '[o]ur society is so phallic that the sexual act without ejaculation is felt to be a failure'.<sup>256</sup> Because of this, only forms of desire which situate themselves around the phallus and its pleasure can truly be social, all other forms of desire are rendered private. This means that the 'first organ to be privatised, to be excluded from the social field, was the anus'.<sup>257</sup> Hocquenghem argues further that homosexual desire, like Irigaray does with the lips and Preciado with the anus, challenges this sublimation of desire to the order of the phallus. He writes: 'Homosexual desire challenges anal-sublimation because it restores the desiring use of the anus'.<sup>258</sup> While Hocquenghem in the next sentence says that 'Homosexuality primarily means anal homosexuality, sodomy', we can read his notion of the anal/anus as much more expansive, as Preciado does. I say this because in the conclusion to *Homosexual Desire*, he writes that

'Grouped homosexual desire transcends the confrontation between the individual and society by which the molar ensures its domination over the molecular. It is the slope towards transsexuality through the disappearance of objects and subjects, a slide towards the discovery that in matters of sex everything is simply communication'.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 150.

The anus then is *not simply* ‘anal homosexuality, sodomy’, but rather sodomy operates anally. That is, the anus is a figure which denotes the possibilities and mutations which can occur in a wide range of spheres. The anal revolution, for Preciado, means the instating of a social form which allows each and every person to ‘redefine the limits of their bodies, to speak of their own sexuality, to make decisions on pleasure and the ways of producing and regulating it.’ This process, on my reading, is ultimately the communisation of the possibilities one can make, the democratisation of power to a somatic level. This somatic communism is the outcome of the process which occur if we were to societally take on Preciado’s call to ‘communise your anus’.<sup>260</sup>

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In contradistinction to both Preciado and Hocquenghem, for Irigaray, the anal is associated with what can be called the ‘masculine imaginary’ or, rather, the ‘anal imaginary’. The notion of the anal imaginary operates in Irigaray’s work as the critique of theories of Freud and Lacan, and, as well, as a critique of the structure of modern society. The association of the masculine imaginary with the anal occurs through linking the Freudian stages of sexual development with the structure and operation of the imaginary of society. Freud presents his theory of sexual development in his *Three Essays on Sexuality*. Freud posits that there are two ‘pre-genital’ stages of sexual development—the oral, and the genital—which are understood as to be ‘prior’ to sexuation—sexual differentiation. Within the oral stage, pleasure ‘consists in the incorporation of the object’.<sup>261</sup>

The second of these ‘pre-genital’ zones is the anal stage wherein a ‘drive to mastery using the musculature of the body’ occurs. This drive to mastery is important as it links to what Freud saw as the arising of activity and passivity in sexual development. Laplanche and Pontalis note that for Freud, in the later editions of the *Three Essays*, that at this stage ‘activity coincide[s] with sadism and passivity with anal eroticism’—which have sources in the ‘corresponding instincts’ of ‘the musculature (for the instinct to master) and the anal mucous membrane’.<sup>262</sup> While the supposed emergence of activity and passivity, on Freud’s reading, leads to a differentiation *in that sense*—that is, the differentiation of active and passive roles—for Freud, it still does not note a differentiation into *male* and *female*. This differentiation only occurs when the child ‘develops’ beyond the non-genital stages of sexual development. In regard to Freud’s reading, it

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<sup>260</sup> Preciado, “Anal Terror,” 163–66.

<sup>261</sup> Freud, “Three Essays on Sexual Theory,” 173.

<sup>262</sup> Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, 90.; Laplanche and Pontalis note that the link between the anal stage and sadism relates to the ‘bipolar’ nature of sadism wherein a ‘self-contradictory aim occurs’. In sadism, the subject has the aim ‘to destroy the object but also, by mastering it, to preserve it’. This aim of sadism corresponds, on Laplanche and Pontalis’ reading, corresponds with the evacuative/retentive functions of the anal sphincter.

should be noted, as Jean-François Rabain has, that while Freud's later work tends to 'assimilate infantile sexuality more and more to adult sexuality' the continuation throughout of Freud's assertion that the 'advent' of puberty leads to the unification and hierarchisation of desires. Rabain notes that 'the child could not emerge from the anarchy of the component instincts until, at puberty, the primacy of the genital zone was assured'.<sup>263</sup>

As noted above, Irigaray's reading of contemporary and past society argues that the masculine imaginary—the imaginary of society thus far—is an 'anal imaginary'. The masculine imaginary of society is necessarily 'anal' as it 'interprets sexual difference as though there were only one sex, and that sex were male (women are defective men)'.<sup>264</sup> Within the masculine, anal imaginary we cannot understand woman-as-subject, or non-hierarchical forms of not only sexual difference, but subjectivity more generally. We are reminded of Irigaray's section from *Speculum of the Other Woman*, titled, 'Any Theory of the "Subject" Has Always Been Appropriated by the Masculine'. Here she writes

'When she submits to (such a) theory, woman fails to realize that she is renouncing the specificity of her own relationship to the imaginary. Subjecting herself to objectivization in discourse – by being "female." Re-objectivizing her own self whenever she claims to identify herself "as" a masculine subject. A "subject" that would re-search itself as lost (maternal-feminine) "object"?'<sup>265</sup>

Any theory of the subject written within the masculine imaginary is one which necessarily *denies* the possibility of 'woman' as a *different* subject—it integrates woman as a desiring subject into the desire of the masculine imaginary. The political goal of Irigaray's project is to create the conditions for 'woman'-as-subject to exist—that is, to lay the conditions for the existence of sexual difference. But still, the lips, however multiple, whatever Irigaray's intention, *still* disseminate a meaning. While we can still use the lips, know that they are multiple, that they are 'at least two', we can still lay claim to the anus as a figure, as a process, which disseminates a meaning much wider in all readings than the lips can. This is why Preciado will refuse to lay claim to the lips, while he may know the lips are multiple, it is why he says he now has issues with terms such as 'body' or 'violence'—rather deciding to use terms such as 'somatic apparatus' and 'techniques of violence', respectively, in order to speak the complexity of these concepts, these forms of subjectivation,

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<sup>263</sup> Rabain, "Genital Stage."

<sup>264</sup> Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*, cited in Roberts, *Irigaray and Politics*, 13.; It should be noted that even at the Phallic stage, the first stage of the 'genital stages', sexual difference does not exist properly as the threat is that of castration.

<sup>265</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 133.

in ways that capture our complex webs of power better than the previous terms.<sup>266</sup> Similarly to how Preciado notes we must not make ‘the anus into a new center’, we must be comfortable with the possibility that we may find the anus to be too limiting—we must be fine with losing our concepts for ones which speak for the non-identity and difference within existence.

While it is important that we refuse a philosophy which operates around sameness, as Irigaray does, on my reading, even if one were to accept the general psychoanalytic account of sexual development, there is a marked difference between the economy of pleasure of the pre-genital and genital stages of sexual development. As there is a marked difference between pre-genital and genital stages of sexual development, the anus as used in Hocquenghem and Preciado’s writing cannot be understood as belonging to a philosophy of the one—the anus is like the category of polymorphous perversity in that a multitude of differentiated beings and desires spring from it. Speaking on Rene Scherer and Guy Hocquenghem’s *Coming and Going Together: A Systematic Childhood Album*, Michel Foucault states:

Some say that the child’s life is sexual. From the milk-bottle to puberty, that is all it is. Behind the desire to learn to read or the taste for comic strips, from first to last, everything is sexuality. Well, are you sure that this type of discourse is effectively liberating? Are you sure that it will not lock children into a sort of sexual insularity? And what if, after all, they didn’t give a hoot? If the liberty of not being an adult consisted just in not being a slave of the law, the principle, the *locus communis* of sexuality, would that be so boring after all? If it were possible to have polymorphic relationships with things, people and the body, would that not be childhood? This polymorphism is called perversity by the adults, to reassure themselves, thus coloring it with the monotonous monochrome of their own sex. . . . Read the book by Schérer and Hocquenghem. It shows very well that the child has an assortment of pleasure for which the “sex” grid is a veritable prison.<sup>267</sup>

Firstly, Foucault lets us read the economy of pleasures of the child and the adult in a way which shows that they do not share a ‘common place’—a ‘locus communis’. This is not Foucault arguing the position Freud argued against when he claimed the child is a sexual creature. To argue this is to argue that the child lacks an economy of pleasure. Rather, Foucault is deeming sexuality—or ‘sex’—to being a slave to ‘the law, the principle, the *locus communis* of sexuality’.<sup>268</sup> On this reading, the child’s economy of pleasure evades the laws

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<sup>266</sup> Paul B. Preciado with Jack Halberstam.

<sup>267</sup> Michel Foucault, “Power and Sex,” in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Routledge, 1988). Cited in Windsor, “Translator’s Introduction.”

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

and principles of adult sexuality—most notably seen in the ‘anarchy’ of polymorphous perversity, though not limited to it. For Hocquenghem and Preciado, we must break through the law of sexuality which has been imposed upon us. On this reading, the ‘grid’ of sex may not necessarily map onto a reading of sexuate difference as multiple in the way that I find in Preciado’s figure of the anus, and because of this, the possibility of the figure of the anus and forms of anal eroticism have the ability to function *with* the notion of sexuate difference rather than in opposition to them.

In a section of *Anal Terror*, titled ‘Anal Utopia’, Preciado fleshes out how we are to understand the ‘resexualisation of the anus [...] as a transversal countersexual center’ which he names as one of the ‘countersexual practices’ which will bring about the countersexual society he writes of in *Counter-sexual Manifesto*.<sup>269</sup> In this section Preciado presents five lessons that arise from the ‘anal revolution’, that is Hocquenghem’s work—the process of creating a society which democratises the power of bodies and allows for each subject to push the limits of the body. Firstly, Preciado writes

‘The anus has neither sex nor gender; like the hand, it escapes the rhetoric of sexual difference. Situated in the rear and inferior part of the body, the anus also erases the personalising and privatising differences of the face. The anus challenges the logic of identification of the masculine and feminine. There is no division of the world into two. The anus is a post-identitarian organ: “Any social use of the anus, apart from its sublimated use, creates the risk of the loss of identity”. Rejecting sexual difference and the anthropomorphic logic of the face and the genital, the anus (and its other extreme, the mouth) establishes the basis for an inalienable sexual equality, every body (human or animal) is first and above all an anus. Neither penis nor vagina, but oral-anal tube. In the horizon of the post-human sexual democracy is the anus, as orgasmic cavity and receptive non reproductive muscle, shared by all’.<sup>270</sup>

Firstly, it should be reminded that the way in which Preciado uses the term sexual difference—as I have noted in the previous chapter—operates as the denotation of a specific understanding of sexual difference which reduces the subject to ‘the two’ or to the dimorphic sexual difference. A sexual difference which premises itself on the ‘at least two’—or rather, the ‘more than two’—and refuses the restriction of sexuate difference to the genital—but rather bases itself on all the forms of sexual differentiation which do and may arise from the subject—can arise from the figure of the anus in Hocquenghem and how it is taken up by Preciado. The sexuate difference of the anus transcends the logic of the two instituted by the masculine and

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<sup>269</sup> Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 33.

<sup>270</sup> Preciado, “Anal Terror,” 163–64.

the feminine, without necessarily dismissing them outright. Rather, the figure of the anus operates as the basis upon which sexual difference flourishes and multiplies through the loss of identity-as-law. It is an example of what Foucault was calling for when he stated that:

‘If identity becomes the problem of sexual existence, and if people think they have to ‘uncover’ their ‘own identity’ and that their own identity has to become the law, the principle, the code of their existence; if the perennial question they ask is ‘Does this thing conform to my identity?’ then, I think, they will turn back to a kind of ethics very close to the old heterosexual virility. If we are asked to relate to the question of identity, it has to be an identity to our unique selves. But the relationships we have to have with ourselves are not ones of identity, rather they must be relationships of differentiation, of creation, of innovation. To be the same is really boring’.<sup>271</sup>

The possibility of the proliferation of difference arises through one not only accepting *the risk* that they may lose their identity, but by actively inducing its loss. The anus operates as the figure in which Preciado *disidentifies* sexual difference. Jose Esteban Munoz put it best when he wrote:

‘Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture’.<sup>272</sup>

By reclaiming the figure of the anus through reading Hocquenghem, Preciado is able to ‘scramble and reconstruct[...] the encoded message’ of sexual difference in a way which *saves sexual difference* from its dimorphic readings.

Preciado continues with the theme of recoding and losing one’s static identity in his second lesson:

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<sup>271</sup> Foucault, *Foucault Live*, 385.

<sup>272</sup> Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 31.



‘The anus is a bioport. This is not simply about a symbol or a metaphor; it is an insertion port through which a body is open and exposed to another or others. It is that portal dimension that demands, for the masculine heterosexual body, anal castration: everything that is socially feminine could enter and pollute the masculine body through the anus, leaving uncovered his status as equal to any other body. The presence of the anus (even a castrated one) in which a body with a biopenetrator dissolves the opposition between hetero and homosexual, between active and passive, penetrator and penetrated. It displaces sexuality from the penetrating penis to the receptive anus, thus erasing the segregative lines of gender, sex, and sexuality’.<sup>273</sup>

Here we are reminded of Derrida’s Hyppolitean proclamation in ‘Violence and Metaphysics’ that ‘[p]ure difference is not absolutely different (from nondifference). Hegel’s critique of the concept of pure difference is for us here, doubtless, the most uncircumventable theme. Hegel thought absolute difference, and showed that it can be pure only by being impure’.<sup>274</sup> Here, we find the impurity of difference through the vulnerability of the anus. The masculine and the feminine can never be differentiated *absolutely*, they infect each other through their holes—however many there are or in what form. Sexuate difference cannot be explicated *or* differentiated without its own recoding and loss of identity—the anus is that figure of vulnerability and dependence upon the other which constitutes the “I” which I noted in the previous chapter in regard to the *ekstatic* nature of subjectivity in the work of Butler, Preciado, and Foucault.

In the third lesson, Preciado highlights how the anus operates as the deheterosexualising of the body that is instantiated by strictly genital forms of sexual difference:

‘The anus functions as the zero point from which an operation of deterritorialization of the heterosexual body could begin, or in other words, of the degenitalisation of sexuality reduced to penis-vagina penetration’.<sup>275</sup>

For Preciado, the sexuate multiplicity which we *should* work to produce and to let flourish cannot operate on the model of the heterosexual couple which arises in *I Love to You* through the proclamation that the ‘ultimate expression of sexual difference in “the relations between man and woman, first and foremost in the couple”’.<sup>276</sup> This is because the anus is not, as Preciado writes, the creation of ‘a new center, but rather

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<sup>273</sup> Preciado, “Anal Terror,” 164.

<sup>274</sup> Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence*, xi.

<sup>275</sup> Preciado, “Anal Terror,” 164.

<sup>276</sup> Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, cited in Guenther, “Other Fecundities,” 29.

setting into motion a process of dehierarchisation and decentralisation that would make any other organ, orifice, or pore, a possible anal bioport'.<sup>277</sup> Because of this, the anus as a figure is one which *denotes* a process of differentiation—and thus of sexual differentiation. It is a figure which encompasses sexual differentiation without being restricted to it, pointing towards the 'non-hierarchical connection of the organs, the public redistribution of pleasure, and the communisation of the anus [which] all announce a "sexual communism" to come'.<sup>278</sup>

The fourth lesson finds Preciado returning to the abjection and paranoia of the anus in society. Key to this, for Preciado, is the anus' 'non-productive' character, writing:

'The anus does not produce, or rather it only produces trash, detritus. No production of profits or surplus value may be expected of this organ [...] Only shit. It is the exalted place of ecological non-production'.<sup>279</sup>

Here, we find Preciado linking the abjection—and thus sublimation and castration—of the anus due to its position as non-phallic with a notion of non-production in the sense of the inability to produce value for the capitalist economy. On Preciado's reading, this non-production could also be read as a way in which the products of capital 'may escape' capital 'and return to the earth'.<sup>280</sup> While he does note that it could be possible 'for the strategies of capital production to eventually reterritorialize anal pleasure', Preciado seems to refuse such a state. In turn, by aligning the anus and anal pleasure with non-production, Preciado unconsciously refuses Freud's schema of Faeces=Gift=Money which Freud posits by stating

'It is probable that the first meaning which a child's interest in faeces develops is that of 'gift' rather than 'gold' or 'money.' . . . Since his faeces are his first gift, the child easily transfers his interest from that substance to the new one which he comes across as the most valuable gift in life'.<sup>281</sup>

On Preciado's reading, while this does not mean there is no value—in the general sense—to the anus' production, it seems that he does not hold that there is a transferability that is present in the schema of Faeces=Gift=Money.

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<sup>277</sup> Preciado, "Anal Terror," 164.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>281</sup> Freud, "On Transformations of Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Erotism," 130–31.

The fifth and final lesson of the anal revolution has Preciado widen the scope of the issue of non-productive bodies and organs under capitalism. He argues that both biological and technoprosthentic organs which are ‘non-reappropriable’ within the ‘heterosexual libidinal economy are anal’.<sup>282</sup> From ‘dildos, nasal and oral orifices’, to ‘pre-existing cuts’, to the ‘vagina that does not procreate’; that which cannot be appropriated by the heterosexual libidinal economy are rendered anal in two senses. Firstly, in the sense that these anal organs are sublimated to the private. Hocquenghem notes that because we live in a ‘phallocratic society’ wherein ‘social relationships as a whole are constructed according to a hierarchy which reveals the transcendence of the great signifier’, the figure of the phallus is necessarily ‘social’ in a phallocratic society.<sup>283</sup> ‘The body gathers round the phallus like society round the chief. Both those in whom it is absent and those who obey it belong to the kingdom of the phallus’.<sup>284</sup> Within capitalist society, for Hocquenghem, all forms of anal eroticism or anal desire must be sublimated to the law of the phallus and its pleasure. He writes that ‘[o]ur society is so phallic that the sexual act without ejaculation is felt to be a failure’.<sup>285</sup> Any and all ‘libidinal energy’ that makes the anus its object must, under hetero-patriarchal capitalism be ‘diverted so that the social field may be organised’ in the fashion of the genital stages hierarchised and compartmentalised desires.<sup>286</sup> For Hocquenghem, the anus ‘is the source of energy giving rise to the social sexual system and the oppression which this system imposes upon desire’.<sup>287</sup> If the ‘maternal condition of possibility’ is too trapped in notions of dimorphism and genitality, the anus offers a figure or process which speaks of the way in which differentiation—both sexuate and non-sexuate—produce our subjectivity, dependence, and vulnerability, and thus must be oppressed by heteropatriarchal capitalism as they undo the phallus and identity’s claim as law—dehierarchising, degenitalizing, and differentiating when they can.

Secondly, non-reappropriable organs are anal in that they represent already the possibility of the degenitalisation, dehierarchisation, and decentralisation of all other organs—a complete analisation. The project of ‘sexual communism’—or what Preciado has recently called ‘somato-political revolution’—is highlighted in a recently translated excerpt from *Dysphoria Mundi*. In this excerpt, Preciado recalls the decentering of penis-vagina penetration through the ‘degenitalising’ of sexuality and sexuate difference in *Anal Terror*. He writes

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<sup>282</sup> Preciado, “Anal Terror,” 165.

<sup>283</sup> Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 96.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

‘Displacing the male-female/heterosexual-homosexual axis implies inventing another kind of desire, another way of fucking. The sexual, gender, anti-racist revolution we were immersed in didn’t simply rely on a critique of petro-sexual racial discourse. We were inventing a new corporality, along with a new grammar to name another way of loving. The activist and writer Bini Adamczak, for instance, describing a configuration opposed to penetration, speaks of “circlusion”: to suck, surround an organ (penis, finger, tongue, nipple, dildo, foot, etc.) with an anal, vaginal, or oral membrane. It is no longer a question of knowing who penetrates and who ejaculates, but rather of circluding and being circluded. I circlude, you circlude, he circludes, she circludes, it circludes, they circlude. We circlude’.<sup>288</sup>

This account of circlusion is, while short, important as it presents a form of practice which in the present seeks to undo the genitalised form of sexual practices—in the expansive sense—which pervade cis-hetero-patriarchal understandings of gender and sexuality. It is these practices which are important to Preciado’s political project—the production of the conditions for the flourishing of differentiated subjectivities. As he writes in ‘Sex is out of Joint’, these practices show us some hope, hope for a society wherein

‘the *potentia guadendi* flows without productive or reproductive objective. We were no longer active, passive, genital, oral, penetrative, or penetrated. Nor the contrary. Nor the complementary’.<sup>289</sup>

This quote summarises how practices should be understood in a society which has undergone an anal revolution. The future of our society and its practices must operate in such a way which evades strict categorisation into static terms. The future of gender and sexuality must be one which harnesses the infinite possible mutations which are embodied by the figure of the anus—a society wherein the somatic self-determination of each and every subject is understood as a basic need and desire.

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<sup>288</sup> Preciado, “Sex Is out of Joint,” 357.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*

### Chapter III: ‘Post-face’: or How to End Primordial Beginnings

‘If we knew what was emerging, then it wouldn’t be a production of the future’.<sup>290</sup>

-Anna Greenspan

In this chapter, I would like to sketch out an account of the human ontological malleability which may provide a base for what I read as Preciado’s account of the multitude of sexuate difference. In particular, I will explore the implications it has upon the notion of sexual difference’s ontological primacy—no matter how this ‘primacy’ is understood. In turn, I will examine how in Ray Brassier’s reading of Hegel, through the notion of *negative universality*—or rather, *undetermined determinability*—changes how we are to understand our relation to sexual difference, and whether attempts to *cling* to sexual difference are warranted, or whether they restrict the possibilities of *subjectivity-to-come*. In particular, I will argue that, from Hegel’s account of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the emergence of self-consciousness instantiates within the human a *sui generis* mutability. While sexual difference *may* be taken as necessary for reproduction and differentiation in species which *lack* self-consciousness, we should not *assume* that sexual difference is necessary for *any* and/or *all* special reproduction and differentiation in self-conscious beings, even if that is how our species operates in the present. Present necessity does not specify future necessity on my reading, and as of this sexuate difference cannot be understood as ontologically primary in a static sense—even if sexuate difference is ontologically primary in the present, it may not be in the future. As the mutability of the human arises *through* the externalisation—or alienation—that self-consciousness instantiates, it is necessary for any politics and ontology to take seriously the Xenofeminist call to seize alienation as a political-ontological tool, even if the Xenofeminist account of alienation is lacking. The final section, on Hegel and Brassier’s reading of him, seeks to ameliorate not only the defense of alienation, but also provide the beginning of an account of the possibility of self-directed ontological change within the sphere of the human. This account, on my reading, acts as well as an attempt to provide the grounding for a more robust framework of human ontological change that can work with the philosophical projects of Paul Preciado, and Xenofeminism. As this chapter deals with a more abstract explication of the possibility of human change I assume the arguments I have made in the past chapters regarding Preciado’s account of sexuate difference. Further, as this seeks to sketch out an account which can form a base for Preciado’s account, references to Preciado’s writing will be scarcer than in the preceding chapters.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section deals with the philosophy of Xenofeminism, which takes influence from Preciado’s work, and which Preciado’s work has been related

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<sup>290</sup> Ireland, “☐, Zigzags, Evil Spirits, Darkside Empathy, Skinning,” 1914.

to. In particular, this section highlights how Xenofeminism’s neorationalist philosophy asserts itself as an account of the possibilities of human ontological change, and indeed politicises the need for human ontological change to occur—through letting ‘a thousand sexes bloom’. In this first section, I also respond to two critiques of Xenofeminism by Jules Gleeson and Bogna Konior. The second section turns to a recent account of transsexuality and the philosophy of sexuate difference by Mitchell Murtagh. On my reading, Murtagh ultimately falls into the same trap as Elizabeth Grosz in restricting the somatic possibilities of transgender subjectivity, while still claiming that sexuate difference has infinite possibilities. By ontologically restricting the somatic possibilities to that of the present, both Murtagh and Grosz present a fatalistic view of the body wherein the possible changes one can make are ontologically restricted rather than restricted by the current capacities of technics. For Murtagh and Grosz, the sexuation you have is the sexuation you get—on their reading, one cannot fundamentally change their sex, they can only ‘modulate’ it. The final section returns to the priorities of the first, rounding out the ontological positions of Xenofeminism with Ray Brassier’s recent Hegelian reading of the human and what it constitutes. For Brassier, Hegel’s account of self-consciousness shows that the human is imbued with an ‘undetermined determinability’. This ‘undetermined determinability’ arises from the *ekstatic* nature of the human, which, in turn, produces a *sui generis* mutability allowing the overcoming of bodily finitude producing a promethean philosophy which allows for the proliferation of bodily mutation that Preciado’s work seeks to bring into existence.

### *A Politics of Alienation*

The notion of alienation being fundamental to a feminist politics is most often associated with the Laboria Cuboniks’ collective’s *Xenofeminist Manifesto*. Speaking of alienation, Laboria Cuboniks writes the following:

‘XF seizes alienation as an impetus to generate new worlds. We are all alienated – but have we ever been otherwise? It is through, and not despite, our alienated condition that we can free ourselves from the muck of immediacy. Freedom is not a given—and it’s certainly not given by anything ‘natural’. The construction of freedom involves not less but more alienation; alienation is the labour of freedom’s construction. Nothing should be accepted as fixed, permanent, or ‘given’—neither material conditions nor social forms. XF mutates, navigates and probes every horizon. Anyone who’s been deemed ‘unnatural’ in the face of reigning biological norms, anyone who’s experienced injustices wrought in the name of natural order, will realize that the glorification of ‘nature’ has nothing to offer us—the queer and trans among us, the differently-abled, as well as those who have suffered discrimination due to pregnancy or duties connected to child-rearing. XF is vehemently anti-naturalist. Essentialist naturalism reeks of theology—the sooner it is exorcised, the better’.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Cuboniks, “Xenofeminism,” 1.

The alignment of feminist politics with alienation, for Laboria Cuboniks, is one which aligns the concept of alienation with the ability to reconstruct not only society, but our ‘nature’ in accordance with how we believe the world should operate. Alienation is thus the basis, for Laboria Cuboniks, of their slogan which ends their manifesto: ‘If nature is unjust, change nature’.<sup>292</sup> This is reinforced further when Amy Ireland, a member of the Laboria Cuboniks collective, in their text ‘Alien Rhythms’ writes ‘Alienness [...] is the genesis of novelty and change. Wherever one encounters the alien, a mutation or a transformation isn’t far behind’.<sup>293</sup>

While alienation is understood, by Laboria Cuboniks and their readers, as crucial to the Xenofeminist project, this link has not been fleshed out—neither by individual members or as a collective. References to alienation may arise, but the Xenofeminist project lacks an explanation of alienation’s ontological origins or the stakes at play in one’s defense of the necessity of alienation.<sup>294</sup> Out of the collective’s members—Diann Bauer—has written the most, explicitly, on alienation and the Xenofeminist project—though Bauer’s account, on my reading, stops short, mostly stating that alienation is not an individual feeling, and the importance of sapience and conceptual abstraction to the concept of alienation. In this section, I will firstly deal with the influence of Preciado’s work upon Xenofeminism, and secondly highlight some issues with the notion of alienation present in some accounts of Xenofeminism.

On my reading, the main secondary account of Preciado’s work with that of Xenofeminism is the chapter ‘Accelerationism and Xenofeminism’ in Sofia Ropek-Hewson’s dissertation *Pharmacopornographic Subjectivity in the Work of Paul B. Preciado*. In this chapter, Ropek-Hewson reads Xenofeminism and Preciado’s work in the context of Benjamin Noys’ account of ‘affirmationism’ (which Noys also calls accelerationism) and ‘negativity’—along with their corollaries ‘mourning’ and ‘misery’—in contemporary Continental philosophy. On my reading, we can characterise the terms ‘affirmationism’ and ‘negativity’ as Noys deploys them in the following manner. Affirmationism denotes a position most explicitly seen in the work of Gilles Deleuze wherein the notion of activity and the affirmation of life are affirmed in opposition the notion of the ‘negative’. Affirmationism, for Noys, is the result of ‘a continuing fear of the supposed totalising effects of dialectical thought’.<sup>295</sup> On the other hand, ‘negativity’ belongs to another line of philosophy engaged in the thinking of the negative—such as Marx—which, for Noys, is ‘truly able to think the conditions of possibility of the change necessary to achieve that politics, and the potential forms of agency to carry out

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>293</sup> Ireland, “Alien Rhythms,” 1.

<sup>294</sup> See Goh, “Appropriating the Alien: A Critique of Xenofeminism.” Annie Goh makes note that the Xenofeminist manifesto ‘does not detail in any significant depth *how* the concept of alienation is meant’. I should also note that, in contrast to Goh, I do not believe the concept of alienation pointed towards in the Manifesto is Marxist in the sense it is usually used—I will outline this later in the paper.

<sup>295</sup> Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative*, ix.

that change'.<sup>296</sup> Ropek-Hewson believes that Noys' too easily dismisses Preciado's work as an 'intoxicated accelerationism' as the presentation of the 'drug experience' of taking testosterone is understood as 'not a device of transcendence [...] but rather [an] insertion with and within the "chains" of signifiers and "materialities" or the present'.<sup>297</sup> Noys, on Ropek-Hewson's reading, believes Preciado ultimately 'embraces immersion in "global capital"' in contrast to 'the "friction of integration"' of resistant practices.<sup>298</sup> For Ropek-Hewson, Noys' reading falls a bit short. Ropek-Hewson reads Preciado as not pushing for the intensification of the mechanisms which allow pharmacopornographic capitalism to operate, but rather highlights the need to 'identify and interrupt' these operations and mechanisms, immanently attempting 'to "transform [the] cultural logic[s] from within"'.<sup>299</sup> Ropek-Hewson, contra Noys, argues that while there are affinities and shared ground between Preciado's work and Xenofeminism there is a crucial difference between them: Xenofeminism, as it is influenced by accelerationism and neorationalism, is theoretically explicated and 'expressed through abstraction', whereas Preciado, in response to 'queer theory's' distancing itself from the body aims to 'establish a technologically-literate trans-feminism based on embodiment'.<sup>300</sup> On my reading, we can understand Preciado's and the Xenofeminists' writing as two parts of a theoretical whole—the Xenofeminists engage in the philosophical abstraction which at times is needed in order to elucidate complex accounts of our world, and Preciado brings these problems to the body through a feminism which is rooted in embodiment.

The work of Preciado has been explicitly noted as having an influence on the Xenofeminist Manifesto and the work of Laboria Cuboniks member, Helen Hester. On my reading, the influence of Preciado on Hester's work is most keenly seen through the adoption of Preciado's notion of the 'auto-guinea pig principle' and Preciado's insistence on 'pushing [Butler's] performative hypothesis further into the body, as far as its organs and fluids; drawing it into the cells, chromosomes, and genes'.<sup>301</sup> The auto-guinea pig principle is Preciado's attempt to 'transform [the] conventional frameworks of the "cultural intelligibility" of human bodies' through self-experimentation upon one's body.<sup>302</sup> Taking inspiration from Sigmund Freud and Walter Benjamin's experimentation with cocaine and hashish, respectively, Preciado motivates his experimentation with exogenous testosterone, citing Peter Sloterdijk, who writes '[i]f you intend to be a doctor, you must try to become a laboratory animal'.<sup>303</sup> For Preciado, trans-feminist theory and practice

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid., xii.; To present an in depth reading of Noys' notion of affirmationism and negativity is beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>297</sup> Noys, "Intoxication and Acceleration," 11.

<sup>298</sup> Ropek Hewson, "Pharmacopornographic Subjectivity in the Work of Paul B. Preciado," 173.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 186, 189.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 192, 199.

<sup>301</sup> Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 110.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 351.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.



must engage in somatic self-experimentation to take our bodies back from monopoly and control which the pharmaceutical companies and ‘medico-legal institutions’ have upon our bodies. In taking up the auto-guinea pig principle, we assert our ability to engage in the ‘construction of biopolitical fictions’, without the reduction of ourselves to such essentialist categories that occurs when biopolitical categories are deployed through forms of identity politics.<sup>304</sup> The political thrust of the auto-guinea pig principle is summarised by Preciado as the position that

‘[w]e have the right to demand collective and “common” ownership of the biocodes of gender, sex, and race. We must wrest them from private hands, from technocrats and from the pharmacoporno complex. Such a process of resistance and redistribution could be called technosomatic communism’.<sup>305</sup>

In her own work, Helen Hester relates Preciado’s to notions of bio- (or gender-)hacking and forms of DIY biology which opens up the possibilities of what we can do with bodies. She writes that ‘[h]acking, as the art of the exploit, can be understood as the strategic misuse of existing elements within a given system’. It follows that the self-experimentation Preciado undertakes involves ‘the identification and leveraging of “holes”’ to produce and change ones’ body in ways which eschew the normative binary forms of sexuation and the medical protocols undertaken in a clinical context.<sup>306</sup> This gender biohacking that occurs within Preciado’s work embodies the promethean call of Xenofeminism to ‘build a new world from the scraps’ and to realise the emancipatory potentials of technology.<sup>307</sup> While biohacking contains emancipatory and liberatory vectors, Hester notes that the way in which this experimentation is presented in *Testo-Junkie* leaves much to be desired, politically. Hester writes that

‘[i]n dealing primarily with small-scale, individualized tactics, it risks remaining satisfied with isolated, temporary and defensive (if appealingly romantic) gestures of experimentation, rather than looking toward how one might enact further reaching forms of change – or indeed achieve ‘*planetary somatic communism*’.<sup>308</sup>

Hester is correct in highlighting that the political practice present in *Testo-Junkie* when not linked with active mass political movements results in the atomisation of political actors and the political as well as ontological

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 352; *Paul B. Preciado with Jack Halberstam*.

<sup>305</sup> Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 352.

<sup>306</sup> Hester, “The Art of the Exploit: Gender Hacking and Political Agency,” 13.

<sup>307</sup> Cuboniks, “Xenofeminism,” 2, 10.

<sup>308</sup> Hester, “The Art of the Exploit: Gender Hacking and Political Agency,” 20.

neutering of bio- and gender hacking's revolutionary potential. This risk of satisfaction with a seemingly romantic practice of experimentation explains why some writers, such as Noys, see Preciado's work as an embrace of the immersion into global capital, rather than the identification of these processes as *always-already* immersed within the current conjuncture (in contrast to a willing *embrace*). Hester argues that the tactics and 'interventions facilitated by [the] tools' presented in Preciado's work must 'be scaled up'.<sup>309</sup> We have the possibility to

'take Preciado's insights and try to understand how we can use them to build capacity for new actions, thoughts and desires; and to articulate a politics that exceeds the individual to express a more concerted interest in transforming biotechnical hegemony'.<sup>310</sup>

Hester's work, and Xenofeminism more broadly, attempts to deal with a political underdevelopment in Preciado's work—which as Hester notes stems partially from what can be called 'a hacking approach to sociopolitical transformation'.<sup>311</sup> This underdevelopment and lack of 'sufficient attention' to mass politics—in contrast to micropolitical action—reflects a similar theoretical underdevelopment which I note in the first chapter in regard to the *Countersexual Manifesto*. On my reading, both Xenofeminism and Neo-rationalism provide us with the ability to flesh out and strengthen our account of the body and our ability to change it—or as Hester puts it, our ability to transform our 'biotechnical hegemony' or horizon.

The Xenofeminist conception of alienation is, on my reading, articulated most extensively in the writing of Laboria Cuboniks member, Diann Bauer. Bauer's notion of alienation takes a form which is no doubt different—and some may say strange—in comparison to how alienation is usually understood. She writes that '[x]enofeminism proposes alienation as an estrangement which is the condition by which humans have been able to do anything involving scale or abstraction, rather than being an inhibitor to what a human can do'.<sup>312</sup> Further, it is noted that alienation, on this account, being the 'capacity for abstraction' the human species has developed, is 'the estrangement between our sapience and our sentience'.<sup>313</sup> The implications of this distinction between sapience and sentience follow on from the work of Robert Brandom, with Bauer writing that '[f]or Brandom, just because discriminating noises can be made [for example, a parrot responding 'red' when presented a red object,] this is not the same thing as having the capacity to understand the concept of "red"'.<sup>314</sup> Brandom writes that 'the sapient being responsively classifies the stimuli

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>312</sup> Bauer, "Alienation, Freedom and the Synthetic How," 109.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

as falling under concepts, as being of some “conceptually articulated kind” rather than “mere differential responsiveness”<sup>315</sup> This distinction between sentience and sapience is important for Bauer as, on her reading, the Xenofeminist account of alienation is that alienation is the ‘capacity to form and be formed by concepts’.<sup>316</sup> While it is true that humans are separated or differentiated from other animals by their ability to engage in abstract thinking and conceptualisation, framing alienation in such a way is different from usual understandings.<sup>317</sup> Still, this novel understanding of alienation has much to offer us, and can, on my reading, be of use when reading Preciado’s work.

Alienation has been explicitly linked with the possibilities of hacking, and of construction in both the Xenofeminist Manifesto, and later writings by members of Laboria Cuboniks. Amy Ireland has recently written that ‘[t]he result’ of Xenofeminism is ultimately

‘a complex refusal of the ‘given’, especially in terms of its biological and political particularities, and the implication that technologically aided epistemological purchase on the given opens it up to increasing levels of hackability. The subject of knowledge in this sense is a collective, human one that embarks on a journey of progressive reconfiguration of its traditional ‘human’ properties, unfolding into ever widening gyres of collective—emancipatory—technical symbiosis. This collective subject is licensed to guide its own process of dehumanization by virtue of its growing epistemological prowess, and its continual deciphering of a trans-cultural value system through the aforementioned modelling systems and as-yet-unknown systems to come’.<sup>318</sup>

The term ‘given’ which Xenofeminism opposes is adopted from the work of American analytic philosopher Wilfrid Sellars. Sellars’ account of the given deals primarily with epistemological problems. James O’Shea characterises Sellars’ account of the ‘myth of the given’ as a criticism of philosophers who ‘have almost always assumed [...] that some fundamental categorization of the world or of persons is *irrevisable*, and so is assumed to be just “given” in that sense’.<sup>319</sup> While the Sellarsian account can be restricted to epistemological claims about the concepts we use to order our image of the world, the neorationalist philosophies of Peter Wolfendale, Reza Negarestani, and Ray Brassier—which Xenofeminism has taken influence from—has

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<sup>315</sup> Brandom, *From Empiricism to Expressivism*, 101–2, cited in Bauer “Alienation, Freedom and the Synthetic How”, 109.

<sup>316</sup> Bauer, “Alienation, Freedom and the Synthetic How,” 109.

<sup>317</sup> Such as Marxist or Heideggerian accounts of alienation. It should also be noted that the differentiation of ‘humans’ from other animals on this basis is not transhistorical. In fact the notion of the human, if taken as being sapient, does not have to be restricted to a species categorization. There could be a sapient lifeform which is not ‘homo sapiens’—in fact there could be or evolve a life form which utilises sapience in a much higher manner than ‘homo sapiens’ do.

<sup>318</sup> Ireland, “☐, Zigzags, Evil Spirits, Darkside Empathy, Skinning,” 1913.

<sup>319</sup> O’Shea, “What Is the Myth of the Given?,” 10553.

extended this notion of the ‘given’ beyond the epistemological frame and into other domains—such as the ‘biological’ and ‘political’ as noted above.

Neorationalism, and its adoption by Xenofeminism, shares with forms of post-humanism, trans-humanism, and Preciado’s notions of counter-sexuality and uranism the transcendence or revision of the seemingly ‘unchangeable’ yolk of nature. While neorationalism holds this similarity between post/trans-humanism and Preciado’s work, neorationalism can be distinguished from them, according to Wolfendale through the following question: ‘do we unbind animality from the normative constraints of rationality, or unbind rationality from the metaphysical constraints of animality?’<sup>320</sup> In regards to *how* somatic change is accounted for Xenofeminism, Neorationalism, and Preciado’s work highlight the importance upon which technologies and tools work upon and transform the body—both recognising their ‘malleability [...] using social and biochemical techniques’.<sup>321</sup> Theorists aligned with post-humanism such as Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway—which Preciado takes influence from—tend to find issue with the distinction between human and non-human animals, and notions of rationality as they can be read as inserting an anthropological bias into one’s philosophy. This is exemplified by Preciado’s statement that ‘[f]eminism is an animalism. In other words, animalism is an expanded feminism, and not anthropocentric’ which ‘reveals the colonial, patriarchal roots of those universal principles of European humanism’.<sup>322</sup> While Preciado and post-humanist writers are no doubt correct that concepts such as ‘rationality’ and ‘the human’ have been deployed in aid of colonial, patriarchal projects, the neorationalists account of the potential of alienation *through* the abstraction in rationality overcomes such a criticism. If rationality is no longer limited to the human, but rather something which can be achieved by anyone or anything, we can say that non-human

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<sup>320</sup> Wolfendale, “Rationalist Inhumanism,” 382.

<sup>321</sup> Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 100.

<sup>322</sup> Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus*, 91.; While Preciado, throughout his work, positions himself in opposition to historical and present political, social, and conceptual colonial regimes—particularly through the incorporation of anti-colonial and decolonial writing within his work (See Preciado, “On the Verge: Paul B. Preciado on Revolution.”)—the critique of colonialism is not, on my reading, at the forefront of majority of Preciado’s work. In turn, there are some statements by Preciado on the relation between transgender people and refugees which, on my reading, are problematic. In particular, Preciado’s use of the term ‘gender migrant’ to describe himself, and his comparisons of ‘trans people to that of migrant bodies’ flattens the distinctions between the political and social experiences of European and Western trans people and that of both cis and trans refugees and migrants from the global south. While Preciado’s highlighting of the way in which laws around gender recognition—and in turn, the general act of transition—creates situations in which trans people are refused social intelligibility or are ‘exiled’ from the cissexist gender system, these situations—especially when experienced by a white European trans person, like Preciado—are not comparable to refugees and migrants (whether ‘legal’ or ‘illegal’ in the eyes of the state). Hannah Baer has also highlighted that Preciado, in his writing, makes the politically questionable move of identifying himself (an Ivy League educated, White, Spanish man) ‘as being represented by colonized continents and peoples’ rather than taking a stance of solidarity. In turn, there has been online community discussion on the way race is portrayed in Preciado’s work, vacillating between a highlighting of the racist and colonial history of reproductive technologies and a racist fetishisation of Black masculinity. See Baer, “The Controversial Report: On Paul Preciado’s Can the Monster Speak?”; “Fetishizing Black Manhood: On Paul Preciado’s *Testo Junkie*”; Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus*, 183–85; “Letter from a Trans Man to the Old Sexual Regime. By Paul B. Preciado.”

animals and artificial intelligence has the possibility to engage in a relentless revision and change ‘what it means’ to be a human, a non-human animal etc. by ‘removing [their] supposedly self-evident characteristics’ including those characteristics which are assumed to arise from a supposedly unchangeable nature or ontological condition.<sup>323</sup>

This aim to produce the possibility to relentlessly revise the construction and ontological structure of the world which Xenofeminism, Neorationalism, and Preciado’s project share has been given the name ‘prometheanism’ by Ray Brassier. Prometheanism has been succinctly summarised by Peter Wolfendale. Wolfendale states that by understanding prometheanism as ‘[t]he rejection of predetermined limits upon *action* and *self-transformation*’ we arrive at a definition of rationalism which entails ‘[t]he rejection of predetermined limits upon *thought* and *self-understanding*.’<sup>324</sup> For Wolfendale, there is an inextricable link between prometheanism and rationalism. This is, on Wolfendale’s reading, because action and self-transformation have the possibility of being *constrained* by thought and self-understanding.<sup>325</sup> The neorationalist account, in particular the work of Ray Brassier, also begins to sketch out how this revision of our world is possible *ontologically*. While Preciado’s synthesis of Teresa de Lauretis, Judith Butler, and Donna Haraway seeks to push ‘the performative hypothesis further into the body, as far as its organs and fluids; drawing it into the cells, chromosomes, and genes’ his account does not really provide an account of this in the ontological frame beyond stating its possibility and certain mechanisms of action—such as endogenous hormones, prostheses, pornography, archives, architecture.<sup>326</sup> The conditions of these ontological changes aren’t really engaged with in Preciado’s work. This is what I seek to sketch out in the third section through a reading of Ray Brassier’s reading of Hegel.

While other members of Laboria Cuboniks have continued working on the themes which arose in the Manifesto the post-manifesto landscape of Xenofeminism is mostly associated with the work of Helen Hester—one of the collective members—and her 2018 book of the same name. It has been pointed out by Bogna M. Konior that Hester’s book—as well as her other non-Laboria Cuboniks work—tends towards ‘only a skilled update of existing Anglophone queer and feminist theories interested in domestic, ‘small,’ mundane technologies and acts of care, which with time may translate bodily autonomy into scalable political change’.<sup>327</sup> Konior writes that while Hester’s book is explicit about its scope and claims ‘the more daring elements of the manifesto that seemed to have attracted most attention and were visibly diverging from feminist theories in the modern academia are not addressed in Hester’s book’.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> Negarestani, “The Labor of the Inhuman,” 427.

<sup>324</sup> Wolfendale, “Prometheanism and Rationalism.”

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 110.

<sup>327</sup> Konior, “Automate the Womb: Ecologies and Technologies of Reproduction. Helen Hester, Xenofeminism (Polity, 2018),” 237.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 238.

Juliana Gleeson has noted in particular that while the XFM may, at surface level, seem to be a Marxist text, it is not. In particular, Gleeson notes that if one is to try and deduce the meaning of alienation from the rest of the manifesto, then the Xenofeminist notion of alienation has more in common with Heidegger than it does with Marx.<sup>329</sup> The Heideggerian account counterposes alienation and authenticity. The alienated subject is a subject who is not authentic to their being. On Gleeson's reading, Hester's adoption of the term 'xenofam' wherein one 'favour[s] outward-looking solidarity with the alien, the foreign, and the figure of the stranger, over restrictive solidarity with the familiar, the similar, and the figure of the compatriot' entails a simple reversal of the Heideggerian account.<sup>330</sup> Gleeson writes that

'Xenofeminists accept the view of alienation and technology proposed by Heideggerians. They then simply attempt to reverse it: to side with the rootless, wandering cosmopolitans whom Heidegger himself saw driven from public life under National Socialism. But even as a correction, this is a deficient and limiting view of both technology, and alienation'.<sup>331</sup>

Gleeson notes that it is 'difficult to extend any "left-Heideggerianism" (whether reversed or not) to serve emancipatory projects in any concrete way'. Gleeson favours a Marxist account of alienation as opposed to the Heideggerian account which understands alienation as a 'relational feature of class domination'.<sup>332</sup> Contra the Heideggerian alienation of the XFM, Gleeson agrees with Sophie Lewis' rejection of the Xenofeminist account of alienation, stating that 'given the right conditions, technologies help us to collectively remake the nature of our bodies in such a way as to disalienate'. On this reading, the domination of subjects under capital 'require us to *overcome* alienation, [...] not celebrate it'. The efforts to resist the forms of domination which occur under capitalism—Gleeson uses access to trans healthcare as an example—is not a 'strateg[y] of "self-alienation"', but a resistance to it. Gleeson's alternative to Xenofeminist Heideggerianism is no doubt correct, though it is only one piece of the account of alienation—or externalisation—which I will outline in the last section of this chapter.<sup>333</sup> As I will outline below, on my reading, capitalist alienation can be understood as an 'alienation of alienation' or 'estrangement of estrangement'.

Further, while writers such as Bogna M. Konior take issue with the Marxist account of alienation, similar issues have been noted with the Xenofeminist account of alienation. Konior writes that '[i]n xenofeminism, alienation means siding with the artificial, 'unnatural', and unfamiliar as well as refusing the use of 'nature' to justify wholly 'social' configurations such as the 'natural' predisposition of women to

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<sup>329</sup> Gleeson, "Breakthroughs & Bait: On Xenofeminism and Alienation."

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

<sup>333</sup> Gleeson has noted, in private communication, that this critique, in retrospect, is somewhat shortsighted.

motherhood or care'.<sup>334</sup> On Konior's reading the XFM ends up 'perpetuat[ing] the nature/technology split' and 'naïve[ly...] fetishizing "artifice" and "technology"'.<sup>335</sup> In treating technology and nature as 'disperse entities', the XFM's project undoes itself through its '[g]rounding [... in] this unchallenged, universalised ontological separation'.<sup>336</sup> While Konior notes the issues with Xenofeminism as found in the XFM, she still argues for a philosophy and politics wherein alienation takes a central role, pointing towards the ways in which Xenofeminism could morph to overcome the pitfalls of its articulations. "Accelerationism is a political heresy," write Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian. What is heresy if not the very denial of naturalised ontologies, unchallenged norms and axioms?<sup>337</sup> Konior's work, on my reading, is not a rejection of xenofeminism as some may assume, but rather an attempt to 'extend xenofeminism to its logical consequences'. Recalling the Xenofeminist demand that '[i]f nature is unjust, change nature', Konior responds that '[p]erhaps this is not enough — perhaps if nature is unjust, we need to erase it'.<sup>338</sup> The term 'erasure' will no doubt raise alarm bells to some, and perhaps this may not be the correct word to utilise. Nevertheless, this erasure of nature, on my reading, is the exact possibility of the 'unprecedented cunning' which the symbiosis of the many forms of 'technics' with 'nature', and the bodies of subjects—both human and non-human—that Xenofeminism has pointed towards. On my reading, the notion of erasure which Konior's work should be taken as the political orientation towards the creation of a world wherein one's embodiment is understood as a contingent situation which subjects find themselves in—a position which Preciado endorses. I specify that the subject's embodiment be understood as contingent not as a rejection of limits *in the present*, but to structure one's thought in a way which refuses to assume 'a *predetermined* limit to what we can achieve or to the ways in which we can transform ourselves and our world'.<sup>339</sup>

### *Sexuate Ontology*

Elizabeth Grosz's ontological account of sexual difference, is, at this point, probably the most well-known—but also one which is no doubt contested. Recently, Mitchell Murtagh has attempted to argue that Grosz's (generative) ontological account of sexual difference is not transphobic—as some have claimed—but rather is 'the most affirming philosophy of transsexuality there is'.<sup>340</sup> On my reading, it is clear that Murtagh is attempting to show how an ontology which affirms the primacy of sexual difference is still able to account

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<sup>334</sup> Konior, "Automate the Womb: Ecologies and Technologies of Reproduction. Helen Hester, *Xenofeminism* (Polity, 2018)," 235.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>336</sup> Konior, "Alien Aesthetics: Xenofeminism and Nonhuman Animals," 88.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>339</sup> Brassier, "Prometheanism and Its Critics," 470.

<sup>340</sup> Murtagh, "An Ontoethics of Transsexual Difference" Forthcoming.

for and be affirming of transgender people's existence. On Murtagh's reading, readings of Grosz's work such as Jami Weinstein, and Oli Stephano's ultimately mirror critiques of essentialism and reimpose the sex/gender binary onto the philosophy of sexual difference. While I am skeptical to this charge, I will mostly focus on Murtagh's paper. Against Weinstein and Stephano, Murtagh seeks to present a reading of Grosz's work which is affirmative of transsexual experience—even in its most seemingly transphobic passages.

Key to Murtagh's defense of Grosz is the notion of the 'sexed specificity' of bodies. If one is to use the notion of 'sexed specificity' in their account of sexual difference, one must be explicit as to what this means. On my reading, sexed specificity means, for Murtagh, the specific limits to which one can 'modulate the sexedness of our bodies'.<sup>341</sup> Further, the term modulate makes Murtagh's ontology one which is flexible but not plastic—a distinction taken from the work of Catherine Malabou. The distinction between flexibility and plasticity in the ontological frame can be described as follows: flexibility means that a thing *can* change in some ways, but ultimately does not change its form, whereas an ontological plasticity entails a radical break with the past without forgetting its past. Even if an object or being has undertaken what seems to be a transformation which included a return back to a previous form, this form is necessarily differentiated from what was prior. On this reading, the ontology of flexibility is an ontology which presents the image of possible change, but ultimately refuses it. In a recent interview Malabou states that '[a] flexible material can be bent in all directions. A plastic material, once deformed, cannot go back to its initial form. It means that in plasticity you have the idea of a resistance, which is not contained in fluidity'.<sup>342</sup>

Murtagh analyses two passages from Grosz's *Volatile Bodies* and *Becoming Undone* which have been read as transphobic. The first passage, from *Volatile Bodies*, reads as follows:

'There will always remain a kind of outsideness or alienness of the experiences and lived reality of each sex for the other. Men, contrary to the fantasy of the transsexual, can never, even with surgical intervention, feel or experience what it is like to be, to live, as women. At best the transsexual can live out his fantasy of femininity—a fantasy that in itself is usually disappointed with the rather crude transformations effected by surgical and chemical intervention. The transsexual may look like a woman but can never feel like *or be a woman*. The one sex, whether male or female or some other term, can only experience, live, according to (and hopefully in excess of) the cultural significations of the sexually specific body. The problematic of sexual difference entails a *certain failure of knowledge to bridge the gap, the interval, between the sexes. There remains something ungraspable, something outside, unpredictable, and uncontainable, about the other sex for each sex*'.<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid. It should also be noted that the notion of sexual difference as a 'ontologically generative force' becomes explicit in Grosz's project later on. This does not necessarily discount a reading which shows a continuity of thought, but it would also be possible to present a reading wherein the notion of the ontological generativity of sexual difference being a break from Grosz' work in *Volatile Bodies*.

<sup>342</sup> Grau, Zahm, and Malabou, "Philosophy with Catherine Malabou."

<sup>343</sup> Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, cited in Murtagh, "An Ontoethics of Transsexual Difference." Emphasis mine. Unfortunately, I will not have time to go in depth into the refusal of a knowledge of one sex by the other. Grosz's position is a simple refusal of the rationalist position that we are able to articulate our knowledge through concepts. Given that Grosz claims that the 'ungraspable' something of sex is ungraspable *for the other sex*, we can take it that those of the same sex, can grasp this thing. But given that humans—while not necessarily using the same language—not



In the second passage, from *Becoming Undone*, Grosz writes:

‘However queer, transgendered, and ethically identified one might be, one comes from a man and a woman, and one remains a man or a woman, even in the case of gender-reassignment or the chemical and surgical transformation of one sex into the appearance of another. Sexual difference is still in play even to the extent that one identifies with or actively seeks the sexual organs and apparatus of the “opposite sex: at the most one can change the appearance and social meaning of the body, but the sexually specific body that is altered remains a sexually specific, if altered, body. Sexual difference has no one location, no one organ or condition. This is why surgical or hormonal alterations do not actually give one the body of the other sex, instead providing alteration of only some of the key social markers of gender’.<sup>344</sup>

If we are willing to linger with the passage from *Volatile Bodies*, Murtagh claims, we can see the ‘more nuanced readings’ from this passage. Murtagh writes that ‘it is clear that sexual difference is not reducible to genital dimorphism for Grosz’.<sup>345</sup> Let us run with this for a moment. In this passage Grosz no doubt highlights the ‘cultural significations of the sexually specific body’ which the philosophy of sexual difference includes. If, as Grosz writes, ‘one can only experience, live, according to (and hopefully in excess of)’ these cultural significations, what is it that limits the transsexual from feeling or experiencing what it is like to be, and to live—in majority of their interactions with others—as their ‘identified’ sex or gender.<sup>346</sup> While Grosz’s account tends to focus on sexual difference as an ontologically generative force, we should note that Grosz is in agreement with other philosophers of sexual difference, such as Rachel Jones—who Murtagh cites in his paper—who have noted that sexual difference does not refer to ‘a mode of being determined by biological sex nor to a cultural overlay of gendered meanings inscribed on a “tabula rasa” of passively receptive matter’.<sup>347</sup> Jones’ reading construes sexual difference as encompassing the multitude of ways in which one becomes an *embodied sexual subject* through—though not limited to—‘bodily, social, linguistic, aesthetic, erotic, and political forms’.<sup>348</sup>

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only communicate but formulate knowledge through concepts, it implies that this ‘something’ cannot be articulated within language, as then it would be able to be grasped by the other sex. If this is the case, how is it that Grosz themselves, is able to even point towards such an ungraspable thing—it must be implied that this something is ungraspable for Grosz herself about her own ‘female’ sex. This ultimately falls into the purview of one of Hegel’s criticism of Kant’s notion of the thing-in-itself, wherein Hegel claims that to claim/know that the thing-in-itself is unknowable, is already to produce knowledge of it—that is, to know *something* about it. Similarly, for Grosz, as well as those of ‘male’ sex, to know that there is something ‘ungraspable’ about the other sex, is to already grasp this ‘something’—what is it that stops us from moving further with our grasping?

Ultimately, if Grosz is to hold onto the claim that there is something ungraspable about the sexes ultimately has to fall into a Heideggerian position wherein she will find herself ‘in an impasse of an excess of presence, one in which being conceals itself’. See Badiou, *Being and Event*, 10.

<sup>344</sup> Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 109–10.

<sup>345</sup> Murtagh, “An Ontoethics of Transsexual Difference,” 233.

<sup>346</sup> I may be accused of inserting the sex/gender split back into sexual difference. Here I am simply using these terms as that is how interpellation occurs.

<sup>347</sup> Jones, *Irigaray*.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*

If Grosz and her readers opt for a different definition or account, that is fine, but if one is to include cultural significations within their notion of sexual difference there must be an attempt to account for the way in which a trans person ‘passing’ (or a cis person failing to ‘pass’)<sup>349</sup> as their ‘gender’ or sex’, or otherwise being treated as their *identified* sex or gender as them *being* their identified sex or gender. While it would be wrong to simply reduce this to a ‘cultural signification’, the ways in which transgender people are understood socially as belonging to the gender they are (that is, the gender they identify with) has implications for *their* sexual specificity—that is, their alignment within sexual difference. If Grosz is to take that a transgender person’s identification and/or the recognition of such does not align them sexually with the domain of sexual difference with which they identify, then this—egregiously—has to be understood as a ‘misrecognition’ on behalf of the other in the process of recognition, for Grosz. On my reading, this ultimately has to be the case for Grosz as she, shamefully, claims in a 2014 interview that ‘it’s a category mistake to believe that by transforming the body you have you acquire the body of the opposite sex’.<sup>350</sup> Grosz, in the aforementioned interview, further states:

‘They can appear like the other sex, they can feel like the other sex, but how do you know what the other sex feels like from inside? You can’t ever know it. [...] But I know that, if you’re born with a female body, you’re always going to have some variation of the female body, whatever you do to it’.<sup>351</sup>

Murtagh does state that Grosz is ‘nowhere claiming that what validates a person’s identity is their genitalia or other anatomical feature’, she is rather ‘refus[ing] that any person can occupy a differently sexed specificity than the specificity of their own sex’.<sup>352</sup> What is meant by sexed specificity is not outlined in any depth. Firstly, one may ask ‘how *specific* is sexed specificity?’ Grosz is no doubt fine with the use of the terms ‘male’, ‘female’, ‘man’, ‘woman’—so those ‘specifications’ seem to mean something in her ontology—at least when applied to humans. Still, this is one question that must be answered if Grosz wants to hold onto specific categories, or to use these categories in the way she does. Whether or not these categories should be kept is another question, but, if we are to remember the plurality which is evoked in Irigaray’s image of woman—that exact plurality which refuses woman an essence, and shields Irigaray’s early writing from the charge of essentialism—how does this function within a framework which asserts the grouping of subjects based on what seems to be such ‘common-sensical’ grounds. If woman’s plurality is innumerable, how can it be delimited in such a way, in such a way which *refuses* some women due to their *individual* sexed

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<sup>349</sup> I do not mean to imply that one’s gender is dependent upon passing, simply that it effects the sex and gender one is interpellated as.

<sup>350</sup> Wolfe and Grosz, “Bodies of Philosophy,” 120.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*, 120–21.

<sup>352</sup> Murtagh, “An Ontoethics of Transsexual Difference,” 234.

specificity?—as when we get down to it, everyone’s sexed specificity *is different*, while still being subsumed into universals (man, woman etc). We can ask further if this distinction between sexual difference and ‘identification’ reinserts the ‘sex/gender’ distinction—or a similarly operative distinction—which Murtagh claims sexual difference elides back into the equation, while eliding identification in favour of the ontological priority of sexual difference?

Murtagh develops Grosz’s reading by ‘reconceiving sexual difference’ through two orders which are termed ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ sexual difference, writing

‘Primary sexual difference would refer to the ontological sexual difference, the “sexuateness” of being itself, or the sexual difference that “the world itself generates,” to use Grosz’s language. This ontology exceeds but subtends each individual sexed being because it is out of which all such beings are produced. Secondary sexual difference, then, would refer to precisely those sexed individuations, human or otherwise, as various effects of primary sexual difference. Hence, human sexed subjects may construct epistemologies to describe their sexed being, but sexual difference itself is not limited to human instantiations or discourse. Those who conceive a philosophical “choice” between gender performativity and sexual difference, and dismiss sexual difference through the Grosz Paradox, operate in terms of a binary grammar, in terms of a choice between the epistemological and the ontological’.<sup>353</sup>

What Murtagh is attempting to overcome is the falling of sexual difference onto a purely epistemological terrain. Murtagh is correct that there is a need to account for the ontological role within sexual difference, but on my reading Murtagh falls short by reducing the human frame to the epistemological—that is, purely to the construction of epistemologies and categorisations of sexual being within discourse. This delineation of sexual difference into two senses which form a continuum is a start in opening the philosophy of sexual difference to trans people, but on my reading ultimately falls short. In particular, given my neorationalist account of human change, I find it necessary to note that while the ontology of primary sexual difference ‘exceeds [...] each individual sexed being because it is out of which all such beings are produced’, the event of ‘the human’ produces a mutability—which is dependent upon technics—which subtends human existence. As of this, sexual difference can be revised in a way which is fundamentally *not epistemological*. The ontological mutability which subtends the human means human action—or even non-human action upon humans—has the possibility of inducing or producing *radical change* within human subjects. Due to this

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<sup>353</sup> Ibid., 243.

mutability (which will be discussed below), there is a reflexivity *upon* what Murtagh calls ‘primary sexual difference’ by ‘secondary sexual difference’—while primary sexual difference is that which begins the sexuation of the subject, this sexuation has the possibility of being radically changed by action.

Further, while Murtagh does state that ‘[s]ex and gender are not mutually exclusive but co-constitutive. Sexual difference is part of what must be navigated in gender performativity’, he quickly avers, as has been noted above, that, on his reading,

‘we live our identities within sexually specific bodies, and that identities cannot wholly determine the sexedness of our being (even though we can modulate the sexedness of our bodies, partially, in ways that do align with our identities)’.<sup>354</sup>

While at first, it may seem that the co-constitutive nature of sex and gender—whether subsumed into sexual difference, or with sexual difference *as a part*—is shown through Murtagh—and Grosz’s—insistence that the body *can be altered* or one’s ‘sexedness’ be *modulated* through whatever means, both Murtagh and Grosz—as I have noted above—refuse any form of co-constitution *through* bodily alteration or modulation of sexedness *through* their assertions that these contingent changes do not allow one to ‘occupy’ a sexual specificity different to that of ‘their own sex’—that being, the sex which they ‘begin’ their life as.<sup>355</sup> This position necessarily refuses any co-constitution as sex becomes a garden walled off from any change which could risk itself losing or changing *that which makes it what it is* (its specific sex, as categorised by Grosz). This reading of Grosz and Murtagh is strengthened by the use of certain universals such as ‘male/female’ and ‘man/woman’—particularly by Grosz. One’s ‘own sex’—and its ‘specificity’—are subsumed—in humans—by Grosz into these terms, but in a way which rigidifies said terms and sexuation.

This use of certain universals makes the statement that one can only occupy the specificity of one’s sex much more rigid than if this ‘specificity’ was localised to each subject. If specificity is understood as localised *to* each living organism, then the meaning of ‘specificity of their own sex’ changes dramatically. If emphasis is put on the irreducibility of specificity, we simply arrive at the position that each separate object is differentiated from another. One person is differentiated, and thus has a different *sexed specificity* than another—even when a subject is subsumed into groups or terms which specify sexuation. In emphasising specificity, one can say it is possible to change one’s sex—that is, in this case, the categorisation *sexuate difference*—while asserting that there is a specificity of one’s own. In fact, that which makes up this specificity may change over time, but it is those differentiations between the *sexuate* make up of one subject and another which are irreducible. In other words, we can say that for anything to exist—including objects

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

or organisms which may not be sexuated—it is necessarily differentiated from *all other* existents and because of this differentiation, each existing thing has a specificity which cannot be reduced into another *purely* on the basis of this differentiation. In this sense, given that the emphasis would be placed upon specificity, universals are able to be used without installing a limit onto the future as an irreducibility has only been assigned to differentiation—or specificity.<sup>356</sup> One could—in the future—completely move from one form of sexuation to another without issue. On my reading, the issue that arises with Grosz and Murtagh’s position is that certain current intractabilities related to the bodies and their possibilities of change—both ontological and ontical—are rendered omni-historical and projected into the future. In fact, this is required for both Murtagh and Grosz’s approach as they specify sexual difference as ontologically first, rather than simply temporally first before any change may occur—including the change that sexual difference is removed from its supposed throne as the king of all differences.

It should be noted that towards the end of Murtagh’s chapter, he takes up the position—via a reading of Rebecca Hill’s philosophy—that sexuate difference refers to tendencies which are actualised or de-emphasised based on natural occurrences or environmental interventions. For Hill, these tendencies can be understood as being actualised in the embodiment of subjects; the ‘female tendency’ is that which is actualised in and by ‘embodied women’ with the ‘male tendency’ being deemphasised, vice versa for ‘embodied men’—and other further tendencies for other forms of sexuation.<sup>357</sup> For Murtagh, it can be understood that transsexuality is the ontological ‘active reemphasising of tendencies by an individual that were initially deemphasised by the ontological force of sexual difference’.<sup>358</sup> Further, Hill’s theorisation of sexual difference is also markedly different from those of Irigaray, Grosz and Murtagh while still taking the concept of sexual difference seriously. On my reading, the key difference between Hill, and Irigaray, Grosz and Murtagh is that Hill does not hold the position that sexual difference is ‘necessary to life on Earth’—while it is ‘a fundamental motor of difference in the actualisation of life on earth’ it is not *the* fundamental and *necessary* event (emphasis particularly on ‘a’ and ‘the’) for life on earth or life as such.<sup>359</sup> Hill, in contrast to Grosz and Murtagh, argues that sexual difference is a ‘tendency to diverge’ which arose from an ‘intermingled multiplicity [...] into the divergent tendencies that are actualised as, for example, male and female mammals’.<sup>360</sup> On my reading, Hill’s account of sexuate difference is much more apt for accounting for trans subjectivities, as well as the account presented in Preciado’s work.

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<sup>356</sup> I should add that say ‘universals’ in this sentence, and not the specific ones Grosz employs, as the terms one may use to name forms of sexuation or any form of differentiation may and do change.

<sup>357</sup> Hill, “At Least Two,” 39.

<sup>358</sup> Murtagh, “An Ontoethics of Transsexual Difference,” 245.

<sup>359</sup> Hill, “At Least Two,” 37–38.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.; While I have issues with the philosophy of Henri Bergson—which I make note of in chapter 1—I believe that the persuasiveness and strength of Hill’s notion of tendency, on my reading, means that one can utilize the notion of tendency while not necessarily depending upon Bergson’s philosophy.

While Hill refuses the ‘totalising claim made by both Grosz and Irigaray that sexual difference is necessary’ for life as such—that is, sexual difference is irreducible—Hill’s position that the ‘virtual “whole”’ from which all life arises is that of an ‘impersonal mother’—the ‘mythical maternal’ which births life—is not without issues. The notion of the impersonal mother—as well as the notion of the maternal-feminine ground of metaphysics—is part of Irigaray’s—and by consequence, many Irigarians—continual attempt to remind us that we came from a mother—that is, a woman. The structure of this reminder is fundamentally nostalgic meaning that in contrast to ‘the Greeks with their *nostos* [‘the return home’...] nostalgia happens because you can’t go home again’.<sup>361</sup> The structure of nostalgia, as Huffer notes, operates in such a way that culminates in the search for the ‘lost mother’ in its search for meaning due to ‘gender ideology[‘s] reduction of woman to mother’.

On my reading, while the Irigarian account of the impersonal mother—and the maternal-feminine ground of metaphysics—reverses the patriarchal position that woman ‘is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential’, it still holds to the search and positing of a lost primordial mother.<sup>362</sup> Even if one is to disagree with the position that the Irigarian account operates through the nostalgic structure, they must also reckon with the fact that in positing and searching for the production of life and of the universe and naming it ‘Mother’, if it does not reproduce the woman = mother = womb equation, it enforces a reversed and equally patriarchal equation which operates as such: origin = womb = mother = woman.

If we are to say that the origin of life is a mother, or, more expansively, the feminine, if we do not fall into an account that makes woman’s only future to be that of the mother, we fall into an account wherein birth—whether it be of subjects or of life itself—can only arise from the feminine.<sup>363</sup> While the philosophy of sexual difference operates in a more abstracted metaphysical frame, the metaphysical position that all life arises from the feminine and relies upon sexual difference implies problematic and concrete conclusions—e.g. the categorical inability in some Irigarian accounts for life to arise from the masculine or masculine subjects (trans men or transmasculine people giving birth) or asexual reproduction. If we are to theorise about sexuate difference while avoiding the ‘regime of sex, gender, and sexual difference’ which Preciado criticises we cannot hypostatise the genesis of life to a singular pole of sexuation—whether through metaphorical or concrete theorisation. In not holding an openness to the future in thought—or presenting a veneer of doing so, which on my reading both Grosz and Murtagh are guilty of—they refuse both the psychoanalytic position that sex is a *question* and not *the answer*. In stressing over and ontologising constitutional limits in the present, one attempts to philosophically inoculate oneself from the question

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<sup>361</sup> Huffer, *Maternal Pasts, Feminist Futures*, 14.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>363</sup> I should note that, on my reading, Hill does not take this position, I am simply using the notion of the impersonal mother which is mentioned in her paper as an example.

which the future will bring—it requires a leap which even some philosophers of difference are not willing to make. As much as Huffer and others may protest<sup>364</sup> the fact remains that the metaphors deployed in Irigaray’s work—in particular the lips or mucus—can only be stripped of their nostalgic, heterosexist, and, ultimately, transphobic form, if we, like Deleuze, take Irigaray from behind and give her a child; Irigaray’s own offspring, yet monstrous.<sup>365</sup>

Returning to Hill’s notion of tendency, we find a refusal to limit the notion of tendency to male or female tendencies—or further, to limiting the sexuete subjectivity of individuals as Irigaray, Grosz, and Murtagh do. Hill writes that

‘[i]n some subjects, the actualised tendencies of sexual specificity are intermingled such that a determination of femaleness or maleness in that human being is reductive. [... And further, while] many actualisations of the human sexes privilege certain features as specific to women and privilege certain features as specific to men, the processes of actualization do not give rise to uniform and rigid manifestations of specific organic forms. The actualisation of a sexed individual emerges from a combination of tendencies; and each emergence of a sexed subject is a singular creation. In other words, there is no proper form of woman, no proper form of man, and no proper form of an intersexed person, although there are configurations of the actualisation of tendencies that are accentuated much more frequently in the evolution of the human species’.<sup>366</sup>

Hill’s account of tendency and sexuete specificity is articulated in such a way that—unlike Grosz and Murtagh—does not restrict certain subjects to a predetermined conceptualisation of sex. Conceiving tendency in such a manner allows—as Murtagh himself points out—an active wielding of these tendencies whether as a form of therapeutic care or, on my reading, as a form of somatic experimentation (not that the two are mutually exclusive). We also find in the above quote that while certain traits may arise more frequently within the human species (at the present), these forms and traits do not constitute ‘proper forms’ of man, woman, intersex, transgender, or other terms of sexuation we may use. This is because, on Hill’s reading, while we can understand embodiment of a certain sex as the emphasising of some tendencies to the deemphasis of others, this is a rather simple account that can be complicated. As noted in the quote above, the sexuation of each individual is produced through ‘a combination of tendencies’ meaning that ‘each emergence of a sexed subject is a singular creation’—in other words, each individuals sexual specificity is *their own* and cannot be reduced to another’s sexual specificity.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> Huffer reads Irigaray as overcoming the nostalgic structure which feminist writers such as Helene Cixous and Julia Kristeva fall into.

<sup>365</sup> Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, 6.

<sup>366</sup> Hill, “At Least Two,” 39–40.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*

This notion of emphasised tendencies is a step in the right direction, *but* when paired with the previous defence of Grosz it is held back. In the statement that “we cannot master the ontological force of sexual difference entirely”, Murtagh has unfortunately conflated the overwhelming and continual power of the force of ontological processes with a limit upon the changes which a subject can *post-facto* effect upon themselves or other somatically. On my reading, Hill’s position that sexual difference be understood as the emphasis and deemphasis of different tendencies—which are not reduced to ‘the two’—is at odds with the defence of Grosz that Murtagh presents. The question at hand is *not* a question of the mutability organisms, but rather becomes a question of the *power of forces at play*. The existence of limits both ontologically and ontically is thus a question of the strength of one force against another. In this sense, in saying that one cannot change their sex and only modulate it, both Grosz and Murtagh have resigned themselves to the position that there is no force which can ever be stronger than the force wielded by the ontological process named sexual difference.

It should be noted that Murtagh’s defence of Grosz on the basis that one cannot ‘occupy a differently sexed specificity than the specificity of their own sex’ comes from an important tending to the problems that arise from embodiment—at least in the present. Murtagh orients his defense of Grosz in the context of a criticism of what has been called ‘trans exceptionalism’ which is understood as the position ‘that bodies are infinitely malleable and endlessly available for hormonal and surgical manipulation’.<sup>368</sup> For Murtagh, to accept such a position is a ‘denial of the realities of sex determination’, a ‘rejection of that which makes transsexuality possible in the first place’ as well as ‘unrealistic and irresponsible’ in a way which ‘conceals the very real struggles of some transsexuals, which are often incited precisely by these limits to the changeability of their sex’.<sup>369</sup> Preciado’s work most definitely would be a target of accusations of ‘trans exceptionalism’—his entire project is the deconstruction of and dismantling of the ‘somato-political biofictions’ of the regime of gender, sex and sexual difference in order to transform our bodies into any shape or form which we find fit.<sup>370</sup> In some of the forms of trans exceptionalism, Murtagh is correct that this ‘trans exceptionalism’ does theoretically produce the conclusions which Murtagh claims it does—that is, uncritically posits the infinite malleability of the body. But because some theories do so uncritically does not mean that we must accept this either-or that Murtagh presents. As I have noted above, while the event of the human instantiates a mutability within human subjects, our malleability is dependent upon and restricted by technics—that is, Murtagh is right that we are not presently infinitely malleable, but as technics advance and become more specialised, our malleability and possibilities slouch towards this infinity. This slouching towards infinity, ultimately means infinite malleability cannot be something of the present, as the

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<sup>368</sup> Murtagh, “An Ontoethics of Transsexual Difference,” 237.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

<sup>370</sup> Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 117; Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 71.



infinite is a continual process which is never completed. Further and importantly, Athena Coleman, writing on sexual difference and transgender being, importantly notes

‘the realization of sex at the ontological level is not reducible to a particular history but always has relational traces in that history. It stakes itself on a claim not entirely determined by the conditions that one finds oneself in. This understanding is consistent with Irigaray's psychoanalytic influences: I do not first identify with myself (as if I were something that preceded the world into which I was born). I always, at first, identify with an Other (even when that other is the other of myself). Thus, my process of self-identification is always about my histories of identification. This means that there is something in relation that preserves the possibility of other ways of relating (including of the self to the self). [...] The very history of being able "to be" was not my self-creation—even if it is that from which I am able to create myself.’<sup>371</sup>

While I take issue with Coleman's assertion that sexual difference should be ‘considered the first difference that allows any differentiation at all’, Coleman's position that while the subject is ‘not self-founding’, its existence—and in turn its sexual specificity and differentiation—is not reducible to this prior individuation wherein the subject and its embodiment comes into being while still having a relation to the history of a subject's embodiment is echoed in Preciado's own work. In particular, Preciado refuses to deny his own history at the demands of the state and society. Writing on his own process to change his name and sex, Preciado writes

‘Before acknowledging my masculine first name, the institution posits the condition that I must first acknowledge myself as dysphoric. [...] My lawyer added a special clause to the application: she requests that my feminine name not simply be replaced by the masculine one, but that I keep it as a middle name. I request the Spanish government to recognize this name as my own: Paul Beatriz. To support this request, my lawyer added a series of examples attesting that the first name is the one that indicates the gender. There is nothing extraordinary about being called Jean-Marie.

The administrative secretary who receives the file asks: “Why Paul Beatriz? He doesn't want to change his sex?” Then he calls another civil servant to make sure he can accept this request. He clarifies: “Paul, they can grant him that, but I'm not sure about Beatriz. They

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<sup>371</sup> Colman, “Tarrying with Sexual Difference: Toward a Morphological Ontology of Trans Subjectivity,” 32.

might refuse him, to prevent any gender ambiguity.” I find myself in that paradoxical situation where the Spanish government can refuse to give me the first name it gave me at birth! I think (but in silence) that I have the right to have my ideas, even if they are stupid. I have a right to my first name. I have a right to have a utopian first name, a heterogenous first name’.<sup>372</sup>

The defense of the production of mutations in Preciado’s work is not, as some may argue, a refusal of history. The history of the body, and its becoming are key within Preciado’s account, and in turn, in my defense of the ontological possibility, and political need for the mutation of bodies to flourish.

Further, could we not also see Grosz’s refusal—and Murtagh’s defense—as falling into the ‘repetition of phallogentrism’ of ‘model[s] in advance of sexuate being to which a woman must be adequate’ which Coleman charges both transmisogynistic transphobia and ‘claims about what trans “really is”’.<sup>373</sup> While it is correct that there are limits to the somatic changes which we can enact at our current conjuncture, the way in which these limits are accounted for in Grosz’s work—as well as Murtagh’s, on my reading—is irresponsible as it installs a limit upon the thinking of the future. If we are to attempt to think the somatic possibilities which *may* arise in the future.

As was noted above in the discussion of neorationalism, if we install a limit on thought, we install a limit upon our ability for somatic and biological change. While thought is in some senses constrained by our environmental limitations, we have the ability to ‘unframe’ or ‘unmoor’ our *thinking* from our present environmental limits due to our grasp of inferential reasoning.<sup>374</sup> Wolfendale highlights this through the example of the difference between weight and mass. He writes

‘Weight is obviously a ubiquitous feature of our environment that has an affect upon most physical tasks [... and] the frame governing our practical understanding of weight is fixed by our evolutionary confinement within the earth’s gravitational field. By contrast, in so far as the concept of mass is defined by precise inferential norms governing its relation to the concepts of force and acceleration, it has enabled us to re-frame our understanding of weight and apply it to other gravitational contexts, as well as to mathematically decompose

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<sup>372</sup> Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus*, 182.

<sup>373</sup> Colman, “Tarrying with Sexual Difference: Toward a Morphological Ontology of Trans Subjectivity,” 32–33.

<sup>374</sup> Wolfendale, “The Reformatting of Homo Sapiens,” 63.

and calculate solutions to terrestrial problems too complex to be held in the human imagination'.<sup>375</sup>

Returning to Grosz, if one necessarily 'comes from a man and a woman, and one remains a man or a woman, even in the case of gender-reassignment or the chemical and surgical transformation of one sex into the appearance of another', as Grosz and Murtagh contend, then sexual difference is necessarily pre-figured from the instance of one's individuation, even if, as Grosz writes '[s]exual difference has no one location, no one organ or condition'.<sup>376</sup> Grosz's statements on the inability to properly *change* one's sex into (the binary) other unconsciously implies that the categories denoting sexual difference (male/man, and female/woman in Grosz's account) *have location, organ, and conditions*, even if each singular sex does not have a singular location, organ, or condition. But if there is no one location, organ, or condition of sexual difference, then it is irresponsible to philosophise in such a way which precludes the impossibility of changing from one sex to another—or further, into an a-sexual being. Grosz, while claiming sexual difference is unlimited and unending, refuses the possibility of this aforementioned change either in the present or future. The assertion of sexual differences lack of location, organ, or condition allows for the unmooring of our thinking for present environmental limits which is lacking in Grosz and Murtagh's accounts when they are put under further scrutiny. This unmooring of our thought from present environmental limits allows us to pave the way for the hypothetical futures which Preciado sketches out in his writing.

### *Postface; or, How to End Beginnings*

The fourth chapter of Hegel's *Phenomenology*—'Self-Consciousness'—is one of the most important chapters, not only for the project of the *Phenomenology*, but for Hegel's reception in both analytic *and* continental philosophy. In the context of the *Phenomenology*, the movement from Section A—'Consciousness', containing chapters i through iii—to Section B—'Self-Consciousness'—entails a movement of the notions of subjectivity and personal-identity which presents important implications for anyone attempting to 'do' ontology after Hegel.

In moving from Consciousness to Self-Consciousness, the subject of the *Phenomenology* undergoes the transformation from an abstracted notion of 'the truth of consciousness' as something *other* than itself, to a notion of the truth of consciousness which is not abstracted from, but rather, confirmed by its own experience. In the first section of the Self-Consciousness chapter, Hegel writes:

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid., 63–64.

<sup>376</sup> Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 110.

‘The concept of the object is sublated in the actual object or the first immediate representation is sublated in experience, and, in the truth, certainty falls by the wayside. However, what has now emerged is something which did not happen in these previous relationships, namely, a certainty that is equal to its truth, for certainty, is, to itself, its object, and consciousness is, to itself, the true’.<sup>377</sup>

Hegel further states:

‘The I is the content of the relation and the relating itself’<sup>378</sup>. It is in confronting an other that the I is itself. At the same time, it reaches out over and beyond the other, which, for the I, is likewise only itself’.<sup>379</sup>

This transition from Consciousness to Self-Consciousness has the subject of the *Phenomenology* move from understanding itself as self-identical—that is, self-subsistent or self-sufficient—to understanding its (human) being as constituted by *other self-consciousnesses*, which function at the negation (and determination) of the subject.

In the section titled ‘Force and Understanding’, Hegel writes the following about the ‘self-identical’:

‘self-identical essence is therefore related only to itself; ‘to itself’ implies relationship to an ‘other’, and the relation-to-self is rather a self-sundering; or, in other words, that very self-identicalness is an inner difference’.<sup>380</sup>

Self-identity, then, is not self-identical—it is constituted by its encounter with ‘the other’, a being external to the subject. In moving to Self-Consciousness, the subject of the *Phenomenology* realizes its determination by the negativity of the other. Brassier, responding to Derrida’s Heideggerian critique of Hegel highlights that the aforementioned passage shows that:

‘Identity is constituted by a self-relating negativity that splits each pole of the relation into a pure opposite that is at once a pure identity. Presence as self-relating negativity is precisely the splitting that cannot be integrated into the present; it is the splitting of time that prevents the end from reinstating the origin’.<sup>381</sup>

This notion of self-splitting is important in the development of the *Phenomenology* as it is the subject coming to the realisation of its own ontological dependence—our subjectivity is not self-made, but is dependent upon not only the institutions we create, but the other subjects we encounter. Brassier writes that ‘the desire for independence [...] cannot be satisfied by any object of desire; if it did, independence would be

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<sup>377</sup> Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, 102.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid.

<sup>380</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 100.

<sup>381</sup> Brassier, “The Human,” 26.

dependent'.<sup>382</sup> Given the stubbornness of its previous desire for independence, the subject of the *Phenomenology* is presented with another self-consciousness which is ultimately in the same—or similar—situation as the subject. Hegel presents this meeting of self-consciousnesses in the tale of the Lord and Bondsman—or, also, the master and the slave. It should be noted—much to the dismay of Alexandre Kojève—the dialectic of the Lord and the Bondsman is not the be all and end all of self-consciousness' realisation. While this is the case, the 'Lord and Bondsman' section highlights the key notions which self-consciousness brings about, on Brassier's reading.

Brassier's reading of Hegel puts the notion of 'estrangement'—or, 'alienation', or, 'externalisation'—front and center. For Brassier, there needs to be a delicate balance when reading concepts such as Marx's 'genus-being'—*Gattungswesen*—so as to not reinscribe the revolutionary political and ontological possibilities, within a substantialist ontology—that is, making the possibility of transcendence into an 'unactualised potential' or an 'a-historical essence'.<sup>383</sup> On Brassier's reading, we are able to account for the transcending of current possibilities through Hegel's 'self-estranging sameness' to use Brassier's terms.<sup>384</sup> Brassier's project is framed with the aim to theorise his political goals—communism—without understanding this goal through notions of 'un-estranged' properties which can be freed. Even if one is to put aside, or disagree with Brassier's politics, his analysis of Hegel—as well as Marx—has important implications for how we understand ontological possibilities, and—to paraphrase Deleuze—what a body can do.

In refusing the notion of an unrealized ontological potential, Brassier is pushing back against readings of Hegel which understand him to be explicating a 'traditional [Aristotelian] articulation of essence and becoming'.<sup>385</sup> Brassier contends that the estrangement, or externalization, which occurs in self-consciousness, fundamentally undoes and shatters any Aristotelian—or, teleological—reading of Hegel. On the Aristotelian account, the potentiality of things is limited by their essence and the 'substantial form' they take.<sup>386</sup> Brassier writes

'Substantial form (e.g., rational animal) fixes in advance the limits of becoming, which is channeled through the furrows of generic division. But essence as self-estranging sameness subverts these divisions and dissolves the fixity of substantial form, thereby rendering contradictoriness constitutive of what is actual'.<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>383</sup> Brassier, "Strange Sameness," 100.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

Further, ‘for Hegel, the self-estrangement of essence deformalizes substance and the essential contradictoriness of the actual turns actualization into de-substantialisation’.<sup>388</sup> If the process of determination which occurs through self-estrangement, is indeed a form of desubstantialisation, Hegel stands there against the Aristotelians who take essence to be substance—and vice-versa.

Brassier does not simply jettison essence, though. On his account, we must understand essence as a retroactive creation: ‘Only what has become can be retrospectively considered essential’.<sup>389</sup> Essence still determines what is possible—one’s ontological limits—but this determinacy must be predicated with the understanding that through becoming, limits are *undone* and *re-established*.

While it may not appear so at first, this notion of limits being undone and re-established is present in the ‘Lord and Bondsman’ section of the *Phenomenology*. The realisation of self-consciousness—for Hegel—entails the sublation of ‘consciousness’ which ‘was posited in this alien essentiality which is natural’—that is, self-consciousness highlights the movement of the subject of the *Phenomenology* out of ‘biological life’ and ‘animal desire’. This is the most pronounced in the end of the ‘Lord and Bondsman’ section. Towards the end of this section, Hegel writes

‘[w]hile he [the master] is the power over this being, this being, however, is the power over the other, so that the master thus has within this syllogism the other as subordinate to him. The master likewise relates himself *to the thing mediately through the servant*. The servant, as self-consciousness itself, relates himself negatively to the thing and sublates the thing. However, at the same time the thing is for him self-sufficient, and, for that reason he cannot through his negating be over and done with it, cannot have eliminated it; or, the servant only *processes* it. On the other hand, to the master, the immediate relation *comes to be* through this mediation as the pure negation of the thing or as the consumption of the thing. [...] he leaves the aspect of its self-sufficiency in the care of the servant’.<sup>390</sup>

The servant—Bondsman—while at the beginning, may be understood as dependent upon the master—Lord—it comes to be that the supposed independence of the master is rather a dependence still to the servant. The servant, on the other hand—through engaging in what Hegel would call ‘universal formative activity’ moves on from natural existence—or, biological life—by ‘mastering death through work’ and thus ‘recognises its own absolute freedom as exerting mastery over the universal power, death, but also over life hemmed by death’.<sup>391</sup> In this process, we find that the servant has transcended ‘first nature’, which is characterized by blind necessity, and into what Hegel terms ‘second nature’. While still dependent—upon life, and the object it works upon—the servant is able to transcend its subordination to biological life and blind necessity—that is, the subordination of the subject to death. Brassier’s—and in turn, Hegel’s—account

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

<sup>390</sup> Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, 113.

<sup>391</sup> Brassier, “The Human,” 31.

can be characterized as understanding the servant to be independent as he has overcome the previous state wherein his life was determined by death, and by natural existence—first nature. This is what is crucial in Brassier’s reading of Hegel. Dependence upon a thing, is not, as some would put it, its engagement in one’s being. The servant *can* still die, but its existence—as self-consciousness—is not determined and defined by it in the primal way which death determines both natural existence and animal life. Animal life has no way to undo its subordination to death in the way Humans—and any other self-conscious being—has. For animal life, death is averted through the daily meeting of its ‘biological needs’. The bondsman continually overcomes death through mastery—and does so in many ways. Self-consciousness unfolds through time—that is, history—as ‘a recurring loop through which the absolute negativity un-determines whatever has become actually determinable’.<sup>392</sup> On my reading, Brassier’s reading of Hegel allows us to posit Preciado’s infinite possibilities of the human—and bodies more generally—not only unmooring our thought from the limits of the present, but also accounting for the change of what some may posit as static ‘ontological limits’

In his recent paper, ‘The Human’, Brassier explicates further his understanding of the human through reading Hegel—and in turn Marx. Brassier’s conceptualisation of the human is in response to Derrida’s statement in ‘The Ends of Man’ that ‘the name of man has always been inscribed in metaphysics’ between the ‘two ends’ of annulment and accomplishment; that is, Derrida’s position that the accomplishment of man is at the same time its annulment. Brassier argues that Derrida’s path of absolute presence from Hegel to Heidegger does not hold. He responds to Derrida’s argument by insisting that the absolute negativity which the human is imbued with defies any accusation of being a metaphysics of presence.<sup>393</sup> For Brassier, because absolute negativity undoes any ‘intrication of limit and purpose’ that the name ‘human’ may have created, the human then does not have a ‘proprietary relation to itself or being’ as Heidegger proposes.<sup>394</sup> This proprietary relation is exactly why the Heideggerian (though not Derrida) opposes the promethean project—they hold the promethean conflates a supposed epistemological limit with an ontological one.<sup>395</sup>

The human, on Brassier’s reading, following Hegel and Marx, is both determined and undetermined through its estrangement from itself. The ek-static quality of its being. In Hegel, we find this ekstatic quality in the transition from consciousness self-consciousness, wherein the subject realises its lack of self-identity through its confrontation with its own finitude—‘its own essential nature’. But a living being’s life is only limited by its finitude ‘so long as [its desire for independence] is tethered to the life of the organism’.<sup>396</sup> This is ultimately the position the Lord finds himself in in the Phenomenology. The Lord’s

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<sup>392</sup> Brassier, “Reflection: The Compulsion of the Human,” 332.

<sup>393</sup> Brassier, “The Human,” 32.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

<sup>395</sup> See Brassier, “Prometheanism and Its Critics.”

<sup>396</sup> Brassier, “The Human,” 30–31.

independence is rather a form of dependence upon the Bondsman, who's dependence is rather a form of independence—due to their engagement in 'universal formative activity'. To put it in a different frame, we find that the dependence of the Lord is much different to the dependence of the Bondsman. While the Bondsman is dependent, as all living creatures are, its 'dependence' is different to that of the Lord's. We can say that, in a sense, the Bondsman has overcome the realm of necessity, and entered the realm of freedom, whereas the Lord is within the realm of necessity. As of this, Brassier writes that

'Self-consciousness recognizes itself as the independence of absolute negativity; it recognizes its own absolute freedom as exerting mastery over the universal power, death, but also over the life hemmed in by death'.<sup>397</sup>

The determinations of the subject which are revealed in the logic of estrangement do not come in a pre-existing form, but arise from the process itself—the process of estrangement is what creates the 'undetermined determinability' of the human. This is what I believe Brassier seems to be getting at when he states that '[s]pirit is not mastery but mastery of mastery', it being 'not the power to dominate but to dominate domination [...] and thereby to abolish it'.<sup>398</sup> The process of estrangement through the event of self-consciousness opens up the human and undoes its bodily limits—allowing ourselves to push and mould said 'limits'.

While the Hegelian influence is important to Brassier, for him it falls a bit short in that negativity cannot be tied purely to self-consciousness. The work of both Marx and Freud are important for Brassier's project in that both Marx and Freud identify the power of the negative as also operating "'behind the back of' self-consciousness' through the capitalist social form and the libido, respectively. The relation between these two paradigms is not fleshed out at length in Brassier's paper, as of this, the following reflections will be short.

On the psychoanalytic account, we find that the notion of the drive undoes any consistency one could find within both nature and culture, and is not a residue or trace of them either: they are 'the disarticulation of the two'. Brassier quotes Mladen Dolar, who puts this position as follows:

'the drive, libido, is not a One, it is not a substance; it possesses the key quality of the drive by the very impossibility of being substantialized and totalised.... Or in other words, we don't have two separate, independent and opposed areas [nature and culture], neatly localised and delimited, which would come into conflict with [an] always unsatisfactory outcome.... Both nature and culture appear as non-all, not fully constituted, but held together by their impossible overlap [the drive]. We cannot simply oppose two massive totalities of nature and culture, for the Freudian notion of the drive can

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<sup>397</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.



be seen as the concept the aim of which is ultimately to de-totalize the two, to undermine this very opposition and its self-evidence'.<sup>399</sup>

Just like Hegel's account, the psychoanalytic account cannot, for Brassier, be taken as the be all and end all of our account. Brassier notes that within the psychoanalytic account the 'danger of ontologisation remains' through the possible 'ontologisation [...] of the drive as aboriginal bifurcation of culture and nature'.<sup>400</sup> On Brassier's reading, the psychoanalysis requires the supplement of Marx's account of historical materialism which shows the mediation of nature and culture. As Marx notes in the sixth thesis on Feuerbach, the essence of the human is not an abstract essence, but rather '[i]n its reality it is the ensemble of [...] social relations'.<sup>401</sup> Brassier concurs with Marx that the fundamental difference between human and non-human animals is one which is created—particularly through the historical forms in which we have reproduced our social existence. What is interesting about the unconscious compulsion of subjects by capitalism—its operation behind our backs—is that it is an 'estrangement of an estranging activity'—that is, social reproduction. The estrangement the capitalist social form creates is not an estrangement from a pre-existing essence—but rather an estrangement from the estrangement which, as we have noted above, undoes the limits of the human. In this sense, the capitalist social form imposes its own limits upon human subjects, just like the ideologies of homophobia and cissexism impose limits upon us in regard to gender and sexuality, as Hocquenghem and Preciado note. To posit the pre-existence of some form of human potentiality would simply just resubstantialise the human. Rather, in its domination of subjects, is an estrangement from the negative universality which arises through the process of estrangement through the reproduction of social existence.<sup>402</sup> Brassier has adopted this term—negative universality—from Simon Skempton who writes that

'[t]he very contentlessness of the subject makes it both genuinely universal and irreducibly singular at the same time. The subject is negative universality in that it evades its own particularisation in any determinate content. Such an evasion is also the basis of its irreducible singularity, as its particularisation would involve the attribution of generally applicable predicates. [...] The subject is the ex-position of substance that enables it to break free from the reified positivity of abstraction, whether particular or universal, and enter into a state of open and living relationality, a paradoxical unity of irreducible singularities, open and exposed to the singular otherness of each other'.<sup>403</sup>

This notion of negative universality encapsulates the Hegelian notion of the mediation, present in both Marx and psychoanalysis, wherein both subject and object take part in their constitution. This relationality—found in self-consciousness, the libido, and social reproduction—which estranges, undoes,

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<sup>399</sup> Dolar, "Of Drives and Culture," 76–78.

<sup>400</sup> Brassier, "Reflection: The Compulsion of the Human," 327.

<sup>401</sup> Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach."

<sup>402</sup> Brassier, "Reflection: The Compulsion of the Human," 330–31.

<sup>403</sup> Skempton, *Alienation After Derrida*, 72–73.

and reconstructs the subject, while operating through a compulsion which we do not recognise, is for Brassier ‘why the human is not only mutable but the source of a mutability that is *sui generis*’.<sup>404</sup> On Brassier’s account, if we are to put in the work to understand and recognise these unconscious forms of repetition, we will move—as humanity—from the position of the Lord to that of the Bondsman.

If we are to take the question of subjectivity and subject formation seriously, we must ask, what is the place of sexual difference in such a theory, if it has a place at all? Does it need a place? This will no doubt cause disagreement with some, but on my reading, what is at stake in the political and philosophical account of sexual difference is not sexual difference itself, but the limitation in regard to subject formation that has been imposed upon us. Sexual difference is merely the vector that this project takes up in Irigaray’s work, and those who are inspired by her. In Preciado’s work, the vector is the proliferation of bodily mutation and possibilities which, on my reading, sexual difference is simply one part among others. As I have argued above, the historical event of self-consciousness as presented in Hegel’s *Phenomenology* inaugurates a form of *sui generis* mutability which opens the floodgates for ontological change beyond simple notions of the plasticity of matter. Even though, throughout this final section, references to Preciado have been scarce, it should be clear that, given my account in the first two sections, Brassier’s account of the human can function, along with Xenofeminism, as the philosophical grounding for the production of what Preciado terms ‘somatic communism’—the democratisation of power down to a bodily level, allowing us to push experimentation to its extremes and negotiate the limits of our bodies and their undoing. While technology may need to catch up, the mutability of the human still remains.

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<sup>404</sup> Brassier, “Reflection: The Compulsion of the Human,” 332.

## *Concluding Remarks*

The arguments of the essays in this thesis can be understood as operating as moving from what could be termed as an account of the ‘ontic’, through the figures mediating the ‘ontic’ and ‘ontological’<sup>405</sup>, and finally to the ontological grounding of this project.

In the first chapter, we deal with Preciado’s account of Uranism and Counter-sexuality. On my reading, Uranism and Counter-sexuality operate as Preciado’s theorisation of the possibilities of sexuate difference and subjectivity. Uranism and Counter-sexuality propose the possibility of a future wherein each subject has the power—both ontologically, somatically, and politically—to push bodily experimentation to the edge, resulting in a society with as many sexuate and bodily differences as there are subjects—with the possibility of changing one’s sexuate and bodily differences if one pleases. Alongside Preciado’s account of Uranism and Counter-sexuality, I present two contemporary readings of psychoanalysis and sexuate difference. The first of these readings comes from Jamieson Webster. On my reading, Webster points to the possibility of uniting of Preciado’s project with that of psychoanalysis. In turn, given sexuate difference’s key role in psychoanalysis, if we believe that Preciado’s project and psychoanalysis are not *in themselves* at odds—but rather, Preciado’s project is at odds with psychoanalysis’ *history*—we are given the possibility that Preciado’s project can be understood as not at odds with sexuate difference *in itself*, but rather only at odds with certain accounts of sexuate difference. The second of the aforementioned readings is that of Oli Stephano. Stephano’s reading of sexuate difference is important, in my view, to reading Preciado, as Stephano grounds his account of sexuate difference with explicit reference to the work of Judith Butler—which Preciado’s work is heavily indebted to. As Stephano is able to produce an account of sexuate difference grounded in the work of Judith Butler, on my reading, this means that Preciado’s work is not necessarily at odds with the possibility of theorising sexuate difference. Through the second and third chapters I am working under these explicit assumptions.

In the second, we move to the figure of the anus which mediates the ontological malleability and Preciado’s political project of producing the political conditions for the flourishing of bodily mutation. I frame this in reference to Irigaray’s figure of the lips. On my reading, while Irigaray’s figure of the lips produces a reading of woman which is multiple, the lips may still disseminate meanings which restrict sexuate difference to a ‘cissexual imaginary’. On my reading, Preciado’s figure of the anus, through his reading of Hocquenghem, acts as a mediating figure which allows for the dissemination of a multitude of differences beyond that which Irigaray espouses, and beyond certain readings of Irigaray’s work. While

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<sup>405</sup> I would like to note that I do not view these terms as static, and they should be taken with a grain of salt.

Irigaray may be read in an expansive manner, we must be careful with the metaphors which we employ, as I find the anus a more apt figure of the multiplicity of sexuate difference than that of the lips.

In the third and final chapter, I provide an account of the human's ontological malleability which can function as the philosophical grounding of Preciado's project as outlined in the first and second chapters, and defend it against Mitchell Murtagh's account of transsexual difference which, on my reading, hypostatizes the difference of subjects, making the possibility of bodily change dependent upon the limits of our current conjuncture, and refuses to unmoor one's theorisation of the future from the environmental limits of the present. In particular, I argue that the philosophies of Xenofeminism and Ray Brassier allows us to understand the human as being fundamentally mutable. This is found particularly in Brassier's work which argues that the process of self-consciousness instates a mutability within the human which undoes previously 'determined' limits. I frame Brassier's philosophical, and Xenofeminism's political defense of human mutability through a critique of Murtagh's account of transsexual difference which, in my view, presents a fundamentally limiting understanding of sexuate difference and the role of somatic change in the determination and revision of sexuate subjectivity.

These three essays move with the underlying goal of sketching a philosophical account of both the political changes which must occur in order to do justice to the subjectivity and lived experiences of trans people, as well as the ontological-revisionary grounding which allows the infinite possibilities which trans-subjectivity embodies to exist. These political and ontological projects are, though, not simply limited to transgender or transsexual subjectivities, but rather trans-subjectivity in the expansive sense—the movement across all categories whether they be those of gender, sexuality, or species. It is for the proliferation of mutation in every and all form. To communise one's anus is to leave oneself open to losing oneself, to guide and be guided by the possibilities one may create or which may arise by accident. In order to do justice to the subjectivity of subjects, we must be open to the futures we create or discover, no matter their form.

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