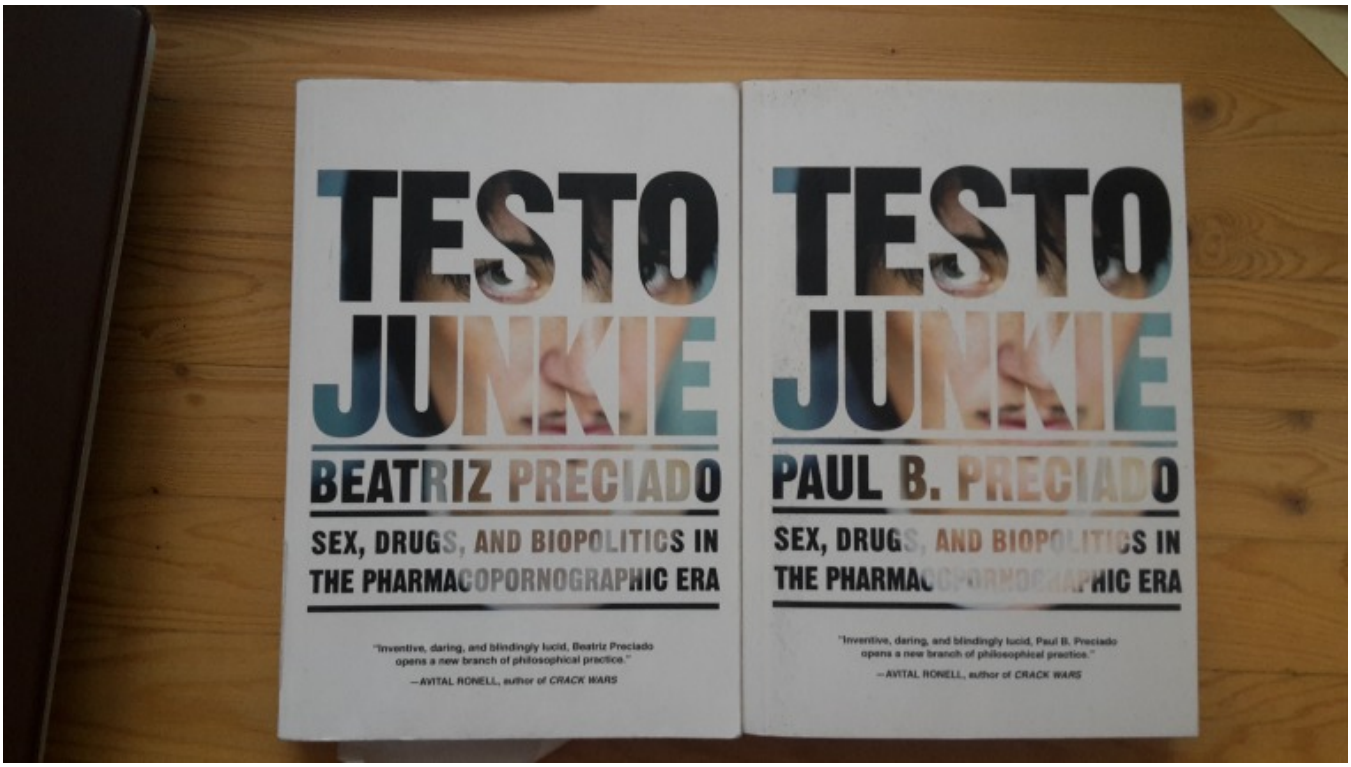
How Testo Junkie Transforms You

“An author who had taken testosterone as a drug in a philosophical self-experiment that she documented in a book - it shook me up so much that it wouldn't leave my mind." Michal B. Ron and Hannah M. Bruckmüller discuss naming, sexuality, fables, giving birth and giving death, in response to Paul B. Preciado’s *Testo Junkie*.

Essay / Michal B. Ron July 20, 2018

20161116_140602.jpg



[1]
The cover of *Testo Junkie* by Beatriz Preciado and the cover of *Testo Junkie* by Paul B. Preciado. Photo: Michal B. Ron

Dedicated to HMB and LMR

Introduction

I must have had the copy of Beatriz Preciado’s Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornograhic Era *[2]* (2013) forever, the one that I borrowed from the university library.1 I managed to find a Facebook message I wrote to the artist NI, from June 20th 2015, thanking her for telling me about it. What she had said shook me up so that it wouldn’t leave my mind – she told be about an author who had taken testosterone as a drug in a philosophical self-experimentation, which

she documented in a book. It had been a longer while until I actually read the book. It just happened to stand on the shelf next to the arbitrary empty desk I had chosen to sit at to write my dissertation. The French version caught me eye first; I took it in my hands and started reading, realizing that my fictive French would not do, and that the English version must be close by (the library I prefer to work in holds a collection of English translations of monographs, a basic necessity for us foreigners and a rarity in Berlin, where the language of choice is always German).

I found it and, all excited, borrowed it, and it has been in my possession ever since, after numerous loan renewals and re-loans. I have no intention of bringing it back to the library. Even now, when my dear friend, the artist OL, got me my own copy for my last birthday. The copies are not identical; the name Paul B. Preciado [3]now decorates the cover (2016).2 I need both copies. One was written by a woman and the other is ascribed to a man; one is borrowed, soon to become stolen, the other bought online and transported via mail delivery. In this text I wish to decipher what it is in this book that has shaken my existence to the core. I address this text to my dear colleague and sister MB [4]-follower, HMB, on the occasion of the first publication of *Testo Junkie* in German.3 To the German version only the name Paul is assigned.

HMB and I will embark on this journey together, I for a second time and she for the first. Two cis-women4 in heterosexual relationships, on a voyage of discovery of the pharmacopornographic era we all live in. Voicing the personal is crucial. Writing in the first person is essential. I am curious to find out what the form of an open letter would reveal.

Note on the Fourth Printing

In the note on the fourth printing of the book Preciado explains the name change to Paul, which appears on the book's cover: "as slaves, upon purchasing their freedom, would take new names, as the names of the villages of Palestine will change when they are once again uttered by those in exile."5 But where is Beatriz? The Beatriz I had read so closely and who revealed my world to me? Many villages in Palestine received new Zionist names and identities. How is the violence of changing the name from Beatriz to Paul any lesser? Preciado declares this as "another practice of displacement and resistance." For the author, "naming, here, is simply another fable, albeit a collective one. Now it's you who must grant me the right to wear this mask."6

How can we respond? A fable never allows a response. I learn that from Jean de la Fontaine in *Le Corbeau et le Renard* (The Raven and the Fox). Mister Raven never gets the opportunity to answer Mister Fox, who has tricked him into dropping the cheese in his beak by falsely flattering him on his charming voice. Mr. Preciado will not drop his mask. No matter what flattery we will use to address him, telling him how beautiful and essential we have found the voice of Ms. Preciado. "The name on the cover – which is simultaneously a trail, an erasure and a promise – has been altered. Understand that Paul absorbs and assumes all that was once BP."7

Yes, but something has changed. I wrote the introduction to this text before taking Paul's book in my hands. Reading the book's introduction made me return a second time to that note that I had read first with loving eyes and then with a betrayed heart. Because something crucial has changed. There is a loss that I now mourn. And just as I need to understand what has shaken me up so strongly in Beatriz's book, I now need to figure out what is so shocking to me in Paul's.

Chauveau_-_Fables_de_La_Fontaine_-_01-02.png **[5]**



[6]
François Chauveau, Illustration for *Fables choisies mises en vers par M. de la Fontaine*, Claude Barbin and Denys Thierry, Paris, 1668 (first edition) 1678-79 (second edition) 1694 (third edition).

* MBR: scholars writing on Broodthaers's *Le Corbeau et le Renard* tend to reproduce this image, even though the artist didn't.

RondpointCorbEtRenar iggy.jpg **[7]**



[8]
Serge Stephan, *Untitled (After M.B.)*, 2018
Courtesy of the artist

I just happened to read something today in the course of parallel reading: “every case of naming involves announcing a death to come in the surviving of a ghost, the longevity of a name that survives whoever carries that name” – Jacques Derrida writes when he deciphers the melancholy or sadness that accompanies being named – “this impossibility of reappropriating one’s own name.”8 This is exactly what Preciado has done – making a case of reappropriating one’s own name. But by doing that the name, to which I have been attached, as the haunted is attached to a ghost, did not survive. And I need ghosts. We need ghosts. Preciado begins the book by addressing a ghost, in the first chapter: “1. Your Death."

Beatriz Preciado: Pharmacopornographic counter-fictions [9]

In Beatriz’s lecture, which I saw online [9], Preciado explained that she would not complete the transition. “He, she or whatever,” as Preciado refers to herself on that stage, explaining that Michel Foucault shows how, historically, masculinity had come to be defined by “the power to give death, by the technics of death.” And this is one of the reasons she “is not transitioning to masculinity, even though my desire all my life was to be occupying that position.” She wants to have that power, of giving death, yes, but “at the same time, politically, I don’t want to have that power.”9 Back then she refused to assume either role. But her words anticipated how the change of the name into a man’s name would give death to the the ghost of a woman whose ghost gave life. Is there anything more final, more fatal than putting an end to the outlasting survival of a ghost? Could the ghost survive the change of name? When I search for “Preciado, Beatriz” in the library catalog I find Texto

Junkie [sic] under “Preciado, Paul B.” My heart is broken. Not because the person Beatriz now goes, writes, lives, and loves by the name Paul. I feel nothing but respect for that. But because a ghost I have loved is gone. It was violently taken away from me. For me it is *Testo Junkie* by Beatriz Preciado by Paul B. Preciado. At this moment, it becomes a first reading for me too. Am I a ghost junkie?

1. Your Death

But then again, in my new first reading of the book I recall the first first reading. Preciado’s autobiographical report stays as present and strong as it has been in the first reading. The “I” goes back in time, to the “I” writing the word “I.”10

And now, I, with no quotation marks, continue writing this piece after another while has passed by, and new metamorphoses have taken, and are taking, place. We are now in the beginning of 2018. I am pregnant, and due to give birth any day. I am again busy with names, from a different perspective – that of the giver, not the receiver, heiress, or ghost hunter. I have a new companion for the journey, while HMB, to whom I feel tied in bonds of sisterhood, is in NYC, curious about the name the girl I am expecting would possess. Let’s call her NA, just for now, to protect her privacy and to keep all possibilities open, before she leaves her solist space in the womb and joins us in our shared, named, and naming world.

Meanwhile, another book dropped into my hands: *The Argonauts* by Maggie Nelson [10] (2015).11 Similarly to *Testo Junkie*, it too starts with an anal scene involving dildos. “A stack of cocks” is the term MN applies, whereas PBP lists “a harness with a realistic rubber dildo (9½ x 1½ in.), a realistic black silicone dildo (9½ x 2½ in.), a black ergonomic one (5½ x ¾ in.) […]”.12 Like *Testo Junkie*, *The Argonauts*, too, deals with metamorphoses. *Testo Junkie* follows the metamorphoses that the self-application of testosterone gel inflicts on identity, and the historical-political-sociological-endocrinological metamorphoses of our society, which led to the pharmapornographic era we live in. *The Argonauts* is a more personal and associative memoire, woven with short quotations of feminist thinking, that MN has written in relation to her pregnancy. I embrace it with gratitude in my own pregnancy-inflicted mind, which tends to be less focused and slightly distracted. MN tracks questions of the body, creating life, inflicting death, sexuality, motherhood, step-parenthood, adoption, and love. The two books are complimentary. PBP pursues the right of self-dozing with the hormone and of self-leading the auto-protocol – a role physicians and psychiaters usually take as they write the medical protocol on behalf of their patients.13 MN conceived by a sperm donation from a friend while in a loving relationship with the artist HD. HD went through the medical procedure of sex change. He has a son, which he has borne and given birth to in the time that preceded the transition.

20180212_164030-1.jpg **[11]**



H., a pregnant woman's comfort prosthesis. Photo: Michal B. Ron

PBP and MN offer us two paths in the rejection of the bond between sexual relations and reproduction: PBP rejects the uterus and the feminine role of giving life, in the face of a narcissistic proposal from her friend the gay writer GD, to conceive a child together as a subversive use of his sperm and her eggs and uterus, the ultimate combination of the two of them . GD is now dead. After some effort, MN gets pregnant from another man's sperm and brings a child, named I, into the world, together with her husband HD.

MN's book touched me. Being pregnant too, I could easily identify with her and her sensibilities. Yet, what has shaken me so in PBP's book is the fact that even though the world he describes is foreign to me – the practices of his lesbian (is it still considered lesbian?) love affair with VD while dosing T and drifting further away from biological femininity, which I am now experiencing at full power – the conditions he analyses are those under which I find myself and all of us operating, hetero or queer, cis-men and women and trans and each and every body.

I was subjected to these conditions from the first time I took the pill, with the intention of having heterosexual relations that should not have led to conception. And even before, wishing to have sex with no intentions of conceiving in the first place – rather the wish to fulfill my "potentia gaudendi," as PBP terms the orgasmatic potential, the working biopower that our current capitalist regime exploits. What difference does it make then, he asks, whether I desired to fuck myself, men, women, cyborgs, or who- or whatever? The pharmacopornographic era is the time in which sex is separated from procreation, and ejaculation as such is what counts. It is the time of the pill and of Viagra, and other synthetic drugs and hormones, from Ritalin to testosterone. PBP even explains the heterosexual relationship I am having as a way for me to obtain some testosterone from my partner – the hormone is transmittable through skin, by physical touch, warns the testogel package. My love, my lover, father of my future child, is my testosterone supplier, my low-tech, bio, hormone regulator. I treat him ever more tenderly since I learned that.[14]

Benno Premsela Lecture 2017 by Paul B. Preciado [13]

2. The Pharmacopornographic Era

Testo Junkie continues as a historical-theoretical investigation. From chapter to chapter Preciado jumps back and forth from the personal account, in which all protagonists appear in initials only, to a meticulous survey referring to other thinkers in many footnotes. One may view the autobiographical voice as a feminist gesture, which prioritizes the particular experience over a fictive general objectivism. But, as HMB reminded me, in the introduction Preciado claims otherwise – it is not his unique emotions that interest him here. One might also recall the legacy of autobiographical confessions, of thinkers such as René Descartes, to name one example, who questioned the possibility of knowing truth in order to establish knowledge. He took himself through an experimental philosophical journey of putting everything in doubt, until he famously realized that he "thinks, therefore, he is".[15] It is a principle Preciado later terms the auto-guinea pig – experimenting on the self, like Sigmund Freud had done with cocaine, and Walter Benjamin with hashish.

In contrast to this principle, Preciado reveals the outsourcing of endocrinological experimentations on marginalized bodies, such as animals in the lab, and racialized people under colonial regimes. Preciado follows the footsteps of Foucault in an excavation, an archeology that exposes the foundations on which we find ourselves standing today, or perhaps laying, in ever more postures: "a biomolecular (pharmaco) and semiotic-technical (pornographical) government of sexual subjectivity."[16] We live in an industrialized promotion of erection and sexual response through porn and its facilitation through drugs, two feedback systems that rely on each other and derive double profit from one another.

Testo Junkie is often labeled as queer theory. But what this book makes so clear is that the differentiations between nature and culture, queer and straight, have no validity beyond their political abuse. In the pharmacopornographic era we all are queer. The differentiation of body and soul gets more complex here. After hacking gender and birth, the next target seems to be hacking death. Beatriz is gone. Long live Paul?

Postpartum p.s.: the comfort protesis Heinrich eventually transformed. Manifesting its maternal sides, Heinrich became Hendrikje.

IMG-20180308-WA0006.jpg **[14]**



[15]
H., a nursing mother's comfort protesis. Photo: Michal B. Ron

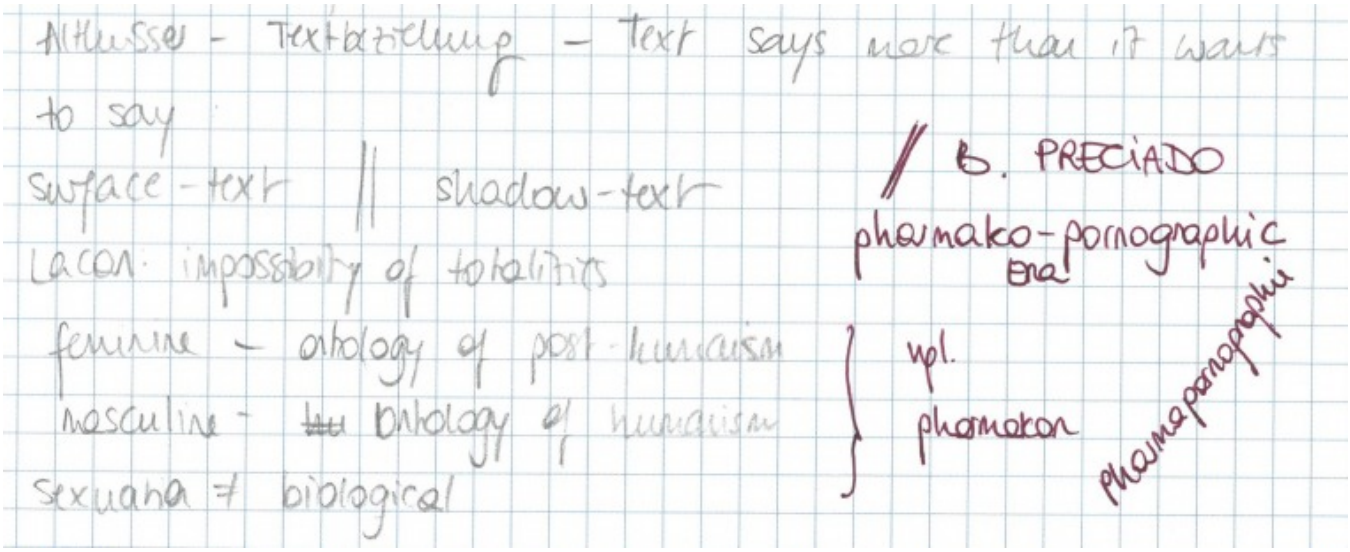
The P is bigger than the B

A response by Hannah M. Bruckmüller

Surprisingly - and although this is my first time with *Testo Junkie* - this conversation takes me back even more years than your first encounter with Preciado, Michal. In 2013, Elisabeth von Samsonow17 discussed the “pharmacopornographic era” in one of her colloquia: a term recently coined by a Spanish writer, a scholar of Foucault, Derrida and Butler. I remember how difficult it was to just write down this word. On behalf of my classical art-historical vocabulary this genderpolitical terminology seemed to be alien, but intriguing and urgently fascinating at the same time. What was going on here? Deciding that I’d have to come back, or rather go there, I quickly took a note: “pharmacopornographic era.” I clearly remember the image of the word, looking somehow weird in my handwriting. Phar-ma-co-por-no-gra-phic. Pharma-co-porno-graphic. Splitting this word into its pieces was only a first step almost five years ago. I am a slow thinker, a slow reader and a slow

learner: 2018, I am still trying to understand what *is going on here*. And there is even more going on meanwhile: Long live Paul?, asks Michal. Beatriz is gone, she says. An echo recalls: ding dong, the witch is dead. “Is the author dead?”, I may ask in response.

Note_Hannah.jpg **[16]**



[17]
Testo note. Photo: Hannah M. Bruckmüller

Let me share some thoughts, notes, comments, or rather: interjections.
About learning the lesson that Beatriz is now Paul, first of all a question: What is “simply another fable,” as Preciado puts it?18 From Avital Ronell I learn that for Derrida the fable is a true fiction.19 From Marcel Broodthaers I learn that you learn from a fable, that you know it by heart and you even recognize it when you are only provided with some words, chained *lettres imprimées* lacking a narrative thread. Jean de la Fontaine tells the fable of Le Corbeau et le Renard [18]: the raven, the fox, the master. Broodthaers’s conclusion: the D is bigger than the T. But back to P: whose fable-lesson are we to learn here? Who is the author of the fable when it comes to the question of *naming* somebody, something, somewhere?

“You must” and “understand” his, her, *this* re-naming: Paul is using an imperative, a firm and very certain one, when he teaches his readers the lesson of his transformation. There is indeed no space to react, least of all to question. This is a finding, and you are put into your place. A place you are allocated to, by an author who claims to have a right to choose for herself, or later himself, while not granting this choice to her and his readers. I can feel a certain aggressiveness that I have re-encountered throughout the whole book. Preciado uses a rhetoric of rough, rude, and harsh words especially in the autobiographical passages of the book. This was something that struck me, that paused my reading and raised a question: why is Preciado in such a constant need of violence when telling her, or his, story?

Anyhow, I was wondering if this violent tone might become even more aggressive when being connected with a male name. Can you provide an answer for me here, Michal?

As a first-time reader, I stumbled over one particular sentence in the introduction: “Ich untersuche nicht, was an ihnen [meinen Gefühlen] individuell ist, sondern was an ihnen äußerlich ist, was sie durchquert und was nicht mir gehört.”20 This proclamation immediately caught my interest: Why is Preciado exactly examining what does not belong to Preciado? Wouldn’t you expect that someone,

who is taking Testosterone for a *test-drive*21, is most of all interested in himself, in herself, in all that which contains and forms this mysterious self? This is a tracing and tracking, a search and quest for what is external to our feelings: what comes from the outside and crosses them, what challenges their borders. The focus is on the exterior - that, which we are not able to possess.

This raises two trains of thought:

First of all, it is stunning that in times in which nearly all of us and everything is declared by private property, someone claims to be interested in what we do not possess. This is not about possession, it is about dis-possession, about a lack of possession. Will this book take us for a ride in the lands of propertylessness?

Secondly, and this is my response to you, MBR, our self-proclaimed ghost junkie, the name is something crucial when we talk about possession. Your name is not in your possession, but at the same time, you are taking possession of the name. There's nothing individual about it, and yet, it is fundamentally individual. You name it. We have to be careful with changing our names: It seems to be dangerous. The ghost author possesses and is possessed by a name. She and he is name-remote controlled.

Reacting, trying to answer or rather to catch your thoughts right after the three letters of my initials, and reading your sentence on calling NA NA to protect her privacy, makes me wonder: what do initials provide? Which secrets are these letters keeping?

Certainly, they spread the atmosphere of a professional intimacy, a specific kind of protection shield, something that lingers in the realm of universality, of generality and anonymity. So many intellectuals, mysteriously, add a third letter to their names. As if the gravity of a third initial proves the gravity of your thoughts.22 Throughout the book, Paul, or Beatriz, is protecting his friends, her friends, by only calling them by their initials. And Preciado is not the only one to use this strategy. It's a quite familiar call. Recently I encountered this game of hide-and-seek in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter*.23 In his story, the letter D hides an individual's name - Minister D - while C. Auguste Dupin, who works on solving the case of the "purloined letter", is revealed by his full name. Dupin's name even includes one of these intellectually heavily loaded third initials, a mysterious C. But the reader is denied learning the full name of the Minister, who is the accused thief of the "purloined letter". He stays an institutional persona, representing a position instead of an individual, private person. Does his D protect him, or rather underpin his guilt? We, the readers, might fill the gap of Minister D - or keep it an absence, meandering between the moral instances of innocence and guilt. But then, after a few pages, Poe starts to work with the D. He asks, plays and claims to "D-cipher".24 He is triggering, extending, questioning the capability of hiding a person behind a single letter, or two or three. I have read Poe's *The Purloined Letter* in preparation for a lecture by Avital Ronell. One week after talking about Poe, she was discussing Preciado, using BP as a substitute for him, for her: for the author. BP. Opening Ronell's *Telephone Book*25 to answer this call, I am setting out to ask: whom do I call, when I call you by your initials?

Our generation has many shortcuts to offer. Paul B. keeps Beatriz as a shortcut, as another initial. He does not change his name, but shortens her name and extends it to his name. One could probably call this transgender, transforming, ftm or mtf.

- 1. Beatriz Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornografic Era*, trans. Bruce Benderson (New York: The Feminist Press, 2013).
- 2. Paul B. Preciado,*Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornografic Era*, trans. Bruce Benderson, 4th ed. (New York: The Feminist Press, 2016).
- 3. Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drogen und Biopolitik in der Ära der Pharmacopornographie*, trans. Stephan Geene (Berlin: b-books Verlag, 2016).
- 4. Cisgender defines the correlation between the gender a person is labeled with at birth and the gender that person identifies with. About the discriminatory practice of naming a gender at birth, watch Preciado in conversation with Terre Thaemlitz. Against being identified with the genitals watch Beatriz Preciado fighting the binary [19].
- 5. Preciado (2016), note on the fourth printing.

- 6. *Ibid*.
- 7. *Ibid*.
- 8. Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 20.
- 9. Beatriz Preciado, “Pharmacopornographic counter-fictions.” https://vimeo.com/95171189 [9]
- 10. The “I”, too, is not individual, and nevertheless fundamentally individual. Everyone says “I,” yet, I write “I” to address myself only. Hegel celebrates this generality of language through the “I” in the twentieth paragraph of his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830). For an analysis of Hegel see Paul de Man, "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's 'Aesthetics'," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (Summer 1982): 761-75.
- 11. Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts* (London: Melville House UK, 2015).
- 12. My own prosthesis now is the nursing pillow, an odd object that occupies my side of the bed as a third entity in its bulky presence. I named it H.
- 13. See Preciado’s Benno Premsela lecture 2017 [20]
- 14. The slogan “hugs before drugs” comes to mind. I read it in a book for the preparation for giving birth, which is also quite sensational, but in an opposite direction: Marie F. Mongan, *Hypnobirthing The Mongan Method: A Natural Approach to a Safe, Easier, more Comfortable Birthing* (Health Communications, 2009).
- 15. René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy* [21], translated by Donald E. Cress, Indianapolis/ Cambridge: Hackett, 1998 (1637, 1641).
- 16. Preciado, 33-4. Foucault crossed the theoretical borders of philosophical writing when he expanded his practice to historical and politico-sociological research. He introduced the term “Biopower” – standing for the administration of citizens’ lives, which historically replaced the threat of death as means of sovereign control.
- 17. Cf. Elisabeth von Samsonow, *Anti-Elektra. Totemismus und Schizogamie* (Zürich: Diaphanes 2007).
- 18. Preciado (2016), note on the fourth printing.
- 19. Avital Ronell, *Die Fabel von der Medientechnik: Unter meiner Aufsicht*, in: Till A. Heilmann/Anne von der Heiden/Anna Tuschling (eds.): *medias in res. Medienkulturwissenschaftliche Positionen* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag 2011), p. 207.
- 20. In the English translation: “I’m not interested in my emotions inso-much as their being mine, belonging only, uniquely, to me.” Preciado (2016), 11.
- 21. Cf. Avital Ronell, *The Test Drive* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2007).
- 22. This finding makes me want to remove my recently uncovered third, which I inherited accidently and rather almost only use when writing texts with M.
- 23. John P. Muller/William J. Richardson (eds.), *The Purloined Poe*. Lacan, Derrida & Psychoanalytic Reading (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 6, 8.
- 24. *Ibid*, p. 21.
- 25. Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).

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