

In Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz's film *Toxic* (2012), a punk figure in glitter and a drag queen move around a studiolike space with violet curtains, and heaps of glitter and poisonous potted plants on the floor. Projected behind the two characters are images of people wearing peculiar masks known through various protest movements, and borrowing poses from mugshots and anthropological photography. A number of toxic substances are mentioned by the characters – among them heroin, ecstasy, mushrooms, radioactivity and AndroGel® – which remind the viewer that while toxins can poison you, they can also cure you and improve your quality of life. This type of double-sidedness is reemphasised by the drag queen, quoting Jean Genet in a 1980s interview: to be asked questions in front of a film camera can be as violent as a police interrogation. In short, an interview is not necessarily 'un-poisonous', however harmless it might appear.

The first time I saw the film I had a strong feeling that it said something about the future. It is a highly staged scenario in which the past is recreated for a future use and new desires take shape. Amid the glitter, curtains, camouflage patterns and impressive wigs, a form of playful opacity makes itself felt among characters who are deliberately difficult to categorise. Even the scale is tricky to determine: one plant looks like a tree, another one like it was meant for a windowsill, while some of the projected photographs serve to oversize the people in front of them. Like several other of Boudry/Lorenz's recent film installations, this one steps in and out of suppressed or illegible moments, staging the actions of individuals and groups living in defiance of normality, the law and economics. The performances are produced for the camera, as if in an intimate safehouse – sometimes looking like a doll's house – making use of a dense net of references to experimental film, the history of photography and underground (drag) performance.

Intimate relations, as well as times ahead, are at the heart of Beatriz Preciado's *Testo Junkie* (2008) too. The book starts when a friend dies. Preciado (who has now transitioned and is known as Paul B. Preciado) then cross-dresses into the deceased comrade and begins her series of rendezvous with Testogel, synthetic testosterone, as if to bring the friend back to life. The purpose of taking the hormone is not to become a man but to test chemically induced sensations, a ritual moving far beyond established categories of sex, gender and objects. The encounters with Testogel involve the cutting of hair, shaving, making moustaches from the just-cut hair, donning dildos, looking into mirrors and recording the whole procedure for online sharing. At the heart of this performance,

ORGASMIC POTENTIAL

or

The future glimpsed in an art video

in which

drag queens, glitter punks and SYNTHETIC TESTOSTERONE contaminate the molecular basis of sexual difference, leading to the EVOLUTIONARY METAMORPHOSIS of contemporary society

by

Maria Lind



Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz, *Toxic*, 2012, film installation, vitrine with 15 photographs, theatre spots, curtain and Super 16mm film, 13 min. Courtesy the artists

beautifully described in great detail, lies a desire for transformation. Even a metamorphosis of life in contemporary society.

This is where both Boudry/Lorenz and Preciado tell us something about a fundamental shift in biopolitics and the nature and economy of desire, about what more of the future will be like. But also what making theory can be, far beyond academicised routine. Preciado then takes the reader on a 'somatopolitical' journey through the world economy, where she claims that a new type of government of the living has emerged in the period after the Second World War, through the forceful interaction between advanced capitalism, global media and biotechnology. S/he labels this new type of government 'the pharmacopornographic regime'. The emergence of terms such as 'transsexualism' (1954) and 'gender' (which Preciado suggests appeared in its current usage in 1957), changes in economic and governmental regulations of pornography and prostitution in the Western world and the development of synthetic molecules for commercial use paved the way for this 'sex-gender industrial complex'. The Pill and *Playboy* are early and widely disseminated components of this material-discursive apparatus of bodily production that includes feedback loops. Viagra and Prozac are more recent examples.

All of which is to say that, today, psychotropic techniques and biomolecular and multimedia protocols affect subjectivity in hitherto unseen ways. Not only is this influencing millions of individuals in their most intimate lives, but also sexuality and its semio-technical derivations are the main resource of post-Fordist capitalism. It is a new model of production: the control, creation and intensification of narco-sexual effects. If work is the central concept in classical economy, then 'potentia gaudendi' as formulated by Preciado, or orgasmic force, is the equivalent in the pharmacopornographic regime. Potentia gaudendi is the strength of a body's excitation, its own extension in space and time. It is an event, relation, practice and evolutionary process; it is essentially impermanent and malleable. Potentia gaudendi depends on 'techno-bodies', half foetuses and half zombies, individual bodies as extensions of global communication technologies, oscillating between excitation and frustration. It is the planetary management of 'naked technolife' through virtual audio-visual connections.

Toxic is part of the exhibition Loving, Repeating by Boudry/Lorenz at Kunsthalle Wien, guest-curated by Maria Lind as part of the Vienna Biennale, on show through 4 October