After being arrested in 1952 for public indecency and sexual perversion, Alan Turing was sentenced to estrogen injections that the Hollywood film *Imitation Game* (Tyldum 2014) portrays as destroying his manhood as well as his mind. Homosexuality was coincident with Turing’s greatness, *The Imitation Game* insists, but endogenous hormones were intrinsic to his brilliance.¹ Yet the film also offers a glimpse into the larger political machinery in which Turing operated, a system that new queer studies scholarship on biopower helps illuminate. This broader frame renders Turing a figure unwittingly located at the nexus of three major vectors of Foucauldian biopower: the emergence of the homosexual as a medical-juridical subject, the administration of the population through the calculation of risk, and

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¹ GLQ 22:4
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the circulation of hormones as tactics of securitization. Turing had helped devise both a foolproof method of decoding Nazi communiqués and a systematic approach to choosing when to redirect targeted Allied missions away from the impending attack. There could not be a starker image of biopolitics: the rational computation of risk that sacrificed the majority of Allied sailors for the benefit of the war effort as a whole, which the film’s most poetic line extols as Turing’s “blood-soaked calculus.” Less than a decade later, however, Turing became a participant in another key development in biopower—the invention of medicalized gender—though this time he figured among the condemned. Midcentury medical and pharmacological techniques, Paul B. Preciado argues, led to the rise of the biomedical subjectivity “gender” as well as the broad circulation of hormones among the population: estrogen was soon to become the most widely marketed pharmaceutical molecule in history. Turing himself chose one year of estrogen treatment, also known as “chemical castration,” as an alternative to jail time, and although he complained of the resultant gynecomastia, he continued his work apace (Copeland 2014). Turing was thus not only the victim of the hormonal treatment of homosexuality but also a coerced participant in the rise of medicalized gender.

The books reviewed here, Preciado’s *Testo Junkie*, Kyla Wazana Tompkins’s *Racial Indigestion*, and Rachel C. Lee’s *Exquisite Corpse*, signal a significant turn in biopolitical theory. In this scholarship we can see the emergence of a third biopolitical entity, one that plays a key role in Turing’s story. We might call the entity materializing in recent queer-feminist work “force.” Force materializes within and alongside the two social formations Michel Foucault named: the individual and the population. The individual is the product of disciplinary personhood, of the orchestration of social space to manage the individual organism, while the population is understood to be a biological phenomenon in its own right, characterized by rates of birth, death, illness, and economic productivity that become the very tactics of its administration. Force comprises affects, molecules, morsels, organs, microbes, animacies, tissues, cells, hormones, energies, textures, apertures, calories, pheromones, stimulations, and other particles and intensities that circulate throughout the individual, population, and milieu. Force exists adjacent to and within the administrative vectors of the individual and the population, circulating throughout a milieu independently, accumulating within and as persons, and forming links among matter that forge bodies and populations. Force helps turn a space into a milieu, an environment in which species and objects affect one another, even at a distance. Force aggregates as gender and racial difference, through the extraction and traffic in particles and vitalities that flow in and out of individual bodies and national populations, such as the increased estrogen streaming through Turing’s
Across these three books, regulating, marketizing, and optimizing the flow of force emerges as a key function of biopower.

Among these three texts, Lee, a literary scholar, is the most direct in proposing a third vector of biopolitical administration and pointing to its intellectual yield. Her impressively multidisciplinary reading of Asian Americanist cultural production and feminist science studies tracks what she calls “the tripartite scales of biosociality—the scale of the person, the scale of the microbe, and the scale of the population” (30). She does so to interrogate the meaning of racial embodiment in the contemporary bioeconomy. The Exquisite Corpse explores how the scale of the microbe affects preexisting notions of race rooted in epidermal difference. Contemporary capitalism, for Nikolas Rose and others, depends partly on fragmenting personhood into marketable tissues, cells, and microbes distributed throughout discrete times and spaces, and as such, scholars must attend to the subindividual circuits of biological material. Building on this work, Lee asks: can critical race studies profitably attend to the level of power that circulates below the level of the human, which fragments the biological, a circuit that may or may not thereby destabilize the notion of racial difference itself?

The broad circulation of body parts, for Lee, displaces traditional models of both physiological racial difference and social construction theory. Lee posits that ideas of race as essential bodily divergence, and the correspondingly strict social-constructionist approaches dominant in Asian American studies, which assiduously avoid any aspect of identity correlated to biological existence (conceived as brute and limiting matter), have lost their explanatory purchase. She emphasizes the need for new analyses of race that see “biological personhood not as fixed or singular but as multiform and distributed” (15). Asian American literature and performance undertake this project, she argues, although its critics tend to elide these contributions. For instance, in Cheng-Chieh Yu’s dance piece My Father’s Teeth in My Mother’s Mouth, Lee sees Yu’s staging of orthodontia as suggesting the bodily regimes of biopolitics, including both the movement of labor across borders and mandates to health that demand the rearrangement of parts within the body. Throughout, Lee is careful to insist that the disintegration of the body does not usher in a postracial epoch. More likely, the fragmented body “creates micro-scale risk factors as the new markers of difference” as well as associates these factors with “anatomical markers read off the body’s surface,” thereby updating, rather than displacing, older frameworks of race and gender (57). This is a strong argument, particularly because the racialized body has long been understood to be fragmented and consumable.

Lee’s emphasis on the circuits of bodily tissues at the level of the cell and
microbe enables an expanded notion of queer reproduction and kinship. Bringing the work of feminist science studies scholars such as Myra Hird into critical race theory, Lee conceives of reproduction as the augmentation of the quantity of cells, rather than the union of male and female gametes. This enables Lee to explore how the traffic in microbes and tissue cultures lies at the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality. She identifies the “zoé-fication” of human lives as “a race or ‘species-being’ apart,” a biopolitical tactic of carving up the population into the expendable bare life of animals or microbes and those whose lives this raw biological material will be used to enhance (48). She challenges this function of modern biotechnology by thinking with Yu’s dance performances, Margaret Cho’s comedy, Amitav Ghosh’s novel *The Calcutta Chromosome*, and the theater artist Denise Uyehara, all of whom embrace the very instability of modern personhood. For these artists, Lee proposes, the entanglement of human parts and lives with other forms of life on earth works as a way to challenge traditional humanism, instead envisioning the human as “an ecology of networked plant-machine-protocist-and-animal symbionts” (49). The book draws on a wide range of theoretical, ontological, and political fields, including disability studies, Lynn Margulis’s microbiology, Elizabeth Wilson’s “gut feminism,” histories of reproductive control, pluripotent stem cells, sentimentalism, bioethics, and affect theory. The result is more suggestive than synthetic, as the book’s organization is overburdened by the weight of its multiple interpretive frames; still, Lee’s study opens numerous avenues for other scholars to build on. For Lee, identifying the subindividual level of biopower opens up new pathways for resistance that transform bodily disintegration into innovative associations.

Read alongside *Testo Junkie* and *Racial Indigestion*, the contemporary market in tissue cultures, organs, and other “human fragments” on which Lee focuses constitutes less a sea change in practices of embodiment than the full flowering of a much longer tradition. Bringing Foucauldian biopower up to the conditions of the present, Preciado proposes a new regime within Western sexuality that overlaps and supersedes the disciplinary biopower characteristic of the nineteenth century: pharmacopornographic power. In *Testo Junkie*, contemporary biopower works through the “miniaturization” of control that materializes the body itself via the flow of hormones, neurotransmitters, silicone, and other pharmaceutical molecules (79). The products of “a new kind of hot, psychotropic, punk capitalism” take shape as “soft, featherweight, viscous, gelatinous technologies that can be injected, inhaled—‘incorporated,’” Preciado writes (33, 77). Pharmacopornographic power emerged as the result of the postwar convergence of the chemical revolution, the medical invention of gender, the sexual revolution, and the rise of global media.
The principal engine of the contemporary economy is not finance and other immaterial and “chaste” labor, as other critics of neoliberalism have proposed, but the body’s capacity for excitement, its “*potentia gaudendii* or ‘orgasmic force’” (70, 41). Capitalism depends on extracting the body’s erotic force to produce corporate profits, new generations, and individual subjectivity—not only as consumers, but as genders.

Whereas for Lee, the micro-bioeconomy poses central questions about the meaning of race and racialized gender, for Preciado, the excitations circulating throughout the economy produce the gendered and sexualized body. Drawing on the work of Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Judith Butler, and Gayle Rubin, Preciado describes how the “sex-gender” model emerged in the mid-twentieth century and replaced the two-sex model of the disciplinary era. Sex-gender materialized within the new role of pornography in popular culture, the separation of heterosexuality and reproduction enabled by the pill, the invention of gender “as clinical tool,” and the sciences of endocrinology, sexology, and psychology (81). While decades of feminist theorists have embraced the notion of gender as a strategy for illuminating how sexual difference comes to signify within social structures, Preciado insists that “gender is a biotech industrial artifact,” not a category of liberation, and renames gender as “techno-gender” (101). He does so through tracing the use of the term *gender* in a behavioral, rather than strictly linguistic, sense, back to its origins in the lab of John Money and the experiments leading to the birth control pill. This is a major contribution to feminist theory, which has been saddled with a curious unwillingness to historicize one of its principal terms, leaving it largely reliant on an outdated biology versus culture dyad. In *Testo Junkie*, exogenous estrogen molecules circulate throughout most bodies, not only for deliberate (or unwilling, as in Turing’s case) gender transition, but for menstrual regulation and birth control (229). Preciado thus names cisfemininity a form of “biodrag,” a gendered subjectivity produced by the flow of pharmaceutical molecules and media images (191).

Preciado intersperses his sweeping, synthetic theory of contemporary power, capital, sex, and subjectivity with intimate autobiographical chapters detailing his own experiment with testosterone and the steamy beginnings of his relationship with the French writer Virginie Despentes. The cumulative effect is performative manifesto, rather than traditional academic theory—we witness the molecular flow of hormones and secretions materialize as his gendered self and his sexuality. It is an impressive feat, if an often over-the-top paean to his erotic prowess. Yet given the book’s provocative ambition—particularly its penchant for coining new terms—its unwillingness to conceptualize racial difference as a fun-
damental strategy of biopower reads less as a matter of manageable scope and more as a refusal to engage with some of the most important work on biopolitics, and feminism, today. Rather than engage racialization directly as a key tactic of population management, one that structures the operation of gender and sexuality and vice versa, Preciado conceptualizes race as a discrete add-on, a factor that further victimizes some in the larger scheme he calls the “pornification of work,” or the harnessing of “orgasmic force” by capital (296). At its worst, the text goes so far as to echo Octavio Paz’s infamous characterization of Mexicans as “la chingada,” portraying the peoples of the global south as “global anuses,” made supine by sexualized capitalism (303). This narrowing of biopower to the fundamental question of gender, at the exclusion of race as a structuring technology of gender itself, also limits Preciado’s chosen resistance to pharmacopornpower—bodily modification, especially drag. If bodily modification is a privileged technique of resistance, does this extend to racialized subjectivity as well, and if so, what would that look like?

Preciado writes that “in the pharmacopornographic era, the body swallows power,” a mode of bodily incorporation he sees as markedly different from the external architectures of nineteenth-century biopower that surrounded the individual (207). In contrast, for Tompkins, an Americanist cultural studies scholar, biopower has long depended on bodies that ingest power. Tompkins tracks the circulation of morsels of food and racialized bodies figured as food to argue that eating is itself a biopolitical practice of long standing. She illuminates “eating as a trope and technology of racial formation” through studies of nineteenth-century material culture, including novels, poetry, cookbooks, and trade cards (2). As Tompkins shows, in the nineteenth century the body came to be understood to be a porous entity with several key apertures through which matter flows in and out; eating became a biopolitical practice regulating the individual’s relationship with the environment beyond its flesh. The literary, reform, and advertising texts that she considers position the mouth as the door to the body, a body that metonymizes both the domestic household and the larger nation. She uses scholarship on biopower (Foucault’s History of Sexuality, the work of Ann Laura Stoler), affect, and performance studies to analyze racial formation as a relational process that consolidates in the interactions of material objects, individuals, and the nation. Tompkins’s framing of what “counts” as food and politics emerges in the book’s strongest chapter, which tracks how William Alcott and Sylvester Graham’s dietary reforms materialize both the body and the imperial nation’s expanding borders by categorizing healthful and dangerous foods on the basis of civilizationist paradigms. In
nineteenth-century food cultures, the regulation of the appetites of the mouth consolidates the gendered and racialized body, the emergent site of political power.

Yet one of the white mouth’s key desires is revealed to be the bodies of black subjects, who are analogized to food. Dominant-eating cultures identify the black body as what is ingested, as bare materiality, which is threatening on its own but, when consumed, consolidates white political subjects. For Tompkins, eating is wrapped up in the “libidinal logic of American racism,” in which the black body functions as raw resource not only for slavery but also for some of its oppositional discourses (90). For example, the sentimental mode in which Harriet Beecher Stowe, Harriet E. Wilson, and others imagine the feelings of the slave relies on a logic of consumption in which “to empathize with the slave is to internalize her,” swallowing the other whole (113). Tompkins considers the class and sexual dimensions of this conflation, which also open possibilities for resistance when the black body “will not go down easily,” sticking in the throat even in the work of Stowe and Nathaniel Hawthorne (11). The antebellum black cook is, on the one hand, sent below the stairs in the kitchen, an area of domestic architecture newly separated from the warming hearth upstairs, yet, on the other, is in control of all the food that will pass through the household’s bodies. Furthermore, the imagined ingestion of the black body in works by Hawthorne, Stowe, and widely circulated trade cards works through a structure of objectification that is inextricable from sexual desire. Eating, for Tompkins, binds sexual desire to the reproduction of the race and nation. Illuminating the “erotic and political life of the mouth,” eating emerges as a juncture between the individual and what we might call force, figured in this period as both food and the vital elements of the black body (55).

The mouth’s porosity, its role as the aperture of body, home, and nation, renders eating an erotic practice. What Tompkins terms “queer alimentarity” marks how the mouth functions as a key site of sex before sexuality, an intensification of the body later discarded when official sexual discourse at the turn of the twentieth century settled solely on the genitalia. Tompkins excavates the complex process in which oral eroticism informs dietary techniques of the self, including white feminist projects like Louisa May Alcott’s, in which food serves as an instrument of female independence. This frame enables Tompkins to effectively counter familiar portrayals of food as merely allegorizing power relations, instead illuminating how the eroticized mouth (re)produces the divisions at the heart of biopower into the eaters and the eaten, a process in which racialization and desire are interdependent. The book’s analysis of biopower centers on the anatomo-politics of individual discipline, however. Given eating’s location within the gradual deploy-
ment of sexuality, a phenomenon that for Foucault came to prominence because it coordinated both the governance of the individual and the management of the population, one wonders: how did eating also function as a regulatory apparatus at the emergent biopolitical level of the population-as-species?

Tompkins’s book, along with Lee’s and Preciado’s, makes a strong case that recent queer scholarship on biopower fundamentally shifts our analyses of not only what counts as power but what pertains to the domain of the biological. Power in these texts materializes in the form of force that circulates and aggregates below and before the level of the individual. Power transpires through a field of the consumable, penetrant, dispersible, and absorbable, coordinating life well beyond the human, beyond the nominally alive, even as it forms the shifting parameters of embodied difference. Together, this scholarship articulates a worthy challenge for the field: how to attend to the flow to force as it accumulates as race, gender, and sexuality, and subtends the regulation and optimization of individuals and populations.

Notes

1. Thanks to Greta LaFleur for thinking through The Imitation Game with me.
2. See also Garlick 2014.
3. See also Vora 2015.

References


