

The Dildo as an Essay on Becoming While Creating

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Why do we have to care so much about what's between our legs? The *dildo* is no longer a substitute for an erected penis, nor is it a symbol of masculinity as the sexual standard. It may be a tool for something, but it doesn't need to head for the crotch. If organic male genitalia continue to be emblematic of the androcentric tradition, the dildo as a prosthesis is, of course, a cyborg. While dissecting and parodying the tradition, the cyborg goes far beyond it. This is not about sexual liberation from the tradition of pleasure. Instead, it is about thinking of the dildo as an implement that takes over the technologies that mould the sexes and create apparatuses of sexuality.

*It's time for philosophy to learn from the dildo.*¹

—Paul B. Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 1998

1. Considering the body from mere organs not yet regarded as sexual

In *Countersexual Manifesto*, Paul B. Preciado depicts the dildo not as a sex toy but as a device that fabricates sexualities and transforms our bodies. As such, the dildo enables countersexual practices, or in his words, “dildotectonics”. From the countersexual perspective, sex organs and sexualities are products of biopolitical technologies and the sociohistorical systems of sex/gender. What we regard as sexual is produced by the technology that gives shape to the sexes. In other words, we do not have sex because we have genitalia and organs for reproduction. “The sex organs are not an exact biological place, nor is sex a natural impulse.”² The society, which views heterosexual-reproductive normativity as a biological nature of the human body, and which constantly attempts to reinforce this understanding, takes organs relating to reproduction as sexual and produces sexed bodies possessing these sex organs, while concurrently forming the world where these bodies live in. Certain physiological affects born in a body are bound to specific sex organs, resulting in desires and sensations to be understood as corresponding to anatomical sexual reactions. Thus the living body is reduced to the 'natural' erogenous zones of females or males.³

¹ Paul B. Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, translated by Kevin Gerry Dunn (Columbia University Press, 2018), 20. The original text in Spanish was published in 1998 under the name Beatriz Preciado.

² *ibid.*, 24.

³ *ibid.*, 19-24.

The History of Sexuality should be rewritten as *The History of Technology*, Preciado claimed. Indeed, the apparatus of sexualities, which is constituted not by oppression and prohibition but by discipline, surveillance, control and language, has already been engraved into the system of (bio)technology and its development. Our bodies and sexualities united with all sorts of prostheses, drugs and media equipment are generated by the technology that marries neoliberal capitalism fostered by white-patriarchy, misogyny, homophobia, racism, colonialism and dehumanization under the name of nationalism. The bodies are sexualized, gendered and racialized to meet heterosexual-reproductive normativity. They are tamed for further control or treated as a tool for strengthening the norm. That is to say, the sexualized subject accompanied by the sexed body has been produced to protect the norm, namely the 'biologically natural'. As a side effect, the normativity produces disposable bodies or bodies that lack the norms. Today, one glance at the unjust global treatment of immigrants and refugees, is enough to discern which bodies are deemed disposable. The production of minorities readily emerges within the matrix that creates the normative sexuality based on heterosexual reproduction.

The dildo is a low-tech technology. However, as Preciado suggested, let's consider it for now as an epistemological and practical tool that rearranges the existing technologies that form our bodies. Countersexuality urges a transition from the social contract based on the biologically camouflaged 'truth' of the natural sex and the authoritative difference between the binary sexes, to the conceptually countersexual contract that recognizes each of us not as gendered or sexual, man or woman, but as a living body. But is it then possible to consider our bodies released from the dominant norms within a system that controls substances, such as estrogen or testosterone, one that transforms our physical organisations, namely the organs registered as a sexual part of the body and their reactions, including erection, ejaculation and orgasm?

*To be free from genitals merely means not to consider the experience of sex organs as the essence of sexual experience, or to make genitals into tools to assess the degree of intimacy between man or woman. Rather, it is to be aware that genitals are not special organs and not open to men in particular.*⁴

—Rieko Matsuura, *For a Gentle Castration*, 1997

⁴ Rieko Matsuura, "Seiki kara no Kaihou wo" in *Yasashii Kyosei no tameni* [For a Gentle Castration], (Chikuma-Shobo, 1997), [Kindle]

2. What kind of dildo do you want?

Although dildos resembling male genitalia have existed all over the world from ancient times, in modern Western society, they made men fearful (pleasure should be given to a woman by the natural penis not by an artificial object) or they became an apparatus of desire for men (by disguising women's sexual pleasure). They were criminalized within Christianity that regards masturbation and anal penetration as taboos, as well as in the discipline society. Unlike in Western societies, Japanese *harigata* were commonly seen in daily life, and they sometimes even became an object of worship. However, regulations against them were introduced during the modernization in the Meiji era. In some parts of the US, medical use of dildos for encouraging heterosexual-reproduction was allowed, but the selling of dildos for sexual pleasure was illegal until the 2000s. Even in the patriarchal society, the dildo functioned as the prosthesis for a sane male body equipped with the ability for sexual reproduction, as well as for the heterosexual family that reproduced the male body as an extension. Accordingly, the use of dildos for purposes other than promoting reproduction has been regarded as a pathology or perversion, and was placed at the border of obscenity (and its criminalization).⁵ The assumed 'naturalness' of reproduction in relation to human sex and unceasingly demarcates of the boundaries between human and animal, between body and machine, leading to categorisations of organs and prostheses, organic and inorganic substances, or living and dead, which in turn form the sexed bodies.

Unlike vibrators that smoothly connected to the sexual liberation of women in the second half of 20th century, dildos were a disputed matter within feminists and lesbians discourses due to their shape and prosthetic aspect: possession of a dildo was deemed a masculine behaviour symbolic of its power, and intercourse with a dildo was considered as tantamount to the reproduction of heterosexuality. When Lynda Benglis held a dildo in her hand in front of her crotch and appeared naked in an advertisement page of *Artforum* as a response to Robert Morris's S&M appearance, the image caused a colossal criticism, which prompted one of the critics, Rosalind Krauss, to leave the magazine.⁶

The practices in those days to parody behaviours of femininity or masculinity brought to light the fact that gender has been socially and historically constructed. However, it doesn't

⁵ Hallie Lieberman, *Buzz: The Stimulating History of the Sex Toy* (Pegasus Books, 2017). Lieberman unveils the development and discourse of sex toys especially in the United States, which also related to a Japanese dildo that was sold as a massage machine.

⁶ David Reisman on Lynda Benglis's "Return of the Blob" at the New Museum, *Texte zur Kunst* (April 15, 2011). <https://www.textezurkunst.de/articles/david-reisman-lynda-benglis-new-museum-new-york/?highlight=dildo> (accessed on May 20, 2020)

go so smoothly when a mock penis as the phallus comes into discussion. This is because bodies performing femininity or masculinity are the product of an essentialism based on heterosexual-reproductive normativity in society, which accepts not only the psychoanalytic tradition but also homosexuality within the heterosexual frame of love, while attempting to re-register transgender or nonbinary bodies into the binary sex category.

*It would be incorrect to say that lesbians associate, make love, live with women, for 'woman' has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems. Lesbians are not women.*⁷

—Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind*, 1978

Gender is socially constructed, yes, but we should also note that it is artificially generated within the physical materiality of the bodies as something with a degree of plasticity (it's not surprising that Preciado that likens it to a dildo). Assuming that's the case, if we accept genital organs as the natural essence of masculinity and femininity and their sexualities, and regard the identities performed by bodies on the premise of that essence, how can we tell the differences between natural and artificial? Artificiality, often regarded as the opposite to natural matter, paradoxically makes the boundaries obscure and threaten the essence of the natural. If we regard the dildo as a prosthesis or as a substitute for the male genital designed to fill the missing part of a male body, a 'naturally' erected penis between his crotch could be a dildo that has a different smell and material—masculinity and the so-called *otoko no saga*, or the nature of man (as male sexuality), could only be a prosthesis—the dildo.⁸ The dildo undermines what is considered to be its nature and essence, and “belongs to an economy of multiplicity, connection, sharing, transference, and usage. The dildo refuses to be inscribed into the body to create organic wholeness or identity”.⁹

3. Are you trying to become the dildo?

In fact, anything can be a dildo. Referring to Marquis de Sade, who hid his manuscript inside a wooden dildo during his imprisonment, Preciado recalls the dildo as a technology uniting his acts of anal penetration and writing. He then goes on to present exercises that can be done using

⁷ Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind And Other Essays* (Beacon Press, 1980), 32.

⁸ Preciado, *ibid.*, 64. This paraphrases Jack Halberstam, who treated the dildo as a gender module rather than as a phallus. Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Duke University Press, 1998), 215.

⁹ *ibid.*, 7.

a dildo. Today, there is no need to reutilize the dildo to deconstruct masculinity and the patriarchal tradition of sex and society symbolized by the dildo as Benglis did in the 1970s. As Akiko Mizoguchi explains, the word *chin-bo* (translatable as a dick stick) that is often used in conversations among the mostly female BL (Boys Love) readers to refer to a penis that can be held and freely manipulated in their hands, indicates a communication of pleasure. Mizoguchi concludes that the penis, which used to be the male genital that gets erected and ejaculates, has already become an organ for virtual intercourses between groups of female readers.¹¹

As the tradition of heterosexual sex and sexuality continues to be strengthened, it is necessary to imagine different bodies and sexualities that could be reconstructed through the dildo in conjunction with all sorts of creative acts of writing, reading, forming, displaying and sharing. The dildo can be used to design a world that these bodies can live. For example, Shu Lea Cheang, who represented Taiwan at the Venice Biennale with the curation by Preciado, does not only disturb heterosexual-reproductive normativity, but also re-narrates it as a different story by bringing different kinds of dildos into the politics interlocked with each body's sex and sexuality. Brazilian performer Pedrâ Costa expels western knowledge and power in a series of performances entitled *de_colon_isation* (2016-) by filming her own trans-body anus with a dildo equipped with a camera, attempting to become a body that generates resonant voices that were inaudible within the Western tradition. In the video installation *Between the Waves* (2012), India-based artist Tejal Shah, creatures, referred to as 'humanimals' by the artist, have a long plastic stick on their heads like a unicorn, which they touch with their hands as if to exchange body fluids, and which also becomes a dildo that penetrates vaginas.

The dildo is something that can be created, and it can be placed anywhere on our bodies. The dildo-body boundary is forgotten through its connections and disconnections, becoming a part of our organs. Without the border between nature and artefact, the dildo unites with our bodies to create pleasure and desire. The dildo belongs to us, our organs, desires and pleasures, yet continues to be foreign to us, threatening our boundaries. Our bodies are being appropriated. Our bodies may already be the dildo.

*This essay was written for the exhibition by Mai Endo and Aya Momose without knowing the details of their new works to be exhibited, based on the author's imagination inspired by two pictures of their working processes (an image with the hands of the two artists playing with clay, and another showing fluffy white costumes lying down on a floor).

¹¹ Akiko Mizoguchi, chapter five "Kanojyo no penis" and "Virtual Lesbian" in *BL Shinka-ron: Boys Love ga Shakai wo Ugokasu* (Ota-Shuppan, 2015) [Kindle]