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*Dissident Self-Narratives: Radical and Queer Life Writing*

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### **An Autotheory of Intertextual Kinship: Ambivalent Bodies in the Work of Maggie Nelson and Paul B. Preciado**

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## **An Autotheory of Intertextual Kinship: Ambivalent Bodies in the Work of Maggie Nelson and Paul B. Preciado**

Alex Brostoff

### **Abstract**

Diverging from understandings of “autotheory” as a mere merger of theory and autobiography, in this inquiry, I attend to practices of citation that transfigure the “auto” in “autotheory.” Combining intellectual and disciplinary history with close readings of Paul Preciado’s *Testo Yonqui* (2008) and Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts* (2015), I compare the historically and culturally specific ways in which these works of queer and trans life writing lay claim to autotheory’s dissident potential. I argue that citation, at once typographic and embodied, need not be reducible to conflicts of authority and influence. On the contrary, the life-sustaining social acts that characterise kinship as a practice enable us to re-envision formal practices of intertextuality as a queer mode of kin-fostering. By extending citational gestures across time, sex, and text, “intertextual kinship,” as I call it, performs a mode of queer belonging that contests the conceit of a single self. Preciado and Nelson proffer an autotheory that is neither a theory of a single self nor a single theory of the self. Rather, radical interdependency is what this corpus both thematises and formalises through its intertextual praxis. In reading intertextual kinship as a part of broader social struggles, I argue that autotheory challenges paradigms of self-knowledge production, opening up more inclusive methods of writing relationally and rewriting relationality.

### **“A Tremendous Kinship”**

“I want to start with the word ‘autotheory,’” Micah McCrary writes to Maggie Nelson. Reporting for *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, he asks why *The*

*Argonauts* (2015), winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award in Criticism, has been called a work of “autotheory.” What does it mean? “I flat out stole this term from Paul Preciado’s amazing *Testo Junkie*,”<sup>1</sup> Nelson replies, “I don’t know of another place where it’s been used...I was moved and felt a tremendous kinship.” She cites *Testo Junkie* (2008), the opening lines of which I will soon recite, for what is “tremendous” about the “kinship” of *Testo Junkie* and *The Argonauts*, I will argue, is how their intertextual praxis transfigures the “auto” in autotheory.

Like McCrary, I too wish to begin with the word “autotheory.” Although the term has gained recent acclaim in American cultural criticism, it tends to be misattributed to Nelson,<sup>2</sup> running roughshod over the context in which Preciado conceives of “autoteoría.” According to *Testo Junkie*, “autoteoría” enables the production of new knowledge and subjectivities, while the autotheorist’s body serves as an experimental site of resistance, alchemising what Preciado calls “la plataforma que hace posible la materialización de la imaginación política” (112) [“the platform that makes possible the materialization of political imagination” (139)]. Less insistent but likewise resistant, *The Argonauts* features the genderqueer family of the autotheorist alongside an interlocking body of theory cited in the margins of non-linear prose paragraphs. The word “autotheory” appears once: wedged between quotes in a blurb on the back cover—a citation, “flat out stole[n]” from *Testo Junkie*, and attributed only in interviews.

There is, however, another context in which the word “autotheory” has been used before, and under a different political and aesthetic rubric. In an account of “The Autotheoretical Texts” (1997), Stacey Young introduces the adjective to describe queer women of colour anthologies published in the early 1980s that alternate between narratives of lived experience and critiques of the social structures under which those narratives are produced. Young approaches the autotheoretical texts as counter-hegemonic projects that document how the construction of intersecting identities challenges the category of ‘woman’ as the subject of feminism. The genre, Young contends, was crucial to transforming feminist political agendas. And transformed, they have. The conflicts staged by the sex wars followed by the rise of third-wave feminism during the nineties set the scene for the emergence of queer theory, which Preciado and Nelson would study under the supervision of Jacques Derrida and Christina Crosby, respectively. The

autotheoretical texts may well have played a role in transforming feminist political agendas, but since Young's account, scant scholarly attention has been paid to the resurgence of the term as a noun. One could follow Young, as Lauren Fournier recently has, by retroactively applying the moniker to select feminist art writing.<sup>3</sup> Or one could, as Robyn Wiegman recently has, home in on autotheory's hybrid heritage, tracing its genealogy to a generic merger of poststructuralism and American autobiography.<sup>4</sup> Contrary to Preciado's rendering of "autoteoría" as a mode of producing subjectivities through technologies of the body that scramble known and knowable categories of intelligibility, for Young, Fournier, and Wiegman alike, "auto" appears to signal a self that is knowable to the extent that it theorises from embodied experience, and autotheory is in turn treated as a unitary category that renders other texts intelligible as such. To date, however, not only are *Testo Junkie* and *The Argonauts* self-identified works of autotheory, but they are also, as I'll argue, autotheories that self-consciously herald a practice and a politics of citation and intertextual exchange that opens up the potential of locating queer futurity in narrative aesthetics.<sup>5</sup> Rather than reproduce conflicts of authority and influence, these citational practices demand redefinition of the role of self-figuration in knowledge production today.

"I was moved and felt a tremendous kinship," Nelson reports with respect to *Testo Junkie*. To recognise another text as "kin" intimates a relation that exceeds influence, one that personifies a textual relation to flesh-and-blood bodies. Not coincidentally, both *Testo Junkie* and *The Argonauts* figure queer kinship into their very compositions. *Testo Junkie* moves between mourning the loss of Guillaume Dustan and the dawn of a dizzying rapture for Virginie Despentes (referred to as GD and VD),<sup>6</sup> as Preciado embarks on two hundred thirty-six days of testosterone-induced theorisation. Explicitly disavowing the telos of transition, the "T-based protocol" entails writing off the high of extreme doses of self-administered, bootleg Testogel.<sup>7</sup> The testo junkie's subject-body, as Preciado describes, enacts "una radicalización (en el sentido químico del término) de mi escritura teórica" (288) ["a radicalization (in the chemical sense of the term) of my theoretical writing" (397)]. *The Argonauts* also probes the gender politics of theorising, while charting a rather different experience of bodily flux: that of giving birth. Nelson's pregnancy coincides with her partner's, the artist Harry Dodge's genderqueer transition; Dodge's mother dies of breast cancer; and Nelson

and Dodge's son is born. As Preciado characterises Dustan and Despentés while citing their work, so too does Nelson characterise Harry while citing his. Exceeding conventional citational practice, Nelson's and Preciado's polyphonic prose is interwoven with a litany of other voices: those of critical theorists and philosophers, those of artists and writers. Anecdote rubs elbows with theory, vignette bumps hips with philosophy. Whether lodged between quotation marks or tipped into italics, whether attribution appears in the margins or a footnote, in both texts, citation performs the social gestures that characterise kinship as a practice.

Conceptualising kinship as a practice, in which the doer of the kin function becomes kin by virtue of the act (i.e. the act produces the status and not the other way around), in "Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory" (2007), Elizabeth Freeman proposes an alternative to dependencies bound by a sex/gender/race system of unequally institutionalised terms. "Mother," "father," "husband," and "wife," for instance, confer legal privileges upon a set of socially recognised roles. Such recognition governs legibility while rendering other relations invisible or impossible.<sup>8</sup> Instead, Freeman offers "a technique of renewal," reconceptualising kinship as a cultural practice that sustains bodies and their bonds over time (298). From birthing to burying, caring to being cared for, kin relations perform repeated life-sustaining social functions, which both originate in and renew interdependency and vulnerability.

Such a conception of kinship queered by sociocultural practice informs my understanding of what is "tremendous" about the kinship of *Testo Junkie* and *The Argonauts*. My argument unfolds in three moves. To begin, I delve into the formal ways in which footnotes and marginalia in the two texts sketch a conception of discursive and bodily interdependency. By extending citations across time, sex, and text, the autotheories of *Testo Junkie* and *The Argonauts* queer the corporeal norms that govern what counts as and constitutes kinship. Second, I turn to the representations of ambivalent bodies—bodies in various forms of transition—that are subject to these relations. Under what conditions and to what extent, I ask, are such queer relations deemed legible under existing social structures? The metaphoric principles of both Nelson's Argo and Preciado's T-based protocol, I show in the third section, at once enable and curb autotheory's corporeal political practices. Although the "self" lodged in the etymology of "auto"

implies narcissistic containment, these citational practices lay bare human and textual bodies as interdependent compositions. Autotheory is neither a theory of a single self nor a single theory of the self; instead, what I call “intertextual kinship” performs a mode of queer belonging that undoes the “auto” in “autotheory.”

### “Keenly Relational,” Citational

When Nelson replies to McCrary’s query about autotheory, she cites the opening of *Testo Junkie*:

Este libro no es una autoficción. Se trata de un protocolo de intoxicación voluntaria a base de testosterona sintética que concierne el cuerpo y los afectos de B. P. <sup>9</sup> Es un ensayo corporal. Una ficción, es cierto. En todo caso y si fuera necesario llevar las cosas al extremo, una ficción autopolítica o una autoteoría (15).

This book is not a memoir. This book is a testosterone based, voluntary intoxication protocol, which concerns the body and affects of BP. A body-essay. Fiction, actually. If things must be pushed to the extreme, this is a somatopolitical fiction, a theory of the self, or self-theory. (11)

Declarative from the outset, *Testo Junkie* is quick to disavow memoir in favor of “Fiction, actually.” Nevertheless, this “fiction” is one about “the body and affects” of its autotheorist. Bruce Benderson’s English-language translation toggles between “self-theory” and “autotheory,” but in the original Spanish, Preciado’s neologism is consistently “autoteoría.” That “autoteoría” is occasionally rendered as “a theory of the self, or self-theory” misrepresents Preciado’s own playful deconstruction of the term; that is, the Anglocentric recourse to autobiography studies appears at odds with Preciado’s transnational and translingual context. Formally, in *Testo Junkie*, alternating “auto” chapters chronicle Preciado’s testosterone protocol and the relationships that constellate around and absorb its gel. In between, “theory” chapters plot a history of the pharmacopornographic regime, whose twin pillars—the pharmaceutical and pornography industries—manufacture the very sexopolitical subjectivities that the testo junkie troubles with testosterone-induced theorising. Verbose, militant, and rife with references, Preciado’s paranoid and parodic prose remains consistent throughout the “auto” and “theory” chapters, which yoked together, yield an *autoteoría*. The “trans” of testo junkie’s “auto” is not a transition from female to male, but rather, a

transnational movement from Europe to the United States, a translation from Spanish to French to English language, and a renewal by resignification; that is, a transition from death to life.

The death of the multivalent “you” to whom *Testo Junkie* is addressed occasions a citational practice which wrestles with the biopower that dwells within by reaching out: to mourn and avenge, to reclaim and resignify.<sup>10</sup> The first chapter, entitled “Tu Muerte” (“Your Death”), sees Preciado absorbing GD’s death as he absorbs his first dose of Testogel: “so that I can begin to write this book,” done in part “to avenge your death” (16).<sup>11</sup> He describes himself slipping a blank cassette into a video camera, producing two frames: one through the digital lens and one through the lens of the written word. He writes of filming himself writing the page we are reading. A single-word sentence, “Play,” appears in the imperative in English: he undresses, shaves his head and crotch, rubs the Testogel on the contour of a shoulder, slides two dildos in two orifices. “You’re the only one who could read this book,” he writes as he films— “Design an image of myself as if I were you. *Do you in drag*. Cross-dress into you. Bring you back to life with this image” (19, emphasis in original).<sup>12</sup> Mourning and resurrecting, internalising and externalising, Preciado performs “as if” and “into” “you.” The double entendre unearthed by the second person address is uncanny: “you” are at once the deceased GD and the living reader. The refrain “It’s your gesture” throbs through the chapter, and footnotes attributing the citations to Guillaume Dustan spread his presence like ashes across the page. In drag, on T, touching himself, Preciado cites *Nicolas Pages* and *Dans Ma Chambre (In My Room)*, reaching out to touch Dustan’s remains, sentient still in the words of his books. In footnotes, like a visual underground at the grave of the page, Preciado buries Dustan textually while reviving him intertextually. “It’s your gesture” made mine: these re-cited citations perform the kin function of grief work that intertextuality makes a formal, compositional practice.<sup>13</sup>

Citation performs this double gesture: at once typographic, as it demarcates the words of another text; and also bodily, as it engenders a corporal norm produced by compulsory repetition. In this double sense, citation makes the norm strange in its displacement of time and place. In his critique of J.L. Austin’s *How to do Things with Words*, Jacques Derrida evinces how the sign, “by virtue of its essential iterability,” is both vulnerable to and constituted by citational

grafting (9). “Every sign,” writes Derrida, “linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written...can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts” (12, my emphasis). As a precondition of communicability, then, citation heralds this illimitable potential and inevitable appropriation. The production of meaning, radically contingent on citation, extends far beyond that which might be designated by quotation marks. Drawing from Derrida’s reformulation, Judith Butler has argued that citationality is not only constitutive of the sign, but of the subject. In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler likens the citation of a norm to the juridical citation of the Law, in which citation is the mechanism that produces, enables, and enforces the mandate it names. While compulsory citation, always derivative and differential in form, shapes subject-formation, “performativity as citationality” also provides the potential for discursive reversal and sociopolitical resignification (xxi-xxiv). That citation finds resonance with discursive and embodied subject-formation makes it critical to social recognition.

Self-conscious students of the ways in which citation is bound up with subject-formation and the production of meaning, Preciado’s and Nelson’s citational practices depart from models of intertextuality that wrestle with influence and wrangle over authority. From T.S. Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919), which locates the Individual Talent in his consortium with an inherited Tradition to Harold Bloom’s *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), which erects a patrilineal edifice in which the Oedipal son rises up to replace the canonical father, intertextuality has rested in (and been wrested from) a patricidal old boys’ club. Alternately, poststructuralism tends to characterise intertextuality as the open-ended *a priori* aesthetic of the literary text, turning the text into what Roland Barthes calls “a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” (1967: 146).

Nelson’s approach, though informed by these antecedents, diverges. *The Argonauts* forwards a feminist model of interdependency that characterises the representation of the human and textual corpus alike:

I’ve often found myself very interested in dramatizing this coexistence—showcasing the situation we find ourselves in, in which dependence on others—or at least relation to them—is the condition of possibility for self-reliance...This is what I mean by ‘writing with, from, or for others’—the problem of performing relationality in a text.” (Nelson 2012)



Born from and dependent on other bodies for our very sustenance, we likewise create textual bodies by virtue of having been fostered “with, from, or for” others. Nelson’s approach to “the problem of performing relationality in a text,” like Preciado’s, is citational. And when citationality performs relationality, not only does relationality lay bare its movements and displacements, but a corpus also lays bare its kin in its very composition:

I mean writing that dramatizes the ways in which we are *for another or by virtue of another*, not in a single instance, but from the start and always...We develop, even in utero, in response to a flow of projections and reflections ricocheting off us. Eventually, we call that snowball a self (Argo). I guess the cheery way of looking at this snowball would be to say, subjectivity is keenly relational, and it is strange. *We are for another, or by virtue of another.* (60, 95)<sup>14</sup>

Referring first to writing her thesis and then to developing in utero, Nelson’s recited, italicised citation echoes across thirty-five pages, “not in a single instance, but from the start and always...*We are for another, or by virtue of another.*” Following the typographic demarcations of Barthes’ *Fragments d’un discours amoureux* (1977), Nelson’s marginal attributions (to Butler, in this instance) mark instantiations of the author “*by virtue of*” citation.<sup>15</sup> The italics tip the citation into motion, enacting “a flow of projections and reflections ricocheting off” Nelson’s prose. I do not mean to compare intellectual production with reproductive futurity, but rather, to read the semblance as associative: whether in utero or on the page, dependent on parenting or mentoring, reading or readers, subjectivity “is keenly relational, and it is strange,” both “*for*” and “*by virtue of*” relationality. “A self (Argo)” may transform without changing its name. And yet, the title of the text isn’t the *Argo*, the metaphoric and mythological ship whose parts are replaced, but *The Argonauts*, the voyagers who repeatedly perform these acts of alteration.<sup>16</sup> Stranger, however, is the unattributed language of “keenly relational,” which echoes Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s much cited gloss of queerness: “Keenly, it is relational, and strange,” as she pronounces in *Tendencies* (1993: xii).<sup>17</sup> Expansive yet specific, polysemic yet transitive and dissonant, queer is to Sedgwick what subjectivity is to Nelson. Or perhaps the production of subjectivity is simply—though never so simply—queer. Interlaced with Nelson’s prose, the citations disclose how the composition of the text is “*for*” in the sense of paying

tribute to, but also “*by virtue of*” an intellectual heritage.

To be clear, I want to suggest that the life-sustaining social practices that characterise kinship as a practice enable us to re-envision the semiotic-sustaining formal practices that stylise intertextuality as a mode of “writing with, from, or for others.” Although intertextuality may always-already be “writing with, from, or for,” in these autotheories, practices of queer kinship cast alternative modes of relating, and in turn, theorising relationality.<sup>18</sup> These are autotheories of intertextual kinship.

Conjuring across time and space, Nelson’s re-citation of Butler and Sedgwick reaches out from *The Argonauts*, much in the way Freeman describes queer belonging. A queer manoeuvre, to be sure, Freeman offers a false etymology of “belonging” that derives from the Middle Dutch *langen*:

[T]o be or seem long; “to ‘think long’, desire; to extend, hold out, offer.” To want to belong, let us say, is to long to be bigger not only spatially, but also temporally, to “hold out” a hand across time and touch the dead or those not born yet, to offer oneself beyond one’s own time. Longing to belong, being long: these things encompass not only the desire to impossibly extend our individual existence or to preserve relationships that will invariably end, but also to have something queer exceed its own time, even to imagine that excess as queer in ways that getting married or having children might not be. (299)

Unlike relations predicated on compulsory heterosexuality, non-reproductive practices sustain queer belonging. In performing relationality that exceeds the bounds of blood and the binding of books, intertextual kinship is culturally generative rather than reproductive; it is intersubjective rather than patrilineal. In Freeman’s terms, one might say that Nelson holds out a citational “hand across time” to touch an unborn body, Harry’s deceased mother, and the intertextual kin whom she calls the “many-gendered mothers,” citing Dana Ward (57). In *Testo Junkie*, Preciado holds out a citational “hand across time” to touch the deceased “you” to whom the text is addressed, Virginie Despentes’ unborn book, and the intertextual kin to whom he appeals for “keys to survival” (135). Creation and conception, mourning and resurrecting, care work and grief work: “keenly relational,” this intertextual practice is keen on queer belonging that belies the conceit of a single self. Rather, bodily interdependency is what these autotheories both thematise and formalise through intertextual praxis. Rather than theorising

the self, as implied by the etymological “auto” of “autotheory,” this is writing relationally and rewriting relationality.

### **Ambivalent bodies**

When Nelson replies to McCrary’s query about autotheory, she offers a brief comparative reading of *The Argonauts* and *Testo Junkie*:

I felt *The Argonauts* to be a similar project [to *Testo Junkie*], not in terms of its being a T-based protocol, but vis-à-vis its charting the vectors and vicissitudes of my own body: its angling in the direction of my beloved Harry, its experience of bearing and caring for a child. (2015)

A poet by training, Nelson’s alliterative “vectors and vicissitudes” tilt: her body angles into the rhyme of “bearing and caring.” I have argued that citationality angles in the direction of other bodies, human and textual alike; but when these bodies touch, the resulting relations are distinct. For all the poetic proclamation against “The tired binary that places *femininity, reproduction, and normativity on the one side, and queer resistance on the other*” (2015: 75), Susan Fraiman rather than Maggie Nelson’s italicised words name the divisions that *The Argonauts* seeks to disavow.<sup>19</sup> Intertextual kin congregate at the margins, but when the non-linear plot of *The Argonauts* is laid bare, we are left with a family: Maggie and Harry are married; they have two children; they eat chocolate pudding on the porch. In “Gay as in Happy” (2015), Moira Donegan refers to this scene as one of “quiet ecstasy...a moment to be allowed to go uncritiqued, allowed to exist and spread.” She then quotes Nelson as saying, “I think of citation as a form of family-making,” similarly noting how *The Argonauts* is a project of family-making both “literally” and “literarily.” What Donegan wishes were “allowed to go uncritiqued,” however, is a reproductive figuring of the happy, homonormative family: a binary pole that Nelson attempts to deconstruct. Tired as the binary may be, Nelson’s ambivalent embrace of “the seduction of normalcy” (90) appears at least in part like a seduction made possible by white bourgeois privilege. Such “normalcy” not only appropriates but tames *Testo Junkie*’s autotheoretical call to arms:

El movimiento farmacopornográfico *copyleft* tiene una plataforma tecno-viva...el cuerpo tecno-vivo como archivo biopolítico y prótesis cultural. Tu memoria, tu deseo, tu sensibilidad, tu piel, tu polla, tu dildo,

tu sangre, tu esperma, tu vulva, tus óvulos ... son las herramientas de una posible revolución *gendercopyleft*" (286 italics in original).

The pharmacopornographic gendercopyleft movement has a technoliving platform...the technoliving body as a biopolitical archive and cultural prosthesis. Your memory, your desire, your sensibility, your skin, your cock, your dildo, your blood, your sperm, your vulva...are the tools of a potential gendercopyleft revolution. (395)

Never shy of superlative, Preciado's protocol propagates sexual politics in batteries of neologisms, while hyperbole verges on, and tends to tip into parody. With a proverbial pen cocked at abolishing gender, *Testo Junkie*, propped up by MLA style citations in footnotes, is recruiting readers for the revolution, beginning with "your cock, your dildo," etc.

What makes *The Argonauts* akin to *Testo Junkie*, then, is not the politics of autotheory, but rather, formal and feral renewals through reading and referencing. In an early encounter in *The Argonauts*, Nelson describes how "the first time you fuck me in the ass" provokes an unintended declaration of love, laid bare on a cement floor (3). And this is how the Argo, at once myth and metaphor, sails into sight:

A day or two after my love pronouncement, now feral with vulnerability, I sent you the passage from *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* in which Barthes describes how the subject who utters the phrase "I love you" is like "the Argonaut renewing his ship during its voyage without changing its name." Just as the *Argo's* parts may be replaced over time but the boat is still called the *Argo*, whenever the lover utters the phrase "I love you," its meaning must be *renewed* by each use, as "the very task of love and of language is to give to one and the same phrase inflections which will be forever new...I thought the passage was romantic. You read it as a possible retraction. In retrospect, I guess it was both. (5, my emphasis)

"Feral with vulnerability," with lover's speech act as tenor and "the Argonaut renewing his ship" as vehicle, the Argo ferries total transformation while maintaining its name. The boat is still called the *Argo*; still, the phrase uttered is "I love you." And yet, "renewing" is a practice which, like citation, resignifies the sign by breaching context and intention. By piloting Barthes through her prose, Nelson renews the love pronouncement while inflecting the myth of the Argo, Barthes' metaphoric citation of it, and her re-citation with new resonance.<sup>20</sup> By reciting Nelson's citation of Barthes, I too renew what might be read.<sup>21</sup> Whether the phrase be "Argo" or "queer" or "kinship," citations such as these perform

Freeman's "technique of renewal," in which "bodies and the potential for physical and emotional attachment are created, transformed, and sustained over time" (298). One might take for granted that the performance of social and sexual acts transforms physical and affective attachment. But if the queer kinship of human bodies finds its form in repeated acts of renewal, then by analogy, intertextual kinship finds textual form in the re-citation of performative utterances.

This is not to suggest that all citation performs gestures of intertextual kinship, nor do I mean to conflate citation with other forms of intertextuality. In these autotheories specifically, the double gesture of citation, at once typographic and embodied, depends on the extent to which social structures deem bodies and their relations legible. "Renewal," writes Freeman, "is based upon practice: in responding to needs, it makes no claims about their bearer. It is bodily and temporal, insofar as it simply makes people more possible; renewal grants a future, but one with an uninevitable form" (299). The 'uninevitable form' of non-reproductive futurity suggests that a practice of renewal evades lawful prescriptions of kinship. In suggesting that "it simply makes people more possible," Freeman proposes that renewal renders practices of queer kinship legible in ways that jurisdiction denies.

Still, *The Argonauts* portrays a family that seeks recognition under the auspices of existing sociopolitical structures: the threat of Prop. 8 precipitates Maggie and Harry's marriage;<sup>22</sup> Harry has gender trouble with identification documents; and Nelson's biological mother gives her a Snapfish mug, a gift that hails Nelson's genderqueer family into its normative clutches (13). Though Nelson shrugs off the motherly mug, *The Argonauts* is explicitly invested in renewing (to borrow Freeman's use of the verb) the figure of the mother. Whether "cruising for intellectual mothers" (58), paying homage to those she calls "the many-gendered mothers of my heart" (105), or mourning the loss of Harry's mother while becoming a mother herself, Nelson is determined to usher mothering under the banner of queerness. Even in reminding us that "no one set of practices or relations has the monopoly on the so-called radical, or the so-called normative" (72-73), even in maintaining that she's "never been less interested in arguing for the rightness, much less the righteousness, of any particular position or orientation" (97), and even in recognising the "gendered baggage" of such anticipatory disavowal, this doesn't undo *The Argonauts'* glorification of

motherhood. To queer an already privileged position, in other words, doesn't debunk the legal recognition that such an identity confers. Does this liberal reckoning with queerness "make people more possible," or does it render homonormativity the grounds for recognition? Do such gestures "make people more possible," or do they make non-normative identities and relations less possible? Early in *The Argonauts*, Nelson quotes Judith Butler in asking, "When or how do new kinship systems mime older nuclear-family arrangements and when or how do they radically recontextualize them in a way that constitutes a rethinking of kinship?" (14). While the practice of citation "radically recontextualize[s]" and "constitutes a rethinking of kinship," Nelson's portrait of genderqueer family-making continues to "mime older nuclear-family arrangements," albeit with distinct elements and for distinct a purpose.

Even while *Testo Junkie* departs radically from "older nuclear-family arrangements," Preciado conversely mimes a normative citation style, subordinating attributions to academic footnotes as opposed to situating names alongside its prose as *The Argonauts* does. Unlike the reproductive futurity incarnated in the figure of the mother in *The Argonauts*, in *Testo Junkie*, books are the figure for cultural generation that "makes people more possible." In moments of "delirio testosterónico" ("testosterone delirium"), Preciado touches the textual bodies lining his shelves—arranging, rearranging, and aligning alliances of those whom he cites: Foucault, Bourdieu, Haraway, Butler, etc. (95). "Busco entre los libros claves de supervivencia" (109) ["I look for keys to survival in books"] he writes, and in citation, survival spreads (135). Feminism turns fluid by metaphoric secretion: "Wittig and Davis, Woolf and Solanas, La Pasionaria, Kate Bornstein, and Annie Sprinkle bubble up," they wash onto the shore of VD's skin "as if with a diaphanous ejaculation, a sea of political sparkles" (97).<sup>23</sup> Gaudy though the image appears, that intertextuality acts as a stimulant excites the possibility of sexopolitical dissemination. Written alongside *Testo Junkie*, Virginie Despentes's *King Kong Theory* whets the autotheorist's appetite:

Yo leo sus capítulos recién acabados, los recibo como bebés aún dormidos que se despiertan por primera vez ante mis ojos. La kif. Reconozco la voz que me excita, la voz que me folla: una voz de adolescente punk que ha aprendido a hablar con un programa de producción de género de bio-hombre, una mente aristocrática de loba futurista que habita un cuerpo de puta, una inteligencia de premio nobel

encarnada en un cuerpo de cachorra callejera. Un milagro biopolítico: la evidencia de que nuevas re combinaciones genéticopolíticas y literarias son posibles. Se levanta y baila como una adolescente delante de mi ventana sin cortinas (227).

I read the chapters as she [VD] finishes them, and I get them as if they were babies still drowsy, opening their eyes for the first time before me. A turn-on. I recognize the voice that excites me, fucks me: the voice of a teenage punk who has learned to speak using the voice of a cis-male program for the production of gender, the aristocratic brain of a futurist she-wolf lodged in the body of a hooker, the intelligence of a Nobel Prize winner incarnated in a street dog. A biopolitical miracle: the proof that new geneticopolitical and literary recombinations are possible. She gets up and dances in front of the curtainless window. (Preciado 321)

Through the curtainless window, we watch her dance. Through it, we watch Preciado watching her, dancing. The “biopolitical miracle,” the “geneticopolitical” proof of Preciado’s speculative *gendercopleft* revolution is born in the simile of cradling “literary recombinations” as if “they were babies.” Again, the overdetermined figure of the child appears in the shape of intertextuality, a recombination that predates Nelson’s metaphoric Argo. The simile seems to surrender Preciado’s “biopolitical miracle” to reproductive discourses endemic to kinship theory. And yet, even if citation may seem as if it were a formal mode of pure reproduction, its illimitable potential for deviation and difference ensure that citation is not a reproductive technology.

### **“Corporeal Political Practice”**

How to hold the formal promise of non-reproductive futurity together with the diverging political implications of Nelson’s Argo and Preciado’s T-based protocol? Where Nelson’s Argo renews meaning-making by resignifying, Preciado’s T-based protocol seeks to intervene in the bio and media technologies of the pharmacopornographic regime. And where Nelson’s Argo seeks a recognition of resignification, Preciado’s protocol seeks unequivocal revolution. “What can you do?” asks Nelson, “Practice gentle aversion, as Barthes might say.” Questions of autotheory have led McCrary to ask Nelson about her relationship with self-representation and Nelson has deferred to Barthes. To “practice gentle aversion” to self-figuration by deferring to Barthes seems to attest, time and again, to a turn away from Preciado’s anti-normative, anti-capitalist project. “In fact I have come

to understand revolutionary language as a sort of fetish” writes Nelson (27). What, then, to make of the move (or lack thereof) from revolutionary language to action, action that Preciado insists is a principle of autotheory itself? While “autotheory” subsists in name, like the Argo, like the bodies in and of these texts, its constituent parts shift.

Autotheory, as Preciado delineates in “El Principio Autocobaya” (“The Principle of the Auto-Guinea Pig”) confronts pharmacopornographic hegemony by taking up the self as the subject of autoexperimentation. “If you intend to be a doctor,” writes Preciado, citing Peter Sloterdijk, “you must try to become a laboratory animal” (351). In turn, if one intends to “doctor” the production of subjectivity, as Preciado does, one must begin with one’s own body. To echo *Testo Junkie’s* examples: Sigmund Freud did it with cocaine, Walter Benjamin did it with hashish, Paul Preciado did it with testosterone. Preciado justifies the project of voluntary auto-intoxication as an ethical precept for research that will be required “for the possibility of any future micropolitical action” (362). More macro than micro, however, Preciado anticipates an imminent gender/sex/race liberation movement, and cites Donna Haraway in insisting that it will “consist of a positioned, responsible corporeal political practice so that anyone wishing to be a political subject will begin by being the lab rat in her or his own laboratory” (352-353). Preciado vows that this is the principle of transformation—a principle that begins with “tu cuerpo, el cuerpo de la multitud” (171) (“your body, the body of the *multitude*”) (348, emphasis in translation). An allusion echoes in Benderson’s translation, for in “the body of the *multitude*,” English-language readers may hear echoes of Whitman’s parenthetical colossus, “(I am large, I contain multitudes).”<sup>24</sup> In Preciado’s autotheory, a theory follows from the body, a body that contains but also *is* that of “the *multitude*.” Emphatically, as if the multitudes had mobilised, the italicised “*multitude*” also moves typographically. On its heels, a hyphenated phrase produces a graphic lineage that allies what Benderson translates as “a monster-multitude-in-the-making.”<sup>25</sup> This figure of kin-fostering appears to animate a revolutionary body which would seize the biopowerful means of pharmacopornographic production. Hailing readers as “a diversity of viable monstrosities,” Preciado’s “monster-multitude-in-the-making” recruits both sexual and textual bodies ravaged by technologies of normalisation. His aim? “Only to convince you, all of you, that you are like me...you are the monster that



testosterone is awakening in me” (398).<sup>26</sup> This “you” is clearly not GD, but a “you” directed pointedly at the reader, and “the multitudes.” *Testo Junkie* is recruiting readers— becoming-kin in the revolution to come. Unlike *The Argonauts*, which depicts a precarity and a desire for recognition under existing social structures, at stake for Preciado’s autotheory is political intervention in the production of subjectivity.

And yet, while *Testo Junkie* takes responsibility for a “corporeal political practice,” that practice is “positioned” as the autotheory of a self-identified junkie theorising off bootleg testosterone. The T-protocol proceeds, as Preciado proclaims, “para escribir, para follar, para sentir una forma post-pornográfica de placer, para añadir una prótesis molecular a mi identidad transgénero low-tech hecha de dildos, textos e imágenes en movimiento” (14) [“so that I can write, fuck, feel a form of pleasure that is postpornographic, add a molecular prostheses to my *low-tech* transgender identity composed of dildos, texts, and moving images,” etc. (16, emphasis in original)]. “*Low-tech* transgender” though Preciado’s diegetic identification is, a trans critique of *Testo Junkie* would charge him for instrumentalising gender as a site of biopolitical play. This cocky, self-serving testosterone protocol casts an imperilling shadow over those who depend on the life support of medically-sanctioned gender-affirming care. While Preciado did transition six years after the publication of *Testo Junkie*, in the text, transition is disavowed on the grounds of the protocol itself.<sup>27</sup>

If Preciado disavows transition, then Nelson clings to it as a condition of her Argo’s shifting parts. While *The Argonauts*’ autotheory applies the “auto-guinea pig principle” to an extent, Nelson’s body is not the only guinea-pig in the lab. However artfully cited, the transition Nelson portrays is not her own. Harry Dodge, “who is happy to identify as a butch on T” (53), transitions over the course of *The Argonauts*’ non-linear voyage, a transition that Nelson positions alongside her pregnancy:

2011, the summer of our changing bodies. Me, four months pregnant, you six months on T. We pitched out, in our inscrutable hormonal soup...On the surface, it may have seemed as though your body was becoming more and more “male,” mine, more and more “female.” But that’s not how it felt on the inside. On the inside, we were two human animals undergoing transformations beside each other, bearing each other loose witness. (79, 83)

In an uncanny echo of Preciado's reading of Sloterdijk, Nelson renders herself and Harry as "human animals undergoing transformation" in the laboratory of autotheory. The gendered and sexed borders of the body expand and contract, but "bearing each other loose witness" constitutes an act of kin recognition that defies the jurisdiction of gender identity even while seeking its sanctions. For Nelson and Harry, what remains legible in the "inscrutable hormonal soup" is each other. And yet, the juxtaposition of these two "changing bodies" is a precarious one. While Nelson repudiates the polarising impression of how Harry's "body was becoming more and more 'male,' mine, more and more 'female,'" that pregnancy is positioned as the analogue of genderqueer transition suggests a commensurability worth questioning: one body becomes increasingly defiant of gender norms, while the other is increasingly recognised as conforming to them.

Even when one begins with one's own body in the autotheoretical laboratory, "auto" is always already relational. I have been speaking of citation's capacity for renewal, but the very history of citationality is that of controlling speech, of authority and control—and in the reproduction of authority, something queer takes place, breaking from a prior context. When Harry tells Nelson that an early draft of *The Argonauts* makes him feel "unbeheld—unheld, even," she goes on to cite his comment that being with her "is like an epileptic with a pacemaker being married to a strobe light artist" (46). Is citation the strobe that sheds aesthetic light or the strobe that provokes a stroke? Nelson cites Harry Dodge's writing at length in *The Argonauts*, a move which I have read as renewing the kin relation; but it is also a move which could be read as giving him a voice strategically intercut with hers. Fraught with conflicting intentions, multiple effects and affects, intertextual kinship can renew in the same gesture as it grafts and appropriates. The sign, like the subject, is vulnerable to and dependent on citational grafting. Perhaps seizing on Preciado's disavowal of the telos of transition, on the subject of Harry's transition, Nelson cites *Testo Junkie* directly:

*I'm not on my way anywhere, Harry sometimes tells inquirers. How to explain, in a culture frantic for resolution, that sometimes the shit stays messy? I do not want the female gender that has been assigned to me at birth. Neither do I want the male gender that transsexual medicine can furnish and that the state will award me if I behave in the right way. I don't want any of it. How to explain that for some, or for some at some times, this irresolution is OK—desirable, even (e.g., "gender hackers")—whereas for others, or for others at some times, it stays a source of*

conflict or grief? How does one get across the fact that the best way to find out how people feel about their gender or their sexuality—or anything else, really—is to listen to what they tell you, and to try to treat them accordingly, without shellacking over their version of reality with yours (53)?<sup>28</sup>

Nelson groups Preciado with Harry to represent embodied resistance to the institutionalisation of gender from which she herself shies away. Is it because such embodiment remains “a source of conflict or grief”? If so, to what extent is she “shellacking” Harry and Preciado’s “version of reality” with her own, in effect conferring on Harry and Preciado the social legibility that they spurn? Questions of authority reenter the scene of citation when “a technique of renewal” renews at the expense of the other.

Preciado warns that the absence of corporeal political practice risks reinforcing pharmacopornographic hegemony, while Nelson remains sceptical. “A philosophy that doesn’t use the body as an active platform of technovital transformation is spinning in neutral,” Preciado writes (359). While *The Argonauts* isn’t “spinning in neutral” per se, Nelson adopts the anthem of Barthes’s *Neutral*, which, “in the face of dogmatism, the menacing pressure to take sides, offers novel responses: to flee, to escape, to demur, to shift or refuse terms, to disengage, to turn away” (98). More intellectual than activist, Nelson’s intervention aims at “that which outplays the paradigm,” as Barthes writes of the *Neutral* (Nelson citing Barthes, 6). The metaphoric principle of the *Argo* is to shift, and sometimes, that shift is a shifting away. In “the face of dogmatism,” Nelson’s *Argonauts* “disengage” and sail away. As if in direct response to *Testo Junkie*’s call to arms, she explains, “Perhaps it’s the word radical that needs rethinking. But what could we angle ourselves toward instead, or in addition? Openness?” (27). What “openness,” one wonders, could overthrow the pharmacopornographic regime? Speculative and demure, *The Argonauts* probes without playing the provocateur. The question that marks the “openness” Nelson craves shies away from the revolutionary mode of relation Preciado demands. Citation’s perpetual alteration, like the *Argo*, with its “inflections of meaning...forever new” and like queer’s “resistances and fracturings and mismatches,” evades what Nelson calls “totalizing’ language” (98).

Given how tension attends citation, I recognise the potential effects of my own citational practice. This is the grafting we exercise upon and against the texts

we read and the texts we cite, even when that grafting is in the service of theorising. If “openness” is Nelson’s Argo of radicalism, then intertextual kinship could signal, as José Esteban Muñoz writes of queerness, “a mode of being and feeling that was then not quite there but nonetheless an *opening*” (2009: 9, my emphasis). Citationality, I’ve argued, opens up the potential of locating queer futurity in aesthetic form. So it is that I cite these passages, imagining a felicitous break with institutionally governed forms of kinship. I imagine what might materialise were new articulations to destabilise codified forms.

### **This Autotheory which is not one**

“A genre-bending memoir, a work of ‘autotheory,’” angles across *The Argonauts*’ back cover. Contrary to Nelson’s citations in the text, the quotation marks encircling “autotheory” signal a citation that is never explained or attributed to Preciado, save for in interviews. Like gender, genre “quotes” prior instantiations; Nelson’s “autotheory” quotes Preciado’s, producing the impression of a norm while unsettling the conventions that seem to demarcate it. Citation renews what might be read.

Given that gender and genre remain a single word in French (*genre*), Derrida’s “The Law of Genre” (1980) hazards classification of both human and textual bodies, producing a system of relations governed by norms that have sociopolitical, medical, and myriad other consequences, including their own reproduction.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, by Derrida’s litigation, the Law impairs its own pairing. It constructs and transgresses the boundaries that it justifies and complicates with its exceptions. Genre, like gender, produces a norm, but texts, like bodies, drag on contingencies of context, convention, and intention. A “genre-clause,” to echo Derrida, “tolls the knell of genealogy or of genericity,” and yet, as we “re-mark” members of the autotheoretical set, the knell tolls and kin bury their dead, citing others anew, to renew (65). Laying to rest the “you” to whom *Testo Junkie* is addressed is the text’s initial and conclusive project; laying Harry’s mother to rest and giving birth, *The Argonauts*’s. The knell reverberates in form and content. Genre-designations can’t, but citation, I’ve argued, is a vital gesture of an autotheoretical corpus, one that reaches out, and in doing so, undoes the narcissistic containment of the “self” suggested by the etymology of “auto.” If the mark of kinship is the repeated performance of life-sustaining functions, and if

citation amounts to one such function, then, as Freeman has argued, “queer belonging...also names the longing to ‘be long,’ to endure in corporeal form over time, beyond procreation” (299). Intertextual kinship extends across the false, spatiotemporal divisions of genre and gender in repeated gestures of renewal.

*Testo Junkie* was published in 2008; *The Argonauts* in 2015. Autotheory isn’t done transitioning. “We transition through genred spaces,” writes poet Kazim Ali, “but when we accept that texts like bodies can be genre-queer then the possibilities for both interpretation and artistic creation are boundless” (2013: 33). Although *Testo Junkie* and *The Argonauts* betray ambivalences in their corporeal political practices, citation produces boundless possibilities for the mutually reinforcing relations of intertextuality and queer kinship. Diverging from understandings of “autotheory” as a mere merger of theory and autobiography, intertextual kinship, I’ve argued, is one way of approaching how two self-identified autotheories rewrite relationality so that the self becomes co-extensive with a kinship network. But the range of projects at stake multiplies when, for example, what Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga have called “theory in the flesh” or what María Moreno has referred to as “teoría de la noche” [“theory of the night”] are taken into account.<sup>30</sup> Across these differential practices, theory gets folded into rewriting relations and rewriting relations unfold alternative modes of theorising.

Keenly, autotheory is relational. In *Testo Junkie* and *The Argonauts*, queer kinship enables us to re-envision intertextuality while autotheory’s citational gestures enable us to reconceive of kinship itself. *The Argonauts*, in its “tremendous kinship” with *Testo Junkie*, renews this gesture. “Writing with, from or for others,” this autotheory is not one.<sup>31</sup> Instead, intertextual kinship honours the past from which it comes at the same time as it seeks a new opening, intimating how “autotheory” is a misnomer, but one capacious enough to behold and to be held, to long and to be long and to belong.

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Academy,” the 2020-2021 Townsend Fellows group, and ongoing conversations with Simone Stirner, Christopher Scott, Taylor Johnston, Ashley Brock, Vicky Kahn, Katie Snyder, and Juana María Rodríguez—in person and in the margins.

<sup>1</sup> Originally published in Spanish as *Testo Yonqui* by Espasa Calpe and self-translated by the author into French as *Testo Junkie: Sexe, Drogue, et Biopolitique*, published by Editions Grasset & Fasquelle in 2008. The English edition, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmocopornographic Era*, was published by the Feminist Press in 2013, translated from the French by Bruce Benderson. In *The Argonauts*, Nelson cites Benderson’s translation. Unless otherwise noted, my citations are also from Benderson’s translation. I have noted minor alterations. As I go on to discuss, although Preciado explicitly disavows transition in *Testo Yonqui*, the “trans” in “translation” bears an undeniable relation to the “trans” in “transition,” especially with respect to the transnational slippage and elision at work in both.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Natasha Bell’s “Cruising for Intellectual Mothers: How Writers Use Theory to Explore the Personal and the Personal to Explore Theory” and Ella Zaslów’s “Theory, Story, and Thought: Annotation and Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts*.”

<sup>3</sup> In “Sick Women, Sad Girls, and Selfie Theory: Autotheory as Contemporary Feminist Practice” (2018), Fournier foregrounds body art in the post-internet era as indicative of an autotheoretical turn in contemporary cultural production. While Fournier identifies autotheory as a general feminist practice, I question what is elided when autotheory is presumed to be a unitary category.

<sup>4</sup> For more on this genealogy of autotheory, see Wiegman.

<sup>5</sup> In the final phase of edits for this article, I was delighted to discover Tyler Bradway’s “Queer Narrative Theory and the Relationality of Form,” which offers a corrective to queer literary studies’ overwhelming emphasis on anti-narrativity. Narrative, Bradway proposes, relates forms of queer attachment and belonging that angle across time. What I go on to call intertextual kinship here may be understood as a figural feature of what Bradway conceives of as “relational formalism.” While I did not have the opportunity to integrate these insights into this argument, I look forward to dialoguing with this work in the future.

<sup>6</sup> As I’ll discuss in more detail, *Testo Junkie* opens with the death of Preciado’s close friend, the French autofiction writer Guillaume Dustan, who had AIDS and died of an overdose. While writing *Testo Junkie*, Preciado’s lover, the French filmmaker and novelist Virginie Despentes, was simultaneously writing *King Kong Theory* (2006).

<sup>7</sup> Preciado did transition in 2014, six years after the publication of *Testo Junkie*.

<sup>8</sup> As Freeman describes, in “The Principles of Kinship” (1949), Claude Lévi-Strauss examines how gender and sexual difference is reproduced and reinforced by the exogamous exchange of women, consolidating the social identities of men vis-à-vis the exchange of women. Gayle Rubin’s “The Traffic in Women” (1975), scrutinises this sex/gender system of oppression to expose how the exchange of women regulates sexuality; or rather, compulsory heterosexuality, as Judith Butler argues in “Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?” (2002), which renders gender and sexuality unthinkable in terms outside those which kinship polices.

<sup>9</sup> BP stands for the name under which *Testo Yonqui* was published in 2008, prior to Preciado’s transition.

<sup>10</sup> To offer a brief gloss per Preciado, from Viagra to Prozac to Testosterone, from the Pill as “an edible panopticon” (173-181) to “the pornification of labor” (273-277), biopower produces a cycle of physiological dependency that only exacerbates our subjugation to it.

<sup>11</sup> In more detail, in the Spanish, he notes, “No tomo testosterona para convertirme en un hombre, ni siquiera para transexualizar mi cuerpo, simplemente para traicionar lo que la

sociedad ha querido hacer de mí, para escribir, para follar, para sentir una forma post-pornográfica de placer, para añadir una prótesis molecular a mi identidad transgénero low-tech hecha de dildos, textos e imágenes en movimiento, para vengar tu muerte.” (14). On the literary and lived relations of Preciado and Dustan, see Kira Ribeiro’s “Paul B. Preciado et Guillaume Dustan: deuil, amour et politiques queer” (“Paul Preciado and Guillaume Dustan: mourning, love and queer politics”).

<sup>12</sup> In the Spanish, “*Play...Tú eres el único que podría leer este libro. Delante de esa cámara más que visible, «siento por primera vez la tentación de hacerme un autorretrato para ti». Dibujar una imagen de mí mismo como si fuera tú. Drag you. Travestirme en tí. Hacerte volver a la vida a través de esa imagen...Ese es tú gesto*” (16-17).

<sup>13</sup> On the significance of grief work to kinship and gender expression, see Judith Butler’s *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (2002).

<sup>14</sup> I cite these two moments in *The Argonauts* (spanning thirty-five pages in the ellipses) to highlight how being “*for another by virtue of another*” is both thematised in terms of *The Argonauts*’ genderqueer family and formalised in terms of its citational dependencies. There are, however, two inconsistencies here. First, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick isn’t cited in this instance, although this particular quote from *Tendencies* does appear earlier in *The Argonauts* with attribution (2015: 29). Second, while both sets of italics are quoting Judith Butler, only the first instance is attributed. In the second instance “*we are*” is italicised where those words weren’t in the first. “*For another or by virtue of another*” appears in italics in Butler’s *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004: 24).

<sup>15</sup> Nelson attributes *The Argonauts*’s marginalia to Barthes, although the form dates back to the Renaissance.

<sup>16</sup> While Nelson, following Barthes, calls this ship the Argo, in classical mythology, it is the ship of Theseus that fits this description. I will return to this potential slip in ships shortly.

<sup>17</sup> Though the language of “keenly relational” remains unattributed in this instance, one could also say that the language of others flows through us in ways that exceed all explicit citation.

<sup>18</sup> For a mode of rewriting relationality akin to this one, see Vilashini Cooppan’s “Skin, Kin, Kind, I/you/we: Autotheory’s Compositional Grammar,” which curates a genealogical assemblage that tenderly unfolds autotheory’s critical kinships from the fleshy forms of fugitivity, the phenomenologies of critical touch, and deconstruction’s opening to alterity. Like Cooppan’s emphasis on grammars of relation, my approach to autotheory is conditioned by “allocentric opening” (584). If “Skin, Kin, Kind” sounds out the query, “How does autotheory get from I to you to we?” (585), my response resides in intertextual kinship.

<sup>19</sup> The standard print is Nelson’s prose and the italics are quoting Susan Fraiman. Attribution to Fraiman is noted in Nelson’s margin. As I go on to describe, Nelson’s citational practice at times appears a mode of distancing herself from the position she ostensibly claims by citing.

<sup>20</sup> In *Essais Critiques* (1971) and *Roland Barthes* (1975), Barthes makes passing reference to a ship whose structural logic is confounded by a name that defies the substitution of its parts. While Nelson, following Barthes, calls this ship the Argo, in classical mythology, it is the ship of Theseus that fits the mould of this particular paradox. That this potential slip in ships becomes Nelson’s organising metaphor figures as the subject of further inquiry. For now, I flag it as an episode of citational grafting.

<sup>21</sup> So too has critical reception read Nelson’s Argo to variously signify “openness” (Brooks 2015), “writing about motherhood” (Szalai 2015), “a family unit, a home” (Turner 2015), and “bodily transformation” (Donegan 2015). While I mean to summon these readings in citation, I am most interested in comparing Nelson’s *Argonauts*’ metaphorical practice of renewing their ship to the ways in which performativity as citationality renews the

intertextual kinship of an autotheoretical corpus.

<sup>22</sup> Proposition 8 banned same-sex marriage in the state of California in 2008. It was overturned as unconstitutional and effectively lifted in 2013. Same-sex marriage wasn't legalized nationwide in the United States until 2015.

<sup>23</sup> In the Spanish, "Wittig y Davis, Woolf y Solanas, la Pasionaria y Kate Bornstein. Ella está cubierta de mi feminismo como por una eyaculación fina, como por un océano de purpurina política" (73).

<sup>24</sup> While the allusion appears explicit in Benderson's translation of Preciado, Carolyn Laubender's "Speak for Your Self: Psychoanalysis, Autotheory, and The Plural Self" likewise suggests, by way of compare, that "Nelson strategically crafts a self that, as Walt Whitman has famously written, "contains multitudes"—that is, a plurality" (51). Laubender goes on to usefully conceptualise the "plural self as a gesture toward relational justice where self and other are seen as collaborative and cumulative, productive of a plurality" (55).

<sup>25</sup> Benderson's translation of Preciado's self-translation produces this particular phrasing. In short, the Spanish "devenir-empresa" bears linguistic equivalence to the French "devenir-entreprise," but from the French "devenir-entreprise" to the English "a-multitude-in-the-making," much compounded by the transformation of "des associations gay, lesbiennes, transsexuels et transgenres" to "a monster-multitude-in-the-making"? If "devenir-empresa" had been translated as "self-commodification," "self-branding," or perhaps even "in-corporation," to signal the dual corporal and corporate plights, then neither multitudes nor monsters would figure into the radical potential of this revolutionary body.

<sup>26</sup> "Vosotros, todos, sois también el monstruo que la testosterona despierta en mí" (289).

<sup>27</sup> And yet, "open-ended refusal to define 'transition'," as Julian Carter writes in the inaugural issue of *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, "is a principled stance against institutionalizing any given form of trans- being. Such resistance reflects decades of struggle over who decides what counts as legitimate trans-/gender expression— struggle that clings to the word itself" (235).

<sup>28</sup> In the margin of *The Argonauts* alongside the italicised text, Nelson includes Preciado's name to cite him directly here.

<sup>29</sup> Gender as genre had not yet emerged in the French language at the time Derrida wrote "The Law of Genre," though it did in the early nineties.

<sup>29</sup> Conversing with Luce Irigaray in a similar vein, Cooppan writes, "'You/I: we are always several at once.' This compositional grammar in which I/you/we touch, this skinthink and kinthink, is autotheory" (594).

<sup>29</sup> My current book projects seeks to offer such an account.

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