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Can the Monster Speak Back to Psychoanalysis? Paul B. Preciado's *Can the Monster Speak?* Book Review

Paul B. Preciado's *Can the Monster Speak?* (2020) is a fusion of memoir and radical political performance. Framed as a “report to an Academy of Psychoanalysts”, the book records the speech Preciado delivered to 3,500 Lacanian psychoanalysts in Paris in 2019. In that setting, he explicitly assumed the persona of “the monster”, a rhetorical-political stance that turns psychoanalysis's gaze back upon itself. Citing Kafka's 1917 “Report to an Academy”, Preciado likens himself to Red Peter the ape, who only gained human language by accepting the “cage” of human norms, flipping this colonial metaphor onto the psychiatric profession. This posture positions the speaker as a subaltern subject demanding to speak from within the clinic, “not as a patient, but as a citizen, as your monstrous equal”, establishing a scene of contention and campaigning for epistemic justice.

Preciado's main target is not merely institutional prejudice but the epistemology of psychoanalysis. He traces Freudian and Lacanian theory back to nineteenth-century Europe, asserting it as anchored in obsolete patriarchal and colonial assumptions. He argues that Freudian psychoanalysis was conceived as a mechanism for regulating the psyche, fundamentally trapped within a colonial understanding of sex, gender, and sexual difference. In Preciado's view, psychoanalysis has never been a neutral science of the psyche; rather, it is an ethnocentric myth that enshrines the privilege of a colonial “universal man”. He argues that the epistemic binary regime of sex, gender, and sexual difference, which psychoanalytic theory deems universal, is neither an empirical reality nor a metaphysical symbolic order but has been in crisis since the 1940s due to the discovery of new data (morphological, chromosomal, biochemical) that renders binary assignment highly contentious, if not impossible.

Rejecting this legacy, Preciado issues a radical call: Set Oedipus free. He insists on a feminist and queer rereading of sexual difference, arguing that psychoanalysis, far from being liberating, provides a technology to normalize deviations from male/female roles. For Preciado, escaping this cage requires a transformation of clinical practice itself, one that sheds the colonial patriarchy at its roots. The analytic challenge is profound: even if progressive clinicians offer liberating care, Preciado notes that the deep cultural inscription of psychoanalysis still features a conservative discourse

regarding gender theories. He points out that the success of his own extensive analytical experiences depended entirely on the analysts' infidelity to their foundational theoretical framework, their creative ability to step outside the "cage" and listen to a non-binary person without immediately resorting to diagnosis, critique, or cure.

Preciado elevates the monster as the protagonist of his manifesto, positioning the figures of the monster and Kafka's ape as ancestors of the trans/non-binary subject, thereby refusing fixed categories and exposing the arbitrary nature of dominant norms. Closely linked to this critique is his framing of gender transition as an act of embodied resistance and knowledge-production. He introduces the concept of the "somatheque": a living political and cultural archive. Distancing itself from the classical notion of the body (as nature or corpus), the somatheque is defined precisely as a "dense, somatic, stratified, organ-saturated apparatus managed by different biopolitical regimes". This concept benchmarks against preceding post-structuralist ideas (Foucault's docile body, Butler's incorporation of the norm) by newly capturing the contemporary, hyper-pharmacological environment of gender modification, the pharmacopornographic age, and insisting on techniques for the desubjectivation of the somatic apparatus.

All these arguments are woven into a broader intellectual critique. Preciado draws upon feminist, queer, and postcolonial thinkers (Monique Wittig, Sylvia Wynter, etc.) to show how even sexuality and identity have been historically constructed. He reminds us that long before Freud, Western anatomies knew a one-sex model in which female anatomy was simply an internalized male body. The notion of fundamentally different sexes is a recent binary epistemology born under colonial capitalism. In this register, normative masculinity and femininity (and even heterosexuality) are essentially powerful, fabricated social constructs. Preciado's trans figure thus embodies an unlimited range of ways of being beyond those artefacts. By foregrounding bodies and lives outside the psychoanalytic paradigm, he insists that knowledge itself is at stake: who is allowed to speak, to define experience, and to be counted as a legitimate subject?

The theoretical importance of *Can the Monster Speak?* lies in these interventions. For gender studies, it overturns a core canon (Freud/Lacan) and recasts transition as knowledge-making. For media studies, it models a performance that leverages digital publicity and visual culture (the viral speech, the "monster" persona) to disrupt power. Preciado's refusal to accept any fixed identity (male, female, patient) highlights how subjectivity is mediated by discourse and technology. Indeed, he argues that the emerging epistemic shift around gender is comparable to a scientific revolution: psychoanalysis must choose between defending the old "cage" or mutating into something new. In the epilogue, he even appeals for a mutant psychoanalysis, a paradigm shift that will allow new bodies and voices to speak.

Can the Monster Speak? is unmistakably of its time. It speaks into contemporary debates on trans rights, #MeToo critiques of patriarchal violence, and the decolonial turn in knowledge. At once performative memoir and theoretical tract, the

book demands that media and cultural scholars ask: how do narratives about sex and identity get made? Who is labelled a *monster* and who gets to tell their story? Preciado's work does not answer these in a single key; instead, it insists that the coming epistemological shift will depend on listening to those very “monstrous” voices that psychoanalysis has so far silenced. In doing so, it offers timely and incisive insights for any contemporary scholar pondering the politics of gender and knowledge.