

Sam Freifeld

Thesis Abstract

### Orlando's Many Forms: How Narrative Autonomy Shapes Trans Stories

My thesis examines how autonomy in who tells one's story shapes transgender representation in different kinds of media. Specifically, I compared Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* to Paul B. Preciado's *Orlando: My Political Biography*. In Woolf's novel, Orlando's entire life story is told through the lens of a fictional biographer, someone whose purpose is to capture Orlando's life through a scientific and factual lens. Orlando is a being who crosses gender and centuries, and yet the biographer simplifies Orlando's experiences for their perceived reader, ignoring many of Orlando's experiences the biographer deemed not valuable. Contrasting Woolf's biographer, Preciado takes on the role of being both biographer and Orlando, merging the story subject and story teller. I argue that the method of storytelling that Preciado uses in his film creates a more holistic and truthful depiction of many transgender experiences. While Woolf's novel focuses on one character who lives through many experiences and centuries, Preciado expands who Orlando is. Expanding the perspectives of who Orlando is and blending the genres of what parts of the film are documentary versus novel adaptation, Preciado breaks down the problematic idea that there is one trans experience. Towards the end of the film, Preciado's visual thesis of him doing surgery on Woolf's novel, sewing in pictures of modern trans icons and activists represents how he is taking narrative authority of both his own story but also including the stories of others. The surgery setting is also significant because of the medicalization of trans people; Preciado becomes his own doctor. While Woolf's novel was forward thinking for its time, Preciado's adaptation expands the definition of "who is Orlando?"

to include many different trans experiences, something he has the power to do because he is Orlando himself.