

TRANSCORPOREAL TECHNOBODIES, SENSORY ORGANISMS: RECOVERING NATURE IN TRANS POETICS

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ABSTRACT: Under the dominant nature-human binary, trans individuals are rejected from both categories on the grounds of their technologized embodiment. Contemporary trans poetic works, including Jos Charles' *Feeld*, reject this dualism through its poetic form and Middle English dialect in order to recover access to both nature and the body. Taking a multidisciplinary approach across trans, ecological, and media theory, with particular attention to the subfields of transecology and somatechnics, this paper argues that technology and nature are compatible, not mutually exclusive. *Feeld*—which embraces a “natural,” embodying technology—is set in stark contrast with *Titane*, a recent horror film that manifests the violence inherent in “unnatural” technology. A varied approach of textual analysis and applied theoretical frameworks draws on Stryker, Butler, Haraway, and Kristeva, among others. A trans ethic emerges as an urgent and imperative path to recovering the body alongside the label of naturalness.

Humankind has become disembodied. Constructs like gender and nature have severed individuals from the material plane, an estrangement accelerated by technology in certain forms. In recent years, trans discourse has emerged as a preeminent perspective on the problem of disembodiment, due in part to the acute sensation of unease, or dysphoria, that is common to many experiences of transgender individuals. Transness is deemed unnatural in the dominant lens due to the use of technologies to facilitate physical transition. As a result, trans people have a particular stake in the recovery of the body alongside the recovery of nature.

This stake is articulated across several branches of trans theory. The emergent field of transecology, a branch of trans theory that extends the interdisciplinary approach of ecocriticism, endeavors to complicate and expand its association between gendered and natural oppressions (Gaard, xx–xxi). The flourishing genre of trans poetics, meanwhile, frequently seeks to situate the trans body in nature by playing with conventions of form and language in order to explore embodiments illegible in cisgender circles. Andrea Abi-Karam and Kay Gabriel, editors of *We Want It All: An Anthology of Radical Trans Poetics*, articulate the project of these interventions, writing that “poetry conjoins and extends the interventions that trans people make into our lives and bodily presence in the world, which always have an aesthetic dimension” (Abi-Karam and Gabriel, 2). This growing body of trans literature and scholarship sets out to heal disembodiment through the recognition that nature and technology are not fundamentally opposite.

One recent and celebrated trans poetic work, *Feeld*, a poetry collection by Jos Charles, substantiates the naturalness of the trans body by eroding and reconstituting the structures of nature and gender. This breakdown takes place on the level of language and form: written in a modern dialect of Middle English, the text relies on ambiguous spellings and slash marks to unsettle binary modes of understanding. Poem XXI problematizes the tenuous relation between nature and the act of transitioning:

bieng graselesse / my breasthes
 foldeing for the firste /
 the crueleste retorick
 fore givenesse / & ther big browne beerds
 lik pubick slugg / i muste
 re member / plese kepe ur handes
 2 urself / i meen this
 ontologicklie /
 nayture is sumwere else (21)

On the level of form, the text demands a performative engagement from the reader, an imperative to interpret, to unravel, that it refuses to satiate. The “poly-vocality” of the poet’s Middle English spellings immediately winds open an ambiguous multitude of meanings—breasthes, for instance, could be “breasts” or “breaths,” invoking distinct yet overlapping sensations in the body that speak to various aspects of its inhabitation (RL Goldberg). Situated early in the speaker’s transition, as implied by the first folding of breasts, this poem insists on trans pubescence as a natural process. This image signifies the movement of the speaker’s body in a wanted direction, propelled by desire. On the other hand, the image of breaths folding comes to depict a catch in or deepening of the lungs, simultaneously hinting at surprise, awe, wonder, and dawning ease. As the speaker’s joy makes itself known on the corporeal plane, the formative roles that desire and affect take in shaping the body’s form are made visible.

The state of being “graselesse” presents another slippage in meaning that invites nature into the poem. Depending on intonation, this term can be read either as “graceless,” denoting some combination of innocence, clumsiness, and perhaps a state of having fallen from grace, or as “grassless,” as in arid and lacking in greenery, distant from nature. This latter interpretation of distance is, on the surface, echoed in the final statement that “nayture is sumwere else,” implying a loss that needs to be recovered.

The opacity of *Feeld*’s language and syntax confounds direct interpretation; at first glance, the only reading that emerges is the speaker’s apparent distance from the “elsewere of nayture.” But the conclusion itself is

troubling—is nature really somewhere else? More light is shed on this statement within the context of the poem’s second half (“i muste re member / plese kepe ur handes 2 urself / i meen this ontologicklie / nayture is sumwere else”). The syntax here is ambiguous: unlike conventional punctuation marks, the slashes only mark where clauses end and begin, withholding the anticipated hierarchical model of relationality.

The most likely reading of this section demonstrates *Feeld’s* project of jointly reconstituting natural and linguistic structures. In this interpretation, the statement “i muste re member” acts as the antecedent of “nayture is sumwere else,” suggesting that the latter sentiment is what needs re membering. To re member something sets an intention to member, or constitute, it afresh. If the concept of nayture being sumwere else needs to be deconstructed, then nayture was never truly absent in the first place. The split of “re” and “member” is self-descriptive: the neologism enacts its own project of overhauling language structures through division. In this context the state of being “grassless” represents not an utter lack of nature, but a lack within nature that needs to be restored.

The act of re membering takes on additional resonance in the context of gender-affirming surgical procedures, summoned up in other poems by terms like “invagination” and “vagynoplastycitie” (Charles 6, 16). Taking “member” as a bodily extremity—in this context, genital—and setting it in motion as a verb, an action that seems to fold back time and memory, directs the project of re membering onto the body in a constitutive sense. The implication of this action is one not only of revision but, arguably, of reversion. Re membering the body, in *Feeld*, means recovering its preexistent natural state through felt and desired practices. Feeling, then, is what constitutes the body, not the other way around; “ontologicklie,” nature isn’t located in the body, but in the sensation that drives it.

Cody-Rose Clevidence refers to this feeling-driven figure as a “sensory organism” in their poem “Untitled”—published in Abi-Karam and Gabriel’s recent trans poetic anthology—and questions its site of being in nature: “is it th need of th bark that calls / up th sap. do the blades of grass quivering in chilled darkness elicit dew. I think th / world evolved organisms to feel it. to crawl across its surface impelled or repelled / by th feeling of it. to hold it inside of them. which we do” (114). By probing into the role of biological tissues in driving life processes, Clevidence articulates *Feeld’s* suggestion that sensation foregrounds being without voiding materiality. The forces of impulsion and repulsion act on and shape the body, but the body itself becomes central as a conduit, a vessel for cradling feeling.

The image of holding nature inside of one’s body strikes at the fundamental set of boundaries that divide humans from nature and induce disembodiment. Through this image Clevidence unlocks a profound reciprocity between the individual and their environment, undoing Judith Butler’s inside-outside manifold, the premise that fields like nature and the body are entirely separate and impermeable (*Gender Trouble*, 98). Timothy Morton writes in his essay “Queer Ecology” that this “exclusion can never be totally

successful—the body just isn't an impermeable, closed form" (274). The body is only one field on which exclusion can be enacted; nature is likewise bound by permeable boundaries.

Feeld reckons with the inside-outside manifold through its fixation on surfaces and their contortions. For the speaker, the term "feeld" itself invokes a natural surface, specifically referring to the dimensional space that predates, or postdates, binary division. The surface of a feeld thus comes to represent a space of nostalgia for a somatically remembered wholeness as well as a space of potential, a space that can be re membered, recovered. In the collection, this re membering frequently takes the form of folding: revisiting the "firste foldeing" in poem XXI—an action that takes place on the surface of the body—the inversion this process entails produces a new signifier from, and within, a flat surface. Folds in this way constitute a doubling that allows for the "production of 'non-human' forms of 'subjectivity,'" in a Deleuzian sense (O'Sullivan, 1). Jos Charles makes plain the ways in which transition, a type of folding in its own right, shapes new subjects: "a tran lik all metall is a series of sirfase in folde / wee call manie of thees foldes identitie / sum spase shuffles betweene" (7). Her reorientation of the subject draws a parallel model alongside the inside-outside manifold: one between subject and object. Transness, expressed in *Feeld* by the folds in bodily and natural surfaces, constitutes a loss of subjectivity through the loss of phallic signifiers, in the vein of Lacan—a re membering which exists "outside the symbolic," escaping the binary (Robbins).

Trans theory extrapolates a spatial model for disrupting binary divisions, a model illustrated by Clevidence's image of "[crawling] across [the world's] surface" (114). Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah, and Lisa Jean Moore release the term "trans" from the suffix "-gender" to articulate a methodology for disrupting binary spaces. "Transing," the act of crossing their divisions, takes place both on a lateral plane—across a single divided field like gender—and vertically, between layered fields, linking, for instance, gendered boundaries with the boundaries placed on nature. Through these pathways, transing forges "capillary [spaces] of connection and circulation" between territories, laying the grounds for deterritorialization (Stryker et al., 14). Think of the spotted cattle in Silko's *Ceremony* and their unbridled ancestral desire to move southward across the barbed wire fences that used to carve up the landscape, now trampled and traceable testaments to their crossing.

Butler articulates the stakes of this relational and discursive feeling in their essay on desire: "If one is moved by oneself, one remains a disembodied soul, immortal, in communion with other souls. If one is moved by what is outside oneself, one acquires body and a human form" ("Desire," 371). The image articulated here highlights a performative as well as an ecological ethic: an active and discursive practice is required to catalyze a somatic response in the practitioner, and the practice must involve contact with others and the surrounding environment. The feeling this practice produces, and from which a body is substantiated, is termed embodiment.

Embodiment holds critical stakes in experiences and discourses of transness. In his autotheoretical “body essay” *Testo Junkie*, Paul B. Preciado describes the physical sensations induced by his daily application of testosterone gel: “An extraordinary lucidity settles in, gradually, accompanied by an explosion of the desire to fuck, walk, go out everywhere in the city ... My body is present to itself” (21). Hormonal technology unlocks a slew of senses and reactive relations to the writer’s environment that express themselves on a somatic level. In this sense, transness exposes the inseparability of technology from embodiment.

Writing more broadly about the fundamental yet tenuous role of technology in embodiment processes, Susan Stryker writes:

Embodiment is always technologized embodiment ... saying otherwise only favors those who can perform the sleight of hand that makes the technology of their becoming disappear into the ambient background. The trick is to remember that not all technologies are of human origin. (“Foreword,” xvii)

The feminist field of somatechnics bears crucial insights on the implications of technologized embodiment articulated here. In a somatechnic frame, the technologies associated with bodily gender affirmation—endocrine, surgical, silicon, mechanical—emerge as instruments for facilitating embodiment, seeding potential for the emergence of “rich and rapidly proliferating ecologies of embodied difference” (Stryker et al., 12). Stryker’s latter point—the recognition that some technologies are in fact natural—is critical to the somatechnic project. She contends that nature and technology do not exist as distinct forces on polar ends of a spectrum, with human animals caught between them. One does not need to be sacrificed for the other; they are not mutually exclusive.

Stryker further insists on the equal reliance of cis individuals on technology for their own access to gendered embodiment, contending that “we are all transcorporeal technobodies” (“Foreword,” xvii). One only has to glance at the catalog of the nearest plastic surgery clinic for evidence. While many of the most obvious examples of cis gender-affirming procedures are geared towards cis women—injections, lifts, reductions, tucks—cis men are also lining up for procedures to treat conditions like gynecomastia, or male breast enlargement, with many of the same techniques and instruments used in trans top surgery, a fact that points to the underlying technological sameness of gender affirming procedures for trans and cis individuals.

While some stigma may linger around cis women getting fillers or face lifts, the discrepancy in social acceptability between cis and trans people electing these procedures is inconceivably vast. The sole difference lies in the transgression of gendered borders—or, as Stryker points out, whether traces are left by the crossing, and whether they can be hidden or erased. Like the trans body, the fences in *Ceremony* are marked faintly with “bits of belly hair the deer left behind on the barbed wire where their trails crossed” (Silko, 174). The body,

in this conception, is made of barbed wire—is, in other words, a boundary on and across which corporeal technologies act. Accordingly, the body does not represent the field on which embodiment is achieved, but a material inhibition. Embodiment entails breaking down the body’s fence posts, its signifiers, and reconstituting the open space as something new.

The stakes of bearing these traces are high: even as the trans visibility movement has gained momentum in the past decade, empowering individuals to embrace the conditions of their embodiment, violence against trans people has never been higher. In 2021, over fifty trans and gender nonconforming people were killed in the US, the deadliest year on record (Carlisle). Transphobic rhetoric has also escalated among a vocal minority in online spaces. Despite this recent increase, however, such rhetoric has always existed. In her landmark essay on Frankenstein and transgender rage, Stryker quotes from an anonymous letter to a gay and lesbian periodical based in San Francisco: “I consider transsexualism to be a fraud, and the participants in it...perverted... People who break or deform their bodies [act] out the sick farce of a deluded, patriarchal approach to nature, alienated from true being” (“My Words,” 85). In this view, the status of naturalness is deliberately contorted and leveraged against trans people in the name of upholding binary gender. The writer frames transness as being fundamentally at odds with nature and “true being,” asserting that gender transition is tantamount to monstrosity, a transgression of the boundary separating human and animal.

In light of this abhorrent sentiment, it becomes impossible to forget that “for [transgender people] to (re) claim nature is a radical act” (Bedford, 1). Stryker’s tactic lies in embracing the status of otherness, strategically aligning herself with the figure of Frankenstein’s creature:

Like the monster, I am too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of my embodiment; like the monster’s as well, my exclusion from human community fuels a deep and abiding rage in me that I, like the monster, direct against the conditions in which I must struggle to exist. (“My Words,” 84)

When she identifies the “means of [her] embodiment” as the origin of her banishment, she is not speaking of the technologies of her transition, but of the path of her crossing, of her transgression of gendered boundaries. Her crossing, moreover, subverts the pejorative intent of linking gender and animal hierarchies by undermining the exclusionary category of human. The result is that her crossings deconstruct multiple interlocking boundaries at once.

In her *Cyborg Manifesto*, Donna Haraway advocates for a move towards hybridity as a political solution to division, rather than leaving human status behind altogether in exile. Whereas Frankenstein’s creature ends up wandering the ice, the cyborg promises wholeness within the existing bounds of society, suggesting that society itself has the capacity to change: “Far from signaling a walling off of people from other living beings, cyborgs signal disturbingly and

pleasurably tight coupling” (Haraway, 4–5). The dual attribution of disturbance and pleasure speaks succinctly to the friction produced by crossing boundaries as well as the embodied sensation the act of crossing engenders. Like Silko’s cattle, and like Clevidence’s sensory organism, Haraway’s cyborg signifies boundlessness on spatial and abstract territories, and likewise embraces technological entanglement as a way out of multiple layered binary oppositions.

Poetry offers a solution to the same problem through language. *Feeld*’s vision of reuniting transness with the natural is coded into its text; its formal elements operate technologically on its substance. Bounded ambiguously by line breaks and marked by slashes, the text itself loosely assumes the form of a field or body. The function of the slashes is incisive, divisive: they rend the substance of each poem like surgical cuts, causing a reiterated interruption in flow that endeavors to disintegrate its syntactical structure. By the same token, however, they simultaneously act as scars that visually stitch the poem together, pulling a vibrant corporeality out of its form. The slashes, in this visual sense, also evoke fence posts, signifying a field that has been released from boundedness. This latter interpretation imbues the collection with an almost prophetic quality, allowing it to enact through its flesh the deterritorializing project.

On the other hand, *Feeld* refuses to lean into the body entirely. The two shaping elements of slashes and line breaks sometimes coincide, but not always; their mismatched overlap destabilizes the sense of where each poem’s boundaries extend, as the visual limits formed by line endings fail to sync with the reader’s natural pauses for breath or emphasis. This incongruence has the effect of deemphasizing the corporeality of each poem in order to draw significance away from its form and onto its vocality, its revelatory inhabitation of the form it occupies. Given that its formal technological elements move the text in a direction of embodiment, then, *Feeld* can be understood as exemplifying “good” technology—technology that heals divisions, recovers fields from division, is nature-affirming.

The question remains of where the distinction might be drawn between good technology and bad. Haraway does not draw a distinction in the creation of her cyborg, leaving this question unaddressed. From a trans theoretical perspective, Preciado eliminates one possibility in *Testo Junkie* when he charts a history of “technosexuality,” the mutual backgrounds of technologies used in gender-affirming practices and in oppressive and violent contexts like war, going back several centuries. In this way, he demonstrates that technology can be reappropriated against the conditions of its origin through an augmentation of the “unfaithful” nature of cyborgs (Haraway 4). In other words, he argues, technology’s moral value is not determined at its creation.

However, bad, pro-binary, anti-natural technology still unquestionably exists, and is exemplified in the French horror film *Titane* (2021), directed by Julia Ducournau. Its protagonist, Alexia, suffers the consequences of transgressing the impermeable boundaries of womanhood and the human. From the beginning, Alexia lacks agency over the crossings she embarks on—crucially, she is motivated not by intuitive sensation or desire, but by desperation to preserve her

own life through any means necessary. For this reason her crossings are not trans, and do not help her access an embodied space.

The first issue is that the means of her cyborg condition are derived from violence. Early in the narrative, she demonstrates a proclivity for killing when she stabs a man who follows her after her performance at an erotic car show. Shortly thereafter, she has sex with a car—a flame-covered Cadillac—and gets pregnant. Her pregnancy, heralded by spillings of motor oil between her legs, marks her crossing of the human-machine boundary, the first plane of transition. It quickly becomes clear that this crossing is unwelcome; she attempts to give herself an abortion with a long metal needle, her murder weapon of choice, over the toilet, stuffing her mouth with tissue to muffle her grunts of pain. It can be inferred that her DIY approach may be necessitated by practicality: as the audience has just witnessed by way of a news broadcast, Alexia is likely responsible for a mysterious string of similar murders in the area, so it is reasonable to assume that visiting an abortion clinic, for instance, might reveal her as the perpetrator. This is the first instance in which the violence she commits restricts her ability to cross boundaries.

This technological crossing is complicated by yet another side effect of her violent acts. After her second killing spree, from which a witness escaped, she is forced to flee law enforcement. On an electronic billboard at the airport, between flashes of wanted posters covered in her likeness, she catches sight of a photo of a boy who has been missing for over a decade and decides to assume his identity. Ducking into the restroom, she cuts off all her hair, gives herself a black eye, binds her chest and pregnant stomach with ace bandages, and breaks her nose, after several attempts, on the edge of the sink. She then turns herself in and goes to live with the boy's father, Vincent, a fire chief.

Although some of Alexia's tactics for assuming the appearance of a boy resemble ones sometimes used by trans people in search of makeshift relief from dysphoria, they are undertaken under radically different conditions. Rather than pursuing makeshift relief from dysphoria in spite of physical risks—binding with an ace bandage, for instance, can result in bruised lungs or ribs—Alexia acts out of self-centered desperation, and is manifestly willing to commit violence to achieve her ends. Stryker's "means of ... embodiment" can therefore be taken to refer not to the physical technologies used in crossing, but to the motive, the desire, the drive that propels someone across and beyond binary spaces ("My Words," 84). This distinction exposes the centrality of active desire in forming the "capillary spaces" that facilitate embodiment and digs into the question of technology's role (Stryker et al., 14).

The premise that technology's worth is construed based on its usage or its user is contested in the discourse of the past half century or so, as the rapid proliferation of Cold War innovations prompted critical reflection of the capacities and dangers of new technological developments. Marshall McLuhan argues that all technology takes a moral position on the grounds of its capacity to "[pattern] human relationships" as extensions of the body (McLuhan, 8). On these grounds, he leverages a premonitory critique of Haraway's cyborg vision,

calling into question her thesis that the cyborg condition, regardless of its deployment, will only extend human capacities. McLuhan's argument suggests that using just any technology to become a cyborg isn't enough.

The technologies acting on Alexia push her toward a cyborg state, but not without an extreme physical toll. Alexia's pregnant body, bound flat into a masculine form for most of the film, quickly bears the signs, in moments of nudity, of both the mechanical being growing inside her and her efforts to conceal it. Her body leaks and lactates motor oil, and the ace bandage slices her skin, leaving lacerations across her chest and abdomen. As her stomach swells and begins to itch, her nails perforate holes in her flesh, exposing smooth metal. One possible point of critique against *Titane*'s politics arises out of the graphic and excruciating depictions of her physical changes. As critic Jude Dry writes for *IndieWire*, *Titane* "twists these milestones of transition—a beautiful and liberating experience for most trans people—making them painful and grotesque in service of its bent toward body horror" (Dry). Given that the film deliberately avoids depicting a trans narrative by keeping Alexia explicitly in the realm of cis womanhood—as Dry admits in the following paragraph—the accusation of transphobia rests primarily on the film's engagement with a particularly trans set of signifiers. Stepping away from a purely representational political interest, this critique fails to penetrate deeper than surface level.

A more productive reading of *Titane*'s abject bodily changes might press into the differences—and similarities—between its visual vocabulary and the real trans proximity to bodily functions and limits as depicted in a text like *Feeld*. Abjection itself, through intimacy with excretions, fluids, etc., is not so far removed from aspects of transition. There is a reason why the genre of body horror, in which *Titane* can be located, resonates with so many trans people. As Nadine Smith writes for *Them*, body horror articulates the experience of dysphoria through the depiction of "an accelerated loss of autonomy": "As a trans woman who has struggled with gender dysphoria my whole life, this may be the only genre of film as concerned with the flesh as I am" (Smith). Given the particularly trans concern with corporeal autonomy, *Titane*'s denial of its protagonist's self-determination and refusal to shy away from the body's corporeality positions the film as a counterpoint to what one might term a trans abjection.

Approaching the issue of what might constitute this trans abjection must be done with sensitivity to the overwhelming appetite of cis audiences for trauma porn—i.e., depictions of trans suffering on the physical field of the body. *Feeld* is aware of this tendency—"trama lit is so hote rite nowe," writes Charles facetiously—and avoids falling into its bind, despite writing about graphic bodily experiences (11). The text, no stranger to excretions, is replete with descriptions of bodily substances and leaky organs of all kinds: "hemorage," "milke in mye sacks," "ur filletted out spleen," "i culdnt shit for wekes," for instance (16, 41, 39, 16).

Feeld's language of abjection can scarcely even be termed abject, as it unequivocally refuses to submit to the shock and disgust of the abject that Julia

Kristeva enumerates in *Powers of Horror*, her seminal text on abjection. In some instances, abject images are turned not on the body, but on oppressive structures: “gendre is not the tran organe / gendre is yes a hemorage” (Charles, 16). The spelling of “hemorage” evokes blood-rage, or anger of the blood, recalling Stryker’s fury at her banishment to a subhuman status. By invoking hemorrhage, the leakage of blood through organ walls, in reference to gender, the speaker inverts the crossing action framed by trans theory to assert that gendered constructs themselves violate the body. In other words, what is horrifying and abject is the binaries that alienate the body from itself and from nature.

In this way, *Feeld* proposes that transness reconstitutes a relationship to the abject that hinges on the trans loss of subjectivity and does not limit itself to bodily excretions. Timothy Morton advocates for abjection to be reconsidered through the lens of queer ecology, drawing the discourse of nature into the question of subjecthood:

Excluding pollution is part of performing Nature as pristine, wild, immediate, and pure. To have subjects and objects, one must have abjects to vomit or excrete (Kristeva). By repressing the abject, environmentalisms...claiming to subvert or reconcile the subject-object manifold only produce a new and improved brand of Nature. (Morton, 274)

By drawing natural subjecthood in line with human subjecthood, Morton supplies a crucial framework for understanding trans embodiment. *Feeld*’s project of deterritorializing both nature and the body, and of dismantling subjecthood altogether, rests on recovering the abject, the third hidden point of the subject-object manifold. The trans individual, fallen from subjecthood, is already intimate with the abject, has already overcome the “primal repression” (Kristeva, 18). This fall from the symbolic order lays the grounds for a trans misreading of abjection that allows for its reclamation and embrace in facilitating embodiment.

Although *Titane* likewise puts the abject on display, Ducournau is clear in her rendering of its nauseating horror. The contortions Alexia’s body endures fail to facilitate unboundedness, barring her from escaping the position of subject. The end of the film drives home this lack of agency with fatal effect: in its final minutes, Alexia dies in childbirth. Her mortality, as well as the circumstances of her death, cement her inescapable status as a human woman, reduced to the function of a womb. For all its resilience to punctures and leakages, her body, ultimately, is the final uncrossable barbed wire fence; the binaries of gender and nature remain impenetrable to her. She falls short of fulfilling Haraway’s vision for a true cyborg because the means of her embodiment are rooted in violence rather than in pursuit of wholeness.

For this reason, *Titane*’s technology is anti-natural in that it neither wants nor permits the destruction of boundaries. When she goes into labor, Alexia—nude, leaking, swollen, punctured—stumbles back to Vincent’s house across a lawn in the firehouse complex. The juxtaposition between her ruined

body and the grassy surface could not be clearer in making manifest her distance from the natural. In this instant, she personifies a perverse and tortured specter of Clevidence's sensory organism: her figurative "crawl across [the] surface" could not be further ontologically from the interconnected, unbounded, desire-driven embodiment the poem conceives of.

Titane does not foreclose the possibility of crossings producing embodied feeling in general, in spite of its refusal to let its protagonist achieve a fully embodied state. In a handful of dance scenes, Alexia visibly experiences a momentary release that likens embodiment in the form of bodily gratification and connection to others. At a rave in the firehouse, Alexia watches as Vincent dances to an exuberant pop song, eyes shut, elated, among the other firefighters under ambient magenta lighting. In this decidedly male dominated space, she encounters, unexpectedly, a soft masculinity that promises hope of connection through community—a crucial embodied relation to environment articulated by Clevidence's sensory organism.

She looks on as Vincent is approached by one of the firemen who is growing suspicious of Alexia's androgynous presentation as a boy. Growing suddenly severe, Vincent proves his loyalty to her by shutting down the accusation before it can be voiced: "We don't talk about my son...Don't talk about my son. Ever" (Ducournau). Alexia crosses the dancefloor to take his hands, wordlessly accepting him as her father. This scene marks a turning point in their relationship: by crossing into this masculine territory and playing the part of a good son, Alexia is afforded both physical safety from discovery and a sensation of lightness that looks like embodiment, an accidental side effect of her passage across gender boundaries.

However, at the same time, the film restrains her from recovering her body completely: her crossings inevitably overlap and contradict each other in ways that annul her desire. As they dance under the colored lights, Vincent hoists Alexia over his shoulders in a triumphant fireman's carry and spins her above the crowd. The pressure on her tightly bound stomach, shown in private moments to be huge, itchy, and punctured by her scratching, causes her to visibly blanch and almost pass out. Here, her pregnancy—and its connotations of her lack of choice and departure from the human world occupied by Vincent and the firemen—prevents her from accessing a truly embodied state. In this sense her crossings work against each other: moving into a masculine zone, she is caught on the fence of her pregnancy and its unavoidable cyborg implications.

Her crossing into this masculine territory likewise proves insufficient in liberating her feeling. Near the end of the film, before she goes into labor, a subsequent party at the firehouse lays bare the conditions of her subjecthood. A group of men chanting "Adrien! Adrien!" force her on top of a firetruck to dance for them in joking camaraderie. She complies by swaying into her old showgirl choreography, circling her hips and caressing the air in an ecstatic performance of femininity. The firemen exchange glances, clearly uncomfortable with the disjunction between her affect and her androgynously masculine presentation; Vincent storms wordlessly out of the room. Feeling moves her, for a moment,

into an embodied space that transcends the categories of Adrien or Alexia, but the threat of discovery coerces her to retreat into the presumed security of binary territories.

Alexia presses up against this reaction until her death. Rather than abandon the gender structure, her insistence on being seen in her femininity precludes her from achieving wholeness—attempting to embody the two territories at once kills the potential for hybridity. During her birth, between contractions, she tells Vincent to call her Alexia, her last desperate attempt to align herself with a binary pole in an act of self-preservation. This insistence on a singular identification is perverse in that she hopes it will help her escape monstrosity. This action reverts her relationship to gender—which has grown increasingly ambiguous and wild in moments of embodied feeling—to an inside-outside setup in which femininity constitutes a core identity, albeit a secret one, a final truth to reveal before death. This allegiance to the realm of womanhood, along with the abject circumstances of her pregnancy, signals her inability to access a hybrid, trans, or cyborg space.

For all the futility of Alexia's crossings, and as distant from embodied wholeness as she remains, *Titane* invites the potential of technologized embodiment as an avenue to what can be described in Lacanian terms as an Other jouissance, or “jouissance of the body” (Robbins). Alexia's failure and refusal to break free of the systems that contain her movement portends a more permanent release, foregrounding an embodiment that rejects the symbolic and emphasizes a term that invokes Clevidence: “the body as organism” (Robbins). Their figure of the embodied “sensory organism” thus gains coherence in the context of lost subjecthood and a fall from the symbolic order.

Another journey comes to fruition in *Feeld* through its intentional fall from subjecthood, orchestrated in part through the distortion of the body. In one poem the speaker refers to anatomy with floridly descriptive language: “i holde my cocke / softe lik a dryed plum / it is not the cocke of whorld / but perchd lik a redened swallow” (Charles, 13). Here, the speaker's sex organ acquires an animal quality as it falls from their position in the “whorld,” or symbolic order. This strategy of holding the translucent glass of sensory metaphor over specific body parts proves their non signification, refracting the cis gaze and turning it back on itself. By refusing to render the trans body fully legible, the text situates the speaker as an other rather than subject, an organism reunited with its excretions. This return to the body is the product of trans crossings, but it is not the end; the process of crossing, of becoming, is endless.

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