

# Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Deleuze: Thinking the Lived, Utopic Body (without Organs)<sup>1</sup>

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In »Utopian Body« (1966), Michel Foucault presents a complex conception of the body informed by certain phenomenological ideas developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. It is a conception that is both paradoxical and unique, inasmuch as it is not found elsewhere in his oeuvre.<sup>2</sup> The *utopic body* is both here and not here; in its *utopic* aspects, it always extends beyond its own conceived limits, but at the same time remains a sealed, unified, experiencing entity. In this essay, I will first demonstrate that Foucault's utopic body may be understood as closely related to Merleau-Ponty's appropriation of the lived body.<sup>3</sup> Second, I will show that Merleau-Ponty's lived body and Foucault's utopic body can, together with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Body without Organs* (BwO), collectively overcome the dichotomy between a *purely utopic* body (requiring no actual basis in the real) and the physical, *objective* body. I conclude by showing that whereas we (as embodied beings) live spatially in a real, concrete world, together, the utopic body – a healthy BwO – and the lived body can promote new, creative ways of pushing the limits of possible experience.

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**2** | Michel Foucault, »Le corps utopique,« in: *Die Heterotopien. Der utopische Körper* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2005), pp. 55-65; transl. by Lucia Allais, Caroline A. Jones and Arnold Davidson under the title »Utopian Body« in: *Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology and Contemporary Art*, ed. Caroline A. Jones (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT press, 2006). Henceforth cited as »Utopian Body,« followed by French and then English pagination.

**3** | The »lived body« is referred to by Merleau-Ponty as *le corps vécu* or *corps propre*, and can be, in conjunction with Merleau-Ponty's concept of *flesh*, understood as interpreted out of Husserl's *Leib*. See Emmanuel de Saint-Aubert, *Du lien des êtres aux éléments de l'être* (Paris: Vrin, 2004), pp. 148-155.

## THE BODY AND ITS UTOPIAS

Foucault's utopic body is a paradoxical entity; it is both open and closed, and always retains utopic (or *virtual*) elements. On the one hand, it is visible, opaque, and a thing; and on the other, invisible, transparent and *life*. Although some of my experiences imply a more intense involvement of my physical body (e.g., pain, sex), and thus seem to *awaken* certain parts of my body to me (e.g., my organs), my body is nevertheless always *open*, as I am intertwined with the external world and can have an infinite number of different interactions stimulated by elements both of this (real) world and *utopic* (*virtual* or simulated) worlds.

A utopia, according to Foucault, is a (generally non-localizable) »place outside all places [...] where I will have a body without a body«<sup>4</sup>). Although a utopia necessarily references experiences beyond our reality, such a creation must bear a resemblance to how we, embodied, experience reality (if it were completely irrelevant to human life, it would cease to have meaning *qua* utopia). Moreover, utopias never succeed in *eliminating* the body,<sup>5</sup> for the body possesses *different types* of utopias deep inside itself. These utopias include basements, attics, obscure stays (*séjours*), and bright beaches, which, on my reading, represent the places-without-place in the body itself, which impose conditions on and structure my perception and encounters of the world (e.g. my head, my mind, my capacities of mobility and memory).<sup>6</sup> Such limitations restrict experience and the types of utopias I can create, and this supports the claim that my existence in the world can never be reduced to the *purely* imaginary and utopic.

Foucault states, »There is no need for magic, for enchantment [...] for a soul, nor a death, for me to be both transparent and opaque, visible and invisible, life and thing. For me to be a utopia, it is enough that I be a body.«<sup>7</sup> Thus, although *I* am something invisible (e.g., a life, an identity or *utopia*), the body is both origin and condition of my existence. Although my body is involved in the

4 | Foucault, »Utopian Body,« p. 56/p. 229.

5 | Utopias that *seem* to aim for the eradication of the body are identified as: *utopias of the incorporeal body* (e.g., lands of fairies, pixies, genies, and magicians – lands in which the body can be immortal), *the lands of death* (in which the transfiguration or denial of the body occurs through the glorification or attempts at preservation and prolongation of dead bodies), and the *utopia of the great myth of the soul* (the soul can escape and purify the body, despite being lodged within the latter). See *ibid.*, p. 56/p. 229-230.

6 | For example, my head is a »cave« open to the exterior world (rather than as purely immanent to it); I see a continuous landscape when I look out of my eyes instead of a divided or fragmented picture; if I try to look directly at the sun, its brightness blinds me in an uncontrollable way.

7 | *Ibid.*, p. 60/p. 231.

development of my *I*, and I am grounded in and limited by my body (and can become hyper-aware of certain parts of my body) – I am not my body. Nor, however, can I ever escape my incarnation as the condition of all identities and utopias, and as the principal actor in these utopias and the locus of their relevance. Instead of allowing one to flee one's body, utopias make it possible for one to experiment with and change the *life* or *identity* within and corresponding to the body. They thus offer the potential to *reconfigure* the body and modify its relationship to different structures and identities, in unpredictable and creative ways.

Despite its seemingly *objective*, universal physical characteristics such as its parts, organs, shape and movements, the body as we come to know it is *a priori* a *lived* body, an experiencing entity within the world, and is therefore not objectively comprehensible. Foucault identifies a great *utopic rage* that decays and volatilizes the body,<sup>8</sup> and which may be characterized as the movement of various, potentially identity-forming factors. The body can never fully escape this utopic rage and be considered objectively, although it paradoxically remains the very *condition* of the existence of this rage. Although the latter can be destructive, the body can also be taken over by utopic or imaginary dimensions, which guide its activity and expression in ways that *do not* directly suppress desire, as in the case of the dancer.<sup>9</sup>

## THE UTOPIC BODY IN LIGHT OF MERLEAU-PONTY'S THEORY

As suggested above, Foucault's utopic body is influenced by Merleau-Ponty's lived body, the experiencing body in which one lives, as differentiated from the *objective body*. This implies that there exists neither an objective body cut off from its environment, nor a body that would be an object for an *I think* or for a constituting consciousness (that could ascribe it its intelligibility and reality).

Foucault's utopic body may also be directly linked to Merleau-Ponty's analyses of perception and imagination. Foucault suggests that things in the world find their origins exterior to me, and they make their ways into my head in the form of particular images or other manifestations, which in turn affect the structure of my thoughts and the type of worlds or utopias I can imagine. Accordingly, for both Merleau-Ponty and Foucault, different postulated worlds, along with all imagined, possible beings, can exist only as variants of *the world*

8 | *Ibid.*, p. 64/p. 233.

9 | The dancer's body can outwardly manifest itself as a creative expression of the specific (musical) utopic spaces in which it participates, in turn engendering different experiences and *possibilities* of experience, and furthermore, new reflections.

and of *actual being* (Merleau-Ponty's *Être actuel*).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, our existence as a lived body in this world is inseparable from our attempts to create ontologies and extract essences. Even if one succeeds in eliminating inessential elements of experience, one still cannot become disembodied or objectively discern the ontological meaning of the concrete elements that remain<sup>11</sup> – throughout all thinking, imagining, reasoning and analysis, we are necessarily embedded in experience.<sup>12</sup> For Merleau-Ponty and Foucault, activity at an invisible (imagined, transparent, utopic, living, or ideal) level is thus always directly related to the visible and to this world, as well as to the reality of the body. This body is the condition of the possibility of all identities. However, identities and thoughts cannot be reduced to the functions of the body and its processes; similarly, our incarnation can never be fully experienced in one moment *by an I*.

Therefore, regardless of the extent to which utopic powers may turn against the body and invite us to live an increasingly virtual<sup>13</sup> existence, utopic worlds can never be a substitute for the real world or render the body irrelevant. The meaning of utopias exists only *for us*, embodied. Nevertheless, one's experience in the world may be *modified* through the imaginary and utopic or digitally coded worlds.<sup>14</sup> The problems presented by the modern, digital, virtual possibilities

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**10** | This consideration of the imagination can also be analysed in the context of art and the invisible. See the discussion of the imaginary as being at once near and far from the actual in Merleau-Ponty, *L'Œil et l'esprit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), p. 24; transl. by Michael B. Smith under the title «Eye and Mind,» in: *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), p. 126.

**11** | To suspend time, body, and my thoughts to find that which necessarily belongs to being «would deprive me of that very cohesion in depth [*en épaisseur*] of the world and of Being without which the essence is subjective folly and arrogance.» Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 148; transl. by Alphonso Lingis under the title *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 112. Henceforth *The Visible and the Invisible*, followed by French and then English pagination.

**12** | Merleau-Ponty accordingly argues that Husserl is unable to effectuate the move from fact to essence through free variation by the imagination, and claims that *idéation* (the formation of ideas) always occurs in a «space of existence, under the guarantee of my duration,» *ibid.*, p. 148/p. 111.

**13** | The term *virtual* is used here in a general sense, including the imaginary, the utopic and the digital.

**14** | For contemporary research on how «virtual worlds» affect reality, see the work of Jeremy Bailenson at Stanford University.

of our age exemplify both the irreducibility of the real and the benefits of the virtual as a modifier of the actual.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, Foucault's reflections on the nature of vision and touch, which involve first-person accounts throughout the »Utopian Body,« may be linked to Merleau-Ponty's later ideas, *in which the sensible is the originary in which everything is*. The general *sensible* becomes *being* in the primary sense; perception, understood as our relationship to the world, things, and being, is primarily in and of the sensible. Moreover, the perceivable nature of our bodies is also inextricably related to our worldly existence.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, reflection on the body is necessarily secondary to sensual experience in a lived body, since experience is pre-reflective and stimulates reflection. Foucault also demonstrates that although *I* can never perceive my lived body in its entirety, experiences of feeling and touch, and looking into a mirror, for example, can help me to understand and feel the possibilities and limitations of the body as defined and discovered through interaction – and subsequently, in a second moment, stimulate me to reflect.

## MERLEAU-PONTY, FOUCAULT, HEIDEGGER AND ONTOLOGY

Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of the lived body and Foucault's utopic body share a common ontological, yet non-foundational, heritage particularly indebted to Martin Heidegger and his response to Edmund Husserl. Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow note that »Husserl's transcendental phenomenology gave rise to an existential counter-movement led by Heidegger in Germany and Maurice Merleau-Ponty in France. Foucault was steeped in the thought of both these existential phenomenologists.«<sup>17</sup> Heidegger denies the possibility of reducing our experience of being to an organizing, transcendental, Husserlian ego or subject. Similarly, both Merleau-Ponty and Foucault oppose the

**15** | See, for example, R. Kolotkin, M. Williams, C. Lloyd, E. Halford, »Does Loving an Avatar Threaten Real Life Marriage,?« in: *Journal For Virtual Worlds Research*, December 5, 2012, <http://journals.tdl.org/jvwr/index.php/jvwr/article/view/6296>, (last accessed 25-4-2016). Conversely, for positive effects of the virtual on one's existence in a real, material world (in this case, regarding soldiers with PTSD), see Alexandra Hemmerly-Brown, »DoD gives PTSD help ›second life‹ in virtual reality,« in: *U.S. Army News*, January 24, 2011, [www.army.mil/article/50751](http://www.army.mil/article/50751), (last accessed 25-4-2013).

**16** | Vision occurs *between* the inside and outside of a perceiver; involving an intertwining of interiority and externality. See Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 171/pp. 130-131.

**17** | Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Second Edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. xxi.

establishment of an originary, founding consciousness or an autonomous, transcendental subject in their conceptions of the incarnated subject-in-the-world (Foucault nevertheless maintains a critical distance from the ontological foundations of Heideggerian metaphysics).

However, such opposition does not imply a necessary postulation of knowable, ontological grounds to explain our own existence. In this matter, Heidegger demonstrates that we do not have direct access to *Being* [*Sein*] itself. In *On Time and Being* (1962), he states: »To think Being explicitly requires us to relinquish Being as the ground of beings in favor of the giving which prevails concealed in unconcealment, that is, in favor of the It gives.«<sup>18</sup> Through the *Es gibt*, Being, as we can comprehend it, is given as a *gift* for Heidegger, as the »unconcealing of presencing.«<sup>19</sup> A similar critique of the search for such a knowable, ontological basis is implied in Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963),<sup>20</sup> and in Merleau-Ponty's indirect ontology and critique of Husserlian essence.<sup>21</sup> In short, for Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Foucault, we cannot have direct access to Being, and accordingly, the acquisition of a privileged knowledge or the ultimate truth of the essence of all things is impossible. It is in this regard that all three criticize the possibility of achieving genuine objectivity contexts of metaphysics and contemporary science.

Being thus *comes to be* reflected upon or »known« by us only indirectly: whether through its opening as presence, specific structures (e.g. of perception, language), historical conditions, orders or knowledges. This entails a general

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**18** | Martin Heidegger, *Time and Being* [*Zeit und Sein*, 1962], transl. by Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 6. »It gives« here is the translation of the German »Es gibt,« which, it should be noted, is more idiomatically rendered in English as »There is.«

**19** | Ibid. Heidegger explains more precisely that »[t]o think Being explicitly requires us to relinquish Being as the ground of beings in favor of the giving which prevails concealed in unconcealment, that is, in favor of the It gives. As the gift of this It gives, Being belongs to giving. As a gift, Being is not expelled from giving. Being, presencing is transmuted. As allowing-to-presence, it belongs to unconcealing; as the gift of unconcealing it is retained in the giving«.

**20** | An ontological ground cannot be directly identified if all that we see (and know) is conditioned by that which we can express. See the »Preface« to Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la Clinique* (Paris: P.U.F., 1963), translated by A.M. Sheridan under the title *The Birth of the Clinic* (London: Routledge, 2003). Henceforth cited as *Naissance de la clinique*, followed by French and then English pagination.

**21** | Merleau-Ponty accordingly states that the indirect method of ontology (*Being in beings* – »l'être dans les étants«) is the only one that conforms to Being (*The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 233/p. 179).

separation of Being from its representations or modalities of being.<sup>22</sup> A meaningful inquiry (into the body or being) must therefore examine that which is beyond the visible or represented in a non-foundational way – the processes, structures or conditions underlying the presence of being as *das Seiende/l'étant*, without claiming that the visible is either merely superficial or a representation that directly corresponds with Being itself.

In his different presentations of the historical *a priori*,<sup>23</sup> Foucault wavers between investigating that which is prior to and persists *outside* of our perception and experience, and the structures of perception itself. The gradual shift from an analysis primarily of perception (including questions regarding the relation of the *seen* to the *said*) to an ontologico-linguistic inquiry can be tracked from Foucault's *Birth of the Clinic* to *The Order of Things* (1966), and, in a parallel fashion, from Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) to *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964).

In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault explores the relationship between the sayable and the visible, in his search for the possibility of a discourse of disease through »the spatialization and verbalization of the pathological.«<sup>24</sup> He traces this relationship through forms of the historical *a priori*, the final form of which entails the surpassing of the *invisible* over the *sayable*. In an allusion to the »Utopian Body,« the body is described as an »opaque mass,« a »tangible space,«<sup>25</sup> whose reality and events can escape perception and linguistic expression (i.e., can evade the medical gaze). Foucault claims that speech and language can affect perception; it follows that the realities of the body and disease can become imperceptible to us once they fall outside the scope of the sayable. Foucault's emphasis on spatialization and his description of the historical *a priori* as »a deep space, anterior to all perceptions« in *The Birth of the Clinic*<sup>26</sup>

**22** | On this point (in light of Heidegger) Béatrice Han demonstrates that although Foucault in *The Order of Things* claims to be in search of that which makes representations and knowledge possible in the epistemological order, »the preface clearly suggests that this perspective should in fact be subordinated to a more ›archaic‹ research, which alone would make it possible to discover what determines the ›mode of being‹ of the knowable.« Béatrice Han, *Foucault's Critical Project: Between the Transcendental and the Historical* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 57.

**23** | It is beyond the limits of this essay to explore Foucault's different presentations of the historical *a priori* and their ontological significance (particularly in relation to Heideggerian Being). However, broadly speaking, the historical *a priori* in Foucault's work may be generally understood as the *a priori* field of the historical conditions of subjects, societal formations, and modes of being.

**24** | Foucault, *Naissance de la Clinique*, p. viii/xi.

**25** | *Ibid.*, p. 123/p. 122.

**26** | *Ibid.*, p. 3/p. 5, my emphasis.

seem to invite us to renounce perception in favor of analyses of space and externality,<sup>27</sup> which reiterates the argument in the »Utopian Body« that certain realities and phenomena of the body elude our individual understanding.

Despite the challenges of correlating Foucault's analysis of the gaze in *The Birth of the Clinic* with Merleau-Ponty's perception-knowledge relationship, it can be said that both thinkers investigate structures of perception and challenge *objective* knowledge. However, theories of perception are limited in their explanations of the body in space, and Merleau-Ponty and Foucault must eventually extend their analyses to the realm of the ontological in a non-foundational way. Beyond the gaze and perception, the body is involved in a real, spatial externality, and navigates the world through places. We can therefore observe a shift in Foucault's early conception of the *historical a priori* towards (in Heideggerian vocabulary) the consideration of the variable conditions of modes or understandings of *Being*.

A subject's development always occurs within a mode of being *beyond* independent subjectivity and does not entail the reduction of experience to thought.<sup>28</sup> However, this rejection of the originary subject should be met with a refutation of theories of absolute, metaphysical foundations, since at the same time the conditions of the possibility of the subject are no longer strictly separable from the subject herself.<sup>29</sup> Correspondingly, it may be argued that beneath visible, ascertainable organisation, discourse, and linguistic and societal structures which condition the subject, there is, following the Heideggerian *Es gibt*, a *letting-be*, a *giving* – an *order* for Foucault, at the origin of the presentation

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**27** | Han claims, however, that this specific Foucauldian *anteriority* is incompatible with Merleau-Ponty's thought (for he rejects the concept of an *a priori*), and highlights the difficulty that the historical *a priori* here seems to be both prior to and at once to presuppose its own founding content. *The Birth of the Clinic* thus perhaps suggests a phenomenological theory of perception that it cannot itself uphold. See Han, *Foucault's Critical Project*, p. 50-51. Philippe Sabot similarly claims that in this text, Foucault effectuates both a phenomenology of perception and at once an anti-phenomenology of perception. See Philippe Sabot, »Foucault et Merleau-Ponty: un dialogue impossible?«, in: *Les Études philosophiques* 106/3 (2013), pp. 317-332, here p. 328.

**28** | See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. vi, translated by Colin Smith under the title *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. xi. Henceforth cited as »Phenomenology,« followed by French and then English pagination.

**29** | Han, *Foucault's Critical Project*, pp. 14-17. Han suggests here that three different interpretations of Foucault's historical *a priori* may be represented by *The Birth of the Clinic*, *The Order of Things*, and *The Archeology of Knowledge*, respectively.

of Being in modes,<sup>30</sup> which underscores the necessity of investigating beyond appearances, representation and Being (*l'étant/das Seiende*). This indirect, non-foundational and ontological approach also alludes to *The Birth of the Clinic*, in which the reversible nature of our perception of the world and the discovery of »obscure masses« in the opaque body relate, according to Han, to the impossibility of representing Being in itself and the emergence of a »new empiricity,« »life« in *The Order of Things*.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, both of these works analyze the relation between seeing and saying, the visible/represented and the expressible, and language and things over time. Nevertheless, although Foucault's *order* seems to be a promising ontological concept, it appears unable to supply the resources for a satisfactory explanation of phenomena such as incarnation; and this is demonstrated in the unclear, complex shift from *The Birth of the Clinic* to *The Order of Things*: neither an investigation of the structures of subjective perception nor an analysis of an ontological *outside* or concept of Being/order can sufficiently explain embodied human life in the world; such an explanation would require elements of both, along with reflections on language and space.

Similar conclusions may be drawn in consideration of the analyses of perception in *The Phenomenology of Perception* and the ontology of the flesh in *The Visible and the Invisible*. The body, in both texts, retains »ontological priority,« since, as David Low explains, in lived experience »the body and the world upon which it opens [...] sustain a field of stable meanings, meanings that are then sublimated in the bodily gesture called speech.«<sup>32</sup> Language, with the dependency of its development and use upon embodied speakers, unifies analyses of perception and ontology. The reversibility between the perceiver and the world as perceived occurs in language, which is a medium through which

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**30** | Han demonstrates that *order*, in the Preface of *The Order of Things*, can engender the codes and discourses of our knowledge of being(s) (in language), and thus define our *modes of being* (ultimately giving rise to order on the empirical level and to scientific theories). See Han, *Foucault's Critical Project*, p. 55. Foucault's »naked« or »pure« (»nue«) experience of this underlying order could thus be a reference to Heideggerian ontological difference. See Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p. 13, translated under the title *The Order of Things* (New York: Routledge, 2005, p. xxiii); henceforth cited as *The Order of Things*, followed by French and then English pagination; see also Han, *Foucault's Critical Project*, pp. 59-60 for more on this topic. Han also acknowledges challenges of the Foucault-Heidegger comparison (e.g., it is impossible for Heidegger to *directly* identify a concept such as order with Being).

**31** | Han, *Foucault's Critical Project*, p. 51. This relationship is, however, limited in its possibilities. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

**32** | Douglas Low, *Merleau-Ponty's Last Vision: A Proposal for the Completion of »The Visible and the Invisible«* (Evanston, Illin.: Northwestern University Press, 2000), p. 22.

the world acquires meaning as things *become objects of perception* for humans-in-the-world.<sup>33</sup> This brings us once again to the non-foundational, ontological thesis, culminating in Merleau-Ponty's concept of the »flesh«, which says that existence comes first, and that reflection is secondary to perception.<sup>34</sup> Through the flesh, the reversible, are expressed the intertwined relationships of body and world, sensate and the sensible, visible and the invisible; blurring the subject-object distinction and enriching our understanding of the utopic body as always in-between theories of ontology and perception.<sup>35</sup>

Merleau-Ponty thus initiates an overcoming of the split between the existence of the human understood in objective, realist terms and an autonomous, originary, transcendental subject. He proposes a »third dimension«<sup>36</sup> beyond the transcendental or empirical, between perceiving and the perceived.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Foucault, through his historical *a priori*s, writes the history of that which »determines the reciprocal positions and the mutual play of the knowing subject and that which is to be known,«<sup>38</sup> and posits the utopic body as irreducible

**33** | Perception also always involves an a-personal sensing of the world. Subsequently, once the perceiver is understood as always in and of flesh – her body as both sensate and sensible – the impossibility of discerning essences becomes clear (*The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 149/p. 111).

**34** | For an account of a possible phenomenological approach to a non-essentialist ontology founded in real difference which entails a turn »to the reverse side or the lining of being, to the invisible in and of the visible,« see Miguel de Beistegui, »Toward a Phenomenology of Difference?,« in: *Research in Phenomenology* 30 (2000), pp. 54-70, here p. 6.

**35** | See Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 184/p. 142. The flesh is both present and undisclosed, and exists neither purely as matter nor as spirit/ideality.

**36** | This third dimension might be designated as the historical *a priori*, the *vécu*, general sensibility, or the flesh. For more on this third dimension and the rejection of the transcendental-empirical dichotomy (which is also challenged by Deleuze), see Sabot, »Foucault et Merleau-Ponty,« p. 325.

**37** | *Ibid.* In this third dimension, Sabot explains, »our activity and our passivity, our autonomy and our dependence, cease to be contradictory,« as it »simultaneously delivers its own conditions of transcendental possibilities.« Here, Sabot is quoting Merleau-Ponty, *Parcours II*, 1951-1961 (Paris: Éditions Verdier, 2000), p. 13. Sabot also draws attention to the dimension of the *vécu* as presented in *The Order of Things* as »both the space in which all empirical content are given to experience and the original form that makes them possible in general and designates their primary roots.« (Compare Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 332/p. 349). Foucault explains that the *vécu* provides a »means of communication between the space of the body and the time of culture.« *Ibid.*, p. 332/pp. 349-350, (English transl. Kyla Bruff).

**38** | Han, *Foucault's Critical Project*, p. 48. Han is quoting Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic*, p. 139/p. 137.

to originary conditions or state(s). Therefore, despite certain difficulties in comparison,<sup>39</sup> the Merleau-Ponty-Foucault relationship shows that invisible elements on the level of »Being,« order, (a-personal) perception and/or language open different modes or ways of being in which we live, embodied.

## THE OPENING OF SPACE

Heidegger's latter analyses of space can help us understand Foucault's claim that the body is always in a non-place, but still irreducibly exists as a perceiving, experiencing body.<sup>40</sup> *Dasein* is spatial<sup>41</sup> and includes our *dwelling* in space in a manner inexplicable in terms of transcendental subjectivity.<sup>42</sup> Günter Figal explains that »to describe something in its spatiality means: to understand it from

**39** | For example, the resolution of Merleau-Ponty's *postulation* of an ontology of the flesh (and its foundational claims) with the historically conditioned/conditioning, epistemic dimension of the historical *a priori*; and, as Sabot notes, the issue of whether Foucault breaks with Merleau-Ponty by historicizing his »ontological resource,« making it depend upon a »change in the ›fundamental dispositions of knowledge‹« and reflecting Merleau-Ponty's failure to historically and critically contextualize man in a set of discursive practices. Sabot also points to pertinent differences in the two thinkers' conceptions of the roots of the historical crisis of the human sciences. Sabot, »Foucault et Merleau-Ponty,« p. 328 and p. 326, (English transl. Kyla Bruff).

**40** | This discussion will help us contradict Sabot's conclusion, namely, that it is perhaps impossible to experience the utopic body, »because this body does not really exist, because it is not this utopic body, topically situated, that we can observe in the mirror each morning, but it designates rather a utopic body or, better, a body-utopia that ›volatilizes‹ the space of the *corps propre* in the non-place of the utopia.« Ibid., p. 332, (English transl. Kyla Bruff).

**41** | *Da-sein* has occasioned misinterpretations (*Mißdeutungen*, states Heidegger); it cannot be simply literally translated as there(*Da*)-Being(*sein*), but must be thought of as the French *être-le-la*, in English, literally, the *being-it-there*. Heidegger further explains in a letter to Jean Beaufret (23 November 1945), »Und le-là ist gleich *aletheia*: Unverborgenheit-Offenheit« (»And the it-there is equal to *aletheia*: Unconcealment-Openness«). In short, *Dasein* is spatial, but does not concern the question of »where?« for it is the *being-of-the-there*. Martin Heidegger, *Lettre sur l'humanisme*, rev. ed., transl. by Roger Munier (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1964), pp. 180-185, here p. 182, (English transl. Kyla Bruff).

**42** | In texts such as *Time and Being* (1962) and *Building Dwelling Thinking* (1951), the space of *Dasein* can no longer be ontologically understood out of temporality, as was attempted in *Being and Time* (1927). For example, in *Time and Being*, we see the creation of a pre-conditioned Being as an ontological field which engenders *time-space*

space and so to be attentive to that which does not appear [*das Unscheinbare*] in the appearance.«<sup>43</sup> Spatiality involves the interplay of the invisible and the visible, the possible and the real, the »appearance and that which does not appear.«<sup>44</sup> We must consequently attend to the inconspicuous in space to prevent the complete closure of the body,<sup>45</sup> and to disclose its hidden possibilities, which may be uncovered by the imagination and through the creation of utopias.<sup>46</sup>

Additionally, Heidegger's *mineness* (*Jemeinigkeit*) as explored by Didier Franck could also offer insight on the genesis of the embodied I. Franck explains that »mineness is the relationship of *Dasein* to its Being that renders *possible* the pronoun ›I‹; *Dasein* is ›always mine, which means neither postulated by me nor separated in an individualized I.«<sup>47</sup> *Mineness* does not refer to one particular person – rather, it renders identities possible.<sup>48</sup> It accordingly bears commonalities with Merleau-Ponty's non-personal dimension of perception.<sup>49</sup>

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as an openness, which »exclusively and primarily provides the space in which space as we usually know it can unfold« (Heidegger, *Time and Being*, p. 14).

**43** | Günter Figal, *Martin Heidegger: Phänomenologie der Freiheit*, 3rd edn., Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013, p. 373. Original text: »Etwas in seiner Räumlichkeit beschreiben, das heißt: es vom Raum her zu verstehen und so aufmerksam auf das Unscheinbare im Erscheinenden zu sein.« (English transl. Kyla Bruff).

**44** | *Ibid.*, original text: »das Spiel von Erscheinen und Unscheinbarem.« (English transl. Kyla Bruff).

**45** | Figal demonstrates that inquiring into the invisible can reveal information on the process of becoming present or visible (»wie das, was erscheint, in seinem Erscheinen möglich ist«). Figal, *Martin Heidegger*, p. 373).

**46** | In light of Merleau-Ponty, the imagination may be described in the context of art as »attention to the immanent, latent, hidden, or repressed hollows of the world, not nihilation of the world in favor of not-being.« See Galen A. Johnson, »Structures and Painting: ›Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,‹« in: *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson and Michael B. Smith, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993, p. 33

**47** | Didier Franck, *Heidegger et le problème de l'espace* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1986), p. 31. Original text: »Le *Dasein* est ›toujours mien, cela veut dire ni posé par moi ni séparé en un Je individualise.« (English transl. Kyla Bruff).

**48** | *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31. »Le *Dasein* est cet étant dont l'être est toujours mien. [...] La mienneté est le rapport du *Dasein* à son être qui rend possible le pronom Je.«

**49** | Merleau-Ponty states that »Every perception *takes place* in an atmosphere of generality, and is presented to us anonymously. [...] Every time I experience a sensation, I feel that it concerns not my own being [...] but another self, which has already sided with the world, which is already open to certain of its aspects, and synchronized with them.« (*Phenomenology*, pp. 249-250/pp. 250-251). The analogy between Merleau-Pontian and Heideggerian spatiality is thus described by Emmanuel de Saint Aubert as

Moreover, *Dasein* is neutralized, and is thus itself not anthropological, ethical or sexual,<sup>50</sup> but represents the *possibility* of incarnated existence.<sup>51</sup> Ontological, transcendental dispersion of *Dasein* is thus differentiated from its factual dispersion in the flesh and sexuality in a manner analogous to the difference between underlying order, and discourse or secondary order in *The Order of Things*. Although I do not have space to develop it here, a spatial theory of the process of factual dispersion (incarnation and sexualization) of being (that is mine), with an emphasis on the role of language as a mediator between analyses of perception and ontology, and as opening spaces, could offer further understanding of the incarnation of life.

In short, the body is neither definitively localizable nor imbued with eternal meaning; but it is always *here*, *through* places, as life's incarnation. Moreover, despite the temptation to understand the utopic body as chiefly a representation of the internal, *phenomenological* space of the individual,<sup>52</sup> it ought also to be considered with its invisible structures and capacities (e.g. language, imagination, memory) as the basis of our relationship with space through places. In so doing, the blurring of the borders between the inside and the outside of the utopic body is highlighted, exposing the latter's potential for enriching further spatial and ontological considerations.

## DELEUZE AND GUATTARI'S *BODY WITHOUT ORGANS* (BWO)

Gilles Deleuze's ontology of difference may be critically approximated to the theories of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Foucault.<sup>53</sup> Merleau-Ponty's concept of the flesh as *the element of the world* (or the sensible itself) may be too limited in its ontological potential for Deleuze.<sup>54</sup> However, for both thinkers, difference

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»undeniable« (*indéniable*). Compare Emmanuel de Saint Aubert, *Vers une ontologie indirecte* (Paris: Vrin, 2006), p. 204.

50 | Franck, *Heidegger*, pp. 32-33.

51 | *Ibid.*, p. 33.

52 | For more on this »internal space,« (»espace du dedans«), consult Sabot, »Foucault et Merleau-Ponty,« p. 330.

53 | As a thinker on the subject of difference, Deleuze praises Merleau-Ponty for following, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, a »thoroughly Heideggerian inspiration [...] returning to an ontology of difference and questioning«; furthermore, Heidegger's concept of difference cannot »be subordinated to the Identical or the Equal«. See Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et Répétition* (Paris: P.U.F. 1968), p. 90, translated by Paul Patton under the title *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 64-65.

54 | See Henry Somers-Hall, »Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty: Aesthetics of Difference,« in: *Symposium – The Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy* 10/1 (2006),

persists without being subordinated to a transcendental subject, and the body is explored within a philosophy of *becoming*.

The *Body without Organs* (BwO) of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari constantly pushes limits; it is an unreachable body inseparable from desire.<sup>55</sup> It *occupies* a space and correlates to produced intensities.<sup>56</sup> The three identified kinds of BwOs correspond with three possibilities implicitly exposed by Foucault concerning the relationship of the body with utopias. The first is the idea of becoming a »pure and simple utopia,« that is, of existing without any grounding in the physical body, and therefore no concrete locus of identity. This corresponds with the empty, catatonic BwO. These BwOs are de-organized: all virtual flows pass through them with no roots, direction or production – they lack Deleuze’s and Guattari’s necessary rule of experimentation (i.e., injections of caution and bearings within an organized body), and may throw themselves into »suicidal collapse.«<sup>57</sup> Foucault’s examples of individuals whose bodies become the products of their own fantasies, as utopic powers turn against them, resemble Deleuze and Guattari’s examples of this type of BwO. Experimenting with desire, they open themselves completely and become chaotic, ever-fluctuating BwOs, such as the schizo-, drugged and masochist bodies.<sup>58</sup> Although these bodies often successfully eradicate *organs* or certain functionalities of organs (in other words, they displace the elements of the body that have fixed ascriptions), they are empty or catatonic and become defeated, unable to become bodies full of gaiety, ecstasy and dance (such as that of Foucault’s dancer).<sup>59</sup>

At the opposite end of the spectrum, Deleuze and Guattari describe the cancerous BwO, which belongs to the organized strata and contains cancerous tissue that blocks circulation, chaos, madness, flow and liberation. It is a *fixed Body with Organs* that maintains rigid, corresponding identities.<sup>60</sup> In

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pp. 213-222, here p. 220. Somers-Hall states, »Deleuze is not rejecting the notion of the flesh, but instead is calling for the recognition that the element of the flesh is only the world seen under one of its aspects.« Ibid., p. 219.

**55** | In the BwO, we sleep and live our lives, fight, seek our place, experience emotions, and love. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux: Capitalisme et Schizophrénie 2* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980), p. 186, translated by Brian Massumi under the title *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia 2* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 150. Henceforth cited as *A Thousand Plateaus*, followed by French and then English pagination.

**56** | There are two different movements involved in BwOs: firstly, their construction, and secondly, producing the corresponding intensities to fill them. Ibid., p. 189/p. 153.

**57** | Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 199/p. 161.

**58** | Ibid., p. 186/p. 152.

**59** | Ibid., p. 187/p. 150. See also Foucault, »Utopian Body,« p. 63/p. 232.

**60** | Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 201-202/p. 163.

Foucault's terms, such individuals cease to create utopias, to experiment and to develop themselves further. They are thus obstacles to their own emancipation from oppressive structures, for they are the defined subjects in matrices of social relations unable to move or change. These cancerous BwOs include, in Deleuzian terminology, bodies of subjectification on a stratum of significance (which defines sense), precluding activity on any levels deeper than that of individuated subjects, along with the totalitarian and fascist BwOs, which block experimentation and freedom.<sup>61</sup>

Finally, the full or healthy BwO permits flux and alternative forms of organization without becoming fixed. Here, the organism is dismantled – instead of upholding rigid subjectification, intensities flow, potentials of the body are discovered, and structures that produce organized, static meanings of the body are disassembled.<sup>62</sup> In the context of Foucault's work, this may be translated into the implicit recognition in the »Utopian Body« that creative living succeeds neither through a complete identification with the utopic, nor within the confines of a rigid, enclosed body ascribed a single and set meaning. A positive relationship between utopias and the body involves discovering the body's potential beyond the dichotomy established at the beginning of »Utopian Body« (that I live either in an organized, limited body or disembodied in a pure utopia).

Deleuze and Guattari offer instructions in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) on how to develop bodily expression, or how to prevent utopic power from negatively limiting the body.<sup>63</sup> Their imperatives express ways to open the body without aiming to live purely utopically. Although Deleuze and Guattari advocate dismantling identities and the self – and tearing consciousness away from the subject – in a more extreme manner than Foucault,<sup>64</sup> they are not as radical as often portrayed: they note that enough of the organism must be preserved (i.e., bits of significance and subjectification)<sup>65</sup> to enable its self-reformation and effective opposition to its systems. Their imperatives may thus be related to Foucault's later proposition to oppose bio-power by »connecting our current

**61** | Ibid.

**62** | »Dismantling the organism has never meant killing yourself, but rather opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity.« See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 198/p. 160.

**63** | Ibid., p. 199/p. 161.

**64** | »[H]ow can we unhook ourselves from the points of subjectification that secure us, nail us down to a dominant reality? Tearing the conscious away from the subject in order to make it a means of exploration, tearing the unconscious away from significance and interpretation in order to make it a veritable production: this is assuredly no more or less difficult than tearing the body away from the organism.« Ibid., p. 198/p. 160.

**65** | Ibid.

style with our current discomfort and then by taking up marginal practices, which have escaped or successfully resisted the spread of techno/*bio*-power.«<sup>66</sup>

## FROM MERLEAU-PONTY TO DELEUZE: THE CREATIVE BODY IN BECOMING

Although Deleuze's, Guattari's and Foucault's negative references to phenomenology and Merleau-Ponty provide grounds to be sceptical of the line I have traced here,<sup>67</sup> the Merleau-Pontian lived body is nevertheless compatible and comparable with the BwO.<sup>68</sup> Although neither Foucault's *utopic body* nor Merleau-Ponty's *lived body* can *fully* support Deleuze's ontological concepts of difference, intensity and affect, they, along with Deleuze and Guattari's BwO, surpass the subjective-objective dichotomy. The body becomes the intersection point of the transcendental and the real, where our identities form and change as we experiment within spaces.<sup>69</sup> It is also the precondition of identities and

**66** | The utopic body/healthy BwO, as it engages with its environment in a *creative* way, may have the potential to help us break free of our »drive to order and optimize everything« (to stratify), thereby opposing oppressive structures, bodies of knowledge and practices. In this sense, Dreyfus understands Foucault (along with Heidegger) as philosophers of freedom. See Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being and Power: Heidegger and Foucault*, [http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~hdreyfus/html/paper\\_being.html](http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~hdreyfus/html/paper_being.html), (last accessed 25-4-2016).

**67** | In *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, for example, Deleuze suggests a necessity to *go beyond the lived body* to understand the virtual. He suggests: »The phenomenological hypothesis is perhaps insufficient [...] the lived body is still a paltry thing in comparison with a more profound and almost unlivable Power.« Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon – Logique de la sensation* (Paris: La Différence, 1981), p. 33; transl. by D. W. Smith under the title *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 47.

**68** | Corry Shores remarks on this compatibility and similarity, whilst also recognizing that Merleau-Ponty's lived body does not provide the same explanatory potential of the body as the BwO, due to its incapability »of having intense phenomenal experiences,« and because the BwO is only present at the *limit* or *borders* of the lived body. See Corry Shores, »Body and World in Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze,« in: *Studia Phaenomenologica: Romanian Journal of Phenomenology* 12 (2012), pp. 181-209, here p. 207. Also compare Alain Beaulieu's claim in *Gilles Deleuze et la phénoménologie* (Mons: Sils Maria, 2004) that Deleuze's critique of phenomenology serves as a helpful contribution to the latter rather than as an actual critique.

**69** | Events *happen* in the BwO; it is the crossroads at which we can describe becoming and events. Similarly, for Merleau-Ponty, the body is »the juncture itself of our

utopias. As the utopic body breaks free of stratification, things begin to be understood as being organized *around it*, since it creatively explores various modes of operation and different possibilities within changing spatial environments.<sup>70</sup>

In conclusion, a fundamental, lived corporeality is at the root of our subjective existence in the world, but this very incarnation presents paradoxical elements that escape purely ontological, perspectival, real or transcendental analyses. Furthermore, working to uphold a single, concrete, attributed notion of identity associated with the body is harmful and restrictive to a discovery of the body's capabilities and potential (e.g., the cancerous BwO), just as eradicating all remnants of identity and living utopically (creating an empty BwO) is dangerous and unproductive. A positive, dynamic relationship between real, visible, bodily existence and ideal, utopic, subjective life may be achieved through the creation of a healthy BwO, which is irreducible in its real existence yet maintains a positive, affective relationship to its own imagined constructions, utopias and memories. Furthermore, despite challenges in providing a Foucauldian answer to certain phenomenological questions,<sup>71</sup> complimentary resources can be found in Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze and Guattari in support of the thesis that through real experimentation and pushing the limits of one's body in spatial interactions (together with an expressive, *utopic*, creative use of the imagination and memory), new capabilities and possibilities for the body may emerge.

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belonging to the world. It is the crossroads, the place of opening (*lieu d'ouverture*) through which passes our interrogation of all that inhabits the world.« See Jean-Yves Mercury, »Une étude phénoménologique du corps,« in: *Approches de Merleau-Ponty* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), pp. 11-26, here p. 16 (English transl. Kyla Bruff).

**70** | In this direction, Todd May emphasizes the role of experimentation in order to become a »political body, woven into the fabric of the world as a celebrator and as a changer« – a process which involves mindful attention to the modes of immanence of the body in one's own political and historical situation. See Todd May, »To change the world, to celebrate life: Merleau-Ponty and Foucault on the body,« in: *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 31/5-6 (2005), pp. 517-531, here p. 529 and p. 531. For more on the possible ontological links between Foucault and Merleau-Ponty regarding their approaches to history, free of teleological presuppositions, the political, and the movement of change and difference in the present (*l'actualité*), see Judith Revel, *Foucault avec Merleau-Ponty, Ontologie politique, présentisme et histoire* (Paris: Vrin, 2015).

**71** | For example, methodological questions concerning the lived body as a starting point, and moreover, the possible universal structures or dispositions that precede the body's *subjectification*.

