Bodies-Language: Immanence in Gilles Deleuze's *Foucault*

Guillaume Collett

Thought-Being

It is important to remember that at no point did Deleuze argue for the preeminence of the body over thought, or prioritise being over thinking. Deleuze's avowed univocal ontology requires us ultimately to neutralise the equivocity of being and thinking, but not by subsuming them under an overarching conception of the *One* transcending them both, such as we find in Alain Badiou's Neo-Platonic *Deleuze*.[1] If univocity means anything in Deleuze's ontology, it is first and foremost a univocity of *difference*, a univocity of nothing else than the very difference between being and thinking, a difference which (un-)*grounds* them both by prioritising the difference between them over either being or thinking taken separately.[2] If they may be said to be one, it is only to the extent that they are perpetually bridging the uncollapsible distance between them by means of an »instantaneous exchange«[3] or a process of »weaving.«[4]

1 | Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, transl. by Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

2 | While Deleuze speaks in the 1960s of *univocal being*, he makes it clear that we should not conflate it with ontology *qua* the study of being, *tout court*: »Philosophy merges with ontology, but ontology merges with the univocity of Being« (Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 205), which we must deduce is thus different in kind from ontology, and indeed Deleuze speaks at times of the »Univocity of sense« (Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, p. 286) rather than of being.

3 | Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?,* transl. by Graham Birchill und Hugh Tomlinson (London: Verso, 1994), p. 38.

4 | Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 38; Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, transl. by Seán Hand (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 92. This is an explicit allusion to the Platonic and Neo-Platonic weaving of the intelligible and the sensible, for instance

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839435755-019 - am 14.02.2026, 11:42:51. https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

For Deleuze, being and thinking, the body and thought, are continuously engaged in a relation of *equality* and even *reversibility*, as he suggests in *What is Philosophy?*, despite being and *continuing to be* radically heterogeneous dimensions. In this text, the »plane of immanence«[5] – which is the phrase Deleuze will use to frame this difference towards the end of his career – is presented as a two-sided »reversible« fold of thought-nature, a plane that co-articulates *Noûs* and *Physis*, the image of thought and the matter or substance of being.[6] Thought cannot be immanent *to* a full and self-complete nature, for this would be to hypostasise nature as a transcendent Being that precedes and is capable of existing independently of thought's constructive and productive force. Likewise, unless thought is freed from the transcendent forms of the Subject and the Ego, and unless it is re-located to a completely impersonal transcendental field animated by non-human forces and relations of force, thought's constitutive power over the world remains merely phenomenal rather than ontological.[7]

Hence for Deleuze, immanence is the proper object of philosophy since it distinguishes itself, on the one hand, from the Being of onto-*theology* and, on the other hand, from the Thinking of *anthropology*. Philosophy is neither anthropology nor theology; rather it is what we might call the *onto-logical* study of

as found in Plotinus. See also Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, transl. by Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992), pp. 174-176.

5 | Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, Ch. 2.

6 | Ibid., p. 38. In Chapter 5 of this text, Deleuze and Guattari contend that at the level of *materiality*, and at the level of fixed *images* tied to propositional concepts, thinking and being, respectively subsist as distinct powers by being held in a relation of dualism (logically, that of denotation, constituting what they call the »plane of reference«); whereas when articulated immanently (on a philosophical »plane of immanence«), being »*becomes*« in-corporeal and thinking loses its image, merging with (or »becoming«) the in-corporeal thought-being it expresses.

7 | As Montebello puts it, *Physis* for Deleuze is insubstantial and it can only be thought, even though it is entirely real rather than merely ideal (Pierre Montebello, *Deleuze. La passion de la pensée* (Paris: Vrin, 2008), p. 23.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839435755-019 - am 14.02.2026, 11:42:51. https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

immanence *qua* equal articulation or disjunctive synthesis[8] of being-thinking.[9] This is why immanence has only ever been immanent to itself, immanence as such. This allows us to bypass the need to ascribe to Deleuze either the position of materialism or idealism, since his project is aimed precisely at overcoming such a binary opposition. Furthermore, it requires us to stop describing Deleuze as a realist insofar as we understand the term as naively pointing to a full, self-organising positivity of Nature, the Real as self-consistent in and of itself, a self-generating *matter-energy*, and so on. If there is any vitalism in Deleuze's work, it is only insofar as nature is constructed by non-human thought.

It is particularly important to bear in mind the above in the context of a volume on Deleuze, Foucault, and the body. This is because I maintain that the body – while not prior to thought – is nonetheless the very site where being and thinking co-articulate to produce a plane of immanence. For instance, in his chapter on logic in *What is Philosophy?,* Deleuze states that every state of affairs is connected to and separated from its own limit, as the referent of a proposition, thanks to »a body, a lived,« which has the capacity to bring the state of affairs in contact with its own virtual potential, namely counter-actualised events which populate the plane of immanence.[10] This generative function of the body, its role as the site of the fold of thought-being, is even more explicit in *The Logic of Sense,* where Deleuze goes to great lengths to describe precisely how the body can carry out such a task (namely produce *sense*), using a psychoanalytic and quasi-structuralist framework.[11]

8 | Deleuze mobilises his notion of the disjunctive synthesis in *Difference and Repetition* in order to conceptualise univocity without identity and thus without the primacy of the One. The many (difference) is synthesised disjunctively through a numerically single repetition, which itself divides into its formally distinct constituent differences or repetitive instances. This is applied more directly to the question of immanence in *The Logic of Sense*, from which we may arguably derive the plane of immanence as the univocal articulation of thinking and being without a One, or a Many (or a Two). See Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, transl. by P. Patton (London: Continuum, 2008), esp. Ch. 2; and Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, pp. 35-37.

9 | Zourabichvili has also strongly opposed an ontological interpretation of Deleuze's work, considering him rather as a kind of ontological logician. François Zourabichvili, *Deleuze: Une philosophie de l'événement* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994); François Zourabichvili, *Le vocabulaire de Deleuze* (Paris: Ellipses, 2003).

10 | Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 156.

11 | Drawing on the work of the post-Lacanian Serge Leclaire, Deleuze argues in this 1969 text that the unconscious body articulates with the conscious mind according to structuralist principles roughly analogous to the signifier's relation to the signified. Being the site of nonsensical yet proto-linguistically-structured sense-impressions or bodily affections, the body is thereby in a privileged position to articulate between

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839435755-019 - am 14.02.2026, 11:42:51. https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

In the following, I will show that this holds true for Deleuze's 1986 book *Foucault*, a text which forms a late trilogy with *The Fold*[12] and *What is Philosophy?*, all three of which build in their own ways on Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense* from 1969. While I will refer to Foucault's own texts, and although most of Deleuze's interpretive claims are to some extent textually supported, I will mainly focus in this chapter on how Deleuze integrates Foucault's work into his own ontological project. Commenting on the validity of such an integration lies outside the scope of my analysis, though a cursory glance at Foucault's work makes it clear that he would have rejected most of Deleuze's overt ontologisation of his own more subtly nuanced and concealed ontological claims.

Having said that, I will focus particularly in the following on the interesting parallels one finds during the 1960s between Deleuze's ontological project – as ultimately oriented towards a thinking of immanence – and Foucault's own deliberations on the question of non/relationality, particularly as they concern the articulation of the sayable and the visible in *The Order of Things* (1966). I will also draw attention to the way in which both thinkers attempt to use force or power to understand how non/relationality curves into itself to express a relation of a deeper sort, which has in both cases an intimate tie to the body as the seat of this curving-in of non/relationality.

The intellectual context of the 1960s is indeed highly instructive when assessing the roots of both Deleuze's and Foucault's work. During much of the late 1960s, Deleuze's project of attempting to reach a point beyond the dualism of thinking and being, without resorting to a transcendent or substantialist conception of the One, is couched in terms of the »disjunctive synthesis« or non-*relation*[13] of bodies and language, words and things. In this sense, and despite its being re-fashioned by him in his works from this period, we must actually privilege French 1960s structuralism when evaluating Deleuze's early

---

corporeal actions and passions, on the one hand, and on the other linguistically expressed incorporeal »sense-events« (Deleuze's re-working of the Saussurian »sign« as unity of signifier and signified).

12 | Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque*, transl. by Tom Conley (London: Continuum, 1993).

13 | For Deleuze (commenting on Foucault), a non-relation is still a relation, and potentially even one of a »deeper« sort (Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 53). Here Deleuze refers to Foucault's *This is Not a Pipe?,* transl. by J. Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press), p. 36, in which the latter shows that »the little thin band, colourless and neutral«, which separates the figure of the pipe from the statement, forms what Foucault – alluding to Blanchot (Deleuze tells us on this page) – calls a »non-relation«. It is a non-relation to the extent that the statement (»This is not a pipe«), the drawing, and the connective or designative »this«, all diverge from the common form of the pipe (they »cannot find a place to meet« as Foucault puts it). Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839435755-019 - am 14.02.2026, 11:42:51. https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

philosophy, and even his more enduring understanding of immanence. In particular, structuralism's intensification of the tension between thought and experience provided a way out of the then dominant phenomenological tradition.

Deleuze's critique of phenomenology remains fairly consistent from *The Logic of Sense* to his *Foucault* and *What is Philosophy?*; in all of these texts, phenomenology is considered to fail because its two central figures, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, both end up falling back onto one side of the being-thinking dualism we have been discussing. Husserl's phenomenology sets itself the task of analysing the phenomenon, and thus remains at the level of thinking, although it powerfully re-works this level as constitutive of the phenomenal world, inheriting Emmanuel Kant's legacy.[14] Conversely, for Deleuze, Heidegger remains at the level of Being, and at the level of Being's power over thinking, despite himself reworking the *sense* of Being as something which only reveals itself in thought and through the act of questioning.[15] Since Being is avowedly distinct from its worldly, ontic manifestations, it remains ultimately transcendent in relation to thinking, as an irrecoverable *Origin*.[16]

Despite both failing to reach the Deleuzian conception of immanence, though in diametrically opposed ways, Husserl and Heidegger are nonetheless significant influences on Deleuze. Husserl's emphasis on the articulation of thinking and phenomenal *being*, and Heidegger's novel attempts to consider the relation of ontological *Being* and thinking prefigure Deleuze's own attempts to examine the being-thinking relation outside the forms of Man and God. Husserl highlights thought's constitutive power, though this is only a power over the *phenomenon* and not the *noumenon*, to the extent that Husserl's phenomenological reduction bars him from speaking directly about ontology. Conversely, after Heidegger, the relation of thinking and ontological Being will never be understood in the same way. Deleuze himself is an indirect heir to this new conception of the being-thinking relation, to the extent that for Deleuze, just as for Heidegger, we can no longer separate ontology from the

14 | For a good starting point, see Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology,* transl. by B. Gibson (London: Routledge, 2012).

15 | For references to the *sense* of Being, see for instance Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, transl. by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1978).

16 | We can say that in Heidegger, Being and thinking co-articulate by means of a transcendental Being itself *transcendent* to thinking. For a condensed critique of Heidegger's conception of the fold (ontological difference), see Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, pp. 77-79; see also Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, pp. 83-84, for a critique of the notion that sense derives from a lost (and transcendent) »*Origin*«, which Montebello argues is an allusion to Heidegger. See Montebello, *Deleuze*, pp. 49-50.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839435755-019 - am 14.02.2026, 11:42:51. https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

»question« of being, which is inseparable from the question: »what is thinking?«;[17] – though, as I have mentioned, Deleuze aims to take Heidegger's work further towards immanence by rendering thinking and being absolutely equal in regards to one another.

While structuralists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss unequivocally prioritised formal linguistic systems over experience, one finds a tension internal to structuralism between *pure* linguistic formalism and a linguistic formalism already tainted by experience.[18] Indeed this can be traced at least as far back as Jean Hyppolite's work on the *productive* tension between thought and experience or between *logic* and *existence,* to allude to his influential book in 1952, which was a major influence on both Deleuze and Foucault.[19] Structuralism arguably provided a way for Deleuze and Foucault to inherit phenomenology's tightening up of the being-thinking relation without having to accept the way it conceived of this relation, and we can recognise this inheritance in their shared emphasis on the non-relation between bodies and language.[20] Along with structuralism, we must also add a final decisive influence on Deleuze and Foucault, namely

17 | For an interesting discussion of the persistence of this theme in Deleuze's work, see Benoît Dillet, »What is Called Thinking?: When Deleuze walks along Heideggerian Paths,« in: *Deleuze Studies*/2, 2013.

18 | One finds this tension throughout the pages of the 1960s journal *Cahiers pour l'analyse*, for instance in the debate between Serge Leclaire and Jacques-Alain Miller on the status of the Lacanian »letter«, or between Jacques Derrida and Lévi-Strauss on the origin of writing. See Peter Hallward and Knox. Peden, eds., *Concept and Form*, in two volumes (London: Verso Books, 2012).

19 | It was partly Hyppolite's aim in *Logic and Existence* – by staging a productive dialogue between Hegel and Heidegger (albeit ultimately *contra* phenomenology) – to envision *complete immanence* through the notion of *sense*, whereby there is nothing *behind* sense which could ontologically account for it. Sense is thus its own ground: »The only secret [...] is that there is no secret«, there is nothing behind the curtain (i.e. behind sense). See Jean Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence*, transl. by L. Lawlor (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 90; see also Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 47: »[...] behind the curtain there is nothing to see [...]«.

20 | We can see this for instance in Deleuze's and Foucault's shared interest in the work of Pierre Klossowski – in »Klossowski or bodies-language«, from the Appendices of *The Logic of Sense*, where Deleuze considers Klossowski's work to attest to the »disjunctive articulation« (p. 321) of bodies and language. In »La prose d'Actéon,« in: *Nouvelle Revue Française*, March 1964, Foucault understands Klossowski's work in terms of a play of doubles (of sight and language), which we can understand in terms of this non-relation (cf. footnote 13).

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839435755-019 - am 14.02.2026, 11:42:51. https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Friedrich Nietzsche, whose theory of non-human force could be used as a corrective to phenomenology's overemphasis on the Ego or Subject.[21]

Deleuze's *Foucault*

I will now turn to Deleuze's reading of Foucault in his 1986 monograph.[22] Deleuze uses the term »knowledge-being« – closely allied with his own *thought-being* from *What is Philosophy?* – in his discussion of Foucault's works from the 1960s. The term points to an attempt at articulating the ontology that would correspond to Foucault's conception of archaeology.[23] Drawing on Foucault's own scattered references to a *being of language* in *The Order of Things* (1966) and in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Deleuze claims that for Foucault, knowledge must be understood in terms of two autonomous yet communicating forms: on the one hand, we have *language-being*, comprised of statements which have only themselves as their referents, rather than denotable things; and on the other hand, we have *light-being*, with its own »actions and passions« or »multisensorial complexes,« to quote Deleuze.[24]

While language »›contains‹ words, phrases and propositions,« the Foucaultian concept of »statement« is not reducible to any of these.[25] In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault gives the example of »no one heard«, and contrasts it with »it is true that no one heard.«[26] Neither the propositional form nor the grammar sheds light on the difference in level involved in these statements. One statement reports on a state of affairs while the other is about this report

21 | We can see Deleuze using Nietzsche *contra* the Heideggerian conception of man, in spite of Heidegger's famous anti-humanist »Letter on Humanism«, in such texts as *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, transl. by H. Tomlinson (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 204, n. 31. See M. Heidegger, *Basic Writings: Martin Heidegger*, transl. by D. F. Krell (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 141-182.

22 | While referring below to both Deleuze's and Foucault's texts, in this chapter I will not however seek to challenge Deleuze's interpretation of Foucault, which amounts to an explicit ontologisation – along the lines of *Deleuze's* ontological commitments – of claims made by Foucault of which the ontological status is usually far more elusive and unarticulated than one would think when reading Deleuze. This is clear for one from the addition of «-being« to all the key Foucaultian concepts discussed by Deleuze in his book (*knowledge-being, language-being, light-being, power-being,* and *self-being*).

23 | See previous footnote.

24 | Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 48, pp. 50-51.

25 | Ibid., p. 51.

26 | Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, transl. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 2002 [1969]), p. 91.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839435755-019 - am 14.02.2026, 11:42:51. https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

and comments on it, and as such the difference in the pragmatic effect on the world both statements have is ignored by other types of linguistic analysis. The Foucauldian concept of statement does not require a subject, and so distinguishes itself from speech act theory, which relies on the subjective intentions of the speaker.

We can derive a sense of the ontology involved in his notion of statement by looking at another example from *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Foucault states that, while in terms of logic one can say that the proposition »the golden mountain« lacks a referent, since such an object is impossible, if we approach it as a statement it does indeed have its own referent and reality, namely the imaginary object in question.[27] This imaginary object relates to a real, historically conditioned imagination with its own potential effects on the world,[28] and so, once again, the ontology involved here can only be understood at the level of a pragmatics of statements. Furthermore, Foucault claims in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* that a statement has a material part, which is the singular and a-subjective act of producing it, as well as the material in which it is inscribed or materialised.[29] While a statement cannot, however, be fully reduced to materiality, nor identified with an enunciating subject or speech act, it nonetheless has this a-subjective material part which prevents it from being reduced to language considered in its ideal dimension. As Foucault puts it, a statement is neither entirely linguistic nor material.[30]

Instead, statements only enter into relations with other statements, if (re)acting exclusively on »visibilities,« which correspond to what Deleuze calls »light-being.«[31] A visibility is itself not reducible to objects or things, which must be broken open to reveal their visibilities. Here Deleuze is drawing partly

27 | Ibid., pp. 101-102. One can find such a *flat ontology* in the recent work of speculative realist Tristan Garcia, see his *Forme et objet: Un traité des choses* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2011).

28 | Similarly, in his reconstruction of structuralism entitled »How Do We Recognise Structuralism?«, Deleuze writes that the »symbolic« register displaces the opposition real/imaginary, in favour of a new type of reality which we can see is amenable to his conception of immanence. Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953-1974*, transl. by M. Taormina (London: Semiotext(e), 2004), pp. 170-192.

29 | Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, pp. 112-114.

30 | Ibid., pp. 112-113.

31 | This term appears throughout *The Order of Things* and other works by Foucault from the 1960s, but it is arguably only Deleuze who thoroughly systematises this term, along with language-being, by pairing visibilities and statements, giving rise to a parallelism or non-causal correspondence between the two series. As for Deleuze's term *light-being*, this functions as an explicit ontologisation of Foucault's numerous references to light throughout the 1960s.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839435755-019 - am 14.02.2026, 11:42:51. https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

on the chapter entitled »The Surface of Things,« from *Raymond Roussel* (*Death and the Labyrinth*),[32] in which Foucault speaks of the surface of things as an infinite visibility or celestial light that in a way precedes language. Foucault says that light is equally visible everywhere, and thus on the surface of things it is impossible to make out anything without the prohibitive, or »proscriptive,« function of words.[33] Words prohibiting certain objects, acts, and so on, contained in light, introduce into this blinding surface of pre-discursive light a structure of differential shading, individuating visibilities through the opposition established in light between that which is prescribed and proscribed.

As Deleuze puts it, »light contains objects but not visibilities«[34] – light itself is *invisible* since being equally visible everywhere, it is specifically visible nowhere. Words are needed to curtail the infinite and indeterminate visibility of this surface of light, thus rendering it visible as such. Hence visibilities are capable of being determined only by statements, even if statements themselves, as *determining* forms, cannot be determining and thus function as statements without these visibilities as *determinable* forms.[35] In short, although they have nothing to do with objects or things, statements must nonetheless draw on visibilities to provide their content.

Any simple opposition between word and thing must be replaced, in conformity with Deleuze's own understanding of immanence, by the *non-relation* or *disjunctive synthesis* of *statements* and *visibilities*. Statements and visibilities – which together form knowledge – can only be fully determined in relation to one another, even while they are considered as completely autonomous. A statement neither signifies a concept nor denotes an object, and refers only to other statements; yet statements are organised in relation to a particular historical epoch. Furthermore, they enter into necessary relations with one another, due only to singular material forms – such as written texts – capable of cutting figures out of light. The irony of Foucault's title, *Les mots et les choses,* is that the

32 | Michel Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth*, transl. by C. Ruas (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 99-124.

33 | Ibid., p. 105. This is partly aimed as an attack on the phenomenological and intentional conception of visibility, where the visible depends on either a transcendental Ego (as in Husserl), Other (as in Sartre, *contra* Husserl), or Being uncovered through interpretation (as in Heidegger). Indeed, Foucault conceives that it is possible to consider the existence of a light »for no one,« or »a visibility separate from being seen« (ibid., pp. 107-108) (the last of which is aimed directly at Sartre). We will see below how, for Deleuze, Foucault's work also rejects the Heideggerian conception of intentionality as a fold of being-thinking, by replacing interpretation with bodily practices (as developed throughout Foucault's genealogical work from the 1970s-80s).

34 | Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 51.

35 | Ibid., p. 52.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839435755-019 - am 14.02.2026, 11:42:51. https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

exceedingly vague duality of words and things, is precisely *not* what the book focuses on; rather its true subject is the in-between space reducible to neither, yet needing both in a non-binary and equal articulation.

Foucault admits at the end of his *Archaeology of Knowledge* that his book is itself only a discourse on discourses.[36] He accepts that it remains bound to the horizon of knowledge and that it is thus incapable of pointing outside itself to its Outside – even if this is an Outside perhaps only ever relative to particular historical epochs. At least for Deleuze, the Outside in Foucault points to the field of forces and relations of force and, for Deleuze, this is why the author of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* needed to start the next phase of his research into power (his »genealogical« period), so as to arrive at the ground of his archaeology. Indeed, the very term »genealogy« comes from *On the Genealogy of Morals*,[37] in which Nietzsche seeks to trace modern conceptions of morality back to their origin in bodily practices, such as incisions directly imprinted on the body, as structured by power relations.[38]

For Deleuze, this new phase provides the means of understanding how the non-relation of knowledge-being can nonetheless be understood as a relation of a »deeper sort«, and produce what may be described from Deleuze's perspective as a monistic plane of immanence overcoming this apparent dualism. Deleuze describes the Foucauldian conception of power as a »mole«: it is both blind and dumb, it cannot see nor speak, but for this very reason, it makes it possible for us to see and speak within a historical system of knowledge, or episteme.[39] Here Foucault's debt to Roussel and the linguistic turn more generally is supplemented, in Deleuze's reading, by this second influence, Nietzsche's theory of force.

For Deleuze, at the limit of Heidegger's ontological fold of thinking-being – or Foucault's fold of knowledge-being – there is a need to rediscover Nietzsche's field of forces and relations of force, as that which underlies them and accounts for the articulation of the fold's two halves.[40] Force is the Outside of Being,

36 | Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 220.

37 | Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, transl. by M. A. Scarpitti (London: Penguin Classics, 2013).

38 | Foucault makes this link very explicit in his programmatic 1971 lecture »Nietzsche, Genealogy, History«, in which he makes clear his debt to Nietzsche. See Michel Foucault, »Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,« in: *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, transl. by D. F. Bouchard and S. Simon (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 139-164.

39 | Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 68. He adds to this: »Seeing and Speaking are always already completely caught up within power relations which they presuppose and actualize«. Ibid., p. 69.

40 | The reference to Nietzsche is important for Foucault, because it is precisely in terms of a genealogy of *the subject of phenomenology* that this next phase of research

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839435755-019 - am 14.02.2026, 11:42:51. https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

which Heidegger had failed to reach.[41] To the extent that being, for Nietzsche, amounts to an ever-shifting landscape of forces and relations of force; and insofar as these forces take on consistency – in Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche – only through the *thought of the return of active types*,[42] Nietzsche can be seen to provide the solution to problems inherent to Heidegger: rather than an Origin waiting to be recovered, Being is now, in Deleuze's Nietzsche, identical to the selection and the return of active forces.

We find this discussed at length in the second chapter of *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. What Deleuze here terms ontological »being«[43] – but which is really *thought-being* – is produced in the present (or even, rather, in the future[44]), despite still being in Nietzsche, as in Heidegger, as the *return* of *ontological being*. This is because, in Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche, ontological being (or rather onto-logical thought-being) is identical to the return (in thought) of what we can summarily call ontic forces, namely *active* ones; it is not the merely partial recovery in thought of an originary and distant Being distinct from its ontic, worldly manifestations. For Deleuze, the chief feature of active forces is that they return, unlike reactive ones. Accordingly, for him, ontological being is identical to the return or selection of active types,[45] a selection that occurs by means of thought, hence thought as such is »the thought of the eternal

was initially framed – in short, Foucault asked: where does this subject emerge from, what relations of power and bodily practices inform it? See Foucault, »Nietzsche, Genealogy, History«.

41 | In both Deleuze and Foucault we can identify a Nietzsche-Heidegger hybrid at work. Deleuze insists that if Foucault believed himself to be ultimately Heideggerian, rather than Nietzschean, he nonetheless had to go by way of Nietzsche to fully understand Heidegger, and not *vice versa*. Be that as it may, we can arguably locate here the key *differend* separating Deleuze and Foucault, insofar as Deleuze's Nietzsche – while undoubtedly informed by Heidegger – would always take priority. See Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 93; and p. 123, n. 33, where Deleuze notes that Foucault admitted this to *Les Nouvelles* at the end of his life in 1984.

42 | See Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Ch. 2, »Active and Reactive,« pp. 36-67.

43 | Ibid., pp. 66-67. Deleuze makes the connection with Heidegger more explicit in *The Logic of Sense*, though it is already there in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, writing that univocity (or the eternal return – see Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 204) »wrests Being from beings in order to bring it to all of them at once, and to make it fall upon them for all times«, ibid., p. 206.

44 | In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze will equate the eternal return with the future; see Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 113.

45 | Ibid., p. 66.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839435755-019 - am 14.02.2026, 11:42:51. https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

return«.[46] This means that the distinction between the ontic and the ontological in Deleuze's *Nietzsche* is retained but folded into thought-being as nothing less than the return in thought of active forces.

Furthermore, the body is given a fundamental role in this production since, in Deleuze's Nietzsche, we are dealing with forces and relations of force directly imprinting themselves on the body (which is itself a metastable complex of interacting forces[47]). While it is thought (namely the thought of the eternal return of active forces) which sorts forces into active and reactive types, it is into the body that thought plunges to find its content, the body being as it were the link between thought and force. If we want to follow this Deleuzian line of interpretation, we must contrast Nietzsche's philosophy, where thought and the body both together equally and actively *produce* ontological being (=selection or return),[48] with Heidegger's, where thought merely *recovers* or unveils it, and for whom the »body phenomenon« remained »the most difficult problem« in philosophy.[49]

Returning to Deleuze's analysis of Foucault's work, power – or relations of force – is that which makes knowledge possible, while also being itself relative to – i.e. constructed *by* – particular regimes of knowledge (or rather power-knowledge). On the one hand, the model of a non-relation between seeing and speaking is accounted for by power, as the blind and dumb mole, which makes knowledge possible. The *visible*, defined earlier as multisensorial complexes composed of actions and passions, must now be understood more deeply as differential relations of *force*; the *sayable* must be viewed as that which brings together certain relations of force with others, integrating these differential relations and actualising visibilities as singularities.[50] What allows the visible to act on the sayable, and what allows the sayable to react on the visible, is precisely power. On the other hand, however, the relations of force from which power is inseparable are themselves conditioned by systems of historically-bound knowledge, or rather by »diagrams« of force relations flush with the real.[51]

46 | See for example Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 41. This in turn is connected to Deleuze's claim that, in Nietzsche, »To think is to send out a dicethrow«, ibid., p. 30, which Deleuze views, contra Mallarmé (ibid., p. 31), as affirming *chance* rather than necessity – or more accurately it is an affirmation of necessity within absolute chance. Ibid., p. 30; see also pp. 23-35.

47 | Ibid., p. 37.

48 | Ibid., p. 66.

49 | Quoted in Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 93.

50 | See Deleuze, *Foucault*, pp. 63-69.

51 | Ibid. The diagram, in Foucault and Deleuze, is therefore the genealogical transformation of the archaeological statement.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839435755-019 - am 14.02.2026, 11:42:51. https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

The body – this siphon between *forces* inhabiting the dimension of corporeality and *thought* as that which thinks the nexus of forces surrounding it – is hence given a real experience of the Outside, namely of force and relations of force; though this Outside is necessarily folded into regimes of power-knowledge. This means that the body can only have an experience of a real or of an Outside *relative to thought*, or relative to series of statements or rather chains of diagrams. Nonetheless, this relative Outside is also, at least for Deleuze, nothing less than thought-being or immanence. Thus, the body has access to the Outside precisely insofar as the body and thought are reversible, since thought and the body both equally generate power-knowledge by folding the Outside into a historical epoch.

In order to articulate this point regarding the topological position of the body with regards to knowledge and power, Deleuze resurrects another Nietzschean (or adapted-Nietzschean) concept, which we have already touched on, that of the affirmation of chance. In *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Deleuze systematises Nietzsche's references to the dice throw in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as a general model for thought, as the thought of the return of active forces conceived, in short, in terms of probabilistic induction.[52] Firstly, to the extent that diagrams, unlike statements, must be understood in terms of the integration and putting into series of differential relations of force, they can be seen as operating »like a Markov chain«, which is to say »at random. However, under extrinsic conditions laid down by the previous draw«,[53] an example of which is the attempt, increasingly less likely to succeed, to throw one hundred sixes in a row. Deleuze takes this from *Discipline and Punish*, where Foucault, quoting Nietzsche, writes »›the iron hand of necessity throwing the dice of chance‹«.[54] Secondly, since the Outside might be called Chance,[55] the folding of the Outside through the use of diagrams is identical to probabilistic structuring.

This brings us to a yet more fundamental problem, and one even more central to the problem of the body, which we have space here only to summarise. This is the third figure of Being which Deleuze locates in Foucault's work, deeper than knowledge-being, and deeper still than power-being, namely what he calls »self-being«.[56] Self-being, which Deleuze locates in the third volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, points to processes of subjectivation occurring by means of the body (the subtitle of the unpublished fourth volume may be translated literally as »the confessions of the flesh«). For Deleuze,

52 | Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, pp. 23-35.

53 | Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 71.

54 | Foucault quoted in Deleuze, ibid., p. 71.

55 | See Deleuze, ibid., p. 96, p. 125, n. 47. Here Deleuze draws on suggestions to this effect made by Foucault in *The Order of Things*, which invoke Nietzsche and Mallarmé.

56 | Ibid., p. 94.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839435755-019 - am 14.02.2026, 11:42:51. https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

subjectivation is inseparable from »folding«, and there are four folds which crystallise all of Foucault's previous research: (1) the fold of the material part of ourselves (the body or desire), (2) the fold of the relation between forces (power), (3) the fold of the relation of truth to our being (knowledge), (4) the fold of the outside (power-knowledge), which is the fold as such.[57] Singular selves are determined by »the places crossed by the fold«,[58] i.e. by the way bodies and desires articulate the audio-visual disjunction.[59] The self is nothing else than the »void« of the non-relation between the sayable and the visible, albeit one filled by knowledge-, power-, and subject-effects the empty place of the non-relation gives rise to.[60]

To conclude, for Foucault, in Deleuze's reading, language, and discursive and non-discursive formations more generally, may be said to come together with relations of force to give them the form specific to their historical epoch. Intensifying the opposition between thinking or language, on the one hand, and being or bodies and their relations of force on the other hand, in the end only brings them infinitely closer (yet without ever touching). In Deleuze and Foucault, the non-relation of being and thinking, or of bodies and language, is what assures their ontological unity, due to an element – namely immanence in Deleuze and power-knowledge in Foucault[61] – which belongs to neither series yet which is also their ground, a ground produced by and in a way excluded from what it grounds.

57 | Ibid., p. 86.

58 | Ibid., p. 94.

59 | Ibid., pp. 98-99.

60 | Ibid., p. 99.

61 | Or, more specifically, the fold of the Outside as produced by bodily subjects.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839435755-019 - am 14.02.2026, 11:42:51. https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -