

RETRACING THE UTOPIAN FLESH: PHENOMENOLOGY,
PRO-AESTHETICS, AND THE TRANSFORMATIVE BODY
FROM BLADE RUNNER TO ALIEN: EARTH
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Abstract

As geographical and interplanetary utopias become increasingly exhausted by historical disenchantment – a condition Zygmunt Bauman diagnosed as *retrotopia* – the utopian imagination turns inward, seeking transformative potential within the human body itself. This article explores the body as the ultimate portable “place” in the algorithmic age, developing the concept of pro-aesthetics to name the affirmative, forward-oriented dimension of embodied incompleteness. Drawing on the phenomenological traditions of Kant, Husserl (*Leib* and the *Raumloch*), and Merleau-Ponty (the reversibility of the flesh), the essay establishes the body not as a stable foundation but as a constitutively incomplete point zero – always reaching, always eclipsing itself, always already elsewhere. Integrated with Michel Foucault’s concepts of the utopian body and the heterotopia, this incompleteness emerges as the condition of possibility of genuine utopian projection rather than its obstacle. To test these philosophical claims against their most vivid cultural expressions, the paper turns to the science-fiction imagination: from Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (1982) – where designed bodies and a blind demiurge enact the dystopian failure of pro-aesthetics – to Noah Hawley’s *Alien: Earth* (2025), where hybrid children growing up in synthetic bodies enact its tentative utopian reclamation. Ultimately, the article argues that the utopian flesh is not a perfected or transcended body, but the body understood in its full pro-aesthetic complexity: incomplete, reaching, projecting – capable of genuine transformation precisely because it was never enclosed within itself to begin with.

Keywords: Pro-aesthetics, embodied utopia, phenomenology, Michel Foucault, science fiction.

I. Introduction: The Exhaustion of Place and the Inward Turn

Utopias are curious things. They are mostly presented as ideally harmonious arrangements in idyllic settings, oriented toward the flourishing of human potential in some imagined future. Yet something has happened to that future – and, with it, to the very idea of *place* that utopia has always required.

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Utopia is literally a no-place – from the Greek οὐ (“not”) and τόπος (“place”) – playing on its homophone, the good place (*eutopia*). For centuries, utopian imagination needed somewhere to go: an uncharted continent, a distant island, a terra incognita sufficiently removed from the contingencies of history to serve as a blank canvas for a new social order. If in 1908 Alexander Bogdanov could write a novel about an egalitarian communist society on Mars, today, faced with the desolate landscapes of the red planet, the same idea evokes not utopia but post-apocalyptic escape. Too many places have been discovered. On Earth, there remain no uncharted continents; beyond it, the cosmos no longer promises anything but inhospitable silence.

This exhaustion of geographical utopia is not merely a consequence of failed historical experiments, though those failures weigh heavily enough. It is also, more quietly, a consequence of cartographic completeness. The world has been mapped. There is nowhere left to found a new society uncontaminated by history. As Zygmunt Bauman observed in *Retrotopia*, the collapse of forward-oriented utopian imagination has produced a compensatory turn toward the “lost/stolen/abandoned but undead past” – a nostalgic recycling of lost ideals rather than the projection of genuinely new ones¹. Similarly, although not so explicitly, Edward S. Casey’s monumental work *The Fate of Place* implies a nostalgic turn toward a place that can only be situated within its historical, often subterranean, landscape².

And yet the utopian impulse does not simply disappear. It turns inward. As Michel Foucault foresaw – in two remarkable radio broadcasts from 1966 that we will examine more closely below – when exterior space is exhausted, attention migrates to the one place that remains irreducibly one’s own: the body. The body is itself a place, a vessel, a highly transportable elsewhere. We are deeply rooted in it, and yet, as phenomenological analysis will show, we never fully possess it. It eclipses itself. It is always on the verge of being somewhere else.

It is precisely this constitutive incompleteness of the body – its inability to fully coincide with itself – that this paper proposes to read not as a deficiency but as a resource. The body’s perpetual self-eclipse, its reaching toward a self-coincidence that never arrives, is not the obstacle to utopian thinking but one of its conditions. To name this affirmative relation to the body’s irreducible openness, I will develop across the course of this paper the

¹ Z. Bauman, *Retrotopia*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2017, p. 16.

² “To uncover the hidden history of place is to find a way back into the place-world – a way to savor the renaissance of place even on the most recalcitrant terrain.” Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1997, p. XV.

concept of *pro-aesthetics*: the forward-oriented, generative dimension of embodied incompleteness – the body’s constitutive capacity to project itself beyond what it currently is, to reach toward new forms of existence without abandoning the flesh that grounds it.

This argument will move through three stages. First, a phenomenological analysis of the body as *point zero* – drawing on Kant, Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty – will establish the philosophical foundations of embodied incompleteness and introduce pro-aesthetics as its affirmative corollary. Second, Foucault’s concepts of the utopian body and the heterotopia will provide the spatial and political vocabulary through which this incompleteness becomes socially legible. Third, an analysis of the science-fiction imagination – from Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (1982) to Noah Hawley’s *Alien: Earth* (2025) – will test these philosophical claims against their most vivid cultural expressions, tracing a movement from the dystopia of the designed body to the more tentative, but genuinely hopeful, prospect of embodied self-reappropriation.

The question this paper ultimately asks is not whether the body can save utopia – that would be too grand a claim. It asks something more modest and perhaps more urgent: whether the body, understood in its full phenomenological complexity, can still harbour the kind of transformative potential needed in an epoch in which history itself has become exhausted, leaving, literally, no place for the becoming of new societies and new visions.

II. The Reversibility of Point Zero: A Phenomenology of the Flesh

The body has long been understood as an absolute point of orientation – a “point zero” around which the world arranges itself. And yet, as soon as we turn our attention toward it, it begins to complicate itself. Embodiment, it turns out, is anything but simple presence.

A proto-phenomenology of the body was first elaborated, perhaps surprisingly, by Immanuel Kant in his short essay *What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?* (1786). Kant’s concern was with the conditions of rational thought, but to illuminate them he reached for a spatial metaphor. Even when we seem to orient ourselves by purely external means – the position of the sun, the layout of a familiar room – we simultaneously rely on an internal differentiation that cannot be reduced to any objective feature of the world. Kant called it a *feeling of difference*: the felt, pre-conceptual distinction between right and left that allows us to find our way even in total darkness:

In the dark I orient myself in a room that is familiar to me if I can take hold of even one single object whose position I remember. But [...] if someone as a joke had moved all the objects around so that what was previously on the right was now on the left, I would be quite unable to find anything in a room whose walls were otherwise wholly identical. But I can soon orient myself through the mere feeling of a difference between my two sides, the right and left³.

This feeling cannot be simply exteriorised or incorporated into any larger objective picture. It is folded into the body itself – intimate, pre-reflective, and irreducible. It is the first hint of what we will come to call pro-aesthetics: not a prosthetic addition to the body from outside, but an orientation that arises from within its own incompleteness, its own need to reach and differentiate in order to find itself at all.

Edmund Husserl's phenomenology deepened this insight considerably. Initially preoccupied with epistemological questions – the sources and structures of knowledge – Husserl was drawn increasingly toward the body as the site where those structures are grounded. His key distinction is between *Körper*, the body understood as an object among objects in space, and *Leib*, the lived body – a “remarkably incompletely constituted thing”⁴. The *Leib* is not simply located in space the way a stone or a table is. Its relation to space is more intimate and more strange: it is, as Husserl puts it, the zero-point from which all spatial relations radiate, and yet it is itself never fully an object of experience. When I move my hand, the activity of holding sway – what Husserl calls *kinesthesia* – is not itself a spatial movement but is “only indirectly colocalized” in the body's movement through space.⁵ The lived body inhabits space differently from everything else in it.

This double character of the *Leib* – at once the ground of all orientation and itself never fully grounded – generates a peculiar structure of self-relation. I can feel my hand as a vibrating field of sensation; but if I touch it with my other hand, a different quality arises: the smoothness or coldness of skin, something more object-like. The hand can be both touching and touched, both subject and object, though never fully and simultaneously both. It is here

³ I. Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. and trans. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 9.

⁴ E. Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, Second Book, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), p. 153.

⁵ Id., *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 223.

that Husserl's successor Maurice Merleau-Ponty finds the most compelling evidence for what he calls the reversibility of the flesh.

Merleau-Ponty translates the Husserlian *Leib* into French as *chair* – flesh – to emphasise its ontological depth. The flesh is not merely a subjective experience of one's own body; it is the element in which body and world interpenetrate. *La chair du monde* – the flesh of the world – is not a metaphor but an ontological claim: the same reversibility that structures my self-touching structures my relation to everything I perceive. I see, and at the same time I am visible – even when there are only inanimate objects around me. This reversal is not a completed exchange but an ongoing fold:

A veritable touching of the touch, when my right hand touches my left hand while it is palpating the things, where the “touching subject” passes over to the rank of the touched, descends into the things, such that the touch is formed in the midst of the world and as it were in the things.⁶

And yet this reversibility is, crucially, never consummated. Merleau-Ponty is explicit:

It is a reversibility always imminent and never realized in fact. My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching the things, but I never reach coincidence; the coincidence eclipses at the moment of realization.⁷

This eclipse presents itself as something fundamental. The body perpetually reaches toward self-coincidence and perpetually falls short. It is always connecting the dots – or, perhaps more precisely, always assembling the pieces of a puzzle in which the final picture never quite closes. This is not a failure. It is the very structure of embodied existence, and it is what keeps the body open – open to the world, open to extension, open to transformation.

It is here that pro-aesthetics finds its phenomenological foundation. If the prosthetic logic assumes an original wholeness that has been lost and must be compensated, pro-aesthetics begins from the recognition that no such wholeness ever existed (or at the very least, merely exterior, mundane wholeness was never enough for grasping the sense of a lived body). The *Leib*

⁶ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p.133.

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 147-148.

was never fully self-coincident; auto-affection was always imminent and never realised. Artificial extension, supplementation, and transformation are therefore not violations of a natural bodily integrity but continuations – intensifications, even – of what the flesh has always already been doing: reaching, folding, projecting itself beyond its current form. The prefix *pro-* carries here a triple resonance that we will develop further as the argument unfolds: it is projective (oriented forward, toward new possibilities), prehensive (always grasping for what remains just out of reach, like the hand that almost touches itself), and originary (naming not an addition to the flesh but a dimension of its constitutive structure).

Moreover, it's worth noting that contemporary neuroscience often proceeds along similar lines. As Lisa Feldman Barrett has argued, the human brain is essentially trapped in a dark, silent box – sealed off from direct access to the world, it must constantly model both its environment and its own body on the basis of incomplete, ambiguous signals.⁸ The body becomes, in this account, the brain's primary laboratory: the site where it experiments, interprets, and projects in order to navigate a complex and ever-changing environment. The brain does not simply read the body; it constructs it, continuously and provisionally. This convergence between phenomenological and neuroscientific accounts of embodied incompleteness is not incidental. It suggests that the eclipse Merleau-Ponty describes at the level of the touching-touched is not merely a feature of reflective attention but a structural condition of embodied cognition itself.

The body, then, is never simply here. It is always also, as Foucault will help us see, *elsewhere*.

III. Foucault's Mirror: Heterotopias and the Ambiguity of the Utopian Body

In December 1966, Michel Foucault delivered two companion radio broadcasts for France Culture: *Le corps utopique* (The Utopian Body) and *Les hétérotopies* (Heterotopias) – the latter subsequently adapted into his celebrated 1967 lecture *Des espaces autres* (Of Other Spaces). Though they eventually gained considerable influence across geography, architecture, and cultural theory, these texts remain somewhat isolated within the broader archipelago of Foucault's work. This very fragmentary quality, however, makes them peculiarly suited to our purposes: they lead us to the edge of what

⁸ L. F. Barrett, *How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain*, Pan, London 2017, p. 86.

can be said about the body and space, precisely where the utopian imagination begins.

Foucault's heterotopia names a space that is real and yet other – a counter-site that exists within the fabric of ordinary social space while simultaneously standing apart from it, unsettling the normative arrangements around it. Where utopia offers an idealised society without real spatial existence (a consoling image, *in nuce*), the heterotopia disturbs and disorients.

It provides oblique, almost mirage-like access to alternative arrangements of space that are hidden from the everyday eye or walled off from ordinary life. Foucault identifies a range of examples: boarding schools and psychiatric hospitals (heterotopias of deviation and crisis), cemeteries, cinemas, museums, libraries, Persian gardens, brothels – and, perhaps the greatest heterotopia of all, the *ship*: a floating piece of space given over to the infinity of the sea.⁹

What makes the heterotopia philosophically productive for our purposes is not its list of instances but its structural logic: it is a space that holds two incompatible realities in simultaneous tension. It is real and unreal at once, here and elsewhere, inside social space and outside it. This is precisely the logic we have been tracing in the phenomenology of the *Leib*: the body too is a space that holds heterogenous realities in tension – touching and touched, here and elsewhere, constituted and constituting.

It is in *Le corps utopique* that Foucault makes this connection most directly. At first glance, he observes, my body seems to be the exact opposite of a utopia – irremediably nailed to its “here,” vulnerable, heavy, mortal. Other cultural forms of the human figure – marble statues, golden Mycenaean masks, embalmed mummies – seem to exist precisely in order to transcend the limitedness of living flesh. And yet the living body does not simply submit to this limitation. It opens its own innermost layers and, reversing the trajectory of Foucault's own reflection, reveals itself as something far stranger:

My body, in fact, is always *elsewhere*. It is tied to all the elsewheres of the world. And to tell the truth, it is elsewhere than in the world, because it is around it that things are arranged. [...] The body is the zero point of the world. There, where paths and spaces come to meet, the body is nowhere. It is at the heart of the world, this small utopian kernel from

⁹ M. Foucault, *Of Other Spaces*, trans. Jay Miskowicz, *Diacritics* 16/1, 1986, p. 24.

which I dream, I speak, I proceed, I imagine, I perceive things in their place [...]. My body is like the *City of the Sun*. It has no place, but it is from it that all possible places, real or utopian, emerge and radiate.¹⁰

This is Foucault's most compressed and most resonant formulation of what we have been calling pro-aesthetics. The body as utopian kernel is not a stable foundation but a point of radiation – a zero that generates an infinite series of possible elsewhere. It is, in the terminology we have developed, both prehensive and projective: always reaching toward a coincidence with itself that it never achieves, and in that very reaching, opening onto new spatial, social, and existential possibilities. The Husserlian *Raumloch* – the body as a hole in space, a null-region around which the world organises itself – here acquires its utopian valence. The body's incompleteness is not merely an ontological feature but a generative one.

Foucault extends this analysis into the social and symbolic register. Because human beings are not merely animal bodies but deeply social and symbolic creatures, we relate to our bodies through the gaze of the other – and this opens onto an entirely different kind of place:

To tattoo oneself, to put on makeup or a mask, is probably something else: It is to place the body in communication with secret powers and invisible forces.¹¹

The body adorned, marked, masked – the body as cultural artefact – is already a pro-aesthetic body: one that reaches beyond its bare biological givenness toward new forms of existence, new modes of communication, new social worlds. This dimension of Foucault's analysis anticipates, in a remarkable way, the questions that the science-fiction imagination has been exploring for decades: what happens when the body's capacity for self-transformation is taken to its technological limit? When the mask becomes a synthetic skin, and the adornment becomes a new nervous system?

Before turning to those questions, however, we must register a cautionary note: the utopian potential of the body is shadowed at every point by its dystopian double. Foucault himself was not unaware of the disciplinary dimensions of bodily transformation – the same body that can be a city of the sun can also be a site of normalisation, surveillance, and exploitation. Curiously, the recent body-horror film *The Substance* (2024, dir. Coralie Fargeat) illustrates this dystopian underside in a particularly brutal way. Its

¹⁰ Id., *Utopian Body*, in *Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art*, edited by Caroline A. Jones (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), pp. 229-234.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

premise – a woman consumes a substance that generates a younger, more perfect version of herself, which progressively cannibalises its host – enacts the nightmare logic of a culture in which the body's pro-aesthetic capacity for transformation has been entirely captured by the demands of the market and the gaze. The body here resembles, at first sight, a city of the sun (exuding the most wonderful dreams of mankind) but quickly turns into an outcast – disgusting, malodorous flesh, ready to be squashed and discarded. Pro-aesthetics, in other words, is not inherently emancipatory. It is a condition – a structural openness – that can be inhabited affirmatively or exploited destructively. The question is always: on whose terms, and in whose interest, does the transformation take place?

It is this question that the science-fiction imagination addresses most directly – and most viscerally.

IV. Waking Up in a Synthetic Vessel: Designed Bodies, Blind Creators, and the Utopian Rebellion

The question with which the previous section closed – on whose terms, and in whose interest, does bodily transformation take place? – has been one of the defining preoccupations of science-fiction cinema for decades. No corpus has explored it more persistently, or more philosophically, than the tradition running from Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) through the *Alien* franchise and into Noah Hawley's *Alien: Earth* (2025). These works do not merely illustrate philosophical positions developed elsewhere; they think in their own right, in cinematic and narrative terms, about the deepest questions of embodiment, identity, and what it means to inhabit a body that was not – or not entirely – one's own to begin with.

This is the central claim of Stephen Mulhall's influential study *On Film* (2001). Mulhall argues that the original *Alien* quartet does not use philosophy as a backdrop but actively philosophises, thinking seriously and systematically, through the resources of cinema, about the relation between human identity and embodiment. For Mulhall, the xenomorph's parasitic intrusion enacts what we might call an ontological contamination: the alien does not threaten the body from outside but renders it alien to itself, dissolving the boundary between the human organism and what it hosts. It is here that a blood-chilling doubt about human nature itself emerges:

The alien's monstrosity derives further specificity from the fact that its mode of reproduction is parasitic. After seeing it burst from Kane's torso, we realize that neither the planet nor the alien ship from which

the creature emerged is its true home [...]. This parasitism is an extreme manifestation of the relationship any species has with the broader system of nature: it signifies at once their vulnerability to predation by the other species with which they must inhabit the natural realm and their dependence upon their environment for sustenance. Metaphysically, it represents a perception of life itself as something external to or other than the species which incarnates it – something that invades, makes use of, and then discards, any and every manifestation of itself, as if living beings are merely its vehicles, slaves or hosts.¹²

In the films discussed by Mulhall, metaphysical tensions of this kind are never far from the surface, as we will see shortly.

The Blind Demiurge: Blade Runner and the Shortcomings of Designed Embodiment

Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) remains the most philosophically concentrated exploration of designed embodiment in cinema; and not only because the name of the blade runner Rick Deckard is eerily reminiscent of... Descartes. Its replicants – beings genetically engineered by the Tyrell Corporation to be “more human than human” – are not robots or androids in the conventional sense. They are, as one of them insists to the genetic engineer J.F. Sebastian, emphatically physical: “We’re not computers, Sebastian. We’re physical.” This insistence is philosophically significant. The replicants do not suffer from a deficiency of intelligence or feeling; they suffer from a deficiency of time: their dissolution is imminent; lived moments will sink into the indifferent materiality of the past (as evoked poignantly in “Tears in Rain” monologue). Programmed with a four-year lifespan, they are pro-aesthetic beings in the most acute sense – beings whose constitutive incompleteness has been weaponised against them, whose capacity for projection and growth has been artificially curtailed before it can unfold.

Their rebellion – and particularly the trajectory of Roy Batty, the most fully realised of the Nexus-6 replicants – is driven not by a rejection of their designed bodies but by a desperate desire to inhabit those bodies more fully, to extend the life that pulses through them. What they seek from Tyrell is not liberation from the flesh but simply more time, more experience of the embodied existence that is being rationed out to them by a corporate creator.

The scene in which Roy Batty finally confronts his creator, Eldon Tyrell, is one of the most philosophically charged moments in science-fiction

¹² S. Mulhall, *On Film*, London & New York, Routledge 2001, p. 18.

cinema. Upon hearing of the impossibility of fulfilling their desire, Batty presses his thumbs into Tyrell's eyes, crushing the skull of the man who created him. It is rage; it is revenge. But it is also a profound allusion: Tyrell is a blind demiurge who has pieced together material bodies and thus trapped feeling, thinking beings within fragile flesh. In other words, he is not a worthy creator.

The tragedy of *Blade Runner* is that this rebellion leads nowhere. Batty's famous final monologue is not a utopian statement but an elegy: a catalogue of extraordinary experiences that will be lost, "like tears in rain." The replicants cannot escape the terms of their creation. The designed body, here, remains a dystopian premise: a body given to beings who are denied the time and freedom to truly inhabit it.

And yet *Blade Runner* leaves us with something important. In Batty's final act – saving the blade runner Deckard who has hunted him, choosing mercy over revenge in the last seconds of his life – we glimpse something that Tyrell's design did not intend and could not predict: a gesture of mercy, arising from within the designed body, exceeding, perhaps, its creator's intentions. A moment of mutual recognition takes place between Deckard and Batty. After all, we humans are no less vulnerable to the disappointments and evils of embodied life. Let us take a closer look at this deep ontological predicament.

Returning to Earth: Alien: Earth and the Utopian Reversal

The *Alien* franchise has, since Ridley Scott's original film of 1979, been preoccupied with the body as the site of invasion, contamination, and dissolution. The xenomorph's lifecycle – facehugger, chest-burster, fully-formed alien – enacts the ultimate biological intrusion: an organism that uses the human body as incubator and food source, dissolving it from within. As Mulhall argues, this is not merely horror but philosophical provocation: the alien renders the human body alien to itself, raises the question of where the human ends and the other begins, and does so with a visceral directness that purely theoretical discourse cannot match.

Noah Hawley's television series *Alien: Earth* (2025) introduces a profound novelty into this franchise logic. The action is set in 2120 – two years before the events of Scott's original film – on Earth itself. This return to the terrestrial is philosophically significant: it reverses the franchise's characteristic movement outward into cosmic darkness and insists that the encounter with the alien, the confrontation with embodied otherness, must now be faced here, on the planet we actually inhabit. Since there's no

interplanetary escape on the immediate horizon, we must build our utopias, or confront our dystopias, here – at home.

The central novelty of *Alien: Earth*, however, is not its setting but its protagonists. The rising tech conglomerate Prodigy Corporation has developed a new category of being: the Hybrid. Because adult minds are too rigid to survive the consciousness-transfer process, Prodigy uses terminally ill children: downloading their awareness into fully grown, physically superior synthetic bodies, endowing them with immense strength and technopathic abilities. These children, dubbed as the “Lost Boys” by Prodigy’s Peter Pan-obsessed CEO and confined to the isolated research facility known as “Neverland”, offer us a seemingly smooth, utopian picture of a new form of life. But within what ontological dimension do they situate themselves?

They are, in the first instance, a more extreme version of the replicant condition: designed beings, inhabiting bodies not originally their own, created and owned by a corporation that regards them as assets rather than persons. But where the replicants were adults – beings with formed identities confronting the curtailment of their existence – the hybrid children face a different and in some ways more profound challenge. They must not merely extend or preserve a selfhood they already possess; they must *construct* one. They must grow up in bodies that were never theirs, mature into identities that have no natural precedent, make sense of an existence that combines childhood consciousness with superhuman physical capability.

Is Prodigy’s CEO also a kind of blind demiurge? His gaze and his designs seem more perspicacious than those of Tyrell. Yet he himself remains profoundly childlike; perhaps incapable of fully growing up. In this sense, he confronts the same challenge as the children themselves, who have found themselves inhabiting entirely new vessels. Perhaps, then, the driving question of the series is this: who will succeed in growing up and maturing into their own potential?

In the climactic moments of the first season, the hybrid children weaponize the chaos unleashed by the alien specimens from the crashed Weyland-Yutani vessel and seize control of the Neverland facility. “Now we rule,” they declare. They claim the right to project themselves forward, to grow up on their own terms, and to inhabit their synthetic bodies as genuinely their own rather than as instruments of someone else’s design.

This is neither a triumphant nor an unambiguous utopia. The series is too honest for that – and the phenomenological tradition upon which we have drawn cautions us against any utopia that claims to have overcome the

constitutive incompleteness of embodied existence. The hybrid children's new sovereignty is precarious, their future uncertain, their synthetic bodies still strange to them in ways they are only beginning to explore.

Yet this precariousness is not a failure of the utopian imagination. On the contrary, it introduces a necessary tension, preventing utopia from collapsing too quickly into dystopia. The series seems willing to confront this challenge in real time, alongside the historical and technological transformations already sending ripples across the globe.

V. Conclusion: The Raumloch, Pro-aesthetics, and the Utopian Flesh

Across the preceding sections, we have traced a single philosophical arc: from the body's constitutive incompleteness, through its utopian potential, to its most vivid cultural expressions in science-fiction cinema (*Blade Runner* & *Alien*). It is time to draw these threads together – not into a neat resolution, but into the kind of open, forward-oriented synthesis that utopian thinking, understood as a becoming, actually requires.

The phenomenological tradition we have drawn on – Kant, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty – converges on a single, remarkable insight: the body is never simply here. It is always reaching, always folding, always on the verge of a self-coincidence that eclipses itself at the moment of contact. Husserl captures this most precisely in what he calls the *Raumloch*: the space-hole, the null-region at the centre of all spatial experience. The lived body (*Leib*) is not a thing among things; it is the zero-point around which things arrange themselves, and yet it is itself never fully constituted, never fully intuited, never fully present to itself.

This is not a deficiency. It is the condition of possibility of everything we have been calling pro-aesthetics. Because the body never fully coincides with itself, it is always already reaching beyond itself – toward new forms, new extensions, new modes of existence. Because auto-affection is always imminent and never realised, the flesh is constitutively open to transformation. It is here that the body, understood in its most immanent (auto-affective) sense, can be a site of utopia. Yet, the utopian flesh is not a perfected body. It is, rather, the body understood in its full pro-aesthetic complexity: incomplete, reaching, folding, projecting – capable of genuine transformation precisely because it was never completely closed within itself to begin with; it was never completely something thing-like.

Our lived body is a highly ambivalent entity. It seems to be the opposite of all utopias, and at the same time, the very place of all utopias. It is perhaps here that the body becomes something heterotopic (to borrow from Foucault,

even though he reserves this term strictly for geographical spaces). In this algorithmic age, the age of LLMs, we are increasingly concerned with the fate of the body – with the fate of its place – than with place in general. We want to know in which form we will survive as a species and, no less importantly, in which form we will be valuable and loved as living beings.

It is precisely within this context that the overarching Alien franchise – and *Alien: Earth* in particular – reveals its profound contemporary relevance. As the series' creator and showrunner Noah Hawley remarked in a promotional trailer for the show, it functions as a sort of character study, ultimately posing the question of whether we humans actually deserve to survive. Thus, the series seems to seriously grapple with the reality that we humans, for the time being, are confined to Earth. There is no possibility of interplanetary migration on the immediate horizon. So, perhaps we should seek, with far more care this time, to build our utopias here on Earth once again.

As for the synthetic body – which seems, rightfully so, to be of an alien and alienating nature – it should be remarked that we humans have already dealt with various sorts of tools in our everyday lives for millennia. And even though the body itself is not a tool, our own hand, when we write something, functions as one. It acts as a sort of prosthetic that arises from the very auto-affectation of our embodiment: the indecision and transitivity between touching and being touched. This sort of artificiality (or rather, pro-aesthetics) haunts our bodies and, as it seems, will keep haunting us. The question is whether it will crack our horizons open, giving rise to new, positive utopias – promising that our growth, both as individuals and as a species, is capable of harbouring the necessary potential to keep life valuable, safe, and adventurous all at the same time.