

Transfigurations of Body and Identity: Between Merleau-Pontian Phenomenology and Contemporary TechnologyAbdelkader YAHIAOUI¹, Ahmed BRAHIM ²

1- Oran 1 University, Algeria,

yahiaoui.abdelkader@univ-oran1.dz

2- Mostaganem University, Algeria,

ahmed.brahim@univ-mosta.dz

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Abstract:

The human body has traditionally been viewed as a central component in shaping personal identity, acting as the physical vessel through which individuals experience the world and express themselves. However, rapid advances in medical technology—such as organ transplants and cosmetic surgery—as well as the rise of virtual and augmented realities, have introduced significant challenges to this traditional understanding. These developments raise critical questions about whether identity can still be rooted in a stable, physical body when technology enables us to alter, enhance, or even transcend it. In this evolving context, the phenomenological insights of Maurice Merleau-Ponty become especially relevant. He argues that the body is not just a biological structure but the primary medium through which we perceive, act, and relate to others. This view invites us to rethink bodily identity in light of modern innovations, questioning whether the body continues to be the foundation of identity or if that foundation is being radically transformed.

Keywords : Body ; Identity ; Medical technology; Merleau-Ponty ; Phenomenology.

تحولات الجسد والهوية: بين الفينومينولوجيا الميرلوبونية والتكنولوجيا المعاصرة

محيّاوي عبد القادر¹، براهيم أحمد²

الملخص: لطالما اعتُبر الجسد عنصراً مركزياً في تشكيل الهوية الشخصية، حيث يُعدّ الوعاء الفيزيائي الذي يختبر من خلاله الفرد العالم ويُعبّر عن نفسه. لكن التطورات السريعة في التكنولوجيا الطبية □ مثل زراعة الأعضاء والجراحة التجميلية □ إلى جانب صعود تقنيات الواقع الافتراضي والمعزز، طرحت تحديات جوهرية لهذا الفهم التقليدي. إذ تُثير هذه التحولات تساؤلات حاسمة حول ما إذا كانت الهوية لا تزال متجذرة في جسد مادي ثابت، في وقت أصبح فيه بالإمكان تعديل الجسد أو تعزيزه أو حتى تجاوزه تماماً عبر التكنولوجيا. في هذا السياق المتغير، تكتسب رؤية الفيلسوف موريس ميرلوبونتي من خلال الظاهرانية أهمية خاصة، حيث يرى أن الجسد ليس مجرد بنية بيولوجية، بل هو الوسيط الأساسي الذي نُدرك ونتصرف ونتواصل من خلاله. ويقودنا هذا المنظور إلى إعادة التفكير في هوية الجسد في ضوء الابتكارات المعاصرة، وتساءل: هل لا يزال الجسد يشكل أساس الهوية، أم أن هذا الأساس يشهد تحولاً جذرياً؟

الكلمات المفتاحية: الجسد؛ الهوية؛ التكنولوجيا الطبية ؛ الفينومينولوجيا؛ ميرلوبونتي.

Introduction

The body is among the most fundamental elements in the formation of individual identity, being the physical vessel that houses personality and brings to life the biological, psychological, and social qualities of human beings. The body has served as the prime medium of expression of individuals in the past, holding an ineliminable relationship with identity formation. This traditional conception of the body as the building block of identity has survived centuries. However, in light of contemporary technological and medical transformations, this model has faced rigorous critique and reevaluation. In our own era, marked by rapid advancements in the fields of organ transplantation, beauty surgery, and virtual reality, the relationship between human identity and body has become increasingly complex.

One of the most fundamental transformations affecting identity today is the progress of medical technology, which has turned organ transplants and bodily modification through surgery into a norm. As a counterpoint, new virtual reality and artificial intelligence technologies provide new possibilities for reconfiguring the human body, enabling individuals to immerse themselves in virtual worlds that can completely

redefine their sense of self and body. These new technologies raise timely questions regarding the current stability of the body as an unalterable factor in establishing identity—particularly when it is possible to change one's physical appearance or even disconnect altogether from one's bodily flesh in the virtual reality.

Here, phenomenology—particularly as it has been articulated by the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty—assumes central importance in attempting to understand the integration of body and identity. Merleau-Ponty contends that the body is more than merely a physical organism but the very "medium" through which the self lives in the world and constructs subjective and intersubjective experience. The body is not separable from thought or consciousness but is inextricably linked as part of lived human experience. This perspective raises a significant line of questioning: does the body still remain the essential identifier of identity, or do contemporary technological and medical advancements recast this traditional understanding?

So the fundamental problematic remains: in what terms, if any, does the body still hold significance in the context of modern developments in medicine and technology? Does the body continue to be the dominant determinant of identity, or does this shift deconstruct the conventional definition of the body as determining human identity?

The Body as a Central Component of Identity Formation

Merleau-Ponty's Notion of the Body

The French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1945/2012) philosophical articulation of the notion of the body is one of the most significant developments in phenomenological philosophy, with a new account that transcends traditional

Western philosophical ideas, including the mind-body dualism of René Descartes (1641/1984). The body, for Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012), is not physical substance or a mechanical device employed by the mind to deal with the world; rather, it is the very essence of human being and the ground of perception and consciousness (Carman, 2008, p. 42)

In his masterwork *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012) theorizes the body as the "natural self"—the human subject is not simply an owner of a body but is in fact a body, such that they are and see the world. This characterization positions the body at the center of understanding the relation between subject and object (Gallagher, 2005, p. 58). The body is not simply an object of perception but the very place where perception occurs, positioning it at the very heart of humankind (Legrand, 2006, p. 92).

Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012) maintains that the body is not separate from the world but actively involved in it. In movement and sensing, the body is perpetually interacting with its environment, not merely passively receiving input from the outside world but actively constituting and reading it. To illustrate, in touching something, we don't merely feel the surface of the object but concurrently sense our power to touch (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012, p. 93). This reveals the body's strange duality: it is touching and being touched, seeing and being seen. This duality makes the body the site of conjunction of subjectivity and objectivity—a reflection of the world and

simultaneously the window of the self onto the world (Weiss, 1999, p. 118).

Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012) thus does away with the notion of a distinct mind that controls the body, rather holding that consciousness itself is rooted in bodily existence. Thought cannot be separated from movement or sensation (Crossley, 2001, p. 101). Furthermore, he identifies the body with time and space, arguing that the body is not merely in spatial coordinates but also creates space actively through its orientations and (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012, p. 112). In reaching for a glass, this movement is not a mechanical response but an indicator of intentionality and relation to the world, so the body is a vehicle of meaning and possibility.

The body is also, in Merleau-Ponty's (1945/2012) philosophy, the medium of communication between human beings. Through facial expressions, gestures, and glances, we exchange meaning and establish social relations. This is the aspect that reveals the existential nature of the body—not a biological entity but a representation of our being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962, p. 78). And so, in this sense, the Merleau-Pontian body stands as the center of human life in all its fullness (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012, p. 151). It is not a machine for the mind or a vehicle for the soul, but the fundamental state of being and perception. Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012) therefore transcends materialist and idealist ideas to offer instead a vision that is focused on embodiment as the basis for knowing ourselves and our world. The body, in his work, is the living

presence of the self—full of potential and meanings, infusing life with its richness and depth by virtue of continuous interaction with the reality surrounding it.

The Body and Personal Identity

The body is the foundation of personal identity according to Merleau-Ponty (1962). Personhood is not being thought in an exclusively mental way but rather through sensuous experience and bodily being. Identity is not a mental construct or an endeavor of language and memory; rather, it is an incarnate one that arises from the ongoing intertwining of the body and the world. The self relies on sensor capacities that give us immediate perception of our presence, and perception is therefore an embodied experience that informs our self-consciousness. Movement, contact, and physical interaction with the world are not just biological operations but perceptual experiences that define how we experience our presence and continuity in the world. When we walk, move around, or apply our hands in the performance of day-to-day tasks, we don't reflect on such acts as mechanical tasks—instead, we live through them as existential events constitutive of our self. Body then becomes a necessary medium through which to live our personal (Crossley, 2001, p. 106).

Moreover, body transcends to be used as a perceptual medium into an essential actor in our intercourse with others (Gallagher, 2005, p. 63). It is the social means of communication, where identity is read from outside appearance, posture, gait, vocal timbre, and even body and facial expression. Communication

in phenomenology according to Merleau-Ponty is not solely confined to the word but to facial expression as well as the movement of the body in the expression of emotions and how we are being interpreted. For instance, the tone of voice may convey confidence or fear, and gestures of the hands may add meaning to speech, so the body becomes a willing participant in the construction of social relationships. Perception of other people—and their perception of us—does not occur merely by language but through a complex coordination of bodily cues that constitute an essential part of social interaction (Shilling, 2012, p. 152).

At a societal level, the body plays a significant role in determining the social standing of an individual, serving as a marker of self and membership (Shilling, 2012, p. 158). Beauty ideals, attire, and even physical attributes come with social definitions that determine how individuals perceive an individual, granting access to inclusion or exclusion. Society puts expectations on the body—whether in appearance or capability—which, in turn, shape the manner in which we perceive ourselves and others. For example, morphological variations or physical impairments can decide the way an individual is treated within his or her social environment, illustrating that the body has social importance independent of its biological make-up (Foucault, 1977, p. 133).

Furthermore, the body is not merely an organ of self-perception or a tool of communication—it is also a site for the exercise of social power (Foucault, 1977, p. 140). Corporeal, racial,

gendered, or aged variations in the body equate to power relations that determine the social standing of an individual. Bodily identity is made into a social privilege or exclusion tool, whereby certain bodies are privileged while others are stigmatized or marginalized. The body is thus a site of struggle where the personal and social meet, and therefore it is a key determinant of human positioning within the web of social relations.

Lastly, Merleau-Ponty describes how the body is not a bodily thing but the very manner in which human existence is lived (Crossley, 2001, p. 101). The sense of identity is embodied in sensory experience and lived bodily life, and the body profoundly affects our relation to others and our social standing. Human communication does not occur simply via language or cognition but via the body as a communication medium and mode of being, thus it is a necessary part in understanding the self and other in any given society.

The Body and Socio-Cultural Identity

The body becomes a fundamental building block of social construction and cultural identity, not just a biological entity but a contested site where social values and norms meet to determine an individual's position within society (Butler, 1990, p. 101). Culture does have a determining factor in the creation of our bodily experiences, establishing values of beauty, behavior, and social standing to render bodily identity into a function of cultural milieu. For instance, beauty standards vary significantly across societies and are a reflection of health,

beauty, and even status definitions within cultures. Consequently, the body becomes invested with cultural signs that influence self-concept and social relationships (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 126).

Gender and race become core concepts in the construction of bodily identity, where differences among humans are not only determined by biological foundations but also socio-cultural ones (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 125). Gender, as a social system, dictates roles and expectations of masculinity and femininity, making the body a site for social power struggles. From an early age, people are socialized to internalize gender-specific patterns of behavior—men are supposed to be strong and resilient, while female bodies are linked with fragility and beauty, thus reinforcing gendered expressions of identity. In the same way, race affects social categorization, wherein some bodily features gain cultural and political meanings that determine everyday lived realities. Societies usually create standards of what the "acceptable" body is, which makes for bodily discrimination or prejudice against some physical characteristics. This verifies that bodily identity goes beyond nature's determination, arising instead from intricate interplays among biology, culture, and society (Butler, 1990, p. 103).

Physical experience is a basic aspect of identity, as people engage their bodies in a range of settings in the physical environment. Physical experiences like illness, disability, or aging all have an influence on self-concept and social behavior. A physically disabled individual, for example, will have to face

the judgment of society that challenges his or her self-concept and social status.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) ultimately demonstrates that the body works not as an identity container, but as a manifestation of socio-cultural relations. Society and culture do not just shape our bodily consciousness; they actually condition our interactions with others, rendering bodily identity a complex phenomenon that extends beyond biological concerns to encompass traditions, values, and prevailing social forms. This representation introduces the body as product and producer of cultural meaning—a body as living text in which power dynamics and identity negotiations are continually inscribed and reinterpreted.

Technological Transformations and the Redefinition of Bodily Identity

Medical and Technological Changes: The Impact on Bodily Identity

Medical and technological transformations have significantly redefined bodily identity (Haraway, 1991) Technology not only reshapes an individual's awareness of their body, but it also transforms the very nature of bodily existence. For instance, prosthetic limbs are no longer considered external objects, but rather integral extensions of the corporeal self. In this sense, technology goes beyond merely enhancing physical abilities; it fundamentally reconstructs the internal concept of the body, altering how the individual perceives and experiences their bodily reality.

The body is no longer a fixed category based on natural biological conditions but is now an open space to be reconstructed and reshaped. This transformation has made a massive impact on the way individuals define their identities. With advances in organ transplantation, prosthetic limbs, and

cosmetic surgery, the body has become more flexible and adaptable, and this has raised philosophical questions about the nature of personal identity in the light of these developments.

Organ Transplants, Prosthetics, and Their Impact on Identity

Organ transplantation and prosthetic limbs are a fundamental shift in bodily experience (Sharp, 2006, p. 78). To lose an organ is no longer to lose it for keeps, since the art of medicine nowadays allows for its replacement—at least, either with a transplant organ or with an advanced artificial substitute. Such operations, though, impact not merely the bodily self but also the psychological and existential aspect of self. Individuals who undergo these procedures often have to struggle with basic questions: Are they still the same person after receiving an implant organ? Do they view their body as a unified whole or as an assembly of distinct parts?

Psychological studies suggest that some transplant patients experience strange sensations, such as the notion of the foreign organ not belonging to them or even becoming behavioral and self-conscious changes (Svenaeus, 2010, p. 115).

This phenomenon, also referred to as "transplanted organ identity," is a sign of the profound integration of body and identity, in which the body is not only a bodily presence but a part of self-perception and the continuity of personal identity.

Prosthetic limbs have also seen great advances due to breakthroughs in artificial intelligence and neural integration (Bostrom, 2008, p. 56). Some prosthetics now can react to neural impulses almost naturally, helping individuals regain mobility and reintegrate into society. But prosthetic use raises new questions about defining a "natural body." The biological

body can no longer serve as the sole measure of identity, for technology is increasingly a component of bodily identity in previously unimaginable ways.

Cosmetic Surgery and "Body Reconstruction" as a Means of Identity Control

In the last decades, cosmetic surgery evolved from a basic improvement of bodily defects to a business of recontouring the body according to the beauty canons of a given period (Gilman, 1999, p. 220). Such operations as plastic surgery, Botox treatments, and body sculpting are now employed to assist individuals in transforming their looks to suit their own perception of beauty and self. This shift is a representation of a growing human desire to assert control over the body and reconstitute it to fit individual preference. But it also places in stark relief profound issues concerning the coherence of bodily identity: Do individuals construct their own selves, or are social and cultural norms bestowing external impositions? Arguably the most contentious aspect of this debate is how media and digital technology fashion self-image. Filtered and computer-aided photos have brought about unrealistic beauty standards, prompting several to go under the knife to get an idealized face that they might not originally have had. Cosmetic surgery is now both a social phenomenon and a medical procedure, reflecting culture as it rebuilds people's images of themselves.

Virtual Reality and the Digital Body

*Abdelkader YAHIAOUI1, Ahmed
BRAHIM
yahiaoui.abdelkader@univ-oran1.dz
ahmed.brahim@univ-mosta.dz*

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While digital technologies have developed at a frenetic speed, virtual reality has emerged as a new sphere where bodily identity can transcend traditional biological boundaries (Boellstorff, 2008, p. 120). Virtual environments such as the metaverse enable individuals to interact with one another via virtual avatars, raising profound questions regarding the relationship between the physical body and its digital representation, and how this experience contributes to our conception of self and bodily identity.

How Does Living in Virtual Worlds Affect Our Bodily Sense of Identity?

Virtual reality reconfigures the perception of bodies by enabling individuals to overcome the flesh-and-blood limitations of their bodies and to direct the shape of their bodies in manners they were unable to in the actual world. Through avatars, individuals can select bodies that are not their bodies—gender, age, or even non-human shape—and can try out new versions of themselves as ideal or imaginary selves. This ongoing interaction with avatars leads to remarkable psychological and cognitive effects. Individuals may begin to identify their virtual selves with their actual life. Some studies indicate that the so-called Proteus Effect leads individuals to behave based on the traits they choose for their avatars, demonstrating how digital identity already influences individuals' behavior when they are in virtual reality. For instance, an individual who chooses a strong and attractive avatar can feel more assertive in social interactions, even once they are out of the virtual environment.

However, this disconnection between the virtual identity and real body can also lead to psychological and social problems. Individuals can become dissatisfied with their bodies once they have spent so much time portraying an "idealized" representation of themselves in the virtual world. It can also generate an identity duality feeling, where individuals feel divided between the virtual self and their true self.

This trend requires deeper philosophical inquiry into the nature of embodiment in a virtual world, challenging traditional definitions of bodily wholeness and identity coherence (Hayles & K, 1999, p. 180). As virtual and physical worlds become increasingly intertwined, the very definition of what constitutes "the self" must be re-examined in light of these technology-mediated experiences.

Can the "Avatar" Be an Extension of Bodily Identity?

In the majority of virtual worlds, the avatar is conceived as a virtual embodiment of personal identity but not necessarily a representation of the individual's biological body (Taylor, 2002, p. 15). However, the way people respond to their virtual selves suggests that the avatar can become an actual extension of bodily identity—not just in terms of appearance but also in terms of self-concept and spatial embodiment in the virtual world.

The avatar constitutes a form of "cybernetic corporeality," allowing users to experience their identity in novel forms, with the biological body no longer constituting the sole medium of presence and interaction. In the metaverse, for instance, users are able to modify their appearance at will, with the liberty to

Abdelkader YAHIAOUI1, Ahmed**BRAHIM****yahiaoui.abdelkader@univ-oran1.dz****ahmed.brahim@univ-mosta.dz****المواقف****المجلد 20، العدد 02، الشهر ماي****السنة 2025**

recreate the self in forms impossible within the material world. This raises a fundamental question: must bodily identity remain fixed, or can it be fluid and multifaceted depending on the space in which one exists?

Furthermore, this virtual representation of bodily identity also re-figures inter-personal interaction, whereby social judgment is no longer based only on physical appearance but also on the aesthetic and symbolic choices implicated in one's avatar (Nakamura, 2008, p. 22). This can lead to a re-figuration of concepts such as beauty, gender, and diversity in new terms, where individuals are able to transcend traditional categorizations and perform new identities with greater freedom.

Critique of the Classical Body and Identity Concept

The body has traditionally been central to the construction of human identity, considered both the vessel of the self and the primary means of perceiving the world (Hayles & K, 1999, p. 190). However, recent technological and intellectual breakthroughs—particularly in artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, and organ transplantation—have necessitated a reconsideration of the body's historical role as the fundamental determinant of identity. Posthumanism has emerged as a direct challenge to conventional definitions, arguing that the biological organism is merely one mode of existence rather than the essential foundation of identity (Braidotti, 2013, p. 50). With technologies like intelligent prosthetics, brain-machine interfaces, and the potential for mind uploading, it has become feasible to envision identity transcending the physical body, raising profound questions about the future of human selfhood.

Posthumanists contend that moving beyond biological constraints is not just an option but an evolutionary necessity for humanity (Ferrando, 2019, p. 97). From this perspective, identity is no longer bound to the physical body but can extend into cyberspace or merge with artificial intelligence. Virtual environments like the Metaverse enable individuals to represent themselves through digital avatars that may reflect identity in ways distinct from their biological form, fostering a more fluid and dynamic concept of self (Doyle, 2020, p. 110). Furthermore, research into mind uploading suggests the possibility of transferring human consciousness into virtual realms, potentially creating a new form of identity unconstrained by physicality.

However, this transformation raises significant philosophical and ethical concerns. Philosophers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty argue that the body is not merely a passive container of identity but the primary medium through which individuals perceive and engage with the world. Even in virtual spaces, some form of embodiment—whether biological or digital—remains necessary for presence and interaction. This perspective suggests that complete disembodiment may be more illusory than achievable, as embodied experience remains integral to self-awareness.

Beyond philosophical debates, these developments could also lead to serious social consequences. A new form of "corporeal stratification" may emerge, where individuals who can afford enhancements or digital transcendence gain advantages over those confined to natural biological limits. Such disparities

could create unprecedented inequalities, with "enhanced" or "digital" identities becoming markers of privilege rather than universally accessible options.

Bodily Identity Between Stability and Transformation in the Context of Future Advances

The Body of the Future in the Age of Artificial Intelligence and Biotech Breakthroughs

The fast development of artificial intelligence has created technologies that allow the human body to be coupled with robotic and intelligent appliances (Bostrom, 2014). Examples include sophisticated prosthetic limbs and implants that facilitate direct brain-machine interaction to such technologies no longer being assistive devices for individuals with disabilities but rather enhancement technologies that enhance human capabilities—like accelerating cognitive functions, improving sensory perception, or even controlling external devices with one's mind. In this case, a fundamental question arises: Is it possible for the human body to be considered an adaptive system that integrates with technology without losing its identity? In addition, is the individual who is equipped with intelligent prosthetics or a brain implant the same individual he or she was before such a transformation?

Genetic Engineering and Gene Editing: Can a "Designed" Bodily Identity Be Created?

Genetic engineering has created new possibilities for the alteration of biological and genetic traits, and it is now possible to alter a human being's genetic code even before birth—either for medical or aesthetic purposes. CRISPR-Cas9 technologies now enable direct genetic manipulations that can alter height,

skin color, intelligence, or muscle structure. This raises profoundly philosophical and ethical questions: Can we pre-plan our physical life, does the body stay the essence of identity or become a preference product depending on personal and cultural inclinations? Most importantly, these transformations might bring new disparities in society where "genetic privilege" follows—divides those who can afford genetic enhancements from those who cannot.

Potential Transformations in Understanding of the Body with the Augmented Human

The human body itself is no longer a fixed vessel for identity but rather an evolving and flexible space inviting enhancement and remolding (Clark, 2003). With ongoing research in sensory augmentation, such as implantable chips that amplify vision or hearing, human perception of selfness and the universe could be transformed in fundamental ways. For instance, neurological sensors could offer individuals new senses, such as the ability to perceive infrared light or hear ultrasonic frequencies, thereby expanding bodily experience and reconstituting biological limits. These innovations pose significant questions: Does a person with expanded sensory capacity still experience selfhood in the same way as before? Could these enhancements increasingly release identity from the biological body?

Toward a Flexible Bodily Identity or the Dissolution of Bodily Identity

In the face of such alterations, physical identity is not rigid or

restricted by definitive biological factors anymore but fluid and always dynamic. The body—either the natural or enhanced artificially—is, however, the fundamental ground upon which one develops the self. Even under the Posthumanism paradigm, where biology and technology are fully synergized, there remains the question: Are we merely enhancing the body, or do we ultimately abandon it? If so, what will remain of the concept of bodily identity in the future?

The Body and Hybrid Identities: Between the Biological and the Digital

With the accelerating pace of technological advancement, the human body is no longer confined to its biological space, but has expanded into the virtual realm, giving rise to hybrid identities that bridge the corporeal and the virtual (Boellstorff, 2022). The contemporary individual no longer perceives the world solely through their physical body but also possesses digital extensions—such as avatars, online profiles, and virtual identities—that they navigate within various virtual environments. The experience of living with multiple virtual identities can lead to fragmentation and confusion of the self, as individuals struggle to define their true essence, resulting in psychological distress. Furthermore, interactions through these identities may foster social isolation, as genuine relationships weaken and are replaced by superficial, shallow engagements. In addition, these virtual identities can impose societal pressures to present an idealized version of the self, heightening anxiety and stress in relation to meeting social expectations.

This raises fundamental questions concerning the nature of bodily identity: Is it possible to possess multiple bodily

identities? And if so, are they an organic extension of the self, or do they oppose it?

Can One Possess Multiple Bodily Identities at Once?

In virtual reality, one can possess multiple bodily identities that are completely different from one's real physical body—appearance, gender, race, or even physical ability. For instance, in a location like the Metaverse, a person can choose a virtual body (avatar) that characterizes them in a totally different way than their meat-and-bone body, enabling them to learn new things and escape the limitations of the physical world. This effect raises a significant question regarding the relation between body identity and self-awareness: If an individual may exist in many places with many body identities, do such body identities remain the true expression of their self or do they evolve into a different entity?

The Interaction Between Virtual Identity and the Biological Body: Integration or Contradiction

A digital identity does not necessarily deny the biological body; rather, it interacts with it in complex ways, sometimes leading to integration and sometimes contradiction. On the one hand, a digital identity can be an extension of the real body, allowing individuals to present themselves through their avatars in ways that symbolize their inner self or their unfulfilled desires in the real world. In such a situation, the digital life serves as a complement to the self-conception instead of flight from it.

A high degree of dissimilarity between digital and organic identity can produce identity splitting, where one resides in two

discrete lives—a tangible one and a virtual one—potentially building psychological stress in between. In addition, social media is the driving force behind a dual identity since people select and carefully maintain their online persona, creating a difference between the virtual self and the real person. The question that comes to mind is: Does digital identity truly represent the real self or is it an intentional reimagining of corporeal representation following societal expectations and personal desires?

The Role of Virtual Reality and the Metaverse in Shaping a New Concept of Multiple Identities

With the development of virtual and augmented reality technologies, it is now easy to liberate oneself from traditional bodily constraints, and individuals can live in multiple worlds with different identities. In the Metaverse, for example, one can switch between multiple virtual bodies at different times and interact with others through perpetually changing virtual identities. This raises the philosophical problem regarding the idea of "liquid identity" where the body is no longer determinate or fixed but instead becomes something fluid that molds itself to contexts and needs.

But despite all this fluidity, the biological body remains a point of reference (Hayles & K, 2017). Virtual experiences do not eliminate body perception but recreate it. Even in virtual environments, humans require sensory interfaces (such as motion-tracking equipment and smart glasses) to navigate around in them, demonstrating that digital self is not an

absolute replacement for the bodily form but an extension of it in a new form.

The Ethical and Philosophical Dimensions of the Future of Bodily Identity

With the development of biotechnology and artificial intelligence, the human body has been the subject of intense philosophical and ethical inquiry (Bostrom & Savulescu, 2021). No longer a fixed biological entity, the body has now become dynamic, liable to modification, enhancement, and even replacement. This raises essential questions about identity, ethics, and society:

Does transcending the biological body lead to a loss of the traditional sense of identity?

What are the ethical implications of genetic control and human enhancement?

Is the body a biological imperative or a social construction to be redesigned?

Does Transcending the Biological Body Mean Losing Traditional Identity?

Human identity has traditionally been closely bound up with the biological body, as the intersection of sensory experience, memory, and subjective.

But recent advances—human-machine integration, virtual reality, and artificial organ implants—raise a basic question: Do people lose their identity if they progressively give up their biological body?

In the posthumanist context, there are philosophers who would argue that human identity is no longer anchored in the physical body but is already a fluid concept that can exist in different mediums, whether digital or biological.

Mind and consciousness, in this perspective, can be uploaded to digital mediums, without any requirement for the traditional body altogether. This poses a serious philosophical conundrum, however:

If one were to lose their body, are they still "themselves"?

Can identity persist without the body that has characterized human experience from the beginning?

Ethical Challenges of Human Enhancement and Genetic Modifications

Enhancing the human body through the utilization of biotechnology, smart prosthetics, or genetic engineering raises serious ethical questions regarding justice, equality, and identity. On the one hand, these advances may improve quality of life, heal genetic diseases, and improve human performance. On the other hand, they may create a new form of biological inequality, whereby those with access to these technologies gain physical and mental upgrades, but others are limited to their natural biology.

Also, genetic engineering challenges the control over manipulating human nature. If it is possible to edit DNA to select physical or mental traits, does the human body become a commodity that is open to market and social forces? (Baylis, 2019). Moreover, does the body's identity lose its intrinsic value when it is customizable and changeable according to external standards?

The Debate on the Body: Biological Necessity or Social Construct?

Traditionally, the body has been a biological given, and its genetic and intellectual capacities have formed the foundation of human identity. Modern critical thought and gender theory, however, argue that the body is not only a biological entity but also a social construct, prone to the vagaries of culture, norms, and technology.

In this case, the contemporary transformations can be seen as a redesign of the body in line with personal and social desires, forcing a reconsideration of the "natural" and the "artificial." Is the body a closed system or an open field for intervention and manipulation?

Does it equate to the emancipation of human beings from the limitations of the body, or does it equate to the loss of their primitive identity?

Towards a New Bodily Identity: Technology and Ethics in Balance

With the foregoing developments, bodily identity is no longer determined by biology alone but has become a hybrid construction wherein the natural exists with the artificial and the biological with the digital. This development, however, calls for the formulation of an ethical model that can provide balance between technological innovation and the preservation of human dignity.

In this context, practical applications can be proposed to support the balance between material and virtual identities, such as artificial intelligence tools that allow users to guide and

unify their digital identities in harmony with their true selves. Technologies like artificial intelligence can help improve the interaction between material and virtual identities by developing programs that enable individuals to have full control over how they present themselves online, thus avoiding fragmentation between different identities. These tools may contribute to fostering a healthy engagement with digital identity, reducing its negative impacts on an individual's psychological and social life.

Conclusion

This study has examined the troubled relation between body and identity through the lens of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, seeking to provide an answer to a basic question: In the face of technological and medical changes, to what degree is the body a determinant of individual identity? Through philosophical thought and recent scientific findings, the body is today no longer merely a fixed material entity but a dynamic space defined by sensory and social experiences, as well as being fundamentally transformed by technological advancements.

Merleau-Ponty asserted the body as "a way of being in the world" and not a tool separable from consciousness, underlining its essential role in the formation of personal and social identity. It is through the experience of the body and sensory perception that a sense of self is created and relations with others are determined, and so the body is an important medium for understanding one's place in society. Yet this traditional perspective is being revised with cultural and technological change, whereby the body is now a more flexible category—no longer determined by biology alone but also shaped by social forces such as gender and race.

Abdelkader YAHIAOUI1, Ahmed

BRAHIM

yahiaoui.abdelkader@univ-oran1.dz

ahmed.brahim@univ-mosta.dz

المواقف

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The second chapter demonstrated how medical and digital technologies are reshaping bodily identity. Advances such as organ transplants and advanced prosthetics are no longer merely intended to restore bodily function but also raise questions about the boundaries of personal identity. Cosmetic procedures have also moved beyond mere aesthetic fixes but are now expressions of human control over the body according to

evolving social norms. In the virtual world, embodied identity converges with online spaces, in which avatars are digital extensions of self, questioning the reality of such alternate identities and their impact on self-perception.

In this case, the philosophical thesis of posthumanism raises a deeper question: Is the biological body transcended entirely? As artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, and virtual reality become more common, a new conception of bodily identity is formed—one that merges the biological with the artificial. But in doing so, there are also ethical concerns, including the potential erosion of traditional identity and the formation of social disparities between those who can enhance their bodies and those who cannot.

From this analysis, one can conclude that the body still remains a key constituent of identity, but no longer essentialized but rather increasingly fluid due to technological and cultural evolution. While phenomenology allows us to understand the constant intertwining of technology and body, there is an open question regarding the future of bodily identity: Could we reach a stage of "disembodied identity," where consciousness is completely separated from the body? Or will the body, despite all the transformations, remain a constitutive aspect of selfhood? They are questions that must be addressed by further scientific and philosophical inquiry, especially in a world

where innovations are rapidly changing our understanding of what it means to be human.

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