

# The Body as (Another) Place: Producing Embodied Heterotopias Through Tattooing

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While previous research has mobilized sociological and psychological readings of the body, this study considers it ontologically as the ultimate place we must live in, with no escape possible. A phenomenological framework and a four-year, multi-method, qualitative study of tattoo recipients and tattooists substantiates the conceptualization of the body as a threefold articulation: an inescapable place (topia), the source of utopias arising from fleeting trajectories between here and elsewhere, and the “embodied heterotopia” that it becomes when people rework their bodies as a better place to inhabit. We show how tattooed bodies are spatially conceived as a topia through their topographies, territories, landscapes, and limits. We then highlight how this creates a dynamic interplay between past, present, and future, resulting in utopian dreams of beautification, escape, conjuration, and immutability. Finally, we show how tattooees produce embodied heterotopias, namely other places that both mirror and compensate for their ontological entrapment. In considering the body as a place, our framework enriches phenomenological and existential approaches to self-transformation in contemporary consumption.

**Keywords:** body, place, utopia, heterotopia, tattooing, time

In his one-man show “The Tattooed Man,” Pascal Tourain—a French “blue man,” as fully tattooed people are called—describes how tattooing changed his life. He explains that he felt “trapped in an irreducible space that he had not chosen” and “that did not belong” to him

(Tourain 2004, 26). Because he “was just born there by mistake,” Tourain’s hope was to “reappropriate his carnal envelope and make it a work of art” (Tourain 2004, 39). By projecting a disparate but carefully thought-out storied world on his skin, he managed to turn his body into a more desirable place that he now feels comfortable with, and that he is proud to exhibit.

Beyond inscribing personal myths, life narratives, and identity negotiations on the skin (Miller 2008; Schouten 1991; Velliquette, Murray, and Evers 2006), tattooing, as this example shows, also offers a means to inhabit the spatial unit that is ours. This spatial unit might not, however, be fully appropriated until it has been altered or reworked so as to become an embodied and meaningful place. While prior research conceptualizes the notion of place as an external “concrete and limited space” that frames people’s activities, exhibits distinctive meanings and values, and creates a sense of attachment, identification, and belonging (Castilhos, Dolbec, and Veresiu 2016, 3; Tuan 1979), it barely touches on the body as a place “where we see the world and where we reside” (Merleau-Ponty 1960, 165). Because we lack an understanding of what results from being trapped in a body from which no escape is possible

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(Foucault 1966/2006), our research examines how people cope with such an ontological and existential condition.

In the light of post-structuralism (Thompson and Hirschman 1995), postmodern feminism (Joy and Venkatesh 1994), and brand culture imagery (Bengtsson, Ostberg, and Kjeldgaard 2005; Bjerrisgaard, Kjeldgaard, and Bengtsson 2013; Borgerson and Schroeder 2018; Kjeldgaard and Bengtsson 2005), prior literature emphasizes the “socialized,” objectified character of the body. But despite claims that bodies should be conceived of “as though they were little more than surfaces etched with social messages” (Longhurst 2001, 23), studies on aesthetic surgery (Schouten 1991), Botox injections (Giesler 2012), body sculpting (Sanders 1989), and diets (Dittmar 2008; Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010) consider body modifications as a form of compliance with socio-moral prescriptions and market-shaped expectations (Cronin and Hopkinson 2018; Turner 2008). In addition to anthropological (Rubin 1988), historical (Sanders 1989), and cultural approaches to tattooing (Botz-Bornstein 2015; DeMello 2000), scholars also view tattoos as cultural imprints that either exemplify deviance (Atkinson 2002; Goulding et al. 2004; Holbrook, Block, and Fitzsimons 1998; Patterson and Schroeder 2010) or gradually blend into evolving fashion norms (Kjeldgaard and Bengtsson 2005). However, as our opening example suggests, such approaches overlook how people deal with a body that is primarily their ultimate and only living place.

Prior research also examines the various functions of skin (Patterson and Schroeder 2010) and its role in psychic exchanges between the self and the outer world (Bradshaw and Chatzidakis 2016). The skin-ego psychoanalytical theory, for example, aptly explains how the newborn baby finds a protective shell in its caregiver that is both a physical containment and “psychical wrapping” (Anzieu 2016). However, while drawing on a spatial premise, this approach does not fully elucidate how mentally mature adults with a cohesive self negotiate their bodies beyond the primitive stages of the ego’s construction. Consumer researchers also address corporeal sensations that arise from intense immersive activities in nature (Belk and Costa 1998; Canniford and Shankar 2013; Woermann and Rokka 2015). Drawing on relational ontological frameworks such as actor–network theories (Canniford and Shankar 2013), practice theory (Maciel and Wallendorf 2017; Woermann and Rokka 2015), and nonrepresentational—or “more than representational”—theory (Hill, Canniford, and Mol 2014; Thrift 2004; Tuan 1979), they suggest paying more attention to the body’s sensitive and performative capacities in the flow of activities, atmospheres, and affects, including pain as a means to decelerate (Husemann and Eckhardt, forthcoming) or to reconnect with the sensing body (Scott, Cayla, and Cova 2017). However, these approaches do not examine what living *within* a body entails beyond temporary and often

extraordinary experiences. Moreover, the reasons why such existential condition nurtures their desire to permanently alter their bodies remains poorly understood.

In order to redress these gaps, we adopt an existential phenomenological perspective to explore how the body is persistently experienced as a place and how this drives the need for permanent modifications (Casey 2001; Foucault 1966/2006; Merleau-Ponty 1962). We examine how consumers’ ontological entrapment fuels utopian projects that are enacted on the body and how this turns it into “another” place (Foucault 1967/1986). We use tattooing as a context to illustrate how consumers conceive of, perform, and modify the body as their ultimate place of origin and destination. In so doing, we address three main research questions: How do tattooees account for their body as a place? How does tattooing help them to transcend the place where they live? How does altering the original body finally contribute to making it another place?

To answer these questions, we develop our insights from a four-year, multisite study that comprises in-depth interviews with tattooees and tattooists, an observational netnography, and participant observations at various tattoo conventions. A back-and-forth abductive process (Peirce 1934; Reichertz 2007) between participants’ narratives and photographs of their bodies highlights how the latter are spatially conceived and managed. Various theories of space, place, and the body are considered (Casey 2001; Landzelius 2004; Lefebvre 1974; Massey 1994; Thrift 2004; Tuan 1979), of which Foucault’s work on the “Utopian Body” (1966/2006) and “Of Other Spaces” (1967/1986) best substantiates our data. Prolonged engagement in the field, a “recursive process of double-fitting data and theories” (Timmermans and Tavory 2012, 179), as well as final discussions with key participants, ensure the credibility of our analytical framework.

Our findings point to a threefold articulation of the body: as *topia* (i.e., tattoo placements reveal participants’ topographies, physical territories, landscapes, and limits), as *utopias* that result from their spatial entrapment in the form of four fleeting trajectories between “here” and “elsewhere,” and as *heterotopia* that both mirrors and compensates for their present embodiment. We use the term “embodied heterotopia” to address the concrete enactment of utopias not as distant from what they challenge, but in the very place that they originate. We thus complement Foucault’s prior theorization by bridging his approach to heterotopic spaces (1967/1986) with that of the body (1966/2006). We also enrich recent contributions to “place” in consumer research (Bradford and Sherry 2015; Castilhos et al. 2016; Visconti et al. 2010) by considering the body as where we make our place in the world. Consistent with psychoanalytical theories, our spatial theorization moves beyond the specific issue of pathologies associated with ego construction to consider how people inhabit their bodies. By foregrounding the radical condition

of being encapsulated in a limited, finite place (Foucault 1966/2006), our theorization also extends prior approaches of the socialized body-object. That is not to say that consumers may escape social or psychological judgments when inking their bodies (Botz-Bornstein 2013; Coleman et al. 2017; Holbrook et al. 1998), or that cultures, social class, and context do not exert any influence on their desire to get tattooed (Goulding et al. 2004; Kjeldgaard and Bengtsson 2005). Our argument is that extant studies neglect what being entrapped in a body throughout a lifespan can offer for understanding the desire to alter it and the way to rethink it spatially through various consumption practices on which our research sheds light.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

### From the Socialized Body-as-Object to the Lived Body-Subject

Any conceptualization of the body cannot be disentangled from its particular historical and cultural context, which shapes the way social groups relate differently to themselves, nature, and the sacred (Lévi-Strauss 1963). From this perspective, body modifications (Featherstone 2000) and bodily techniques (Mauss 1979) demonstrate how ontology shapes the way people conceive of and regulate social uses of the body (Descola 2013). As (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 257) notes regarding totemic societies, customary tattooing not only serves to “imprint a drawing onto the flesh but also to stamp onto the mind all the traditions and philosophy of the group.”

Differently from primitive societies (Viveiros de Castro 2014), modern rationalism considers humans as the only beings endowed with spirit and soul. Dichotomies such as mind/body, nature/culture, or emotions/rationality have permeated Western thought since the Platonist philosophical tradition, which later expanded with the ego-conscious Cartesian subject during the Renaissance period (Damasio 1994). As an obstacle to knowledge and reason, the “faulty” body appears in constant need of upgrading (Turner 2008; Williams and Bendelow 1998) and is subjected to practices that seek to reform both its internal functioning (Giesler and Venkatesh 2005; Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010; Romanyshyn 1989) and its external appearance (Giesler 2012; Schouten 1991; Thompson and Hirschman 1995). As an objectified locus where society inscribes rules, obligations, and prohibitions, the voiceless, invisible body of modernist thought (Joy and Venkatesh 1994) is reclaimed by antimodernist discourses that challenge socio-cultural-institutional orders (Botz-Bornstein 2015; Foucault 1984/1997; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). Feminist, Marxist, and postmodernist theories in particular give voice to bodies that are otherwise silenced by racism, classism, ageism, sexism, and patriarchy (Butler 1990; Grosz 1995; Haraway 1991; Massey 1994; Turner 2008).

At the same time, such approaches make the body an object of discourse (Thompson and Hirschman 1995), fraught with dualistic tensions such as male/female or dominant/dominated.

The socialized body-object perspective is also what prevails in the extant literature on tattooing. It points out either the singularity of which such practice is considered emblematic (Atkinson 2002; Holbrook et al. 1998; Larsen, Patterson, and Markham 2014), or the “optional,” “playful,” and “ironic” “sign” that the tattooed body-object represents in postmodern consumer culture (Turner 1999, 49). Yet as (Turner 2008, 229) later notes, reducing the body to a mere “facet of culture” leads us to “neglect or deny our experiences of embodiment.” Indeed, such perspective sees the body as “incorporeal, fleshless, fluidless, little more than a linguistic territory” (Longhurst 2001, 23). Patterson and Schroeder (2010) add to this that when interpreted from an etic perspective, body modifications reflect anything but an onlooker’s specific judgment and social position. Hence, because the body “may function as both a signifier and that which signifies the undecidability of signification” (Patterson and Schroeder 2010, 263), its objectification fails to deliver the “truth” of the subject when viewed from the outside. In sum, the body-as-object perspective discounts the subject’s lived experience and the fundamental significance of the way it inhabits the world (Grosz 1995; Merleau-Ponty 1962).

Scholars also address how body and space interact at a macro, meso, and micro level (Hertz 1960; Lévi-Strauss 1963). Regarding the latter, approaches involving proxemics (Hall et al. 1968) and the constitution of self-territories (Goffman 1971) demonstrate how individuals take possession of a space that they make their own (Bradford and Sherry 2015). At a macro level, Joy and Venkatesh (1994) articulate the recursive interplay between broader social spheres (e.g., “the body politic” or “the social body”) and the location, distribution, and containment of physical beings (Douglas 1970). At a meso level, scholars theorize how bodies and space get recursively produced, represented, and appropriated, constantly reshaping boundaries, distances, and practices (Lefebvre 1974; Massey 1994). For example, they illustrate how individuals (re)appropriate and challenge the “conceived” space through various practices such as skateboarding (Borden 2001), tailgating (Bradford and Sherry 2015), or street art (Visconti et al. 2010). As the relationship between body and space may “exclude from recognition, in both a corporeal and discursive sense, ‘deviant’ groups and individuals” (Landzelius 2004, 281), Marxist and feminist perspectives challenge the way spatiality itself is analyzed. Feminist discourses in particular emphasize that space is conceived through “the medium of a male body and heterosexual male experience” (Massey 1994, 182), which results in and explains the marginalized position of women within that space (Grosz 1995; Haraway 1991). Tiidenberg and



Gómez Cruz (2015) exemplify women posting sexy selfies on Tumblr blogs as an attempt to reconnect with their body. They show that female selfie-shooters find a place, albeit virtual, to authenticate themselves within a highly normalized social sphere. But despite the attention paid to the living body as the “key site of personal experience” (Landzelius 2004, 281), the authors reinstate the prominence of norms, beauty ideals, and the external gaze to which female bloggers subject their physical appearance.

In sum, despite acknowledging the social construction and co-constitution of the body and space, extant approaches conceive of it either metaphorically (i.e., as an abstract entity that disregards people’s lived experience; Shilling 1993), or praxeologically as acting in/on space (Bradford and Sherry 2015; Canniford and Shankar 2013; Scott et al. 2017; Woermann and Rokka 2015), without offering a systematic understanding of what being a place consists of and results in.

### Articulating the Body as Topia, Utopia Generator, and Embodied Heterotopia

We draw on phenomenological premises introduced by Husserl (1970), Heidegger (1962), and Merleau-Ponty (1962, 117) that “there would be no space at all for me if I had no body” and Foucault’s (1966/2006, 90) later assumption that, unlike other objects, the body “cannot be moved away from” the subject’s experience. As a result, the body is our primary medium for inhabiting the world (Merleau-Ponty 1962), a proposition that Casey (2001, 684) reiterates by arguing that “the relationship between self and place is not just one of reciprocal influence” but also “of constitutive coingredience.” Moreover, the body/self operates by integrating reciprocal “outgoing” movements (experiencing external places through various encounters) and “incoming” flows (retaining memories of places encountered; Casey 2001; Miller 2008). Foucault (1966/2006) focuses on how the body (topia) relates to imaginary places (utopias; see table 1).

*The Body as Topia.* Elaborating on the phenomenological condition of being a body, Foucault (1966/2006) stresses the ontological experience of living in a finite place that we move with but cannot leave behind. The impossibility of being anywhere other than “here” thus makes the body “the place without recourse to which I am condemned” (Foucault 1966/2006, 229). Being an “absolute” topos (Dehaene and De Cauter 2008, 25) renders Cartesian metaphysics, Foucault (1966/2006) argues, a vain, helpless attempt to deny our spatialized condition. Moreover, because the body is our main origin and destination, utopias are the key mechanism by which we negotiate the place where we reside. The body’s utopian nature thus derives from our human condition of being entrapped in a body

whose physical flaws, finitude, and even unexplored areas may be transcended (Foucault 1966/2006).

*The Body as Utopia Generator.* “Utopia,” as imagined by More (1516/1985), alludes to a perfect or perfectible fictional territory whose faultless organization compensates for an extant social ordering. Utopia, however, is a no-place. It projects imagination into a better elsewhere and thus provides idealists with romantic desires of transformation that challenge reality. As a result, utopia must be distinguished from both *myth*, as a consistent, “compelling” but actual “heroic story” (Velliquette, Murray, and Evers 2006, 37), and *ideology*, as something that conceals and enforces particular social grounds (Ricoeur 1986). In short, the primary function of utopias is to open up new fields of possibilities and to offer a “fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold” (Palladino and Miller 2015, 2). According to Foucault (1966/2006), being incarnated in a closed place of which, in addition, some parts are unknown (e.g., backs, the back of necks) nurtures three forms of utopias: obtaining a magnified, incorporeal, and powerful body reshaped by giants and fairies (magical body); preserving one’s appearance and eternal youth over time (immutable body); or surviving a finite existence through an undying presence (immortal body/soul). Utopias may be achieved through subjective, voluntary, temporary, out-of-body experiences with drugs, trances, dances, or extraordinary sport activities (Canniford and Shankar 2013; Woermann and Rokka 2015) because they help consumers to escape or compensate for the challenges of modern life (Husemann and Eckhardt, forthcoming; Scott et al. 2017). Utopias may also result from involuntary physical disorders of the body in pain. As Scarry (1985, 162) points out, pain is “of all states the one that, by its aversiveness, makes most pressing the urge to move out and away from the body.” Through its relationship with imagination, pain can be transcended by changing “a wholly passive and helpless occurrence into a self-modifying and, when most successful, self-eliminating one” (Scarry 1985, 164). Poignant narratives of people confronted with disease and a degrading body from which they cannot escape highlight examples of such power of imagination (Murphy 1990; Sontag 1978). When imagination is enacted through deliberate bodily alterations, however, utopian dreams may create places that epitomize what Foucault (1967/1986) theorizes as heterotopias, although he never applied his concept to the body itself.

*The Body as Embodied Heterotopia.* From its original medical sense as a congenital anomaly of an organ that should not be where it is (Palladino and Miller 2015), heterotopia retains the meaning of a strange, incongruous displacement. For Foucault (1967/1986, 24), though, heterotopias are social places that highlight the “mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live.” Five

**TABLE 1**  
**ARTICULATING THE TOPIA, UTOPIA, AND HETEROTOPIA**

Concepts	Topia	Utopia	Heterotopia
Definition	A place that is “here, irreparably,” “never elsewhere” (Foucault 1966/2006, 229).	A place that is “nowhere,” literally a “no place” (the prefix “u” negates the substantive “topos” or place).	“Real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (Foucault 1967/1986, 24).
Origin and subsequent uses	Foucault (1966/2006) introduced the topia in a radio conference about utopia and literature in December 1966 called “The Utopian Body.” This concept served to ground the source of utopian dreams in human ontological bodily entrapment.	More (1516/1985) depicted Utopia as a perfect territory where a society creates a flawless religious, social, and political organization.	Foucault (1967/1986) introduced heterotopia in the same set of radio conferences as “The Utopian Body” in 1966. Heterotopia is a tool for understanding the meaning of space and contemporary urban practices. The concept of heterotopia was then extended by Soja (1996), Hetherington (1997), and Palladino and Miller (2015) in an attempt to build heterotopology, a science of “other spaces,” that Foucault sketched only in his radio lecture.
Implications for the body	The body is presented as the primary, unique, and “absolute place,” the “little fragment of space where I am, literally, embodied [ <i>faire corps</i> ] (229). The topia makes the body a “pitiless” place (Foucault 1966/2006), an “absolute topos” (Dehaene and De Cauter 2008) that fuels imagination and utopian dreams.	According to Foucault (1966/2006), utopias derive from our ontological entrapment in a body-place. Being a topia nurtures various utopian dreams (beauty, freedom, eternity) that translate into the desire to have a magnified, incorporeal, and undying body.	When utopias are concretely enacted, they produce heterotopias. Engaging in body modifications is one example of how utopian dreams may be achieved by altering the original body.
Contributions for understanding the body as space	The topia is the ontological condition of being embodied (Casey 2001). The body as a place (topia) retains the memory of places, people, and things it has encountered (Casey 2001). This view aligns with phenomenological theorizations of the lived body as “the place where we see the world and where we reside” (Merleau-Ponty 1960, 165).	Utopia opens a fictional space of imagination and representations that bring the body into play. The oppressive feeling of confinement in the body-topia fuels the imagination as a means to relieve the ontological, possibly painful experience of being embodied (Murphy 1990; Scarry 1985; Sontag 1978; Svenaeus 2011). Utopia crystallizes imaginary projections in nonexistent places in the world and possibly distorted memories of real past external places.	Body modifications alter the original body and produce it as “another space” that is variously challenged, negotiated, and (re)appropriated. The transformation of the body into a heterotopia articulates its condition of being a topia, its projection into utopia, and its incarnation as a more livable space. As heterotopias emerge in the very place where utopias originate (the body), we term such transformations “embodied heterotopias.”
Prominent uses in consumer research	Places as they appear, surround us (topos), and may be appropriated through various consumption practices (Belk and Costa 1998; Bradford and Sherry 2015; Canniford and Shankar 2013).	Utopian projects that unfold in the form of ideal communities (Hong and Vicdan 2016) or countervailing marketplaces (Maclaran and Brown 2005).	Places that challenge existing meanings of space (Borden 2001; Roux, Guillard, and Blanchet 2017; Visconti et al. 2010) and produce contesting enclaves (Chatzidakis et al. 2012; Kozinets 2002; Roux 2014) within ordinary time-spaces.

main characteristics help to define them. First, heterotopias originate from utopias, of which they represent concrete enactments. Second, they underscore differences in representation with regular modes of social ordering (Palladino and Miller 2015), whereby they are “defined as Other, relationally, within a spatializing process” (Hetherington 1997, 12). For example, a brothel imitates a marital bedroom, but contradicts the basic principles of conjugality. Third, heterotopias happen to “neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect” (Foucault 1967/1986, 24). Spatially, they either (re)create places that are as perfect as the extant world is chaotic and disorganized, thus compensating for its flaws or, in the same way as mirrors, show the illusory character of existing places (Kozinets 2002; Maclaran and Brown 2005; Rokka and Canniford 2016; Roux, Guillard, and Blanchet 2017). Fourth, although heterotopias may encompass places as diverse as cemeteries, ships, brothels, prisons, asylums, rebellious urban enclaves, commercial venues, and virtual spaces (Chatzidakis, Maclaran, and Bradshaw 2012; Foucault 1967/1986; Kozinets 2002; Rokka and Canniford 2016; Roux 2014), what unites them all is their ambiguous character. Heterotopias offer clear spatial demarcation from conventional places (Hetherington 1997), but they are not open to everyone. They may even conceal some invisible but actual boundaries that make entering them either compulsory, as in prisons, asylums, and retirement homes, or subject to specific rituals and ethos, such as cemeteries, brothels, or ships (Foucault 1967/1986). Fifth and lastly, heterotopias are entangled not only with space but also with time. They mark particular breaks in ordinary life, or what Foucault (1967/1986) calls “heterochronies.” For instance, a cemetery represents a radical rupture associated with the loss of life; carnivals are chronical events that temporarily suspend the established order (Bradford and Sherry 2015). Heterotopias may thus emerge from transitory experiences and their particular timeflows (Woermann and Rokka 2015), or they may exist as more permanent spaces dealing with recurring, long-term issues such as illness (Bolaki 2015), death, or deviance (Foucault 1967/1986; Foucault 1975/1977). They may also harbor diachronic accumulations, as exemplified by libraries and museums that merge incompatible time-spaces (Foucault 1967/1986). Heterotopias thus tangibilize and question people’s relationships with space as much as time.

In short, our theoretical framework draws on a phenomenological reading of the lived spatial body (Casey 2001; Husserl 1970; Merleau-Ponty 1962) in its threefold articulation as topos, utopia generator, and subsequent enactment into heterotopia (Foucault 1966/2006; Foucault 1967/1986). It departs from canonical approaches to spatiality and embodiment in social science by considering space/place phenomenologically rather than metaphorically. Beyond the spatial practices of making one’s place in

external spaces, it examines the body *as* a place (Merleau-Ponty 1962). This holistic ontological–existential perspective foregrounds the condition of our embodiment as being *a* place, or “placialized” (Casey 2001, 688), and not only being “emplaced” *in* space (Joy and Sherry 2003), thus shifting from extant approaches to space as the background of human activities. Using tattooing as a context, we next examine how tattooees conceive, perform, and alter their original bodies, turning them into “embodied heterotopias.”

## CONTEXT AND METHOD

### The Trivialization of Tattooing in Contemporary Consumer Culture

Tattooing is an ancient practice whereby the skin is inked permanently to express either voluntary cultural or subcultural affiliation (DeMello 2000; Fisher 2002; Le Breton 2002) or to attest to the involuntary marking of social infamy (Larsen et al. 2014; Sanders 1989). Whether undesired branding or a chosen, albeit deviant, identity (Crossley 2001; Sanders 1989; Vale and Juno 1989), tattooing is viewed as an ambivalent form of “out of place” disfiguration that shifts the body from normal to deviant (Holbrook et al. 1998). After World War II, however, inking practices were revitalized in the context of pop culture, sexual liberation, hippie movements, feminism, and the growing dissemination of tattooing techniques and aesthetics (Sanders 1989). This “Tattoo Renaissance” (Rubin 1988) leads to a gradual process of artification (Kosut 2006) resulting from tattoo artists’ enhanced skills, style innovations, and recognition of their work as a tenth art. At the 2006–2008 ART Basel fairs, Swiss artist Wim Delvoye presented “Tim,” whose back was tattooed and signed as an artwork by Delvoye, then sold to a German collector after Tim’s death. Although controversial, such initiatives help to detach tattooing from deviance (Goulding et al. 2004), producing a new regime of taste (Arsel and Bean 2013) that enables middle- or upper-class consumers to set themselves apart from the “lowbrow” use of tattooing (Kosut 2006).

The cultural diffusion of tattooing (Goulding et al. 2004; Sweetman 1999) is now evidenced by the proportion of Americans (29%) and US millennials (47%) with at least one tattoo (Shannon-Missal 2016). In France, tattooing is also a growing trend: Lehu’s (2015) 10-year study (2003–2013) of 576 French tattoo recipients indicates that perceptions of tattoos as aesthetic (15%) or commonplace (8%) have increased, whereas their categorization as vulgar (17%) or degrading (11%) has decreased. Demand for tattooing is also visible in the proliferation of French tattoo parlors, up from 15 in 1982 to 400 in 2000, and roughly 4,000 today (SNAT 2018), as well as the number of visitors (30,000) attending the 2018 World Tattoo Convention

in Paris. Yet even though tattooing has been democratized, such that an estimated 14%–26% of young French people have at least one (Ifop 2016), its prevalence still remains low, likely because France is predominantly Catholic, a religion that bans permanent bodily alterations. Another reason is the late development of institutions through which tattooing became professionally organized, developed, and legitimized. The French national tattoo association (SNAT) was founded in 2003, and the first tattoo convention (Mondial du Tatouage) and its magazine (*Tatouage Magazine*) were launched only at the end of the 1990s. In addition, there are few entertainment productions devoted to tattooing, and those that have been imported, like *Miami Ink*, appeared on French screens only in 2013, eight years after becoming available to US consumers. Tattooing has thus gradually but slowly shifted from its cultural ghetto (Roux 2014) through the influence of foreign media and the fashion industry (Bengtsson et al. 2005; Bjerrisgaard et al. 2013). Yet, while France provides a good context for considering how tattoo consumers inhabit and alter a body-place that is theirs, it is not exclusive. Many other Catholic countries where the body is shaped by analogous religious and cultural norms could have been used in this study.

### Method: Multisite Data Collection

**Data Collection.** We conducted a four-year, qualitative, multisite study, using four main data sources (table 2). Initially, the first author conducted in-depth interviews in Nantes, the sixth largest city in France, home to 24 tattoo parlors, the highest number per capita. The interviews included four male and two female professional tattooists as part of a prolonged, four-year observation. The interviews provided in-depth accounts of how consumers' expectations are formulated, what they expect from tattooists, and how professionals translate consumers' desires into personalized designs (Goulding et al. 2004). As the six professional participants represented "committed collectors" (Goulding et al. 2004, 280), they also provided insights into tattooees with regard to when and why they got tattooed, and how their plans for new tattoo projects evolved over time. This stage was critical for our theoretical framework, as it helped us to understand how people conceive of their bodies spatially and engage in an ongoing dialogue between their present condition and other past/future places/times in the world. The synthesizing process guided the subsequent data collection from "ordinary" (nonprofessional) consumers.

Second, 18 in-depth interviews involved individuals bearing from 1 to 44 tattoos at different stages of their tattoo projects. These loosely organized interviews began with an open question, such as, "Let's talk about your tattoos. Could you show me where they are on your body, explain why you chose this location, and describe them?" As the prior literature indicates (Schouten 1991; Thompson

and Hirschman 1995), participants are inclined to give personal details once they have established a relationship of trust with the researcher. Putting the emphasis on the tattoos' location was a deliberate ploy to avoid asking first about the intimate meaning of the designs. The participants were recruited in tattoo parlors through a snowballing technique from the first author's personal network, and three of them were interviewed during a tattoo convention (Girl Ink Tattoo Show, March 21–22, 2015) in Brie-Comte-Robert, a small Parisian suburb.

Half of our participants (nine) have an average of 1.77 tattoos each, which corresponds to other observations in the French context (Lehu 2015). For the other half, more variance arose from a continuum of commitment to tattooing (Goulding et al. 2004). Since there is a positive association between the age of tattooees and the number of tattoos they have, we sought to represent the age distribution of the French tattooed population, of whom 35% are 18–24 years old (Ifop 2016). The final sample features nine women and nine men, ranging in age from 22 to 48 years (average 31), consistent with extant statistics (Lehu 2015). Theoretical considerations related to sociodemographic profiles and professional status that influence tattoo placements also guided our sampling (Coleman et al. 2017). To achieve variance, we considered both professional occupations that welcome tattoos (e.g., music, artwork, underground cultural productions) and those that tend to discourage them (e.g., medical assistant, optician, university teacher; table 3). Because our theoretical foundation pertains to embodied experiences, interviews were systematically accompanied by audio recordings of tattoo sessions, and photos/videos of the participants' tattoos that, when profuse, included a wide framing of the whole body (Scott et al. 2017; Woermann and Rokka 2015). To ensure good conditions for a friendly discussion and visual contact, the interviews were conducted at the participants' homes, tattoo parlors, or, in a few cases, at tattoo conventions. Interviews lasted one to two hours, depending on the number of tattoos the participants had to discuss; for five informants, additional interviews were conducted as new projects unfolded, offering a better understanding of how the body is transformed over time.

Third, as part of a prolonged immersion in the field, we attended the Paris World Tattoo conventions (Mondial du Tatouage) from 2015 to 2017 and the Girl Ink Tattoo Show in Brie-Comte-Robert in 2016. During the former events, we observed types of tattoo designs, styles, and iconic representations by about 340 tattooists from 30 countries. In the latter event, we conducted interviews with individuals who wanted to get a flash design during the show.

Fourth, we sought triangulation through observational netnography, which can showcase spontaneous accounts, questions, and suggestions without being influenced by the researcher (Kozinets 2010). We browsed interactions on two websites: one dedicated to tattooing, piercing, and



**TABLE 2**  
DATA COLLECTION

1. Interviews with professional tattoo artists	Six tattooists in Nantes	Audio
2. Interviews with tattooees	18 tattooees (nine male, nine female), aged 22 to 48 (average 31) from various socio-demographic background	16 hours and 31 recorded files (five participants were interviewed several times)
	1–44 tattoos (average 8.94); half of the sample were novices (1.77 tattoos on average), the other half were enthusiasts (16.11 tattoos on average).	Videos 4h 30m of video footage in tattoo parlors
3. Nonparticipant observations in four tattoo conventions	Mondial du Tatouage 2015, 2016, 2017	Photos 1,465 photos: 202 of participants' and tattooists' tattoo projects, and
	Girl Ink Tattoo Show 2015 in Brie-Comte-Robert	1,263 taken at the Girl Ink Tattoo Show 2015 in Brie-Comte-Robert or Mondial du Tatouage in 2015, 2016, 2017
4. Observational netnography	forum.doctissimo.fr (85 messages posted by newcomers to tattooing with more than five answers each)	
Websites dedicated to tattooing	forum-bodywork.com (194 posts related to tattoo placements with more than five answers each)	
	51 tattooists' Facebook and Instagram pages	
	MadmoiZelle "Street Tattoo" internet series	
	SNAT website	

heavymods (forum-bodywork.com) and a well-known French medical website (Doctissimo) that offers a public chatroom "dedicated to tattooing, piercing, body art and branding" (forum.doctissimo.fr). The latter attracts more novices than the former, so we gathered insights from prospective tattoo recipients. In this stage, we privileged observational netnography, because unlike "insiders" in the domain (Rubin 1988; Sanders 1989), the lead author is not tattooed and therefore could not give participants any advice. Being an outsider, however, proved useful for "defamiliarization," a distancing process that was conducive to abductive reasoning and sensitization to unexpected phenomena (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). In addition, observations were collected from 51 international tattooists' and participants' Facebook and Instagram pages. We paid particular attention to the SNAT website, which gathers information about the tattoo business, and the French feminist webzine, MadmoiZelle.com, which produces "Street Tattoo," an internet series of short videos in which people exhibit their tattoos and briefly discuss their designs, placements, and meanings.

**Data Analysis.** We analyzed the interviews and messages using a free-floating approach consisting of attaching one or more labels to each narrative and engaging in constant data comparisons in search of differences. As they served as participants' first-person illustrations of their spatial embodiment, the images were not coded (Svenaues

2011). By carefully examining and comparing participants' discourses and visual data, we began to uncover the salience of the body as a place. Axial coding led to the emergence of spatially related concepts and categories, whereby the meaning of tattoos was fully entwined with their location on the body and their symbolic representation for each participant. As posited by Timmermans and Tavory (2012, 171), abduction consists of formulating alternative explanations and categories "into which observations would fall." Thus, our theoretically informed orientation toward the body-as-object gradually shifted, through selective coding, to an approach to the body-as-place. In outlining explanations and categories as researchers, we must also account for our positions and familiarity with particular theoretical fields (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). In this sense, the research team—which combines both genders and two cultures, as well as two different theoretical approaches and scientific backgrounds—helped ensure trustworthiness through different perspectives on the data and consideration of competing theories (Figueiredo, Gopaldas, and Fischer 2017; Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989). The second author scrutinized the initial interpretations and introduced complementary or alternative readings. Negative cases were also carefully considered in the course of theory building and contributed to redefining the body not only as an uncomfortable place that should be escaped, as suggested by Foucault (1966/2006), but also as a unique place in which one's most personal convictions are expressed.



**TABLE 3**  
**PARTICIPANT PROFILES: TATTOO ARTISTS AND TATTOOEEES**

Name	Age	Sex	Occupation	Location of tattoos
Théo	25	M	Tattooist	Arms, forearms, legs, thighs
Alice	25	F	Tattooist	Arms, forearms, legs, ankles, ribs
Bertrand	26	M	Tattooist	Everywhere (including the hands) except the head and the back
Sonia	27	F	Tattooist	Everywhere (including the hands) except the head
Chris	31	M	Tattooist	Arms, forearms, legs, ankles, chest
Jules	39	M	Tattooist	Everywhere (including the hands and the head)
Inès	22	F	Medical assistant	1 (neck)
Baptiste	28	H	Business student	1 (chest)
Ethan	42	M	Dentist	1 (Achilles heel)
Corinne	38	F	Salesperson	1 (forearm)
Claire	24	F	Optician	2 (collar, foot)
Joël	26	H	Cook	2 (arm, forearm)
Raphaël	23	M	Art student	2 (calf and chest)
Aurore	25	F	Freelance designer	3 (ankle, shoulder blade)
Clara	32	F	Illustrator	3 (wrist, forearm, back)
Louise	48	F	University teacher	4 (chest, back, wrist)
Serge	32	M	Waiter	6 (arms, forearms)
Zoé	30	F	Hostel receptionist	6 (thighs, forearms, shoulders)
Julie	33	F	Unemployed	6 (flank, arms, forearms)
Steeve	28	M	Gardener	15 (legs, thighs, arms, forearms, ankles, belly)
Eric	35	M	Musician	18 (everywhere except hands and back)
Caroline	26	F	Clothes seller	18 (legs, thighs, arms, forearms, ankles, ribs)
Clément	28	M	Tattooist	28 (arms, forearms, chest, legs)
Vincent	27	M	Designer	44 (the whole body, including hands, but not on the head or the back)

Locating and visualizing tattoos highlights how people use their bodies to escape or cope with reality to find themselves rightly emplaced. Though variously expressed by participants, meanings attached to the chosen designs highlight how tattoos are articulated with other time-spaces to which they connect through tattooing. In line with previous consumer research (Bradford and Sherry 2015; Floch 1988; Holt and Thompson 2004; Kozinets 2008), we used a semi-otic square (Greimas 1987) to map the way present, past, and projected experiences animate such trajectories (Casey 2001).

## FINDINGS: PERFORMING THE BODY AS A PLACE

Conceiving the body as a place is crucial in the participants' conception of tattoo projects and their ongoing performance (Shilling 1993). We first unpack how the topographies, territories, landscapes, and limits drawn onto the skin testify to the body as topia. We then examine how participants negotiate their here/now condition in relation to four utopian dreams: beautification, escape, conjuration, and immutability. We finally examine how such transformations turn the original body into "another" place (figure 1).

### The Body as Topia: Topographies, Territories, Landscapes, and Limits

As Foucault (1966/2006) suggests, the body is a "pitiless place" that people cannot escape from, except through

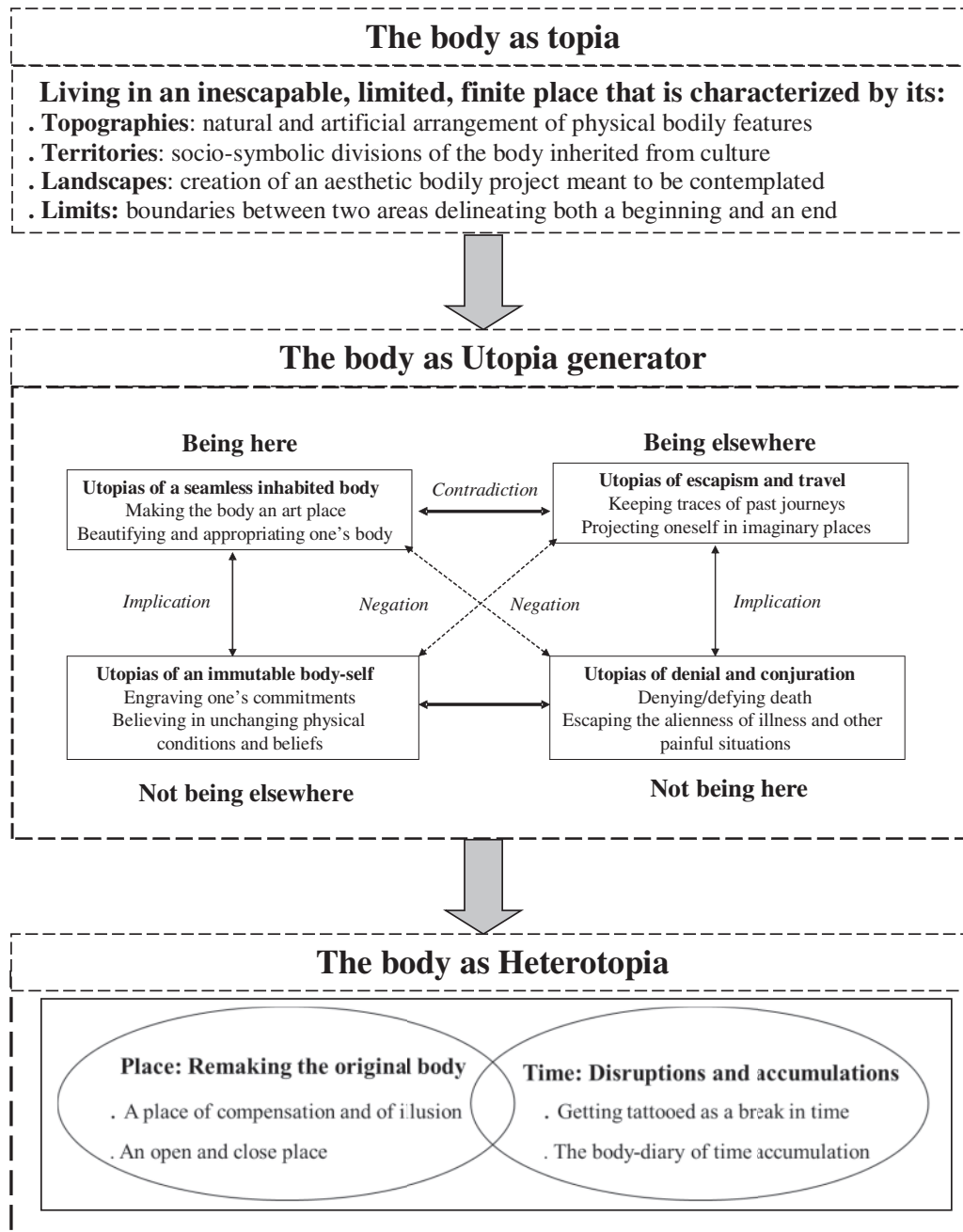
utopias. However, his approach fails to illustrate what being a topia consists of in practical terms. Accordingly, we show how tattooees experience the body as a confined territory whose spatial nature is revealed by its topographies, territories, landscapes, and limits.

*Topographies: The Body as a Place.* The various areas where tattoos are inked and the way new projects unfold illustrate participants' conception of the body as a place. The first tattoo often begins at some point in a particular body area that is highly significant. For example, Ethan, a 42-year-old dentist, said that he located his unique tattoo on the back of his foot when he was in Asia. Several months before, he had torn his Achilles tendon and had had major surgery that left him with a long, J-shaped scar. Being in Thailand—where tattooing still follows traditional techniques—was crucial in his decision to get a tattoo. In addition to being immersed in a foreign culture imbued with local exoticism, his body absorbed a painful but restorative rite of passage (Casey 2001) that gave him cathartic value, forever tangible in his flesh, beyond the moment of experience (Scott et al. 2017).

In line with Ethan's symbolic meaning of the Achilles tendon, tattoos frequently signal the strong spatial significance of specific bodily locations. For her first tattoo, Inès, a 22-year-old medical assistant who is deeply involved in animal rights, chose to write "fight until they're all free" on the back of her neck, a fragile area that materializes the junction of head and body, saying: "If one day my neck is broken, it will mean that I won't live anymore, so my fight

FIGURE 1

## THE BODY AS TOPIA, UTOPIA, AND HETEROTOPIA



will stop at the same time. As long as I'm alive, I'll fight for this cause, and because I'm fighting for it, I'm alive."

Both Inès's and Ethan's accounts indicate that tattoo placements are fully intertwined with the symbolic meaning of a dedicated body area. Complementing previous assumptions that tattoos represent other places in the world (Casey

2001; Foucault 1966/2006), they demonstrate that some areas are given special value in line with a cosmological ordering of space (Hertz 1960). Such cosmology differs from that of primitive tribes since it has lost its statutory and affiliative character (DeMello 2000), but it still confers sacred properties on certain body areas (Hertz 1960).

*Territories: Socio-Symbolic Divisions of the Body.* While Foucault (1966/2006) never alludes to how tattoos delineate symbolic body territories, our participants' photographs reveal that when they get more tattoos, demarcated areas where time/space/people are entangled begin to emerge (Miller 2008). Aurore, a 25-year-old designer and fan of manga culture, has three tattoos inked onto her shoulder blade and right ankle. These may appear aesthetically inconsistent, as they form a set of dispersed figurations separated by large empty spaces. But when asked about the location of "the fox with two tails," her totem animal whose design is inspired by the Japanese tradition, Aurore indicated that she wanted it on her shoulder because "this area represents what propels me, protects my butt, and pushes me forward." In French, "shoulder" (*l'épaule*) has the same Latin origin as "to support" (*épauler*), creating a close link between this specific body part and the idea of backing. Similarly, she inked a pipe on her ankle representing her grandfather, and a Japanese comic character symbolizing her father's initiation to Japanese anime culture, because the lower limbs support the whole body and anchor it to the ground "as these people did for me."

Gradually, as new projects accumulate, body-space territories extend, and specific areas become more salient, as illustrated by Steeve, a 28-year-old gardener who has 15 tattoos (figure 2):

I began to get tattooed a few years ago, and my body quickly turned into a portrait gallery. The right arm is dedicated to friends, and the left arm and leg to my family. The left side represents—and is close to—the heart and therefore symbolizes my roots, my origins, whereas the right side is what makes me stand up. It embodies my mates and the people who support me. And the crab in front represents my girlfriend. Everything that's in front stands for the future; and everything that's on the sides is what helps me to move forward. Now, I'm preparing a project for my back, which symbolizes the past; an eagle that stands for my father and the fight I had with him during my childhood. I won't see the tattoo every day, but it's a way of saying: it's part of my story, yet it won't haunt me anymore.

According to Alice, a 25-year-old tattooist, "people choose to tattoo symbols on the back that evoke lightness, such as butterflies, birds, and wings that free them from painful memories." Contrary to Miller's (2008) observation that tattoos crystallize past pleasant experiences, some participants may use visually inaccessible body parts (e.g., the back; Foucault 1966/2006) to leave personal conflicts and unhappy memories literally behind them.

*Landscapes: Building the Storied Body-Place.* Foucault's (1966/2006) approach to the body as topia emphasizes that while it is impossible to escape this place, tattooing can contribute to transcending people's

spatial entrapment by projecting them out of their bodies into the realm of imagination. However, he never envisaged what the accumulation of such marks could produce over time (Shilling 1993). Not only do tattoos serve to keep track of key moments in life (Miller 2008), but they also demonstrate the careful appropriation of the body as an aesthetic scene. "Landscaping" thus appears as a cultural orientation toward connecting and homogenizing scattered areas in order to create a consistent bodily appearance for the external gaze (Peck and Stroud 2015). Filling in the blanks and unifying designs over different periods is particularly frequent among tattoo artists. Théo, a 25-year-old tattooist, dedicated his right arm to his deceased father in the form of a long-stemmed rose that twirls around his arm. But gradually the rose blended into new designs that, for the observer, are hardly visible: "I have added lots of small pieces around to fill up the blank spaces. At first, I wanted the rose tightly wrapped around the upper arm, not descending along like this. So, I got new tattoos that progressively filled the voids to give the body area a more coherent set."

For professionals, visible body parts are used to showcase what the tattoo artist values aesthetically. Landscaping the body thus generates participation in a "taste regime" (Arsel and Bean 2013) that depicts tattooing as art, corporeal language, and praxis (Kosut 2006). Fashioning the body as a landscape is not unique to "committed collectors," though (Goulding et al. 2004). It also concerns "aesthetic tattooees" (Goulding et al. 2004) who are steeped in specific cultural spheres such as rock or metal music, comics, cartoons, and video games. This is not to say that the communicative purpose of conveying personal narratives entirely disappears (Velliquette, Murray, and Evers 2006), but greater emphasis is put on the connotative consistency of the whole project, as exemplified by the following excerpt from Rhinoféros on <http://www.forum-bodywork.com>:

I always have this idea in my mind to get a full sleeve tattoo on the left side. With time, I managed to define my project a little more, telling myself that I wanted pieces by different artists . . . but wondering how to link all these tattoos. So I'll carry on with several pieces that represent different things, mostly in black, that will remain in the graphic/geometric style . . . And then, to link all that, I imagine big jumbled lines going over the tattoos in black and color, or watercolor, or even patches. . . . Then, the second big question: How do I arrange the pieces? Where do I put them?

Selecting a tattoo placement is thus crucial. It affects not only visual choices, but also social, technical, and phenomenological limits (Sanders 1989), as discussed below.

*Limits: The Constrained Body-Place.* Because social conventions influence the management of appearance (Crossley 2001), some participants avoid tattoos on their

FIGURE 2

PARTITIONING THE BODY AND CREATING MEANINGFUL TERRITORIES



hands, neck, or face, the latter being the primary location for achieving identity and recognition by others (Le Breton 1999). Tattooists themselves acknowledge that they avoid engaging their customers in “social suicide”—a common locution used to signal the risks for people working outside specific environments familiar with tattoos.

Beyond what society prescribes about what can be shown or hidden (Turner 2008), topographic and technical considerations also testify to the body's spatial limits. Because they are “subject to place” (Casey 2001, 688), participants need enough space—back, thighs, waist, or flank, compared to arms, calves, shins, and ankles—for large pieces to be properly executed. When space begins to run out due to previous intensive tattooing, careful planning becomes critical. Participants explain that they take more time to reflect on how much space remains available. Those who are almost fully tattooed find solutions by blasting over existing tattoos—technically, covering a design without completely deleting it—or even moving tattoos from place to place, as 26-year-old Caroline, a gothic clothes seller with 18 tattoos, illustrates: “I have this tattoo here that I don’t want to give up. I’m going to put it in another place so as to recover this space and put it elsewhere, probably on this empty space, there, on the arm. But I won’t blast over it!”

While intensive tattooing highlights the restricted nature of body-place, limits may also emerge as tattoos gradually delineate consistent spatial units of sense. For instance, Caroline explains how completed tattoo projects create spatial and symbolic closures on the body: “The question of space . . .

yes, it’s a real problem, but I still have a little room. I’m going to ‘close’ my leg now. It’s like finishing a story.”

Caroline’s discourse aligns with Le Breton’s (2002, 21) assumption that “The mark is a symbolic limit drawn on the skin” but at the same time, “a way to stop the individual’s search for sense and identity.” In achieving her right thigh project, Caroline also concurs with Miller’s (2008) observation that tattooing helps people to retain what they want to keep from the past, but she adds evidence of the way embodied memories spatially delineate dedicated body areas.

Finally, in addition to managing space as a scarce resource, spatial limits are fully intertwined with the phenomenological experience of pain (Scarry 1985). While sensitive places such as the back, rib cage, or bony areas often repulse apprehensive customers, they appeal to those who use in-body painful experiences as a means to feel alive (Scott et al. 2017), such as Claire, a 25-year-old with two tattoos: “I chose this area to awaken something that had fallen asleep in me. Through pain, I can experience reality; that’s to say . . . when I get tattooed, I like the pain in the sense that I like to know that my body is physically there and that it exists.”

Unlike pain due to a diseased body (Murphy 1990; Scarry 1985; Sontag 1978), such experiences are deliberately sought after (Le Breton 1999; Scott et al. 2017). However, Claire also admits that she will never tattoo her back because, she says, “It’s an area that’s too sensitive that I can’t touch myself.” Hence, in highlighting the



FIGURE 3

BEING ELSEWHERE: VINCENT'S UTOPIA OF TRAVEL AND IMAGINED PLACES



existence of pain thresholds associated with specific body areas, Claire's account adds nuance to a uniform approach to pain (Scott et al. 2017).

### The Body as Utopia Generator

Foucault (1966/2006) suggests that utopias engender a magic, never aging, and immortal body that encompasses all power in space and time. Yet, in stressing the transformative power of utopias, he amplifies their ability to deny or erase the body, thereby restating its fundamental fallibility and superfluity (Le Breton 1999; Turner 2008). In contrast, we show that people may also alter their bodies to make them a personalized, embellished, and (re)appropriated place.

*Being Here: Utopias of Beautification.* Following the elevation of tattoo culture (Kosut 2006), some participants, like Pascal Tourain in our introduction, point to the liberating character of inhabiting a body that has been aesthetically reworked (figure 3). Tattooing helps people to achieve the visual aim of "exposing their soul and telling who they are" (Tourain 2004, 39). Weighing more than 120 kilos, Tourain is almost the exact opposite of Eric, a 35-year-old musician with 18 tattoos, who regards his skinny body as physically unsatisfying. But for him too, tattoos serve to reappropriate a body where he now feels more in line with his own "ideal" of beauty (Dittmar 2008): "From time to time, I come across pictures of me when I was younger and had no tattoos. Since I didn't necessarily feel good about myself, having more and more tattoos, increasingly covering my skin, I feel that tattoos are a kind of protective shield and make me feel better about myself now."

While tattoos are still considered socially deviant (Holbrook et al. 1998) and despite his mother's insistence that he has "utterly ruined his body," Eric has created what he calls a "protective shield" for himself (Anzieu 2016). The hermeneutic tension arising from a badly lived place has been eased by altering his original, vulnerable body, thus becoming one with it (literally, *faire corps*). Likewise, Louise, a 48-year-old unmarried teacher, has four tattoos, three of them depicting tiny roses and the last one a set of little stars. Roses and stars are widespread, mass-produced designs that many tattooists scorn for their lack of originality (Bengtsson et al. 2005). Louise's compliance with socio-moral rules is manifested in the small size and discretion of the designs, dictated by her job at a university. Yet she chose these particular designs to mitigate her "boyish style" and to feel "more feminine," with no intention other than to appeal to herself: "I kept the same theme of roses three times because they evoke femininity. Unlike my mother, I'm not very feminine, so for me, it adds a little. And no one can understand that this is the meaning I want to put into it. The only one who can see what I'm saying to myself is me."

Although seemingly visually insignificant, Louise's tattoos illustrate how her present body has been gently reworked to reflect how she wants to feel (Schouten 1991). Louise does not exhibit a radical rejection of her original body or a form of resistance against hegemonic masculinity (Bordo 1993; Pitts 2003), nor does she need another's gaze to authenticate herself (Tiidenberg and Gómez Cruz 2015). Rather, she finds in tattoos the feminine touch that makes her the appealing woman she aspires to be in her own eyes.

As these examples show, consumers experience varying degrees of discomfort inhabiting their original bodies. In comparing tattooing with cosmetic surgery, both rites of

passage (van Gennep 1960), Chris, a 31-year-old tattoo artist, suggests that while the latter involves imposed beauty codes, the former engages in more authentic self-definition: “each motif, even of ordinary appearance, has a special meaning that, as a tattoo artist, we help our clients to identify, and a form of execution in which we add our own creative touch.” As a result, because of the reflexivity and personalization it involves, tattooing is experienced as an “authenticating act” or an expression of true self (Arnould and Price 2000) rather than an “authoritative performance” or strict alignment with fashion discourse (Bengtsson et al. 2005; Kjeldgaard and Bengtsson 2005; Schouten 1991). By using tattooing to turn the body into a more desirable place, consumers pursue Nietzsche’s (1968, 536) formula of *amor fati*, the “Dionysian relationship to existence” that urges them to embrace the immanent project of turning themselves into a work of art and of making the body a place they can embellish.

*Being Elsewhere: Utopias of Escape in Imagined Places.* Foucault (1966/2006) suggests that one consequence of utopias is to push the body’s spatial boundaries, which, simply because we are here, creates a fantasized and idealized elsewhere (Ricoeur 1986). Vincent, a 27-year-old designer and tattoo enthusiast, accumulates ink in an unending round-trip between his body and other sites he encounters in the world. By being engraved with symbols of all the countries he has visited, Vincent’s body is “shaped by the places it has come to know” (Casey 2001, 688), thus literally reproducing a world map (figure 3). His first tattoo, an Irish harp, came after a trip to Ireland, a memory that he wanted to record. Inside his left bicep, he has tattooed the geographical coordinates of all the places he has visited abroad—his “little personal log book,” as he calls it. The iconic representations associated with traveling also led him to get tattoos of various indexical “objects” related to the nautical world and the frequent boat trips he made earlier in life with his father. Gradually, Vincent’s accumulation of tattoos came to exemplify the long-term journey that he pursues in his imagination through his body, not to escape pain (Scarry 1985) but to relive pleasurable moments (Miller 2008). In addition to his real experiences, he depicts future journeys that he would like to make, such as “getting a tattoo before flying to Mexico because that gives me the urge to go.” In addition, places may also be experienced vicariously, as when he got the same tattoo that his great-grandfather had before his confinement in a concentration camp, both a person and a place he has never seen in reality. In sum, most of Vincent’s tattoos relate to symbolic forms of “elsewhere” in real or imagined places, which function both as an “externalised memory” (Miller 2008, 81) and a “presentification” of what has either disappeared or not yet taken place (Husserl 1970).

In reflecting consumers’ “outgoing” movements in external places and incorporation of encountered place-worlds (Casey 2001), tattoos make the dialogue between places tangible (Coleman 2008). However, unlike material artifacts exemplified by tourist souvenirs (Masset and Decrop 2016), tattoos are carnal experiences that cannot be easily removed and remain permanently engraved in the flesh.

*Not Being Here: Utopias of Conjunction.* Foucault (1966/2006) points out that, beyond nurturing the imagination of elsewhere, one of the primary functions of utopia is to free people from their deadly condition. In alluding to the dream of immortality through the embalmed body and soul, he highlights the entanglement of utopia not only with space but also with time. Yet he barely addresses how the temporal dimension of utopias unfolds. Participants in our study complement this point by alluding to the desire “not to be here/now” in the circumstances they face (e.g., bereavement, traumatic memories, disease), and hence conjure a past/present condition by projecting themselves into a better future. Steeve, for example, inked a portrait of a friend who disappeared in tragic circumstances, which affected him deeply. At that time, getting a tattoo gave him the illusion of keeping death at a distance and his friend alive. Echoing Miller (2008, 110), who notes that tattoos serve to gel what “we possess inside our heads and we control from within,” Steeve’s tattoo functions like a carnal amulet. While “filling the void” is not possible, the tattoo helps to ensure that his friend, through an artificial physical “scar,” remains embodied in his flesh. By looking at his friend’s face on his right arm, Steeve is able to vividly prolong the illusion of his continued presence in the world.

This type of conjuring ritual is also illustrated by Oseane, a young woman who sought advice on Doctissimo about a design that would fittingly symbolize her liberation from violence:

When I was little (and until my adolescence), my father used to hit me to stop me from going out or dating. He also took my cell phone and read all my messages, texts and emails, and looked at all of my photos . . . some people even noticed the marks on my body . . . we’re not here to talk about that, but I’d like a tattoo that discreetly “covers” this period of my life. Any ideas? It could be a symbol against violence, a sentence, etc. Thank you for your help.

In this excerpt, it is particularly significant how Oseane uses the term “covers” to refer to the idea of masking the past and making it disappear, thus creating an “epidermal armor” that protects her from psychic suffering and rejects it to the periphery of the body (Anzieu 2016). Oseane’s request also paradoxically illustrates the ambiguous memory process (Marcoux 2017) whereby the tattoo she is looking for is intended to help her transcend unpleasant past experiences that it may, however, serve to reactivate.

Utopias of conjuration arise not only when people need to cope with the loss of a loved one, but also when they face their own illness. Clara, a 32-year-old illustrator with three tattoos, inked a song title from *Monty Python's Life of Brian*, "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life," across nearly all of her left forearm. She chose this sentence not just because she is a true Monty Python fan, but more fundamentally, because it is how she countered stressful situations even before she was diagnosed with breast cancer. "I told myself: 'Hey, stop moping! Try to get your black humor back!' Last year, I was diagnosed [with] cancer, so this tattoo was . . . blinking again. It played its role and much more."

Hence, what is deemed "playful" and "ironic" from the outside (Turner 1999, 41) actually appears more tragic in the light of some participants' embodied experience. Tattooing helps them to overcome the "alienness" of illness (Svenaesus 2011) by creating the conditions through which they can conjure up such "unhomelike being-in-the-world" (Svenaesus 2011). Moreover, the status of cancer as a "master illness," fully encumbered by the trappings of metaphor (Sontag 1978), increases the urgency to care for oneself and to use personal rituals to reinvest the body as one's ultimate living place (Williams and Bendelow 1998).

*Not Being Elsewhere: Utopias of Immutable Selves.* Foucault (1966/2006) envisions utopias primarily as a form of escape from our corporal entrapment. As a result, he pays little attention to how people find anchoring points in their own bodies. Yet tattooing highlights how consumers are in symbiosis with all the beliefs, hopes, and projects they pursue to the extent that the present appears as if it were immutable. For example, Inès shows her indefectible dedication to a cause or passion by engraving her commitment with an irrevocable inscription. Similar identity signs are noted by many tattooists who respond to consumers' frequent desire to tattoo a spouse's first name or their children's faces. In trying to give meanings to such "vow" tattoos (Sanders 1989), Jules, a 39-year-old tattooist, emphasizes the utopian dimension of these projects: "At first, I thought it was ridiculous, because the children are alive. They can contemplate them every morning. Why do they need to get their face inked on their body? Then I gradually came to understand that they mean: 'I'm here or there, but my kids are with me wherever I go.' But it's a pure dream because the child in the portrait doesn't exist anymore. They have frozen a picture that's already disappeared."

Echoing consumers' desire to exert mastery over time (Husemann and Eckhardt, forthcoming; Rosa 2013), Jules suggests that some people consume tattoos as if the present could last forever. In addition, as various signs of affiliation (e.g., emblems, coats of arms, community mingling of blood) have disappeared, tattoos enable people to express their commitment to a particular group or family identity in a "collective sense of identity" and "quest for unity"

(Arnould and Price 2000, 147). Unlike Steeve's attempt to revitalize his dead friends' memory, inking portraits of living family members serves to congeal the present and keep them unchanged (Sanders 1989).

The utopian belief of an immutable self is also evidenced by the rising market for tattoo removals (Coleman et al. 2017). The decision to get a tattoo requires certainty about who one is and will remain. For some consumers, though, tattoos acquired impulsively no longer represent who they are (Coleman et al. 2017), so they seek to erase old meanings, a decision that is costly and even more painful than tattooing. Nabilla, a 24-year-old French reality television star, reports why she wanted to erase a "hated" tattoo on her chest: "It was a bit fashionable to have one of these Chinese signs. And so we opened a catalog and said, 'we want this one' and it was done . . . too fast . . . That's the trap, in fact! I feel that people who get tattoos think that they'll stay young forever, or else believe they won't want to mature" (<https://bit.ly/2LqULXs>).

Nabilla's comments show that when getting a tattoo, people often focus on their immediate desire at the expense of careful reflection about the future. Consumers thus rarely envision the "body as becoming" (Coleman 2008)—for example, through aging or evolving—but rather as a fixed and impermanent place, insensitive to change.

## Producing Embodied Heterotopias

Our findings highlight how consumers use tattooing to rework and cope with their original bodies. They demonstrate that utopias of beautification, escape, conjuration, and immutability help them to confront what may otherwise be unsatisfying, inaccessible, depressing, or impermanent in their lives. Through an enduring dialogue between here and elsewhere, they illustrate Foucault's (1967/1986) first principle defining heterotopias—namely, the enactment of utopias. Yet, as this is achieved on the very place where utopias originate (i.e., the embodied self), they produce what we term "embodied heterotopia." We now elaborate on the four remaining principles that characterize such heterotopias.

*Challenging Extant Social Ordering.* In contrast to socially driven body modifications (Giesler 2012; Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010; Schouten 1991), tattooing primarily supports the creation of a singular chosen identity through utopian rather than mythical heroic narratives (Velliquette, Murray, and Evers 2006). As Eric's and Louise's accounts demonstrate, participants challenge social dictums that frown on them altering their original appearance and yet do not refrain from doing so. In his one-man show, Tourain (2004) dedicates a long ironic tirade about audiences' reactions to his full-tattooed body. Although he acknowledges that tattoos "hurt moralizing authorities of all kinds and those defining good taste" (Tourain 2004, 39), his decision,



in the first instance, was an effort to feel more comfortable in his body. Hence, because tattooing serves as a remedy to consumers' incompleteness, unease, or longing for something/someone/somewhere else, it does more than simply integrating personal experiences into a consistent whole (Velliquette, Murray, and Evers 2006): it enables tattooees to reappropriate a place that is theirs by challenging both the social taken-for-grantedness of the pristine body and its adherence to common aesthetic ideals (Holbrook et al. 1998).

*Remaking the Body as a Place of Both Illusion and Compensation.* Just as Foucault (1967/1986) introduces heterotopias as concrete places that "mirror" the extant social order, our participants show that tattooed bodies "play" at reproducing realities that do not exist, or not anymore. For example, Vincent's body map assembles a set of remote places that are incompatible in the real world (Foucault 1967/1986); Steeve's portrait of his dead friend is nothing but a fantasy of his living presence; Clara's humorous inscription is a simple attempt to deny her illness; and Eric's heavy coverage is a trick to disguise his thinness. As Aurore suggested regarding her new tattoo project, heterotopias thus serve to transfigure reality (from deviant to normal) more than they refigure the body (from normal to deviant; Holbrook et al. 1998): "The next parts that I would like to tattoo are my knees, because I don't like them . . . I hope that like that they'll be less visible and a little less awful. Sure, tattoos can help but I could do something else like . . . let's say . . . consult a psychiatrist. For my knees are what they are, and tattoos won't change them at all, really!"

In line with Miller (2008, 110) who argues that tattoos are "a kind of fiction" about what deserves to be kept, our findings support Foucault's (1967/1986) illusory function of heterotopias. Tattoos represent places, people, and times that never fully existed as such. At the same time, because tattoos are inalienable, they also are "a resource" that people use "when times become difficult" (Miller 2008, 113). This second, compensatory function of heterotopia is attested by the ameliorative or corrective function of tattoos. As our findings show, these make the imperfections and limitations of consumers' current situations salient, thus variously serving to beautify bodies; mentally travel through imaginary spaces; revitalize moments, places, and people that have disappeared; or stop time as if the present could last forever.

*Creating the Body as an Open and Closed Place.* Throughout history, tattooing has been understood as a shared language for people, tribes, and groups who participate in a particular culture or subculture (DeMello 2000; Sanders 1989). From an etic perspective, tattoos are said to produce either trivialized, fashionable, and mass-marketed bodies (Bengtsson et al. 2005; Turner 1999), or stigma that call for various psychological processes of

justification, legitimation, or neutralization (Larsen et al. 2014). Our participants' emic accounts, however, show that they use spatial boundaries to protect intimate stories that are either intended for them only or sometimes shared with certain others. For example, Raphaël, a 23-year-old art student, has a large tattoo of two dogs on his chest, symbolizing his loving relationship with his pets. Accordingly, he decided that his tattoo would remain hidden, except for close relatives. Conversely, because the two Dragon Ball Z manga tattoos inked on his calves mean nothing more than a particular taste for a visual culture, they can be displayed prominently. Zoé, a 30-year-old hostel receptionist, has six large tattoos that are difficult to hide, and she explains that she deliberately used tattooing "to communicate with other people, not because I necessarily want them to ask me about my tattoos, but because I feel a lot more fulfilled and relaxed . . . It's made me establish a dialogue with both myself and the rest of the world." As these accounts show, tattooed bodies retain personal, secret, and partly undecipherable meanings, and entertain ambiguous dialogues between openness and closedness, a core characteristic of heterotopia (Foucault 1967/1986). Such ambiguity derives from the socio-historical "hidden/shown" dialectical tensions that permeate tattoo culture and its association with deviance (Bjerrisgaard et al. 2013; Goulding et al. 2004; Hebdige 1979). Yet Raphaël and Zoé both provide vivid metaphors that the body may be presented with more or fewer restrictions to onlookers' gaze, depending on their intimacy or interest in tattooing.

*Time and Embodied Heterotopias: Chronicity and the Palimpsest.* As Foucault (1967/1986) argues, while heterotopias represent, contest, and reverse actual places, their spatial dimension cannot be disentangled from time in such a way that they form specific space-times.

For example, tattoo parlors and new street shops provide consumers with transformation rituals that change who they are before and after entering them (Roux 2014). For Corinne, a salesperson who got her only tattoo at the age of 38, getting tattooed was like a rebirth. Although she anxiously expected the procedure to be painful, she remembers this particular moment as emotionally laden, with the tears and blood reminding her of the experience of giving birth. As in other beautification rituals (Schouten 1991), participants allude to tattoo sessions as sacralized time-spaces or "oases of deceleration" (Rosa 2013, 87), in which they reconnect with themselves, but at a slower pace (Husemann and Eckhardt, forthcoming).

The time-space entanglement is also attested by the fact that being tattooed "timestamps" personal and significant past/future places on the body, the location of which may be highly symbolic, such as placing unpleasant memories/situations on the back and anticipated future places/lives on the front (Casey 2001; Hertz 1960; Miller 2008). As



Cotte, Ratneshwar, and Mick (2004) suggest, time can be experienced as both a map and a mirror. The map helps people locate where they are in their life trajectory; the mirror serves to reflect on how they have used their time, thus prompting nostalgic reminiscences. Both the map and the mirror underscore the intricacy of space with time that fuse on the tattooed body. Vincent's account above exemplifies how his tattoos reflect processes that involve both orienting and assessing where he is now in his life trajectory (map) and remembering past places that are significant to him (mirror). Similar to Marcoux's (2017) analyses of souvenirs, tattoos help to sustain memory while retaining selective fragments of experiences (Miller 2008). However, as our findings show, some individuals may express regret that moments/places/people that a tattoo was meant to symbolize no longer represent them (Coleman et al. 2017), while others do not necessarily deny this past. In such cases, they may blast over tattoos, not erasing them but partially covering them with a new one. For instance, Alice, a 25-year-old tattooist, inked a rose when she entered the world of tattooing as an apprentice. As it is now less relevant, it has faded under the new project of a Gothic cathedral, without totally disappearing (figure 4): "I recently blasted over a tattoo that only stands for a rite of passage as a tattooist. At the time, it was necessary; it made sense. Now it has no such significance for me. But because it did mean something and always will, I made sure that it was still there."

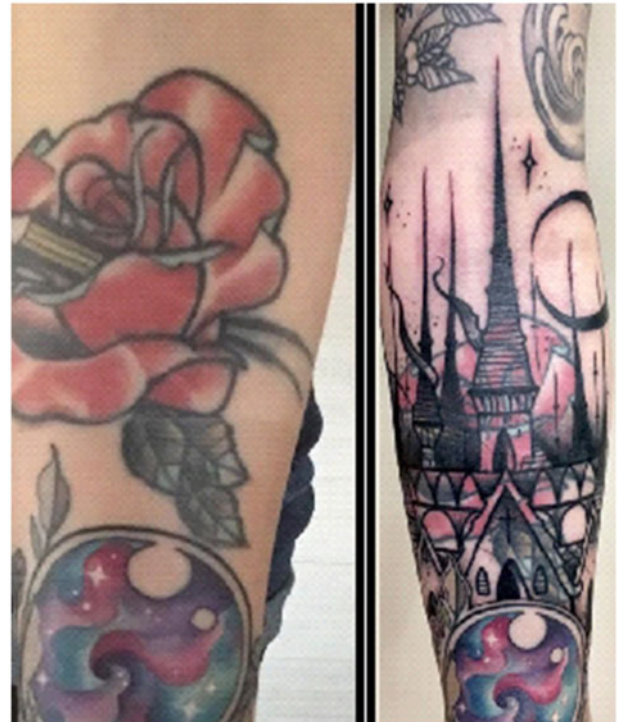
In sum, on a continuum from the absolute worst regret to a possible accommodation with tattoos associated with other spaces and times, consumers permanently inscribe prominent moments/places on their bodies as places that constantly evolve (Miller 2008), thus echoing Foucault's (1967/1986) theorization of shifts in the meaning of heterotopias. As for other concrete external territories, the body is a palimpsest (Corboz 1983)—namely, a surface that may be constantly rewritten for as long as possible. To establish new creations or use the space more efficiently, it is thus crucial to rework the body, not only by adding new layers but also by erasing, covering, and concealing parts of existing inscriptions. This practice resonates with other contexts in which consumers accommodate objects from different temporalities, as when they creatively (de) and (re)compose heirlooms in an attempt to combine tradition and modernity (Türe and Ger 2016).

## CONTRIBUTIONS

By relating Foucault's work on the body (1966/2006) to that of heterotopia (1967/1986), we advance a phenomenological approach in which the body is viewed as the place where people are condemned to live (a topos). In our sample population, this subsequently becomes a source for projection both in and of imaginary places (a utopia) and,

FIGURE 4

OVERLAPPING TIMES: ALICE'S PRODUCTION OF A PALIMPEST



when enacted, the place where the body is experienced and appropriated differently (an embodied heterotopia). We introduce the latter to apply five main distinctive features to the body that Foucault (1967/1986) theorized as external heterotopic spaces, but never combined with his reflections on the body (Foucault 1966/2006). First, we show that the tattooed body becomes "another place" through the negotiation of people's ontological entrapment in a body-place. Second, we demonstrate how tattoos differ from more positively sanctioned body modifications, such as aesthetic surgery (Schouten 1991), bodybuilding (Rosen 1983), Botox injections (Giesler 2012), or diets (Cronin and Hopkinson 2018; Moio and Beruchashvili 2010), by altering the pristine body for reasons of psychological necessity, and often contrary to social acceptability. Third, we highlight how the tattooed body is both illusory and compensatory, for enacted utopias simultaneously mirror places/people/times that do not or no longer exist, and that provide consumers with the sense of correcting imperfections of their present and past lives. Fourth, we show that tattooees manage careful spatial boundaries when choosing tattoo placements in order to avoid social and moral condemnation, but also use tattoos as a potential means to dialogue with others. We suggest that tattoos do not really make the body an open

place, and that “stigma management strategies” (Larsen et al. 2014) are used to carefully define what is visible in intimate settings and what remains hidden from the external gaze. Finally, we highlight the temporally dynamic nature of embodied heterotopias. Tattoos shape the perception of time, both by marking moments of life through tattoo sessions and by condensing memories in a place that can be reworked repeatedly. In addition, because tattoos are deeply engraved on the body and mark the skin permanently, the time devoted to undertaking such permanent body modifications is never trivialized and requires both the creation of a personalized design and discussion of an appropriate placement. Hence, tattoos depart from Botox injections that gradually abate and blend into mundane activities and ordinary schedules (Giesler 2012). Our study also adds new contributions to the conceptualization of both the body and spaces/places in consumer research.

### Contributions to Research on the Body and Body Modifications

Conceiving the body as a place complements past consumer research on impression management, compliance with social norms, and the production of a “normatively acceptable body” (Thompson and Hirschman 1995, 147). Our spatial theorization considers body modifications not only in terms of consumers’ dependency on the gaze of others (Giesler 2012; Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010; Schouten 1991; Tiidenberg and Gómez Cruz 2015), but also in terms of personal transformations whereby people (re)invest in their ultimate living place. Our study theorizes the triadic existential process (topia, utopia, heterotopia) whereby people, because of their ontological confinement, nurture various dreams that they permanently enact on their bodies. Therefore, and contrary to what the previous literature suggests, we argue that tattoo consumers are not necessarily condemned “to justify their actions (by constructing narratives of personalized meaning around their tattoos) and/or to moderate them (by covering them up)” (Patterson and Schroeder 2010, 256). Instead, we show that tattooees are primarily concerned with pursuing their personal project and feeling better emplaced, even if this may sometimes violate common standards of good taste (Tourain 2004). Our framework helps to substantiate the overall process by which people negotiate cultural codes of self-presentation and engage in fluid ways of reshaping their lives (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013; Tiidenberg and Gómez Cruz 2015). In so doing, we also reconcile conflicting approaches to bodily practices by overcoming previous dualisms such as hidden/visible, object/subject, personalized/mass consumption, or conformity/deviance (Atkinson 2002; Bengtsson et al. 2005; Kjeldgaard and Bengtsson 2005; Patterson and Schroeder 2010; Vale and Juno 1989). As our participants show, while tattoos challenge common norms of appearance, they provide those receiving them

with a “new” home where they can feel more aligned with who they feel they are. In addition, if/when tattoo designs reproduce mass-market symbols that lack originality (Bengtsson et al. 2005), they nonetheless convey meanings that are intertwined with the consumer’s story, the symbolic significance of their particular placement (Hertz 1960), and a personalized reinterpretation by the tattoo artist as well as the tattoo recipient (Goulding et al. 2004). Hence, we argue that although embodied heterotopias challenge conventional uses of the body, they create a more livable, personalized place to be.

In stressing that human ontological entrapment is the source of utopian dreams and their subsequent enactment on the body, our framework concurs with approaches that consider body modifications as self-transformative processes (Tiidenberg and Gómez Cruz 2015). As these authors demonstrate, such ways of cultivating a person’s bodily life in search of an ethical identity—or what Foucault (1984/1997) terms the “care of self”—do not entirely escape disciplines, social norms, or cultural formations. Nevertheless, caring for oneself emphasizes people’s ability to reconnect with their embodied self, which calls for a more nuanced reading of the refigured/disfigured altered body versus the transfigured fashion subject (Bengtsson et al. 2005; Holbrook et al. 1998). In addition, within the realm of representational fetishization (Borgerson and Schroeder 2018; Coleman 2008), the literature indicates that consumers’ visual encounters with their own bodies lead them to refashion themselves through visual interactions (Tiidenberg and Gómez Cruz 2015). However, we suggest that the mediation of the other’s gaze may obfuscate how people primarily experience their embodied condition for themselves and how this may emotionally and mentally affect their desire for change (Casey 2001).

With regard to women in particular, previous studies have noted that female bodies are subject to the reproduction of gendered prescriptions (Butler 1990, 2004); Grosz 1995; Haraway 1991), resulting in women’s approaches to tattooing being fraught with contradictions (Atkinson 2002). While women’s decisions to get tattooed seemingly challenge patriarchal ideology through pursuing a liberating and celebratory chosen female identity, at the same time they may demonstrate their obedience to culturally accepted codes so as to avoid stigmatization (Patterson and Schroeder 2010; Sanders 1989). In other words, women’s tattoos “are layered with culturally established, resistant, and negotiated images of femininity” (Atkinson 2002, 220). Louise’s example in our findings seems to echo this argument. When considering both how discreet and feminine she wants her tattoos to be, Louise apparently reproduces traditional sex-based conventions that guide the choice of tattoo designs and tattoo placements (Sanders 1989). Yet for her, getting tattooed is neither pure social compliance nor gender resistance, but rather a way to enact

her desire to feel better emplaced. While Louise maintains the fiction of heterosexual coherence (Butler 1990), she uses a historically constructed “masculine” body practice that transcends the constructed categories of gendered identity. Likewise, male tattooees may also opt for “feminine” designs, like Théo, whose rose symbolizes his deceased father. Hence, tattoo consumers do not exhibit a fully consistent gendered self, but rather pursue their own “body projects” (Shilling 1993), blurring the boundaries of sex/gendered differences (Haraway 1991).

Beyond our research context, the case of transsexualities also offers a vivid instance of the need for transformation on which our study sheds new light. Holbrook et al. (1998) consider transsexualism as a perfect example of transfiguration (i.e., the normalization of an incorrect biological gender assignment or “gender dysphoria”), whereas they view tattooing and other self-mutilations as refiguration (i.e., shift from normal to deviant). In contrast, our theorization encompasses both transfiguration and refiguration within the same mechanism of embodied heterotopia, whereby people de- and renormalize their original appearance in order to reinvest their own bodies. In both cases, however, consideration of both self and audience is critical (Ruvio and Belk 2018). In addition, instead of addressing specific body parts, as in previous studies on body modifications (Giesler 2012; Schouten 1991), our research considers the holistic, indivisible spatial entity of the body. A recent study of trans men’s modifications echoes this consideration (Bishop 2016) by showing that the presence (or absence) of generic body parts that are altered or recreated through surgery matters less than the perception that these individuals (and their partners) have of their bodies and themselves as a whole.

More broadly, our research resonates with recent reconsiderations of the body and embodiment in consumer research (Canniford and Shankar 2013; Scott et al. 2017; Woermann and Rokka 2015). We offer a novel approach to consumption phenomena such as extreme sport activities, first by explaining escapism from day-to-day routines by consumers’ ontological-existential physical entrapment, and second by proposing that such liberating activities may provide bodies with only temporary relief, requiring incessant repetitions to distract the saturated self (Scott et al. 2017). From this perspective, tattooing offers a relevant illustration of how enduring involvement in reshaping one’s place may affect the body beyond transient experiences, turning it, in some cases, into a palimpsest. Our findings also resonate with considerations of the role of time in modern consumer culture (Husemann and Eckhardt, forthcoming; Rosa 2013) by showing how significant milestones in people’s lives are both frozen and gelled on the body so as to keep selective tracks of the past (Marcoux 2017; Miller 2008). Our contribution suggests paying more attention to longitudinal considerations of people’s living

trajectories beyond temporary consumption experiences (Heidegger 1962; Shilling 1993).

## Contributions to Research on Place, Embodied Heterotopias, and Spatial Practices

Prior research has extensively and metaphorically addressed the body as a fragment of the social fabric, overshadowing its fundamental ontological being as *the* place where we are born and condemned to live. Just as vestavall (Bradford and Sherry 2015) or street art (Visconti et al. 2010) involves domesticating and appropriating public space, tattooing represents a powerful act of reclaiming the body on which people etch their intimate relationship with the world (Botz-Bornstein 2015). We introduce the notion of embodied heterotopia to account for how such utopian transformations occur in the very place where they originate. Foucault (1967/1986) suggests that heterotopias are forms of illusory reflection or compensation for the imperfections of the current social order, while unfolding at a distance from that which they challenge. We extend his theorization in two ways. First, our findings show that heterotopias are not solely an illusion *or* a compensation but are fundamentally both. The tattoo consumers in our study illustrate how tattooing recreates the illusion of places/times that have either disappeared or are otherwise out of reach, yet can be recreated on the skin. At the same time, their tattoos serve to soothe the tensions generated by such absence (compensation) and imply that these places/moments still exist (illusion). We thus argue that the illusory function of heterotopias cannot be disentangled from their compensatory purpose, as—through their ability to reflect, invert, and improve reality—they tangibilize both the parodic and consolatory meanings of utopias (Palladino and Miller 2015). Second, we extend Foucault’s (1967/1986) theorization of heterotopias as external sites only. Castilhos et al. (2016, 2) advocate “for a more concrete conceptualization of space in the study of markets,” pointing to the centrality of four dimensions—place, territory, scale, and network—to understand the emergence, dynamics, stability, or frailty of socio-material marketplace assemblages. We respond to this invitation by adding a theorization of the body as a place. Bodies create places by acting on physical spaces (Bradford and Sherry 2015; Goffman 1971) or by projecting themselves into virtual spaces (Tiidenberg and Gómez Cruz 2015). However, we argue that they also constitute the very point at which multiple determinations (biological, social, psychic, phenomenological, and praxeological) combine to produce an ongoing spatial dialogue. By examining how people conceive, enact, and transform the pitiless places they inhabit, we contribute to a better understanding of this “concrete and limited space that is acknowledged, understood, and invested with meanings and value” (Castilhos et al. 2016, 3; see also Tuan 1979). Beyond the examination of space



as an abstract category to be perceived, conceived, and lived in (Lefebvre 1974; Soja 1996), we highlight the relational properties of the body-place and the ongoing conversation it maintains with other places, people, and times. The tangibilization of the body as a place and its transformation into embodied heterotopias is also what Goulding, Saren, and Lindridge (2013) illustrate from a different angle through Von Hagen's Body Worlds, a famous traveling display of plasticized corpses. This spectacular provocative exhibition of internal organs contrasts with the emotional distance created by their artificial sanitized staging, thus negating the body's mortal condition (Le Breton 1999). Both this example and our findings show that exhibiting a body that blows up common representations not only transgresses social norms of acceptability, but also questions our ultimate living place when this is rendered conspicuously salient.

While the creation of heterotopian places has been explored by previous literature (Chatzidakis et al. 2012; Hong and Vicdan 2016; Maclaran and Brown 2005), this is not the only way that people deal with spatiality. External spaces also provide consumers with resources for action, a perspective that is addressed through practices, internalized engagements, and performances (Canniford and Shankar 2013; Scott et al. 2017; Woermann and Rokka 2015). Our study also enriches such approaches by illustrating how consumers enduringly incorporate external places in their flesh beyond the limited temporal occurrence of a lived experience. For example, it would be relevant to examine tourist souvenirs by considering not only objects (Masset and Decrop 2016), but also body modifications, that consumers may keep from their travels as memory traces. In addition, following Latour's (2004, 205) contention that "to have a body is to learn to be affected, meaning 'effectuated,' moved, put into motion by other entities, humans or non-humans," our model of spatial ontology emphasizes the enduring interplay of external places with the shaping of the body. Our framework thus suggests examining how outdoor environments may alter surfers', skiers', or skydivers' bodies and practices. Such a dynamic approach to learning practices is illustrated by Maciel and Wallendorf (2017), who show that taste gets constructed through various bodily engagements, backed up by external expert sources, and accommodated to people's generic dispositions. Our approach echoes such perspective by highlighting how tattooees' commitment to landscaping their bodies may in turn enhance how they perceive themselves aesthetically (Tourain 2004; Vail 1999). Our spatial framework could also enrich the dynamics of practices by examining how various encounters with foreign places participate in the sensory training of the body and the shaping of people's taste over time.

## LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH AVENUES

Our contribution highlights the topical dimension of the body and, following Foucault (1966/2006), the coextensive utopias that produce an ongoing negotiation of the place in which we live (Foucault 1966/2006; Heidegger 1962; Merleau-Ponty 1962). However, several caveats need to be formulated. First, tattooing does not systematically transform utopias into embodied heterotopias. Although we did not encounter people with poorly executed tattoos, which are by far the highest cause for regret (21.5%; Sanders 1988) that turns the body into a dystopia, our findings provide evidence that tastes evolve and may lead tattooees to erase or blast over prior designs (Coleman et al. 2017). Our theorization of embodied heterotopia is thus supported as long as body modifications are experienced positively and lead to the desired outcome of deliberate self-transformation. Second, any enacted utopia does not necessarily produce heterotopia. Previous literature shows that various techniques enhance the body (Giesler 2012; Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013; Schouten 1991; Tiidenberg and Gómez Cruz 2015), but such alterations align with socially desired ideals of beauty. Hence, these self-transformations do not fully support the "patterns of resistance" or "suspensions of normative order" that characterize heterotopia (Palladino and Miller 2015, 5). Seen differently, our findings demonstrate that tattoo consumers contravene the common norm not to alter the body, but rather—as with transsexualities (Prosser 1998)—in order to "own" their bodies and reclaim these places as their "last spaces of freedom" (Tourain 2004, 39). We thus argue that enacted utopias create embodied heterotopias only when body modification practices "interrogate established, real spaces" (Palladino and Miller 2015, 6). This perspective reconciles antagonistic positions about the tattoo as deviance versus cultural mimicry. Indeed, embodied heterotopias emerge only when the body inherited at birth is permanently and sometimes provocatively altered, and when self-transformations are undertaken for existential reasons that disregard common, gendered, and aesthetic beauty ideals. Finally, not all utopian dreams result in embracing tattoos. As secondary data show, only a quarter of young French people, at most, have tattoos (Ifop 2016). Our findings also indicate that even the most committed consumers set limits on tattoo accumulation, both for social reasons and due to their physical limitation to endure pain, despite some recent literature supporting pursuit of pain (Scott et al. 2017). Hence, while our study focuses on the body as a place and its subsequent ability to produce utopias, these may not be enacted exclusively through tattooing. As previous literature has suggested (Hong and Vicdan 2016; Maclaran and Brown 2005),



many other forms of utopias exist that are enacted in external spaces.

Yet, as spatiality is a core dimension of corporeal consumption experiences, more research is needed to determine what is implied by being *a* place, compared to being *in* places. Our study examines how people transform their body for themselves, but it does not consider recursively how aesthetic differences, refigurations, or more radical alterations might destabilize others' perceptions of the body (Bishop 2016). A temporally oriented perspective on drama and marketplace dynamics (Giesler 2008), or an institutional theory approach to contested marketplace strategies by marginalized groups (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013), could also be enriched by including a spatial analysis of how mainstream places/bodies are challenged by heterotopic places/bodies that themselves may evolve or become normalized (Roux 2014). In addition, our study was conducted in France, a Catholic, Western culture. Further research needs to be conducted in other religious and cultural contexts where permanent or extreme body modifications are more commonly accepted versus prohibited. More radical differences in particular might be explored by considering nonrationalist ontologies that do not separate body from mind or humans from nonhumans (Descola 2013; Ingold 2011; Viveiros de Castro 2014).

Previous research also frequently apprehends the body as a surface (Borgerson and Schroeder 2018; Bradshaw and Chatzidakis 2016; Patterson and Schroeder 2010). Our spatial theorization suggests extending this view to consider the body's depths as well. For example, nonmedical ultrasounds give parents the opportunity to make an unborn baby's body tangible, a space previously visible only at the moment of birth. According to Hockey and Draper (2005), this technique makes the fetus more concrete for the father, who, unlike the mother, cannot experience this "space-to-be" directly. Our approach calls for further investigation of techniques that gradually reduce the invisibility of and unfamiliarity with the body-place and give rise to the commodification of nonmedical investigations. Fascination with X-rays before they were medicalized (Knight 1986) and dissection when it was a public spectacle (Romanyshyn 1989) offer insights into such a perspective. While Scaraboto and Fischer (2013) demonstrate how bodies carve out collective spaces for marginalized groups in the marketplace, we also suggest considering further linkages between these spaces (Castilhos et al. 2016), as well as the emergence of new markets that aim to beautify, transcend, strengthen, and immortalize the body (Zelinsky 2013). Likewise, conceptualizing the body as a place questions its limits and boundaries. Tiidenberg and Gómez Cruz (2015) suggest envisioning the body not as an enclosed site but as a porous, open place that extends elsewhere, like virtual online selves such as avatars and other digital refigurations. As Lupton (2014, 169) argues: "There

is no digital 'second self': the self configured through the digital is always already part of the self." Clark (2011) also suggests that the body and mind extend into their environment, like the blind person's cane or the user's smart device connections. Similarly, Hockey and Draper (2005) note that by occupying a funerary urn or a place in a cemetery, the corpse does not fully disappear but retains a spatial presence beyond its life course, as do the mummies that Foucault (1966/2006) considered typical instances of heterotopia. Our study may also inform further research into various transhumanist and post-humanist ambitions that extend the spatial tangibility and potential (re)actualization of bodies through technologies (Moravec 1999). It also resonates with the rise of biohacking and bio-art initiatives that testify to new utopias, whereby life is manipulated through various open-sourced DIY experiments (Delfanti 2013). Blurring the body's boundaries therefore echoes broader concerns about fluidity in postmodern culture (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017), and questions whether incorporating more technology shifts our awareness of what our (and the other's) body is (Buchanan-Oliver, Cruz, and Schroeder 2010; Giesler and Venkatesh 2005). Enhanced, reshaped, and altered bodies nurture burgeoning markets whose globalized and accelerated space-times (Rosa 2013) may contribute to engendering more flexible and even fragmented selves. We believe that our spatial approach to the body can contribute to current debates about emerging rhizomatic networks of bio-utopia in the making, which accelerate the dissolution of human/nonhuman categories in favor of a continuity between places/entities/species that form the seamless, hybrid character of nature and culture.

## DATA COLLECTION INFORMATION

This project was initiated by the first author, who conducted all the fieldwork between 2014 and 2017, as well as the data analysis and coding. The second author joined the project in 2016. He provided an external perspective on the fieldwork and theory building as well as assistance for proofreading and readability of the text in English. The final analysis and article were jointly authored.

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